

Rules of Succession

By: Kasuto of Kataan

Prologue

In the dark room, illuminated by a small oil lamp, a man sat in the corner, partly shrouded in darkness. He was dressed in a simple shirt and pants. Another man sat across from him, he was dressed in more elaborate clothing. He was obviously very rich. The rich man fidgeted in his chair, this place made him nervous. He had heard about the first man's reputation, he was the absolute best in his field. The man had no name, he was known only as Z.

Z stood and picked up a bottle that was sitting on the stand next to his chair. "Would you like something to drink?" said Z. The rich man nodded. When Z offered you something, you didn't refuse. "Good. I think you'll like this." From the bottle he poured an amber liquid into two small glasses. He walked over to the rich man, handed him one of the glasses, and sat back into his chair. "It's Gerudo Brandy." The rich man took a sip and immediately coughed and hacked. Z chuckled. "Sorry, it's a little strong."

"You're telling me," said the rich man, his voice hoarse. He set the glass onto the table next to his chair.

"Well, let's get down to business," said Z after drinking the liquor in one gulp. "I understand that you need my services." Z and the rich man had talked in two prior meetings. They discussed plans of how to carry out the mission, and the rich man had told Z that he would help in as many ways as possible.

"Yes," replied the rich man. "I need you to this job for me. It's the person I told you about."

"Mm-hmm," mumbled Z.

"I can get a drawing, if recognition is a problem."

"That won't be necessary," said Z. "I know what this person looks like."

"Good," said the rich man. "Can you do it?"

"Yes," replied Z after a moment of silence. "But this is going to be high profile, and I want to avoid attention. I'll have to go into hiding for a long time after this. Plus, because of who this person is, it's going to cost you... a lot."

"Money is no object. How much?"

Z thought for a moment. "Two million rupees," he replied.

"Done," said the rich man.

"Good. Now, I'm going to need to plan this perfectly. Is there any deadline? Do you need this done at any certain time?"

"I want this done as soon as possible," the rich man said.

"Okay. I can work quickly. I'll need intelligence to form my plan. Basically, I'm going to need to get into the castle somehow."

"Oh don't worry about that," said the rich man. "I can get you into the castle easily, without arousing any suspicion. I already have a plan."

"Excellent," smiled Z. "One last order of business... I'll need an advanced payment. I want half now."

"That can be done," said the rich man. That was a lot of money to put up front, but he had no choice. This had to be done.

"I want one hundred thousand rupees in cash, the rest can be in gold and valuables."

"Great," said the rich man, with a menacing smile. "I'll have the money to you by the end of the week." He stood up and shook Z's hand to seal the deal.

"It's a pleasure doing business with you," said Z.

Chapter One

Link floated on his back in the pond. The pond was actually the opening of a large underground spring. He preferred to come here when he wanted to be alone. Link had discovered this place a few months prior while he was hiking through the Kokiri forest. It turned out that the Kokiri children were forbidden from entering this whole area, told that they would die if they did so. Rules, Link hated rules, especially ones made by Mido. But this was good. No one knew about this place, so no one would bother him here.

Link's hair waved in the water as if it were some kind of life form. After all the experiences he'd had earlier that year, he decided to change his image a little. The only thing he could think of was his hair. He decided to let it grow instead of cutting it every few weeks. Now it was just past his shoulders. He never thought hair could grow so fast. After it had gained some length, Link decided that he like the way he looked. It was something new, a small change in his life. Saria had recommended that he tie his hair in a ponytail, but Link decided not to. He just let the hair go where it wanted to. This place was so peaceful. The water was perfect, not too hot or too cold. No one could bother him here. Link floated for an eternity, not quite asleep, but not quite awake. He had been gone for hours, but he didn't care if people wondered where he was. He could stay here forever.

Then he hear a rustling in the forest nearby. Link floated upright and scanned the surrounding forest. It was probably just an animal. The rustling again. Link slowly floated towards the shore. Suddenly a small figure emerged from the dense woods and into the clearing near the pond. Link quickly propelled himself deeper into the pond and away from the shore. The figure walked to the shore and stared into Link's eyes; it was Saria. How did she find this place?

"So this is where you've been hiding," Saria said, scanning these new surroundings. The pond was fairly large, and surrounded on three sides by a horseshoe shaped cliff face. The shore of the pond was a small clearing, beyond which lay extremely dense foliage and vines. How did Saria manage to get here?

"Well, it was a great secret place I had once," Link muttered.

"What's that?" Saria yelled, she was to far away to hear what Link said.

"Nothing," he responded. "How did you get here? Were you following me?" he accused.

"Well...no. I just had a feeling that you might be here. You weren't in any of your other hiding places, so I came here." She sat on the ground and folded her legs.

"How did you find this place?" Link asked. "No one knows about this place. You remember the rules, you're not supposed to go out this far." He was starting to sound like Mido. Link shuddered at the thought.

"You're not the only one who breaks the rules, you know," said Saria. "I've been here before. But don't worry, no one else knows about it."

"How come you never told me about this place before?" Link asked. "We have our 'secret place' but that's not so secret. I just found this place a few months ago, why didn't you ever bother to tell me?"

Saria shrugged her shoulders. "You never asked," she said. Link scowled. "Why don't you come out of the water, it's almost supper time."

"Umm..." Link mumbled, blushing. He still floated in the water, only his head above the surface.

"Well, what's taking you so long?" Saria shouted. "Swim back over here."

"No...I'll stay here...in the water. Why don't you go back home? I'll meet you there later."

"Why? I thought we could walk home together. What are you stalling for?" asked Saria. She looked around and her eyes locked on a large, flat rock. She saw a small pile of clothes on the rock. They were Link's clothes, *all* of Link's clothes. "Oh...I see the problem," she said. She ran over to the rock and searched through the pile of clothes.

"No don't..." Link said but it was too late. Saria picked up a pair of white shorts and waved them around like a flag.

“Is this what you’re looking for?” said Saria, giggling hysterically. Link’s face turned red, he had never been so embarrassed. “Why don’t you come and get them?” Saria teased. Link was going to get her for this.

“Please give those back,” Link begged. He shouldn’t have let his guard down like this. He thought that no one knew about this place, and he would have privacy. He remained fixed in the water, not moving any closer to the shore.

“Why would you need these shorts?” Saria asked sarcastically. “Aren’t you *wearing* anything?” Link wished that he could just sink to the bottom of the pond and not have to ever come up. “You can’t hide the *naked* truth,” She taunted. “Don’t feel like you’ve been *stripped* of your dignity. It looks like your plot has been *exposed*. I bet you can’t *bare* to listen to me any longer.” Saria giggled again. She was starting to get on Link’s nerves. If she uttered one more pun, Link would go nuts. “Don’t feel bad, it’s not like you *nude* this would happen.” She continued to taunt Link by waving his shorts in the air.

“You are so dead,” said Link. “Why are you torturing me like this? What did I ever do to you?” Saria stuck out here tongue at him. “Give me my shorts back or I’ll tell everyone that you wet the bed.” Blackmail, it was his only choice now. Saria suddenly stopped, and stared blankly.

“How...how did you know about that?” she stuttered, mortified beyond belief. He wasn’t supposed to know that. She never told anyone about that before, not even Link because she was so embarrassed. Besides she’d grown out of it. She hardly wet the bad at all anymore...except when she was nervous or scared.

“Ah-hah, now I see the tables have turned,” Link said with an evil cackle.

“I...I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Saria, feigning ignorance.

“I know about your little secret,” Link said, now the tormenter and not the tormented. “And I’ll tell everyone unless you give me the shorts.” Rather than tempt fate, Saria tossed Link’s shorts into the water. He quickly fetched them and put them on, without ever exposing more than his head above the water. After that, he swam to the shore and stepped out of the pond. He smirked at Saria and walked over to the rock to fetch the rest of his clothes.

“That was mean,” she said, frowning.

“*That* was mean?” Link said, in disbelief. “What about what you did to me? You took my clothes and teased me with them. You’re the bad one here.” Link began to put on the rest of his clothes.

“It was kind of funny,” Saria snickered. “But for what it’s worth, I’m sorry.” She gave Link the puppy-dog-face.

“Well...I’m sorry too.” Link shouldn’t have been angry at Saria. She was just being playful. Link blamed himself for being so stupid as to take off all his clothes when he went swimming. When Link had finished dressing, he began to walk Saria back home.

“How did you know about my...problem?” Saria asked, trying to hide her reddened face. “I’ve never told anyone.”

“Well...” Link mumbled, trying to annoy Saria further. “You told me yourself.”

“When? I never told you! I never told anyone about it.”

“You told me that time when you were sick and I took care of you, remember?” Saria didn’t recall what he was talking about. She remembered the time she was sick, she had the flu really bad. She had a high fever for days and was almost delirious at times. “You were rambling about all sorts of things, and when you happened to say that you used to wet the bed, it caught my attention. I asked you about it, and you said that you used to do it a lot, but now it only happens rarely.”

“How do you know that’s true?” Saria said defensively. “I was delirious, that could’ve just been hallucinations.”

“I know it’s true because you did it.” Saria’s eyes widened. She didn’t wet the bed when Link was taking care of her, did she? “It happened the night before you got better. It was the first good night’s sleep you’d gotten in days. Before I went home, I heard Niva say ‘uh-oh’, and I asked what was wrong. And she told me that you just had an... ‘accident’ and that you still did it sometimes. She said not to say anything to you the next morning because you’d be too embarrassed.”

“She told you that!” Saria yelled, glaring at the fairy hovering above her head. “When I woke up that morning I found out that I...you know...and you were gone and I thought you didn’t know about it. How come you never told me that you knew?” Saria was angry that Link had kept a secret that he knew her secret.

“You never asked,” Link said. Saria scowled and charged after him. Link ran through the forest with Saria chasing him. She was *really* annoyed now. She would tackle Link as soon as she caught up with him. They emerged from the deep forest and ran through the village towards Saria’s house. Some of the children stared at Link and Saria, those two were always pestering each other. Link ran into Saria’s house and sat on the chair. Saria quickly followed and saw Link sitting on the chair. Deciding not to beat him up as she originally planned, Saria plopped down onto her bed to try and catch her breath.

“You’re so mean!” Saria said, still breathing heavily. “How could you know about my problem and not tell me?” Link shouldn’t have told her that he knew. Now he would never hear the end of it. “Promise you won’t tell anyone,” she pleaded.

“Of course I promise, I would never tell anyone that.” He quietly snickered at the look on Saria’s face, she looked so pitiful. “Oh, cheer up. You know that nobody will ever find out our little secrets. No matter how annoying you are.” Saria scowled and threw her pillow at Link. He saw the pillow and caught it before it could hit him. “Okay, I get the point. You said it was almost supper time before...well what’re we having?”

“Is food the only thing you ever think about?” said Saria, shaking her head. Link nodded, rubbing his belly. “We’re having seaweed stew! Mmmmm.” Link made a disgusted face, and Saria giggled.

“Are you serious?” he said, starting to feel sick to his stomach. “I like your cooking, but...seaweed? I think I’ll pass.” Seaweed? He’d rather eat worms.

“I’m just kidding, silly. I’m not making seaweed for dinner, we’re having something special. I’m making soup out of these mushrooms I picked earlier. Besides, what do you have against seaweed? What did it ever do to you?”

“I...uhh. Wait a minute, why are you being so defensive of seaweed? I think you’ve finally gone off your nut.” Saria made a crazy laugh. “Oh, definitely,” Link continued. “I think you’ve spent too much time in the Sun. You need to cool off.” It had been a hot day, that’s why Link went to the swimming hole in the first place. Maybe Saria had overexerted herself and got heat exhaustion. The summer heat could make anyone crazy.

“I’m fine,” Saria reassured. “You should go change into some clean clothes, you’re all dirty.” Link looked at his dirt-smeared clothes and agreed. He did need to change. After all, he’d been wearing the same clothes for a week, and they were starting to smell. The hot weather had made Link even more lazy than he usually was. He wanted to wear his clothes as long as possible before he had to wash them. So far, he had made it five weeks without washing his clothes, a new record. Saria thought it was gross, but Link told her she wouldn’t understand it because it was a guy thing.

“Okay, I’ll go change,” said Link, standing up and leaving. Saria dumped the basket of mushrooms she picked on the counter and began to chop them. She nibbled and ate a few more mushrooms as she prepared the soup.

Link had changed his clothes, and now he was brushing his hair. He looked in the mirror at his shoulder-length blonde hair. He liked his new look. He wanted to grow his hair as long as he could. Zelda thought it was cute and made him look like a rebel. Link sighed, everything was cute to her. He wished she would use a word other than “cute” to describe him. He put on his cap and left his house, heading for Saria’s. When he entered her house, she wasn’t cooking. He saw some partially chopped mushrooms on the counter, but Saria wasn’t doing anything with them. In fact, she wasn’t cooking at all. Saria was dancing and twirling around the house like some kind of ballerina.

“What in the world are you doing?” asked Link. Saria stopped and looked at him. She ran up to him and hugged him hard.

“Oh you’re back!” she said, slightly slurred.

“Are you okay?” Link asked. Saria was definitely not herself right now. She was acting totally crazy.

“Oh, I’m fine!” she cheered, releasing Link from her bear hug. “I feel great!” She stepped back and looked at Link’s clothes. “I thought you were going to change into clean clothes.”

“What are you talking about? I did.”

“No you didn’t, silly. Your clothes are all covered with bugs,” she giggled.

“Are you *sure* you’re okay?” Saria nodded. She collapsed onto the floor and started giggling uncontrollably. Link went up to her and tried to get her to come to her senses. “Saria, calm down.” She stood up and stumbled to the counter. She grabbed a mushroom and presented it to Link.

“You should try these,” she said. “They’re really yummy.” Link grabbed the mushroom from her and took a close look at it. He immediately grabbed the basket and shoved all the mushrooms into it.

“You’ve been eating *these*?” Link said, horrified. “These are poisonous! What did I tell you about these mushrooms? Remember the time *I* ate one of these? I felt like I was gonna die!”

“That was fun,” Saria said, falling into another fit of giggling.

“How many did you eat?” he asked, gently shaking Saria to get her attention.

“Oh maybe a few...three or four. Why are you so worried? Come on, have one!” she giggled again.

“You ate four mushrooms?” Saria smiled. “When? How long ago?”

“While you were changing,” she replied. She stopped giggling, grabbed her stomach, and groaned. “Oh...I don’t feel so good. I think those mushrooms were bad. I think I’m gonna be sick.” Link tried to get her to sit down. She winced in pain as cramps ravaged her digestive system. Saria coughed and moaned about feeling sick. Then, without warning, she started retching. She vomited violently, all over herself and Link. After regurgitating most of her stomach contents she looked at Link. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, almost crying.

Link helped her stand up to take her outside. Before they reached the door, she doubled over and vomited again. This time she completely emptied her stomach. Link saw the undigested pieces of mushroom on the floor and almost puked at the sight of Saria’s stomach contents. He walked her to the stream so he could clean her off. She lay down on the ground and continued moaning.

Link ran back to his house and fetched a washcloth and a pair of her pajamas. Link helped Saria change out of her soiled dress and into her pajamas. He used the cloth to wipe off her face. Link took off his tunic which Saria had vomited on. He piled the dirty clothes next to the stream and went back to Saria, who was lying on the ground. She was half asleep. Link picked Saria up and carried her back to her house. He gently placed her onto the bed and pulled the covers over her. She rolled over and fell into a sound sleep. Now Link had to clean up. He scrubbed the floor and washed their soiled clothes. Link still couldn’t believe that she’d eaten those poisonous mushrooms. He remembered when he had eaten them, and how sick they made him. She had a completely different reaction than he did. He had been delirious, but Saria just acted weird. It was like she was drunk. He would have to stay at her house tonight, to make sure she would be okay. Saria was strong, she would get over it.

The rich man who solicited Z’s services tried to act normally for the next few days. He couldn’t allow people to think that he was doing something. He had overslept this morning, and was running late for an important meeting. He rushed through the castle gates and into the castle. He hoped the king wouldn’t be angry. He was headed for the weekly meeting that the king had with all of his top government staff: the military leaders, diplomats, and his cabinet of advisors. The rich man stopped at the door that led to the king’s meeting room. The guard opened the door and let him pass.

“Ah, Duke Kaore, you’re here,” the king said cordially. “Have a seat.”

“I apologize for my lateness, your majesty,” mumbled Kaore. “I...”

“Don’t worry about it,” said the king. He never got angry over petty mistakes, he had more important things to worry about. Kaore bowed slightly and took his usual seat at the large, round conference table. “Let’s get down to business,” said the king, initiating the conference. “First, I need to know what’s going on militarily. Let’s start with the Navy, Admiral Nosu?” The admiral began speaking about various naval strategies that Kaore couldn’t care less about right now. Kaore wasn’t paying any attention to what was being said. He thought about the deal he made with Z yesterday. Kaore wished he wouldn’t have to do this, but it was necessary. It was the only way he could get what he wanted.

“Kaore,” a voice said. “Duke Kaore,” said the king again. Startled, Kaore gathered his papers and smiled. “What’s happening in your department?” Duke Kaore was one of the king’s most trusted cabinet members. He was in charge of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic department.

“Oh, yes,” Kaore said, trying to gather his thoughts. “There’s not much happening right now. The Gerudos ratified the non-aggression treaty and want to schedule a banquet to celebrate. They want to do it sometime next month.” He shuffled through his papers again. “Oh, and there’s a small delegation due to arrive in Hyrule sometime this week; it’s the ambassador from Sukinta.”

“Sukinta?” asked the King. He wasn’t familiar with that place.

“Yes, Sukinta. It’s a small principality just south of Hyrule. Militarily speaking, they pose no threat. They want to open official diplomatic relations, probably for economic reasons. Their economy is declining and they need new trade routes.” Kaore flipped the paper over. “The delegation will consist of Ambassador Zimm, a few guards, and probably some of his lackeys.” Kaore told the king that that was all the information he had. The next person began to drone on about his cabinet department. Kaore’s mind faded out again, as he thought about his plan, and how he was going to carry it out.

During the night, Link had washed his and Saria’s clothes, and hung them out to dry. Then he had to scrub the floor and clean up the rest of the mess that Saria had made. At first he had planned to sleep at Saria’s house, but it didn’t turn out that way. Link didn’t sleep at all. He was worried about Saria and decided to instead stay up all night and watch her. Now morning had come and he hadn’t slept at all. He was so tired. He’d been up for more than twenty-four hours and he wanted to sleep. *Saria will be okay*, he thought. *I can rest my eyes for just a minute*. He rested his head on his hand and closed his eyes.

A rustling noise woke him up a few minutes later. He groggily looked at Saria’s bed. She was finally moving; she slowly sat up and stretched her arms. She turned her head and saw the exhausted Link, half asleep in a chair. “Uhhhh...what happened?” she moaned.

“You were totally out of it last night,” replied Link. Saria tried to remember the previous night, but her mind was a total blank. She couldn’t remember a thing that happened yesterday.

“I don’t feel good,” she complained. “My stomach hurts, my head hurts, my neck hurts, my arms hurt, my...”

“I get the idea,” Link interrupted. “Do you remember what happened last night?”

She searched her memories. “I have no idea,” she replied. “I can’t remember anything, everything is a blur.”

“Well, you had a pretty interesting night. You ate some mushrooms, bad mushrooms. You were totally crazy. You were dancing around the house, you were giggling like crazy, you hallucinated, and you finally threw up all over me and yourself.”

“Oh...I’m sorry,” said Saria. “I didn’t mean to...”

“It’s okay,” Link reassured. “It wasn’t your fault. You ate those poisonous mushrooms and they made you go insane. Remember the time *I* ate the mushrooms? They made me hallucinate and I was sick for days...and I just ate one. I don’t know how you even *survived*, let alone recovered in one night.” Saria shrugged her shoulders. “What’s the last thing you remember from yesterday?”

“Ummm...I think I was walking in the forest. Yes, I was Picking berries and I got some mushrooms, too. I thought the mushrooms were the good kind. I hadn’t had mushrooms in a while, so I wanted to pick

some. I remember eating one while I was picking them and...that's it. I can't remember anything else." That was a little scary to Saria. It made her uncomfortable to not be able to remember anything from last night. She was uneasy not having any recollection of what happened.

"So...do you remember about when you found me at the pond?" asked Link.

"Pond? What pond?" She had no idea what he was talking about. Link, however, secretly cheered inside.

"Oh, the pond," he mumbled. "You just found me when I went to the pond; it's no big deal," he said, pretending to shrug it off. *This is great!* He thought. *She doesn't remember what happened at the pond! That means she doesn't know about my embarrassing moment and she doesn't know that I know her little secret. Except...Niva knows. That stupid fairy better not say anything.*

"I hope I didn't cause too much trouble," Saria said, feeling embarrassed. Link shook his head. "It's so weird not being able to remember last night. I mean, I know I was really sick because I feel bad now. Of course, I probably don't *want* to remember what happened."

"You're right," Link said. "You were..." Link tried to think of a word. "You were out of your mind. It was almost kinda funny." Link smirked.

"You look tired," Saria said, concerned.

"Well, that 'cause I stayed up all night watching you to make sure you were all right."

"Oh that's so sweet," Saria said in a slightly teasing voice. "You should go home and sleep. I take it you washed my clothes for me?" Link nodded. "I'll go outside and get them. Now you go home and go to sleep, okay?"

"All right," Link said. Sleep, he could finally go to sleep. Link stood up to leave, and so did Saria. She smiled at him and walked outside to get her clothes from the line. Strangely, her fairy Niva stayed behind. Link glowered at the fairy.

"If you say a *word* to her about what happened at the pond..." Link threatened, "I'll hit you with a fly swatter." The fairy knew that Link wasn't serious, but she decided to obey him anyways. The fairy hovered for a moment, then flew back towards Saria. Link quickly walked back to his house. He could finally get some sleep. When he got inside, he didn't even bother to take any of his clothes off. He collapsed onto the bed and fell asleep instantly.

Link opened his eyes. He felt so much better now, so refreshed. It felt so good to have finally gotten some sleep. Judging by the level of light in his house, it must've been nearly dusk. Either that, or it was dawn. No, it couldn't have been dawn. He didn't sleep *that* long. Link got out from under the covers and stretched. Link wondered if he should bother getting up or just go back to sleep.

Then he heard a noise coming from just outside his door; someone was on his balcony. It was probably Saria. "Hello?" Link called. The person walked into his house. To Link's surprise, it wasn't Saria; it was Zelda. Why was she here? Zelda had the habit of turning up at the most unexpected times. "What're you doing here?" Link asked.

"What do you mean?" Zelda replied. "I was supposed to come here today, remember? We were *supposed* to spend the day together," she said in a nagging tone, putting her arms on her hips.

"We were?" Link scanned his memory. He had totally forgotten that he and Zelda had plans today. She was supposed to come over today and they were going to spend the day together. But that was before Saria got sick. Link was so tired from staying up all night that he slept through the day. "Oh yeah. I'm sorry," he apologized. "I was up all night watching Saria because she got sick 'cause she ate some bad mushrooms. And I stayed up to make sure that she didn't..."

"I know, I know," Zelda interrupted. "Saria told me."

"Why didn't you wake me up when you got here? I wouldn't have minded you..."

"You needed your sleep," she interrupted again. "You look so cute when you're sleeping. I didn't have the heart to wake you up." Zelda went over to the bed and sat down next to Link. "It's so nice how

you took care of Saria. You stayed up all night because you wanted to make sure she would be all right; that's so sweet. You know, it's not *that* late. We could still do something."

"Like what?" Link asked. "You probably have to go home soon, and there's not much to do here at night. Did you have any ideas?"

"Actually, I do. You can come over to my house."

"*Your* house?" Link said. "To the castle?"

"Yeah," she replied. "You can spend the night there. After all, I stayed here for more than a week, and it's only fair that you should be able to come over to my house for a while. So do you want to come? Oh of course you do. Go on and get your stuff."

"Um, I really don't have any 'stuff'. I'll just bring some extra clothes." Link stood up and packed some extra clothes. He couldn't refuse Zelda's offer to go to the castle. He had been there before, but he had never spent the night. Link admired the way that Zelda was so persistent. She had offered to let Link stay at the castle, and got him ready to go before he could even respond. This quality in any other person would have annoyed Link, but in Zelda it was different. He didn't mind her making decisions for him. Besides, she always made the same decision that he would've made anyway. He packed a few days' worth of clothes into his backpack.

"Oh good, are you ready?" asked Zelda excitedly. "We should probably go before it gets dark." She grabbed Link's arm and pulled him towards the door. When they had both exited Link's house, they stood for a moment.

"Um...I should go to Saria's house and tell her where I'm going," said Link, starting to head towards Saria's house. Zelda stopped him by grabbing his arm again, and he turned his head to look at her.

"Don't worry," she said. "I already told her you were going to go to the castle."

"Huh? When?" he asked, slightly confused.

"While you were sleeping. I already planned everything. All you had to do was wake up." It figures. Zelda always seemed to have everything planned before she even asked Link. She always knew what Link's response would be before she even asked him a question. Zelda could read him like a book.

"Oh...okay," he mumbled. "But shouldn't I go check on her anyways? I should go see if she's okay. I want to make sure she's still not sick from those funny mushrooms." Zelda stopped him as he was walking again.

"You worry too much," she told him. "Saria's fine, I was with her the whole day. Besides, if she gets sick again, there are plenty of other people her who can take care of her. You don't always have to do everything yourself. You need to relax once in a while." Link knew that was true. He often felt like he was the only one who could help. He always went out of his way for everyone. He somehow felt obligated to give more than he needed to. This generosity often had less-than-satisfactory results for him, however. He usually neglected himself too much and didn't take time out to do things that *he* wanted.

"Yeah, you're right," Link said. Zelda was always right, she always knew what to say to him.

"Well, come on. Let's go," Zelda nagged. She tugged Link's arm and they walked to the exit of the Kokiri forest.

"Are we just going to walk to the castle?" Link asked. "I mean, I don't mind. It's not that far. But do you mind walking that far?"

"There you go again, always looking out for me. To answer your question, we are walking." They exited the forest to see a Secret Service guard standing outside the entrance to the forest.

"Your Highness," said the guard, bowing. He turned around and began to walk back towards the castle; Link and Zelda followed a little ways behind him.

"Daddy wouldn't let me walk over by myself," Zelda whispered to Link. "So he sent this guard to follow me over here. He's really nice, though. He's not a mean, boring person like the other guards."

"Was he standing out there waiting all day?" Link asked. Zelda nodded. "Doesn't he get bored doing nothing like that?" Link couldn't understand how a person could wait for hours like that. Link couldn't stand not doing anything. That guard's job would drive him crazy.

“Don’t worry about him,” Zelda said. “He doesn’t mind not doing anything,” she said loud enough for the guard to hear. “Isn’t that right, Charles?”

“Of course, Your Highness,” the guard responded with a smile.

“See,” Zelda said. “He gets paid either way. And I’m sure he doesn’t mind taking a time out every once in a while.”

“So, what are we gonna do when we get to the castle?” Link asked.

“I don’t know...Probably eat dinner first.” Link’s face brightened and he patted his stomach. Food, he hadn’t eaten in almost two days. He was famished. The thought of eating all that rich food made Link’s mouth water. “You like that, don’t you?” Zelda teased. “Is your stomach the only thing you ever think about?” Link nodded his head. She thought it was cute to see him like this. It made him seem so innocent and child-like. Of course Link was a child, but he usually didn’t act like one. He and Zelda were both very mature for their ages. And Link had had enough bad experiences to last him a lifetime. He thought of the food again. The food in the castle was so much more elaborate and tasteful than what he usually ate. They walked across the drawbridge. It would only be a few minutes until they were inside the castle.

Chapter Two

A large table covered in food was set up in the banquet hall. A small ensemble of musicians played soft music in the corner. This wasn’t a very large banquet, only the most important people were in attendance. The king sat at the head of the table. To his left were some of his advisors and other members of Hyrule’s government. There was Duke Kaore, economic ministers, the top military leaders, and a few professors from the University. On the right side of the table were Ambassador Zimm and his delegation. He had brought eight people with him. A few were guards, and the rest were his advisors. The whole group had just gotten out of an official diplomatic meeting, and were now taking a break for dinner. They could be casual now.

“I have to thank you for your hospitality to us, Your Majesty,” said Ambassador Zimm. He was a man of relatively normal size, he was about six feet tall and was fairly thin. He had short, black hair that was slicked back. His clothes were fairly normal, but of a type that indicated that he was an important person.

“Your very welcome,” replied the king. “It’s my honor to be able to open official relations with your country. If you don’t mind my asking, how come you waited so long to come here?”

“Well, there are many reasons for that,” Zimm began. “Mostly because my country has not had good experiences with other countries in the past. Our history is fraught with wars and numerous invasions. The whole country is atop the largest gold mine on the continent. For centuries, it has been the basis of our economy. And, of course, many others have tried to invade us and take our wealth. So, after a while we completely closed off relations with any other country. But now, it’s starting to hurt us. Our economy is in a rapid decline and we need to be able to trade with other people. The government decided to open official relations with the surrounding countries. Hyrule is the last on the list, but it looks like the most promising. You’re not as hostile as some other places.”

“We’ve always believed in peace,” said the king. “We try to solve problems with diplomacy instead of fighting.”

“If only everyone else were so sensible,” said Zimm somberly. “Well, let’s not get ourselves upset,” he said, trying to lighten the mood. “This is a happy occasion for both our countries. You haven’t told me much about yourself. Do you have a wife, or children?”

“Actually, I do have a daughter,” replied the king. “Her name is Zelda. Sadly, her mother died during childbirth and I could never bring myself to marry anyone else. So Zelda is my only child. She’s out at the moment, but she’ll be back in just a few...” He was interrupted by Zelda running towards him.

“Hi, daddy!” she said as she ran to her father and hugged him. The king noticed Link standing in the doorway. “I brought Link home with me, I hope you don’t mind.”

“That’s fine honey,” he said. The king turned to speak to the ambassador. “This is my daughter. Say hello to Ambassador Zimm from Sukinta, honey.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” said Zelda politely as she gave a curtsy.

“The pleasure is mine,” said Zimm.

“Link, you don’t have to stand there, come in,” offered the king. Link hesitantly walked into the banquet hall and scanned the room. Zelda didn’t say that there would be people here. Being around strangers made Link nervous; he didn’t feel hungry anymore. He put on a smile for the people. Zelda stepped next to Link and grasped his hand.

“Daddy, do we have to stay in here?” complained Zelda. “Me and Link don’t want to ruin your party so we’ll just go in the regular dining room. Link doesn’t want to stay here, do you Linkie-poo?” When Link didn’t respond, Zelda gently jabbed him with her elbow and he nodded.

“That’s fine dear,” said the king. “You two run off, it’s just grown up talk here.” Zelda smiled and tried to drag Link out of the room. Zelda pulled at his arm making him stumble backwards. His gaze didn’t shift from the large ham on the table.

“What about...the food?” Link mumbled. It all looked so good.

“Oh, I forgot that you were hungry,” said Zelda. “We can just go up to the table and get some now. We can take the food with us to my dining room.” Link smiled, and they walked up to the table. Link was taken aback by the wide array of food before him. There was a ham, pheasant, roast beef, and a wide selection of pastries and pies. Zelda grabbed an empty plate and began to pick out the things she wanted to eat. Link was about to take a plate for himself, when he noticed a large platter near it. The platter was empty, and was three times bigger than the dinner plate. Link took the platter and began to pile food onto it. Zelda giggled as she saw him putting a little bit of everything onto the platter.

“Are you going to eat all that?” asked Zelda, eyeing the mound of food on Link’s plate. “You must be really hungry.” The only response Link gave was a nod; he was too focused on the food. When he finished selecting, he reviewed the foods on his plate. He had two pieces of pie, some small pastries, a large slice of beef, a slice of ham, some turkey breast, and some pheasant. He didn’t even touch the fruits or vegetables; he had those every day.

“Okay we can go now,” said Link, satisfied with the dinner he had chosen.

“Let’s go,” said Zelda. Link hefted the platter and followed Zelda to her dining room.

“That’s so cute,” said Zimm after the children left. “Who’s that boy? He didn’t look like he lived here. Is he a friend of Zelda?”

“Yes, that’s Link,” replied the king. “He’s really the only friend she has. They really get along together. She’s lucky to have found a friend like him. Of course, Zelda says she loves him and wants to marry him, but I’m not sure if she knows what she’s talking about.”

“He seems like a nice boy,” said Zimm. He reminds me of myself at that age. You know, you shouldn’t blow off Zelda’s comments so easily. She might very well been in love with him. She’s young, but she seems to really connect with him.”

“Perhaps you’re right. She couldn’t have picked a better person.”

Link and Zelda were eating their dinners in the smaller dining room. This was the room that Zelda usually ate her meals in. Zelda watched Link devour his dinner, bite by bite. She had finished her food long ago, but Link was still going. His plate was half-empty and Link was still hungry. “If you eat any more, you’re gonna explode,” commented Zelda. Link paused his eating to glare at Zelda.

“What? I’m hungry,” Link said defensively. He finished off the last piece of turkey on his plate. Now the only food left was dessert. He started with a piece of pie. It was very sweet and made with some kind of berries. “You sure you don’t want some?” said Link, offering her some of the pie.

“No, that’s okay,” Zelda declined. “You go ahead. I’m having fun just watching you.” Zelda giggled and Link scowled again. After a few more minutes of wolfing down desserts and pastries, Link was finally finished. Zelda was awestruck that a person could possibly eat that much food.

“See, I told you I could do it,” Link teased, sticking out his tongue at Zelda. She had bet him that he wouldn’t even be able to eat half a plateful, let alone the whole thing. He proved her wrong.

“I have to give you credit,” Zelda said. “You’re a bigger pig than I thought.” She giggled at him. She picked up a napkin, thrust it onto Link’s face, and began to wipe it briskly. “You have frosting on your face.” Link would’ve felt humiliated if anyone else were around; luckily they were alone. Link didn’t really mind if Zelda babied him like this. It was a fairly new experience for him, he was accustomed to taking care of himself. “There, all better,” she said.

“I won the bet,” said Link. “Now you have to kiss me.” He puckered his lips, and made kissing noises. This was one bet that Zelda didn’t mind losing. She leaned over and gave Link a quick kiss.

“Okay, I think it’s time for you two to go to bed,” said Impa from the doorway. Startled, Link and Zelda turned to see Impa looking at them from the doorway. How long had she been standing there? Link’s face flushed and he turned away.

“Oh, do we have to?” Zelda whined.

“Yes, it’s getting late. If you get ready for bed now, you can stay up a little while longer. Zelda, you go put your pajamas on.”

“Okay,” Zelda conceded. She walked off to her room to change into her night clothes. Link still sat in his chair, unsure of what to do. He’d never been told when to go to bed before. He just went to bed when he was tired. Impa looked at this little boy that Zelda never stopped talking about. Zelda seemed to act as if Link were the center of her universe.

“I don’t have any pajamas,” Link said, trying to break the awkward silence.

“That’s not a problem. You can wear one of Zelda’s nightgowns,” Impa joked. Link’s face stiffened. Was she serious? No, she couldn’t be. No one could ever make him wear one of Zelda’s nightgowns, except for Zelda. Link would do anything for her.

“Um…” was the only response Link could muster.

“I’m just kidding,” Impa finally said. Link breathed a sigh of relief. “You have to learn not to take everything so seriously.” Link looked at Impa blankly. She sighed. “Come with me, I’ll show you where you’ll be staying.” Link followed Impa out of the dining room and into the hallway. After walking past a few doors, she stopped. “This is your room,” she said pointing to a door. Link opened it and walked into the room. He was taken aback by the sheer size of the bedroom. The bed alone was almost four times the size of the one he had at home. He ran over and felt the velvety sheets on the bed. *Royalty sure know how to live*, Link thought. Link started rolling around on the bed, trying to grasp the whole experience of living it up.

“Are you having fun?” said Zelda, watching him from the door. Impa had gone and now Zelda was there. She was wearing a long, white nightgown with patterns of purple flowers.

“Um…It’s just a really big bed, that’s all,” said Link. Zelda ran over to the bed and stood on it.

“You know what’s really fun?” she asked. “Jumping on the bed!” They both started to jump on the bed. Link thought this was fun, the bed was just like a trampoline.

“Hey, stop that!” Impa yelled. “I leave you two alone for one minute, and look what you do.” Link froze, he didn’t know what to do. Was Impa really mad at him? He didn’t want to get on her bad side.

“I’m sorry,” Zelda apologized. “I was just showing Link how to jump on the bed,” she said innocently.

“Okay, it’s bed time,” Impa ordered. Zelda sulked and walked out the door. She saw the almost scared look on Link’s face. “Don’t be upset,” Impa said in a motherly voice. “I’m not mad at you. Zelda always tries to cause mischief and I have to yell at her before she’ll listen to me. My room is just down the hallway, next to Zelda’s; it’s the one with the Sheikah symbol on the door. If there is any problem, feel free to come to me. You try and get a good night’s sleep, I’ll come and get you in the morning.” Impa turned off the bright oil lamp on the nightstand and closed the door. Link sat quietly for a moment, and

then took off his boots and socks. He stripped down to his under shorts and tee-shirt and climbed into the bed. It was so soft and fluffy. It was like sleeping on air. Link would have no trouble sleeping in this luxurious bed. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

“That was an excellent reception,” said Zimm, thanking the king for the wonderful meal and entertainment. It was late, and everyone wanted to retire for the evening. “You are such a gracious host.”

“It’s my pleasure,” the king responded. “I had guest quarters prepared for you and your group. The servants will show you the way...”

“Allow me, Your Majesty,” Duke Kaore interrupted. “I’ll take the liberty of showing them to their rooms.”

“As you wish,” said the king. Kaore led Zimm and his entourage through the castle and into the guest wing. He showed Zimm’s assistants to their rooms and then he and Zimm were alone. A guard passed them in the hallway as Kaore led Zimm to his room. “Your room is this way, Your Excellency,” said Kaore. They both entered into a guest bedroom and closed the door. It was safe now. “Okay, Z. We can talk now.”

“I think I’ve gotten enough information,” said Z. “Now that I know the layout of the castle, it should be a lot easier for me to do my job. I have to admit, it was rather clever of you to tell them I was some kind of ambassador.”

“Yes, well...just remember that I’m paying *you* to do this job, so I expect *you* to do the rest of the work. Otherwise I would simply do it myself.”

“Don’t tell me how to do my job,” Z said in a threatening tone. “Now, do you want to know how I’m going to do this? Because some of my customers like to be in on the planning.”

“Actually, I would like to plan this with you,” replied Kaore.

“Okay. I already have a plan in my head. You can meet me in one of my safehouses after I leave here.”

“Where is this safehouse?” Kaore asked.

“I’ll tell you that before I leave,” Z replied. “And I need to know one more thing: why is that boy here? Who is he?” It surprised Z when he had seen Link with Zelda. And he didn’t like surprises. That boy seemed like the meddling type, and Z didn’t want him getting in the way.

“He is just Zelda’s friend,” replied Kaore. “He shouldn’t be a problem. I wouldn’t worry about him if I were you.”

“I hope you’re right, because I’m not going to take care of him. Unless you pay me extra. I don’t do things for free.”

“Just concentrate on your task,” said Kaore. “If Link gets in the way, I’ll take care of him myself.”

Impa looked at the clock in her room, it was eight already. She had to go wake up Zelda. Impa had already been up for hours, she was never able to sleep past sunrise. Now it was time for her usual morning routine of waking the princess. Actually, it was more of an ordeal. Zelda never liked to wake up in the morning, it was hell trying to get her out of bed. Impa took a deep breath and opened the door to Zelda’s bedroom. The bed was empty. Where in the world had Zelda gone? She never got up on her own. If it were up to Zelda, she would never even get out of bed. Maybe she was wandering around somewhere. Zelda was probably with Link, Impa would go check in his room.

Impa walked to the guest room where Link stayed and opened the door. She saw Zelda, still in her nightgown, sitting in a chair in front of the bed. She only sat there, staring at the still sleeping Link. “What are you doing?” Impa half-whispered, half-yelled.

“Nothing,” said Zelda, innocently. “I’m just watching him sleep. He’s so cute.” *Why is she watching him sleep?* Impa thought. *Zelda is so obsessed with that boy.*

“How long have you been sitting there?” Impa asked.

“Oh, I don’t know... a little while. Right after sunrise.” *She must really like him to wake up that early,* Impa thought. *The end of the world wouldn’t wake her up early, but apparently Link had the power to.*

“Zelda, that’s almost three hours! You’ve been sitting there for three hours, just watching him?”

“He’s really interesting when he sleeps,” commented Zelda. “Every now and then, he rolls all over the bed and then he lays still for a while. And he snores sometimes, too. Sometimes he mumbles things, but I’m not sure what he’s saying. Oh, and watch this.” Zelda leaned over and poked Link’s side with her index finger. His response was an unconscious groan. Zelda giggled. “You see, he doesn’t wake up if you poke him.” Impa couldn’t understand why Zelda found that entertaining.

“Well, it’s time for him to get up anyway,” said Impa. She walked up to the bed and gave Link a hard shaking with her hand. Link’s response was to roll over and groan again.

“He’ll never wake up if you do that,” said Zelda. “This is how you do it.” She leaned over Link’s face and pinched his nose shut. A couple seconds later Link abruptly gasped and woke up.

“What are you doing?” Link shouted, flailing his arms wildly. He was still half-asleep and didn’t fully grasp what was going on. His eyes focused and he saw Zelda giggling and Impa glowering at her with her arms folded. “Oh,” he mumbled, finally understanding the situation.

“You have a very interesting way of waking him up,” Impa commented.

“It’s the only way that works,” Zelda said. Link still sat on the bed, feeling awkward. “Hee hee, your hair looks funny,” Zelda giggled, pointing to Link’s head. One disadvantage of Link’s now long hair was its tendency to go completely out of order through the night. Individual strands as well as clumps of hair pointed in every direction. Link tried to smooth it down with his hands.

“Leave him alone for a while,” Impa said. “You need to get dressed, young lady. Come on.” Impa dragged Zelda out of Link’s room and closed the door. Zelda pouted and walked to her room with Impa.

“Impa,” Zelda said with a pleading look. “Please don’t tell Link I was watching him sleep. It’s... embarrassing.” She blushed slightly.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell him,” Impa assured her. Zelda then changed into one of the two Kokiri dresses that Link had given her as a present a few months prior. She had already had two Kokiri dresses that she bought at the market, but now she liked the ones Link gave her. They were the only thing she ever wanted to wear. Zelda had always preferred to dress herself, even though the servants were “supposed” to do it. Impa had told Zelda that it was part of being a princess. The servants always did her laundry, until she got the dresses from Link. She insisted on washing them herself. She wouldn’t let anyone else even touch the dresses, and she would have a fit if someone did. She also almost never took off the jewelry that Link had given her for her birthday so many months ago.

When Zelda had finished dressing, she went back to Link’s room to see if he was ready. She knocked on the door and entered without waiting for a response. He was sitting in his chair struggling to put his left boot on. *I need bigger boots,* he thought. Finally his foot squeezed into the tight leather footwear. He gazed at how worn out his Kokiri boots were. He had worn the same pair as long as he could remember; they had a sentimental value. But now he was growing, and they didn’t fit well any more. “Are you done now?” asked Zelda, interrupting Link’s musings.

He looked up at her. “Yeah,” he responded.

“Okay, good. It’s time for breakfast now,” she said, clutching Link’s hand once again and leading him to the dining room. It always seemed like Zelda was grabbing his hand and taking him somewhere. Link didn’t mind, though. It gave him an excuse to hold her hand. Her hand was so soft and delicate, not calloused from hard labor like Link’s. When they entered the small dining room, Link pulled out a chair for Zelda and pushed it in when she sat down. Impa had told him that it was a polite, gentlemanly thing to do, so he gave it a try. “Oh, that’s so sweet,” Zelda commented. Everything Link did was either “sweet” or “cute” as far as Zelda was concerned. But that didn’t bother Link, he liked compliments. Link sat in the chair next to Zelda, waiting for breakfast to arrive.

“So what are we having?” Link asked hungrily.

“Eggs and bacon,” Zelda replied.

“That sounds good.” Link couldn’t wait. This would taste so much better than his usual breakfast of fruit and bread that he had in the Kokiri forest. Not that his normal diet was bad, but Link like a little change every now and then.

“Are you hungry, Linkie-pooh?” asked Zelda. He nodded. “I would think you’d still be full after everything you ate last night.” Link shook his head. “You were so funny. I’ve never seen anyone eat so much. Are you going stuff yourself silly today, too?”

“I don’t know...maybe,” he responded. “I won’t know for sure until the food gets here.” Aside from the diet, having food served to him was also a new experience. He and Saria always took turns preparing meals; they did an equal amount of work. But Link enjoyed being pampered like this, it appealed to his inner lazy side. Link’s face brightened and he licked his lips as a kitchen servant entered carrying a tray. She placed plates full of scrambled eggs and strips of bacon in front of Link and Zelda. The servant then gave them each a small loaf of bread.

“Would you like some tea, sir?” asked the servant, holding a silver teapot.

“Um, okay,” Link answered, too focused on the food in front of him. She poured the tea into an elaborately decorated teacup and placed it in front of Link. The servant bowed and left the dining room. Link paused his food shoveling to examine the beverage he’d been given. He had never had tea before. “So what is this?” Link whispered to Zelda, sniffing the steamy drink.

“It’s black tea,” Zelda answered. “It’s real yucky and I don’t like it. But you can go ahead and try it.” Link sipped it and quickly put the cup back down.

“It’s hot!” He said, trying to air out his burned tongue.

“Of course it hot, it supposed to be.”

“Oh,” he responded. He started blowing on the tea, trying to cool it down. He decided to wait a few minutes and put the cup down. Then Link continued to devour his breakfast. Zelda smiled and ate her breakfast at the normal, slower pace.

“Are you going to take any time to breathe?” Zelda giggled.

“M fnn,” he mumbled, his mouth full. Zelda shot him a confused glance and he swallowed his food. “I said, ‘I’m fine.’” He finished off every last remnant of food on his plate and stared at Zelda’s. She had some eggs left along with a few strips of bacon. “Are you going to eat that?” he asked sheepishly.

“No, you can have it,” she replied, pushing the plate to him. Link smiled and quickly devoured Zelda’s leftovers. When he was done, he sat back in contentment. “Are you going to drink your tea? I don’t like it myself, but you might.”

“Okay,” he said. Picking up the cup again. He carefully sipped the tea; it had cooled down and it didn’t burn him. “This isn’t bad.” Link quickly gulped the entire contents of the teacup. “That was good, is there more?” he asked. Zelda pointed to the silver teapot, and Link leaned over and brought it over to him. He poured himself another cup and quickly drained that one.

“Wow! You really like that stuff,” Zelda commented. She couldn’t understand how Link could like that tea, she thought it was repulsive. He poured a third cup and began to drink that one. “Slow down! You shouldn’t drink it that fast, you’ll choke.” Link tried to retort, but he ended up coughing and hacking. “See,” she said smugly. After he stopped coughing, he finished his third cup. This tea was good. And Link wanted more. It was almost...addicting. He emptied the teapot into his cup which, to his dismay, filled it only halfway. Oh well, three and a half cups would do.

“Well what do we do now?” Link said in a quick, almost nervous voice.

“Umm...we could go outside. It looks like a nice day.”

“Oh, that sounds great!” Link said, jumping out of his chair and grabbing Zelda’s arm. “Come on let’s go,” he said, running to the doorway. He felt so energetic now, that tea was some kind of miracle elixir. Link ran through the corridors of the castle towards the entrance, and Zelda had to jog to keep up with his pace. He ran into the field in front of the castle and sat down on the ground. Zelda came and sat next to him a moment later, huffing and out of breath.

“What’s the matter you tired?” he asked.

“I’m okay, I just need to catch my breath,” replied Zelda.

“Oh, your fine! Come on let’s do something.” Link was jumping up and down like a hyperactive two-year-old. He’d never had caffeine or any other stimulant before, so he was totally wired. “You know that was really good tea and I think I’ll have some more later because it’s really cool and really speeds you up,” Link jabbered as if the whole sentence were one word.

“Um...are you okay?” Zelda asked, concerned about Link. He had never acted this hyper before, he was usually calm and rational.

“Ok come on I’m fine let’s go run around do you want to run around?” Link started running laps around Zelda, making her dizzy.

“Calm down!” she yelled, grasping Link’s ankle, causing him to fall to the ground. Link stared at Zelda with a fanatical smile, he was definitely over-stimulated.

“What’s wrong? I don’t need to calm down I’m fine,” he rambled.

“I think you need to lie down, you had too much of that tea.” Link plopped down on the ground and pouted. He folded his arms and gave Zelda a pleading look.

“Oh, you’re such a party-pooper,” he moped. “I just need to do something or I’ll go crazy.”

“Fine,” Zelda said, rolling her eyes. She pointed to the stone wall at the other end of the yard. “Go run over there and back,” she suggested. Link nodded his assent and quickly started running towards the stone wall. Maybe this would calm Link down. With almost unnatural speed, Link sprinted to the stone wall and back to Zelda.

“Okay what next?” he asked. Zelda groaned and laid on her back. Link sat next to her and gave an innocent smile.

“Your hands are shaking,” Zelda pointed out. Link looked at his trembling hands. All of a sudden, he didn’t feel very well. He keeled over and moaned.

“I don’t feel good,” he complained, holding his stomach and grimacing. “I think I’m gonna be sick.” His face took on a grotesquely pale color.

“Maybe you should go back inside.” Zelda helped him stand up and slowly walked him into the castle. Link felt terribly nauseous and felt like vomiting. She helped him into the bedroom and laid him on the bed.

“Uhhh...I’m thirsty,” he grumbled. Zelda quickly fetched him a glass of water which he drank in one long gulp. He groaned again. His hands still trembled, and he felt exhausted and wired at the same time. He was having a caffeine overdose from the pot of tea he drank. “I shouldn’t have drunk that tea,” he said, groaning again. “I’ll never drink that again.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know it would do that to you. I guess I never had enough to know that it would do that.”

“Don’t apologize,” Link said. “I just need to lay down for a while. I’ll be fine in a little...” his face contorted and he covered his mouth. “Where’s the toilet?” he asked urgently.

“Down the hall, third door on the left,” Zelda answered, pointing to the hallway. Link quickly bolted out of the room and down the hallway. Zelda heard retching noises coming from the bathroom. The feeling of Link being sick was starting to make Zelda sick. She walked down the hall to the bathroom and knocked on the door. “Are you all right?” she asked.

Link responded with yet another groan. “I’m fine,” he managed to say, followed by another bout of retching and vomiting. After another minute, Link finally stopped gagging. He came out of the bathroom and saw Zelda waiting outside. Even though he had a sickly expression on his face, he managed to force a weak smile.

“Do you feel better?” asked Zelda, leading Link back to his bedroom.

“Unh,” he moaned. “I’ll be better in a little while. I just need to take a nap.” He lay down on his bed and tried to relax. His hands and arms were still shaking from the caffeine overdose. He felt like he would be awake for the rest of his life. Link was exhausted, but he was still artificially awake. This really sucked.

“Just try to calm down and rest,” Zelda said in a gentle voice.

“I’m sorry I ruined our day,” Link apologized. “After I take a nap we can do something. It’s still early.”

“Don’t worry, Linkie-pooh. You didn’t ruin our day. I just want you to feel better. You try to sleep, I’ll come back later.” Zelda kissed his forehead and left Link’s room. She would return later, after he had time to rest.

Today was the day Ambassador Zimm was to leave the castle. He had arrived early yesterday morning, and now it was the mid-afternoon of the following day. Diplomatic visits usually lasted for a week or more, but this one was different. It wasn’t an official visit, it was more like a prelude to an official visit. Zimm told the king that his meeting to open relations had gone well. Sukinta’s head of state would come to Hyrule later in the year to officially open relations; or so the king of Hyrule thought. Ambassador Zimm now prepared to return to his home. He had to give his farewells to the king of Hyrule.

“On behalf of my country,” Zimm said with a bow, “I thank you for your hospitality and openness. Expect more delegations in the coming months. We’ll be sending people to get more in depth information on your economy, culture, the standard stuff. But I’m sure our king will agree to open diplomatic relations with Hyrule. He’ll want to come to Hyrule himself, to do things officially. I’ll send word to you when he makes a decision.”

“I can’t wait,” said the king.

“Before I leave, I need to have a talk with your foreign relations minister, to arrange some things. Is he around?” asked Zimm, pretending to be curious. Duke Kaore was the Minister of Foreign Relations, and Zimm knew exactly where he was.

“Oh, his office is in the administrative wing of the castle. It’s just down that hallway,” the king answered, pointing to a hallway to his left. “It’s the second door on the right, it says ‘Foreign Minister’ on it.”

“Thank you,” said Z, heading for Kaore’s office.

Link had tried to take a nap, but to no avail. After a few hours of staring at the ceiling, Link decided to get up. He felt a lot better now; his hands weren’t shaking anymore and he didn’t feel sick. He felt more awake now, like he had gotten a good night’s sleep. He decided to go find Zelda and see if they could do something. Zelda saw Link enter her room and her face brightened immediately. “Oh Link! Are you feeling better now?” she ran up to him.

“Yeah, I actually feel a lot better now,” he replied. “I think I just needed some time for that tea to work its way through me. What do you want to do now?”

“Hmmm...” Zelda thought. “Maybe we could just walk around the castle. You’ve never seen the whole thing.” She leaned over and whispered into his ear, “We could sneak around where we’re not supposed to go.”

Link thought about it. Zelda always wanted to get into trouble. Link realized that he didn’t need to worry about getting in trouble when he was with Zelda, she was the princess. She could do whatever she wanted. “Okay, why not?” agreed Link.

“Oh goody!” she replied. “Follow me, I can show you parts of the castle that you’re not allowed to see.” Link thought this would be fun, he liked exploring. Zelda quietly took him downstairs and she walked him into the western wing of the castle. This held many of the various government offices and administrative offices. It also held the high point of Zelda’s tour: the dungeon.

“You’re gonna love this,” Zelda said as they reached an old door at the end of the administrative wing. She opened the door to reveal a large library. They walked into the room and Link gazed at the thousands of books on the shelves.

“What’s so interesting about this?” Link asked. “I’ve seen books before.” He had no idea why he should be fascinated by the library. It wasn’t very interesting.

“You haven’t seen the cool part yet,” Zelda said. She walked over to a bookcase on the far end of the room. “I found out about this when I was exploring in here on time.” She stuck her hand into a space between two bookcases and fiddled around. Link heard a click and Zelda swung the bookcase outward like a door. Behind the bookcase was a rusted steel door.

“Oh neat!” Link exclaimed. “Is this some kind of secret passageway?”

“Better,” she commented. She opened the steel door and it opened to reveal a dark stairway.

“What’s down there?” Link asked, peering into the blackness.

“It’s the dungeon,” Zelda answered. “It’s really old and they must’ve boarded it up when they put all these books in here. Almost no one even knows it’s here, it’s my little secret. They don’t put people in there anymore, so it’s empty. We can explore it together now, I was always afraid to go down there myself. Come on, let’s go.” She grabbed a lantern from the wall and they both walked down the stairs. The dungeon was dank, and humid. Strings of cobwebs hung from the ceiling.

“Wow! This place is awesome!” exclaimed Link, his voice echoing in down the row of cells. “When was the last time anyone was down here?”

“I don’t know,” Zelda answered. “But I think it’s been quite a while.” Link walked up to one of the prisoner cells. The bars were rusted and corroded, and the door was half-open. Link walked into the cell and looked around. This was really cramped, there was no light and almost no ventilation. The cell was terribly cramped, too.

“Ooh, what’s that?” Zelda said pointing to the corner of the cell. Link walked over and peered in the corner. There was some kind of stiff, furry mass there. It was a dead rat. And by the looks of it, it had been dead for a long time. Link poked at it.

“Yuck,” he commented. Zelda picked up the rat by the tail and dangled it in front of his face.

“You know it would be funny if we put this in Impa’s bed or something,” said Zelda. They both thought of the endless mischief they could cause with a dead rat.

“No, that would be too mean. We should just leave it here,” Link suggested. Zelda dropped the rat back onto the ground. “You know, any other girl would be freaked if they saw a rat. Saria goes crazy when she sees a spider, she’d probably faint if she saw a rat.” Link liked how Zelda was never afraid to do things. She was so unlike some of the other prissy girls he’d known. She was like him, and he loved that.

“I never understood why other girls are afraid of those kinds of things,” said Zelda, shrugging her shoulders. “I guess they’re just wimps. Well, what do you want to do now? You’ve seen the dungeon.”

“Um...let’s go back upstairs,” Link suggested. “We can go outside or something.” Zelda agreed and they walked back up the stairs. Link and Zelda quickly closed the door and moved the bookshelf back into place. When they came to the door of the library, they saw two people enter the hallway. They ducked back into the library, only poking their heads out.

“Who are they?” Link whispered. Zelda caught a glance of the two men’s faces as they walked into the Foreign Minister’s office and closed the door.

“I think that’s the guy that was visiting here last night,” Zelda said. “Remember the foreign man my daddy was talking to when we were getting the food last night?” Link nodded, remembering him. “The other man is Duke Kaore, he’s one of the government people. He’s the one that yells at all those people from other countries. Come on, let’s go before someone sees us.” They tiptoed through the hallway, trying not to draw attention.

Zelda and Link stopped in front of Kaore’s door, and heard talking coming from within. “I wonder what they’re saying?” Zelda whispered. “Let’s listen,” she said, putting her ear against the door.

“Are you sure we should be doing this?” Link whispered. Eavesdropping was a lot worse than just roaming the castle. They could get in a lot of trouble if they got caught.

“Shh! I wanna hear what they’re saying.” Link decided not to argue, and he put his ear to the door also. He strained to hear parts of the conversation. It was hard to make them out, but he picked up a few sentences.

“...going to the place in Kuato,” said one voice. “It’ll be safe and no one...what we’ll do.”

“...sure no one will find out...” said the other voice.

“Don’t worry,” said the first voice. “The plan is fool-proof...discuss the rest of it later. I need to go.” Link and Zelda heard footsteps approach the door and they quickly tried to get up and run away. The door opened and a stunned Duke Kaore looked down to see Link and Zelda crouched on the floor. The children gave innocent smiles.

“Um...hello Mister Kaore,” said Zelda in a surprised voice. Kaore stiffened and looked at her.

“Good afternoon, Your Highness,” Kaore said. “Are you lost?” he said sardonically.

“Um, no,” she replied. “Link was just helping me find my pet frog...that got loose. He hopped over here somewhere. Right Link?” She jabbed him with her elbow and he smiled.

“Oh, yeah,” he mumbled. “Right, we’re looking for the frog.” Link and Zelda tried to look like they were innocent. Zelda glanced at the “Ambassador” who was staring at her. The look in that man’s eyes gave her chills. She shrugged off the feeling and continued acting guiltless.

“Why don’t you two run along?” Kaore suggested. “We’ve got work to do.” Link and Zelda nodded and quickly ran down the hallway and towards the main entrance. They went outside and sat down in the shade of a tree. Zelda looked to make sure no one was around.

“That was close,” Link said, his heart beating like a jackhammer. “I thought we would be in big trouble.”

“I told you nothing would happen,” Zelda said. She hadn’t been worried that much. “Remember, I’m the princess. I can’t get in trouble with anyone else but my dad...and Impa. He couldn’t have done anything, they’re not even allowed to yell at me.”

“You mean you can do anything you want and not get in trouble?” Link asked.

“I can’t get in trouble by everyone else. But they tell Impa and then she lectures me for about three hours. So I still get in trouble, but just by Impa or daddy.”

“Oh,” Link mumbled. “Did you see how that one guy looked at you? It was kind of scary.”

Zelda remembered the look that Zimm had given her. “I know, that was kind of scary. He sort of reminded me of Ganondorf.” They turned their heads to see a small group of people exit the castle. It was Zimm and his entourage. Some mounted horses, while Zimm sat inside an elaborately decorated carriage.

“Speak of the devil,” Link said. “There he is. It looks like he’s leaving.” The group of people and horses began to move. They went down the path and through the gates, and they were gone. Zelda felt relieved.

“That’s good, he’s gone,” Zelda said. “I’m sure there was nothing wrong about him. Besides, he’s not coming back.”

Chapter Three

Ambassador Zimm had finally returned to his home. Actually, it was a safehouse in the abandoned town of Kuato, only a few miles southwest of the castle. It used to be a thriving town until about ten years ago. People had gotten the idea that evil spirits were invading the town. The townspeople just deserted the town and never came back. Everyone in Hyrule knew that Kuato was haunted, and no one dared go there.

Now Zimm could finally return to his normal persona of “Z”. After he had gotten far enough away from the castle, he paid his assistants and dismissed them. He had hired some lackeys that lived in his real hometown. They knew what Z did for a living, and often provided him with supplies and services. Z’s request for them was unusual, but he did it without asking questions. Z paid them a lot of money for this.

They all went their separate ways, happy with their money. Z and Kaore agreed to meet at the safehouse later in the day. Kaore was supposed to leave the castle an hour after Z did. Kaore should arrive any minute.

Z sat down in a chair behind a desk. This building was very different than his actual home. The safehouse used to be a blacksmith or swordsmith's shop. It was one of the only buildings that wasn't completely dilapidated. There was an old blast furnace in one end of the shop that Z used as a fireplace. This place was sparsely furnished, a couple chairs, a table, and a bed. Various tools and other devices were strewn about the room. He poured himself a glass of brandy and waited for Kaore.

After a few minutes, Z heard a trotting horse approach his building. The horse stopped and Kaore entered a moment later. "I have to admit, you're a good actor," said Kaore as he sat in the chair in front of Z.

"It's one of my many talents," Z replied.

"Well, I trust you're ready to do the job tonight. Have you planned everything?"

"Yes, I have," replied Z. After he had seen the castle, he came up with a quick idea of what he was going to do. He didn't need any special equipment, just his usual tools. All Z had to do was fine-tune his plan. "The guards at the castle seem to be fairly incompetent, so breaking into the castle shouldn't be difficult. Just in case, I have some chloroform and a cloth. If I see any guards that might get in the way, I'll put them out. Then I'll simply kidnap the girl and bring her back here. As for killing her, is there any specific method you had in mind?"

"I really don't care," Kaore replied. "I just want her dead, and I don't want there to be a body. I don't care what you do to her, as long as it has the same result." Z smiled sadistically. One of his pleasures was torturing people. He would enjoy seeing this girl in agony. Z could hone his torturing skills. He enjoyed his line of work. He could do what he loved and still get paid for it.

"One more thing," Z said. "Zelda and Link were by your door this morning. What if they heard our conversation? I don't want this plan to be botched. If you want I can postpone this a while."

"No, I want this done tonight. Just forget about this morning. I'm sure they didn't hear anything. Besides, no one would believe those children even if they knew what our plan was. But just in case, I'll take care of Link. I'll kidnap him an hour before your arrival and you just take care of the princess. The boy won't get in your way, I'll kill him myself."

By the end of the day Link and Zelda had mostly forgotten about the look Z had given Zelda earlier in the day. They spent most of their time sitting in the field and talking. Now it was starting to get dark, and they were watching the sunset together. "Link, what are you thinking?" Zelda asked. She gazed into Link's eyes. She knew that it bugged him when she asked that question.

"Huh? Nothing," Link replied. Then he turned to look at her with a quizzical expression. "Why do girls always ask that question? Saria always asks me that and when I say 'nothing' she gets mad. What do you want from us?" Link never could understand the why girls acted the way they did. Being close friends with Saria and Zelda gave Link a special insight into the female mind, but there were still things about them that he couldn't begin to comprehend.

"I just want to know what goes on inside your head," said Zelda, tapping Link's head with her index finger. "Don't you wanna know what I'm thinking?"

"Um...not really." Link didn't really care what Zelda was thinking, he didn't know why girls had such an obsession with that kind of thing. There were some things Link didn't *want* to know. The female mind was a scary place, and Link didn't want to know what went on there. It was something that males weren't meant to understand. "I just don't like it when people interrogate me. Especially when girls ask question with no right answer."

"Oh, so it annoys you when girls ask you questions like that?" Zelda said tauntingly. She stood up with her back to him and waved her hips. "Does this make my butt look big?" she teased. Link tried not to

blush. “Oh, how ‘bout this: which dress do you like better, the blue one or the pink one? Do I look fat in this?” Link was clearly flustered. She loved annoying Link just to get a rise out of him. She sat back down and smiled at him. She didn’t want to make him mad.

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Link pointed out.

“Oh well, I’ll try not to ask you any more questions. Isn’t that a pretty sunset?” she smiled. Link playfully pushed her and she wrapped her arm around him. They watched as the glowing orange orb of the Sun sank below the horizon. It was a beautiful sight. Now only the twilight and the full moon illuminated the sky.

“Isn’t it about time for dinner?” Link said.

“There you go with your stomach again,” said Zelda, rolling her eyes. “But you’re right, it is time for dinner. And I’m hungry. I bet I can beat you there.” Link stood up and prepared to run.

“Okay, on the count of three,” Link said. “One, two…” Zelda bolted for the entrance. Link saw her run and he chased after her. “That’s not fair!” he yelled. “You got a head start!”

“You snooze, you lose,” she yelled back at him. Link chased Zelda across the yard and into the castle. Some of the guards tried to tell them to stop running, but to no avail. As they approached the dining room, Link caught up with Zelda. With a burst of speed he passed her and stopped at the doorway to the dining room.

“Hah-Hah, I beat you!” he teased. “Cheater.” Zelda sat down in her chair and tried to catch her breath.

“I could’ve beaten you if I wanted to,” she said. “I let you win,” she insisted.

“Yeah, sure,” Link said sarcastically. “So, what’s for dinner?” he asked, grabbing his fork expectantly.

“I think they’re making roast duck today,” replied Zelda. Link’s eyes opened wide.

“Duck? As in ‘quack-quack’ duck?” Zelda nodded. Link had never eaten a duck before. What if it tasted strange? The royal family sure ate a lot of weird things.

“Oh don’t give me that look,” said Zelda. “You’ll like it. Besides, what do you care? You’ll eat anything.” She was right, Link was willing to try anything once. “Oh, here comes the food now,” she said as the servants entered with their meals. Link looked at the plate that was placed in front of him. On the plate were mashed potatoes, the roasted duck, and some pretty-looking garnish and decorative things. The duck looked just like a roasted chicken. Zelda started eating her food while Link stared at it.

“Go on, eat it,” she urged. Link carefully cut some of the breast meat and ate a piece. It tasted really good. It wasn’t as bad as he thought it would be. He really loved whatever spices the cook put on it.

“It tastes like chicken,” Link said, happily devouring his food.

“You think everything tastes like chicken,” Zelda commented.

“Everything does.” Zelda rolled her eyes. “You know, worms taste like chicken, too,” said Link, trying to gross out Zelda while she was eating. Zelda just brushed off his comment. “If I had told Saria that, she would’ve gotten sick.”

Zelda shrugged her shoulders. “Oh well, that doesn’t bother me,” Zelda said. “Besides, I’ve eaten worms before. And they *do* taste like chicken.” Link didn’t bother trying to gross out Zelda again, that kind of thing just didn’t bother her. He decided to concentrate on his food. Link systematically ate the roasted duck, piece by piece. After a few minutes he had completely stripped the bones. He looked over at Zelda who was finished, but some meat still remained on the duck. He smiled at her. “Go ahead,” said Zelda, handing her plate to Link. He quickly ate Zelda’s leftovers and finished his potatoes.

“Happy now?” Zelda asked. Link nodded. “Impa was right when she said the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Link asked defensively.

“Nothing,” Zelda replied innocently. “All I have to do is give you food and you’re happy.” Now Link rolled his eyes. He knew Zelda was right.

“It’s true, but you shouldn’t take advantage of it,” Link said. “You know I like you because of who you are, not because of the things you give me.”

“I know. I just like to make you happy,” said Zelda. She knew that Link would like her no matter what. Zelda liked giving him things because it pleased her to see Link happy.

“I’m kind of tired now,” said Link, yawning.

“I am too,” Zelda said.

“You’re right, it’s bedtime,” said Impa, standing in the doorway. When did she get there? Impa seemed to appear at the most unusual moments. Link mused that it must be some kind of Sheikah thing. Link and Zelda both left the table and prepared to go to bed. Zelda kissed Link on the cheek before she closed the door to her bedroom. Link smiled to himself and went to his room.

Kaore looked at the clock on his wall. It was one in the morning. Z would be here in about an hour. Kaore needed to take care of Link now. He quietly walked through the dark castle. It wasn’t abnormal for him to be up at this hour, so his presence wouldn’t arouse suspicion. Everyone else was asleep, it was the perfect time for him to do his job. He walked to the other side of the castle and to the second floor. He was in the hallway with Link and Zelda’s bedrooms. Link’s room was a few doors down. Kaore walked to the door and stopped. He heard an noise coming from the other side. Kaore quickly ducked behind a corner just as Link opened his door.

Link slowly walked into the hallway. He was tired but he managed to get out of bed; he had to pee really bad. Link slowly walked down the hallway and to the bathroom. Link closed the door and went about his business. Kaore crept to the bathroom door and hid in the shadows, waiting for Link. Kaore removed a handkerchief and a small vial from his pocket. He opened the vial and poured some chemical onto the handkerchief.

Link opened the bathroom door and continued back to his room. He felt much better now. Link thought he heard footsteps behind him, but before he could turn around, someone grabbed him. Link felt somebody put a cloth to his face. For a few futile moments, Link tried to struggle. Then he felt his limbs become heavy and everything went black as he fell unconscious. Kaore picked up Link and carried him away.

Link woke up in a dark room. His head hurt and his vision was blurred. He tried to get up, but he couldn’t move. Link realized that he was tied up. His legs were tied together and his arms were tied behind his back. To top it off, his whole body was wrapped in rope like a mummy. He tried to squirm, but couldn’t even move. He looked around and tried to figure out where he was. The room he was in was very dimly lit by the full moon. He looked up and saw the moon shining through window bars near the ceiling. He was in the abandoned dungeon. The same one that he and Zelda had explored earlier. Why was he in here?

Link saw a flickering orange light in through the cell bars in the hallway. He heard footsteps approaching. Maybe this person was responsible. The man stared at Link and opened the rusted cell door. He hung the lantern on the wall and stood in the corner. Link saw that it was the man he’d seen earlier. What did Zelda say his name was? Kaore?

“I would’ve left you alone, but I feared you would get in the way,” Kaore said.

“What do you want? Why did you tie me up?” Link asked. He thought of screaming for help, but he didn’t. The look he saw on that man’s face told him that if he did, he would be dead. Kaore’s expression reminded Link of Ganondorf, so evil and wicked.

“Don’t bother yelling for help, no one can hear you,” Kaore said. “This dungeon has been abandoned for years, and a lot of people don’t even know it’s here. To answer your question: I took you here because you’re a hindrance to my plan.”

“What plan?” Link asked. There was something ominous about the way Kaore had said that.

“Trying to get the bad guy to reveal his evil plan, huh?” Kaore gave a sinister chuckle. “It doesn’t matter if you know, you’ll never be able to get help. I guess I should tell you. You might want to know why I did this before I kill you. I couldn’t let you die without knowing what the reason was. It’s simple, really. I need to get rid of a member of the royal family, who stands in the way of my plans. This person should be taken away any minute now.”

“Who? Who’s being taken away? The king? Are you kidnapping the king? There’s no point in doing that.”

“No, I’m not kidnapping the king. It’s the princess, Zelda. And I hired someone to do it, I can’t be the one to do it myself, that would be too suspicious.”

“You’re having Zelda kidnapped? Why? You want money, don’t you? You’re gonna try to get a ransom.”

Kaore chuckled. “You are naïve little boy aren’t you?” Link looked confused. “I’ve got more money than I’ll ever need. And I’m not having Zelda kidnapped...I’m having her killed.” Infuriated, Link struggled to get loose, but he only fell onto his side.

“How dare you!” Link yelled. “If she gets even a scratch on her I’ll kill you!”

“It’s too late, she’s gone already.”

Link had to think rationally. He couldn’t let his anger blind him. Zelda wasn’t dead now, he could feel it. He had to try and see if he could get more information, and possibly escape. He had to be calm. “Why are you doing this?” Link asked, his fury showing on his face.

“Because. That stupid girl is the only one in the way of my rise to power. If she’s dead, I’ll become king.”

“What? But the king is still alive! You won’t become king if Zelda dies. Are you going to kill the king too?”

“No I’m not going to kill the king,” replied Kaore with a cackle. “Since you’re too dumb to understand, I’ll explain it to you. When the king dies or abdicates, Zelda will become the queen. But, if she is dead, then there will be no heir to claim the throne. That’s when I become king.”

“What do you mean? The king can name any heir he wants to. Why would he name you?”

“You have no idea how the world works. The king is not an absolute ruler, he has to follow certain laws. My future as king is secured by the Rules of Succession. In the event of a monarch’s death or abdication, his oldest son will ascend to the throne. If there are no sons, then the oldest daughter will become queen. But, if he has *no* children, his closest living relative gets the throne. That’s the good part: he has no living relatives. Zelda is the only person he has. There are special rules for this. If there are no relatives to claim the crown, the next person in the line of succession is the Minister of Foreign affairs. That’s me.”

“That’s the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard,” Link said. “The king could just get remarried and have another child.”

Kaore cackled again. This boy had no grasp on reality. “You obviously don’t know the king. When his wife died, he was devastated. He could never remarry because he loved his wife so much. The only thing that has kept him alive all these years is his daughter, Zelda. If Zelda died, the king would lose all will to live. I wouldn’t need to kill him. He would simply die of grief. He wouldn’t have any motivation to give the throne to anyone else. Zelda is the only reason he’s alive.

“And you. I have plans for you. I can tell that you too love Zelda a lot. In fact, you love Zelda so much, that when you find out she’s dead, you can’t go on living either. Out of grief, you commit suicide. Now do you understand?”

Link glared at Kaore. He wouldn’t let this man hurt Zelda. Link would do everything he could to save Zelda, he would die for her. “You’re not going to get away with this!” Link yelled, squirming again. Kaore rolled his eyes and took a large piece of cloth from his pocket.

“I’m sick of hearing your voice,” Kaore said. He rolled up the cloth and stuffed some of it into Link’s mouth. Link could do nothing to resist, he could barely move his head. Kaore stuffed the gag into Link’s mouth and tied it tightly around his head. Link winced as Kaore tightened it. It really hurt. Link fidgeted

and mumbled through the gag. “That’s better. Unfortunately, you’re going to be staying here for a while. I have some work to do right now. Mainly, making your suicide note, stuff like that. Don’t worry, no one will find you here. I’ll be back in a few hours so you can...commit suicide.” Kaore gave a sinister smile and walked out of the cell. Link gave a muffled scream. Kaore took the lamp and locked the cell door. The lock was rusted and weak, but he didn’t worry. Link would never be able to get out of the ropes.

Link saw the lamp’s light fade, and the footsteps grew quieter. Kaore was gone. Now Link was alone in this dark cell. He had to think of a way to get out of here.

Z, dressed completely in black, sat on his horse and gazed at the exterior of the castle village walls. The drawbridge was down, but that would cause no problems. He steered his horse to a tree and dismounted. He then tied the horse to the tree, which wasn’t unusual. People did it all the time, sometimes leaving their horses out overnight. Z approached the wall and tried to gauge the appropriate distance. He removed a long rope and grappling hook from his backpack and tossed it into the air. The hook flew over the wall and landed with a clang. He tugged at it to make sure it was secure. When he was satisfied, Z climbed up and over the wall to land on the roof of a building. This particular building housed the bridge’s chain mechanism, and also acted as a kind of look out tower. Stairs were conveniently carved into a side of the stone building. He descended the stairs and quickly made his way through the castle market.

Z was finally at the castle. Getting past the guards by the gate outside was a cinch, a child could break into the castle. He was in now. Z knew exactly where Zelda’s bedroom was. He had gone over the plan in his head a thousand times, he knew exactly what to do.

Z entered the castle’s foyer. The place was dark and empty. The lack of internal security made Z’s job a lot easier. He almost pitied the overconfidence of the people here. They apparently never thought anyone could actually break into the castle. He crept silently through the foyer and took a right into a stairwell. Z climbed the stairs and peeked into the hallway; no one was here. Zelda’s room was just down the hallway and there wasn’t even a guard in front of it, such idiots. He wouldn’t have to worry about Link, Kaore should’ve taken care of him by now. He walked up to the first door and placed his ear against it; he heard nothing. He removed a small mirror attached to a thin rod and slid it under the door. He scanned the room with the tiny mirror and saw no one there. Good, he had to make sure no one would catch him. He repeated the process with each door, finding only a sleeping Impa. *Excellent*, he thought.

Z walked to Zelda’s door and slowly opened it. She was in her bed, sleeping peacefully. Z walked up to her bed and looked at her. This was the target. This was the girl he was being paid two million rupees to assassinate. He would also be able to torture her to death. He could definitely practice some new methods on her. Z pulled a cloth and a bottle out of his pocket. He poured the chloroform onto the cloth and covered Zelda’s nose and mouth. She opened her eyes and tried to scream. She struggled and fidgeted, but to no avail. She passed out within seconds. Z picked up Zelda’s unconscious body and hefted it over his shoulders. He silently exited her room and closed the door. With cat-like stealth, he walked down the stairs, through the foyer, and out of the castle.

The single sentry at the front gate was sound asleep. Z smiled, this was too easy. He made sure that no one had seen or heard him. He quietly evaded the guards and walked to the castle’s gate. He wouldn’t be able to climb that hill and get out, not while carrying Zelda. He placed Zelda on the ground and approached the unsuspecting guard. He was pacing back and forth on the inside of the gate, not paying attention to anything. Z poured more chloroform onto his rag and tiptoed towards the guard, whose back was facing Z. With one fluid motion, Z wrapped his arm around the guard’s neck and mashed the cloth into his face. The guard went out cold without making a sound.

Z opened the gate, picked up Zelda, and carried her through the sleeping village. He climbed up the building that he’d originally entered over and looked over the wall. His horse was standing right where he left it. Z clipped a metal ring attached to his belt onto the rope. Holding Zelda over one shoulder and

holding the rope with the other hand, he swiftly rappelled down the wall. Now he had to ride his horse back to Kuato. Carrying Zelda's limp, unconscious body was going to make riding difficult. He mounted his horse and placed Zelda in front of him on the saddle as if she were riding. He wrapped one arm around Zelda's body to hold her still, and used the other hand to control the horse's reins. Z held onto Zelda tightly as the horse galloped towards his safehouse in Kuato.

When Zelda woke up, she was groggy. She felt someone's arms wrapped around her. She opened her eyes and realized that someone was carrying her. Z was carrying her off a horse and into some building. Zelda began to squirm around wildly, trying to get out of the man's grip. "Let go of me!" she screamed. She kicked and wriggled.

"You are a feisty one," said Z. They were in the safehouse, and he was still holding her tight. Zelda started to scream at the top of her lungs. "Shut up!" screamed Z, as he placed his hand over her mouth. Zelda stopped screaming and bit down as hard as she could. Her teeth sunk into Z's hand and she could feel the blood. Z yelped and instinctively let go of Zelda to examine his hand. When he let go, Zelda bolted for the door so she could escape. As she fidgeted with the locks, Z ran over and grabbed the back of her nightgown. Zelda was caught again. Z spun her around.

"You insolent bitch!" he yelled, striking her with his fist across her left cheek as hard as he could. The impact knocked Zelda onto the ground. The pain in her jaw was enormous. She tasted blood in her mouth; this time it was her own blood. She spit a mouthful of blood onto the floor. It hurt so much. She saw Z looming over her; there was nothing she could do. Z lifted his hand and chopped her on the back of the neck with the blade of his palm. She was unconscious immediately.

Chapter Four

Link had to get out of this dungeon. His eyes had finally adjusted to the darkness, and he could see a lot better. This jail cell was completely bare, save for a few cobwebs. He tried to move around, and he found out that he could maneuver a little. He lay on his back and tried to slither like a snake. It wasn't as hard as he thought it would be. He managed to get his way to the door of the cell. It was a simple door made of vertical iron bars. The door and the locking mechanism were severely rusted and corroded, he could probably kick it open. That is, if he wasn't tied up.

Then something caught his eye. One of the three horizontal bars on the door was damaged. Part of it was worn away, creating a small notch. He might be able to use this to his advantage. Link wriggled his body until he was upright and sitting against the door. Link could just barely move his hands. He could move his fingers and grasp things, but he could not move his hands side to side. He had to untie his hands first. He felt around for the notch on the bars. He knew he'd found it when he cut his palm.

Link began to put his plan into motion. He moved and undulated his whole body up and down, in an effort to wear away at the rope. It was hard moving his body in such a weird way, he felt pain in muscles he never knew he had. He felt strands of the rope fray and tear with each movement he made. He was making good progress. After about five minutes, he started to get the hang of doing this. He moved faster and faster, still fraying the rope. He felt a tear over his wrists. One of the ropes around his wrists had broken. He could move his arms up and down now, albeit very slightly. Link moved his wrists and his body, fraying the rope even more efficiently. This was getting easier.

Another layer of the rope broke. His hands were even more free to move. He kept rubbing and fraying, rubbing and fraying. The final rope binding his wrists broke. Now he could move his hands about his wrists with complete freedom. He tried to feel the ropes wrapped around him within his few inch radius of movement. He felt a bulge on the ropes. It was a knot. Was Kaore stupid enough to tie a knot so close to his hands? Apparently he was.

Link fingered the knot. It was an ordinary granny knot that was double-tied. He tried to undo the knot. It was hard to do, considering he couldn't see what he was doing. He maneuvered his fingers and

began to untie the knot. He pulled and yanked at it. Finally, it began to loosen. With the still limited movement of his hands, Link pulled at the intertwined ropes. It loosened some more. He pulled until he felt one end of the rope come loose. He had untied the first knot. The second knot was a cinch to untie.

The ropes around his body were free. Now he had to somehow unwrap himself. He decided that the best way would be to roll on the floor. Link laid down and rolled to the other side of the room. He saw the loose rope make a trail on the ground. His upper body was no longer tightly bound. He could wiggle out of the ropes. Link manipulated his shoulders and managed to get some of the rope above his head. He scraped his body along the ground to loosen the rope more. He finally had enough room to move his arms. With a surprising amount of pain, Link unnaturally bent his left arm and pulled it out of the ropes and over his shoulder. His arm was completely free. He unwrapped the rope that bound his upper body. Link removed the gag from his mouth and untied the ropes around his legs and ankles.

He was free now. It felt so good to be able to move, after he had been tied up. Link stood and walked to the door of the cell. Upon closer inspection, the bars were even more corroded than he thought. The stone that made up the walls was also disintegrating from years of moisture. Link kicked the door and winced as shockwaves of pain rippled up his leg. This wouldn't be as easy as he thought. Link tugged and pushed at the door, it budged only a little. He walked to the other side of the room and looked at the door. Maybe he could bust it down. He then ran as fast as he could, aiming for the side of the door with the old, rusted lock. When he impacted it, waves of pain shot through his shoulder and side. But he made progress, the lock had shifted outward ever so slightly. He decided to try again. With all the speed and power he could muster, he bolted for the door. His shoulder landed square on the lock and busted it out of the wall. There was a loud crash and a cloud of dust as the lock fractured and the door flew open. He was free.

Now what to do? Link had to save Zelda. Maybe she was still in her room. Maybe she hadn't been kidnapped yet, like Kaore said. Link ran out of the dungeon and up the stairs as fast as he could. He threw open the door of Zelda's bedroom and searched frantically. She wasn't in her bed. Zelda was gone. Link sat down, almost in tears. His heart was beating uncontrollably, he had to calm down and think. Where could Zelda be? Link mulled over the conversation he had with Kaore. There had to be some clues. *Think!* Then it struck him. He remembered the conversation he and Zelda had eavesdropped on. He remembered hearing something about going to Kuato. Link knew that Kuato was a ghost town. That would be the perfect place to go if you didn't want to be found. Yes. That's where Zelda is. Link knew it. He felt in his heart that it was true.

Should he wake Impa or get guards to help him? No, he didn't have time. He had to get there *now*. Link ran out of Zelda's bedroom, out of the castle, and to the side yard. He saw the stables where the horses were kept. He had to steal a horse so he could go to Zelda. Link mounted the first horse he saw and rode it to through the gates of the castle, which were strangely open. He saw a guard lying on the ground, but he had not time to stop and help. Link's horse galloped through the market and to the drawbridge. The guard who operated it Extended his palm towards Link, motioning for him to stop. "Whoa," said the guard. "Where do you think you're going, little boy?"

Link got off his horse and approached the guard. "Open the bridge!" Link ordered.

"I don't think so," the guard responded in a condescending tone. Link had no time for games.

"What's that?" Link said, pointing in another direction. The guard looked where Link pointed, and Link socked him in the gut. The guard doubled over in pain and Link delivered a left hook to his jaw, knocking him unconscious. "Sorry," Link said. He looked at the dagger in the guard's belt. Link might need a weapon. He bent over and retrieved the guard's knife. Link then turned and saw the crank that raised or lowered the drawbridge. The multitude of hidden pulleys and gears made it easy for one person to open or close the bridge. Link quickly turned the crank, lowering the bridge. He jumped onto his horse and galloped out into Hyrule Field.

As he traveled through Hyrule field, Link's thoughts never strayed from Zelda. He knew she was still alive, he could feel it. She was terrified. Link had to get to her before Z killed her. Link wouldn't let

anyone hurt Zelda. He would get there on time, he had to. Failure was not an option. If Z so much as scratched Zelda, Link would kill him.

Zelda came to and looked at her surroundings. She was still in that building. Her neck and her face hurt tremendously. Her wrists hurt and so did her arms. Her wrists were tied together and she was hanging from a hook attached to the ceiling. Her feet dangled almost a foot above the floor. It was hard to breathe with her arms over her head like this. She looked at the man who had taken her captive. He looked so evil, yet he appeared to be enjoying this. Zelda was completely terrified, but she didn't know what to do. She felt so cold, she realized that her nightgown was gone. She was clad only in a camisole and her underwear. Tears streamed down her cheeks, what was going to happen to her? The man held a large, curved knife and approached Zelda.

"I see that you're awake," said Z. "I have plans for you." He lifted the knife and showed it to Zelda. She closed her eyes and cringed as he ran the cold blade across her bare belly. She waited for the pain to come, but nothing happened. He hadn't cut her. She had never feared for her life before, but now she did. "You're not going to get off that easily," Z said.

"What do you want with me?" Zelda cried.

"I'm going to kill you," he answered flatly. "But not right now. I want to see you suffer."

"Why?"

"Why?" Z repeated. "You want to know why?" he said in maniacal voice. He retrieved a leather strap that hung on the wall. "You are in no situation to be asking questions!" He swung the strap and whipped Zelda across her bare side with tremendous force. She shrieked in pain; the strap had left a huge, bloody welt. "I'm doing this because it's one of the perks of my job. Torture happens to be one of my specialties. It's been a while since I've done this, so I need the practice. I remember the last person I did this to. It took him twenty-two hours to die. I'm hoping to break that record."

Zelda swung her leg and kicked Z in the chest. He whipped her across the thighs and she shrieked again. "I always liked a victim who struggled, you're going to be fun," said Z. He retrieved a small rope and tied Zelda's ankles together. Her mind raced with a million thoughts at once. She couldn't understand why this man was hurting her. What had she ever done to deserve this? She prayed for her life, she prayed that she would be freed.

Z wheeled a small cart over to Zelda. There were dozens of tools on it, each one specifically designed to cause the maximum amount of pain and least amount of damage. There were also bottles of various chemicals that Zelda didn't even want to know what they were. Z retrieved what appeared to be a steel-wire brush. Zelda closed her eyes and tried to think of pleasant thoughts, she had to ignore her surroundings. Z walked around to Zelda's backside. He took the tool with the stiff steel bristles and jammed it into the skin on her back. He then moved the tool back and forth quickly, as if he were scrubbing a floor. The bristles grabbed and tore at Zelda's flesh, leaving bloody streaks across her back. It felt like a thousand knives were stabbing her in the back. Z stopped and placed the brush back on the table. He put on a pair of leather gloves and grabbed a bottle and a cloth. He poured a strong acid onto the cloth and placed it on the wound on Zelda's back. Zelda screeched as the cloth came in contact with her torn skin. She was in agony, it felt like her back was on fire. She had never felt so much pain in her life. The acid burned her wounds and her flesh; the pain was so intense that she fainted.

Z thought this would happen. He waved a small bottle of smelling salts under her nose, causing her to awaken immediately. "You're not going to get off that easily," he said. "What you're feeling now is nothing compared to what I'm going to do later. Now I'm going to have to punish you for fainting." He got the leather strap and began to whip her on every part of her body. She no longer feared death. She welcomed it. Zelda prayed that death would come and free her from this agony.

Kaore left his office and closed the door. He had already planted a ransom note on Zelda's bed. Now he would have to check on Link. Link was probably already on his way to Kuato. His plan was simple. Kaore would go back to Kuato and make sure that Z has finished his job. When that was done, he would kill Z and Link. Kaore would make it appear that Link had found Zelda's dead body and killed Z out of rage. Then, because Link loved Zelda so much, he would kill himself out of grief. Then he would return to the castle like a normal day and everyone would find out that Zelda was missing. They would find the ransom note on Zelda's bed and begin a search. They would assume that Link had either been kidnapped also, or that he had already gone out to look for her. In an effort to look as if he were helping, Kaore would assist in the search for Zelda. Once everyone finds the murder scene, his plan would be complete. Being so respected, no one would ever suspect Kaore of any involvement.

Kaore walked into the library and opened the secret door to the dungeon. It was only three in the morning, he still had time to do everything. Kaore thought about the work ahead of him. He would have to knock out all the guards who saw him, so they couldn't point to him as a suspect. Everyone would attribute that to the kidnapper. He walked down the cell block of the dungeon and towards Link's cell. It was the last one at the end of the hallway. As he approached the cell, Kaore noticed that the door was wide open. *Perfect*, he thought. He saw the heap of ropes on the ground. Link had escaped. Kaore knew this would happen. Link had escaped and went to rescue Zelda. His plan was unfolding perfectly. Link had unknowingly sealed his own fate.

Kaore left the dungeon and made his way out of the castle. He pulled a blackjack out of his pocket and prepared to take out the guards. He quietly and systematically knocked out each guard as he walked through the castle yards and through the village. When he approached the drawbridge he saw that it was open and there was a half-conscious guard lying face first on the ground. Link had definitely done this. The guard stirred and prepared to get up. Kaore quickly bludgeoned the guard's neck with his blackjack, sending him into unconsciousness once more.

Kaore exited the castle walls and walked a few hundred yards to where he tied up his horse. He had pretended to leave the castle just after nightfall to remove suspicion that he was in the castle during the kidnapping. He had reentered the castle just before he kidnapped Link, via the secret entrance. Very few people knew how to enter the castle walls without going through the drawbridge, but Kaore knew. He mounted his horse and rode off towards Kuato. Now he had to finish the final piece of his plan.

Link was almost to the abandoned town. He could see the dilapidated and collapsing buildings ahead of him. He stopped at the town's entrance. He knew Zelda was here, he could feel her presence. Which building was she in? She had to be in one that wasn't completely collapsed. He rode through the town and his eyes locked on an old blacksmith's shop. He dismounted his horse and walked towards the building. This had to be it. Then, a blood-curdling scream verified his suspicions. It was Zelda screaming, he had to save her. Link ran over to the building and looked in the window. What he saw made his blood boil. Z was violently whipping her with a leather strap. Her body was covered in bruises and bleeding everywhere. She had a large bruise on her left cheek and a black eye. Zelda shrieked and cried. She wished this man would just let her die.

Link's demeanor totally changed. His face contorted with an expression of anger and hate. This man was hurting his beloved Zelda, and he wouldn't get away with it. Link's heart beat wildly as he felt a surge of adrenaline course through his body. Link drew the dagger that he had stolen from the guard. He kicked open the door and stood there, brimming with rage, yet fully aware of what he was doing. Z stopped his whipping and turned to see Link standing in the doorway and holding a knife. Before Z could react, Link held up the dagger and charged for Z. Z tried to duck out of the way, but he was too slow. With blinding speed Link ran and jammed the dagger into Z's body. It lodged just below his right shoulder. With a stunned expression, Z collapsed onto the floor. Link then kicked Z's head with all his

strength, shattering his jaw. Z was nearly comatose now. Link violently kicked his body a few more times.

Then he slipped out of his violent trance. He had to save Zelda. Link quickly grabbed a knife from Z's table of torture devices and cut the ropes around Zelda's ankles. He then cut the ropes around her wrists and caught her as she fell to the ground. Zelda was barely conscious. Her face was bruised and swollen, and blood oozed from her nose and mouth. Link quickly took the blanket from Z's bed and wrapped it over Zelda's shivering body. "It's okay, I'm here," Link said in a soothing voice. Zelda opened her eyes and saw Link's face. Was this real? Was Link really saving her? Or was this a hallucination? Maybe she was dead. It didn't matter. Zelda felt safe now, her pain was suddenly gone. She wrapped her arms around Link, and didn't let go. Link carried Zelda to his horse and mounted it. He had to get her back to the castle. He rode the horse back towards the castle, holding Zelda tightly. She still had her arms around him, and she buried her face in his chest and cried.

Kaore had almost reached Kuato. He saw twilight in the horizon, the sun would rise soon. He rode to the abandoned blacksmith's shop and entered it. He was flabbergasted by what he saw. Z was in the corner of the room, bleeding and with a knife in his chest. This was not part of Kaore's plan. Neither Link nor Zelda was here. Kaore's plan was failing. He hadn't planned on seeing this. Kaore walked over to Z's body. He was still alive and conscious. "What the hell happened?" Kaore yelled.

Z tried to speak. "The boy...he came...and took Zelda. I didn't have a chance...to kill her. He came and stabbed me...before I could do anything."

Kaore was furious. "You were supposed to be the best assassin in Hyrule! And you let a little boy do this to you? I can't believe I paid two million rupees for this! You were supposed to kill her."

"I wanted...to hurt her...first. Then I would...kill her," Z said, trying to sit up. "Please help...me."

"You want help?" Kaore said in a crazy voice. "I pay you to do a simple job and you botch it! But don't worry, I'll help you." Kaore grabbed the knife and pulled it out of Z's shoulder, causing Z to yelp in pain. "This wasn't part of my plan," Kaore said. "You were supposed to just kill Zelda. And look what happens to you."

"You were supposed to...take care of the boy!" Z said.

"I was going to take care of him after he saw Zelda's body. Then I would kill him. I knew Link would come here and try to save Zelda, but I didn't think he could hurt someone like you!"

"What are you...talking about?"

"Maybe you should know. I planned on having him come here and try to save her. Then I would kill him. But you let him get the best of you, and now I have to put you out of your misery." Z gave a startled look. Kaore brandished the dagger and leaned over to Z's face. "I was planning on killing you anyway," Kaore whispered. With one quick motion, Kaore slit Z's throat down to the bone. Z choked and gurgled as blood sprayed from his severed jugular vein. He died in seconds. Kaore dropped the knife into the huge puddle of blood and stood up. He had to get back to the castle. He might be able to salvage his plan. Link and Zelda were probably on their way back to the castle. Kaore had thought he'd seen a horse on his way here. That could be them. Kaore ran to his horse and quickly rode it out of the village.

It was just past sunrise and it was time for Impa to get up. She always woke this early, she often had a lot of work to do. Every morning, she routinely checked with the castle's security chief, Akanti. The security chief had a lot of responsibilities. He was the head of the Secret Service, which included all of the guards in the castle. Akanti was a retired Captain in the Royal Navy who asked for this job and got it. Impa went down to the administrative wing of the castle, and walked to Akanti's office. When Impa

walked in, she noticed that something was different. Akanti looked a lot more stressed than usual. He looked up at Impa. "I'm glad you're here," he said. "We've got some rather unusual problems."

"Like what?" Impa asked.

"I got some strange reports from the guards on the night watch. It seems that, for some reason, almost half of the guards were physically hurt earlier today."

"Hurt how?" she asked.

"They were apparently knocked unconscious by blows to the backs of their necks. I think that someone was here and he deliberately knocked out the guards. I have the whole castle on full alert now, with extra guards on duty everywhere. But that's not the weird part." Impa raised an inquisitive eyebrow. "The guard at the drawbridge reported the most unusual disturbance," Akanti continued. "Just about an hour ago, he was confronted by a little boy. It was Zelda's friend, Link. The guard says that Link was on a horse and asked him to open the drawbridge. When the guard refused, Link punched him and knocked him out. When he woke up, the drawbridge was open and his dagger was missing." This information worried Impa. She knew what kind of person Link was, he would never attack a guard and steal a horse without a damn good reason. Something was seriously wrong.

"Have you checked on the princess?" Impa asked urgently, suddenly bolting out of her chair.

"Well, yes. I posted two guards outside her door as an increased security measure," said Akanti, a little worried by Impa's sudden change in demeanor.

"But did you go into her room and *see* her there?" she asked. Akanti gave her a blank look. Impa cursed and ran to Zelda's room, with Akanti following behind her. Impa walked down the hallway and approached the two guards by Zelda's door. Seeing the look on her face, they quickly gave her room. Impa stomped into Zelda's room and saw her empty bed. When Akanti entered, his face turned pale. Zelda was gone. Impa saw a piece of paper on her bed and picked it up she read it:

I have kidnapped Princess Zelda. If you want to see her alive again, follow these steps exactly. The king, accompanied by no one, will take two million rupees of gold bullion to the blacksmith's shop in Kuato. You have until exactly midnight tonight. If you obey, Zelda will be released unharmed. If the anyone other than the king comes, if he is accompanied by anyone, or if he is one minute late, I will kill the princess.

Impa's eyes opened wide. She couldn't believe what she was reading. With a sudden dead seriousness, Zelda walked confronted Akanti and pointed her finger at him. "Zelda has been kidnapped. I want you to get every single guard and servant in the castle and begin a search for her. I'll wake the king and tell him what's happening. And I want you to get some army soldiers down here and I'll take them to Kuato." Akanti opened his mouth to ask a question but Impa interrupted him. "Don't think! Just go downstairs and make it happen." Akanti obeyed and went downstairs to gather everyone.

Now Impa had to wake the king. She ran down another a corridor to the other side of the castle where the king's bedroom was. She opened the door and walked in. He was still asleep. Waking the king was just as difficult as waking Zelda. She walked to his bed and shook him awake. "Your Majesty, we have a bad problem." He opened his eyes and saw Impa hovering over him.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Zelda has been kidnapped." The king shot out of bed. Zelda was kidnapped? He had to do something now.

"How do you know?" He asked. Impa handed him the note and he read it. He gave the note to Impa and put on his bathrobe. He didn't have time to get dressed. He started barking orders at Impa. "I want you to get the guards to start searching..."

"It's already been done," Impa interrupted. "I'm going to go to Kuato with some soldiers and go on a stealth mission. We can take out any kidnapper and save Zelda."

"Good. He wants me to pay a ransom. I should probably do that to make him happy. But you and the soldiers have to be there before I pay the ransom. We have to get Zelda before we pay the ransom because they'll kill her."

“There’s another problem,” Impa said. “Link is missing too. A guard said that Link tried to get him to open the drawbridge. Link knocked out the guard and apparently left.”

“Where would he go? Why would he go?” asked the king. He knew that Link had a good reason for whatever he did.

“The only thing I can think of is that Link went to save her himself.”

“Why would he do that without telling anyone?” said the king.

“I have no idea.”

Link held on tightly to Zelda. He could see the castle in front of him. He saw a multitude of guards and army soldiers entering and leaving the castle. Everyone stared at him as he dismounted his horse. Link walked over the drawbridge and into the town, still carrying Zelda. She still had her arms wrapped around him, she refused to let go. The guards approached Link and Zelda in disbelief. They had just been ordered to search for her, and here she was. Link saw the guards huddling around him as he walked to the castle. They were getting in his way. “Quit getting in my way and make yourselves useful!” Link shouted. “Somebody get a doctor!” A few of the guards listened to Link and ran off in different directions. Most of them hurried back to the castle to report this to their superiors.

Impa and the king were in the throne room. The king paced back and forth, he was frantic but tried not to show it. Meanwhile, Impa was barking orders at a multitude of people. It caught Impa’s attention when a guard rushed into the throne room. “Zelda’s here! Somebody found her!” shouted the guard. Impa and the king immediately followed the guard. He took them into the foyer where Link was sitting on the floor, holding Zelda.

“My baby!” shouted the king as he ran to Zelda. he picked her up and embraced her. What happened to her? Her body was battered and bruised. She had numerous cuts and abrasions on her skin, some of which were bleeding. Her left side of her face was black and blue with a huge bruise.

“Daddy?” said Zelda, looking into his face. She finally let go of Link and hugged her father. Suddenly she burst into tears and started bawling. All of the emotions she had locked up inside her were released in flood of tears and wailing. Zelda couldn’t even talk, she was too upset. The king saw Link, who sat next to Zelda. His face was pale and blank, wet with tears. Link tried to keep his composure. Anger boiled inside him. He had gotten revenge on Z, the man who beat Zelda. But Kaore was still somewhere. Link wouldn’t let that man get away with this. This was all Kaore’s fault.

“What happened to her?” the king asked Link, almost shouting to overcome Zelda’s wailing.

“Someone was trying to kill her,” Link answered flatly.

“The kidnapper,” said the king.

“No,” Link said. “There was no kidnapper. Someone hired an assassin to kill her. I found her in a building in Kuato. The man was...beating her.” Link tried not to cry. The sight of Zelda being whipped flashed through his mind. “And I saw him hurting her...so I stabbed him and kicked him till he stopped moving. Then I took Zelda here. I don’t know what he did before I got there.” Zelda stopped crying and looked at the people around her. She saw the people who cared about her: Impa, Link, and her father. They were the only ones who cared about her. They were the only ones she trusted. She looked at Link and wrapped her arms around him again.

“You saved me,” Zelda whispered, barely audible.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get there earlier,” Link said. He would never forgive himself for letting this happen to Zelda. He felt like it was his fault for letting her down. Impa put her hand on Link’s shoulder.

“Come on,” Impa said quietly. “We need to get Zelda cleaned up.” Impa took Zelda into her arms and carried her. She started to take Zelda to her room to clean her up. Zelda started screaming and kicking her legs.

“No!” Zelda shouted. “Don’t take me away from him! Link please...” she cried and ran back to Link, wrapping her arms around him. She put her head on his shoulders and cried. “Please don’t leave me.

"You're the only one who can protect me." Impa and the king saw how upset Zelda was. She didn't want anyone to separate her from Link, even the people she trusted the most. Zelda felt like Link was the only person she could trust. He had saved her from that torture, and he was the only person who could help her now. Link was the only person who could understand her pain.

"Link, pick her up and follow me," Impa said. "Don't worry Zelda, you can stay with Link. We won't take him away from you." Link picked up Zelda and followed Impa through the castle. The king remained in the foyer, he wanted to be with his daughter, but he had work to do. He had to take care of the mess this all caused.

Impa, Link and Zelda entered a large bathroom with a huge marble bathtub in the center. Link set Zelda on the floor while Impa prepared to draw a bath. "We need to get her cleaned up," Impa said. "I'll get a bath ready, you stay here." Impa walked to another room and talked to some servants. They went off to different rooms and one of them began to fill the bathtub from a water pump. Impa reentered the bathroom and sat on the floor next to Zelda.

"The servants are getting a bath ready for her," Impa told Link. "It'll be a few minutes before it's ready." Link watched servants go in and out of the bathroom, dumping buckets of boiling water into the tub. Impa stood on the side of the tub, swirling her hand in the water. When it was at the right temperature, she dismissed the servants. "It's ready now," Impa said. She unwrapped Zelda from the blanket she was in and walked her to the bathtub. Impa helped Zelda removed her remaining clothes and Link looked away.

"Um..." he mumbled, his face starting to turn red. "Maybe I should leave you alone for a minute..." Link heard Zelda splash into the bathtub. He opened his eyes. It was safe to look now.

"Stay here," Impa said. "She needs you." Impa held up a washcloth and looked at Link. "Come over here, I need your help." Link slowly approached the bathtub. He had never seen Zelda without anything on, and he was feeling very awkward right now. He didn't want to look. But he had more important things to do. He had to help Zelda, and privacy wasn't exactly a key issue right now. Impa handed him a wet washcloth. She herself began to gently wipe Zelda's shoulders, but she pulled away and screamed.

"No! Don't touch me!" Zelda cried, pushing Impa's hand away. "I want him to do it." Impa shrugged her shoulders and urged Link to do what Zelda said. Link began to gently bathe Zelda, he wiped the dried blood from her face. "Thank you," she whispered. Impa now saw the full extent of Zelda's injuries. She was covered in welts and bruises from head to toe; it almost made her sick to see it.

"Roll over so I can get your back," Link said. Zelda slowly turned over in the water. The hot water felt so good. She was so sore and tired from her ordeal. But she was with people she trusted now, and the pain subsided. Impa gasped when she saw the wound on Zelda's back that was caused by the steel brush and acid. The center of the wound was purple and spotted with scabs and pus. There were blisters and chemical burns surrounding the wound. The area around it was pink, swollen, and very tender.

"What happened to you?" Impa asked, horrified. Impa was relieved that Zelda's father didn't see this, he might not be able to take it. Impa couldn't fathom how someone could do this to Zelda. Now Impa wanted to seek vengeance on whoever did this. When Impa found out who did this, she would give him what he deserved.

"He used some kind of brush on me," Zelda said. "He scrubbed my skin away." Images of her torture flashed through her mind. But it made her feel better to talk about it, she wanted Impa to understand. She didn't have to explain anything to Link, he already knew what she went through. "Then he put some stuff on it that burned it, it hurt so much." Tears started to flow again.

"Don't cry," Link soothed. "I'll make it better." Link gently wiped around the wound; Zelda writhed and winced. "Sorry," Link said. "I'll try to be more careful." Impa knelt down and grasped Zelda's hand.

"Don't worry honey, it'll be fine," Impa said. Link finished cleaning Zelda's back, and she turned back over. Link had finished Zelda's upper body, and he paused for a moment.

"Um...do you think you can do your legs and stuff yourself?" Link mumbled. "Because I don't want to...um..." his face turned red and he looked away. Zelda took the washcloth from him.

“Okay, Linkie-pooh,” Zelda said. “I’ll do it myself.” Zelda began to wash her legs and lower body. Link tried to avoid looking there. Zelda’s mood had greatly improved now. She felt so much better now. Zelda was finished with her bath. Impa helped her stand up and wrapped her in a large bathrobe.

“Now I’m gonna put some bandages on you,” Impa said. When Zelda was dry, Impa went and fetched a roll of gauze and a jar of special ointment. She was going to rub it on Zelda’s back, but paused for a second. “Here, Link. She might want you to do it,” Impa suggested, handing the jar and gauze to Link. “First put the ointment on her back.” Link dipped his hand into the jar of goop and pulled out a small handful. It was greenish and smelled minty. Link rubbed it onto Zelda’s back. It felt cool and soothing.

“What is this stuff?” Link asked, gently massaging it into the wound.

“It’s a special ointment,” replied Impa. “It has a lot of herbs in it that’ll help her heal faster.”

“It feels cold,” Zelda said. She expected the ointment to sting, but was surprised when it didn’t. It felt like someone had put ice on her. It was relieving. When Link had put the ointment on her, he began to apply the gauze. He wrapped the gauze around her back and chest like a mummy.

“There, all better,” Link said, admiring his first aid work. Link put the robe back around Zelda’s shoulders.

“Let’s go upstairs, you need some sleep,” Impa said. Zelda agreed. She was so tired. Zelda began to walk slowly, but stopped. It hurt to move.

“Here, I’ll carry you,” Link offered. He gently picked up Zelda and carried her like a baby. Zelda was so grateful about the trouble Link was going through for her. When they had finally reached Zelda’s bedroom, Link gently laid her on the bed. Impa fetched one of Zelda’s nightgowns and offered it to her. Zelda sat up and removed the robe. She pulled the night gown over her shoulders and lay back down. Link pulled the covers over Zelda and smiled.

“You try to sleep now,” Link said.

“Will you…” Zelda mumbled.

“Don’t worry, I’ll stay here with you,” Link interrupted. “You just go to sleep. I’ll be sitting right here in this chair if you need me.” Link leaned over and kissed Zelda on the forehead. This reminded him of when he was sick a few days ago. Now their roles were reversed: Link was the caretaker.

“Thank you,” Zelda whispered as she drifted off to sleep. Link sat in a chair and Impa left the room. Link sat there and cried silently. All the emotions that he locked up for the past day came out. He had felt all the pain Zelda went through; he felt every whip and every cut. He then realized that he hadn’t told Impa or the king what had happened. They probably wanted to know. He had been so focused on helping Zelda, that he never revealed what happened. He had to tell them, but he promised Zelda he would stay here. His problem solved itself when Impa and the king entered the room. The king didn’t look like a powerful ruler now. His face was solemn and grave. He wasn’t the king right now, he was Zelda’s father.

“Link, we need to talk to you,” Impa said.

“But Zelda wanted me to stay in here with her,” Link protested.

“It’s okay, we can talk in here,” Impa responded. “Let’s go over to the table so we can all sit down.” The three walked to the other side of the room where there was a small wooden table. It was covered in Zelda’s stuffed animal collection. They sat on chairs in front of the table and pushed some of the animals out of the way. The king grasped Link’s hand and looked into his face. It was hard for him to put his feelings into words.

“I wanted…to thank you,” the king managed to say. He wiped a tear from his face. This was harder than he thought. “What you did was more than I could ever ask. You saved my little girl’s life. I can’t thank you enough. I owe my life to you, I’ll be in your debt forever. I wouldn’t be able to live without Zelda.”

“Me either,” Link said.

“Link, we need you to tell us what happened,” Impa said. “We need to punish whoever did this.” Link nodded, he understood. “Now, you said that she wasn’t kidnapped. You said that someone hired an assassin… Tell us exactly what happened.”

“Well… it started when I was kidnapped,” Link began.

“You were kidnapped too?” Impa said with surprise. “By whom?”

“It was one of your closest friends,” Link said, looking at the king. “It was Duke Kaore.” The king’s eyes narrowed.

“What?” he said in disbelief. “He kidnapped you? What happened?”

“He took me to the old dungeon and tied me up. I had a pretty interesting conversation with him. He’s the one who hired an assassin to kill Zelda.” suddenly filled with rage, the king rose out of his chair. Impa put her hand on his shoulder and sat him back down.

“Let him finish,” Impa said. The king tried to contain his anger and listen to Link.

“Anyways, he took me to the dungeon and tied me up. When I woke up in there, he talked to me. He told me that he had hired an assassin to kill Zelda, and that he was going to kill me himself.”

“Why would he want to kill my baby?” asked the king. “That coward. If he wanted to hurt me, he should’ve attacked me himself.”

“He said he was going to kill Zelda because he would become king. He talked about the Rules of Succession, and how he would become the king if you died and had no heirs. He said that you would be so grief-stricken over Zelda’s death that you would never name another heir. Then he said he would make it look like I killed myself over Zelda’s death. Then he left me alone and said he would come back to kill me later.

“That’s when I escaped. I wore the ropes down on the cell door and eventually got out of them. I got out of the dungeon and went to find Zelda. When she wasn’t in her room, I had to think of where she would be. I remembered when Zelda and I were roaming through the castle, and we overheard a conversation between Kaore and that foreign ambassador. I heard them say something about Kuato. So I went there.”

“What about the foreign ambassador?” the king asked. “Are you talking about Zimm?”

“He wasn’t an ambassador. He was the assassin. Kaore must’ve brought him in here and told you he was an ambassador. Well, when I realized where Zelda had been taken, I had to go there. I didn’t wake anyone up because I didn’t have the time. I took a horse and beat up the guard at the drawbridge. I hope he’s not mad, I had no choice. I rode to Kuato and found the assassin whipping Zelda. I ran and stabbed him and kicked him. I think I might’ve killed him. Then I brought Zelda here.”

“I can’t believe you did this for my daughter,” said the king. “So...Kaore is the one who wanted Zelda killed. He’s not going to get away with this. You stay here with Zelda. I have some work to do.” Impa and the king left Zelda’s bedroom and went downstairs. “Impa, why don’t you go and take a few soldiers with you to Kuato. I want to know if this assassin is still alive. If he is, arrest if. If he’s dead, burn his body.”

“I’ll get right on it,” Impa replied, leaving and preparing to carry out the king’s orders. The king went to his throne room. There were still guards running in and out of the place; it would be a while before things returned to normal. Now he had to find Kaore. He wasn’t going to send out a warrant for his arrest, he was going to wait until Kaore came to him.

When Kaore had ridden close to the castle, he decided not to go in. He left and waited for a while. There were guards and soldiers everywhere. If Link had told them what happened, Kaore could never enter the castle. So he waited for a while. He waited a few hours until some of the commotion wound down. He decided to enter the castle walls now. He stopped and talked to the guard. He needed to know if he was wanted.

“What’s going on here?” Kaore asked the guard, feigning curiosity.

“Sir, the princess was kidnapped. Then her friend brought her back. If you don’t mind my asking, where have you been? The whole kingdom knows.”

“Actually, I just rode in,” Kaore said. “I haven’t seen anyone all day. Do you know who kidnapped her in the first place?”

“No, sir. To my knowledge, no one knows who it is yet.” Kaore stared blankly, thinking. “Is that all, sir?”

“Oh, yes. Carry on,” Kaore replied. This was perfect, he wasn’t wanted by the soldiers. He continued walking through the village and towards the castle. He decided that he would walk in and act as if he didn’t know what was going on. He had to take care of Link before he told anyone. That shouldn’t be too hard.

Kaore walked through the castle’s main gate. This was going to be hard to pull off, but he’d been in worse situations than this. He entered the castle. There were a few more guards than normal. He walked past them, and none gave any indication that Kaore was in trouble. He walked to the throne room and talked to the guard.

“Is the king available?” Kaore asked the guard.

“Yes, Your Grace,” replied the guard. “He has been waiting for you.” Kaore smiled and walked into the throne room. He saw the king sitting on his throne, sipping a cup of tea. Kaore approached him and gently bowed.

“Your Majesty,” Kaore said. “When I came in just a few minutes ago, a guard said that Zelda had been kidnapped. Is she okay?”

“Yes, she’s fine,” the king said. “Link rescued her somehow. He brought her back home right after she was kidnapped. I’m glad you’re here, Kaore. I could use a friend right now.”

“Well, I’m here now,” Kaore said. “Please accept my deepest regrets for what happened. I’m so relieved that Zelda is all right. It would be terrible if something happened to her.”

It took all the king’s willpower to keep from jumping out of his chair and breaking Kaore’s neck. “You know, I had an interesting conversation with Link after he brought Zelda home. He seems to think that someone was trying to have Zelda assassinated. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?”

“I’m totally flabbergasted. Why would someone want her dead?” said Kaore.

“Why don’t you tell me? You see, I’m not as stupid as you think I am. I know what’s going on.” The king gave a slight nod, cueing the guards to advance. They slowly snuck up behind Kaore. “You wanted Zelda dead so you could be the king. But apparently, your plan fell to pieces. I guess you underestimated Link’s resourcefulness. Don’t worry, though. You’re going to have a long time to think about it. Mainly... the rest of your life.”

The guards advanced and each grabbed on of Kaore’s arms. The king walked up to the restrained Kaore. The king then slammed his fist into Kaore’s face. “That is for trying to kill my daughter. You’re lucky I’m such a nice guy, that I don’t have you executed. Guards, take him away.” They tried to drag Kaore away, but he resisted. They did not know that Kaore was an accomplished martial artist. He quickly knocked the two guards off their feet and ran. The king ran after him, telling the guards to go after him. “Seize him!”

Every guard and soldier in the castle surrounded Kaore. He slowly backed into a corner. There was no escape. The wall of people aimed swords at him. There was only one way out. “I won’t let you take me alive,” Kaore said. He pulled a small vial out of his pocket and uncorked it. “I’ll see you all in hell.” He drank the contents of the vial and collapsed onto the ground. His face contorted and his body convulsed. After a few seconds of violent shaking, Kaore went still. One of the guards cautiously approached Kaore’s body. He knelt down, and examined Kaore. He felt for a pulse and checked to see if he was breathing. The guard stood up with a blank look on his face.

“He’s dead,” said the guard. The king walked up to Kaore’s body and nudged it with his foot.

“Coward,” said the king. “He couldn’t face his own fate. Take his body away, and burn it.”

Link was still sitting by Zelda’s bed, where she was sleeping peacefully. He hadn’t moved from there for over three hours. He didn’t want to move. He had plenty of time to think. All the emotions he locked

up came out. He sat there for a long time, crying silently. He thought of what it would be like if he hadn't gotten there on time. He loved Zelda so much, he couldn't live without her. Link's daze was interrupted by the door squeaking open. Link turned around to see Impa walk into the room, carrying a plate of food.

"You missed supper, I thought you might be hungry," Impa said. She put the plate on a table and beckoned Link to come over. Link was hungry, he decided to follow Impa's suggestion. He walked over to the table and sat down. He started nibbling in the roast beef that was on his plate. Impa sat across from him. "I have some news for you, if you want to know." Link nodded his assent. "I went to Kuato and found the place where the assassin took Zelda. The assassin is dead, his throat was cut."

Link stopped eating and looked up at Zelda. "I didn't cut his throat," he said. "That means I didn't kill him. Who did?" Link was slightly relieved. As much as he wanted Z dead, he didn't want a homicide on his conscience.

"My guess is that Kaore did it. And speaking of Kaore, he's dead too. He killed himself."

"He got what was coming to him," Link said.

"I agree, I would've killed him myself if I got the chance. There's also something else you might want to know. You told us about his reasons why he wanted Zelda dead, about the Rules of Succession. Well, the king and I had a discussion about that. It turns out that Kaore's plan wouldn't have worked, even if Zelda was dead."

"What do you mean?" Link asked.

"He thought he would become king if the king had no heirs. He got this idea from the Rules of Succession. But apparently, he had bad sources. He must've read an archaic version. The rules were changed fifty years ago. The Minister of Foreign Affairs isn't the one who would take over the throne now, the king's personal advisor does. Kaore was the victim of his own ignorance."

Link thought about what Impa had said. He was amazed that Kaore had gone through all that trouble to perfect his plan. But he obviously wasn't smart enough to see if his sources were correct. Kaore got what he deserved. Link and Impa sat silently, while Link ate his meal. When he was done, he walked back over to Zelda's bed and sat down in the chair.

"She looks so peaceful," Impa said. "It's good that she can sleep after everything she went through. It'll take a long time for her to recover. Physically, she'll be fine. But emotionally, it's gonna take a lot of work. She's going to need you. You're the only one who understands her."

"I know," Link said. "I'm going to help her every step of the way. I love her, and I'll never leave her."

Epilogue

It had been nearly three weeks since the whole ordeal, and most of Zelda's injuries had healed. To everyone's surprise, her emotional state had improved much quicker than expected. Zelda had used Link as an emotional crutch, he was a shoulder she could cry on. Zelda didn't have to talk to Link about what happened, he already knew. After a few days, she no longer insisted that she be with Link twenty-four hours a day. The king had thanked Link repeatedly over those days. Link really got to know him as Zelda's father, not as the king. The suffering everyone went through did have positive results. Impa, Link, Zelda, and her father grew closer together. They were like a family now.

Today was Link's big day. The king wanted to reward Link for what he did. Link felt that Zelda's safety was reward enough, but the king insisted. He said that no good deed should go unrewarded. Link wasn't quite sure what he had in mind, but he knew it was something big. There was going to be a big ceremony and a party tonight. All of the influential people in Hyrule would be there.

Link was nervous the whole day. He had heard that this was going to be a fancy party. People at fancy parties wore fancy clothes. He didn't have any fancy clothes. Both Zelda and her father told Link to wear his normal clothes. They all felt that Link's clothes were more than just a green tunic and shorts. They represented who he was. Link agreed to wear them.

This was going to be an elaborate award ceremony, and a lavish party. The largest ballroom in the castle was prepared for this event. There were rows of benches set up for the audience to sit on. There would be hundreds of people here, many would be some of the most influential people in the kingdom. In one side of this room and in the two adjoining rooms were large banquet tables. After the king gave Link the award, there would be a large party. Link had seen servants preparing food all day, he couldn't wait.

In the center of the ballroom was a long red carpet that led to the front of the room where Zelda and the king were. Two elaborate thrones had been set up earlier in the day. They were made with red velvet cushions and gold trim. They sat beside each other in these elaborate thrones. Zelda and her father wore super formal clothing for this ceremony; Link had never seen them in clothes like these. Zelda wore a beautiful violet dress with intricate designs stitched into the front. There were images of the Triforce, eagles, and mythological figures. Her dress was trimmed with gold thread actually sewn into the fabric. She wore a platinum tiara on her head that was studded with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, and emeralds. The king donned an equally sophisticated garb. He wore a red velvet robe with white fur trim. His clothes were decorated with gold braiding and various medals and lapels. He wore a gold crown topped with the biggest ruby Link had ever seen.

Link waited at the end of the red carpet, far away from the two thrones. The king stood and addressed the audience, it was time to begin the ceremony. "My fellow countrymen, my friends and colleagues," he began. "We have gathered today to bestow a great honor upon a young man. A young man who is a hero. He has given more of himself than anyone could possibly ask. He risked his own life to save the life of Princess Zelda, my beloved daughter. Words cannot express my gratitude to him. I will now award him the kingdom's highest honor. Link, please step forward." That was his cue. He walked down the red carpet towards the two thrones. Link tried to ignore the hundreds of eyes staring at him. As he walked the aisle, he saw Zelda wink at him. Link smiled. He stopped when he reached the king's throne. The king opened a small box on a table next to him. He removed a beautiful gold medal attached to a velvet ribbon. The medal was a seven-pointed gold star with detailed engravings.

"Link, it is my great pleasure to award you Hyrule's greatest honor: the Star of Nayru. It is awarded only to those few who perform an act far above and beyond the call of duty. You saved Zelda's life without any regard for your own safety." Link bowed his head and the king put the medal around his neck. The king hugged Link and whispered into his ear, "Thank you." The room filled with a roar of applause and cheers. When the noise had died down, the king removed another item from the table. It was a large gold sword, with beautiful engravings on the blade. The king held the sword with the blade pointing upward.

"Because of your bravery, I will bestow another honor upon you. Please kneel." Link knelt down and bowed his head. "As the king of Hyrule, I hereby install you into the Royal Order of the Hylian Knights. You are now a Hylian Knight, with all the rights and privileges thereof. From this day forward, you shall be known as Sir Link of the Kokiri." The king touched each of Link's shoulders with the sword and then drew it back. "Arise, Sir Link." Link stood up and looked at Zelda, who smiled at him. Holding the sword with both hands, the king presented the sword to Link. Link took it and examined the beautiful blade. He saw words engraved on the blade, *Sir Link of the Kokiri, I am forever in your debt.*

"Now, let the celebration begin," cheered the king. Everyone gave Link a standing ovation. After they applauded, the people vacated the benches and filled the banquet tables. Link, Zelda, Impa, and the king sat at the head of the largest banquet table. The king sat in the center, Impa was on his left, Zelda was on his right, and Link was on Zelda's right. Zelda turned and smiled at Link.

"My little Linkie-poo is a knight now," Zelda said. "Does that mean I have to call you Sir Linkie-poo?" she teased. Link smiled. He was an actual knight now, but Zelda still saw him as her cute little Linkie-poo. He didn't mind. Link tried not to show it, but he secretly liked it when she called him that.

"Um...you can call me whatever you want," Link said. His mouth watered as servants placed plates of succulent food in front of him. He tried to pay attention to Zelda.

"Link, I wanted to tell you how much...how thankful I am that you saved me," Zelda said with a sudden air of seriousness. Link looked into her eyes. "The only thing that kept me alive was the hope that

you would come for me. I knew you would save me. You risked your life to come and get me.” She leaned over and gave Link a loving embrace. Link hugged her back, he never wanted to let go. They released each other and sat back into their chairs. Zelda wiped a tear from her cheek. “You don’t know how much that means to me,” Zelda said.

Link gazed deep into her eyes with a serious expression, as if he were gazing into her soul. “Yes, I do.”

The End