

Forever Can End in Seconds

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Prologue

Shadows danced across the aging ebony walls of the cavernous house. A small lantern illuminated a dilapidated old table, and the flickering rays of light cast an eerie glow onto a woman's tired, drawn face. She took a sip from a small glass of liquor that sat on the table. It was all starting again. She could feel the strength slowly draining from her body and soul. She had experienced this feeling many times before, each time with the same end result. But over the years, the feeling had come at shorter and shorter intervals. It was as if her remedy didn't want to work anymore. This time she would need something stronger. A normal person—with a normal body and a normal soul—would not do this time. She knew all too well that ordinary people would no longer have any effect whatsoever. That is why she had been seeking out a person with a stronger spirit. It had to be someone more than unique, someone with extraordinary powers. And she had found that person. His spiritual strength was more than she had ever sensed in any other person before. This boy would be enough to sustain her for centuries. Of course, his spiritual strength also made him more difficult to capture. It would take extreme steps to “extract” him, as she had so delicately named the procedure. Normally, all she would have to do was capture the person and perform the spiritual extraction. But this boy would take much more work. She would have to not only break him down, but all those who loved him.

Day One

Link exited the deep woods of the Kokiri Forest and walked into the clearing where all the houses were. He smiled at his accomplishment. In his hand were a dozen perfect, white roses. He had been up since the wee hours of the morning searching for the perfect flowers. He could have easily bought the roses from some vendor at the market, but it was more personal this way. Link had been lucky to find a clearing deep in the woods that was filled with wildflowers. But what caught his attention was a wild rose bush growing in the center of the clearing. It had huge white roses growing on it, and they seemed to just call to him. Zelda would definitely love these flowers. She always liked getting flowers from Link. Today was a special occasion, though. And a special occasion always called for a special gift.

Saria was lounging on the grass in front of her house, enjoying the fact that the sun had finally come out after days of rain. She spotted Link emerging from the woods and ran over to him. “Link, where have you been?” she asked in a nagging tone. He gave her the most innocent smile he could muster and showed her the flowers. She knew him all too well not to expect them to be for her. Saria knew exactly whom the flowers were for.

“I was out picking flowers,” responded Link, stating the obvious. “I had to find just the right ones.” The sweet, intoxicating scent from the pure-white blooms wafted to Saria's nose as Link presented the flowers to her.

“So, what's the occasion?” she asked, knowing that Link never needed an excuse to give Zelda flowers. He was always so sappy when it came to her. But these flowers were much more spectacular than usual. It had to be for some special purpose.

“Don't you know?” replied Link, his face showing the slightest expression of hurt. “It's been exactly five years since I first met Zelda, five years since I first snuck into the castle because it was my destiny to save the world, five years since I first saw her beautiful face.”

“That's so sweet,” commented Saria. “You remember the exact day you first saw her?”

“Of course I do. I could never forget a day like that. Of course, it's only been five years from her point

of view; it's been a little bit longer from mine, with all the time-travel and alternate timeline stuff. But that's not important. Do you think she'll like these?"

"Yeah," Saria replied in a disenchanted voice.

Link saw the almost sad expression on her face. "What's wrong? You look upset."

Saria tried to shrug it off. "It's nothing, really."

"If something's bothering you, you can tell me," Link assured her.

"Well, it's just that...you always give Zelda flowers and stuff. And I...I don't want to sound jealous, but..."

"Oh, I get it," Link interrupted. "You're upset that I never give you flowers." Link removed a leather pouch from his belt and dug inside it. "I was going to make it a surprise, but I guess you kind of beat me to it." He pulled a few small flowers from his pouch and handed them to Saria. She was always a nature freak and knew every single plant that grew in the forest. But she had never seen these flowers before. They were small, delicate green blossoms with five petals surrounding a yellow center. Saria's face beamed with happiness as Link handed the flowers to her. "I figured that it would be selfish of me not to give you anything. In a way, you were responsible for me meeting Zelda. If you hadn't talked me into actually going to the Deku Tree, I probably would've never left the forest. So in a way, you brought us together."

"Oh Link! That's so sweet!" with the flowers grasped firmly in her tiny hand, Saria ran to Link and jumped up, locking her arms around his shoulders. She kissed him on the cheek and then dropped back down. Link was so much taller than her that she couldn't reach his face even if she stood on the tips of her toes. Saria examined the green flowers with amazement. "Where did you find these? I've never seen flowers like these before."

"They were growing out in a meadow. These were the only ones there. When I saw them, I knew they would be perfect. They match the color of your hair. Even though we know that's not your *real* hair color."

Saria glared at him. "You *know* you're not supposed to tell anyone about that. You promised."

"I know, I know. I always keep my promises. You just better hope that no one else finds out your secret like I did," he said with a smirk.

"You're so mean," complained Saria in a mocking tone, folding her arms over her chest. "But since you got me flowers, I'll let it go this time." She flashed a smile at him as she sniffed the flowers once again. "I hope you didn't cut up your hands on those thorns like you did last time."

"No, I wore gloves this time," he replied matter-of-factly.

"Well, you should probably go over to the castle as soon as possible so Zelda can put those flowers in some water. You don't want them to be all wilted before she sees them."

Link nodded. "I guess you're right. I should get going." Link turned around and began to walk towards the exit, but stopped after a few strides. He looked back at Saria, who was still standing there. "I'll be back later. Maybe we can all have a picnic together later today. I think she would like that." Saria smiled and waved at Link as he disappeared through the forest's exit.

Solo stuck out her tongue in disgust as Malon showed her yet another facet of her daily routine. Normally, they would just have fun when Solo came over, but Malon was behind on her chores and had to finish them before some prospective buyers came over to look at the horses.

"And then you just shovel it into the wheelbarrow," Malon said as she dumped another shovel-full onto the growing pile of manure. Solo had her dress pulled over her nose and mouth, trying to mask the unpleasant odor. "Is something wrong?"

"How can you stand that smell?" blurted out Solo in an exasperated voice.

Malon shrugged her shoulders. "You'd get used to it if you didn't plug your nose like that."

Solo glared. "I'm happy like this, thank you very much. I always knew you had chores, but not like this. Frankly, if I was you, I would move out if I had to clean up horse shi—" Solo stopped in mid-word as she realized what she was saying.

"My, my, we have a potty mouth," commented Malon.

"Don't blame me, I was street-rat for eight years. I had a bad upbringing."

"You'd think living with Link and Saria would teach you some manners."

"Yeah right. You should hear Link when he drops something on his foot, which he does often 'cause he's so clumsy, he curses a blue streak... words even *I* haven't heard before."

"I never thought the great Link would ever utter a dirty word," said Malon in a half-sarcastic tone. Solo just rolled her eyes. Malon finished cleaning out the stable and moved on to the last one. "I just have to finish this one and then I'm done for the day." They both went to the next stable and Solo gasped at the steaming pile in the corner.

"Geez! I think you've forgotten about that one for a couple weeks...or months."

"I clean them every day. That's Little Washu's stable. She's a miniature pony, the cutest one in the world. You've seen her before, she usually wanders around the northern corner of the ranch."

"You mean that little horse..."

"Pony," Malon corrected.

"Okay, *pony*, made *that*? That thing must only weigh like thirty pounds, and that pile of crap is waist-high! How in the world can something that small possibly poop that much?"

Malon couldn't help but laugh at Solo's refreshingly blunt comments. She was never one to sugar-coat anything. "She eats a lot," replied nonchalantly, as if it was a well-known fact.

"Yeah, but that is one huge pile," Solo continued. "That horse must..."

"*Pony*," Malon interrupted again. "There's a difference."

"Never-mind," Solo relented. "You just have fun shoveling up that stuff. I'm gonna wait outside before I get sick." Solo quickly ran out of the stable as Malon turned to finish cleaning. She saw Little Washu in the distance and still couldn't imagine how such a small pony could produce so much waste. There were some things she just couldn't understand. After a few minutes of picking at dandelion blossoms, Malon finally emerged from the stable.

"Okay, I'm all done. We can move the wheelbarrow over to the compost pile later. That stuff isn't going anywhere." Malon walked over to Solo and waited for her to stand up. Malon gave Solo a quizzical look when she bent over and sniffed at her hair and her dress. "Wha...what are you doing?"

"At least you don't smell like horse poop," Solo replied, after satisfying herself that Malon didn't radiate any offensive odors.

"Geez, I don't bathe in it. The smell won't come off onto you unless you fall into a great big pile. Besides, I thought appearances didn't matter to you. Smell is part of appearance. Would you stop liking me if I smelled bad?"

"No," replied Solo. "It's just that if you did smell bad, I would throw you in the trough first, then I would go on liking you."

"My, my, you sure are touchy about odors considering that you spent years on the street never having a bath in your life." Solo's face turned from a jovial expression to one that was somber, and almost hurt. "Oh...I'm so sorry..." Malon stammered. "I didn't mean to bring that up..." Malon mentally scolded herself for reminding Solo of her painful past. "I was just joking, and you always joke about that to lighten the mood. I didn't mean to hurt..."

Solo held up her hand to silence Malon. "No... no it's not that," she said. "Nothing you say would ever hurt me. It's just...I just felt really strange all of a sudden." Out of the clear blue, a strange sense of foreboding had come over Solo. Her heart was racing and it felt as if something were terribly wrong.

Malon noticed that Solo's hands were shaking and that she was sweating, even though it was a very mild day. Malon put her hand on Solo's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"I'm...I'm fine," Solo muttered, her mouth suddenly feeling as dry as a desert. Not only was she shaking, but all the color had drained from her face. "I just need to sit down."

"I'll take you inside," Malon said, putting her arm around Solo's shoulder and assisting her to the

house. Solo could barely remain standing, as if her legs were giving out. After a few tense moments, Malon brought Solo inside and guided her into a chair. "Here, let me get you some water." Malon quickly poured her a glass of water from the pitcher and handed it to her. Solo carefully grasped the glass in her hand and brought it to her lips. She took a few small sips and set it down before she dropped it. Her whole body felt disoriented, disconnected, and numb. She couldn't make her heart stop racing, it felt as if she had just run a marathon.

"Something's wrong," whispered Solo in a quiet, ominous voice. "I can feel it."

"What's wrong?" asked Malon in a frantic tone. She had never seen Solo this upset—or this quiet—before.

"Link...I think there's something wrong with Link. I can feel it...something that's not supposed to happen."

"Is he hurt or something?" asked Malon. "Can you sense him or something? You're really starting to worry me."

"It might be nothing, but I have to go see him." With sudden determination, Solo stood up and walked towards the door, occasionally wobbling, but regaining her balance.

"At least let me come with you," begged Malon, quickly running to her side. "I don't want anything to happen to you."

"Fine." Solo managed a weak smile, but the wrenching feeling in her gut precluded any happiness. "I'm not sure where he went, so let's go check back at home first. I really hope this is just nothing, I don't know what I would do if something happened to him."

"Me too, I'm sure everything will be fine." They both made their way to the stables to quickly prepare their horses. It wasn't a very long walk from the ranch to the forest, but Solo wanted to get there as quickly as possible. The feeling of dread kept building inside Solo as she prepared to leave. She just prayed that nothing would go wrong.

Link leisurely walked through Hyrule Field, enjoying the beautiful weather. The sky was strikingly blue, and there was not a cloud in sight. This excellent weather perfectly complimented the great mood Link was in. Before he had even realized how far he had walked, Link crossed the drawbridge that led to the castle town. Apparently his daydreams had made the trip seem a lot shorter. He walked through the town, smiling at some of the people who recognized him and waved at him. Most of the people he had seen before were vendors that he frequently visited. Some were just townspeople who knew who he was. And a couple were apparently love-sick girls who constantly tried to flirt with him. They all seemed to know who he was, but he didn't know them. The vast majority of the townspeople however, didn't even know who Link was, let alone that he had a romantic relationship with their princess. Most people had never even seen the princess.

Link pushed his way through the gaggle of people in the town center and towards the castle gate. A sudden strange feeling of foreboding came over him as he brushed past one of the townspeople; he felt a cold, tingling sensation travel down his spine. Link quickly turned around and looked to see what had caused that feeling. All he saw were oblivious people going about their daily business. He shrugged the feeling off and continued on his way. In just a few moments Link approached the gate, which was already being opened by the guard ahead. "I see that this day finds you well," said the guard as Link approached.

"Oh, it's a beautiful day," said Link with a beaming smile. "And it's going to get better." The guard gave Link a knowing smile as he walked by. The guard knew that the princess and Link were infatuated with each other. Zelda always made it a point to let everyone who worked in or near the castle know each and every little "romantic" thing Link did. As he locked the gate, the guard jumped as a small black creature ran underneath his legs and through the gate. He relaxed when he saw that it was just a rabbit.

Thankfully rabbits weren't on his list of things to pursue for unauthorized entry.

Link cheerfully walked through the vast lawn that lay spread out in front of the massive castle. Taking the dirt path was simply too boring for the mood he was in. He felt like enjoying the multitude of wildflowers that grew in the field. Link nearly stepped on a small black rabbit as it rushed underneath him and scurried behind a nearby bush. He smiled to himself upon thinking about what Zelda would do. She would probably chase after the "cute little bunny" and try to capture it and keep it as a pet. As much as a tomboy as she was, she had a fascination with animals, punctuated by her massive stuffed animal collection that filled nearly half her bedroom. She had had all sorts of strange pets over the years, such as hamsters, gerbils, birds, frogs, toads, and snakes. Most of them had escaped, and a few she had set free because Impa had found out she had them. Apparently, it wasn't good for a princess's image to have a pet boa constrictor. Link always wondered why she never got a normal pet like a dog or cat.

The whole lawn was a very shallow hill that was barely noticeable except from afar. He had reached what could be called the summit and he could see the castle not too far away. All of a sudden, he felt a sharp stinging sensation in his right arm, startling him enough that he dropped his flowers. Link examined himself to see that an ordinary honeybee had stung him. "Great, I *was* in a good mood," he muttered to himself. He wasn't going to let a stupid little bee sting ruin his day. He had been stung many times before, and he was used to them. One bee sting was nothing compared to the thirty he had gotten when he had accidentally disturbed a nest many years ago. Link pulled a small dagger from his pocket and felt the sharpness of the blade. He had since become an expert in removing bees' stingers. With a quick and simple motion, Link angled the blade on his skin and quickly flicked the stinger out. All that remained was a small red spot. It didn't even hurt that much. After replacing his dagger, Link picked up the flowers he had dropped and continued on his way.

To his surprise, after a few moments, the pain from the sting began to grow more intense. He looked at the mark and realized that it had swollen to almost twice its size, and red streaks were radiating from its center. Link stopped in his tracks as he felt his heart suddenly begin to race. His whole body became covered in a cold sweat and it was starting to be more difficult to breathe. Link took short, gasping breaths as it felt like his throat was closing up. Link panted desperately and fell to his knees. There was a strange tingling sensation all throughout his body, and there was a metallic taste in the back of his mouth. The beating of his heart became erratic and arrhythmic, like no other feeling he had had before. Link tried to make a call for help, but now he couldn't breathe at all. He finally collapsed completely, lying on his back and staring at the sky. Then the sky began to cloud and darken; but it wasn't the sky, it was his eyes. He could barely see right now. The feeling of panic grew greater as Link realized that he couldn't breathe no matter how hard he tried. A million things flashed in his mind in just a few seconds. What was happening to him? He had never had a reaction like this to a bee sting before. Then a sudden, dreaded question flashed through his mind: Was he dying? No, he couldn't be dying. Today was his and Zelda's fifth anniversary. He had too many things to do. He just had to relax. Link tried to think of calming thoughts as the pain in his body grew from nagging to excruciating. He tried once again to scream, but only a tiny hiss escaped his lips. He tried to think of Zelda as an agonizing crushing sensation gripped his chest; it felt as if a boulder were pressing him. Link curled over onto his side and stared blankly.

Just out of the corner of his eye, he saw a blurry figure approach him. He suddenly felt ecstatic, somebody was coming to help him. Link closed his eyes and waited for whomever it was to reach him. Somebody knew he was here, and everything would be okay. "Hello, my boy," said an unfamiliar female voice in a very dark, sinister tone. Link would've opened his eyes, but he couldn't. "It only gets worse from here..." The rest of the words became a blur as Link's consciousness finally left him.

She watched from behind the bush as the boy used the knife to remove the stinger from his arm. *A lot of good that will do, she thought, your fate has already been sealed.* She watched him walk a few more feet and then collapse to his knees. She so enjoyed watching her victims futilely struggle. Bee stings always gave the best show. She knew that he was gasping for breath, she could see his chest heave, but no air entered his lungs. The show got better and better till he finally collapsed onto his back. *His life must be flashing before his eyes, she thought with a grin.* Now was the time to act. The boy was totally incapacitated, and she could handle him safely.

The woman stood up from behind the bush, metamorphosing from a tiny rabbit to her normal human form. It was a rare occasion when one of the crackpot spells from her many books actually worked. She approached the boy and smiled down at him. "Hello, my boy," she said, trying not to cackle. The woman could see a look of fear cross his face as he rolled over onto his side. "It only gets worse from here." At that moment, she saw his body go limp. The first stage was complete. She bent over his body and assessed his condition. He wasn't breathing, and his face was beginning to turn a bluish shade. The woman quickly chanted a few cryptic verses from an unknown language, and the boy's body began to glow. There were no guards to bother her, she had made sure to take care of them. She smiled as his body glowed brighter. Now the process could begin.

Zelda was sitting in the castle foyer, becoming extremely impatient. Link should have been here by now. He always came over before noon on the days that he did come over. And today was exactly five years since they'd met. Surely he wouldn't forget a day like this. He had hinted a few days prior that he had something planned, so why wasn't he here? Sometimes boys just utterly confused her, or more specifically, Link confused her. Most of the time he was not only punctual, but early. He was never late when they had something planned. Then again, sometimes he was tardy, especially when the task involved waking up early in the morning. But it was almost noon, and he had to be awake by now. Zelda folded her arms over her chest and huffed. She wasn't going to give Link the satisfaction of knowing that she was sitting here waiting for him to show up. But that nagging feeling in the back of her mind told her that something might be wrong. She usually ignored that feeling; Zelda always had been a worry-wart. Of course, so was Link. *I swear, if he's not here in the next five minutes, then I'm gonna go hunt him down,* she thought to herself.

Impa and King Harikana were strolling through the castle, laughing and having some kind of casual conversation. It was lunchtime and they needed desperately to take some time off work. They both happened to see Zelda sitting in a plush chair in the foyer with her arms folded over her chest and a pouting look on her face. The king leaned over to whisper in Impa's ear, "She must be waiting for Link again." Impa nodded. "She's always so impatient."

"Just like her father," Impa quipped.

He glowered at Impa playfully. "You know I can throw you in the dungeon, right?"

Impa laughed. "I'm shaking in my boots."

He then proceeded to walk over to Zelda to see if there was anything he could do for her. "We might as well see what's wrong," he said to Impa.

"It's probably your typical teenage angst."

Impa and Zelda's father stopped in front of the chair and looked down at her. Zelda simply ignored them and pretended that she didn't notice them. Her father promptly kneeled down to bring himself to her eye level. "Is something wrong, sweetie?" he asked in a gentle tone.

"No, I'm fine," Zelda replied poutingly. Her father stared her in the eye and she caved in immediately. "It's nothing... Link just should've been here by now. It's been exactly five years since we met each other and I thought that he would come over today. He's never late."

"He probably just overslept," said Impa, knowing Link's sleeping habits all too well.

"Maybe he was coming over and he fell down," said Zelda, beginning to send herself into a spiral of

worrying. "I know that *something's* wrong because he's never late. He could've been attacked by a wolf or something."

"You worry too much," her father said. "I'm sure he's fine."

"Well, I want to go look for him," Zelda demanded with a stern look on her face.

Impa sighed. "Do you want me to go fetch him for you? I'm sure he's already on his way."

"Would you?" asked Zelda, her eyes lighting up. "I'd go, but I know you won't allow me out of the castle 'without an escort,' I'm old enough to take care of myself."

"Let's not get into *that* discussion," her father warned. He wasn't in the mood to hear Zelda whine that she was mature enough to go out on her own. A princess just didn't go out into public without some type of escort. He could handle the bloodiest battle, or the fiercest warrior, but winning an argument with his teenage daughter was something that neither he nor any other father could do.

"I'll be back in a while," said Impa as she began to walk towards the door. "If Link overslept, I'll be able to wake him up." She exited the castle and closed the door behind her. Harikana sat down in the chair next to his daughter and examined her expression. There was a hint of some deeper feeling that she was hiding. He knew his daughter's expressions enough to know when she was hiding her feelings.

"There's something else you're not telling me, isn't there?" he asked. Zelda looked at him and slowly nodded, a saddened expression on her face. He patted his hand on his leg, indicating for her to go up to him. "You can talk to Daddy about it." Zelda got up from her chair and plopped herself onto her father's lap. It was just like when she was a little girl and used to sit on his lap to hear him tell her bedtime stories. She wrapped her arms around him and rested her head on his shoulder.

"I just don't feel right," she whispered. "It feels like something's wrong. I don't know why, but I think he's hurt. But you and Impa always tell me not to worry so much, but it feels more serious than usual. I don't know what it is. What if I'm having some kind of premonition? What is there really is something wrong with him? What do I do?" Zelda sniffled and tried not to cry. She didn't have any reason to be upset, yet she still was. She hated crying because it made her feel weak and helpless, and the future ruler of the country had no room for weakness and helplessness.

"Zelda, honey, sometimes people just have bad feelings and there's no real cause for them. But I also know that you're a very perceptive person. I'm sure that, whatever it is, everything will be fine. Link's been through so many things, that I doubt he would trip on a rock or something on his way here."

"I guess...I guess you could be right." Zelda couldn't think of anything else to say, so she just hugged herself closer to her father. He was the only other person whose presence made her feel as safe as she was when she was with Link.

On the castle lawn, Impa walked down the dirt path that led from the castle's door to the main gate. She always kept her horse tied up in the stables in the village, where she knew some people that could take good care of her horse. For some reason, she just didn't trust the stable hands at the castle. Impa was about halfway to the gate when something in the corner of her eye caught her attention. She stopped for a moment and look towards the far end of the lawn, near the stone walls. She thought she saw Link's trademark green clothes in the distance, but it was hard to tell with all the grass. Rather than ignoring it, she decided to go take a look. As she made her way up the small hill, she could see the object of her curiosity more clearly. It was definitely Link. It looked like he was lying on the grass looking at the sky. *He's probably nervous and just taking a breather*, Impa thought to herself. "Hey Link!" Impa shouted as she got closer. "You know Zelda's waiting for you! It'd be much nicer if you two looked at the clouds together."

Impa's smile faded when Link didn't reply; he didn't even move. *He couldn't have fallen asleep, no person could be that lazy*. She stepped up to the motionless form and sighed. His back was facing her and it appeared that he didn't even notice her. "Hey Link, you should get up," said Impa, nudging him with her foot. Link only flopped over lifelessly. "Oh, dear gods," Impa muttered, suddenly becoming extremely apprehensive. She knelt down beside him and rolled Link onto his back. She almost screamed when she saw his face: it was completely still and lifeless, and all the color had drained from it. Impa had seen situations like this many times before, so she immediately snapped into soldier mode. "Medic!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. *Somebody will definitely hear that*. After she had called for help, Impa

leaned over and listened for any signs of life. There were no hints that he was breathing. Impa placed a finger against his neck to feel for a pulse. . .there was none. She opened his eyes and saw nothing but a blank stare; his pupils didn't even react to the sun. "Somebody get a doctor! *Now!*" she yelled when she saw a concerned guard come up the hill. Impa bent over Link's body and placed her mouth over his. She tried breathing into him a few times, followed by rapid compressions to his chest. This particular technique had saved the lives of more than a couple of her friends. Impa kept repeating the procedure of breathing and pushing, but there was no sign of life. Then she saw a large red mark on his arm. She examined it closely and all her hopes of bringing Link back suddenly crashed to the ground. "A bee sting?" Impa thought aloud. "Oh gods no...he must've been allergic to them." *If he was allergic, then he has no chance. Oh, gods in heaven, please let this be a dream.* "This can't be happening...this just can't happen..."

Zelda had begun to calm down when she and her father were suddenly interrupted by a couple guards rushing into the castle and running down one of the corridors. "Hey!" the king yelled. "What's going on?" He went to go after them, but stopped to look at Zelda. "Stay here honey, I'm going to see what's the matter. I'll be back in a minute." Zelda's heart began to race when she saw her father run off. Guards running frantically into the castle without warning was not a good sign. Now Zelda knew that something was wrong. And those guards had run towards the part of the castle where the physician's office was. Now she became even more tense.

Zelda's hopes disintegrated when she saw her father, the royal physician, and even more guards running back towards the castle's entrance. Zelda stood up as everyone but her father and a guard ran by. She saw a dire look on her father's face and knew immediately that something was terribly wrong. "Daddy? What's wrong?" she asked, choking back tears of fear.

"Honey, you stay right here," her father said in a frantic and almost hysterical voice. "Don't move! I'll be back in a second." He quickly ran off with the other guards.

"But daddy! I want to know what's the matter!"

"No! You stay there!" Zelda was shocked by the tone of his voice. He had never yelled at her before. Something was definitely wrong. Zelda noticed that one of the guards was blocking the doorway and watching her like a hawk. Zelda approached him and gave him a pleading look.

"Please..." she begged. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I'm sorry, Your Highness," he replied. "But I don't know. I'm ordered to keep you here until your father comes back."

"Something's wrong with Link! I know it!" she screamed, tears flowing down her cheeks. She backed up and ran full speed towards the guard, but he caught and grabbed her easily. Zelda squirmed and fidgeted with all her might, but the guard held on. "Please! I have to find out!" she wailed.

"I'm sorry, I can't let you," the guard insisted. He had never experienced anyone who put up such a fight. Zelda wiggled and squirmed, trying to loosen his grip. A sudden burst of pain caused the guard to release her and fall to his knees. She had managed to kick him in the crotch.

Zelda ran frantically towards where everyone had gone. She saw a small crowd gathering near the center of the lawn. She saw Impa and the doctor both on their knees, apparently attending to someone who was lying on the ground. She slowed and approached cautiously as she got closer, not sure if she wanted to know what was happening. But her curiosity got the best of her, and she needed to know what was wrong, no matter how bad it was. Zelda tiptoed ever closer, and pushed her way through the gaggle of royal guards, who stood there stunned.

Zelda then saw what everyone was gawking at. There on the ground lay Link, completely motionless and completely lifeless. It was as if Zelda's heart suddenly stopped and her blood froze in her veins. There was Link...lying on the ground. The doctor sat up from Link's position and looked Impa squarely in the eyes. "I'm...I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do. He's...gone." Everyone's face suddenly turned to shock. Time seemed to have completely frozen. There was total silence, not even the sounds of chirping birds could be heard.

Upon hearing those words, something snapped inside Zelda's mind. It was as if her life had totally ended at this very moment. She tiptoed closer to Impa and Link's lifeless body. "No..." she whispered in

an almost inaudible voice. She felt like she had lost total control of both her body and her emotions. “Nooooo!” she screamed at the top of her lungs. Zelda ran up to Link’s body and fell to the ground before him. “No! This is not happening!” she screamed, shaking his lifeless form violently. “Wake up! You’re going to be fine!” She continued to shake him even though her eyes were blinded with tears and she had lost all control of her breathing. She looked at the doctor with desperate eyes. “You have to do something! You have to!” Zelda ran up to the stunned doctor and began to shake him violently. “You’re a doctor! There has to be something! Some kind of potion, *anything!*” she wailed as her whole life came crashing down.

“I...” muttered the doctor. But before he could utter a word, Zelda had released him and was back on the ground hovering over Link’s face.

“This can’t happen to you,” she pleaded to his pale body. “Please Link...I love you...please...” She leaned over and kissed his lips. It was then that she realized the futility of it all. He was cold and completely lifeless. Zelda sat up slowly and staggered around, trying to regain her balance. The world spun before her and she saw all the faces of the people staring at her: the guards, the doctor, Impa and her father. They just stood there and watched her. “What are you all doing?!” she screamed in an almost maniacal tone. “Can’t you see what’s happened? You all let him die! You let him die! *All of you!*” Zelda had suddenly become overtaken with uncontrollable rage. “You all did it!” She ran up to Impa, whose face was blank and devoid of emotion. “You let him die!” she screamed at Impa, tackling her and flailing her arms wildly. Zelda tried to hit Impa anywhere she could. “You let him die!” she screamed again. Impa wrapped her arms around Zelda’s waist in an attempt to control her. Zelda simply struggled wildly, kicking and punching at anything she could. Zelda was now completely out of control, like a rabid animal, and it took all of Impa’s strength just to keep her from going on a rampage. Something had to be done before Zelda hurt herself or someone else. Impa eyed the doctor and he nodded. He knew what that look meant. Impa spun around holding Zelda so that her back faced the doctor. He retrieved a small vial from his bag and stepped up behind Impa, who was twisting and turning to keep in check with Zelda’s flailing body. She screamed and cried as Impa began to lose her grip. The doctor leaned over and waved the small vial underneath Zelda’s nose. The squirming began to slow as Zelda smelled a very strange odor underneath her nose. She felt dizzy and lightheaded. Suddenly, her legs buckled and she fell to the ground.

“No...please...take me too...” she whispered toward the sky as her vision faded and she blacked out.

Zelda’s father bent over and gently picked her up, cradling her in his arms like a sleeping baby. “We have to take her inside,” he said. “She has to calm down. Guards, you are dismissed. Don’t tell anybody about this until I tell you that you can.” The guards all nodded their heads and dispersed. He looked over at Impa, whose face was still emotionless. “Take care of him. I have to get Zelda to bed.” He choked back tears and tried to continue. “You have to find his friends and family. Get Saria, Malon, and...and Solo. We have to tell them. Don’t say anything until you bring them here.” Impa nodded and he walked off.

Impa looked at the doctor, who stood there with a depressed look. “Doctor, please take him inside to the medical chambers. I...I just can’t do it.”

“I understand,” he replied. Impa walked off as the doctor picked up Link’s body and carried it towards the castle.

Impa waited in the field for a moment until everyone was gone. She walked over to the decorative stone wall and just leaned against it. If she had stood any longer, her legs would’ve buckled underneath her. Now Impa was reliving the death of her husband all over again. Everything—the pain, the grief, the feeling of emptiness—was all coming back to her. She had prayed that no one would ever have to go through the pain she went through so many years ago. Now it was happening to Zelda, the girl she had accepted as her surrogate daughter. And it was even worse for Zelda; she was young and immature, and she probably had never experienced the death of a loved one. Worst of all, Zelda didn’t have the emotional maturity to move on. Impa had never seen two people who were so emotionally attached to each other. This was going to devastate Zelda more than anything in the world. Impa knew that Zelda was strong enough to handle just about any hardship, but Link was always the one who helped her through it. Now without him, Zelda would have nobody to depend on. She had opened up to Link even more than she had with her father. Impa prayed that Zelda wouldn’t go through the emotional breakdown that she

had had when her husband died, but somehow she knew that Zelda would. It was only a matter of time.

Impa unconsciously rubbed her hands against her forearms and wrists, suddenly remembering the pain that she had endured so long ago. This flood of emotions finally became too much for her to bear. Tears began to well in her eyes and fall down her cheeks; she hadn't cried in years. Impa finally lost her balance and collapsed to her knees, hunching forward and supporting herself with her arms. Now a sickening, nauseous feeling began to well in her stomach. She could taste an acidic sensation in her throat and knew what was going to happen. Impa's body shook as she began to retch violently and vomit all over the grass in front of her. After what seemed like an eternity of retching and heaving, Impa finally collapsed onto the ground and rolled onto her back. She stared at the sky for what must have been several minutes, just trying to control herself. She had no idea how she was going to tell Link's friends and family about this. Something like this was just too difficult. She'd never had to tell friends about the death of a loved one. Now she felt like the Grim Reaper, having to send the message of death to Link's loved ones. Impa couldn't let her emotions destroy her. She had to be strong and calm to break the news to Solo, Malon, and Saria. Trying with all her might, she managed to bury her emotions enough to keep herself from crying or getting sick again. Never really being a religious person, Impa still prayed for strength and guidance, because she knew that this was going to turn her entire world upside-down.

Malon and Solo both dismounted their horses when they reached the entrance to the Kokiri Forest. They took the horses' reins and led them inside the forest so they could tie them up without having to worry about thieves. They passed by a little boy who was appointed as the guard to prevent the children from aimlessly wandering off. "Um...hi Solo," he muttered, eyeing the horses. He appeared to be apprehensive about the very large animals that the two girls were bringing with them. "What's...what are those? They don't bite, do they?" He cautiously approached one of the horses but jumped back when one of them suddenly snorted.

"Don't worry, it's just a horse," Malon said, trying to calm the shaken little boy. "They won't hurt you. Just think of them as really big puppies."

"Oh...okay," he muttered, still backing away. Malon sighed and followed Solo to the nearest tree, where they securely tied up the horses.

"What was that all about?" Malon asked, motioning toward the boy who was still staring at the horses.

"They've never seen horses before. These poor kids never get out." Malon nodded, forgetting the fact that the only world the Kokiri children knew was inside the forest.

"Do you feel any better?"

"Not really," Solo replied frankly. "It's just getting worse. I don't think it's just an idle feeling. I know something's wrong, I can feel it in my bones. And I've never felt this way before." The seriousness of Solo's words was making Malon very apprehensive. "Let's just go to my house, and see if he's there." Solo quickly ran over to her and Link's house, praying to any god that would listen. She practically jumped the ladder, climbing it in seconds. She ran into the house hoping to see him lying on his bed or reading a book, but the house was empty. The only sign that he had been there was the disorderly state of his bed, and the pile of clothes on the floor. "He's not here..." Solo said, feeling tears come to her eyes.

"Maybe he's at Saria's house," Malon suggested. Solo's face brightened a little, but not much. With amazing speed, Solo ran out of the house and jumped off the balcony, bypassing the ladder entirely. Solo landed on the ground and ran over to Saria's house as if nothing had happened.

Saria was sitting at her table reading a book when Solo came barging into her house, frantic and out of breath. "What's wrong Solo?" asked Saria in her normal worried tone.

Solo motioned for her to wait a second as she caught her breath. A few moments later, Malon entered the house and stood next to Solo. "Have...have you seen Link?" asked Solo.

“Well, yeah,” Saria replied. “I saw him this morning. Is something wrong?” Saria was becoming worried at Solo’s dire expression.

“Do you know where he went? I have to see him.”

“He went over to Zelda’s house. It’s their fifth anniversary and he was going to give her flowers. He even gave me this.” Saria proudly displayed the beautiful green flower Link had given her.

“Did everything seem okay with him? He didn’t seem sick, or hurt, or anything bad like that, did he? Are you sure he’s okay?” Solo let out the string of questions in one long, uninterrupted sentence.

“Are you okay, Solo? You look a little upset.”

“I just have a bad feeling. You know that feeling, when you think something’s wrong and you don’t now what it is?”

“I guess so...” Saria mumbled, but Solo interrupted her.

“Well, I just have this bad feeling about Link.”

Saria’s face grew very somber when she realized the seriousness of Solo’s tone. “Are you...are you sure?” she asked, suddenly feeling her heart sink. “Are you sure you’re not just imagining things?”

“Yes, I am!” Solo shouted. “Why won’t anyone believe me? I’m just the stupid little homeless girl who doesn’t know anything,” she mocked angrily. “Everybody just humor her, she doesn’t know what she’s saying!” She flailed her arms in exasperation.

Malon put her hand on Solo’s shoulder and snapped her out of her fit. “Just calm down,” Malon soothed.

“I don’t want to calm down! Something’s wrong and I need to find out what it is. I see the look on your faces, and I’m not crazy.” Solo’s feelings of dread were becoming more intense as each minute passed. Attempting to bury those feelings was practically driving her crazy.

“I don’t think you’re crazy,” Saria stated flatly. “But you’re worrying me. I thought I would have felt something if anything happened to Link. I usually do.”

“There’s something different about this. It’s something bad, but it’s not supposed to be this way. It’s wrong. We have to go to the castle. I have to see if he’s there.” Before anyone could respond, Solo was out the door and walking towards where they had tied up the horses. Malon followed closely behind her when Solo suddenly stopped, nearly causing Malon to run into her.

“What’s wrong?” whispered Malon.

“Do you hear that?” Malon listened closely but heard nothing. “It’s a horse, I hear a horse coming. It’s coming through the forest entrance.” Solo pointed, and sure enough, a horse emerged from the dark passageway that linked the forest with the outside world. The rider completely disregarded the little guard boy’s shouts to stop and rode right through the meadow towards Malon and Solo. Solo slowly backed away as if she were being confronted by some kind of horrible monster. The rider was still a distance away, but Solo knew that it was Impa. Tears began to roll down her cheeks as she came to a horrifying realization: Impa never came inside the forest, something had to be dreadfully wrong for her to do that. “No...” Solo muttered, shaking her head in disbelief. “I can’t be right about this.” Malon put her arm around Solo’s shoulder in an effort to comfort her, but Solo was completely oblivious.

Impa rode up to the two girls and promptly dismounted her horse. Impa had a very solemn, stern look on her face. It seemed to be absent of emotion or feeling, simply a mask of nothingness. Impa took a deep breath to calm her racing heart and walked over to the girls. She totally avoided eye contact with them and stared at the ground. “I need you all to come to the castle with me now. There’s been...there’s been an accident. I...I would rather not say it right now. I want you all to come with me first, everybody needs to be together for this.”

“I knew it...I knew it!” Solo screamed, running into Saria’s house. To Saria’s surprise, Solo ran up to her and fell to her knees, wrapping her arms around her waist and crying. Before Saria could say anything, she saw Impa and Malon enter the house. The look on Impa’s face sent chills down her spine; Saria knew that Solo had be right about something.

“What...what’s happened?” mumbled Saria, fear and apprehension suddenly rendering her unable to speak.

“You all have to come with me to the castle. I’d rather not explain it right now. It’s...it’s too hard for me.”

"It's bad, isn't it?" asked Saria, her tone turning very dark. Impa simply nodded.

"I told you," Solo sniffled.

"Saria, you can come with too," Impa added. "I know the legend about you kids dying if you leave, but..."

"I already know that that's false. I'll go."

"Very well," said Impa. "Do either of you want to take Saria with you?"

"I'll do it," replied Solo. She tried to keep herself from breaking down. Everyone else's face was solemn and expressionless. They apparently were expecting the worst but hoping for the best. But Solo knew better, she already knew what had happened. She could feel it; every fiber in her body told her that the worst was true. But not knowing for sure enabled her to regain at least some control of herself. Solo took Saria's hand and walked over to the horses, following Malon and Impa.

Saria stopped in front of the horse and waited for Solo's assistance. "I've never ridden one of these before," she said.

"Don't worry," said Solo. "It'll be fine. When I boost you up, just grab onto the thing up there and sit on the saddle." Solo lifted Saria's tiny figure onto the horse and she did what Solo had told her. Then Solo climbed on in front of Saria. Saria felt a little apprehensive, she had never been so high up before. "Don't be scared, just hold onto my waist." A second later, Solo felt two arms wrap firmly around her, squeezing tightly. "Let's go, it'll only be a few minutes until we get there." Impa rode out of the forest first, followed by Malon, and then by Solo and Saria. As the horses made their way into Hyrule Field, they accelerated to a quick gallop. Saria squeezed even tighter and buried her face in Solo's back. Solo expected that the horse ride would probably frighten Saria, but she knew that this experience would be trivial compared to what was ahead for them.

Pain. A deep, throbbing pain in her temples was all she could feel. What had happened? She felt around blindly for a moment and realized that she was lying in her bed. Zelda's eyes flew open as memories came flooding back at her. Had it been a dream? Had the entire ordeal been a dream? Zelda sat up and opened her eyes, squinting due to the sudden brightness. As her vision cleared, she could see her father sitting in a chair next to her bed with his face buried in his hands. Then she realized that her memories weren't of a dream, but reality. "It's...it's real isn't it?" Zelda thought aloud, her voice shaking. "It wasn't a dream..." Her voice trailed off into a whisper and her mind drifted. Somehow, the realization of what had happened didn't quite register in her mind. It seemed so unreal, almost like a dream, but not quite. Zelda felt almost as if she were watching her own body from a third-person perspective, not really experiencing anything first-hand.

Harikana had heard his daughter's whispering and looked up at her with watery eyes. "I'm sorry, baby," he said. He had always thought of Link as a son; he had loved him just as much as he loved Zelda. Now a member of his family had been taken from him by a cruel twist of fate. He could not even begin to imagine how Zelda felt right now. Those two had been so perfect for each other. He wanted to be strong for his daughter, but he didn't know how long he would be able to hold back his own tears.

"What happened...to me?" Zelda asked, not remembering going to bed or changing into her nightgown.

"I'm sorry, the doctor gave you something to calm you down. You were getting violent, and I didn't want you to hurt yourself. But I understand why you did it."

"He's...gone..." she whispered. Zelda collapsed to her knees and hunched over, sobbing uncontrollably. Her father immediately went to her side and hugged her tight.

"I'm so sorry, Zelda," he soothed, rubbing her back and trying to keep himself from crying. But the tears came anyway.

"Why did this happen?" Zelda sobbed. "Why did this happen to Link? He never did anything to anyone. Why couldn't it have been me?"

"It was an accident. No one knew this would happen, it just did."

"If I had just gone over to his house in the first place, none of this would've happened. It's my fault."

For some reason, it made her feel better to blame herself. She didn't want to place any blame on Link; he was too perfect as far as she was concerned.

"Honey, don't ever blame yourself," he said, looking into her tear-filled eyes. "I spent years blaming myself when your mother died, and it only made me feel worse. It took me years of pain and suffering to realize that neither of us had control over what happened. I realized that it just wasn't my place to question the will of the goddesses."

Zelda suddenly broke her embrace and stood up, looking at her father with anger-filled eyes. "Goddesses? *Goddesses?!*" she screamed. "What kind of goddesses would do this? What kind of loving, caring creators would kill a such a wonderful person for no damn reason!" Zelda was screaming angrily, angry at the entire universe for taking Link away from her. "What kind of goddesses would take away such a caring, loving, beautiful person? They told me themselves that we were meant to be together! And what do they do? They rip him away from me! *Those fucking goddesses don't love us!* We're just their pawns, put on this world for their sick, twisted pleasure! They're not goddesses, they're demons," she muttered in a hateful, loathing voice. "And I never want to hear of them again. I don't care about the Triforce, I don't care about the integrity of the universe! And I don't care what they have planned for me! I hate them, and I will curse their names as long as I live!" In a fit of rage, Zelda ran up to her vanity, which had a delicately-forged glass statue that depicted a red phoenix carrying the golden Triforce in its talons. She grabbed the statue and threw it to the floor, causing to smash into hundreds of pieces. She saw a copy of the Book of Mudora, a book of sacred scriptures, and began tearing pages out of it and crumpling them up. Harikana quickly tried to run over to Zelda to calm her down, he narrowly missed the book flying past his head and crashing into the wall, the pages exploding everywhere.

"Zelda, stop this!" he pleaded in a stern tone. She was going mad and he had no idea what she would do next.

Zelda turned to him with her hate-filled eyes. "No! I won't stop! Not until every image of the Triforce, not until every image related to those goddesses is gone!" Then she eyed the delicately woven tapestry on her wall, which depicted the creation of the world. She yanked it from its place on the wall, causing it to tear at the top. With an eerie sense of satisfaction, she hurled the bundled up tapestry out the window, where it fell nearly three stories into the small moat. "It all has to go! All of it!" Zelda frantically looked around for more artifacts, but was so blinded with rage that she couldn't even think straight. Her father finally grabbed her and tried to tackle her to the ground as gently as she could. The sudden action had snapped Zelda from her rage and realize what she had done. With a new-found sense of self-hatred, Zelda buried her face on her father's shoulder and sobbed.

"Honey, just calm down. You're going to hurt yourself."

"I don't care any more," she wailed. "He was the only reason for me to get up in the morning. Now I have no one."

"Zelda, that's not true. You have lots of people. You have me, Impa, Saria, Solo, and Malon. All of us love you."

"But nobody loves me like Link did. Nobody understands me like he did. He was the other half of my soul, now I'm empty."

"I know honey," he said, breaking into tears once again. He had loved Link like a father, and losing him was almost too much to bear. He knew how much Zelda had loved him, and it hurt him terribly to see Zelda in so much pain. At this moment, he would've given his life to bring Link back. "You just have to be strong for him. He wouldn't want to see you in such pain. Just try to remember his life; don't dwell on his death."

"I'll...I'll try..." Zelda whispered, sobbing even more. "It just hurts so much. I've never felt like this before. I want the pain to go away."

"You'll get over it, when you're ready. I won't lie to you, it'll take a long time. But you'll learn to accept it. It seemed like it took forever for me to recover when your mother died. I loved her the same way you loved Link. I went through hell before I finally came through. I came to realize that she wouldn't want me to brood and suffer like I did. I knew Link enough to know that he wouldn't want you to suffer. He wants you to live. He would've given his life for you, and the only thing he wants is for you to move

on. Don't dwell on his death, but don't forget him, either."

"I'll never forget him as long as I live."

Saria, Malon, and Solo were standing in the foyer of the castle, awaiting an explanation from Impa. Saria was shaking and extremely apprehensive, Malon was simply waiting, but Solo already knew the answer. Impa had already whispered something to a servant, telling him to inform the princess that her friends were here. "I'm so sorry to have to tell you all this," said Impa in a solemn tone, her eyes watering. "But I thought it would be proper for you to all be here together." Impa sighed for a moment, her voice giving only the slightest hint of emotion.

"What happened?" asked Saria, already on the verge of tears.

"There was...there was an accident," Impa finally said after an awkward silence. "Earlier today, I went out to look for Link. Zelda had expected him to be at the castle earlier in the day and she was starting to get worried. So I offered to go look for him. I figured that he had overslept, or that he was just late because he was nervous. As I was about to exit the gates, I thought I saw him laying on the castle lawn. I went up to him and saw that it actually was him. I thought he was just lying there, but as I got closer, I saw that he was unconscious and not moving. I tried to get him to wake up, but nothing happened. That's when I noticed...his injury. There was a large red mark on his arm; he'd been stung by a bee."

"A bee?" exclaimed Saria with relief. "That's it? He's been stung dozens of times. That's nothing."

Impa's expression became more somber, not expecting her comment to improve Saria's mood. "No, Saria, it wasn't nothing. He may have been stung before, but people can develop allergies without warning. I called the doctor, and he tried to resuscitate Link. But after a few minutes, we both knew that there was nothing that could be done. From what we can tell, Link suffered from a severe reaction to a bee sting. He..." she fought back tears. "He didn't make it. Link died at about noon today."

Time came to a standstill. In an eerie repetition of what happened earlier, everyone merely stood there with stunned faces. After nearly a minute of stunned silence, Saria's clam finally disappeared and she broke into tears. Malon followed suit a moment later. But Solo still stood there, her face pale and shocked, but not a hint of tears. She had already known the answer, but hearing it from someone else only reinforced it. Solo couldn't even cry. She just stood there. No tears would come, no emotions would surface. She only felt empty and lifeless. Everything was numb: her body, her mind, her soul. It really surprised her that she felt nothing. After a few moments of nothingness, Solo finally began to notice what was happening around her. She heard high-pitched wailing and felt some kind of weight pulling on her legs. She looked down and realized that Saria was on her knees, clutching Solo's legs tightly. Likewise, Malon also wrapped her arms around Solo's shoulders, crying more for Solo's sadness than her own. "I want to see him," Solo blurted out after a few minutes of silence. "Is that okay?"

"I suppose," Impa sighed. "He's in the physician's office right now."

Solo nodded and knelt down to Saria's level. Saria looked at her with agonized, tear-filled eyes. "Be strong, Saria," said Solo, kissing the little girl on the forehead. "Things will get better. I promise." Saria couldn't understand how Solo could say something like that after hearing such terrible news. As far as she was concerned, things would never get better. As Solo stood and walked away, Saria latched onto Malon and cried with her.

With a dull face, Impa led Solo to the physician's office. She walked inside and saw a large stone table in the center. On the table lay the motionless body of her brother; the boy who had saved her from an eternity of torture, the boy who had completely changed her life. Now he was gone, only a still corpse was there. Solo walked up to Link's body and stood before it. He was so...lifeless. *What was I expecting?* She thought to herself. She couldn't believe she actually expected him to be doing something. What an absurd thought.

Solo didn't want to touch him, but she somehow found herself running her fingers across his expressionless face. His skin was hard and cold, nothing like it used to be. In the first show of emotion, a single tear fell down her cheek. She had no idea why she wasn't bawling like everyone else. "There was

nothing we could do,” said Impa suddenly, surprising Solo. Impa walked up to her and put her hand on her shoulder. “He had some kind of allergic reaction.” Impa lifted Link’s right arm and showed Solo the red mark where the bee had stung him.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen,” Solo said matter-of-factly. “He’s not allergic to bees. I’ve seen him get stung before. This shouldn’t have happened.”

“Things just...happen sometimes. There’s never a reason for them.”

“You don’t understand,” Solo rebutted, her voice becoming forceful and angry. “This wasn’t *supposed* to happen. He has too many things to accomplish in his life...or he did. Does anybody realize that? It’s not his time. It’s not supposed to happen like this. It’s not *right*.” The tears were now freely flowing and Solo felt like she was once again alone in the world. On the table lay the body of the boy who had rescued her from a hellish life, her savior. Now her savior was gone. What reason did she have to live in the world he had given her? She shook the thoughts out of her head and looked back toward Impa. “So what happens now?”

Impa sighed. “The doctor and some officials are taking care of the funeral preparations. I’m leaving that to people that didn’t know Link personally. It’s just too hard for us. I’d do it...but I can’t.”

“When will the funeral be?” Solo asked nonchalantly.

“The day after tomorrow. It’ll be small; only close family members and a few high-level officials. Link was more highly respected than even he himself knew.”

All of a sudden Solo turned around and walked out of the room. Out of the corner of her eye Solo saw the confused look on Impa’s face and she responded as she left the room, “I have to get out of here before I get sick.” Solo walked out of the administrative wing and back towards the foyer where she had left her friends. She now saw that Zelda had joined everyone else in the foyer, crying like the rest of them. Solo stopped before she reached them, staring at them with a blank face. Why was it that they could cry and she couldn’t? She had cried so many times in her life, over things that now seemed trivial. So why couldn’t she cry now? She had never felt so depressed in her life, not even when she had contemplated suicide while living in the streets. It felt as if her soul had been sucked out of her body and only an empty shell remained. She was sad, but strangely, she couldn’t really feel it. She saw Zelda on the floor bawling, holding Malon and Saria tightly. But Solo just felt numb. A feeling deep inside her told her that all this was wrong. It was like a surreal dream, as if there was more to the situation than it seemed. Even seeing her brother’s cold, dead body didn’t make the realization sink in. Solo wondered if she would always feel like this.

After staring blankly for a few minutes at the heartbreaking display before her, the others finally noticed Solo standing there. All three girls motioned for her to come over, but she remained completely still. She didn’t belong with them; they were upset and distraught. Solo felt nothing. So why should she bother them if she couldn’t feel anything? Zelda noticed Solo standing a few feet away from them. She looked so lost—so alone, like no one in the world could possibly understand how she was feeling. But Zelda knew how she was feeling. Solo didn’t even notice Zelda walking up to her; her mind was off in some other dimension of nothingness and she stared blankly into space. It took Solo a few moments to realize that someone had wrapped their arms around her. She looked down to see that Zelda was hugging her and sobbing quietly. Simply going through the motions, Solo felt obligated to hug her back, even though she didn’t feel anything.

“I’m so sorry,” Zelda whispered between sobs. “I know how you feel.”

Solo couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic chuckle. This caused Zelda to look up at her with a confused expression. “You have no idea how I feel,” Solo stated bluntly, almost harshly. “You couldn’t possibly understand how I feel.”

“But...Link is dead; he’s gone. I loved him more than anything in the world, and I know you loved him too. We both share the same pain.”

“We don’t share any pain. You’re upset because your precious little lover is gone and never coming back. Sure, he loved with all his heart, but you couldn’t possibly understand what he did for me. I lived through hell for eight years, never having a home, a family, food or clothes. I had absolutely nothing. I had *less* than nothing. I *was* nothing. I was a worthless scrap of meat that wandered aimlessly, hoping and

praying that maybe I could find a piece of garbage to eat. You always had a family. You always had food, clothes, and shelter...you always had someone to talk to and share your feelings with. I had nothing, no one. All I could do was wallow in self-pity, or, if I was lucky pass out from hunger and maybe have a dream where I didn't have to worry about anything. You always had someone. Link just added to your already enormous wealth. But I had no one—*nothing*. Link was the only person I ever had. He saved me from hell, and I owe my life to him. Everything that I have, I have because of him. He gave me everything: a life, a family and friends. Now he's gone and everything I ever had has gone with him. I have no right to be here with you anymore, I don't deserve any of you. Without him, I have no purpose. I might as well be dead along with him." Solo didn't even realize that she had fallen to her knees and was sobbing, clasping Zelda tightly.

Malon had somehow wedged herself into the whole scene, replacing Zelda's arms with her own. With all the gentleness she could muster, Malon touched Solo's face and directed her eyes towards her own. Solo's usually bright and cheerful eyes were eerily empty. The once beautiful blue pools, filled with love and happiness, were now devoid of life. It seemed that Solo's eyes didn't even register Malon's presence. Malon always noticed that Solo's eyes brightened when she saw her, it was one of the things she liked about Solo. But the eyes didn't brighten this time. "Solo..." Malon whimpered, gently stroking Solo's face and hair in an attempt to calm her. Solo had never rejected Malon's touch before, but this time she flinched and moved back slightly. "Please, please don't think those things. You still have me. I still love you. You're not alone any more. I will always be here for you." Tears welled in Malon's eyes, and a few drops managed to make their way down her cheeks. Solo couldn't quite understand why Malon was behaving like this. Malon didn't deserve her any more. Link had always made Solo feel important and needed, that she had a place in this world. Now with him gone, her light had suddenly been extinguished. He was no longer there to guide her, and all her purpose had suddenly vanished in one fell swoop.

"No, I don't deserve you any more. I realize now that I was never good enough for you. I never really understood why you would want to love a person like me. But Link always reassured me that I was good enough for anyone. I was good enough for him...He accepted me for who I was. He showed me that I could be a person. And as long as he was there for me, I always believed it. He was...he was my savior. Now whenever I feel like I'm worthless, he won't be there to tell me that I am worth something. A lot of times, in the middle of the night, I would have nightmares about my old life. The feelings of despair and worthlessness would come back. But he was always there to comfort me. He was always there to hold me and save me again. Now he can't. I'm worthless again." In a sudden flood, Solo's emotions went rushing through her. She finally collapsed and let out all the feelings that had been locked away. Burying her face in Malon's shoulder, Solo sobbed violently.

"Solo, don't ever think about yourself like that. I don't think you're worthless. You mean more to mean than anyone, and Link would tell you the same thing."

"No, no, you don't *understand!*" Solo shouted. "You don't know what it was like. None of you had a brother, you couldn't possibly understand what he meant to me. He was not only my brother, he was my savior, and he was the first and best friend I ever had. I know you all loved him, and so did I. But it was more than that. He was my idol; I worshipped him. I wanted to do everything I could to be like him. I looked up to him more than anyone else, I wanted to someday become the kind of person he had already become. You don't know what it's like to have someone your age, someone who's blood-related to you, someone you can relate to and someone who understands your feelings. He was my brother, and he was my light. Now I'm back in the darkness again...and he won't be there save me from it." After the heart-wrenching display, Solo continued her distraught sobbing.

Malon couldn't stand Solo's terrible self-pity. She tried to grasp Solo's face forcefully enough to get her attention, but gently enough so as not to hurt her. Solo closed her eyes and shook her head back and forth, not wanting to hear any more. "Solo...Solo! Look at me!" After some cajoling, Malon finally managed to get Solo to open her eyes. "Listen to me. You are not worthless, you never *were* worthless. Link obviously showed you that. He showed you what it was like to be human. His death can never take that away from you. He showed you that you could become a great person. But most important of all, he gave you the strength to be yourself. You know he wouldn't want you to act like this. If you think of

yourself this way, then you're throwing away everything he gave you. He showed you that you weren't worthless, and if you think you're all of a sudden worthless because he's gone, then you're spitting in his face!"

That seemingly insensitive comment suddenly brought Solo back to reality. The harsh truth of her situation finally hit her. She was spitting in his face. If she pitied herself again, then she was only desecrating his memory. "I...I guess you're right," she mumbled, at a loss for words. "It's just that the problem is...I never got a chance to tell him that. With all the help and support he gave me, I never told him how I really felt. I always meant to tell him, but I never really got the chance. Now I'll never get to tell him. Now I'll regret it for the rest of my life."

"He knew," Zelda stated simply. "Believe me, he knew. A lot of times when he was rambling on endlessly, he would start talking about you. I guess he never told you how proud he was of you. He always wanted to have a sibling. He was so proud that you were able to adapt so quickly, and finally fulfill your potential. I think he looked up to you as much as you looked up to him. He was always amazed by your strength and your independence. He always thought that you were stronger than he was. But he always regretted the fact that you had to live the life you did. If he had been able to change the past, he would've taken your place without any second thought." Zelda tried her hardest to make Solo feel better, even though she herself was inconsolable. Zelda would never be able to relieve her own pain, but maybe she could take some of the pain away from her friends.

Solo looked at Zelda with a glimmer of hope in her eyes. "He...he really said that about me? He was proud of me?" Zelda nodded. "I always thought that I could never live up to his example."

"It's quite the opposite, he wanted to live up to your example. He only gave you a little push, you did everything else yourself."

"It's true," added Malon. "Link introduced us, but you were the one who decided to be my friend."

"I know that," sighed Solo. "But I'm going to have a hard time living without him. He was such an important part of my life."

"Mine too," said Zelda.

"I don't think there's anyone he's met who wasn't deeply affected by him," said Saria, who had been silent until that moment.

"That's right," said Solo. "But he wasn't supposed to die, at least...not like this. This isn't his time. He had too many more things to do."

"I know," said Zelda. "I always thought that we would get married some day and have a whole bunch of kids and live to be old and senile. But now that'll never happen. If I had known this was going to happen, I would've already married him. I don't think I'll ever really get over this. I'll never be able to love anyone else, ever."

Saria looked out the door and noticed that it was nearly nighttime. She hadn't told anyone where she'd gone, and everyone was probably worried about her. She had no idea how she would break the news to the rest of the Kokiri, or if they would even care. None of them had ever really accepted Link as one of their own, on Saria did. They might not even care. And if they didn't, then she wouldn't be able to stand living with them any more. "I have to go home," said Saria. "I have to tell everyone what happened. They probably won't care, but they need to know."

"I understand," responded Zelda. "You go back home, they need you, and you need them."

"I can take her home," offered Malon. She wanted to let Solo stay with Zelda so they could try to comfort each other as much as they could. They had both known Link the best, and they could help each other more than Malon ever could.

"It's okay," said Zelda. "Solo can go with. I'll be fine by myself. I need some time alone."

"Are you sure?" asked Solo.

Zelda nodded. "You need to go home. It'll be easier if you're at home with your friends."

They all eventually agreed. Everyone was completely burned out. All they wanted to do was simply go to sleep and forget about this for a few blissful hours. Solo knelt down and picked up Saria, whose face was still wet with tears. It surprised Solo that Saria had shown such remarkable maturity facing the situation. She always had looked like a small, naïve child, but she was definitely wise beyond her years.

Saria wrapped her arms around Solo's neck as they made they walked towards the doors. "I'll be back tomorrow," said Solo. "I just want you to know...that I always loved you like a sister. You made Link so happy. Don't forget how happy you made him."

Zelda wiped away a tear as they disappeared into the night. Zelda's dad sidled up beside her and put his arm around her shoulder. She grabbed at his clothing and cried again. She had tried so hard to remain composed in front of her friends, for their sake. But now she was free to pour her heart out. "Daddy, I don't think I'll ever get over this. Am I supposed to get over him? I feel that if I ever fell in love with someone else, that I would be betraying him. I don't even *want* to fall in love with someone else."

"You might not fall in love with someone else," he said frankly. "I never did. Sometimes, when you find that perfect person, no one else can take their place."

"We pledged to love each other for the rest of our lives. I just thought that his would last longer, at least until we got married. I always looked forward to the day I would finally be his wife. But now that'll never happen."

The sun had set and the twilight disappeared when Solo, Saria, and Malon entered the Kokiri Forest. They were surprised to see a whole slew of children run up to them as they tied up their horses. All the little kids ran up to Saria and started barraging her with questions. When they saw the pained expression on her face, every one of them suddenly clammed up. They never saw Saria like this, and they became even more worried. After moments of awkward silence, someone spoke up. "What's wrong, Saria?" asked Hoshi, a dark-haired girl who was usually the biggest gossip in the village, but could also be surprisingly sensitive.

Saria took a deep breath and tried not to burst into tears again. "I have some really bad news for you." They all waited for her to compose herself and continue. "It's about Link."

"What happened to him?" came a few stunned voices in unison.

"He's..." Saria sniffled a bit, but managed to control herself. "He's dead. He was stung by a bee and he died." The response the children had totally amazed Saria. Most stood there with looks of complete shock, while others broke down and wailed.

"No! How can Link be dead?" screamed one girl.

"Who's going to protect us from the monsters?" shouted a boy.

"What if that giant raccoon comes back?" asked two twin girls simultaneously.

Saria was heartbroken to see all the children huddling together, crying. After all the hell they had put Link through during his childhood, she still had to remember that the Kokiri were still children after all. They couldn't help their childish name-calling. Perhaps that had loved Link more than she previously thought. "You mean...you guys liked him?" asked Saria.

"Yes!" they all replied in unison, some of them too distraught to speak.

"After the Deku Tree died, he was the only person big enough to protect us," said one of the boys. "Now what will we do? We have no one to protect us."

All of the children, their eyes and faces wet with tears, looked towards Solo, who was trying not to break down. "You'll protect us," said Hoshi again, running to Solo's side. The other Kokiri quickly followed. Before Solo could even react, dozens of little kids were hugging her and looking up at her with sad, teary eyes.

Solo couldn't help but look back down at them. They were so cute and so innocent. The recent death of their guardian spirit, the Deku Tree, would have sent them into chaos had they not had someone to rely on. Apparently they had seen Link as some kind of replacement. He was bigger than them, and it only seemed natural that they would see hi as a type of protector. Of course, Link was gone now. And Solo was the biggest one there. She didn't want the responsibility of having to be their new protector. But when she looked at their pitiful faces, it melted her heart. She couldn't say no to these kids. All of them had helped her to live the childhood she never had, and she would be forever grateful for that. "... I guess I could do that," mumbled Solo, putting a small glimmer of hope into the eyes of the distraught youngsters. "I'll do

what I can. But right now, I just need some time to myself.”

Most of the Kokiri reluctantly let go of her, while a few still clung to her legs. “You promise you won’t leave us, right?” asked a little girl in a pitiful tone.

“Of course not,” Solo replied, gently running her hand through the girl’s hair. The stragglers finally let go of Solo and joined the rest of the group a few yards away from the three girls. Solo saw Saria, whose eyes were still filled with tears. “Why don’t you go with them for a while? I’d kinda like to be alone right now.” Saria nodded and joined a few of the children, the rest of them slowly dispersing.

“Do you want me to leave too?” asked Malon sheepishly. She really didn’t like the idea of leaving Solo alone in her time of need.

“I really don’t want to tell you to leave...” replied Solo, not sure how to answer without hurting Malon’s feelings. “I just need some time to myself. And you should probably go home and tell your father what happened. He needs to know.”

“I guess you’re right. You’ll be okay, right?”

“Yes, I’ll be fine,” Solo assured her. “I just have to deal with this in my own way. I hope you understand.”

“It’s okay, I understand.” They stood there for a few minutes until Malon suddenly clutched her in a tight embrace. “I’ll help you get over this, I promise.”

Solo stood and watched silently as Malon hopped onto her horse and slowly disappeared through the forest exit. She looked around for a moment, taking in the silence of the forest. It was no surprise to her that things were so quiet, the children were all usually in bed by now.

She sullenly walked to the house that had once belonged to Link; now it belonged to no one. Link probably would’ve given it to her anyways, but she felt like she didn’t deserve it. But she didn’t care about that right now; all she wanted was sleep, assuming she would be able to sleep at all. She grasped the rungs of the ladder and slowly made her way up into the house.

Solo stood in the house, which was strangely empty and silent. There were two beds in the room, both of them in similar states of disorder. And there were piles of clothes in front of each bed, mixtures of clean and dirty. Solo never really realized how much she took after Link. It all seemed to make much more sense now. After all, Link was the only role model she had, it only seemed natural that she would pick up his habits. Link probably never realized that she’d taken up his habits entirely on purpose. She wanted so much to be like him, that she would do anything to emulate him. She walked over to Link’s desk and saw the piles of books on it. It didn’t take very long for her to realize that he was a closet bookworm. The day she found that out was the day that she had meekly asked him to teach her how to read. She had felt so ashamed at the time, everyone else knew how to read. But he hadn’t made her feel stupid or insignificant. He even praised her ability to learn new things quickly. That had brightened her outlook on life more than anything. He never really realized how much those small compliments affected her. Solo sat at the desk and looked at the titles on the various books: *Elementary Calculus*, *Botany of the Jungle*, *Ancient Hylian Architecture*, *The History of Hyrule*, *The Book of Mudora*, *Great Literature*, and dozens more. There were so many books on so many subjects. It boggled her mind that Link could even comprehend those books. There were so many of them, filled with page after page of big words and completely alien ideas. Sometimes Solo would sit there in the middle of the night reading them, hoping that maybe she could become interested in what Link liked reading. It was another attempt to try to be like him, but sometimes it seemed futile. She just couldn’t understand the books.

Solo snapped out of her reverie and walked over to the bed. What was the point of looking at those books now? She never understood them before, and she wouldn’t understand them now. It didn’t even matter anymore. Link was gone, there was no reason to try to be like him anymore. Now she had no more guidance. Suddenly feeling terribly dejected, she finally collapsed onto the bed and buried her face in the pillow, not even bothering to remove her clothes or shoes. Muffled sobs emanated from the pillow as she wailed loudly. Link was no longer there to reassure her and to tell her that everything would be okay. She was alone once again.

Day Two

Harikana stared at the ceiling of his bedroom. He hadn't gotten a wink of sleep so far. How could he even sleep? There was too much on his mind. Link had been such a wonderful person, like a son to him. He'd always waited for the day that Link would become his son-in-law, and marry his daughter. It was always so obvious that Link and Zelda would eventually get married, a person had to be really thick not to notice that. He personally understood how Zelda felt right now. It had devastated him when his wife died giving birth to Zelda. But he had had Zelda to help him overcome the pain. Zelda didn't have anyone to love like she did Link. He had no idea how Zelda would take this in the long run. He didn't even know if she would truly overcome it. How would she live the rest of her life? He knew his daughter well enough to know that she would never love anyone else.

He wondered how she was doing right now. She was most likely awake just like him, probably crying into her pillow. He couldn't lie in bed while his daughter was in so much pain. He needed to be with her. Harikana stood up and put his robe and slippers on. He quietly padded down the hallway, making his way towards Zelda's bedroom. Normally he would worry about waking her, but he knew she wouldn't be sleeping. He opened the door and peeked inside, expecting to see her lying on her bed. He was surprised to see that she wasn't there. He walked into the room and quickly scanned it, not seeing any sign of her. It would be difficult not to miss a distraught teenage girl.

Feeling defeated, he exited her room and walked across the hallway to Impa's chambers. He opened the door and saw her sitting at her desk, eerily illuminated by a small oil lamp. She looked up and saw Zelda's father standing there. "So I guess you couldn't sleep either, huh?" she said in an emotionless voice.

"No. I was looking for Zelda, but she wasn't in her room. I don't suppose you've seen her?"

A look of worry came across Impa's previously expressionless face. "I had no idea she'd gone somewhere. I'll help you go look for her, I hope she didn't get herself hurt or..."

"Calm down," he assured her. "I'm sure she's fine. She probably just needed some time to think. I think I know where she is. I'll go find her, don't you worry." Impa nodded and went back to her sulking as he left the room.

Harikana walked to the end of the hall and down the stairs. He had a good idea of where Zelda might be. Many times when she was little, she would sneak off to the courtyard to calm down. She liked the flowers and the grass there, it was calming for her. He had no doubt that his daughter would be there right now. As he approached the center of the courtyard, he could hear sobs echoing off the stone walls. As he rounded the corner, he could see Zelda's form highlighted by the full moon. She had her knees pulled up to her face and was rocking back and forth.

"Zelda honey?" he said quietly. His comment startled her, causing her to jump back a little. She scuttled back and knocked over what looked like empty bottles. He heard the telltale sound of glass bottles falling over and rolling onto the grass. She looked up at him for a moment and then hung her head back down, ignoring him. "What are you doing?" He walked up to Zelda and saw that she was clasping a large green bottle in her hand.

"N...nothing," she replied, sounding not at all like herself. Zelda took a drink from her bottle and continued staring off into space.

Her father, hoping she wasn't doing what he thought she was, went and sat down next to her. His suspicions were confirmed when he smelled the unmistakable odor of alcohol. He put his hand on her shoulder, but she didn't even react to his touch. "Why are you doing this?"

"Why not?" she replied smugly, her voice slurred. She attempted to take another drink but her father snatched it from her. She groaned in disapproval but was too inebriated to do anything about it.

He looked at the bottle. It was an extremely expensive wine from halfway across the continent. "For someone who's so upset, you sure picked some expensive stuff to binge on. Where did you get this?"

Zelda shrugged her shoulders. "I dunno. Was in the cab'net, in the kitchen. It wass the firs' thing I saw. I wan' it back." She made a feeble attempt at reacquiring the bottle, but her father pushed her hands away. She folded her arms and pouted when she realized the futility of her attempt.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked again.

“B’cause. ‘Cause it makes the pain go away. I don’ hafta feel anymore.”

“You know this isn’t the answer. You shouldn’t drink away your problems. It’ll only make things worse.”

Zelda let out a sarcastic laugh. “Thin’s can’t get any worse.”

Harikana had no idea how to approach this situation. He knew how Zelda felt. She felt like there was no reason to do anything in this world. “You’re smarter than this. Don’t degrade yourself like this. How much of this stuff have you had?”

She shrugged her shoulders again. “I dunno...I los’ count after the secon’ bottle.” Her father looked around and saw four empty bottles strewn about. There were five bottles including the one he had taken from her. “Jus’ gimme it back. I jus’ wanna pass out and forget.”

“Dammit Zelda! Don’t do this to yourself! I did the same thing when your mother died and it just made things worse!” He turned Zelda’s face toward his and looked into her eyes. “If you keep doing this, you’ll only sink deeper and deeper into depression. You’ll eventually dig yourself into a hole you can’t climb out of. You will just end up destroying yourself.”

“Maybe tha’s what I want,” Zelda mumbled indignantly. “Maybe I wanna destroy myself. There’s no reason not to. I have nothing else to live for. At least there’s somethin’ to get rid of the pain.”

“Zelda, you have more to live for than you might think. You have friends and family. We all love you, and none of us want to see you like this. There’s nothing I can do to stop you. I’m not going to lock you up or ground you or anything. It has to be your choice. All I can do is tell you not to do this to yourself. Please, trust me. I know from personal experience what this will do to you.”

“I’m sorry,” she slurred. “I just don’t care anymore. I know you’re up...upset, but I don’t want to feel anymore. I can’t stand the pain. And if I can’t feel anything, then I won’t have to feel the pain. I can’t promise you anything.”

“Well, we can talk about this later. Right now, you’re going straight to bed before you get sick.”

“I alrea’y did,” she mumbled, pointing to some spot in the corner of the courtyard. “Twice.”

“Come on, I’ll help you up.” He placed Zelda’s arm around his shoulder and tried to get her to stand up. She had barely moved when she stumbled over and fell flat on her face. She was thankful that she couldn’t feel a thing at that moment. The world was spinning when she just sat still, now it was spinning and twisting so fast that she could feel it even with her eyes closed. Zelda finally gave up and collapsed limply onto the grass, letting out a pathetic whimpering noise. Her father sighed and picked her up, cradling her like a baby. It reminded him of happier times when she was a baby and he would carry her around all day. She wasn’t a baby anymore, and this certainly wasn’t a happy time. Only half conscious, she snuggled up against him and put her arms around his neck. He slowly meandered his way through the castle and towards Zelda’s room. Another difference between now and the past was that she weighed a lot more. He wasn’t in nearly as good shape as he had been back in his military days. Somehow he still managed to walk up the stairs and into Zelda’s room without arousing any suspicion.

When they had finally made it into her room, he gently placed her onto the bed and pulled the blankets over her. Instead of her normal relaxed pose, Zelda curled herself up into a fetal position. He didn’t know if it was from the emotional pain or just from being sick. He hated seeing her like this. He so wished he could take the pain away from her and make everything better. But now there was nothing he could do, he was the almighty King of Hyrule, but his power couldn’t bring Link back. He leaned over and brushed Zelda’s hair back a little, giving her a kiss on the forehead. “I love you sweetie,” he whispered. Zelda had already fallen into a deep sleep, albeit a fitful one.

Harikana exited Zelda’s room and quietly shut the door behind him. His next stop was Impa’s quarters. He opened the door to see Impa sitting in the exact same position he had seen her previously. Her face was unusually blank, even for her. He walked up to her desk and sat down atop it, only a couple feet away from her. “I guess you found Zelda,” she said as more of a statement than a question.

“Yeah, I did,” he replied. “She was in the courtyard. She always goes there when she’s upset.”

“It makes sense.” Impa sipped something from her cup and placed it back on the table. “How was she?”

“Well,” he sighed, “she obviously wasn’t in the best of spirits. She was probably more upset than

earlier today. Not to mention she was blind, stinking drunk.”

“That’s doesn’t surprise me,” she said nonchalantly. “At least she didn’t do anything worse. She’s not exactly thinking clearly.”

“Tell me about it. Somehow she managed to get her hands on five bottles of the most expensive wine we have. The thing I don’t understand is how she got it. That stuff is in a locked cabinet.”

“That’s simple. I gave her the key.”

“You gave her the key?” he asked, completely astonished that Impa would do something so out of character. “Whatever possessed you to do that?” He studied her face closely and then realized the problem. “Impa, are you drunk?”

“I was until about twenty minutes ago, yes.” She looked over at her longtime friend and shrugged her shoulders. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t think of anything else to do. I couldn’t sleep and I really didn’t want to think about my problems. Then Zelda came in with the same problem. She didn’t feel like talking. I just gave her the key and left it up to her own judgment.”

“Were you drunk when you gave her the key?” he asked.

“Not totally. But I was a little tipsy.”

“Why did you give her the key in the first place? That’s so irrational, and you’ve never done anything like that before.”

“Would you rather I’d given her a knife?”

That comment made him think. But something like that wouldn’t happen. “Good point. But I think it’s time for you to go to bed too. I don’t want to have to carry you.”

“Is that an order?” she asked sarcastically.

“I can make it one,” he replied. Impa signaled her surrender and put her bottle of liquor away.

“I guess you’re right. I’ll try to get some sleep.”

The king left Impa’s room, confident that she could take care of herself. Before going back to his room, he quickly peeked into Zelda’s room just to make sure she was okay. Satisfied, he walked back to his own room and shut the door. He climbed back into bed, knowing full well that he most likely wouldn’t get any sleep.

The pain. That’s all there was, horrible, agonizing pain. Where was it coming from? Everything was a blur of agony and dejection. Her whole world was being turned upside-down. She opened her eyes and saw nothing but a bunch of dark blurs. It was as if she was experiencing her life from a third person perspective. She could see and feel, but everything felt so detached and impersonal. But in another sense, it all seemed so real. She looked down at herself and realized that something was strange. It didn’t feel like her own body, but her instincts told her it was. There were no clothes on her, only a few tattered scraps remained. Then she saw the source of the pain. There were welts and marks all over her body. Purple bruises and dozens of lacerations replaced her pale skin. There were also a few deep gashes, some still oozing blood, randomly spaced on her body. She tried to move her hands to touch her face, but realized that her arms were tied. She also noticed that her ankles were shackled to the ground and tied together. She couldn’t move at all. Then she felt the pain in her face. Her left eye was sore, and her jaw gave an occasional sharp pain.

A few other unusual feelings accompanied the physical pain. She had a debilitating sense of sadness and anguish. And there was more—a dreadful feeling. She had a dreadful feeling of humiliation and—shame. That’s what she felt: terrible shame. She felt like she was no longer human, like some scrap of meat. Something had happened to make her feel like this, something terrible. But she couldn’t put her finger on it. She had been through many beatings in her life, and none of them had made her feel like this. Something had to have happened to make her feel such indignity. But she didn’t know what. The feelings just kept getting worse and worse, building themselves into some kind of self-perpetuating cycle. She was about to simply give up when a voice came from someone she couldn’t see. “You’re mine now,” it said with a cackle.

The world suddenly vanished as Solo shot up out of her bed. Her heart was beating wildly and she was breathing so erratically that she felt as if she were about to pass out. Solo looked around and realized that she was back in her house and in her bed. *A dream, it was a dream.* She usually didn't remember her dreams, but this one was still vivid in her mind. The images and feelings of pain came rushing back. She anxiously rubbed her hands all over her body, making sure that there were no wounds. Then the terrifying sense of shame and indignity came rushing back. Solo suddenly felt as if she were going to get sick. Solo tumbled out of bed and staggered to a mop bucket in the corner, which she immediately leaned over. Solo retched and heaved, but very little came from her stomach. She hadn't eaten anything the previous day, so all that was left was burning acid that sent sharp pains all the way up her throat. After an eternity of dry heaves, which were now agonizingly painful, Solo finally calmed down enough to lie on the floor.

Tears flowed from her eyes once again, caused both by her sadness at the death of her brother, and also because of the dream she had awoken from. The feelings in the dream were so real and tangible. But what did the dream mean? Did this dream even have any meaning? Link had always told her about his own prophetic dreams. She wondered if this was some kind of premonition of what was to come. It certainly couldn't have been a memory of the past, because she had never had an experience like that before. Then again, maybe it was just a dream and nothing more. Perhaps her feelings about Link's death were being manifested in her dreams. She had no idea what it was, but she didn't want the dream to come back. It was so terrible.

Staring at the ceiling was doing her no good. As much as Solo wanted to, she couldn't sit around in the house and mope all day. She had to talk to someone, to confide in someone. She peered at the clock and noticed that it was nearly noon. On a normal day, Saria would have already woken them up for breakfast. It wouldn't have mattered if Saria had done that today, Solo still didn't feel like eating. She had gone for days without food before, so it didn't even faze her. Solo finally gathered the strength to get up and was shocked when she looked in the mirror. The face that looked back at her was tired and drawn, and her eyes were so bloodshot that she looked like some kind of demon. Her hair was matted and out of order, and her clothes were wrinkled. Then she remembered that she had slept in her clothes. After a few moments of debating with herself, she decided that it wasn't worth the trouble to change clothes.

Now she needed to decide what to do. She wanted to go to Malon's house to talk to her, but she felt the need to check on Saria first. Perhaps they could help each other a little bit. Solo walked out onto the balcony and climbed down the ladder. What she saw at the base of the tree house left her in disbelief. All around the front of the house lay dozens of bouquets of brightly-colored flowers. There must've been hundreds of flowers lying there. Those flowers certainly hadn't been there the night before. The display almost brought her to tears. The only people that could've done that were the forest children, and she had never thought of them as the truly compassionate type.

Solo walked over to Saria's house to see the same beautiful display of flowers that were in front of her house. She walked into Saria's house to see her lying on her bed staring at the ceiling. Saria heard Solo walk in and sat up to greet her. "So how'd you sleep last night?" asked Saria, rubbing her tired eyes. "I didn't get any."

"Pretty much the same here," responded Solo. "I slept for a little while, but what little sleep I had was taken over by a nightmare."

"Really? I'm sorry." Saria's face showed a twinge of concern, but the bags under her eyes overpowered any other expression. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really. I don't feel like talking about it." Solo shuddered upon remembering her terrible nightmare. "Have you been outside today?"

"Yeah. Those flowers were a nice touch. I guess everybody did like Link. I really wished they'd told him that. He was always convinced that none of the Kokiri liked him. Especially with the way they treated him when he was younger. They always teased him and made fun of him. But they're just little kids, it's their nature. But he was always so self-conscious, and I guess the teasing made him feel worse about himself. He always had self-esteem problems. It might've helped him if he'd known that everyone here looked up to him."

"I guess it's too late for that. I was going to go over to Malon's house. But I wanted to make sure you

were okay first.”

“Well, I’m not okay,” Saria replied. “I don’t think I could be ‘okay’ after what happened. But I’ll be fine here. I can take care of myself.”

“You’re not...mad at me or anything are you? For just leaving?”

“No, of course not. It’ll help you if you share your pain with Malon. She understands you. I can talk to the rest of the Kokiri here. They understand me. We’ll get through this.”

Solo walked over to Saria and gave her a tight embrace. “Thank you. You’ve always been like a sister to me. I just wanted you to know that.”

Saria managed a weak smile as Solo walked out of the house. When she was out of sight, Saria went back to moping on her bed. The other Kokiri would understand her; what was she thinking? This tragedy was making her delirious. None of them understood her. None of the Kokiri were friends with her like she had been with Link. They were all sad now, but they would all go back to their normal lives soon enough. But her life would never go back to normal. She would never find another friend like Link.

Solo rode the horse back to Lon Lon Ranch, and was there in a matter of minutes. She really didn’t feel like going anywhere, she just wanted to curl up in her bed and cry for the rest of her life. Solo had spent the whole night mulling over how she had reacted the previous day. She knew that she didn’t have to feel worthless. At least she had Malon to talk to. She had been so distraught yesterday that she hadn’t realized that there still were people who could make her feel worthwhile. Malon could never be to her as Link had, but she was the only one Solo had left.

Solo rode into the ranch and stopped the horse near the corral. She dismounted and the horse quickly ran off and started grazing, happy to be back at its home. Solo sighed and knocked on the door. “Hello?” she said meekly. “Is anybody home?”

She heard some footsteps grow louder and the door opened a few moments later. Talon answered with a solemn expression on his face. “Hi, Solo,” he said, showing her in. “I’m so sorry about what happened. Link was such a nice boy. I can’t believe this happened.” Talon really couldn’t think of any adequate words to say to Solo. There really wasn’t much he could say to console her. He himself was quite fond of Link, and was devastated when Malon told him the news. He gave Solo an affectionate pat on the back and pointed towards the barn. “Malon’s in there, I’m not sure, but I think she’s been worrying about you. I don’t blame her. She’ll be happy to see you, if happy is even the right word at a time like this.”

Solo nodded and ran off towards the barn. She opened the door and looked around for Malon. After a few seconds, she located her behind some stack bales of hay. Malon quickly ran up to Solo, hugging her and kissing her on the cheek. “I’m so glad you came over. I was worried that you would never want to come back and see me, that you would be too depressed.”

“I am depressed,” Solo stated bluntly. “But I needed to be with someone. I just don’t want to be alone.”

They both sat down on the hay bales and Solo let out a sad sigh. “I wanted to go over to see you, but I wasn’t sure if you wanted to be alone or not. I was thinking about the time when I thought I’d lost you up on the mountaintop, I can only imagine how Zelda must be feeling. And I really don’t know how you’re feeling, I never had a sibling.”

“It’s terrible,” Solo said, her eyes watering. “He meant so much to me, and now he was taken for no reason. He showed me how to live.”

“I think he all gave us a new perspective on life. Before I met him, I thought nobody would ever care to listen to me. He was the first person I met who didn’t think I was a total nut. And I could never thank him enough for introducing me to you. I just can’t believe that he’s gone. He brought us all together, and I’m just worried that we’ll all drift apart.”

“I have no idea what I’m going to do now,” Solo said. “What’s it going to be like waking up every morning without him there? It’s not just the important things I’ll miss, it’s all the little things that make up our daily lives. I mean, I’ll never hear him snoring in the middle of the night, or hear him complain when Saria scrubs his floor, or laugh when he puts a spider in Saria’s bed. But most of all, he made me

feel like I was the most wonderful person in the world, like the whole reason I was put on this planet was for him to take care of me. From the moment he took me into his home, he made it his job to tell me I was worth something. He never judged me or yelled at me for anything. Now I just feel like I've been thrown back on the streets again." Solo choked back a sob and tried not to let it out. She didn't want to end up blubbering like a baby again.

Malon put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "It's okay," she soothed.

Solo leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Malon, burying her face in her shoulder. Solo sobbed loudly for a few minutes, while Malon sat there, gently stroking Solo's back. "I just can't understand why this had to happen now," Solo cried. "Why did this have to happen when I needed him the most? Those damn Guardians said he was going to be some kind of turning force for the whole universe. So why did he have to die? He had so much more to do! And I had so many more things to tell him. Now I'll never get to tell him those things."

"I'm sure he knew. You know how much of a perceptive person he was. I'm sure he knew all along."

"But I needed to tell him! I needed to say the words." Solo couldn't bear talking anymore. She resumed bawling on Malon's shoulder, thankful that at least she didn't have to be alone with her pain.

Zelda rolled over and tried to open her eyes, but suddenly squinting at the bright light streaming through the window. She didn't remember going to bed last night, all she remembered was trying to drink herself stupid in the courtyard. Then the memory hit her. She remembered being caught by her father and talking to him for a while. Everything after that was a total blank. Zelda knew that she had gotten quite intoxicated, the way she felt now was proof enough. She really didn't care how terrible she felt physically. Not wanting to face the day or even get up, Zelda rolled over and buried her face under the pillow once again.

A creaking door suddenly broke the silence as her father walked into the room carrying some kind of tray. "Go away," Zelda mumbled from underneath the pillow. She did not want any visitors.

"Honey, it's me," he said.

"I don't care," she replied. Harikana set the tray down on the nightstand and pulled the pillow off his daughter's head. "Go away!" she shouted, flailing her arms about. "Just leave me here."

"I'm not making you go anywhere," he assured her. "Now come on, sit up." Zelda reluctantly moved herself into a sitting position, squinting her eyes and massaging her throbbing head.

"Why are you trying to torture me?" she whined.

"Because I don't want my little girl to sit here and suffer all day." He took a ceramic mug from the table and handed it to Zelda. "Here, I made some tea for you. It should help settle your stomach after that little binge you had last night." Zelda unwillingly grasped the mug and took a sip. "I brought you some oatmeal..."

"I'm not hungry," she interrupted.

"You haven't eaten since yesterday morning; you need something."

"What's the point of eating if I'm gonna throw it all up anyways?"

"Fine, have it your way," he said in defeat.

Zelda took a few more sips of the tea and set the cup back on the tray. She lay back down on the bed and rolled over, facing away from her father. She didn't want to have to face him, not after how she had behaved the previous night. She didn't want to have to face another lecture.

"Honey, do you remember what happened last night?"

"Of course, how could I forget?" she scoffed.

"I suppose that's a good sign. What motivated you to go into the liquor cabinet last night? You could've come and talked to me."

"I already told you last night," she replied indignantly. "I just wanted to forget it all. Every time I tried to go to sleep, I kept hearing his voice in my head and seeing his face, I just couldn't take it anymore. No matter what I do I can't stop thinking about him, and I can't stop seeing his dead body on the ground."

That's all I see now. I can't even remember the way he was alive anymore. His death is haunting me."

"Sweetie, I'm so sorry," he said, leaning over to gently stroke her hair. But before he could even reach her, she squirmed farther away from him to the other end of the bed, still not turning around to look at him.

"No, please. I just want to be alone right now." She wrapped herself in the blanket and put one of her huge pillows over her head.

Harikana could hear her sobbing underneath the pillow, but he decided against bothering her any further. "Fine, I'll leave you alone. I just wanted to tell you that the funeral is scheduled for noon tomorrow. I know you don't want to hear it, but I just thought I'd tell you. I love you dear. Come downstairs later if you feel like it."

Although her hearing was muffled by the pillow, Zelda still heard the door close as her father left. At least now she could be left alone to wallow in her own depression.

The people who called themselves the Guardians were gathered in the largest building among the cluster of cottages in the outskirts of Kataan. Most of them had been going about their daily business when Zoya had told them to meet inside. She said she had extremely urgent news. All of them sat, waiting for Zoya to come back inside. They hadn't had any urgent news in quite a while. In fact, life had been quite dull lately.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of waiting, the gray-haired woman known as Zoya walked into the house and closed the door behind her. "I hope this is important. I had to miss my hair appointment for this," quipped Kira. Everyone except Zoya gave her bewildered stares, she was not one to make wisecracks. Kira grinned, but her expression faded as she saw the grim look on Zoya's face. "What's wrong?"

Zoya sat at the head of the table and sighed loudly. She rubbed her face with her hands for a moment, trying to keep her composure. "I just came across some bad news about an hour ago," began Zoya, her voice grim. "While you were all out doing your things, a messenger from the castle delivered a message to me. I have to say that I was more than shocked when I read it."

"Something's really wrong, isn't it?" asked Gaiden in a serious tone.

"Yes, yes it is," Zoya replied matter-of-factly. "The message I received was personally written and signed by the king. It informed me of the death of one of our...friends." Zoya paused for a moment in an attempt to calm herself. She had been quite fond of Link, and his death was tearing her apart inside. She almost thought of him as a brother, even if their age difference was huge.

"Well? Who died?" prodded Gaiden.

Zoya took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She realized that her hands were shaking and her eyes were welling with tears. "Yesterday afternoon, Impa, Zelda's caretaker, discovered a body on the castle lawn. It was...it was Link. Link died yesterday due to an allergic reaction to a bee sting. His funeral is at noon tomorrow in the castle yards."

Stunned: that was the only thing that could describe the looks on their faces. All of them sat there silently, brooding over the news they had heard. For some reason, it didn't seem right. "This is a joke, right?" asked Kira, the others nodded their agreement. Zoya was known for playing pranks on them, but she never did anything this serious.

Zoya shook her head. "No. This isn't a joke. I really wish it was, but...it's true."

"I think I'm going to be sick," mumbled Talan.

"Yeah, that was my first thought," commented Zoya. "But it's true." She stood there silently, letting the news truly sink in. "Any thoughts on what we should do?"

"This isn't right," said Kira in a gloomy voice. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I think this reeks of evil-doing."

"That was my first thought," commented Zoya, her voice and demeanor transforming her into the familiar "detective-mode".

“This is obviously the work of someone we have no knowledge of,” said Kayla. “It’s our job to see this type of thing coming. But I guess we’ve gotten a little lax lately. After all, Link was supposed to be one of the Supreme Oracles. Kasuto himself predicted that he would change the world, and so did all of his predecessors. And I personally felt it in him. We would’ve known if he was destined to die so soon. None of us would have these feelings about him otherwise.”

“I’m going to have to agree with her,” said Soral. “I mean, a bee sting? I distinctly remember him rambling about bee stings that night he and Zelda were over for dinner. He said he stumbled on a nest and got stung dozens of times. If he were allergic, he would’ve died then. And one bee sting is nothing compared to multiple ones.”

“That’s true,” commented Zoya. “So we’re all going to the funeral tomorrow, we were invited after all. We’re going to have to do some investigating. I want to find out who did this.”

Zelda slowed her horse as she approached the entrance to the Kokiri Forest. She was sick and tired of lying in her bed, being babied and coddled by her father, Impa and the servants. All she wanted was to be left alone with her misery. She had pretended to be asleep and then sneak out of the castle when the time was right. The guards at the gates would’ve normally stopped her before she could leave, but they took one look at her face and backed off. Zelda had been ready to simply knock them out if they had protested, but it didn’t come up. Secretly she had wanted them to try just so she could have an excuse to do something to vent her frustration. Zelda didn’t really care about anything that happened anymore. As far as she was concerned, the world could go on without her.

Slowly leading her horse behind her, Zelda walked into the Kokiri Forest. She tied up the white stallion to a tree and glumly walked to Link’s, or what used to be Link’s, tree house. With every step she took, Zelda became increasingly distraught. The simple act of approaching his house only made the pain worse. But she had to do it; Zelda didn’t plan on visiting his house much in the future. She was taken aback by the sight she saw before her as she approached the house. Strewn all over the grass were dozens of bouquets of brightly colored flowers, some of them with small cards attached to them. Zelda picked up the card and quickly scanned the scrawling writing. It was a sympathy card from one of the Kokiri children. Apparently they had liked Link a lot more than they let on.

Not able to handle the emotions she was feeling, Zelda climbed up the ladder into the house. Zelda moved the curtain away from the doorway and let out a sigh when she realized that the house was currently occupied. Malon sat on Solo’s bed, cradling her like a small child. Solo was sobbing and whimpering, occasionally speaking broken sentences about some kind of dream. Malon tried to comfort Solo’s trembling body the best she could. Malon looked up and directed a pitiful glare to Zelda and motioned for her to sit down. Zelda took a seat at the desk and stared at the floor. Malon shook Solo gently to get her attention, and she stared up at the auburn-haired girly with red, tear-streaked eyes. “Solo, angel,” Malon whispered. “Zelda’s here.”

Solo looked over to Zelda and gave her a look of empathy and understanding. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know anyone was here,” said Zelda, hanging her head. “I just wanted to come here and...wallow in my own misery.”

“Join the club,” Solo commented cynically, using her dress to wipe tears from her face.

Zelda stood up and paced around the room, gazing at all the meager possessions that lay before her. She looked at everything with new eyes; everything was the same as it had been just a few days before, but somehow it seemed different. Stacks of books were lying on Link’s desk, a few of them open. Next to the books was a notebook full of his own scrawling handwriting and absent-minded doodles. In one corner of the room was a pile of clothes, haphazardly built up against the wall. And then there was the bed that Link slept in every night. The sheets and blanket were crumpled and in a state of extreme disarray, and the pillow had somehow made it into the exact center of the bed. It looked as if the bed had never once been made, and knowing Link, that was probably true. As Solo sobbed in the other corner of the room, Zelda cautiously walked up to Link’s bed, approaching it as if it were a wild animal ready to

pounce at any moment. Then she finally sat down on the mattress, feeling it push down a little under her weight. She then lay flat on her back, placing her whole body on the mattress. She rolled over and rubbed her hand over the sheets, noticing for the first time the slightly rough texture. She had slept in this bed many times before when she had visited his house, but never really noticed how it felt before. Every time she came over, Link always let her use his bed, and he slept on the floor. He had always been adamant that it wouldn't be proper for them to sleep together in the same bed. And she had never protested, no matter how much she wanted to lie next to him and cuddle up beside him. Zelda never understood why he protested. Perhaps he was worried that sleeping next to each other would make him lose control of himself. But Zelda knew he was worried more about her than himself. Zelda had inadvertently tried to seduce him on more than one occasion, but she never followed through. She didn't want to tarnish her perfect image of Link because of her own biological urges. He had too strong a sense of honor for her to ruin that.

Now Zelda didn't care about that any more. She only wanted to see him and hear his voice one more time. Zelda reached for his pillow and grabbed it, hugging it to herself. She quietly sobbed into his pillow, slowly soaking it with tears. She took a deep breath and was overcome by a flood of emotions and memories. The pillow smelled like Link, the same scent that she was so familiar with whenever she embraced him and kissed him. The smell alone brought back so many memories of him that she completely broke down and bawled into the pillow, occasionally lamenting about why this had to happen to him.

After an eternity of wailing and crying, Zelda felt someone's hand on her shoulder, attempting to shake her out of her reverie. Zelda looked up and saw Solo's face staring back at her. "It's okay Zelda," soothed Solo. "We can get through this together." Zelda took Solo's hand and squeezed it tightly, giving her a strange look. Solo gave her a confused look, wondering what the expression of longing in Zelda's face meant.

"I'm sorry," Zelda mumbled, gently running her hand over Solo's face. "It's just that...you look so much like him. Did you know that?"

"Yeah...I guess," Solo mumbled.

"Every time I look at you...I see his face. You have the same eyes...the same nose." Zelda sniffled and suddenly felt ashamed of herself. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that. I just want to see him so bad, and I see him when I look at you. I know it's stupid. I'm sorry I said anything."

"You don't have anything to be sorry for," assured Solo, hugging Zelda's shaking body and gently stroking her hair. "I know what you feel like. Didn't you think I noticed that? I can't even look at myself in the mirror anymore. I can't even stand to wear my own clothes, because they're the same as his. It's hard for me, too. I'm almost jealous because you knew him longer than I did. Even though he was my brother, I still didn't have enough time to get to know him better. And imagine how bad Saria must feel. She knew Link for his entire life. But we're all friends. We can get through this together."

"So you guys think of me as one of your friends?" asked Zelda meekly. Malon and Solo both nodded. "I never thought of it that way. I always just knew all of you through Link. Saria was Link's friend, you're his sister, and," she pointed to Malon, "you're Link's sister's girlfriend. I don't mean any offense, but I never thought you would all want to have anything to do with me if he was gone. I'm used to not having friends."

Solo suddenly felt so sad for Zelda. She knelt down in front of her and kissed her on the cheek. "There would be no reason for us not to be friends with you. I always thought of you as a sister to me, I thought you knew that." Zelda shamefully shook her head. Solo hugged her again tightly, feeling her own tears flow once again. "I still love you. We all loved Link, and that should bring us together, not push us apart."

"Thank you," Zelda mumbled quietly. "You don't know how much this means to me."

"For what it's worth, it means as much to me as it does to you."

Zelda let go of Solo and used her dress to wipe the tears off her face. "I'll leave you two alone; I have to go talk to Saria." Solo nodded and Zelda turned around and left.

She slowly walked through the beautiful forest on her way to Saria's house. But somehow, it didn't

seem as beautiful anymore. Zelda figured that it was probably just her own emotions that were clouding her senses. The Kokiri Forest looked exactly the same today as it had the first day she'd stepped inside it. Now she didn't even care how beautiful it was anymore. What did it matter if she couldn't enjoy it with the one person she loved?

Zelda knocked on the doorway as she walked into Saria's house. In the far corner of the room lay Saria; she was on her bed staring at the ceiling, as she had been for most of the day. She just didn't have the will to get up and do anything. Saria heard Zelda's knocking and flashed a quick glance at her. "Hi, Zelda," said Saria in an empty voice, far from the child-like cheerfulness that it normally possessed. Without prompting or invitation, Zelda pulled a chair from Saria's table and sat down next to the bed.

"I just came by to see how you were doing," said Zelda. Saria continued staring, her only acknowledgement was an almost inaudible groan. "I thought I would come over and talk to you. Between all of us, you were the one who knew Link the longest."

"Yeah, I know. I knew him for his whole life. He was the only real friend I ever had. I'm sure you understand that. I feel so lonely without him." Saria felt somewhat uncomfortable talking to Zelda so frankly about Link. After all, Zelda was the person Link had loved more than life itself, and she felt like she had no place being friends with Zelda when Link wasn't there. But she didn't care anymore; nothing could possibly get worse than it was now. "I guess I took it for granted. Every day, Link and I would eat breakfast and dinner together. We would always talk about things; he would tell me everything that was bothering him and I would make him feel better. Now I can't talk to him about what's bothering me. Now I'm going to have to wake up every morning and he won't be here, coming to my house in the morning with his hair and clothes all disheveled. I loved just talking to him the most, and I'll never be able to do that again."

"I know," said Zelda, hanging her head. "I loved that too. Everybody always said he rambled and talked endlessly, but I liked listening to him."

Saria saw that Zelda was on the verge of breaking down again, and decided to try to say something positive. "You know, he loved you a lot." Zelda nodded, understanding fully. "From the day he first met you, he always talked about you. I'm sure you know that you were the center of his universe."

"Yeah, I know. Everybody always says that. It's only been a day and it already feels like forever." Zelda buried her face in her hands and took a deep, ragged breath. She really didn't feel like talking at the moment, but she somehow felt obligated to let Saria get her feelings out. Zelda had never once seen Saria complain or gripe about things, and she knew from Link that Saria almost never dumped her problems on him. Zelda had no idea how Saria could keep all her feelings bottled up inside her, especially when she had someone to talk to. "Saria, is it okay if I ask you something personal?"

Saria shrugged her shoulders. "I don't care; it's not like I have anything else to lose."

"I don't know if it's my imagination, or if I am actually a perceptive person. Link was always better at reading people than me. But I've noticed that you always seem to be concealing something, like you're hiding your feelings. It seems like you have a lot of pain hidden inside that you don't want anyone to know about."

"You're right," replied Saria after a long silence. Zelda could tell that Saria was desperately trying not to break down once again. But the expression on her face was different this time; it hinted at some kind of pain that went much deeper than what they were both feeling right now. "You're right, I am hiding something. I am hiding my pain. I always did. But it doesn't matter anymore, because this pain is much worse."

"What kind of pain are you talking about?"

"I don't even know," Saria sighed. "The pain of being weird, the pain of being an outcast. I always felt a lot like Link did when he was younger. I never truly felt like I fit in here, like I was destined for something else and I just ended up here by mistake. Then Link came along and we became friends right away. I was his friend even when he was a baby. The first word he ever said was my name. I guess we became such close friends because we were the oddballs of the forest. Once we became friends, I really didn't think about all those years when I was lonely. He more than made up for that."

"Why didn't you ever tell him these things?" asked Zelda. "It helps to let things out."

“No,” Saria replied quickly, shaking her head. “No, I could never tell him those things. He already had it bad enough, he didn’t need me dumping my problems on him. Link had too many of his own problems to deal with. He always told me everything that was bothering him, and I didn’t want to make his life worse by making him worry about me.”

“But you know he would’ve listened to you.”

“No!” Saria insisted. “Don’t you know what his life was like as a little child?” Zelda shook her head. “He was miserable all the time. All the children here treated him like dirt. He was the weird little kid without a fairy and everyone used that as an excuse to torment him. The boys were the worst. He would come outside and they would call him over to their little group, making him think that he could come play with them. Then they would do something to humiliate him in front of everyone. Sometimes they would push him in the mud, and other times they would sneak up behind him and pull his pants down in front of everyone. But no matter what they did to him, he would never fight back or sink down to their level by getting revenge. He was just too nice to do anything. And he hated that. He hated not being able to fight back. Sometimes he would try, but he wouldn’t be able to do it. Then they would make fun of him for that. Then he would run up to his house crying and wouldn’t come out. Sometimes he stayed in there for days. I would go over and try to make him feel better, but he only stayed curled up on his bed. He didn’t even bother to eat. Do you know how much it hurt me to see him like that? For years, Link hated himself and who he was. He really believed that everyone in the world hated him. Until you came along, I was the only person he would talk to. When he met you, he finally discovered that there were people out there that actually liked him for who he was. That’s why he loved you so much, because you made him feel like he mattered when for his whole life he thought he was worthless.”

Zelda was speechless, and tears were flowing again. She was so sick of crying. “I didn’t know it was that bad for him.”

“Even after he met you, he still worried that it would all be a dream and he would wake up and everything would be gone. He knew that you loved him and would never leave him for anything, but he worried anyways. That’s why he was always trying to impress you. He would do anything for you because he wanted to show you that he was worth loving and that you didn’t need to leave him.”

“But I would’ve never left him,” Zelda insisted. “I still won’t leave him. I’ll never love anyone else. Why would he ever think that I would leave him?”

Saria shrugged her shoulders. “I’m not totally sure. But it’s probably because he was insecure. All those years of torment made him think that there really was something wrong with him. It’s hard to break something that’s been ingrained in him for so many years.”

“What does it even matter anymore?” Zelda sighed dejectedly. “He’s dead and he’s never coming back. Nothing we say can do anything to change that. Tomorrow he’s going to be buried and I’ll never be able to see him or talk to him again. I didn’t know him long enough to let him know how much I appreciated him. He was the first real friend I ever had, and now I’m going to be lonely again. I was going to marry him and have a family and live the rest of my life with him. Now what am I supposed to do? I’m not even fifteen years old and I don’t have anything to live for anymore.”

“Don’t talk like that,” Saria pleaded, worried about Zelda’s state of mind. “You have plenty to live for. You’re a princess, you have a whole kingdom to live for. You have a father who loves you. We can get through this eventually.”

“Everybody keeps saying that!” Zelda shouted, suddenly flying into a rage again. “Everyone keeps saying ‘Don’t worry, you’ll get over it.’ Well I won’t get over it! My whole life has come crashing down and nobody seems to notice! ‘Oh look, it’s the poor little princess whose boyfriend died, how tragic,’” she mocked hatefully. “‘Just give her time, she’ll get over it.’ I’ve heard it all, so don’t bother. Everyone’s treating me like I’m just some dumb little girl who doesn’t know what she’s talking about. I wasn’t really in love, it was just some stupid childish attraction.” Zelda’s face had turned a bright shade of red and she was yelling so loud that her voice was becoming increasingly hoarse. She was seething with unbridled anger and grief, and she didn’t care how she let it out.

“Zelda, calm down please,” Saria begged, beginning to feel scared. She had never seen Zelda in even a bad mood before, this new side of her was frightening.

“No, I will not calm down! I’m sick of calming down! I want to be mad, I want to scream. They drugged me yesterday because I wouldn’t calm down. Isn’t that great? My father loves me so much that he’ll knock me out just so he doesn’t have to hear me whine. Nobody cares how I feel, they just want me to shut up. Apparently, I’m not supposed to have feelings. A princess has no room for emotions or caring. Well, I’m sick of being the perfect little princess. I never asked to be a princess. I never even wanted to be a princess. But does anybody care what I want? No! Of course not!” Unwilling to scream any longer, Zelda collapsed to the floor and sobbed quietly. Saria couldn’t help but feel sorry for her. She knelt on the floor next to Zelda and put her arms around her.

“Zelda, I’m sorry there’s nothing I can do to make things better. All I can do is tell you that I’ll always be here for you if you need me. And you were wrong that you had no friends. I’d still like to be your friend if you want me to.”

Zelda didn’t voice any response, she only nodded. Zelda pushed Saria away and stood up. “I’m so sorry Saria. I didn’t mean to get mad like that. I just can’t take it anymore.”

“I understand,” Saria assured her.

Zelda stood up to leave but Saria held her back. “Yes?” Zelda asked, still feeling ashamed of her outburst.

“I don’t know if you even want to hear this, but I might as well say it anyway because it won’t make a difference now.” She paused for a moment to think of the easiest way to word what she wanted to say. Finally giving up when she couldn’t think of a tactful way to do it, Saria just decided to get it over with. “I really do understand how you feel...because I loved him too. If it’s any consolation, I know what it’s like.”

“We all loved him...”

“No, not like that,” Saria interrupted. “I loved him more than a friend. I loved him like you did.” Zelda’s reaction wasn’t jealous or hateful like Saria had expected it to be, instead her face remained fixed with the same chagrined mask that Zelda had worn for the last two days. Not seeing any hint of a response, Saria elaborated. “I always had this insane crush on him even when he was little. I thought that some day we could be more than friends. Then I found out he wasn’t even a Kokiri like me, and that crushed all my hopes for anything. And when he started seeing you, I knew that there would be no chance of him ever loving me back in the same way. Somehow I knew it would never work out anyways, but I never told myself that. I always kept putting off telling him how I felt until it was too late.”

“Did...did you ever tell him?”

“Eventually...not too long ago. But he was understanding and he let me know that he still loved me, even if he couldn’t love me in the same way he loved you. And that was the worst part...” Saria’s voice cracked and she tried to repress her feelings and tell Zelda the story as matter-of-factly as she could. “He told me it was okay and that we would be friends forever. And I didn’t have a problem with that because he was happy with you, and I just wanted him to be happy. But what he didn’t say was what made things worse. I could tell that he was hiding how he really felt. What I said hurt him. It didn’t hurt him because I told him I loved him, it hurt him because I was sad. He never said it, but I could tell by looking in his eyes. He always gets this look in his eyes when he feels like he’s let someone down. He felt like he failed me because he didn’t notice how I felt. And I could tell that every time I looked at his face. I hurt him even more because I let him think that he let me down. Sometimes he’s gets too concerned over other people’s feelings. He thinks that any time somebody he knows is upset that he failed them somehow. I tried to never let Link know when I was upset because he would always think it was because of his own shortcomings.”

“I understand,” Zelda replied flatly. She always suspected as much, but had never mentioned anything to Link. Zelda knew by the way Saria acted towards Link, but apparently he never noticed it. “I know why you felt that way. I really don’t think there’s anyone who couldn’t love him. I should probably go home. I’m sure my dad’s wondering where I am right now.”

“Go ahead,” said Saria. “Thanks for listening.”

“Thank you too.” Zelda turned around to leave, but stopped before exiting. “I just thought I’d remind you, the funeral is tomorrow at noon. It’ll be in the graveyard in Kakariko village. Solo and Malon both

know where it is. They can take you there.” Saria nodded before Zelda walked off. Discussing his funeral only made the ordeal seem more real. She realized that once Link was buried, she would no longer be able to deny to herself that everything was okay. Tomorrow she would have to face cold, hard reality. And she didn’t want to have to do that.

Impa and Zelda’s father were sitting in the castle foyer, discussing what they should do. “I’m just worried about her,” he said. “She never runs off like this. The last thing I need is my little girl running off and getting herself hurt.” Only a few minutes after Zelda had left the castle, the guard came inside and reported that she had gone off somewhere on her horse. The king had been ready to send out a search party after her, but Impa had talked him out of it. Now he simply waited for her to return.

“She’s not a little girl anymore, no matter how much you want her to stay that way,” Impa told him. “I know she’s more than just upset right now, but you have to give her a little more credit. She probably just wanted to get out and calm down for a while. You need to let her sort things out in her own way. Sometimes the best thing you can do is nothing.”

“But I don’t want to do nothing,” he complained. “I want to hug her and kiss her and make everything better. I’m supposed to be the most powerful man in the country, and I can’t give my daughter the one thing she wants. Link was the kindest and most noble person I’ve ever met. I adored him as much as Zelda did. I’ve never seen a person who was so selfless and dedicated. I always thought that when Zelda got a boyfriend that I would have to watch him every minute to make sure he didn’t do anything to her. I thought I would have to interrogate him every time they went out together. But I never had to do any of that. I always tried to find some fault with him, just to justify my stupid suspicions. And I never found anything. I guess that’s when I realized he was the best boy Zelda would ever find. At first I thought it was just a normal childhood infatuation. I always had little crushes when I was a kid. But as the years went by, their infatuation with each other gotten even stronger. Then I thought to myself, ‘he’s the one.’ I looked forward to the day they would finally get married and I would get grandkids. But now that’s not going to happen. I know that their relationship wasn’t some childish infatuation. I could tell just by seeing the way they looked at each other. And all of a sudden, for no reason, he dies! What I am supposed to tell Zelda now? Should I tell her that everything will be okay? That she’ll find someone else? Now I’m worried about her. What is she going to do now? We both know that she’ll never find anyone as good as Link. And even if she could, she wouldn’t want to. She’s too young for this to happen to her. She’s too young to cope with something like this. She doesn’t have the emotional maturity to handle his death. And I’m worried that she might take this too hard.” After venting his frustration, the noble king of Hyrule broke down and cried like a child. As his best friend, all Impa could do was try to calm and comfort him, but nothing seemed to do any good for him.

“She’ll find a solution,” Impa said quietly. “I know she’ll cope with this somehow. But whatever she does to deal with this, you have to be supportive, and don’t judge her.” Impa sighed and mentally scolded herself for what she was saying. Being the person she was, Impa always assumed the worst. She knew that Zelda was a rational person, but a situation like this was making her far from rational. Impa only hoped that Zelda wouldn’t take the easier way out that she herself had tried so many years ago. That had been a mistake, a stupid, ill-gotten mistake. And she regretted it everyday of her life. Impa knew all too well that talking to Zelda would do no good. It hadn’t done any good for her. Talking to concerned friends and family members never changed someone’s mind when they were dead set on doing it.

Impa’s musings were suddenly interrupted when Zelda sullenly walked through the castle’s front door. It was obvious that Zelda had been crying quite a lot; it had become almost commonplace. “Where have you been?” asked Impa. Harikana’s head shot up and he realized that Zelda was standing right in front of him. He rushed to her side and hugged her tightly, not wanting to let go. After a couple minutes, he finally let go, regretting the fact that he had let his emotions get so far out of check.

“I went to the forest, to see some friends,” Zelda replied meekly, hanging her head. “I didn’t mean to worry you.” Her voice sounded so timid and apologetic, and her father knew that she truly was in a

distraught state of mind. Zelda had never been timid or reclusive, she always let everyone what her opinion was. Not once in her life had she immediately apologized when she did something wrong. She would always protest and insist that she was innocent. Zelda had been the most difficult child to discipline. And now she was acting like a mindless zombie who was waiting for another hypnotic command.

“Zelda, honey,” her father stammered, “Are you okay?”

“I’m...I’m fine,” she replied. “I just went to the forest to see Link’s sister and Saria. I was sick of being alone. I didn’t mean to run away and make you worry. I wasn’t thinking straight, I just did it.”

“It’s okay, it’s fine sweetie,” he said, gently stroking her hair and hugging her tight. “I’m not mad at you. I know how you feel. Just remember that I’m always here for you.” Zelda nodded that she understood. “Go ahead and go up to your room,” her father said. “I know you need some time alone. If you need anything, just ask me.”

“Okay, I will,” she replied. “I love you Daddy.” Zelda kissed her father and ran down the hall to the stairway.

After she disappeared, her father went back to his dejected state. “It’s terrible for her,” he commented, rubbing his hands over his face. “I can tell by the look in her eyes. She always has that spark of life in her eyes, but look at them now; they’re dead. There’s nothing behind them, not even a hint of hope. This is eating her alive. And what worries me is that I don’t see any hope in her. She’s hopeless, and she doesn’t care what happens any more. I don’t want to see her like this. I don’t want to see her waste away into nothing. I wish there was something I could do.”

Impa put her arm around her best friend’s shoulder pulled him closer. “All you can do is let her know that you love her,” Impa suggested. “Just be there for her, and let her try to sort this out herself. Don’t try to take control of her emotion; listen and give her a nudge in the right direction when she needs it. She’s going to feel worthless and alone. Tell her that she’s not alone. Tell her about you and her mother to let her know that you understand.”

“This is bringing back so many bad memories,” he sighed, leaning back in the chair.

“Yeah, me too,” Impa said. They sat there alone in the foyer, not saying anything else. They had both gone through the pain of losing a loved one, and now they were reliving the pain. And what hurt them the most was seeing Zelda go through the same thing.

They both sat in silence for some length of time that neither of them could guess. It was late in the afternoon and the day was beginning to wind down. There hadn’t been much work to do lately as far as the kingdom was concerned, most of the administrative parts of the government were on a break for the summer, and what little work that was left was easily tackled by the few people who were still working. The king felt relieved, if was even capable of such a feeling at the time, that he wasn’t missing any important duties. Even if he’d had to fight a war a this very moment, he probably wouldn’t have been able to do it. His people knew that, and they knew not to bother him when he was clearly not in the mood for anything.

Footsteps echoing off the domed ceiling brought Impa and the king from their reveries and they looked up to see a guard hesitantly approaching. The guard knew very well that this was not the time to disturb the king, and he tried to hide his discomfort. “Your majesty, I’m sorry to disturb you,” apologized the guard, bowing slightly to emphasize his point. “But there are a couple people to see you. I told them that you did not want to be disturbed, but they insisted they were old friends of yours, and they had passes to enter the castle grounds.”

“Who are they?” Harikana asked, the annoyance evident in his voice.

The guard stiffened and replied, “Two women, named Zoya and Kira.”

The king’s expression immediately shifted from annoyance to curiosity. He immediately stood up and put on his professional face. “Send them in,” he ordered. The guard nodded and walked off. A few moments later, the two women he knew well walked up to him. They each gave him a hug and patted him on the shoulder. “It’s nice to see you again,” he said in as cordial a voice he could.

Both women didn’t pretend to be in a good mood, the expressions on their faces reflected their true feelings. “I’m sorry we have to meet under such dire circumstances,” Zoya said solemnly. “We got your

message earlier today. It shocked all of us.”

“Yes, we were quite disturbed by the news,” Kira added.

“I was hoping you guys could come,” the king said. “I know that Link spent a lot of time with all of you, you in particular Zoya.” She nodded and frowned. Zoya was quite fond of Link, and her reminded her of herself at a younger age. “He and Zelda saw you all the time, ‘going to bring out my spiritual side’, as he put it.” Harikana then wondered why only Zoya and Kira had come. “Where are the others?”

“They’re all on important business,” Zoya replied. “But they will be here tomorrow, I can guarantee that.”

With Impa following behind, Harikana led them out of the foyer and into a small conference room. When they had sit down, he gave them questioning looks. “So why did you come here today instead of for the funeral?” he asked.

Zoya sighed. “We wanted to come see for ourselves.”

“Somehow I feel that’s not the only reason,” he countered.

“We have other reasons too,” Kira said.

“To tell you the truth, something just doesn’t seem right about the whole thing,” Zoya said. “We had a rather...special connection to Link. As well as his sister and Zelda.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Oh? I knew they admired you quite a lot. Zelda tells me about some kinds of meditation techniques you taught all of them. What kind of connection do you mean?”

Zoya tried to think of a way to explain herself without giving up too many secrets. “It’s a little hard to explain. I assume you’re familiar with a group known as the Oracles?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Supposedly a group of mystics with magical powers. Joushi is my Prime Oracle. She’s actually been quite helpful at times. When I was crowned, some advisors told me to appoint someone as the Prime Oracle to replace the one who died in the war. And I remember that you and your friends also recommended her. I never really believed in that supernatural stuff that much, but I thought that it couldn’t hurt. What does this have to do with Link and Zelda?”

“We believe that they may be gifted in those ways also,” Kira replied.

“You think Zelda is psychic or something like that?”

“The term is a bit crude, but yes,” Kira said.

“That’s not the point we’re trying to make right now,” Zoya interjected. “Zelda can tell you about that on her own time. It’s not our position to tell you about it, it’s her choice alone. The thing that worries us regards Link, Zelda, and Solo as a group, but now it’s focused on Link. It’s hard for us to explain, but I’ll try to make it simple. Link, Zelda, and Solo are special not just because they may have extra sensory abilities. There is a large group of people with those abilities, collectively called the Oracles. We normally try to seek them out and help them develop their special powers. All of us fall into that category as well. But these three kids go beyond that general description. You really wouldn’t be able to understand, but they have more significance to the course of history than any other people in the world.”

“Okay...” he mumbled, rubbing his chin. “So they have extra special powers. You still haven’t explained why that brought you here early.”

“We wanted to see Link’s body before the burial,” Kira finally admitted. “We think there’s more behind this than an allergy to bees.”

The king purposely showed his skepticism. “Accidents do happen,” he said. “Not everything is a conspiracy.” He couldn’t remember how many times these people had come and told him that some event was an evil conspiracy to take over the world. But he still trusted their judgment, even if he was a bit skeptical.

Zoya sighed. “Yeah, I know what you’re thinking. Let me just tell you what all of us believe. We don’t think this was an accident. It just seems too suspicious. Link wasn’t supposed to die. At least not now.”

“Solo kept saying that,” he recalled. “But that doesn’t mean anything. We all know Link was a great person, but I think everyone here is still in denial. We have to learn to let this go. And how would you know when someone’s ‘supposed’ to die? I know that not even you people can predict the time of someone’s death.”

“That’s true,” Zoya admitted. “Nobody can predict exactly when someone’s supposed to die. But

sometimes one can get an idea of the general time frame. And I can tell you that he wasn't supposed to die this soon. It's not right."

"He's destined for great things," Kira added. "Things that we can't predict or even comprehend. But we do know that it wasn't supposed to happen now. There is more to this than it seems. We all have a bad feeling about this."

"And I'm supposed to go on just a feeling? Do you even have any evidence? Can't we just let the kid rest in peace?"

"We're not trying to desecrate his memory or anything," Zoya insisted. "We just want to get to the bottom of this. If you want evidence, let us at least see his body. Maybe that'll turn up some clues."

The king sighed. He didn't want to start some kind of wild goose chase, but he trusted these women enough to at least let them get what they want. "Fine," he sighed, standing up from his chair. "You can see his body. He's in the infirmary right now." The king led the women out of the room and down the hall towards the infirmary. He opened the door and they walked into a room that housed a few beds, some examining tables, and racks of various medicines and potions. No one was in the room when they entered; the doctor was probably in the other lab working on something. The king pointed to one of the beds in the corner, on which lay a body covered by a white sheet. "He's right over there."

"Thank you," Zoya said, quickly scurrying over to the bed. As she bent down to grab the sheet, she hesitated for a moment. She didn't like the idea of uncovering the dead body of her best pupil, but she had to calm herself. *It's not like you haven't seen a dead body before*, she thought to herself. *Just relax.* Clenching her teeth and taking a deep breath, she pulled the sheet off the body and uncovered everything above the waist. For some reason she had expected to see a horrific sight. But all she saw was the Link she knew, only now his skin was a pale color with a bluish tinge. His face wasn't contorted into some horrifying expression, instead it was plain and almost serene. Kira stood back and eyed his body for a moment, and then turned to look at her friends, as if waiting for a cue from them.

"What exactly are you looking for?" Harikana asked.

"Anything unusual," Zoya replied. She put on a pair of glasses and examined Link closely, starting with his head and face. She opened his eyes and made a semi-surprised sound.

"What is it?" the king asked, wondering if she'd found something.

She shook her head. "It's nothing major. His pupils are dilated, but that happens sometimes when people are injected with venom." Not seeing anything of interest she examined the arm he had been stung on. "Well, it definitely was a bee sting, I can tell you that." She used her thumb and forefinger to grasp something at the sting site, and pulled something out. She eyed the tiny barbed stinger between her fingers and showed it to the others. "The stinger was still in his arm." She flicked the stinger onto a piece of white cloth on the table next to her and continued the examination. Zoya's eyes landed on his right shoulder and her eyes widened. "Hmm..." The others gave her annoyed looks and she told them, "Look at his shoulder." She pointed to it, and Kira and Harikana both shrugged their shoulders, not understanding.

"What am I supposed to be seeing?" he asked. "His shoulder looks fine to me." He didn't want to admit it, but looking at Link's lifeless body was starting to make him a little uneasy.

"That's the problem, there's nothing wrong with it," Zoya replied cryptically. "He should have a scar there. He was stabbed there a few months ago. Usually when a knife goes through someone's shoulder and out the other side, it leaves a scar."

"So what does this mean?" Harikana asked.

Zoya shrugged her shoulders. "It could mean something, but it could mean nothing. Remember what I said about him having special powers? This could be part of it. It's possible that he could have accelerated healing powers."

"Have you seen healing powers in people before?" he asked.

"Yes. But not very often." She continued examining every inch of his body. The other two looked away when she pulled away the sheet and examined the lower portion of his body. Zoya saw the looks on their faces and glared. "Oh grow up. I didn't want to be looking at this either." After finding nothing she looked to Kira and Harikana for assistance. "It's a little awkward for one person, could you help me turn

him over?" They hesitantly agreed and helped to flip Link's body over onto his stomach, exposing his backside. Zoya tried to keep a façade of professional detachment, but wasn't doing very well. Examining her friend's dead body wasn't her idea of a good time. She kept pushing back the urge to vomit. "Oh wow, this is a little weird," she commented with wide eyes. "Look at his back and legs." She pointed to Link's pale skin, which was the same bluish color as the rest.

As they looked, the doctor walked into the office from his lab and stopped when he saw the company. "I'm sorry, did you need something?" he asked.

"Actually, I have a question," Zoya said, with a curious expression on her face, but it also appeared that she had suspicions she wasn't voicing.

"I'm all ears," the doctor replied.

"Have you done any embalming or preparations to the body?"

"No, not yet," he responded.

"Have you drained any of his blood?"

The doctor gave her a very odd look, not sure if he was serious. They both knew very well that draining a person's blood was sacrilegious. In Hylian funeral traditions, people never tampered with the deceased person's body. Although they believe that the spirit had left the body, it was still treated with respect and dignity. Draining the blood was never even considered.

"Of course not," the doctor replied, not taking Zoya's question entirely seriously. "Why would I do that?"

"Okay," Zoya mumbled. Then another idea hit her. "Have you done anything to the body like moving it or flipping it over?"

"No, he's been like that since we brought him in here."

Zoya motioned for the doctor to come forward, and she pointed to Link's back. "Do you notice anything unusual?" she asked. The doctor peered closer and a realization hit him full force. He nodded, understanding what Zoya was getting at. The others were confused, and gave her questioning looks. "The skin on his back is the same pale color as the rest of him," Zoya explained. "He was lying on his back for almost two days. If he hasn't been moved, the blood should've settled at the lowest point, in this case, his back. So the skin on his back should be a dark, reddish, purple color. But it's not. There's definitely something strange going on here."

"Like what?" the king asked, suddenly questioning his previous belief that Link's death was only an accident.

"It could be anything," Zoya responded, slipping into her detective mode. "But no blood settling is a pretty sure sign that something's just not right. If his blood clotted, then it might not settle like that. But it would take something really strong to clot so much blood."

"Like poisoning?" the doctor suggested. "But what kind of poison could do that?"

"There's some plants that could," Zoya mused, thinking back to studies she did as an herbalist. "There are also venoms from some animals that have been known to turn a person's blood into a tar-like sludge in just a few minutes." She turned to the king and long-time friend and gave him a serious look. "I think you should start an investigation. I don't want to make a fuss, but I don't think this was an accident."

"You think he was murdered?" Harikana asked frankly.

"It's a possibility."

The mere possibility of a murder made his blood boil. Who in the world could possibly want to kill Link? He didn't have any enemies, jealous friends, or jilted lovers. Everyone he met loved him. Who could be so cold? "I'll have my detectives get right on it," he said, making a mental checklist of all the things he would have to do. There would have to be questioning, and a full blown investigation. He would have to have a drawing of Link made, and question people that might know something. He didn't want to make the lives of Link's friends any worse, but he would eventually have to ask them to see if they knew anything. "I want to keep this as low key as possible until we find out more information."

"That's a good idea," Zoya admitted. She turned to the doctor, who was showing a look of surprise. He understood how well-loved Link had been, and suspecting murder was quite a serious accusation. "Doctor, I want you to examine Link's body thoroughly. Record every detail, every mark, no matter how trivial.

Everything you see should be written down. Nothing is to be overlooked. Do you understand?" The doctor nodded.

Before the doctor went about his business, the king added one more thing, "I want you to get this started right now. The funeral is to be tomorrow at noon as planned. Do you think you can handle that?"

"Of course," the doctor replied.

With that business complete, the four left the infirmary and congregated in the hallway. "So you want to have the funeral tomorrow?" asked Kira, slightly surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "I want things to proceed normally. And it won't do any good to delay the funeral. Everyone needs closure, and we won't get any more information by delaying. Whatever the doctor comes up with will be all the information we need." Zoya and Kira both nodded, understanding his reasoning. They told him that they needed to leave and tell the others about the developments. But before they left, the king said one last thing, "I hope you'll all make it tomorrow."

"You can count on it," Kira said.

Malon had finally given up on trying to get Solo to sleep. After Zelda had left earlier in the day, Solo lapsed into some kind of catatonic state. One minute she had been lamenting and grieving, and the next minute she had suddenly clammed up and backed into the corner of the room. Malon had always been good at reading Solo's feelings, but this new expression left her baffled. The expression on her face was both blank and saddened at the same time. She hadn't even looked like this when she had heard the news about Link. Now her face seemed less than empty, if that were even possible. Solo had spent the rest of the day and evening cowering in the corner and rocking back and forth. Malon had heard her mutter a few incoherent phrases, but nothing that made sense. Malon had tried everything to snap her out of it, yelling at her, begging her, crying, shaking her, and finally splashing water in her face, but nothing worked. In the end she had given up on bring Solo back to the real world. Malon had at least tried to pick up Solo and put her into the bed, but she remained fixed like a statue.

Now Malon was sleeping in Solo's bed, exhausted from the day's ordeal. Solo however, remained fixed in the same position she had been in for hours. Although her face had remained an expressionless façade, her mind had been racing. Thousands of thoughts at once flew through her head, the vast majority of them not making any sense to her. In a split second earlier in the day, she had thought of the dream she had the previous night, what followed was a rush of thoughts that wouldn't stop. It was as if remembering the dream had opened the door into some new dimension of ideas and emotions. And the things she was seeing and feeling terrified her. It wasn't the rush of a million thoughts and feelings at once that terrified her, it was the one that lay in the background of it all, the feelings that had begun to plague her. For some reason, these particular emotions haunted her. They seemed closer and more real than the others. All the rest were random thoughts that were flying in all directions. But these thoughts seemed to be directed right at her. It was like she was in a crowded room in which dozens of separate conversations were taking place; she could filter out all the other noise, but the emotions that were haunting her were like a person talking directly to her. And it wasn't just analogous to someone talking to her, it was as if someone were standing next to her and screaming in her ear. No matter how much she tried to ignore it, the emotions sneaked up on her. It wasn't as if a person were communicating with her directly, it was like she was experiencing someone else's emotions in a personal way. Solo knew that they weren't her own emotions, but she still felt them as if they were. The feelings were close and far away at the same time. They were strange and personal at the same time. But the thing that made her so uncomfortable was not the feelings themselves, but their intensity. They were more than intense, they were overwhelming. Solo had enough trouble dealing with her own terrible emotions. These new feelings drove her over the edge. She was expending all her mental power just to try to understand them; she had long since given up on trying to block them. Understanding these emotions had sent her into a semi-conscious state. She no longer had the mental power to remain in the conscious world. All she could do was sit in the corner and try to sort out what she was feeling.

Solo wished she could find out where these feelings were coming from. She wondered why she was the only one feeling them. Zoya had told Link and Zelda that they were unusually receptive to psychic energy, but she never said anything about her. All she wanted was for the terrible pain to stop. The feelings that invaded her mind were far from pleasant, they were horrifying. Every image and thought haunted her to her very core. There were so many terrible emotions bombarding her—every single negative feeling in existence: hate, fear, shame, loathing, vengeance, and jealousy to name a few. But the ones that scared her were the ones she knew were true, and were coming from some specific person. Solo knew she was feeling some other person's emotions, it was obvious they weren't her own. Terrible feelings of fear, remorse, pain, and crippling shame brought her to the edge of insanity. But there was one last thing inside the barrage of sensations that made her keep listening: a cry for help. Somewhere buried deep inside the fear, pain, and shame was a small voice crying out for help. It was hardly noticeable, but it was there. Whoever this person was, Solo wanted to help them. She wanted to at least tell the person that she heard them, and she knew what they were feeling. But she could do nothing but sit there and listen to the pain and anguish.

Day Three

This particular night seemed to have lasted a lot longer than most nights. But it made sense; Zelda hadn't slept a wink. She hadn't expected to sleep anyways. Too many things plagued her mind. Only a couple days ago she was talking to Link, enjoying her life with him. Today he would be buried. She would never spend another day with him, never tell him a some silly secret, never hear him babble endlessly about some random subject, never see him smile or hear him laugh, and worst of all, she would never be able to live the life she had dreamed of. She no longer had any dreams; she looked forward to nothing, and hoped for nothing. Before, she had looked forward to growing up, looked forward to someday becoming the queen, looked forward to having a family and watching them grow up. Now the dreams were gone. She wouldn't have a family or kids, she couldn't care less about becoming queen, and she doubted that she had the will power to grow up. What was the point if her whole reason for living was gone? She could hear her friends and family debating that now. They would tell her that she had her whole life ahead of her, that she had plenty to live for, and that she would eventually get over it. But they were wrong, they couldn't possibly understand how she was feeling. They couldn't understand the connection they had. Nobody understood. And they couldn't understand the pain she was feeling.

Zelda reluctantly climbed out of her bed and squinted at the glaring sunlight streaming through the window. She had gone to bed wearing the same dress as yesterday, and the same dress she hadn't changed out of for two days. She didn't even have the will power to change her clothes anymore. But they were starting to get dirty and wrinkled; she would have to find something clean to wear for Link's funeral. Zelda quickly glanced at the clock, which indicated that it was half past nine. In just a couple hours Link would be buried forever. For some reason, she didn't want to have to admit the finality of death. She wanted to continue fooling herself, telling herself that everything was fine and that Link would be back any minute with his usual cheery attitude. But that wouldn't happen. She laughed at herself for entertaining such an absurd thought.

She reluctantly walked over to the closet and pulled the doors open, revealing dozens of dresses and gowns, ranging from simple to highly-adorned. As she stared at them, a sliver of green caught her eye. She pushed the other clothes out of the way to reveal a small green dress hanging in the back. It was the Kokiri dress she had acquired so many years ago. For a long time, she had insisted on wearing that and nothing else. But she had long since outgrown it. Now it hung there, unused and gathering dust, a solitary reminder to the carefree childhood she'd once had. With a sudden anger coming from nowhere, Zelda ripped the dress from the hanger and threw it across the room. She didn't want any more reminders of her past life. As far as she was concerned, the Zelda everyone had known was dead. She had died along with

Link two days ago. All that remained was an empty shell giving the false appearance of a living, breathing person.

Zelda stopped her useless musings and continued searching through the closet for a suitable garment. After rejecting dozens of them, she finally came across a dress that seemed to do the trick. It was a normal, unadorned dress, not fancy like the others. It was made of thin wool and had a slightly rough texture to it, not smooth and soft like the various silk garments she had worn. And the color...the color was perfect. It was solid black, black like pitch. Black like her soul. It seemed to be the perfect embodiment of her emotions, the perfect outfit to wear to a funeral.

She quickly removed her wrinkled dress and put on the black one. Zelda walked over to the full length mirror and gazed at her reflection. The person who stared back was a stranger. Her hair was disheveled, her face was tired and drawn, and her eyes were empty. That was the truly striking feature: the eyes. A person's eyes were said to be the window to the soul, and it rang true in the reflection. The eyes that stared back revealed the pain and emptiness behind them. They were ugly, dull, and bloodshot. Anyone that saw those eyes would know the pain underneath. But the pain inside was far greater than her eyes revealed. But it didn't matter because no one would understand it.

All of a sudden there was a knock at the door and Zelda turned around and waited for it to open. A few seconds later, the large wooden door creaked open and her father walked in carrying a tray. He looked over to the bed, and then not seeing anything, scanned the room. He saw Zelda standing by the mirror, staring back at him, but not making a sound. He approached her slowly and cautiously, like she was a tiger waiting to pounce. "Honey, I thought maybe you would decide to eat something, so I brought you some food." He set the tray, holding a bowl of oatmeal and a glass of milk, on the table in the middle of the room.

Zelda glanced at the food then back at her father. "I'm not hungry," she mumbled.

He sighed and gave a concerned look. "You haven't eaten anything in almost three days, you have to have something."

Zelda glared at him. "I told you before that I wasn't hungry."

"Fine, have it your way. But you have to eat something some time." He sat down at the table and motioned for her to do the same, but she decided to remain standing. "You know the funeral will be in a couple hours. I thought that maybe you'd want to go get your friends or something."

"They'll manage," she replied. "They've been here before, and they'll be able to get here now. I'd like to stay in my room until the funeral."

"Okay, fine," her father replied standing up from the chair. He walked over to her and embraced her tightly, whispering words of love and support into her ear. But she didn't hear them, she didn't even return the gesture. Her arms dangled limply at her side and she simply stood there. After a few moments the door closed and she realized that her father had left. She knew that he loved her, and she loved him back. All her friends loved her too, and she loved them as well. They would definitely try to comfort her and soothe her, but she knew it wouldn't do any good. It wasn't her fault that they loved her. They chose that path on their own. She didn't want to hurt them, but maybe it would give them a small understanding of what she was feeling. In the end it didn't matter if they loved her or not. She had made her decision.

Solo stared at the wall of her house, as she had been all night. After a while, the foreign emotions in her head had faded away. She felt both relieved and saddened at the same time. She couldn't handle the influx of new feelings, but she also was concerned for whoever was the source. The pain and anguish had been severe and intense, but had faded away as suddenly as it had begun. Solo didn't know why; perhaps the person had finally given up, or fallen asleep, or even died. But whoever it was, the feelings were gone now. She still wondered about it though. It had been a call for help, and she could do nothing. She wondered if that person was still suffering right now.

Solo felt a hand on her shoulder and looked up to see Malon's face; she looked relieved. "You're still awake?" Malon asked. Solo nodded. She knelt down before her and put her hand on Solo's shoulder.

“You really scared me last night. I didn’t know what to think. You just sat there staring into space. I tried everything to snap you out of it, but nothing worked. What happened?”

“It’s...it’s hard to explain,” Solo responded in a whispered tone. “I was hearing things in my head—thousands of voices and thoughts were flying everywhere. But there was one voice that I couldn’t get out of my head. It was more like a person’s feelings than a voice.”

“Someone else’s feelings?” Malon thought aloud. “Is this another one of those psychic experiences? What were the feelings like?”

“They were...horrible. I thought I was feeling bad, but these were even worse. I can’t even describe what it felt like. The emotions were overwhelming. Whoever it was, they were absolutely terrified. I’ve never felt fear like that before, not even on my own. And loneliness... there was a terrible feeling of loneliness, like there wasn’t anyone in the world the person could depend on. I wasn’t just experiencing this person’s emotions, it was almost like a call for help. Like they were pleading for someone to come save them. The feelings were just so overwhelming that I couldn’t even think. I wanted to tell you what was wrong, but I couldn’t. I couldn’t even move. It took over so much of my mind that there was nothing left to use. But during the night it finally stopped, and I don’t know why. Maybe the person fell asleep, or maybe they’re dead, but the feelings stopped coming. I just can’t stop thinking about the fear, and the desperate cry for help.”

“I’m sorry you had to go through that,” Malon said with a look of compassion.

Solo stood up, stretching and yawning, the fatigue evident on her face. “Well, now I have to go through the worst day of my life. I always thought he would be there for me all the time, but now he won’t.”

Malon approached Solo and put her hand on her shoulder and looked into her eyes. “I’ll always be there for you.”

“Thanks, you don’t know how much this means to me.” They stood there for a moment, both trying to sort out their feelings. It made Solo feel good to have someone who cared, but it hurt terribly to no longer have her brother around. She still didn’t know how she would cope without him around, when he had been the one to help her cope with change before. “I guess I should change clothes and go make sure Saria is awake.” She looked at the small clock Link had on his desk and frowned. “We need to get going soon, I don’t want to be late.”

When the hour finally came, Zelda was so anxious that she felt like throwing up, crying, screaming, and running away all at once. Her stomach was twisted into painful knots that refused to go away. The knowledge of what was to come only made her more nervous. She was holding her father’s hand, walking towards Kakariko Village and the graveyard. Not long from now, she would see the love of her life be buried.

As they made it outside the castle walls, the thought of running away popped into her head. She wanted to run away and never look back, to run away from her problems and forget about them. She wanted to pretend none of this ever happened. But she knew from personal experience that ignoring her problems would only make things worse.

She hadn’t even noticed how far they had walked until she saw the sign that marked the entrance to the village. She took a few moments to look at the faces of the villagers wandering about. They all knew that a royal funeral was planned and who it was who died. Some knew who Link was, and others had never heard of him. The villagers were accustomed to seeing high level officials attend funerals in the graveyard. It was a small town, but it also had close connections to the royal family. The Sheikah and the royal family had always worked closely together. Kakariko was originally a Sheikah town, and it was a great honor for the royal family to bury their dead there. Some of the villagers were curious as to what connection this Link had with the royal family, but when they saw the look on the princess’s face, they knew.

Zelda trudged toward the graveyard like a criminal walking to the gallows. She noticed some of the townspeople giving her sympathetic looks, but she paid them no heed. They wouldn’t understand. She looked around her at the people she considered her friends and family. Malon, Saria, Solo, her father and

Impa. They were all huddled around her in a tight pack, each with the same glum expression. They were the only ones who could come close to understand her feelings, but they weren't close enough. Solo was the only one who could understand how Zelda felt, but she loved Link in a different way.

They entered the graveyard, where a few dozen chairs had been set up, along with a makeshift altar in front of them. Before the altar was a freshly dug grave, with Link's coffin suspended above it, held up by tightly secured ropes. Zelda looked at the grave, the hole where the love of her life would spend all eternity. She wished she could climb into that hole and be buried along with him. She had no desire to remain in a world where Link was dead.

As Zelda's group approached the chairs at the front, Zelda gazed at some of the people there. Many of them Link didn't even know, but a few he did. All of the Guardians were there, sitting in the second row. There were even people Zelda had never met, the ones Link had told her about when he recounted his adventures. Darunia, the massive king of the Gorons stuck out like a sore thumb. The Zora princess Ruto was also there, looking as if she was crying, but no tears came out of her eyes. Then she remembered that Zoras didn't have tear ducts. The rest of the people were various royal officials and whatnot who had known Link only by his reputation. The most solemn group were the small gathering of knights sitting in the back, dressed in their finest dress uniforms. Link had been knighted a couple years ago, and the rest of the knights in the Royal Order had quickly gained a fondness of him. He often would visit them and train with them, but only for fun. Even though Link hadn't known the knights very well, they took his death seriously. Any member of their brotherhood who passed away was honored. The knights who were present weren't at the bottom of the totem pole, they were the Hylian Knights' Grand Council, a twelve-member group that made up the Knight's chiefs of staff. It was rare to see all of the Grand Council at a funeral, which proved how highly respected Link had been.

Zelda's group quietly sat down in the front row, waiting for the last few people to arrive. Without any warning, Solo stood up from her chair and walked over to where the Guardians were sitting. She shot hateful glares at all of them. Then she approached Zoya, the Prime Guardian, the leader of her group. Solo leaned forward and forcefully grabbed the neck of her shirt, bringing their faces within inches of each other. "You..." Solo said in a quite, hateful voice. "You *knew* this was going to happen." Solo tightened her grip and gave a maniacal grin. "You said Link would accomplish great things. You *lied to me!*" That last comment came out as a scream, and a few of the people gave her strange looks.

Zoya calmly pried Solo's fingers from her garment and gave a relinquishing look. "Believe me, I never knew this would happen," Zoya replied, in a calm, but sincere voice. She leaned over to Solo's ear and whispered, "I know what you're thinking...and I agree. His death wasn't right. It wasn't supposed to happen, and I'm going to find out why if it kills me." Zoya leaned back and awaited Solo's response. She merely stared, not expecting Zoya to agree with her. "I don't blame you for being angry at me. If you want to take it out on me, then go right ahead." For a moment, Solo contemplated calling Zoya's bluff and punching her in the face, but decided not to. She would only make herself look like a fool. Deciding not to tempt fate, Solo walked back to her chair and sat down, feeling Malon grasp her hand and rest her head on her shoulder. Solo appreciated the comfort, but didn't truly believe that anything could make her feel better. She looked over at Zelda, who was sitting on her left. Her face was still and blank, looking like it was more fitting on a statue than a person.

Zelda was paying no attention to the people gathered around her, instead she stared at the coffin a few paces away from her. She stared at the face she had seen so many times before, but was now silent. The image of Link's lifeless face would be burned into her memory for as long as she lived. He looked strangely peaceful lying there, his arms folded gracefully over his chest. It surprised Zelda to see that they had dressed Link not in an elaborate suit or knight's uniform; instead he wore his normal green tunic. Somehow his normal everyday clothing made it seem all the more real for Zelda. If he had been dressed in some kind of fancy suit, Zelda could continue denying to herself that it wasn't really Link in that coffin. But seeing his normal clothes in that coffin made her realize that it wasn't some nameless corpse lying there; it was Link. She continued to stare, trying to ignore everything going on around her.

After everyone had settled in, Impa gave a nod to one of the head priests. The holy man, who wore long flowing robes adorned with the symbols of their religion, looked at the crowd and prepared to being

the ceremony. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "my friends and countrymen; we have gathered here together in sadness and mourning, to bid farewell to a kind and noble man. A man whose reputation truly precedes him. Many of us don't know him personally, but we have heard of him. There is not a person here who has not heard of the boy named Link. Every single day, he gave more of himself than anyone could ever want, and never asked for anything in return. For the people who didn't know him personally, this is a great loss, but doesn't affect them personally. However, for the people who knew him and loved him, this is a terrible day. While we are here to mourn his death, we must also celebrate his life. It is our duty today to cherish the life he lived, and commend his spirit to the afterlife awaiting him."

Link's friends and family who sat in the first row showed visible signs of grief as the priests began some of their rituals. Some people chanted hymns and prayers, while assistants ignited coals of incense in ornate stands. Zelda watched all the ceremony with almost complete detachment. She had been to funerals in her life, but all for people she had never known. Seeing all the rituals had fascinated her then, but now, seeing those same rituals performed on Link was too much. She simply did not want to see the meaningless symbolism they were going through, singing the praises of the almighty, all-loving goddesses who were waiting to welcome Link's soul into the afterlife. But now, it all seemed silly to her. If they were so all-loving, why would they take away the life of such a good person? It didn't make any sense. She never was a religious person, but now she had lost what little faith she'd had. The rituals the priests performed were almost laughable now. Zelda saw no point in believing in goddesses that would betray her like this. Now she even questioned if those visions she and Link had had were actually real. Maybe she had been imagining the whole thing. They promised her that she and Link were destined for great things, so why would they suddenly change their minds and take him out of the picture? Right now it seemed as if her whole life had been one great big lie. In her mind, this was proof positive that real happiness didn't exist.

Solo watched the proceedings through blurred, tear-streak eyes. She felt ashamed for crying in front of some many people that she didn't know; it made her feel helpless and weak. She was weak enough, she didn't want other people seeing that. A reassuring squeeze from Malon's hand made her feel a little less alone. But that still couldn't eliminate the loneliness in her heart. It was just as agonizing and crippling as when she had lived alone on the street. In fact, it felt worse. Back then she had not know what she had lost, she had simply begun with nothing and had always been that way. But now she had something to lose, and the pain of losing someone so dear to her was worse than never having anything in the first place.

The bulk of the ceremony was short and to the point. After the clergymen had finished their chants, prayers, and rituals, the head priest stood in front of the coffin, holding a small basket. He reached into the basket and pulled out a small handful of red flowers petals. "In the name of Din, goddess of power and creator of the world, we commend Link's soul to the world beyond. May your power and grace bring him to the eternal bliss that awaits him." He sprinkled the red flowers on the casket and lowered his head. Then he took a handful of blue flowers. "In the name of Nayru, goddess of wisdom and guardian of order, we commend Link's soul to the world beyond. May your wisdom and infinite knowledge give him the true understanding he could never achieve in life." He then sprinkled the blue flowers onto the casket. He reached his hand into the basket once more and pulled out some green flower petals. "In the name of Farore, goddess of courage and creator of life, we commend Link's soul to the world beyond. May your courage be bestowed upon him, to enable him to receive the peace of eternal life." He finally sprinkled the green flowers onto the casket. Now the casket and some of Link's body were strewn with the colorful combination of petals, each color representing one of the three forces.

With the religious rituals complete, the priest turned to the audience. "We ask our almighty creators to accept Link's soul into their loving arms. We also pray that they will give us the strength to accept this loss that has befallen us. Instead of dwelling on his death, we must celebrate his life and all the things he accomplish in his short time. Let us now remember him by hearing from those whom he called his family." The priest then stepped down from the makeshift podium and sat down. Link's friends in the first row looked at each other, silently debating who would speak first, or if any of them would speak at all.

Finally, Saria nodded and stood up. She nervously approached the podium, and, realizing that she was

too short to see over the top, decided to stand in front of it. She gazed at the audience and anxiously twiddled her thumbs. Never in her life had she seen so many grown up people, they were so big that it made her feel uncomfortable. But she buried her fears and tried to think of something to say. "Um...my name is Saria..." she stammered. "I live in the Kokiri Forest with Link." Briefly she took her eyes off the ground and looked at the people in front of her. All of them had expectant looks on their faces, waiting for her to continue. "I knew him for his whole life, and a large portion of my own. He was my best friend, the only real friend I ever had. It's hard to describe our relationship. I really loved him a lot. I think that I was the only real friend he had for along time. All of the other children that lived with us picked on him and teased him all the time. It's hard to explain why, but it was mainly because he wasn't the same as us. Link always came to me with his problems, because he needed a friend to listen to him. But I don't like to think about the problems. I like the trust we had in each other. We never kept secrets from each other. He really was the kindest and most sensitive person I ever knew. He always seemed to know what other people were feeling. And if he thought someone was feeling bad, he would go out of his way to make them feel better, even if it was the expense of his own feelings. He was always like that—always giving and never asking for anything in return. I could tell that sometimes it was tiring for him to be so nice all the time, but seeing other people happy really did make him happy. That's all he cared about, making other people happy. I just never got around to really telling him how much that meant to me. After all the hardships he'd been through, he always took the time to comfort me when I needed it. I don't think anyone could've asked for a better friend. And that's why I loved him so much." The last few words came out in muffled sobs. She tried not to break down and cry, she had to at least finish before she became too upset to continue. "I just hope he knows that I loved him." With tears streaming down her face, Saria went back to her chair, and welcomed Zelda's comfort. She put her arm around Saria and held her free hand.

For a moment, no one else made a move; everyone sat their silently, mulling over the words of the little girl they'd just seen. Malon finally stood up and looked at her friends, receiving nods of approval. She walked behind the podium and took a deep breath. "I didn't really know Link as well as everyone else. But I still considered him a friend. We were really more like acquaintances after we first met. I remember meeting him a long time ago. I was in the castle village, waiting for my dad to return from a milk delivery to the castle. I saw him wandering through the market, looking lost and confused. I knew he wasn't from near here, because his clothes were so different. He looked like one of the Kokiri that I'd heard about. It turned out that he was from the Kokiri Forest. I really had nothing to do, so I decided to talk to him. I know I must've sounded really dumb, because I was rambling. But he didn't seem to think I was being annoying, he actually listened. When I heard he was going to the castle, I asked him to go find my father for me. He definitely succeeded, because he came running back a little later. Then we met again later on when he came to my ranch. He was really good with the horses. After that, he would always come over occasionally to visit and we would talk and I would give him riding lessons. We actually became good friends. He was such a wonderful person. The way the animals acted around him really proved how good he was, they have a sixth sense for that. A lot of times the chickens or cows would crowd around him and it was funny how he reacted; he always thought they were going to attack him. But he always just ended up with cow slobber on his face. I think the best thing he did for me was introducing me to his sister. It's a long story how they even met, but I thank him for letting me meet her. She turned out to be the best friend I ever had. And I can't thank him enough for that. But I really will miss him more than anything else. He was the glue that held us all together and made us a family. And I don't want us to drift apart because if this. I've already lost the first friend I ever had, and I don't want to lose the rest of them." Without waiting, Malon walked back to her chair, discreetly wiping a tear from her face. She sat in her seat next to Solo and looked into her eyes. Her eyes said more to her than any words could. Solo had greatly appreciated Malon's comments. But her eyes also revealed the sadness within her, and also hesitation. Malon could tell that Solo didn't want to go up and talk in front of so many people she didn't know. "You should go up there," Malon whispered. "It'll help you cope better, to get out your feelings."

Solo hung her head, sniffing slightly. "But I don't think I'll be able to control myself," she said almost inaudibly. "I don't want people to think I'm some kind of weak little girl." Solo had always worried that

she was a weak person, both emotionally and physically. One part of her mind has always told her that she was strong and could handle anything, but the deeper part had always taunted her, telling her she was weak and worthless. No matter how hard she tried, she could never silence that voice. She had buried it and ignored it, but it was always there. Solo wanted to be brave and strong like Link had been, able to handle any problem that came forth. She had always drawn her strength from Link, even before she knew he existed. All the times she had been able to muster up strength and courage, it had come from him. He had always been there in spirit, like they'd had a connection all along, before they knew each other. For a brief moment, she thought she could still feel that connection, but it faded quickly. He wasn't here anymore. He wasn't here to give her the power she needed.

Solo snapped out of her trance when Malon put her hand on her shoulder. "You never were weak," she said. "And crying isn't a sign of weakness. You have the right to be upset, you have the right to scream and wail. Do what you think is right."

Solo nodded, finally deciding to say something. She stood up and went to the podium, using her sleeve to wipe the tears from her red, puffy eyes and she turned to face the people. Solo had no idea what she was going to say, so she decided to say whatever came to her mind. "I don't really know how I can put into words how he affected me. He was my brother, but he was also a lot more than that. For a long time, I didn't even know he existed. I lived homeless and alone for most of my life. Then one day, he appeared out of nowhere. We were strangers to each other, but he decided to take me into his home anyways. He offered me food, clothes, and shelter out of the goodness of his heart. I had never before met such a kind and caring person, and I've never met anyone as good as him since. He was the first family I had. He loved me unconditionally, no matter what I did. He was my friend, I could laugh and joke with him, or go to him with my problems. Whenever I felt worthless or alone, he would tell me that he would always be there for me, that he *knew* I wasn't worthless. I don't think I ever really told him how I truly felt. I didn't see him as just a brother or a friend; it was more than that. He was...he was my savior. He didn't just give a home and family, he saved me from the horrible torture I lived in. He was like a guardian angel sent to free me from hell. And I don't think even he understood how profound that was to me. Not only is he my savior, he's my idol. After meeting him, I finally had someone to look up to, someone to be my role model. He was a friend, a family member, and an example for me. And it goes farther than being a role model, I worshipped him, he was practically a god to me. I wanted to do everything I could to be like him. Everything he did, I wanted to do it too so he would be proud of me. He taught me how to read and write, and he told me he was impressed that I learned so fast. But I learned so fast because I wanted him to be proud of me, and he told me he was. That meant more to me than anything in the world. Whenever he complimented me, it made me feel like I was invincible. I always tried to do things to impress him, to try to be like him. Sometimes when he was gone, I would sit at his table and read his books, hoping that maybe I could understand some of the things he was interested in. But so many of the books he had were way over my level, and I thought I was stupid for even trying. But when I asked him about the stuff, he wouldn't make me feel dumb, he would tell me that there was no such thing as a stupid question. And that's why he meant so much to me. He went out of his way to make me feel better. He always treated me as an equal, and never talked down to me or insulted me. And he would defend me against anything. Even if someone made a stupid comment or insult, he would defend me even if I didn't feel insulted. But now I feel alone again. He's not going to be there anymore to tell me I'm worth something. He won't be there to calm me down if I have a nightmare. He won't be there to guide me through my life. He was the light in my world, and now all that's left for me is darkness. He wasn't supposed to die like this, so soon and without meaning. It wasn't right. It's gonna take me a long time to cope with this, and I don't think I'll ever fully recover." She began to snuffle and choke on sobs. "I just hope that his spirit will watch over me." She wiped the tears from her face and began bawling. "I...I'm sorry...I can't..." Solo ran back to her chair, finally unable to control her feelings. Malon hugged her tightly and whispered words of reassurance into her ear. Some of the people in the congregation were shedding tears at Solo's eulogy.

Zelda had sit through the entire funeral without saying anything or showing any hint of emotion. But all of her friends had given their statements, and she knew they were waiting for her. She didn't want to let them down, but she also didn't care anymore. However, she wanted people to know how she felt.

Perhaps she could give them some idea, even though they would never truly understand. But she had to at least try.

She stood up and mindlessly walked to the podium, ignoring the looks from everyone, including her friends. When she got to the podium, she stared at everyone, watching their expressions. She could tell by the way they looked that they wouldn't understand her. But she was going to tell them anyway, to make them feel her pain. "I'm not going to stand up here and reminisce about good times, or about his life, because it doesn't matter anymore. He's dead and he's never coming back. I loved him with all my heart and soul, and nobody seems to understand that. They tell me it's a childish infatuation, or that I don't know what I'm talking about. I've heard people say it. But no one understands how I felt about him. No one understands how much I loved him. It was more than love, it went beyond that. We were soul-mates, we shared our deepest feelings. We had an emotional bond that went beyond love. It was like we were one person; he was the other half of my soul. Now he's been ripped away without warning, and that half of my soul has gone with him. I'm no longer a whole person. I'm empty and dead inside. I won't ever get over this or cope with it as so many people are telling me. He was the love of my life, I wanted to marry him. I will never love anyone else, and I will never get married now. I don't care about being a princess, I don't care about heirs, or continuing the family line. I don't care about anything anymore. Without him, existence has no meaning to me. I thought we would be together forever; I thought nothing could break us apart. But apparently fate had other ideas. Forever...it sounds so stupid now, to think we could be together forever. This just proves that there is no point to hoping for anything, because your hopes will just be crushed. I have no hopes anymore. I thought we would be together forever, but I didn't know that forever can end in seconds."

Zelda watched with a strange sense of satisfaction at the looks of shock she saw from the people. Even her friends and family looked concerned. Maybe now they had a small understanding of what she was going through. She walked away from the podium and stood before Link's coffin for a moment. She looked at his empty face and let a tear run down her cheek. "I love you Link...goodbye," she whispered. Then, without any more comments or hints of emotion, she sat down in her chair as if nothing had happened.

For a while, people sat in shock and wondered if anyone else was going to say anything. When it became apparent that no one was going to, the final ceremony began. Impa stood and stiffly walked to the front of the coffin. She was dressed in an extravagant military dress uniform, covered with golden braids and shining medals, with insignia indicating the Army rank of colonel. A few moments later, the knights who had attended marched in single file toward the coffin, each one stopping at a certain point so that there were six soldiers on each side. "Attention!" shouted Impa, ordering the knights and other soldiers to stand up straight. She stiffly and mechanically turned to face the people, while still standing at full attention. "Today we honor the memory of our deceased comrade and friend, Sir Link of the Kokiri, of the Royal Order of Hylian Knights. Through the honor and bravery he showed in his life, he is entitled to the right of full honors in his death. His death may have been by accident, but he died with honor." Impa then turned back to the coffin and removed Link's sword, which had been placed across his chest. She closed the casket and returned to her place at the head of the coffin, holding the sword so that the blade was flush to her body and the point was near her shoulder. In a loud and monotone voice, she ordered, "Present arms!" In quick and fluid motion, the knights removed their swords from their scabbards and raised them above the coffin, creating a canopy of shiny blades. The soldiers off to the side saluted stiffly and one of them brought a trumpet to his lips and played a somber funeral melody. With the swords still raised, four soldiers marched to the anchors in the ground that were tied to the ropes underneath his coffin. In perfect unison, they each undid the knots and slowly lowered the coffin into the ground, the melody still playing and the knights still holding their swords. After a short while, the coffin settled at the bottom of the grave, and the soldiers holding the ropes dropped the few remaining feet of rope into the hole. They promptly made an about face and went back to their original positions, saluting when they had stopped. Impa made a right-face and strode toward Zelda, who watched the display with near fascination. Impa knelt before Zelda and presented her with the sword Link had been knighted with. Zelda accepted the golden, shining blade, and sobbed quietly. Impa marched back to the spot she had been to and saluted as

well. After only a few more seconds, the trumpeter finished the melody, he lowered the trumpet and continued standing at attention. Impa lowered her arm and said in the same monotonic voice, "Order arms!" The knights lowered their swords and sheathed them in the same swift motion as they had taken them out. "Burial detail, you are dismissed."

The knights and soldiers marched out of the graveyard, followed by some of the people. The funeral ceremony was now officially over, and more people began to leave. Gravediggers were already shoveling dirt into the grave, and workers were removing the empty chairs. After a short while, only Zelda and her friends and family remained. Still holding the sword in her hand, Zelda walked to the front of the grave and looked down into it as the gravediggers piled on soil. They went about their business and paid no attention to her standing there. She watched for what seemed like an eternity as her precious Link was gradually covered in dirt, never to be seen again. The finality of seeing him in the ground was almost too much to bear.

Zelda shuddered when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned around to see her father giving her a concerned look. "Are you okay honey?"

"I'm fine," she replied quietly, not making eye contact.

Her father was tempted to question her about her disturbing speech, but decided against it. Maybe they could talk about it later. "There's a small reception in the castle. Most of the people are going there. You should go and at least get something to eat. Do you want to come?"

"No," she answered flatly. "I don't want to go. I want to stay here for a while. I want to be alone. Please just let me be."

"All right," he conceded. He hugged her and kissed her on the cheek. "Just know that I'm here for you." He walked away from her and met the rest of her friends. He told them that Zelda wanted to be alone and they all left for the castle.

Zelda stood in front of the grave, watching as the dirt piled on and the hole became shallower. She said nothing and thought nothing as a couple workers positioned a gravestone at the head of the grave. After nearly twenty minutes of work, the last shovel full was piled on. They neatly packed down the soil and positioned the gravestone perfectly. The workers looked at Zelda, who stood silently like a statue. They made quick bows and walked off to perform other jobs.

Zelda looked around, noticing that she was finally completely alone. She walked to the gravestone and knelt before it, laying the sword on the ground. Now that no one saw her, she could finally let herself go. The tears and wails finally escaped her as she prostrated herself and rested her head on the soil in front of her. She screamed and cried, not caring if the whole world could hear her. She screamed so loud, she hoped the heavens would hear her anguish and despair.

A few people at the reception talked and conversed, but an air of solemnity cast a pall on the whole room. Nobody felt in the mood for talking. Link's friends were sitting at a small table together, looking generally depressed. After seeing him lowered into the ground, the truth finally hit them all. They couldn't deny anything anymore after seeing his body buried. None of them wanted to talk, but they made the occasional comment. Solo had discovered the wine on the drink table and was now working on her second bottle.

"You really shouldn't do that," Malon advised.

Solo shrugged her shoulders. "I really don't care. At least things are quiet like this." Those feelings that she had experienced the previous night had returned again. They were even more intense than last time, threatening to make her shut down again. But the wine seemed to help a little, dulling her senses and quieting the voices.

"I'm worried about Zelda," Saria said. "She still hasn't come back." They had expected Zelda to remain at the graveyard for a while, but not this long. Almost six hours had passed since the funeral ended, and dusk was arriving. Over the course of the afternoon, clouds had moved in, signaling the coming of another spring shower. Most of the people had left before the rain started, and only a few of the guests

still remained. Zelda's friends worried about her; the rain was pouring down now and the temperature had dropped significantly.

"She needs time to herself," Solo said.

"She didn't seem really distraught," Malon commented. "What she said was almost scary. I'm really worried about her. She didn't sound like she was thinking straight."

"How could she think straight at a time like this?" Solo said.

"I guess you're right," Malon admitted. "I hope she can get through this. I hope we all can. We have to stick together."

"I agree," responded Saria. "We all need each other."

Impa and Harikana were at another end of the ballroom, quietly talking to each other. They watched as the reception wound down and the few remaining people left. "Zelda's worrying me," he said. "I thought I always knew how she was feeling, but what she said really came as a surprise to me. I can't believe that she has lost hope like that."

"She thinks she's lost hope, but I don't think it's entirely true," Impa replied. "She feels like that now, but she'll find a way to cope with it. She may be right about the other things, like never loving anyone else. You and I both know what that's like. I never wanted anyone else after my husband died."

"It's really coming down out there. She shouldn't be out there in the cold. Do you think I should go get her?"

"It's up to you. But you said she wanted to be alone. I think it's best to give her the space she needs. She has to deal with this in her own way. I'm sure she'll be back soon." Neither of them said anything else; they only sat there thinking about how Zelda must feel. She had been distraught and depressed for days now, but what she said at the funeral had somehow made it seem more real. The pain and anguish had been ever present in her voice, and she didn't try to hide the fact that she felt hopeless and lost. And what had disturbed them the most was the lack of emotion or inflection in her voice, it had been dull and matter-of-fact. Impa and Harikana both felt helpless, they wanted to make Zelda feel better, but knew that she didn't want their help. Perhaps they could nudge her in the right direction, and make her regain her hope in life. Impa was especially concerned. She was only vaguely familiar with the signs of a mental breakdown, but Zelda seemed to fit the parameters. If only Impa could remember the signs she had shown when she had gone through the same thing. But she could only remember how she had felt, not how she had acted. If Impa could only get inside Zelda's head, then maybe then she could understand. Impa hoped once again that Zelda wouldn't make the mistakes she herself had made.

Zelda leaned against the headstone, looking up at the sky and feeling the drops of rain hit her. She was soaked to the bone, and the wind only made her feel colder. She hugged her arms to herself and shivered. For a long time she only sat there and cried, but now she was silent. She had finally cried herself out, unable to do so any longer. The sheer exhaustion combined with the cold made her want to fall asleep right there. But the thoughts plaguing her mind wouldn't let her get any sleep.

After becoming silent, she had sat there staring at the sky, and just thinking. She repeatedly mulled over her situation, trying to think of what to do. But staring and thinking wasn't getting her anywhere. Zelda sat up on her knees and turned to look at Link's gravestone. "So it's finally happened," she said. "You're buried in the ground and I'll never see you again. Why did you have to leave me Link? No... I shouldn't say that. It wasn't your fault. I just wish it hadn't happened like this. You didn't deserve this. You never did anything to hurt anyone, but it seems that the goddesses had something else planned. I don't think I believe or trust in them anymore, but I know you did. I hope there is some kind of paradise up there for you. I hope you're happy wherever you are. I wish I could be with you, because it's hell without you. I had so many hopes for the future, so many hopes for us. I wanted to be your wife, I wanted to have your children. Now I have no more hopes for the future. I look ahead and I see nothing, just loneliness and sadness. You know I can't live without you. You gave my life meaning. Your mere existence gave me all the happiness I needed, even if you had never loved me, because I love you so

much. All I wanted was for you to be happy. And you never even got a chance to do that. You had so much more ahead of you. You had so many things to accomplish in this life. Everyone saw that in you. I'm sorry this had to happen. I feel like it's somehow my fault. Maybe if I had gone to your house instead, the bee sting wouldn't have happened. I wish I could've at least told you I loved you one last time. Now I can't even say it to your face, but I hope you can hear me. I love you. I love more than anyone in the world, and losing you is the worst thing I've ever had to face. You were the other half of my soul, and I feel empty without you. I can't live without having you here. I just don't know what to do. I don't want to go on feeling like this. I want the pain to stop, I want it all to stop."

Zelda paused and sobbed a little while, once again depressing herself. She contemplated her life and what meaning it had anymore. She felt like she had lost control over everything. Nothing mattered to her anymore. Zelda wanted to go to her friends and family for support, but they could offer no solace no matter how hard they tried. Zelda simply couldn't accept any help. Without anyone to love, she saw no reason to love herself either. And since she didn't love herself any longer, what other people did to try to help her was futile.

She thought of the one solution that would make things better, if only for herself. It was selfish to think these thoughts, but she didn't care. She had thought things over, and this was the only thing that made sense. It was her only choice. "Link, I wish I could be with you right now. I don't know if my decision will make anything better, but I know things can't get any worse for me. All I ask is that you don't hate me for this. The last thing I need is for you to hate me." Zelda picked up Link's sword and ran her fingers across the blade, admiring its smoothness and beauty. There wasn't a single scratch on the blade, even though he had used it for training. The blade was still as sharp as the day it was forged. But she didn't deserve to have his sword, she didn't even know why Impa had given it to her. It deserved to stay with him. She stood up and faced the gravestone, grasping the sword and aiming it downward. She gently pushed the tip of the blade into the soft mud until it was deep enough to stand on its own. "I don't deserve to have this. I know I'm being weak and selfish, but I have no will power anymore. Just know that I will always love you. Please... please don't think any less of me."

Zelda turned and walked away from the headstone and out of the graveyard. She hugged her arms to herself and shivered as the cold rain pelted her from above. Now she noticed how cold it was, and she could barely keep her shaking body under control. Zelda walked through the rain, feeling a strange sense of calm. She had finally made her decision, and that gave her some solace. At least the curse of indecision was no longer plaguing her. She knew her friends and family would disapprove, that they would be sad, and maybe even furious, but it was her decision to make.

The sky was dark now and all the guests had left the castle. Workers were cleaning up from the reception, and Link's friends were still sitting at the table they had chosen earlier. Saria rested her head on the table, exhausted and asleep. Malon had finally convinced Solo to stop drinking, and now she was in Malon's arms resting her head on her shoulder. Impa finally walked up to the depressed group and tried to be as sympathetic as possible. "It's dark outside and it's still raining," she said. "You girls don't have to walk home in the rain. I don't want any of you getting sick. You're all welcome to stay here for the night. We have more than enough room."

"Thanks a lot," Malon replied. Solo moaned to indicate her acceptance as well.

Impa went over to Saria and tapped her the shoulder, causing her head to shoot up in surprise. Saria calmed down when she remembered where she was. "Saria, honey, I just told them that they could stay here for the night because it's raining outside. The offer applies to you as well."

"Um... oh thanks," Saria replied groggily, rubbing her eyes. "I think that would be a good idea."

"Would you like me to show you to your room? You need some rest, you were asleep and drooling on the table."

Saria peered down at a small wet spot on the tablecloth and looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry, I was a little tired," she said. "But I don't think I want to go to bed right now. I want to stay here with my friends,

and I want to be here when Zelda gets back.”

“Okay, you can do what you want,” Impa said, patting Saria on the head. Impa walked back to the couch in the foyer where Zelda’s father had been sitting for hours, waiting for Zelda to return. His anxiety grew by the minute, and it was now quite obvious that he wanted to go out and find Zelda himself. Impa sat down next to him and put her hand on his shoulder. “Calm down, she’ll be back soon.”

“What if something happened to her?” he asked worriedly. “She’s not in a stable state of mind. And it’s cold and wet outside, I don’t want her getting sick. I’m just worried that…” He paused when he heard a sneeze echo through the hall. They both turned to see Zelda standing there. Harikana immediately leaped out of the chair and ran over to hug Zelda, not caring that her soaking clothes were wetting the front of his garments. He looked into her depressed eyes and kissed her multiple times. “Oh honey, I was beginning to worry about you. You poor thing, you’re all wet and cold.”

“I’ll be fine,” Zelda insisted through chattering teeth.

“I was going to go out and find you, but I know that you wanted to be alone and I didn’t know what to do.”

“Thank you for respecting my wishes,” she said meekly, breaking their embrace and kissing him on the cheek. “I’m a little cold, but I’ll be okay. I just want to go to my room and change into some dry clothes.”

“That’s fine dear,” he replied, motioning for her to do what she wanted. “I just want you to know that your friends are staying for the night. They’re over in the ball room sitting at a table. You can go see them later if you want, after you get changed.”

“Okay, thanks,” she said, managing a weak smile. “I’m sorry about what I said earlier, I didn’t want to scare you. I was just so upset. I can’t say I feel any better, but that time alone helped.” Then she turned around and walked down the hall to the stairway that led to the upper floor, leaving wet footprints and drops of water behind her.

Zelda silently entered her bedroom and shut the door. The clothes on her stuck to her skin tightly and she had a tough time removing them. Once she had stripped her garments off, she grabbed a large towel and wrapped herself in it. The rain had chilled her to the bone, and she only now noticed how cold she was now that she had gotten out of her wet clothes. Zelda sat on her bed and lay down for a minute. She wanted to go downstairs and talk with her friends, if not to simply tell them how much she appreciated them. Zelda knew they wouldn’t like what she was going to do, but she was hopeless. One voice in her head told her it was a stupid idea, that she was being selfish and cruel. But the other voice told her it was her only choice, the only choice that would take away the pain. She couldn’t second guess herself now; if there was one thing she would commit herself to, it was this.

After a few minutes of lying on her bed, the shivering stopped and she felt a lot better. Zelda got out of the bed and used the towel to dry her hair and the few remaining drops of water on her skin. She dropped the towel to the floor and put on clean undergarments and her nightgown. After a look in the mirror, Zelda decided that brushing her hair might be a good idea. Although she really didn’t care about her appearance, she wanted to look at least slightly presentable. She grabbed the brush and ran it through her hair a couple times. When she was finally satisfied, Zelda put on a pair of slippers and left the room.

As she walked down the stairs, she tried to compose herself. If everything went as planned, this would be the last time she would see her friends and family. It saddened her slightly, but losing Link was worse. And the pain had only gotten worse. She took a deep breath to calm herself as she entered the room everyone was in.

Her father immediately walked up to her once again and gave her a hug. “You look a lot better now,” he commented.

“Thanks,” she responded. After the embrace, she went over to her friends and sat down at the table. They managed weak smiles, but they faded quickly. “Listen, I’m sorry if I worried you guys earlier. I was just so upset, seeing Link buried like that was really scary. I would’ve come back here with you guys, but I needed some time alone. I think it really helped.”

“You really don’t have to apologize for anything,” Saria said. “We’re all devastated, and I would think it’d be the worst for you. I know how much you loved him, and how much he loved you. You have a right to be upset.”

“Thanks,” Zelda responded. “I just wanted to thank you all for being there for me. I never realized how important friends were. Even though I don’t think they pain will ever go away, it helped to have someone to share it with. You mean a lot to me. And I wanted to tell you how much I love you all.”

The other girls were deeply touched by Zelda’s admission, even though they had always known it was true. Without any encouragement from her friends, Zelda hugged and kissed each of them one by one. She really loved her friends and didn’t want to make them sad, but they would understand if they knew how she felt. “I’m going to go to bed in a minute,” Zelda said. “I hope you sleep okay.”

“I hope you sleep well too,” Saria added kindly. Zelda fought back the urge to chuckle at that comment. She knew she would be sleeping well tonight, and every other night for that matter. After bidding her friends goodbye, Zelda walked over to where Impa and her father were sitting.

“It’s good you changed out of those wet clothes,” Impa commented. “I don’t want you getting a cold.” For no apparent reason, Zelda latched onto her and hugged her tightly. Impa hadn’t expected this gesture, but returned it.

Zelda sniffled a little, but tried not to cry. “I just wanted to tell you how much I love you. You’ve been like a mother to me my whole life, and I don’t think I tell you enough how much I appreciate you. I don’t think anybody could do a better job than you did, especially considering I’m not actually your daughter.”

Impa patted Zelda’s back to soothe her. “Oh honey, you know that blood doesn’t matter to me. I’m honored that you would consider me your mother, because I always thought of you as my daughter. You know I love you as much as I would my own child.”

Zelda hugged tighter for a moment before releasing Impa and turning to her father. Repeating what she had done to Impa, Zelda hugged her father tightly and kissed him. “Daddy, having someone I loved so much dies so suddenly made me realize how precious my friends and family are. I guess I just took it for granted that you would all be there forever. I didn’t tell Link often enough how much I appreciated and loved him, and I don’t want the same thing to happen to us. I love you so much, Daddy. You’ve been such a wonderful father to me. Even though you were gone sometimes, you were still always there when I needed you. I know a lot of parents aren’t with their children like you were with me. I feel so fortunate that I have you, especially because Link didn’t have any parents at all. I know I may have said hurtful things to you in the past, but you know I never meant them. I just want you to know that you’re the best daddy any kid could ever have.”

Harikana felt tears come to his eyes as Zelda said such touching words. He sat her on his lap and hugged her tighter, never wanting to let go. He gently stroked her hair and rubbed his hand on her back. “Oh honey, you now I love you too. I love you more than anyone in the world. You’re my little angel, and I will always love you.”

Zelda sat back and rubbed the beginnings of tears from her face. She gave him and Impa affectionate looks and said, “I know you both love me, and I love you too. I know I’ve done some...not so good things in my life, things that may have upset you. I just want to make sure; you would love me no matter what, right? Even if I did something bad or wrong?”

They were both taken by surprise at Zelda’s question, but they responded in unison, “Of course we would still love you.”

“My love for you is unconditional,” her father added. “Nothing you could do would make me stop loving you. Why did you ask?”

Zelda looked surprised by the question, not expecting him to ask that. “I just wanted to make sure. I only wanted to hear you say it. I’m sorry if I upset you...”

“No, no. It’s okay,” he soothed. “I’m not upset. I would always love you no matter what, and nothing will ever change that.”

“Thank you.” She kissed her father once again and then stood up off his lap. “I’m going to go to bed now. I feel really tired and I haven’t gotten much sleep lately. I hope that tonight I’ll be able to get some sleep. Can I just ask a favor?” Impa and her father both nodded. “Can you make sure nobody bothers me? I want to have some quiet time to myself so I can fall asleep. Is that okay?”

“Of course, sweetie,” Impa replied. “I’ll make sure nobody bothers you.”

“Thanks,” Zelda said, kissing both of them on the cheek. “Good night.” Zelda turned around and ran

off to the stairway. Saying those things was much easier than she had thought it would be. She had thought it would be difficult or that she would arouse suspicion, but it ended up turning out how she had planned. Zelda didn't want to make them sad, but it was her only choice. She didn't want to leave all her friends and family behind without telling them definitively how she felt. She wanted them to know how much she loved them. Originally she had considered not saying anything, but she realized that she would regret it if she hadn't. At least she had finally made her peace.

To Daddy, Impa, and my friends,

I know you will be upset when you find this and find out what I have done. I don't blame you for it. But nobody understands how much pain I am in. It just hurts too much. Every minute, the pain keeps getting worse, and I can't take it anymore. I hope that some day you will understand why I did this. I know you will try to blame this on yourselves, but please don't do that. There was nothing you could do, I have already made up my mind. Don't think that you could've talked me out of this, I wouldn't have let you. I made the decision to do this and I carried it out. I tried not to give you any signs because I didn't want you to know what I was going to do. I know you will wonder why I did this, and it's really hard for me to explain. Link was more than just a boyfriend to me. He was the other half of my soul, I lived for him and he lived for me. Having him gone feels like I've had my heart ripped out. And without him here, I'm not even a person anymore. I can't go on because there's nothing left to live for. I have no outlook on the future or any hopes, and a life without hope is meaningless. When I look towards my future and see nothing but pain and darkness, I don't see a reason to prolong it. I'm already a shell of a person, there's no point in pretending to want to live. It's true that I don't want to live anymore. But it doesn't really matter because I'm already dead inside. Please don't blame yourselves. I understand that you will be mad and upset. But please don't hate me, and don't hate Link for this. I don't want you to be torn apart by this, but you had to know that I wouldn't be the same person if I continued living such a pointless life. It's better that I end it now because I would only cause more pain to you as time went on. If I die now, then you will eventually get over it and continue with your lives. I know I'm being selfish, but this is the only thing left that I have control over. I can't bring Link back, I can't make myself feel better, and I can't live my life when there's nothing to live for. But at least I have the ability to end the pain once and for all. Please know that I will love you forever. Goodbye.

Zelda finally signed her name on the letter and placed it on the middle of the desk. It would be easy for them to find. For a while she debated to herself whether or not she should even bother to write a letter. In the end she decided that it was a good idea. She didn't want to die without telling them why. She wanted them to know that it wasn't their fault. Zelda knew full well that a letter wasn't going to make it any easier for them, but at least they would know her reasoning.

Zelda had also wondered if she should actually perform the deed in her own home or if she should run away and do it somewhere else. But she knew that she would never be able to escape without arousing suspicion. Everyone was extremely on edge, and it seemed that there was an increase in the number of soldiers and guards roaming around the castle in the last day. She couldn't go anywhere in the castle without stumbling on someone. Zelda didn't want them to see her after she had done it, but she had no choice. It would be traumatizing, but she hoped they would forgive her.

The next problem she had to consider was how she would actually carry it out. At first she had considered some type of poison, but she had no knowledge of poisons and didn't have the first clue how to tell what was poisonous. And she wanted to do something that was sure to work, if she picked the wrong substance, it might not work. Also, asking an apothecary for a good poison was sure to make people suspicious, especially if it was the princess who was asking. Zelda had also considered hanging herself, but also decided against it. She couldn't tie a decent knot, let alone a noose. Jumping out a window wouldn't work because the castle wasn't tall enough to guarantee that she wouldn't survive. In the end she decided to simply use a knife. It was quick, easy, and it was sure to work.

Zelda looked at the clock on the wall, and saw that it was past ten. She had been in her room for hours

deciding what to write in her letter. But she didn't want to put it off any longer. She was going to do this tonight. She sincerely hoped that Impa would keep her word and not let anyone bother her. If everything went according to plan, they wouldn't find her till morning. Zelda knew that she was being crazy and irrational, but her sanity and rationality had disappeared the moment she saw Link's lifeless body lying on the ground.

She walked over to her desk and picked up the dagger that had been sitting there. It came off a decorative plaque that hung on her wall. The handle was made of ivory and gold and was elaborately decorated.

Slipping the knife under her dress, she walked over to the door. Quietly cracking it open, she peeked out into the hallway. It was empty, now was the perfect time. Zelda quietly tiptoed down the hallway towards the bathroom. After entering the bathroom, she carefully closed the door behind her and engaged the lock. She leaned against the door for a moment, breathing a sigh of relief. Now she was alone and didn't have to worry about anyone finding her.

Zelda went over to the wash basin and stared at her reflection in the mirror. Now was the time. After seeing the empty eyes staring back at her, Zelda didn't even bother to question her decision. She knew it was the right thing to do, it was the only thing that would stop the pain. She removed the knife she had hidden in her dress and examined it closely. The blade was a silver color that reflected her face perfectly. It was shiny and perfect, as if it had never even been touched. She ran her fingers across the smooth blade, surprised by its sharpness. Running the blade across her arm, she smiled as it neatly shaved the fine hairs off her arm. This blade was razor sharp and it would be no problem cutting herself. Zelda looked in the mirror once again, studying her own face. This would be the last time she would ever see her own reflection. A sense of calm and relief washed upon her when she realized that the pain haunting her would finally end for good. For a minute she simply held the knife in her hand, fingering the blade and admiring its beauty and elegance. Holding this dagger finally gave her a sense of power that she so desperately needed. She finally had control over her own destiny when everything else was left to fate. At least now she could spite fate by controlling her own future. Fate had cursed her by taking away Link, and now she could finally get revenge on fate for taking him away.

Zelda turned around and faced the other side of the room, not wanting to look at her own depressed expression. She clasped the blade tightly in her hand and held it up for a moment, the light from the torch in the corner glittering off the shiny metal. It was now or never. For a moment she looked at the smooth skin on her wrist and arm, running a finger over the bluish veins underneath. Through those veins ran her blood, her life force, and now she would watch as it flowed out of her body. Gripping the handle tightly, Zelda placed the edge of the sharp blade against the underside of her forearm, the blade's coldness sending chills down her spine. With a quick, fluid motion, she pressed the blade into her skin and sliced it diagonally to the base of her wrist. She winced at the sudden stinging pain, but recovered quickly. This pain was so minor compared to what she was already feeling. Zelda watched with fascination as bright red blood flowed from the thin red line of the cut. It wasn't the slow oozing she'd had before when she'd suffered minor injuries, now it was flowing freely and quickly. She placed the blade in her other hand, which was already covered in blood, some of it dripping to the floor. With the same determination as before, she placed another deep gash into her other wrist. The blood on her hand was wet and slick, causing the knife to slip from her hand after cutting. The blade fell to the ground, splattering drops of blood where it landed. Her lips twitched up in a small smile as she watched the blood flow down both her arms, collecting at her elbows and dripping to the floor in a steady stream. She had never seen so much blood before, amazed at how easily it gushed from her body. Bright red stains appeared on her nightgown as some of it soaked into the soft cloth. A metallic, coppery smell filled the air as her life force spilled before her. It was eerily beautiful seeing the brilliant redness contrast against her creamy skin.

It had only been a minute or two, but she was already beginning to feel dizzy and lightheaded. She didn't know if it was from simple shock or the loss of blood. It had to be the blood; it was flowing even faster now, the small streams pulsing with each beat of her heart. Breathing seemed more difficult now, it felt as if she were out of breath. A sudden wave of nausea and dizziness overcame her and she desperately gripped the edge of the sink. But the blood drenching her hands caused her to slip and crash to the floor,

leaving a red streak on the marble pedestal. She shifted a little, but didn't have the strength to even sit up. Feeling increasingly weak as each second passed, Zelda moved one of her arms in front of her, and watched as the blood began to puddle before her. It was everywhere, all over her body, smeared on the sink and cabinet, and beginning to creep closer to her face and hair. The metallic smell was overpowering now; it overwhelmed her senses and made the finality of her choice all the more real.

After a couple minutes of lying there, what seemed like an eternity for her, she began to feel tired and groggy. It seemed as if the lighting had suddenly darkened; spots floated in front of her eyes. Her breathing had slowed significantly, and it felt as if she were being smothered. But she welcomed the feeling. Now she knew that she had chosen the correct path; she could feel the life draining from her, and that's exactly what she wanted. Now she would not have to live through decades of pain and suffering. As the darkness crept closer, a faint smile appeared on her lips; her trial was finally over.

Feeling death approaching was nothing like she had anticipated. There were no scenes of her life flashing before her eyes, no demons haunted her, and she had no regrets. The only thought that crossed her mind, albeit for a split second, was of Link. Tears formed in her eyes, falling to the ground and dissolving into the red pool before her. Zelda whimpered quietly and whispered to the heavens, "Please, Link, forgive me." She exhaled deeply and closed her eyes, finally letting the darkness overtake her.

To be concluded...