

Origins

By: Kasuto of Kataan

Chapter One: Watching from the Shadows

It was about three in the afternoon; it was a normal day in the Hyrule Castle market, the place bustling with activity. People hurried around the town center going about their daily business. There were merchants displaying their wares, and shoppers haggling for lower prices. Nobody really paid attention to each other, they had their own problems to worry about. Consequently, no one paid any attention to the girl who watched from the shadows. She sat on the cold, hard cobblestones of the alley that was located between two buildings and behind a pile of old crates. The girl was about twelve years old. She was short and thin, her growth stunted by malnourishment. A scar ran diagonally from just above her left eyebrow and up into her scalp. Her knee-length blonde hair was frayed and matted from years of neglect. Her once vibrant blue eyes were now dull and lifeless. The girl wore what was once a beautiful yellow dress, but was now only a mess of smelly, tattered rags. She was happy to have anything to wear. She had stolen this particular dress from some merchant months ago. She didn't enjoy stealing, but it was her only choice.

The girl watched the people go about their daily routines. Men and women shopped for various goods, and children played happily in the streets. She wished she could be as carefree as those other children. They didn't have to worry about finding food and shelter; they could enjoy their lives. The girl would give anything to be able to live like that, just for one day. Sometimes she wondered why she was alive at all. If there was any justice in the world, she would've died and been freed from this suffering long ago. But she couldn't do that, she wanted to live. She prayed day and night that she would be able to live a normal life someday, to have food, a family, and friends. Right now, all she needed was food. She was so hungry, she hadn't eaten in four days. She could worry about improving the rest of her life later.

The girl stood up and walked past the crates and out of the alley. She slowly walked out from the streets and into the town center. She saw people walking past her without giving her so much as a glance. She looked for a nice-looking person, maybe someone would give her money so she could buy some food. A young man walked by, and she tried to get his attention. "Spare a rupee for a hungry child?" she said meekly. The man gave her a cold stare.

"Sorry, I don't have anything," said the man, devoid of emotion. He continued walking towards a merchant's cart where he bought some kind of pastry and began to eat it. *Filthy liar*, thought the girl. She saw another man approach, and she attempted to get his attention also.

"Sir..." she mumbled. The man shoved the girl as he walked past, knocking her to the ground.

"Get out of my way you little runt," the man said harshly, shoving her roughly onto the ground. The girl stood up off the ground and ran back into the alley. Maybe begging people wouldn't work today. Sometimes people gave her money, and other times she had days like this. She didn't have the patience to ask people for money today. She was too hungry, she needed food now. She would have to steal again. The girl watched one of the merchants and studied his routines. This man had a cart filled with loaves of bread and dozens of kinds of cured meats and sausages. It all looked so good, her mouth was watering. Now she needed to find a diversion so she could steal some food from that man.

The girl walked out of her alley and stealthily approached the merchant's cart. As usual, no one gave any notice to her. When she was only a few paces from the cart, the girl hid behind a pile of boxes that the merchant had thrown there. He continued selling his goods without even noticing the girl who was watching him. She needed a diversion.

A middle-aged woman walked up to the cart and examined some of the foods. She pointed to one of the products and said something that the girl couldn't hear. The merchant responded and the woman's face gained an expression of dissatisfaction. She began to yell at the merchant, complaining about the price. The merchant shouted back and began a heated argument. This was the girl's chance. She ran from behind the boxes and to the cart. She ducked down behind the side of the cart so no one would see her. The merchant and the woman were still arguing. With lightning speed, the girl snatched a large cured

sausage and a loaf of bread and bolted back to her alley. The two people continued to argue, never even noticing the girl who stole the food.

The girl ran through the streets and back into her secluded alley. She sat down behind her crates and eyed the food that she'd gotten. She stole a loaf of bread and a large, salami-like smoked sausage. She decided to eat the bread first. The girl ripped a large hunk from the loaf and quickly devoured it. This bread was soft and warm, it must've been baked only a short while ago. It tasted so good. It was so satisfying to finally put some food in her stomach after days of hunger. In what seemed to her like only a few seconds, the girl completely consumed the loaf of bread. Now it was time for the sausage. She unwrapped the paper from the smoky-scented salami. It smelled so heavenly. It had been such a long time since she'd had real meat. The girl took a bite of the sausage and savored its smoky flavor. For a moment, she almost forgot that she was a homeless peasant. She took a few more bites of the salami until she felt satisfied. This was a fairly large sausage, so it would last for a while. At least she didn't have to worry about food for the next few days. She wrapped the paper back around the sausage and placed it next to her in the crate.

She leaned against the wall of the building and started to daydream. She wondered what it would be like to have a normal life. She imagined having friends and a family. She fell into a fantasy world where she had no problems, and where reality had no meaning. It was so much better in her daydreams. She wished they would come true some day. That was the only thing that kept her alive; hope that her life would someday get better.

Link was in a beautiful meadow filled with colorful flowers. Also with him was a young girl who was about the same age as him. The girl was the same size as him, only a little thinner. They ran and played in the field like small children, without a care in the world. The girl's long, golden hair swayed as she sprinted through the meadow. Link bent over, picked a flower, and gave it to the girl. She smiled and said, "Thank you." They played all over this beautiful clearing, inventing games when they started to get bored. Link and the girl had never had so much fun. Then they saw an adult woman approached them. The blonde-haired woman gave Link and the girl a warm smile. but her soft blue eyes revealed sadness, a sadness deep inside her that she was trying to hide. "It's time to go," said the woman in a kind voice. "Play time is over." Link and the girl both gave looks of disapproval. "It's time to go home now," added the woman. They didn't want to go home, they were just fine right here.

"Why do we have to go home?" complained Link.

"You're looking for something," replied the woman. "Something you lost." Link gave her a quizzical look. He didn't remember losing anything. "And you, too," said the woman to the little girl. "You have also lost something. You both need to find what you have lost."

"What? What have we lost?" asked the girl.

"You know what I am talking about," replied the woman. Link and the girl gave sighs of frustration. Why was the woman being so cryptic? "You both know that long ago you lost something deeply important to you, something you cannot live without." The children still didn't understand, there was nothing that they were missing. They had everything they wanted right here. "It is time to leave now."

"No, I don't want to leave," protested the girl. "I want to stay here."

"But you must leave," insisted the woman. "You have to embark on a quest...to find what you lost...to find what you need...to find what you have always wanted but could never obtain...to find the truth..."

Link woke up, startled. He was having that dream again. He wondered to himself why he was always tormented by strange dreams. He knew that this dream meant something, it wasn't like normal dreams. He felt the same way now as he did when he'd dreamt of Ganondorf. That had turned out to be a premonition; was this dream also a premonition? Link had no idea. He didn't want to worry about dreams again. Still, this dream puzzled him. What was that woman talking about? He really didn't remember losing anything. Who was that woman, anyway? She looked familiar, but he couldn't

remember who she was. And who was that girl? He had never seen her before in his life. Link scolded himself for dreaming about another girl. Zelda would have a fit if she ever found out. Of course, it was perfectly innocent. That girl was a friend to him in the dream. Link had friends that were girls but weren't *girlfriends*. Still, it would probably be best if he didn't tell Zelda about the dream. He didn't want her worrying or getting jealous.

Link thought about the woman's words. She said that he had lost something. Now he felt like he did. Link was getting that feeling again, that feeling of cold emptiness. He got that empty feeling sometimes, like something was missing from his life. He always thought that Zelda would fill that empty space, that she would make him feel complete. And she did sometimes. Most of the time, Link felt like there wasn't anything else he needed in his life. But right now, he felt empty. He *had* lost something. He knew it. He had lost something that was crucial to his being, as if he had lost part of his soul. But what could it be? Link tried to think. Nothing. He couldn't think of anything that could've caused that empty feeling. He had to stop thinking about this right now. It was still dark, and he was tired. He needed sleep. He was sick of staring at the ceiling all night, he wanted just one night of peaceful rest. He would talk to Saria about this tomorrow. She always seemed to have the right answers; she always knew what to say to make him feel better.

The girl woke up and looked around; she was disoriented and confused. She looked around and saw her crate and the dark alley. She was still here, that must've just been a dream. She leaned against the wall and sighed. She was so happy there. She didn't have to worry about anything in that dream. It was just like she wanted, to be normal and carefree...like the other children she always saw. For a moment, the girl thought her problems were over; then she woke up. Why was life so cruel to her? Why did she have to have a dream like that? Waking up just made her feel miserable again. She yearned to go back into that dream, where she didn't have to worry about anything.

She wondered who that boy was that she saw in her dream. She felt so happy when she was with him. He seemed like a friend, like someone she could trust. She felt safe when she was with him. The girl also wondered about that woman who was in her dream, who was she? The girl didn't remember ever seeing that woman before, either. The girl was confused by what that woman had said. What had she lost? The girl could think of a millions things that she could've lost. After all, she had no friends, no family, and no home. She had lost all those things. Of course, she couldn't actually remember losing all those things. She never even remembered having them. This was all she knew. Her whole life was living in the streets begging for food. Oh well, there was nothing she could do about that now.

She was hungry again. She thanked the gods that she had gotten that large sausage, now she would have something to eat. She felt around the place where she'd stashed her food; there was nothing there. She stood up and looked in her immediate area. She didn't see her food anywhere. Where could it possibly be? Who would want to steal food from a homeless girl? It had to be somewhere. She upturned crates trying to find it; it wasn't very easy to hide a large smoked sausage. Her searching revealed no food. She sat down in despair, wondering how it could've disappeared.

Then the girl heard a noise coming from deeper inside the alley. It sounded like rustling and gnawing. She stood up and slowly walked down the alley. A small dog was lying on the ground, chewing on her food. The paper wrapping was torn to shreds and the sausage itself was almost gone. She wondered how this dog could've gotten her food without her knowing. She knelt down and tried to make friends with the dog. "Please, that's mine," she said in a high voice. The dog looked at her. The girl slowly moved her hand towards the sausage. The dog growled viciously and flared its teeth. "That's mine, give it back!" she pleaded, as if the dog could understand her. The dog growled even louder as she moved her hand closer to the sausage. When she had almost reached it, the dog snapped and attacked her. Its teeth sank into her left hand, causing large puncture wounds. The girl shrieked in pain and drew her hand back. The dog grabbed the sausage in its mouth and ran away, leaving the torn paper behind.

The girl looked at her injured hand. Blood was oozing from the three painful bite marks. The skin

around the punctures was already starting to become pink and swollen. It hurt so much, and she had to stop the bleeding. She buried her hand in her tattered dress and applied pressure to her hand, causing more pain. She winced as she pressed against the bite marks. What a great way to end the day. She thought that she would have some food for at least a few days, and now this happens. What did she do to deserve this? She leaned back down into her box and tried not to think about her throbbing hand or her rumbling stomach. She tried to think of pleasant things, but it didn't work. All she could think of was her poverty and misfortune. Why did she have to be poor and homeless in the first place? Had she done something to anger the gods? She couldn't help but feel sorry for herself. What did it matter anymore? Her only food had been taken by some filthy mutt. She sank into the dark pit of depression and self-pity again. What was she going to do now? She kept trying and trying, but she always failed. Sometimes she wondered why she even bothered. She was alone; no one cared about her. She didn't even have a name. At least, she couldn't ever remember having one. She had decided long ago to make a name for herself: Solo. It was perfect, it described her entire existence. She was solo, living by herself and for herself. No one else had ever given a damn about her, she could only depend on herself. Solo had nothing anymore, she wished she could either be saved from this hellish existence, or just die. Solo curled up into a ball and cried.

Link opened his eyes and squinted because of the bright sunlight; it was finally morning. It was just his luck that he fell back asleep only an hour before he woke up. He was used to losing sleep, anyways. Breakfast would make him feel better. Link sat up and slowly got out of his bed. He searched around on the floor for some clothes to wear. Saria always bugged Link about never using his dresser drawers, but Link couldn't see any point in it. It was easier just to pile all of his clothes on the floor. He picked through the strewn tunics until he found one that smelled relatively clean. He pulled it over his head and fastened his belt. This wasn't too dirty, he could wear it for another day. Link looked in the mirror and tried to fix his hair. It stuck up in all directions as it always did after he slept. He smoothed it with his hands until it looked more decent. He had no idea where his comb went; Saria had "organized" his things yesterday and he was still trying to find all the stuff she had misplaced.

That feeling of emptiness that Link had last night was beginning to sneak up on him again. It was like a predator, stalking him and hunting him. It waited for the opportune moment to strike; it waited until he was emotionally drained to attack him. Here it was again, that cold void in his soul. That just made him feel more depressed. Link stepped out of his house and slowly walked to Saria's house, trying to enjoy the fresh air. He tried to ignore the empty feeling, but he couldn't. Maybe he could talk to Saria about it. She might not understand his feelings, but at least she listened to him. Link entered Saria's house to see her sitting at the table waiting for him.

"You look bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning," said Saria sarcastically. Link forced a smile. He didn't look like his normal self this morning. His face was pale and tired, and his eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep. He didn't feel very well. "What's wrong?" she asked. Link sat down across from her. The breakfast had already been prepared, Saria was only waiting for Link to get up.

"Nothing's wrong, really," Link sighed. Saria knew he wasn't telling her the truth. Link swirled his oatmeal with the spoon, but he didn't eat it. He didn't feel hungry. Link saw Saria's concerned expression; he couldn't hide anything from her. "I had one of those dreams...*again*."

"Really? You really seem to have bizarre dreams," said Saria. "Is it making you uncomfortable again?"

"Well...it's not just the dream. It's the feeling that came along with it, how I feel right now. It's kind of...empty, a feeling of emptiness and abandonment. I don't know why, but I feel like I'm missing something. It's like part of my soul is missing. The woman in my dream told me to find what I lost. And I have no idea what I've lost."

Saria sat there, thinking about what Link said. It was very confusing. She wished Link could elaborate, but she knew that Link was already telling her everything he knew. "So you feel empty?" Saria asked. "What do you think the dream has to do with it? It's gotta mean something."

“I really don’t know. I’m sure that whatever I lost is what’s causing the void inside me. I wish I knew what it was that I’m supposed to be looking for. I’m so confused.”

“I’m not really sure what to tell you...” Saria said. She didn’t really understand what Link was talking about, so she couldn’t give him any advice. She shrugged her shoulders. Link expected that, he knew that Saria wouldn’t have the solutions to his problems. But at least she listened to him. “Do you have any ideas as to what it could be?” asked Saria.

“I don’t know. I’m sure I’ll figure it out sometime.” Link sat silently for a moment, thinking. He swirled his oatmeal around and decided to finally eat some of it. It tasted okay, albeit slightly cold. “You know, I’ve always had that empty feeling,” said Link, breaking the silence, “as far back as I can remember.” Saria was surprised at that comment. She didn’t know that Link had always felt like this. She thought that it had just started a few weeks ago when he began having the dreams. Saria gave him a look, indicating for him to elaborate. “The emptiness has always been with me. It’s like a shadow; it’s always there, but I can’t touch it. It follows me, always one step behind or one step ahead. I usually ignore it, but sometimes it doesn’t work. It’s a predator that’s hunting me. I always thought that the emptiness was just my need for some kind of companion, a soul-mate, someone who could understand me. For a while, I started to think that Zelda had finally filled that void in my soul...but she didn’t. I mean, I love her and I would never want to lose her, there’s just something else I need too.”

Saria contemplated Link’s words. She thought that maybe he needed a new friend, but that wouldn’t work. Even though Link had only a few friends, the ones he had were dear to him. He wasn’t one to have countless acquaintances whom he had no emotional connection with. Link preferred to have only a few very close friends. Maybe it was something else that he was missing. “You think you need a soul-mate?” asked Saria.

“I don’t know,” replied Link. “Probably not. I always thought that either you or Zelda would be my soul-mate. I couldn’t think of anyone else being that. Maybe I don’t need a soul-mate, maybe I’m just supposed to be this way. Maybe I should just forget about it and try to ignore it. I have enough problems already.”

Saria sighed. She hated to see Link wallowing in self-pity like this. But there was nothing she could do. She wanted so bad to just wrap her arms around him and tell him that everything would be fine. She wanted to give him her own soul so he wouldn’t have to feel empty inside. “Don’t feel sorry for yourself,” said Saria. It was the only words she could think of. “I’m sure you’ll figure this out. It’s only a matter of time.”

Link unenthusiastically ate another spoonful of the oatmeal. Food wouldn’t fill the void in his soul. He slowly and silently finished off his breakfast. “Right now I just need something to take my mind off it,” Link said. He looked out the window. The sky was dull and gray, it looked like it would rain soon. But Link didn’t care, the weather reflected his mood perfectly. “Maybe I’ll go shopping at the market. I guess I’ll buy some clothes or something.”

“Okay, now I know you’re *really* messed up,” Saria said. “Since when did you every like going shopping, and for *clothes*?”

“Never,” Link replied. “But maybe it’ll take my mind off my problems for a while.”

“Well, you’d better go soon because it looks like it’s gonna rain,” said Saria, pointing to the dreary sky outside. “I don’t think many people will be out when it’s raining.”

“That doesn’t bother me, I like the rain. Maybe I’ll buy an umbrella.” Saria smiled at him. That was a sensible idea. She didn’t want to prevent him from going out. Saria knew that sometimes Link needed time to himself, time to think. Link started to help Saria clean up, he always made it a point to help whenever he could. He would leave for the market as soon as he was done.

Solo crept around the market, trying to see if there was any way she could swipe some food. It didn’t look like today would be a good day. The sky was gray, and it looked like it was going to rain. Only a few merchants were out today, and only one was selling food. This particular food merchant wasn’t one that

she could easily steal from. He watched people like a hawk and suspected everyone. She would never be able to steal from him in a million years. She had to find some other way to get some food.

Solo walked through the alleys of the town. She saw a shadow emerge from around the corner, and she ducked away to hide. It was a man, one of the townspeople, walking back to his home. He was nibbling on an apple. It looked so delicious; Solo would give anything for it. The man walked past Solo without noticing her, and opened a door to one of the houses. It must've been his home. He tossed the half-eaten apple over his shoulder as he walked into the house and closed the door. Solo made sure no one was looking, and ran over to where the apple landed. It was a small red apple with only a few bites taken out of it. Solo picked up the apple and brushed off the bits of dirt and gravel that clung to it. Three-fourths of the apple remained, at least she would have something in her stomach. She quickly devoured everything but the stem.

This wasn't enough, she needed more food. There had to be some other food around here. Solo walked out of the alleys and through the market. She walked to the outer part of the town, near the Temple of Time. There was a small open area with a large pit. This is where the townspeople dumped their garbage, as well as where the waste from the castle's stables was dumped. It made a large stinking pile of decomposing food scraps and fetid horse droppings. Every week, workers either burned or buried the trash. It was the day before the trash day, so maybe Solo could find something here. She dug around in the pit, searching for scraps of food that weren't completely rancid. A few dogs were also digging around in the garbage looking for food. Solo felt so inhuman, burrowing for trash like an animal. She envied the slop that hogs were fed. She continued digging in the slimy, putrid refuse. There had to be something here, something that resembled food.

She dug deeper until she came across an amorphous blob partially wrapped in a waxy paper. She unwrapped it; it looked like an old piece of cheese. The cheese itself was a dark shade of yellow and slightly hardened. Part of its surface was covered with a hairy, green mold. She had eaten semi-rotten cheese before, she knew that it was okay to eat it if she picked the mold off. Solo would have gotten sick had she tried that with any other food. She dug into the tiny block of cheese with her fingernails and scraped off the bits of mold that clung to it. When she had finished removing the mold, she gazed at the nugget of food in her hand. The piece of cheese was small, about the size of a walnut. She popped the rotting piece of cheese in her mouth and ate it. It tasted like dirty socks, but she didn't care. At least it was something. The cheese wasn't enough, though. She continued digging, hoping to find something else.

After about five more minutes of picking through the rancid, stinking garbage, she decided to give up. It was no use trying to find anything else here. She was so hungry, but was used to it. She climbed out of the garbage pit. Her clothes were smeared and stained by the garbage. She and her dress reeked of rotting trash and fetid horse droppings.

Solo began to walk back to her alley. She tried to avoid people, ashamed of herself. There was a clap of thunder in the distance. Solo felt a few drops of water fall onto her face. It was starting to rain. She had to get back to her alley before it started pouring. The rain grew to a heavy drizzle as she made her way back to the alley. When Solo rounded the corner to her familiar place, she saw people there. There were two men, some kind of workers, doing something at the house which formed one of the walls of her alley. They were working on the house, and loading her empty crates onto a large cart. Solo stood there, watching the men. One of them gave her a frustrated look. "What are you doing here, kid?" he said in a condescending tone. Solo just stared at him, she couldn't speak. These people were invading what poor excuse for a home that she had. "Get out of here and go home," shouted the man, waving Solo away.

She sullenly left the street and wandered aimlessly through the town. The drizzle had now grown into a steady rain. She had nowhere to go now. Solo decided to stop wandering. She sat down on the steps near the temple. Thunder roared and lightning streaked through the sky. The rain increased to a heavy downpour. There was nowhere for Solo to go. She had once tried to go into the temple, but the people there kicked her out because of her disheveled appearance. A lot of good religion ever did for her. Solo hugged her legs to her chest. A deluge of giant rain drops pelted her from above. She was completely soaked from head to toe. The temperature had dropped drastically, and the wind had picked up. Solo tried to curl up to keep warm. She saw the merchants scurrying to pack up their things before they were ruined.

Solo shivered and her teeth chattered. She was so wet, and so cold. She would give so much to be inside a house near a warm fire. She instinctively rubbed her arms over herself, trying to keep warm. The cold rain combined with the wind chilled her to the bone. She tried to think of someplace warm. She lay down on the ground, trying to ignore the pouring rain. Small streams of water ran through the streets of the town. Puddles formed in the many low spots on the cobblestone roads. Most of the merchants had closed up now; only a few people were out walking around. Solo was tired, she wanted to go to sleep. It was so cold.

Her eyes grew heavy, ready to drift into sleep. She thought she saw a familiar person in the town center. There was a small boy sitting on the edge of the fountain, holding an umbrella. He just sat there, staring blankly. He looked familiar to Solo. He had blonde hair and wore strange-looking green clothes. He looked just like the boy that Solo had dreamed about. Maybe he was, but she didn't care. She was so tired, half-asleep and half-awake. She could've been dreaming right now. Solo didn't see any point to wondering who this boy was; all she cared about was getting indoors. But she knew that wasn't going to happen anytime soon.

The boy stood up and began to aimlessly walk around the town center. Solo wondered what he was doing. People usually had things to do and places to go to, this boy had neither. As the boy grew closer to her position, Solo slid through the mud and behind a small bush. She didn't want that boy coming across her and seeing her like this. She didn't want anyone to see her. She never let anyone get close to her. She felt so ashamed, so dirty, so inhuman. As the boy wandered closer, Solo prayed that he wouldn't see her. She didn't want to be shunned and rejected by yet another person.

Link walked through the market. Saria was right, it did rain. He had taken his own advice and bought an umbrella when he had first arrived in the market. Now it was raining heavily. All the merchants were closing up because of the weather. So much for his shopping. He decided to just wander through the town. It would give him time to think. His feet splashed through the tiny puddles as he wandered through the town.

The rain didn't seem to be letting up at all. It hadn't gotten any heavier, but it hadn't gotten any lighter, either. Link purposely splashed through the puddles. He kicked a rock into a bush near some steps and heard a yelp. That caught his attention. Link curiously approached the bush, looking for the source of the sound. Maybe he had accidentally hit a dog or something with the rock. He hoped it wasn't hurt. As Link drew closer to the bush, he saw two blue eyes staring at him through the foliage. It wasn't a dog, it was a person. It looked like a girl. Before he could reach the bush, a figure bolted out from behind it. In a sudden flash, Link saw a girl run away from the bush and into the streets.

As soon as the boy had approached the bush, Solo ran from behind it. The rock he had kicked hit her on the left cheek. She would probably get a bruise. Solo ran away from the boy as quickly as she could. He didn't seem to mean any harm, but she didn't want his help. She didn't want anyone to see what a pitiful excuse for a person she was. She gave a quick glance behind her. The boy was still in pursuit, shouting that he wasn't going to hurt her. Solo weaved through the streets of the village, trying to lose the boy. Solo winced as she stubbed her toe on an upturned cobblestone. She wished that she had shoes.

Solo turned around a corner and ran through another one of the village's twisting alleys. The rain began to get heavier. She repeatedly slipped and almost stumbled on the muddy streets. She heard the boy chasing her. *Don't let him catch up with me*, she thought. *I don't want him to see me like this*. She ran through across the street and into the other side of the town. Solo sprinted into another alley and hid in the shadows, trying not to make a sound. The wind picked up and the heavy rain became a deluge. The lightning-streaked sky seemed to open up, letting torrents of water fall from the heavens. Solo curled up and hoped the boy wouldn't find her here. She felt a sharp stinging sensation on her face. Another sting

across her legs. The stings kept occurring, becoming more and more frequent. She looked into the streets and saw tiny glistening balls pile up on the ground. It was hail. Tiny pellets of hail pelted everything, and Solo tried desperately to protect herself from the icy projectiles.

The torrential downpour and stinging hail had severely reduced the visibility. Link tried to see where that girl went. He had lost sight of her when she turned a corner. He slowly walked to where he last saw the girl, but couldn't find any sign of her. The heavy rain and tiny hailstones pelted Link from above; he had to try to get out of this storm. The umbrella wasn't doing him much good right now. Link quickly ran underneath the overhang of one of the many houses. At least the hail wouldn't hit him here.

While he stood there, waiting for the rain to die down, Link tried to think of where that girl could've gone. He hoped that she had just gone home. That girl looked so familiar to him. She looked like that girl he had seen in his dream. Her hair was unmistakable. No, she couldn't be the girl from his dream. That girl wasn't real; she was just a figment of his imagination. The girl he was chasing just happened to have a resemblance to the one from his dream. He hoped that that girl was okay. She was probably inside her house now. But there was something about her that made Link feel uneasy. By the looks of her, the girl was obviously poor. Maybe she didn't have a home. No, that wasn't possible. There weren't any homeless people here, were there? Link had never seen any homeless people in the village, that girl was probably just from a poor family.

The barrage of hailstones finally died down. The rain continued, but at a lighter rate. Link went out from under the overhang and walked down the alley towards the town center. Saria was probably worried sick about him. He had to get home. Link slowly made his way through the town and towards the exit.

Solo sat in the alley and hoped the boy wouldn't see her. To her surprise, he stopped beneath an overhang to the house across from her. Solo hid behind a wooden post that belonged to one of the houses. The boy just stood there, not even looking for her. Maybe he had finally given up. Solo silently breathed a sigh of relief. She wondered who he was. He definitely looked like the boy from her dream, his clothes were a dead giveaway. When the hail finally stopped, the boy walked away from the overhang, he wasn't looking for her anymore.

Solo had a strange feeling about this boy. She wondered who he was and where he came from. There was only one way to find out. She quietly snuck out from behind the post and peeked her head around the corner. She saw the boy in green clothes leisurely walking towards the exit of the market. Solo stealthily followed the boy, making sure not to make any noises that would get his attention. He seemed entirely focused on walking, never looking around or anything. This was good for Solo, it made following him easier.

Solo weaved around hiding places to make sure the boy didn't see her if he decided to turn around. The boy kept going without even noticing that he was being followed. As the boy exited the castle walls and crossed the drawbridge, Solo wondered where he lived. Maybe he was from Kakariko. She tried to keep a large amount of distance in Hyrule Field, there weren't a lot of places to hide in this open area. Solo was surprised when the boy didn't cross the stream that led to Kakariko Village. She wondered where he lived. She wasn't aware of any other villages in the area. She continued to follow the boy, hoping he didn't turn around. She didn't like the idea of stalking him, but she had to know who he was. This was the boy from her dream, he was real.

Chapter Two: Mysterious Stranger

Link walked through Hyrule Field, he was about halfway home. It was still raining, but it was fairly light. Link would've normally hated the rain, but it didn't bother him today. It was the perfect complement to his dreary mood. Shopping in the market today didn't turn out to be such a good idea. Saria was right about the rain. Link was glad that he had the common sense to buy an umbrella first. At least he wasn't soaking wet. Of course, once it had started raining, all the merchants had closed up. He could go shopping another day.

As he walked, Link tried to avoid the many mud-puddles that had formed during the storm. He looked at the sky and could see that the storm wasn't over. There were more dark clouds on the horizon, and they were slowly making their way towards him. Brilliant bolts of lightning streaked and branched through the sky. It was going to be another dreary night. It was the beginning of the rainy season, and there would be many more days like this.

Link passed the large tree that marked the entrance to the Kokiri Forest. He walked across the bridge and into the forest. It still drizzled outside, even in here. All of the children were secure inside their homes by their fireplaces. Most of the Kokiri children didn't like rain, especially when it was a severe storm like this. They just stayed inside and waited for better weather. Link made his way towards Saria's house. He sloshed through the puddles and mud. His mood had improved a little since this morning. Maybe Saria would have some new words of wisdom for him.

Solo was amazed when she entered the Kokiri Forest. This was the most beautiful place she'd ever seen. There were so many beautiful trees and flowers here. She was taken aback by the peace and tranquility of the forest. It felt so wonderful just being here. She felt as if she could forget all her problems while she was in this stunning forest. If she lived here, she wouldn't even mind being homeless. Who needed a home if the outside was so wonderful?

Solo snapped back into reality and concentrated on the task at hand. She surveyed her surroundings to make sure that no one would see her. There were groups of quaint little houses with smoke coming from their chimneys. But no one was outside. Everyone must have gone in because of the weather; it made sense. Solo continued to follow Link as he walked towards Saria's house. He never once turned around to see the girl who was following him.

Solo crept behind houses to make sure no one saw her. She watched Link walk into a house that was nearly identical to the others. *That must be where he lives*, Solo thought. She quietly sneaked over to the house Link had walked into. Trying not to be noticed, she peeked through the window. She saw Link sit down and start talking to a green-haired girl. They looked happy together. Solo noticed that this girl wore clothes that were similar to Link's. All the people here must wear the same kinds of clothes. Solo was fascinated by the glowing, winged creature that hovered above the green-haired girl's head. These kids seemed so strange to Solo. She peeked in the window, and tried to eavesdrop on their conversation.

Link sat down at the table in Saria's house. She sat next to Link and gave him a comforting smile. He folded up the dripping umbrella and leaned it against the table. Link's head and some of his clothes were wet, regardless of the umbrella. Saria could see in Link's eyes that he was feeling a little better, but was still depressed. "So, did you find anything you liked at the market?" asked Saria.

"Not really," replied Link. "I didn't have much time to browse before it started raining. At least I bought this umbrella first."

"I told you it was going to rain," Saria said in her I-told-you-so voice. Link rolled his eyes.

"I thought maybe it would start later. Besides, the rain didn't really bother me. It was the hail."

“Ouch,” Saria said. “I hope you weren’t hurt by it.”

“It wasn’t too bad. I went under the overhang of some house. I didn’t get hit by much of the hail. You know, something weird happened while I was there.”

“Oh?” Saria said, raising an eyebrow.

“I was walking around the market, and I saw this girl. She was crouching behind a bush and I think she was watching me. I tried to go up to her and see who she was, but she ran away. I tried to chase her down, but it was raining so hard that I couldn’t see and I lost track of her. An you know what the weird part is? She looked exactly like the girl I saw in my dream.”

“Really?” said Saria. “Are you sure? Maybe you were just seeing things. Did you get a good look at her?”

“Well, not really. She was running, so I didn’t really get the chance to get a good look at her. But I really think she looked like that girl in my dream; her hair looked exactly the same.”

“You really think the girl you saw in the market looked like the one from your dream? I suppose that’s possible. But do you think that girl from your dream could be real...you know, an *actual* person.”

“I don’t know,” Link said, thinking deeply. Even though the girl at the market had looked like the one from his dream, he doubted that the dream-girl was actually real. “I don’t think she’s real. She probably just a dream.”

“I know what it is. You know how your dreams always end up being premonitions? Well, maybe your dream is a premonition or something like that. You said that the girl had really long hair. Maybe that’s just what you want. Maybe you want Zelda to have long hair like that. You’re always talking about how you love Zelda’s hair but wish it was longer.” Saria wasn’t very serious about this comment, she just wanted to get a reaction out of Link.

Link tried to stifle a smile. “No I don’t think so. I like Zelda’s hair the way it is.” He gave Saria a playful glare.

“It was just a thought,” she said. “Besides, you seem to have an obsession with girls’ hair. You’re always talking about how pretty Zelda’s hair is.”

Link turned red. “What?” he said defensively. “I just think her hair is pretty. I’m not *obsessed* with it.”

“Whatever you say, I believe you. You know, you’re all wet. You should go change into some dry clothes.”

Link looked down at his damp clothes. He didn’t even notice that he was still wet. “That’s a good idea. I think I’ll go home for a while. I’m a little tired ‘cause I didn’t get much sleep last night. I’m gonna take a nap. I’ll be back in a couple hours.” Link stood up and smiled at Saria as he walked out the door.

When Solo saw Link stand up and get ready to leave, she immediately ran behind the house and out of sight. She watched Link walk away from Saria’s house. She wondered where he was going now. Maybe that wasn’t his house after all. Solo wasn’t sure, she wasn’t able to make out the conversation that Link and Saria were having. Solo watched where Link was going. She made sure not to make any noise. He went next door to a strange-looking tree house. Solo was amazed when she first saw this house. It was so unique, and didn’t look like the others. Solo crouched near the tree house and watched Link climb the ladder and walk inside.

Solo looked around to make sure no one was looking at her. The rain had started to pick up again. Solo was completely soaked, and she was terribly cold. She wished that she could go inside where it was warm and dry. Solo walked to the front of the ladder and looked up. She could partially see inside the house. Link was walking around and it looked like he was changing his clothes. Solo ducked under the porch when she saw him approach the doorway. He closed the curtains that hung over the doorway. Now no one could see in or out.

Solo thought that she might as well do something. She quietly climbed up the ladder, wincing whenever she heard the slightest creak come from the wood. She stealthily ducked near the doorway to Link’s house. Solo moved the curtain ever so slightly so she could peek inside. Link was on his bed, lying

on his side. He looked like he was going to go to sleep. Thunder and lightning crackled in the sky once again, and the rain deluged again. She shivered as the oversized raindrops pelted her already sopping body. Solo repositioned herself so she could see inside better. A loud creak from one of the balcony's planks startled her. She looked inside Link's house and saw him stir. He rolled over, and looked like he was going to get up. Solo was terrified. She couldn't let him know that she was here. She had to get down before he saw her. She quickly scrambled for the ladder so she could climb down. As she reached the edge of the balcony, Solo felt her foot slide on the slippery deck. As look of horror came upon her face as she realized that she was going to fall. In what seemed both lightning fast and like an eternity, she flew into the air. With a startled shriek, Solo fell and her back slammed into the muddy ground. The air was completely knocked out of her lungs and she couldn't breathe. The world spun around her in a daze as everything blurred and went black.

Link was startled when he heard a scream come from outside. He sat up in the bed and looked towards the doorway. Was that scream real? He had been half-asleep when he heard it, maybe it was just a dream. Still, he had to make sure. Maybe Saria had slipped and fell when she tried to climb the ladder. Link quickly walked out onto the balcony and into the pouring rain he looked down towards the ground to see who was there. To his utter astonishment, it wasn't Saria that he saw outside; it was some strange girl. He quickly climbed down the ladder to see if the girl was okay.

Link knelt beside the girl. He was surprised to see that it was the same girl whom he saw at the market earlier today. How in the world did she get here? Link couldn't worry about that now, this girl was hurt and he needed to help her. He gently shook the girl to see if she was awake. Her eyes twitched but didn't open. Link saw a small trickle of blood dribble from the corner of her mouth. She looked really hurt. Link quickly picked the girl up and carried her up the ladder and into his house. He was accustomed to carrying large objects up the ladder, and a person wasn't much different. The girl was also surprisingly light, which only made the task easier. Link placed the soaking-wet child on the bed. He needed help.

Link ran out of his house and towards Saria's. Saria gave Link a puzzled look when he came barging into her house, dripping with rainwater and breathing heavily. "What's wrong?" Saria asked frantically, seeing the urgency in Link's expression.

He paused to catch his breath. "I need you to help me," he replied. "I think that girl followed me home. She fell off my balcony, and she's really hurt."

"What?" Saria said in confusion. Link was so frenzied that she could barely understand him. Before she could say any more, Link grabbed Saria's arm and dragged her over to his house. They climbed up the ladder and into his house. Saria gasped when she saw Solo's thin body lying on Link's bed. She was still unconscious. Saria quickly went to the bedside to assess Solo's injuries. There was a small bruise on her left cheek, and blood trickled from the corner of her mouth. She must've bitten her lip when she hit the ground. Saria felt sorry for the girl when she saw how pitiful she looked. The girl's clothes were torn and dirty. She was soaking wet and shivering from the cold.

"We have to get her out of those wet clothes," Saria said. Link gave a look of confusion. What could they dress her in. Saria saw Link's face and sighed. "She's going to freeze to death if we don't get her out of these cold, wet clothes." Saria leaned over Solo's body and tried to pull the worn rags off her. Solo only gave an unconscious grunt. Link turned his face away when Saria pulled the dress off Solo. "Will you quit being embarrassed and do something useful? Go get a towel." Link nodded and fetched a large bath towel for Saria. She quickly dried off the girl's goose bump-covered body. When Solo was dry, Saria gently wrapped her in one of Link's blankets. The girl still shivered, but didn't wake up.

"You think she'll be all right?" asked Link with great concern.

"She'll probably be okay," she replied. "She needs to rest. Why don't you stay here and make sure she's okay. I'm going to go make some food. She looks like she hasn't eaten in a while." Saria remembered the way Solo's body looked. She was very thin and bony. If she had eaten something, it wasn't very much. Saria felt so sad for this girl. She left Link's house and went to hers so she could

prepare some food for the girl. Link sat by the side of the bed and watched the unconscious Solo. She had finally stopped shivering, and a little color returned to her face. Link wondered why this girl was here. Why would she follow him home if she ran away from him when he tried to talk to her? He had a lot of questions to ask her when she got up.

Solo was awake now, but didn't open her eyes. She tried to think clearly. Where was she? She remembered falling off that balcony, but what happened after that? She felt comfortable now; it was warm and soft here. For a second, she wondered if she was dead and in heaven. She couldn't feel this good and still be alive. She slowly opened her eyes to see where she was. Her blurred vision focused onto the ceiling of some house. She turned her head and looked at the inside of this residence. She was inside that boy's house. Solo looked down at her body. She was wrapped in a soft, warm comforter. It was such a new feeling, being safe and secure.

Solo wondered how she got into the house in the first place. That boy must've brought her in here. She wondered why anyone would go through the trouble of helping someone like her. She closed her eyes and lay down on the soft mattress, enjoying the feeling of the soft blanket against her skin. She could lie here forever, in perfect bliss.

"Oh, you're finally up," said a voice. Solo started and sat up to see who was there. It was the boy in the green clothes. He approached Solo. She jumped back and huddled in the corner of the bed like a frightened animal. "It's okay, I'm not going to hurt you," said the boy in a kind, soothing voice. Solo only stared at him, not sure if he was for real. "You really should lie down, you took a pretty nasty fall." Link walked up to the bed and tried to show the girl that he was only trying to help. "You look hungry, Saria should be bringing some food by any minute."

Upon hearing that sentence, Solo relaxed a little. Was this boy really going to bring her food? She was so hungry; it would be a god-send if she got to eat something. Solo sat back down on the bed, and wrapped herself tighter in the blanket. It was so warm, she didn't want to leave. Link sat down on a chair next to the bed and gave her a warm smile. "Maybe I should introduce myself, my name is Link," he said. So that was his name: Link. Solo looked at him, gazing into his eyes. She saw something in those bright blue orbs that she had never seen in another person before: concern. She saw genuine concern in his eyes. Link actually cared about her. She had no idea how to respond to him; she never really had much contact with people who weren't shunning her or telling her to go away. Not able to think of any words, she just continued to stare at him.

"What's your name?" asked Link. Solo gave a confused look, and her eyes started to well up with tears.

"Um...I...don't have...a name," she mumbled. She must have sounded so stupid to him.

"Oh, come on," Link said. "Everyone has to have a name. What do people call you?"

Solo thought about that question. Did her name for herself count? Or did Link want to know the name her parents would have given her? She couldn't remember even having parents. "People usually call me 'kid' or 'you little runt'," she replied. "Or they call me a smelly little girl and tell me to go away." Solo sniffled upon recalling those painful memories.

Link frowned, not knowing that people were actually treated like that. "Well...is there any name your parents call you, or your relatives?"

"No. I don't have parents or relatives," she said, hugging her knees to her chest. "No one ever gave me a name. I call myself Solo."

"Solo?" Link repeated. "That's your name?"

She nodded. "That's the name I made up for myself. I heard someone say that I was solo once. I think that means that I'm alone and by myself. I used that as a name." It hurt for her to say these things, but at the same time, it made her feel better. She had a good feeling about Link. She felt like she could tell all her problems to him and he would listen without shunning her or telling her she was dirty and stupid.

"So you're all alone? You don't have any friends or family at all?"

Solo shook her head. “No, I don’t have anyone at all,” she said, struggling not to cry. It was such a new feeling to have someone listen to what she was saying. She could tell that this boy cared deeply about her. She never knew that people could be this nice.

“Where do you live then, if you have no family?” asked Link.

Solo sniffled and cried. “I don’t live anywhere. I...have no home. I lived in...the alley...on the street. Sometimes I had a box or a crate to sleep in.” Link looked at the sniffing girl and almost cried himself. He never knew that there were homeless people so close to him. He felt so sad for this girl.

“You’re homeless?” Link said with almost disbelief. Upon hearing a noise from outside, Link turned and looked at the doorway. He walked outside and onto the balcony to help Saria. Solo smelled the most beautiful aroma as Saria and Link entered the house. It was food, she could smell food. Solo’s stomach rumbled. She was so hungry. She was weak and shaking from not eating anything for so long. Saria carried a picnic basket and laid it down on the table.

“I hope you’re hungry,” said Saria, opening the basket and placing the food out on the table. Solo stared at the basket and the food Saria was removing from it. Saria removed a large loaf of fresh bread and a big pot of hot soup. “I hope you like the soup I made,” Saria said, ladling some of the soup from the pot into a smaller bowl. Solo was completely focused on the food, and never took her eyes off it.

“Is...that for me?” Solo asked sheepishly, slowly approaching the table with the blanket still wrapped around her.

“Of course,” Saria replied, smiling.

“All of it?” asked Solo.

“You can have as much as you want.” Solo smiled brightly. So couldn’t remember ever being so happy. People were actually giving food to her, without having to beg for it. Still wrapped in the blanket, she sat down at the table and smelled the wonderful aroma coming from the soup. Solo was in her own world now, only she and the food existed here. She grabbed the loaf of bread and tore a large chunk out of it. The crust was crispy and flaky, while the inside was warm and soft. It was heavenly. She quickly devoured the entire loaf of bread, barely stopping to breathe.

Link and Saria were amazed at how quickly Solo ate the food. “You poor thing, you must’ve been starving half to death,” said Saria. Solo paid no attention, caring only about the food in front of her. When the bread was gone, Solo started on the soup. She bypassed the spoon entirely and just grabbed the bowl with both hands. She put the bowl to her mouth and loudly slurped the soup. This soup was ambrosia to Solo. It had many chewy chunks of chicken and oodles of different vegetables. In a few large gulps, she swallowed the bowl of soup without even stopping to chew the pieces. Solo plopped the wooden bowl back onto the table after gulping down the soup.

“There’s more if you...” began Saria, but she paused when Solo had already taken her suggestion. Solo gently tipped the pot and poured more soup into the smaller bowl. She then proceeded to slurp down that serving of soup as she had the previous one. She repeated the process until the large pot had been completely emptied.

“Wow, I’ve never seen someone eat so much so fast,” commented Saria. “Even Link doesn’t do that, and he’s a pig.” Solo didn’t pay much attention to Saria. She was still in her own little world. She finally had real food. She prayed that this wasn’t a dream. Maybe things would go right from now on. She walked back to the bed and sat down on it. She felt so happy and content. Solo couldn’t remember the last time she had been able to eat as much as she wanted, if ever.

“So what’s your name?” asked Saria. Solo came was startled out of her daydream when Saria asked that question. Solo gazed into Saria’s soft, caring face.

“Um...Solo,” she mumbled. Saria gave a warm smile that made Solo feel better.

“That’s cute. I’m Saria,” she said, holding out her hand towards Solo. “Where do you live?” Saria asked innocently, not knowing about Solo’s origins. Link tried to silently gesture that that wasn’t the right question to ask, but he failed. Link was not very good when it came to subtlety. In cases like this, Link was about as subtle as a lead pipe.

“I...don’t...have...a home,” Solo murmured, feeling ashamed.

Saria gave a surprised look. She had never known anyone who didn’t have a home before. Saria’s

whole world were these few cottages in the Kokiri Forest. Even with the stories Link told her, she was still unaware of many of the facts in the outside world. She couldn't understand how someone couldn't have a house. "You mean...you don't have a house? Your homeless?" asked Saria. Solo nodded, feeling sorry for herself again. "What about family?" Solo shook her head. Saria was heartbroken. This poor girl didn't have a house or a family. It baffled Saria that Solo could even survive.

"You don't have to worry about that anymore," Link said. Saria and Solo both looked at him. Link decided to take the initiative now. He wasn't going to let Solo go back to the streets and starve. It was wrong for him to let someone go back to those conditions when he could easily prevent it. "You can stay here with us."

Solo was amazed. Was she really hearing this? Did Link just offer to let her live here? No one had ever offered her shelter before. She wondered if there were any strings attached. "You want me to live here?"

"Well, I'm certainly not going to let you go back on the street," said Link. "So yes, you can stay here with us. I want you to be here." Link thought about the dream he had, and about the girl. He knew now that Solo was the girl from his dream. It was fate that brought them together, and Link wanted to find out why.

"I don't have any problem with her staying here," said Saria. "It would be interesting to finally have a new person around here. It gets a little boring." Saria smiled at Solo, and she smiled back. "But there's one thing we need to do first." Link and Solo gave Saria questioning looks. "I don't want to sound insulting or anything...but you need a bath." Solo looked down at herself. She was dirty and smelly, and she was used to people pointing that out. But she wasn't being insulted by Link and Saria, they cared about her. Solo knew that she needed a bath, she rarely bathed at all. The closest she ever came to it was swimming in the river. She came to the realization that she wasn't in her disgusting dress anymore; she was clad only in the blanket that she had been sleeping on.

"Okay," Solo replied. "Where are my..."

"Clothes?" Saria interrupted. "When we found you, you were soaking wet and shivering. We had to get you out of that wet dress. I'm sorry we didn't have anything else to dress you in. Besides, the dress you had on was all grungy and worn out. We'll get you some new ones." Solo felt ecstatic, not only had she gotten food and a place to live, she was also going to get new clothes. Clothes that were clean and didn't smell like garbage. "Now we have the problem of what to actually dress you in. I don't think my clothes will fit you..." Saria eyed Link up and down to gauge his size. Even though Solo was fairly thin, she was about the same height as Link. "Link, you could give her some of your clothes. You two are about the same size."

"Huh?" he said.

"You and Solo. You're the same height. She would fit in your clothes. She's too big for mine. You wouldn't have any problems with wearing a boy's clothes, would you Solo?"

"Um, no. I don't mind," replied. She was happy to have any clothes at all. She wondered if she would get shoes, too.

"Come on, I'll take you outside to the spring," said Saria, taking Solo's hand. She self-consciously kept the blanket wrapped around her like a cloak as she walked out to the balcony. Solo was faced with a small dilemma when she reached the ladder. She tightly wrapped the blanket around her chest just under her arms. She climbed down the ladder without the blanket falling off. At least she could keep her modesty. Saria led her over to her house where she retrieved a large towel, a cup with goop in it, a bowl, and a bar of soap. Solo then followed Saria through the clearing of the Kokiri village and to the edge of the dense forest.

There was a narrow trail worn into the ground that lead to another small clearing. Solo was amazed when she saw what was just inside the forest. There was a large pond surrounded by smooth stone platforms. Stone cliffs about thirty feet high bordered one end of the pond. It looked as if the pond had been carved out of the rock. The stone surrounding the pond was smooth, and not rocky. This whole area stood in stark contrast to the trees and forest that completely surrounded it. Saria walked up to Solo and pulled the blanket off of her. "Go on, get in," said Saria. Solo walked to the water's edge and put her foot

in to test the temperature. It was warm, very warm. She walked into the pond which started out shallow and grew to be about ten feet deep in the center.

Solo sat down in the warm water and basked in the steam coming off the surface. This area was a natural geothermal spring. The whole area was volcanically active because of Death Mountain. This hot spring just happened to come up out of the ground in this area. All of the Kokiri thought it was magic and didn't question it. Link knew there was a more rational explanation, but he didn't bother with his people's beliefs. The Kokiri greatly enjoyed this area, especially during the winter. During the hot summer months, they played in the cool stream and pond. During colder times, such as today, they bathed in the hot spring.

Saria took off her slippers and waded into the spring until she was thigh-deep. Solo splashed and played in the water. She had never been in a hot spring like this. She had never even bathed in warm water before. "Here, take this," said Saria, handing the bar of soap and a washcloth to Solo. She took the items and examined them. She sniffed the off-white bar of soap. It smelled like roses. She held the cloth and the soap, unsure of what exactly she was supposed to do. Was there a right way to using this kind of soap? Saria saw Solo's confusion and showed her how to lather the soap with the washcloth. When Solo realized how simple it was, she took the soap and cloth and began to wash herself.

"I'll wash your hair for you," said Saria. She dunked the bowl in the water and then dumped it on Solo's head. She repeated the process a few more times until her hair was completely soaked. "My, my. This is going to be a challenge." Saria looked at Solo's hair. It was oily and soiled. The strands were tangled and stuck together due to years of neglect. It would be difficult for her to wash Solo's hair. She had never seen a person with so much hair. It went all the way down her back to just above the backs of her knees. Although it was very dirty, this hair had great potential. It would be beautiful when it was clean. Saria grabbed handful of the gelatinous shampoo and gently massaged it into Solo's hair.

"What is that stuff?" asked Solo.

"It's shampoo. It'll clean your hair and make it nice and pretty. I made it myself from the plants in the forest. It'll make your hair smell nice, too." Solo could smell the fragrance coming from the shampoo on her head. It was a fruity smell that was reminiscent of peaches and apples. Combined with the rose-scented soap, Solo was in heaven. She would no longer have to deal with the shame and humiliation of the way she smelled because she never bathed. Saria continued to massage the bundles of hair, Solo wincing whenever she pulled at a tangle. Still, Solo enjoyed the feeling of being clean. She had never gotten so much attention.

"That'll do," said Saria as she rinsed the soap off Solo's hair. "Okay, we're done now." Solo stepped out of the spring and Saria wrapped her in the large towel that she brought with them. Saria then led Solo back down the trail and to her house. They entered the house and Solo stood there while Saria put all the stuff away. She saw that Link had placed a set of his clothes on her bed for Solo to wear. Saria took another towel and dried Solo's hair. "There's some clothes for you to wear," said Saria. "I hope they're okay."

Solo smiled and walked over to the bed. She began to dress herself in Link's clothes. Saria smiled as Solo put on each piece of clothing. Solo fiddled with the belt and Saria helped her fasten it. Saria stood back from Solo and assessed her appearance. "Oh, you look so cute in that," commented Saria. "I never thought a girl would look good in Link's clothes. Now go over in that chair and I'll fix your hair for you." Solo walked over to the vanity and sat in the chair in front of the mirror. Saria stood behind Solo and worked on her hair. She finished drying Solo's hair and then grabbed a brush from the table. She gently brushed Solo's long, golden locks and smoothed out the rest of the tangles. "So, how do you want me to do your hair?" Saria asked.

"Um...I..." mumbled Solo.

"Never mind, I'll just leave it down. I think it'll look nice that way." Saria grabbed a pair of scissors from the table, and Solo got a frightened look on her face. She didn't want Saria to cut off her hair. She liked her hair. She didn't want it cut off, it was the only thing she had. "Don't worry, I'm just going to even it out a little," said Saria in a reassuring voice. Saria quickly trimmed Solo's bangs and evened out the hair at the bottom. She stood back and admired her work. Solo's hair looked better than she thought it would. The flowing, golden hair shone in the light coming through the window. "Hmm...it's missing

something,” said Saria. With a burst of inspiration, Saria dug through one of the drawers in the dresser. She rummaged around until she found the object she was searching for. She pulled out a green bow and tied it to the top of Solo’s hair. “Perfect,” commented Saria. Solo stood up and looked at herself in the mirror. She looked like a whole new person, a person who was clean and beautiful, a person who was happy.

“Come on, let’s go show Link how nice you look,” suggested Saria. Solo smiled ecstatically and followed Saria to Link’s house. She was so happy to finally look and smell nice for once. After all the ridicule she had gotten over the years, this was a welcome change. When she had gotten the chance to bathe, it felt like a whole lifetime of sorrow and depression had been washed away. Not only had her body been cleansed, but her soul as well. When they entered Link’s house, they saw him lying on his bed and staring at the ceiling. He sat up when they walked in.

Link eyed Solo up and down. She looked a far cry better than she had just a few minutes prior. She looked like a whole new person. “Wow,” said Link, that being the only word he could think of. He thought that Solo looked pretty good in his clothes. He never realized that she had such beautiful hair. It now looked so shiny and clean. It was no longer tangled and frizzy like it was when he first met her. “You look really nice,” Link added. Solo smiled, she had never been so happy. She had just stumbled across these people by accident and they took her in. They gave Solo everything that she had always wanted. She had food, clothes, shelter, and friends. But a thought still bothered her in the back of her mind, the thought that this was all fake. She hoped that this wasn’t another one of her dreams, that she wouldn’t wake up just as her life was beginning to improve. Solo could only think of one way to respond to this kindness. She ran up to Link and hugged him, tears flowing down her cheeks. She clutched him tightly, not wanting to ever let go. He was the one who rescued her from hell. “What’s wrong?” asked Link, wondering what was upsetting Solo.

“Nobody has ever been nice to me,” she replied. She continued to hold her arms around Link. He was the boy she dreamed about, the boy she waited for all these years, the boy who saved her from a life of misery.

Zelda sat was lying on the bed in her room. She was so bored today. There was nothing to do in the castle. Impa was busy doing paperwork and her father was endlessly talking with his advisors and staff members. Zelda wanted something to do. She thought of Link, which was the only thing she did at these times. She wondered what he was doing right now. They had planned on him coming over tomorrow and having lunch. She didn’t want to wait that long. Maybe she could go over to Link’s house right now and surprise him. She knew that Link didn’t like surprises, but she was so bored.

Zelda got up out of her bed and wandered down the hallway to find Impa. She wasn’t in her room; Zelda ran downstairs to the administrative wing to see if Impa was down there somewhere. Zelda cracked open all the doors and peeked inside the offices. So far she only met with sighs from the people in the offices. She opened one more door and saw Impa standing in front of a desk, talking to one of the officials. Zelda quietly walked in and prepared to put on her puppy-dog-face. Zelda cleared her throat as a subtle way to get attention. Impa and the official kept talking, paying no attention to her. Zelda tugged on Impa’s shirt, and she turned around to see what the little girl wanted.

“What is it honey?” asked Impa with a sigh.

Zelda wore the cutest face she could muster. “I was wondering if you could take me somewhere.”

“Where?” asked Impa, trying not to show her annoyance at the interruption.

“Well, I was bored and I wanted you to take me to Link’s house.” Even though they trusted Zelda to go to Link’s house any time she wanted, she still wasn’t allowed to go by herself. Someone had to escort her there. And since Link wasn’t here, she needed Impa to take her.

“Can’t it wait a while, honey? I’m really busy right now.”

“Oh please...” Zelda begged. “It’s so boring here,” she whined. Zelda began to cry fake tears. “Please, I promise I’ll never ask for anything again as long as I live. You can make it my birthday present. Please,

please, please, please?” Zelda completed the melodrama by kneeling and begging.

Impa sighed when she looked at Zelda’s face. Why did that girl have to be so cute when she wanted something? Impa had work to do, but she could spare a few minutes. She didn’t like spoiling Zelda like this, but it was easier than listening to her throw a temper-tantrum. “Oh fine,” said Impa. “I have some stuff that I have to do right this minute. Do you think you could wait for a half-hour or so?”

Zelda gave a pouting face. “Fine,” she said. “Do you promise you’ll take me in thirty minutes?”

“I guess,” Impa said grudgingly. “You go upstairs to your room and I’ll come get you when it’s time to go.” Zelda smiled and ran happily back up to her bedroom. She was finally going to do something today. She hoped that Impa would really come and get her in half an hour. When grown-ups said something was going to take a certain amount of time, it usually took ten times longer. Zelda looked around her room and wondered if she should bring anything with her. She couldn’t spend the night because she was looking forward to spending time with her father tonight. She rarely got to see him nowadays because of all the work he had to do. Zelda hoped that Link wouldn’t mind her coming without knowing ahead of time. She leaned back on her bed and counted the swings of the pendulum dangling from the grandfather clock in the corner of her bedroom. It would only be a little while until she could go and see Link.

Chapter Three: Love Will Leave You Crying

Solo had cried in Link’s arms for what seemed like an eternity. Her tears ended up wetting the front of Link’s tunic, but he didn’t mind. Seeing her like this almost made him want to cry. Solo looked so sad and upset, but she was actually happy. She just had to let out her depressing emotions to make room for the happiness that was beginning to fill her soul. This boy cared for her, and she found that almost overwhelming. She had been so used to being shunned and neglected, she didn’t know how to react when people were nice to her. Weeping was the only way she could think of to express herself.

Solo finally quieted. She sniffled and looked up at Link, her face wet with tears and red from crying. She expected to see a look of annoyance on Link’s face. Instead, she saw compassion and love. His striking blue eyes gazed into hers, giving her a sense of peace and calm. Solo saw a single tear run down Link’s face. He raised his hand and quickly brushed it away. Solo stood up and wiped off her face with her hands. “I...I’m sorry. I just got a little overwhelmed,” she mumbled, apologizing in case she had upset Link.

“It’s okay,” Link said in caring, empathic voice. “I understand.” Those were all the words that were necessary. Link’s expression told her everything. Link was overwhelmed by the emotions he was feeling. Seeing Solo’s display had made him reconsider his whole outlook on life; it changed his perspective on everything. He saw in Solo’s eyes what true poverty was. It was difficult for him to understand how this girl could be so full of emotion when she had been so poor in life. Her destitution hadn’t taken away her spirit and her hopes. He began to feel trouble by a new feeling he was having. Link couldn’t quite put his finger on it nor describe it. It was a feeling of compassion...of love. He loved her. He had no idea why, but he did. His mind began racing with thoughts about the implications of this new feeling. He loved Zelda; she was his life. But now he had feelings for this girl. Maybe he didn’t love Zelda as much as he thought he did. After all, Zelda didn’t fill that void in his soul. Solo filled this void. For the first time in his life, he felt complete. This girl seemed to give him something that he had been yearning for. He pushed those thoughts out of his mind. He couldn’t betray Zelda like that. Zelda was the one he loved; there wasn’t room for anyone else. He would try to be friends with Solo, like he was with Saria. Yes, that would enable him to love Solo without betraying Zelda.

Solo walked over to Link’s bed and sat down on it. It was so soft and comfortable. She remembered how tired she was. She wanted to sleep now, to go to sleep without worries for the first time in her life. “Is it okay...if I take a nap?” Solo asked sheepishly. She was still no good at making requests, even

simple ones.

Link brought himself out of his racing thoughts to answer her question. “Oh, sure,” he replied. “You probably need the sleep. You do look a little tired. Are you comfortable? Do you need another blanket, or some pillows?” He scrambled around the bed, fetching an extra pillow and a blanket from a drawer. He held them up and presented them to Solo.

“No, I’m fine,” she said, lying back on the soft mattress. “I just want to rest for a while.”

“Okay,” Link said, putting the blanket and pillows back. He went over to the bed to make sure Solo was comfortable. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she began to drift into restfulness. It made her feel special to see Link fussing over her. “I’ll come wake you up when dinner’s ready,” he said quietly. Solo smiled and nodded, not quite awake. She allowed the sweet embrace of sleep to engulf her, and closed her eyes. Link saw the peaceful look on her face. At least he didn’t have to see her in pain anymore. Link quietly exited his house, careful not to wake the sleeping girl. He gazed at the sky as he made his way over to Saria’s house. The storms had finally passed, blue sky was starting to emerge near the horizon.

Link entered Saria’s house and sat down at the table where she was already seated. She had been waiting for him. “So?” Saria asked.

“She’s sleeping,” Link replied. “She was really tired, she needs it.”

“That’s good. Maybe she can get some real rest now.” They both sat silently for a while, thinking about what had happened today.

“I’ve been thinking about Solo’s life,” said Saria, finally. “I just can’t imagine a person being homeless and having no family.”

“I felt that way, too,” said Link. “I didn’t know that there were homeless people in a place so close to me. I think I’m gonna get a whole new perspective on life.”

“What were you saying earlier, about Solo being the girl you saw in your dream?” asked Saria.

Link sighed, he couldn’t hide any of his feelings from Saria. “She *is* the girl from my dream. I know that we’ve been brought together for a reason, I just don’t know what that is. I felt something just before Solo went to sleep. Remember that empty feeling I told you about? Well, I don’t have it anymore. When she was crying in my arms, the feeling went away. It’s like we were meant to be together.” Link took a deep breath and tried not to betray his emotions, he had to be calm. “Now I’m not sure about Zelda anymore. I thought I loved her so much, but now I think I love Solo, too. I...I don’t know what to do. I’m so confused.”

Saria sighed. This definitely a big problem for Link. She knew how much Link and Zelda loved each other. Now Link thought he loved Solo; Zelda would be really upset if she found out about this. Saria couldn’t imagine the emotional turmoil that Link was going through right now. He’s being torn between two girls, and he doesn’t know which one he loves. “You know, love isn’t always so clear-cut. It’s not something that can be stamped, categorized, and easily-referenced.”

“But I love Zelda, and I don’t want to betray her. I can’t devote myself to two people. What should I do?” Link was desperate for a solution. He had been so confused about everything lately. What was once clear-cut and black-and-white became gray and fuzzy. Nothing seemed to be easily definable anymore. He thought the one constant in his life, the one thing he could always count on, was Zelda. He knew that he was devoted to her and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. But now his feelings for her were starting to blur. He wasn’t sure if he loved Zelda unconditionally anymore. Solo introduced a totally new variable that threw his entire emotional state out of balance. He sighed again, how could he solve this new problem?

“I’m not sure what you should do,” said Saria. “Maybe for now you should just try to be friends with Solo. I’m sure a solution will present itself eventually. You just have to have faith. In the meantime, I don’t think you should tell Zelda about this. She might overreact.”

“Yeah, I think you’re right,” sighed Link. He had always thought that he could tell Zelda anything, no matter what it was. But he wasn’t sure that he could tell Zelda about this problem. She might think he didn’t love her anymore. He was still sure that he loved her, but he didn’t want Zelda to think otherwise. Of course, she would probably find out anyways. They had a connection on the spiritual and emotional level, he couldn’t hide his feelings for her. He just hoped that she would understand.

Growing increasingly agitated, Zelda paced back and forth through her room. She looked at the clock, it was almost three in the afternoon. It had been nearly two hours since Impa said that she would only take thirty minutes. Zelda wondered why grown-ups had such a warped sense of time. They always took longer than they said they would. Zelda pondered whether or not she should go find Impa and whine some more, but decided not to. Instead, she just moped around the room and mused to herself. *Why do grown-ups always take so long?* she thought. *Impa said she would take a half-hour, it's been almost two. I just wanted one thing and she has to make me wait forever. It's her job to take care of me, I should be her main priority. I wonder what Link's doing. I hope he doesn't mind me coming over unannounced. I wonder if I should bring him a present. It's been a while since I've given him something, maybe he might like a gift. What could I give him? I don't want to smother him or make it look like I'm desperate for his attention. Maybe I should give him something small.*

Zelda tried to think of a small gift she could give to Link. There had to be something around here. Then she thought, Link probably wouldn't like anything that she had off-hand. Boys didn't like girls' stuff. Of course, Zelda never had much "girl stuff". She had a collection of stuffed animals, but that was it. She never liked playing with dolls or playing dress-up. People called her a "tomboy", but she wasn't quite sure what that meant. She wasn't a boy, so why did people call her that? Zelda shook her head, she couldn't let her mind wander again. She looked at the table in the corner of her room. There was a small glass sculpture on the desk. It was an elaborately decorated, green-tinted frog. Zelda had bought this item when she was in the market one day. At the time, she thought it looked cool. But after a while, it became just another piece of clutter in her already messy room. *I wonder if Link would like this,* she thought. *He probably likes frogs. Boys like dirty slimy things like that. He might enjoy having a frog sculpture. I can tell him it's a good luck charm.*

Zelda picked up the delicate glass paperweight and examined it. It was made from leaded glass and was delicately engraved with remarkable detail; it almost looked real. A million points of light sparkled inside the frog as Zelda held it up to the light. Yes, he'll like this. Zelda went to the bed and sat down, the frog gripped tightly in her hand. Waiting, she hated waiting. Impa always took forever.

Then, as if on cue, Impa opened the door and walked into Zelda's bedroom. "Finally," Zelda said in an annoyed voice. "What took you so long?" she complained. "I was waiting forever."

Impa put her hands on her hips to show her dissatisfaction. "Well I'm sorry *your highness,*" said Impa in a sarcastic voice. "But I had a lot of work to do. And I don't appreciate your bugging me for something every five minutes." Zelda did whine an awful lot, more than she realized. Zelda was the princess, but she still had to listen to Impa. "We can go now. Are you ready?"

"Uh-huh," Zelda said happily, quickly making her way to the door.

Impa saw the green figurine clutched in Zelda's hand. "What is that you're holding in your hand?" asked Impa.

"Oh, that's just a present for Link," replied Zelda, holding the glass frog to Impa's face. "You think he'll like it? Because I don't want to give him something if he's not gonna like it." Zelda started to think twice about her choice of a gift. What if Link didn't like it?

"I think that's cute," Impa replied, trying to reassure Zelda. "Link is crazy about you. He'd like a present from you even if it was a bowl of mud. I'm sure he'll like that little sculpture." Zelda smiled, Impa was right. Link always liked the presents she gave him, no matter what they were. Zelda followed Impa as she walked through the castle and outside. Zelda was happy that she was going to go to Link's house. She wondered what they would do when she got there. She hoped he was there and wouldn't be annoyed by her coming unannounced. They could just sit there and talk. She didn't care what they did, she just wanted to be with him.

Impa and Zelda walked over to the stable, and Impa prepared on of the horses. "Let's hurry up and get this over with," said Impa as she climbed onto the horse's saddle. "I've got a lot of work to do." Impa took Zelda's hand and helped her onto the saddle. Zelda positioned herself comfortably in front of Impa.

Impa tugged at the reins, and the horse began to walk out of the stables and down the path. It would be only a few minutes before Zelda was at Link's house.

Still sitting at the table in Saria's house, Link thought about his emotional predicament. He still hadn't thought of any ideas. He didn't know what to do. He still loved Zelda, but he seemed to love Solo too. Whom should he choose? The thoughts running through his mind were starting to drive him mad. He needed time to relax.

"Maybe you don't *really* love Solo," said Saria. "You might just feel sorry for her. You could just feel bad and think that you love her when you really don't."

Link thought about that one. It made a lot of sense. Solo led such a horrible life and Link felt sorry for her. Maybe he was mistaking sympathy for love. Or maybe what he really wanted was simply friendship. That had to be it. He just wanted to be friends. "You could be right," Link mumbled. "I don't know what I'm feeling right now. I think I'll just go outside for a while to clear my head." Link stood up and began to walk towards the door.

"Where you gonna go?" asked Saria.

"I have no idea," Link replied. "I'm gonna walk around for a while." With that, Link exited Saria's house. He didn't know where he wanted to go. Maybe walking around for a while would help him think more clearly. He slowly walked through the damp grass in the forest's clearing. He looked up at the sky; the storm front had finally moved across the sky and was disappearing below the horizon. Link wished his mood could improve like the weather had. He stopped walking and sat on the ground. He wished he knew what to do.

"When are you coming home?" asked Impa, after Zelda dismounted the horse. They were at the entrance to the Kokiri Forest, and Zelda was waiting to go inside. Of course, Impa had to ask her a myriad of questions first. Why couldn't Impa just trust her to make her own decisions?

"I don't know..." Zelda said. "Maybe around seven...or eight?"

Impa sighed. "Whatever, you just come home before it gets too late. Your father is going to want to see you when he gets back tonight. I trust that Link will take you home so I don't have to come back and get you."

"Of course he'll take me home. He always does. Can I go now?" Zelda was growing more impatient. She wished Impa would quit bothering her and leave.

"All right go. Bye-bye, sweetie. I'll see you later." Impa waved at Zelda as she disappeared into the forest. Impa tugged at the reins and rode back to the castle.

Zelda leisurely strolled through the forest and towards Link's house. For once, the children of the forest didn't give her strange looks. They were finally used to her being here. The Kokiri children began to slowly accept her as one of their own. Zelda stopped at the front of Link's tree house. She hoped that he was home. He often went wandering all over the place. Zelda climbed the ladder and walked through the door. She removed the crystal frog from her pocket and held it tightly.

She saw a figure bulge from beneath the blankets of Link's bed. The rhythmic up-and-down motion indicated that it was definitely a person. A small puff of blonde hair jutted from beneath the blankets near the front of the bed. The blankets and pillow completely covered the sleeping figure's head, save for the small bit of hair sticking out. *He must be sleeping*, thought Zelda. Sleep, that's all Link ever seemed to do. Link was always sleeping whenever she wanted to see him. Of course, she did enjoy the rather difficult task of waking him up. It was both a chore and a pleasure.

Zelda walked up to the bed and shook the figure that was under the covers. A quiet groan came from under the pillow. Zelda shook the person harder, another groan and a slight movement from under the blanket. "Oh come on Link, wake up," whined Zelda. Another groan. "All you ever do is sleep. It's me,

Zelda. Wake up.” Zelda sighed when there was no response. She would have to play hardball if he was going to act like this. Zelda ripped the covers off the bed and revealed the sleeping figure. Solo shot out of the bed and Zelda simultaneously jumped backwards, as two shrill screams echoed through the forest.

Link was sitting on a rock when he heard a loud scream. He stood up to tried to listen to where it came from. It sounded like it was coming from someone near his house. It was definitely a girl who was screaming, maybe Solo was in trouble. For a moment, he wondered if he really even heard that. No, it sounded too real to be a hallucination. He was only a short ways from his house, and the scream sounded like it came from his own house. Link sprinted over the stream and through the grass towards his tree house. The scream had an air of terror and urgency to it.

Link heard additional, quieter shouting coming from the distance as he approached his house. It was definitely coming from his house. Maybe someone was hassling Solo, or somebody scared her. As fast as he could, Link climbed the ladder and ran into his house. He almost let out a scream when he saw what was going on. Solo was backed up in the corner of the bed and Zelda was standing, completely stiff, in front of the bed. Link could feel the tension in this room, as if it could be cut with a knife. He wondered why Zelda was here. Link began to feel sick to his stomach, a sudden fear and dread engulfing him. He didn’t want Zelda to meet Solo like this. He wanted them to be friends. Link knew that Zelda wouldn’t react kindly to this.

“What’s going on?” asked Link. Zelda turned and looked at Link with eyes he had never seen on her before. Her eyes welled with tears of sadness and betrayal. Zelda dropped the glass frog she’d been holding, causing it to fall and shatter into hundreds of pieces. Link approached Zelda and gave calming gestures. “Whoa, don’t worry, I can explain.”

“Well, you better,” Zelda said curtly, putting her hands on her hips and giving a sad and angered expression. She was experiencing something totally new, jealousy. She had never really been jealous before, but now she was. Zelda didn’t want this strange girl coming between her and Link. She almost felt an urge to fight with Solo; but that wouldn’t be right. Link would get mad. Zelda glared at Link, waiting for his explanation.

“It’s not what you think,” he mumbled. His face turned bright red and he was sweating profusely. He had to think of the right way to word this. “She’s just a friend; nothing more.”

“A friend?” asked Zelda. “How come I’ve never seen her before? She’s wearing Kokiri clothes, but I’ve never seen her here. And I know everyone who lives in the forest.” Solo stood still and stared blankly as Zelda eyed her up and down. “And those look like your clothes. Why is she wearing your clothes?”

“Okay, just listen,” Link said, putting his hand on Zelda’s shoulder. “It’s kind of a long story. Earlier today, I was in the market and I saw this girl. She looked familiar so I tried to approach her. But she ran away and I lost track of her. It turns out that she followed me home.”

“Why would she follow you home?” asked Zelda, looking at Solo. Solo lowered her head, trying to avoid eye contact with her.

“That’s a sad story,” Link said. “You see, she doesn’t have anything. She’s poor and homeless. She doesn’t have a family or anything at all. When I saw her, she was wearing a tattered old dress and didn’t even have shoes. That’s why she’s wearing my clothes; they’re the only ones that fit her.”

“She’s...homeless?” Zelda said. Her jealousy was starting to be replaced with sadness and pity. Was this girl really homeless? “I never knew that there were people in my town who were homeless.” Zelda looked at Solo and gave her an apologetic expression. “I’m sorry...I didn’t know. I...I...had no idea that there were people who didn’t have houses.” Zelda sniffled. She was starting to feel guilty about everything that she had. If Zelda had known that there were homeless people in the village, she would’ve gladly given them food and shelter.

“I was going to introduce her to you, but I guess you decided to come over and surprise me. Do you two think you can be friends?” asked Link, looking at both Solo and Zelda.

“I guess so,” Zelda said. Solo nodded. “But you could’ve told me about her before.”

Link sighed. "Geez, I only met her a few hours ago. It's not like I had enough time to run over and tell you. I was going to tell you tomorrow, anyways."

"Okay, fine," Zelda said. "Are you going to introduce me?"

"Oh, yeah. Zelda, this is Solo." Zelda walked over to Solo and shook her hand. Solo breathed a sigh of relief, Zelda wasn't mad at her anymore. "That's kind of a weird name," Zelda commented. "Where'd you get it?"

"Um..." mumbled Solo. "I came up with it myself. I don't have a real name."

"Oh, that's so sad. You're all alone?" Solo nodded. "The name makes sense. It's just kind of depressing that someone is so alone that she would have to name herself."

"And Solo, this is Zelda," said Link. Solo smiled, that name sounded familiar. "She's the princess of Hyrule."

Solo gasped and almost choked when she heard that. Was Link telling the truth? He had to be joking. "Are you serious?" asked Solo. "She doesn't look like a princess. Where's her crown?"

"He's telling the truth," said Zelda. "I have a crown, but I never wear it. I'm not some kind of weird person, I'm just like anyone else."

"Oh okay. You're just not what I imagined when I think of a princess. I always thought that royalty wouldn't want to be around a poor, pathetic person like me. No one has ever reached out to me before. Link was the first person who ever acted like he cared about me. Everyone has always told me to go away, calling me a dirty little runt. I never had any friends." Tears began to come to her eyes. She didn't want to talk about this.

"Um, Solo? Can I ask you a question?" said Zelda.

"Okay, go ahead," she sniffled.

"How exactly did you meet Link? I mean, why did you follow him home in the first place?"

"Well, because I've seen him before," replied Solo. This revelation piqued Link's interest. He gave her an inquisitive look. "I saw him...in a dream."

"You saw me in a dream?" asked Link. "What kind of dream was it?" He wondered if Solo had a dream similar to his.

"I was in a field with lots of pretty flowers. And you and I were playing in the field. A woman told us that we had to go home and find what we lost. When I woke up...I was so sad." Solo tried not to cry. "I wanted to stay there, because my life in the real world was so horrible. But when I found out that the boy in the dream was real, I knew I had to follow him. Link saved me, I know that dream was a sign that my life would get better."

Link stood there, not quite paying attention to Solo's account. He was amazed that she had the same dream as he did. It couldn't be a coincidence, his having the same dream had to mean something. "I had the same dream," Link blurted out, not realizing he was thinking aloud.

"What do you mean?" asked Solo, slightly confused by Link's statement.

"I had the same dream," Link repeated. "The *exact same dream*. Everything you said...it happened in my dream. We had the same dream."

"You dreamed about *her* too?" asked Zelda, giving Link an accusing stare. "What are you doing dreaming about another girl?"

Link sighed. "What? There's nothing I can do about my dreams. I can't control them. That doesn't mean that I don't love you. Don't overreact, it was just a dream."

Zelda thought for a moment. Maybe Link was right. She might have been overreacting. She tended to get jealous whenever she thought someone was trying to take Link away from her. She tried to hide it from Link, but she was extremely possessive of him. She cared about him so much and couldn't bear to lose him. Sometimes Zelda wondered if she was too obsessive over Link. She didn't really care, though. He was the only thing that mattered to her.

"So, what about having the same dream?" asked Solo.

"Well, the dream I had was just like everything you described. The field, the flowers, and the woman. What do you think it all means?" asked Link.

"I think you were destined to save me from the life I had to live," replied Solo. She truly believed that.

She felt such a close bond to Link, part of it was because he took her into his home. But there was something else about him, something she couldn't pinpoint. She knew there was more to him than was on the surface. Solo wondered if she herself was starting to obsess over Link, as Zelda obviously was. "Thank you."

All three stood in silence, mulling over everything they had just said. The awkward silence was broken when Saria climbed the ladder and entered Link's tree house. "What is going on in here?" asked Saria. "I heard some screaming earlier." Saria looked at Zelda and almost winced. She hoped that Zelda hadn't overreacted to Solo being in Link's house.

"Everything's okay now," replied Zelda. "I was just a little startled when I pulled back the covers on the bed and saw her laying there," Zelda said, pointing to Solo.

"Oh, I hope you didn't overreact to seeing Solo here," said Saria, trying to defend Link. She didn't know if it was too late or not. "There's nothing going on. She's just a new friend and..."

"It's okay," interrupted Link, "I explained it to her." Zelda nodded.

"Oh...okay. I'm happy you didn't jump to conclusions, Zelda. Solo? Why don't we go over to my house for a while? Let's leave them alone for a minute." Solo nodded, maybe it was a good idea to let Link and Zelda talk things over in private. Solo followed Saria outside and to her house. When they had left, Zelda sat down on the bed and Link remained standing where he was.

"So, is everything you told me true?" asked Zelda bluntly.

"Of course it is," replied Link. "Why would I lie to you?"

"I don't know. It's just that...when I came into your house and saw that girl sleeping in your bed, I didn't know what to think. I thought maybe she was a new girlfriend you found." Link sat on the bed next to Zelda and put his arm around her.

"What would make you think something like that? I could never replace you with anyone."

"Okay," she sniffled. "I was just worried. When I saw Solo, I thought for a minute that maybe you were just lying to me all along, that maybe there was something about me you didn't like." Zelda stared at the floor in front of her, trying to avoid Link's face.

Link extended his arm and gently turned Zelda's face towards his, so he was looking directly into her eyes. "There's nothing about you that I don't like. You're the most perfect person I've ever met." Zelda blushed. "I could never replace you with Solo or any other person. I love you more than anyone else."

Zelda believed Link's words. She knew that Link loved her, she could feel it. She still wondered what he felt about Solo, though. She could tell that Link felt something about Solo. Maybe it wasn't love, but it was something profound. "I know that you love me," said Zelda. "But what do you feel about Solo? I can tell that you're feeling something for her. I just don't know what it is."

"I don't know, either. But I can tell you that I would never choose her over you. I think Solo is in a completely different category. We were supposed to meet each other for some reason, but I don't know why. But I do know that you and I are supposed to be together like this. And you know that, too. I love you, I'm sorry I caused this whole misunderstanding."

"It's okay, as long as I know that you care about me. Link, do something for me. Will you please tell me that you love me? I want to hear it."

"I love you, Zelda."

Solo sat at the table in Saria's house, with Saria sitting across from her. Solo wanted to have a conversation, but she had no idea what to say. No one had ever really talked to her before, she didn't know how to begin. "So, do you think I got Link in trouble?" asked Solo.

"No, I think he'll be okay," replied Saria. "Zelda will understand. They love each other so much, they couldn't leave each other because of a little misunderstanding. Don't worry, you didn't cause any trouble that can't be fixed." Solo stared at the table, looking saddened. "What's wrong?" asked Saria.

"I don't know..." replied Solo. "I just don't feel right. It's about Link. I have this feeling about him, and I don't know what it is. I feel connected to him."

“Do you love him?” asked Saria bluntly.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what I’m feeling.” Solo didn’t know how she was feeling. She was so used to her emotions being clear-cut and easily defined. She was either happy or sad. But now she felt different. She couldn’t put her finger on the emotions she was experiencing. She didn’t know if she loved Link or not. Solo thought that she would be able to understand her own feelings, but she couldn’t no matter how hard she tried. Maybe she did love Link, but she couldn’t be sure. “I don’t know if I love him. I’m not sure what I should be feeling.”

“I know how you feel,” said Saria. “Do yourself a favor: forget about it. If you really do love him, don’t pursue it. He’s already in love with Zelda and there’s nothing anyone can do to change that. Just try to be friends with him. Don’t try to take him away from Zelda, because he won’t. Believe me, I kept my feelings to myself for too long, and now it’s too late. I can never tell him how I feel.”

“Do you love him, too?” asked Solo.

Saria’s expression turned somber. “I do...I did...a long time ago. Maybe I still do, but I try not to think about it anymore. I kept telling myself to tell him how I feel...but I always postponed it. I kept thinking ‘I’ll tell him tomorrow.’ But once tomorrow finally came, Zelda came into his life. Now I can never tell him, I don’t want to ruin our friendship. I guess I just have to live with it. I don’t care if he doesn’t know how I feel. All that matters to me is that he’s happy. It doesn’t matter if I’m happy.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” said Solo. She felt a closer bond to Saria now. She had revealed something to Solo that she never told Link. Solo knew that she was finally being accepted by someone.

“It’s okay, I’ve never told anyone. Do me a favor, promise me that you won’t tell him I said this. I don’t want him to know. Do you promise?”

“I promise.”

Chapter Four: What Was, and What Could Have Been

After the initial awkwardness had passed, Link, Saria, Solo, and Zelda finally began to get along. Their overall moods improved and they all became instant friends. Zelda was starting to feel that she could be good friends with Solo. Since her talk with Link, she realized that she would never lose him to another girl. Looking back on the way she felt, Zelda realized that she had been overreacting.

Now they were in Saria’s house, about to eat dinner. Zelda had listened to Solo’s account of her terrible life, and it had almost driven Zelda to tears. She was horrified that someone in her kingdom could live such a terrible life. She vowed to ensure that no one else ever had to live like that.

“So, when’s dinner going to be done?” asked Solo hungrily. She couldn’t wait to eat something. It was unusual for her to get used to having regular meals.

“In a few minutes,” replied Link. He was at the stove cooking the two large fishes that he had caught earlier.

Solo looked at the Saria and Zelda, who were sitting at the table with her. Saria had finished making the bread and now she was waiting for Link to finish cooking. Saria was only going to eat her usual salad and vegetables, but she didn’t start eating until everyone had their meals. “How good is Link at cooking?” asked Solo quietly, directing the questions to the other girls.

“He cooks really well,” replied Saria. She leaned over and whispered quietly so Link couldn’t hear. “But he can’t bake at all. The last time he tried to make a loaf of bread, he almost burned the house down.”

Solo tried to stifle her giggle, but failed. She laughed, and Link turned around to look at the giggling girls. He directed a glare towards Saria. “You told her about the time I tried to make bread, didn’t you?” said Link.

“Uh-huh,” replied Saria with a sly smile. “It was so funny, I had to make sure everyone knew.”

“Is he real clumsy, or is he just bad at baking?” asked Solo.

“A little bit of both,” replied Saria.

“Oh he’s not that bad,” said Zelda. “He can be a klutz sometimes, but all boys are like that. What I

like about him is that he's so sweet. He cares about everyone." Link heard Zelda and Saria talking while he continued to cook the meal. He didn't like it when they talked about him while he was in the room, even if they were good comments. He was always very modest, and got embarrassed when people gave him compliments. "Isn't that right my little Linkie-pooh?" said Zelda in baby-talk.

Solo immediately giggled upon hearing that, and Link blushed. "You call him that?" said Solo. She couldn't believe that Zelda had such a cute pet name for him. She quietly giggled when she saw Link's face turn red.

"That's my name for him," said Zelda. She looked over at Link, "You know you like it."

"That's so cute," Solo remarked.

"Dinner's done," said Link, trying to take the attention away from himself. Maybe he could change the subject of their conversation. Link placed one fish fillet on each of three plates. He set the plates in front of Solo, Zelda, and put one at his spot. Link sat down and everyone began to eat their meals.

Solo curiously watched Saria as she ate her salad and sautéed vegetables. "Aren't you having any of the fish?" asked Solo.

"No," replied Saria. "I don't eat meat. I'm a vegetarian."

"Oh," said Solo. She thought it was kind of weird that someone wouldn't want to eat meat. It was, or it used to be, a rare treat when she could have meat. Solo didn't understand why someone would voluntarily choose not to eat meat. Solo didn't care, she had food. And it looked really good. She saw the fork lying next to her plate and grasped it with her left hand. She awkwardly used the utensil to pick at her food and eat it. She had never used a fork before, silverware wasn't one of the things she used when living on the streets.

"You're holding it wrong," said Link, seeing Solo's frustration. She didn't see the point to using a fork, her hands should've been good enough. Link took Solo's hands and showed her how to hold the fork. "See, it's not that hard. You just have to hold it right."

"Okay," said Solo. This utensil wasn't as complicated as she thought it would be. Solo took a large morsel from the fillet and put it into her mouth. The fish tasted better than she imagined it would. It had a sweet, delicate flavor that didn't taste fishy at all. "This is really good," said Solo, her mouth completely full. With increasing speed, Solo ate more and more of the fish. The others watched her as she devoured her fish.

"I've never seen someone eat so fast," remarked Zelda jokingly. Solo ignored the comment and continued eating. She couldn't care less if people made comments about her. Solo shrugged her shoulders. "I always thought Link was a pig because he always ate so fast. But I have to give you the credit for this one." As Zelda was talking, Solo finished the large fish fillet that she had been given.

"It's a new record!" Link said, grabbing Solo's hand and raising her arm high above her head. "Solo's the champion!" Solo smiled; she didn't know that Link thought it was such a big deal that she could eat so fast.

"I don't see what the big deal is," said Solo.

"Link always tries to see how fast he can eat something," said Zelda. "It's like some kind of personal challenge he's taking. I have no idea *why* he does it."

"It's just something I like to do," said Link. "Anyways, this is just further proof that the *left*-handers are better the right-handers."

"Oh boy, here we go," said Saria, sighing.

"What?" said Solo, confused about both Link's statement and Saria's reaction.

"You're left-handed," said Link.

"Yeah, so?" asked Solo, looking at her left hand.

"I've always thought that left-handed people were better than right-handed people," said Link. "You see, almost everyone else is right-handed. That means that you and me are special. Left-handed people are smarter and more creative than right-handed people."

"You always say that," said Zelda. "But you don't have any proof. You're just saying that because lefties are freaks and you're trying to deny it." Zelda gave a sly smile. She was joking, but wanted to get a rise out of Link. He was always talking about forming a left-handed clique, but could never find any other

lefties.

“Silence, you right-handed scum,” said Link in a joking manner. “Don’t listen to them, Solo. They’re just jealous because they’re not left-handed. Now you can be my left hand man...I mean, woman.”

“Okay, that’s fine,” said Solo. “I still don’t see the big deal about being left-handed. Does that mean there’s something wrong with me?”

“No, of course not,” said Link. “The majority of people in the world are right-handed. They all try to force lefties to use their right hands. It’s such an injustice against us. Don’t let anyone tell you you’re bad for using your left hand. Another prejudice against us is myths and legends. In old stories, left-handers are portrayed as evil. It’s just another injustice we have to suffer.”

“Okay, I think you’ve gone on long enough about that,” said Zelda. “You can continue ranting some other time.”

Link stopped talking and leaned over to Solo’s ear. “Right-handed oppression,” he whispered. Solo chuckled. She pushed her empty plate aside and drank some of the milk that Saria had poured earlier. Solo was in a state of bliss, she had never known what it was to like to have a meal with friends, and to have a conversation at the same time. Food had always been nothing more than a necessity, something she had to work for so she could survive. Being here with Link and the others had totally changed her perspective on food. She never thought that something so simple and basic to her existence could be anything more than simply fuel. Now it was something that brought her together with other people. For so many years, stealing food was what alienated her from the rest of the world. She had to avoid people so she wouldn’t get in trouble for theft.

“Saria, can I ask you a question?” said Solo, after a few moments of silence.

“Sure, go ahead,” said Saria with a smiling face.

“What’s that thing floating above your head?” asked Solo, pointing to the glowing fairy hovering just above Saria.

“Oh, you mean my fairy?” replied Saria. Solo nodded. “They’re our guardian fairies. They’re spirits that guide us and protect us in our lives. Every Kokiri has one.”

“Do they talk?”

Link gave loud and purposely sarcastic laugh. Saria glared and answered Solo’s question, “Sometimes they talk. But they usually stay in the background, they act more like spiritual guides. It’s a kind of emotional or almost telepathic link. Each fairy is different, they all have unique personalities. They’re almost like little people. Every Kokiri has one.”

“Then why doesn’t Link have one?” asked Solo bluntly. “He’s a Kokiri, right?”

“Actually, I’m not,” Link answered. Solo’s eyes widened. “For most of my life, I thought I was a Kokiri. But, then I found out that I really wasn’t. Everyone always made fun of me because I didn’t have a fairy. For a while though, I did have one. The Great Deku Tree sent a fairy named Navi to help me fight Ganondorf. She was supposed to give me advice on things, but she basically told me things I already knew. And the stupid thing never shut up, she talked all the time. I was almost glad when she finally flew away.”

“I’m confused,” said Solo. “You had one, then she flew away? And who was Ganondorf?”

“That’s just a small part of a really long story,” said Link. “Do you want to hear it? It’ll take most of the night.” Solo nodded excitedly. She wanted to know everything about Link. Link began to tell Solo a detailed history of his life. He told her everything about his adventures fighting against Ganondorf, and his quest for the Triforce. He told her about the alternate future he experienced, and that he was sent back to the past. Solo was amazed by his story, wondering if it was all true. Hearing this from anyone else, Solo wouldn’t have believed it. But there was something about Link that told her he was telling the truth. So Solo listened, imagining all his amazing adventures as Link recounted the story of his life.

Link and Zelda were walking through Hyrule field, and had finally reached the outer walls of the castle. It was nearly nighttime and they had made it just in time before the guards raised the drawbridge.

A guard waited just inside the walls to escort the princess back through the village and into the castle.

“So, you’re still going to come over tomorrow, right?” asked Zelda. They were standing on the bridge while the guards patiently waited for them to finish their conversation.

“Of course I am,” Link replied. “I would never think of missing a date with you.”

“I have a special surprise planned for you tomorrow,” said Zelda with a crafty grin.

“Ooh, I can’t wait,” said Link, wondering what it was that Zelda had in store for him.

“Why don’t you bring your friend over tomorrow, too?”

“Who, Solo?” asked Link.

“Yes,” replied Zelda. “I think she might really enjoy seeing the castle. And I want to become friends with her. I’m so ashamed of the way I overreacted earlier. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Link insisted. “It was my fault for creating that situation in the first place. I should’ve had her stay at Saria’s house until I could tell you what happened. So, you really want her to come over with me? Won’t that ruin the surprise or something?”

“Yes I want her to come over with you. And don’t worry, the surprise can be for her, too. You’ll both enjoy it. I should better get going, Daddy’s coming home tonight and he’s probably waiting for me. I’ll see you tomorrow, Linkie-poooh.” Zelda gave Link a light kiss on the cheek and ran into the castle. Link waved to her and walked back over the drawbridge and into Hyrule Field.

Link walked briskly through the wide open field towards his home. The crisp night air helped to clear his mind of the disconcerting thoughts. He wondered what he was going to do with Solo. He had promised her that she could live with him. Link wondered if Solo should actually live in his house, or Saria would let her live at her house. Either way, Solo would need a bed. Link would probably have to build a new one for her. The thoughts of the dreams Link had began to haunt him again. He still couldn’t understand why he and Solo had had the same dream. He didn’t even know what the dream meant. When he first saw Solo, he thought that maybe his questions would finally be answered. But finding her had just left more unanswered questions. Link wished he knew what the woman in his dream had meant about finding what he lost. He found Solo, was he going to lose her? Maybe the dream was a premonition; he would lose Solo and then he would have to find her. But that didn’t make any sense. Why would Solo have the same dream? The woman told both of them to find what they lost. Had they both lost the same thing? Link hated not knowing things. He wished that his questions could be answered.

Link walked through the entrance to the Kokiri forest and towards his house. The trip from the castle to his home seemed so much shorter than usual. He walked up to his tree house and climbed the ladder. He walked into the house and saw Solo sitting at the table, smiling.

“You’re finally home,” she said. “What took you so long?”

“I wasn’t gone for *that* long,” Link countered. “You just have a warped sense of time. So what did you do while I was gone?”

“Nothing much. Me and Saria cleaned up and then I came over here to wait for you. Is it okay if I stay here, or do you want me to go somewhere else? Because I don’t want to impose or anything, and it’s not like I’m not used to be shuffled around...”

“Of course you can stay here,” Link interrupted. “I promised before that you could stay here, and I never break my promises. And you’re not imposing on me, I’m glad to have you here.”

Solo smiled, she was happy that Link was so welcoming of her. “Do you have extra covers I can use to put on the floor or something?” she asked.

“You can have the bed,” said Link. “I don’t want you to sleep on the ground anymore. I’ll sleep on the floor.”

“Are you sure? Because I’m used to...”

“It’s okay,” Link insisted. “You sleep on the bed. I don’t mind sleeping on the floor, I’ve done it before.” Upon listening to Link’s insistence, Solo decided that she should accept his gracious offer. She ran and jumped onto the soft, pillowy bed. She pulled the soft, warm blankets over herself and put her head on the pillow. Lying in this bed was so wonderful, it was so much better than the cold, hard cobblestones of the alley.

“Are you comfortable?” asked Link. “Is there anything I can get you?”

“I’m fine,” replied Solo. “I’ve never felt better in my life.”

“Good, I’m glad.” Link went to his dresser and pulled out some spare blankets and a pillow. He laid out a soft comforter on the floor of his house to give him a small amount of padding. Link walked over to the table and blew out the flame in the small oil lamp, plunging the whole house into darkness. He then lay down on the fluffy comforter and pulled the lighter blanket on top of himself. He really didn’t mind sleeping on the floor, even though he might be a little sore in the morning.

“Link?” asked Solo quietly.

“Yes?”

“Thank you for letting me stay here. And thank you for everything. You saved my life, and I owe you mine.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” said Link. “I would’ve done the same thing for anyone.” Both lay silently in the darkness, not sure if the other had fallen asleep. They both thought about how and why they found each other. Neither knew why they felt so important to each other. Link didn’t want to think about this right now, he wanted to go to sleep. He was so tired. “Good night, Solo.”

“Good night, Link.” Solo rolled over on the bed so her back was facing Link. She closed her eyes and fell into the comforting bliss of sleep.

Link walked through the familiar winding streets of the Hyrule Castle village. It was nearly dinner time, and he would definitely get chewed out if he was late. He was wearing a blue vest with a violet shirt underneath. His trousers were supposed to be a dark blue, but were covered in dirt and grass stains from playing outside. He ran faster towards his house, wiping the sweat of his forehead. His blonde hair was short and neatly-trimmed, and he wore no hat just as the other children in the village. Link jogged around the last corner that led to his street. He slowed down as he approached his house. The entire street was a long block of townhouses, each separate building comprised of two smaller units.

Link approached the door to his home stealthily, wondering if he was in trouble for being late. The front of his house was an off-white stucco with dark wood framing. What distinguished it from the rest of the houses were the door and windows. The windows were beautiful, stained glass designs. Each window was a mosaic of beautiful shapes and colors, forming a very interesting, but abstract design. They resembled something that one would see in a temple. They had bought the windows many years ago from some demented glass-maker. He offered such a low price that they couldn’t refuse. The door was made from a beautiful dark wood, which was much more expensive than the doors that others had. The door itself was embossed with a golden symbol of the Triforce, the Royal Seal, the seal of the Royal Army, and the number “33”. The door itself indicated that the person inside was a high-ranking military official.

Link slowly cracked the door open and peeked inside. Warm light and the smell of cooking food tickled his senses. Link walked into the house and closed the door. The blonde woman in the kitchen turned around and gave Link The Look. Link gave an overly-innocent smile. “You’re late,” said the woman.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to,” replied Link. “I was just outside with my friends and I guess we lost track of the time.” Link turned and looked at the into the other room of the house. A young man was sitting in a chair near a lamp, reading something. He had very dark-blond hair and a gentle, kind face. It wasn’t the face one would expect to be on a military officer. He looked up at Link and gave him a slightly accusatory glance.

“You were late again,” said the man. “Your mother was slaving over the stove all day to make this special meal for you. You should’ve been on time.”

“I’m sorry Dad,” Link apologized, “I didn’t mean to...”

“Now, now Batai,” said the woman in a nagging tone. “Let’s not be too harsh on him. He wasn’t *that* late. Besides, *you’re* late more often than Link is. So I don’t think you have any room to complain.”

“Oh come on, Araia,” said Batai. “You know that my job has really hectic hours. Don’t feel bad, Link. We’re not mad at you. Just try to be on time for dinner more often, okay?”

“All right,” Link said. Link and Batai sat down on the table as Araia placed bowls of steaming hot stew in front of them. “Why can’t we have dinner later so I can play longer?” complained Link.

Araia sat down with her own bowl of stew and looked at Link. “Honey, you know you have to spend some time with your family. You can’t go outside and play all day. All the other kids have to come in for dinner, too.”

“But they get to stay out later,” Link whined. “I miss out on all the fun. Why can’t I stay out just a little longer?”

“Because I said so,” stated Batai. “Now quit complaining and eat your dinner.” Link made a purposely loud groan and began to eat his stew. It was a special recipe that his mother only made about once a month; it was Link’s favorite.

“This is really good, Mom,” Link complimented, his mouth half-filled.

“Thank you., honey,” she replied. “And don’t talk with your mouth full, it’s bad manners.” Link sighed. His parents were always on his back about something. It seemed like they were always lecturing him about manners and etiquette. Link didn’t see any point to all that stuff, but he had to do it anyways; he didn’t want to make his parents mad. Link looked around the kitchen and his house. He looked at his loving parents who sat across from him.

Link looked down at his bowl of stew and put the spoon down. All of a sudden, he didn’t feel hungry anymore. A feeling of confusion and dread overcame him. There was something wrong with this place, something he couldn’t quite put his finger on. “This is all wrong,” Link said, thinking aloud. He stood up and looked at the two adults sitting at the table, his parents. “I’m not supposed to be here. None of this is real.” The feeling of dread was overpowering. Memories began to flood back to him. This wasn’t his house and his family. None of this felt right. Everything here was wrong, he could see that now. *Why am I here?* he thought to himself.

It is a vision of what could have been, said a voice, sounding as if it was inside his own mind. Link watched as the house and his parents faded into a brilliant flash of whiteness. The whiteness became blinding, and then subsided to reveal a beautiful meadow. It was the same meadow he had seen in his dream. The smell of the blooming flowers, and the sounds of the chirping birds flooded his senses. It was so peaceful here. The feelings of dread and confusion subsided into bliss. This was better.

“I knew you would come here sooner or later,” said a female voice from behind him. Link turned around to see the blonde-haired woman slowly approaching him. It was the same woman that had been his mother a few minutes ago. It was also the same woman Link had seen in his dream.

“Who are you?” asked Link.

The woman stopped when she was directly in front of him. She put her hand on Link’s shoulder and smiled. “You know who I am. I am the one you’ve been looking for.”

“Are you...my mother?”

“What do your emotions tell you?” asked the woman. Link wasn’t sure of the answer to that question. He felt a bond with this woman, but he wasn’t sure if she was his mother. He had never even known his mother. “I have something important to tell you, and I can only say it one time, right here, right now. You have come closer to what you’re looking for, but not close enough. You have that empty feeling inside of you, don’t you?” Link nodded, he was familiar with the emptiness. “The only way that emptiness can be filled is if you look hard. Search for the one you have lost.”

“Are you the person I lost?” asked Link.

“Yes and no. I am one of many. If you can find me, then all your questions will be answered. Search for what I have left behind, for what I have left for you.”

“What? What did you leave behind? Where is it? How do I find out where it is?”

“Patience, my son. I cannot tell you exactly where it is. Ask people, find out about me. Search into my history, then you will know where to look. Seek and you shall find.” The woman turned around and prepared to leave. Link ran up to her and stopped her from going.

“Wait, what do the dreams mean? Can you tell me that?”

The woman smiled. “You’ll find out what the dreams mean. They’re telling you more than you think. Remember your dreams, and you will find out everything you need to know.” The woman turned around

and walked until she vanished from sight. Link stood in the open meadow, utterly confused about the statements he'd just heard. He had no idea what to do now. He would have to search like the woman said. His only problem was where to begin.

The little girl was lying in her bed on the second story of the building. She was about four years old, and had long blonde hair and beautiful, vibrant blue eyes. She wasn't asleep like she was supposed to be. Sometimes the girl just couldn't sleep at night because she was too sad. She was happy to have a place to live, but she wished she had a family. She opened her eyes and looked around the large dormitory hall. There were two rows of ten beds, each one filled with a sleeping child. This was one large bedroom for the girls. The boys' bedroom was behind a large wall at the end of the room. The girl looked out the second-story window that was above the bed across from her. It looked like a beautiful night, she wished she could be outside. But the grown-ups never let the children go outside at night.

The girl looked at the other sleeping children. These other orphans were her brothers and sisters, and they were they only world she knew. The rest of the children in the town never wanted to associate with the orphans. So this girl only had the children in her orphanage to play with. She sat up and looked around the dark room. All of the other girls were sleeping, she had no one to talk to. Of course, if she did talk, she would probably get yelled at by the grown ups. She laid her head back on the pillow. She might as well try to get a little sleep tonight. As she closed her eyes, she began to smell something. It smelled like someone downstairs was starting up the stove. It was the familiar smell of burning firewood. They were probably going to make breakfast soon. That meant that she wouldn't have much more time to sleep. She closed her eyes and tried to sleep.

What seemed like moments later, the girl woke up once again. The smell was a lot stronger now, and didn't smell like the firewood in the stove. It was a strong, foul, burning smell. She opened her eyes, and closed them immediately. She rubbed her eyes to try to relieve the terrible burning sensation. She squinted to see the whole room filled with thick, acrid smoke. She coughed and hacked, trying not to breathe the hot vapors. She got off her bed and crawled across the floor to the bed next to her. The stinging smoke was beginning to make her feel dizzy and lightheaded. She felt so tired now. She stopped crawling as she fell into a fit of violent coughing and hacking. She finally managed to reach the bed next to her. The girl could only see a few feet in front of her face because of the smoke. She climbed onto the bed and shook the girl who was lying there.

"Wake up!" said the girl. "What's happening?" The little girl continued to shake the sleeping figure on the bed. "Please, help me!" There was no response. She climbed onto the bed and bent over the older girl who was on the bed. She moved the girl's head and looked at her face. The little girl screamed at what she saw. The older girl's face was a slightly blue shade, and completely devoid of life. The little girl slapped the older girl's face, but received no response.

The little girl climbed off the bed and onto the floor. She ducked down underneath her bed. The smoke was becoming even thicker, and the temperature was rapidly increasing. It was so hot in here. The girl saw bright orange flames flare up outside the window. The building was on fire, and she had no idea what to do. She continued to hide under the bed, hoping someone would help her. The girl covered her ears to the deafening roar that seemed to fill the entire house. There was a loud popping and cracking sound as the floor a few feet in front of her disintegrated.

The girl screamed and fled from underneath her bed. Massive tiers of flames roared up through the hole in the floor, singeing the girl's bangs and almost burning her face. The heat was unbelievably intense, and the girl ran to the opposite side of the room to escape it. The flames waved and parted, moving like a living being. The tips of the fire touched the ceiling of the dormitory room and spread over the ceiling. The black and orange fire traveled over the ceiling like water spilling on a floor. The heat became stifling as the living flames caressed the underside of the roof. There was another deafening crash as a massive roof beam fell from its position on the ceiling and crashed through the floor, widening the hole.

The girl screamed and curled into a ball. She could barely breathe now. She could feel the smoke

burning her throat and lungs, tears flooding from her eyes which felt like they were on fire. The heat was more than any she had ever experienced. The girl felt like she was going to burst into flames. She felt a vibration underneath her feet, and heard a loud cracking sound. The cracking grew into a roar as the floor beneath her disappeared. For what seemed like an eternity, the girl fell through the smoke-filled air. She landed hard on the ground, knocking all of the air from her lungs. No matter, she couldn't breathe the acrid air anyways. She tried to crawl out of the building, but the brilliant frames blocked her only exit. She looked up to see the ceiling above her crumble and collapse. She covered her head as a barrage of hot cinders and fragments of wood pelted her from above. In a split second, the girl looked up and saw a beam fall from the ceiling. The beam fell, coming ever closer to her. The girl tried to move out of the way, but it was too late. The corner on the edge of the beam slammed into her head, ripping a huge gash in her scalp and face.

The girl tried to scream, but there was no air in her lungs. She tried to stand, but immediately stumbled and hit the ground. She crawled across the floor as more rubble crashed around her from above. Her sight was blinded by the thick smoke and the blood flowing from the gash in her head. She crawled over the mountains of debris that piled in front of her. She felt something soft as she climbed over the debris, it was the charred corpse of one of the girls she lived with. She had just talked to this girl hours earlier, now she was dead. The little girl continued to crawl. She saw a small opening ahead of her. The smoke swirled out a large hole in the wall. She could see the night sky through the hole in the wall. She crawled, almost passing out from the lack of air. As she poked her head through the hole, more debris collapsed and crashed into her right leg. She made a breathless scream as she struggled to pull her leg from under the burning rubble. She pulled one more time, and her leg came free. The glowing cinders created a huge burn on the side of her leg.

The girl crawled a few feet from the building and collapsed onto the ground. She inhaled the cool night air, and coughed violently as she tried to expel the toxins from the acrid smoke. She turned and looked at what was once her home. Huge orange flames spewed from the pile of burning wood. The flames seemed to go on forever into the dark night sky. She stood, and stumbled across the cold ground. She ran as fast as her trembling legs could carry her. She had to get away from this place, this scene of horror and death. She ran into the thick forest that was only a few tens of yards from the burned building. She ran behind a large tree and collapsed. She lay face first in the cold mud, watching her home turn into a blazing inferno. She saw a myriad of townspeople run to the burning building, some of them trying to form a primitive bucket-brigade. But the girl knew it was too late to do anything. She watched her home burn, and her family die in the roaring flames. She lay her soot-stained, blood-covered face in the mud and lost consciousness.

Link woke up with a start. This was the most unusual dream he'd had. He found out who the woman was, it had to be his mother. That dream had been so real, he felt like he was actually there. It was more than a dream, it was a vision. He had seen something important, but he wasn't sure what it was. The dream had been more vivid than anything he had ever experienced before. For the first time, Link was beginning to understand the dream he had before. He now knew what he was looking for: his parents. He had to find his parents. But they were dead, and he had no idea how to find out anything about them. Are there any people that knew his parents? If so, who could he ask? His revelation only left more unanswered questions.

Link's thoughts were interrupted by the noise coming from the bed next to him. Solo was tossing and turning in her bed, making desperate and distressed sounds. She rolled over again and started to mumble. Link couldn't quite understand what she was saying. Judging by the tone of her voice, Link guessed that she was having a nightmare, a very bad one. She tossed wildly again and started to scream. "No..." she mumbled. Link was becoming more concerned. "No...help..." Solo flailed her arms wildly and tossed even more. Link stood up and looked down at Solo. She looked so scared, Link wondered if he should wake her up. But someone once told him that it was better to leave a person who was having a nightmare

asleep. As much as it pained him to do so, Link decided to let her sleep. She rolled over and screamed again, a scream of sheer terror. It sounded as if she was being tortured. “Dead...they’re all dead!” she screamed. “Somebody help me!”

Solo let out a horrified scream and awoke in a distraught and anxious state. “There all...dead,” she whispered, nearly out of breath because of screaming. “Everyone’s...dead. It’s all gone,” she said, sobbing.

“What’s wrong?” asked Link, deeply concerned. “Who’s dead?”

“They’re all gone...” she said, crying almost silently with a steady stream of tears coming down her face.

“It was just a dream,” said Link in a soft, comforting voice. “You’re safe here. Nobody’s dead.”

Solo looked at her surroundings, as if she was exploring a new place. Slowly, Link could see the expression on her face turn from confusion to understanding. The dream she had seemed so real, the sounds, the sights, and the colors were almost tangible. It had seemed more real to her than reality. Solo felt like she’d had the dream before, but she wasn’t sure. It was all so real. The memory of the dream was starting to fade already, the details were becoming fuzzy and indistinct. The one thing she could remember vividly was the emotion, the sheer terror. It was like nothing she had ever experienced before. The fear completely overwhelmed her, even now. It was as if the fear was some kind of entity that was leaking from the deep recesses of her mind, waiting to attack her. This fear was not new to her, she had experienced it many times before. It always overcame her in the middle of the night, after a nightmare. But she could never remember the nightmare, what it was about, or why it was so terrifying. All she knew was that it scared her almost to death.

Solo looked at Link’s caring face and sobbed. Maybe he could save her from this terrible dread she was feeling. “Please...hold me,” Solo begged in a pleading voice. “Don’t leave me.” Link gave a confused look and approached Solo.

“What do you mean?” asked Link. Solo wrapped her arms around Link’s waist and pulled him down onto the bed, still sobbing loudly. She squeezed him tightly, not ever wanting to let go of the one who saved her life.

“Please don’t leave me...” she begged.

“Don’t worry,” Link said, “I won’t leave you.” Because of Solo’s emotional state, Link decided not to refuse Solo’s pleading. Link remained on the bed with his back to Solo, her arms still wrapped tightly around him. She buried her face on the back of Link’s shirt and sobbed quietly, soaking his shirt in tears. Link could feel the tiny girl shivering and trembling next to him; whatever dream she’d had must have been terrifying.

Link lay there silently, feeling the girl’s shivers grow weaker and finally stop. She must have fallen back asleep, yet her grip remained tight. Link realized that he wasn’t going to get out of this awkward situation until Solo woke up. He just hoped that no one else would see this, fearing that they would misinterpret it. Link remained on the bed next to Solo and tried to close his eyes. Maybe he could get some sleep. But his mind was racing with thoughts. He wondered what could’ve provoked such a reaction from Solo. Link had never had a dream that was that terrifying before. He couldn’t begin to imagine the emotional turmoil that she was going through. He could feel nothing but sympathy for her. Link closed his eyes once again and tried to concentrate on resting. The first thing he had to do in the morning was think of a way to find his parents. There had to be somebody he could ask.

Chapter Five: Memories of Things Past

The loud shriek of a chirping bird woke Link from his fitful sleep. He opened his eyes to see that it was finally daytime. Link tried to get up, but remembered Solo; her arms were still tightly wrapped around him. Solo yawned and slowly opened her eyes. When she saw that she was embracing Link, she

sat up with a start. “What...?” she mumbled in confusion.

Link sat up and looked at her. “You had a bad dream, and you wanted me to stay with you,” Link explained. If Solo didn’t remember this, he wouldn’t know quite how to explain it. “You were screaming and you said you wanted to hold me. So I laid there all night.” Link tried to avoid Solo’s stare, hoping she remembered what happened and why.

“I remember something...” she said, trying as hard as she could to remember. “I remember being scared about something...but I don’t know what it was. But I remember you.” Solo looked at Link with her glowing blue eyes. “Thank you. It’s happened before and no one has ever been there for me. Thank you for being there.”

“It was no problem,” Link said. “I would’ve done the same thing for anyone. Do you remember what the dream was? It sounded like it was really bad.”

Solo tried to remember the terrible nightmare she had last night. She scanned her memory, trying to retrieve the images of the dream, but could not. Solo couldn’t remember the dream at all; it was completely gone from her memory. Not a single detail remained. This was a familiar sensation for her; many times she had had a nightmare but couldn’t remember it. All those nights in the cold dark alley came back to her. She remembered having terrible dreams, but couldn’t remember the dreams themselves. The only thing that stuck out in her memory was the terror. She shudder upon remembering it. “I don’t remember what the dream was about,” Solo replied.

“Well, it must’ve been bad because of the way you were screaming. You kept yelling ‘help!’, and ‘they’re all dead’. Does that remind you of anything?”

Solo thought once again, but still couldn’t recall the dream. “I don’t know...” she said. “I really can’t remember it. All I do remember is being scared.”

“You *were* scared. You were shaking and crying for most of the night. I’m sorry that you had to have such a bad dream.”

“Link, thank you...for staying by me. It made me feel a lot better...like I finally wasn’t alone for the first time in my life.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Link said. He remembered the night vividly. The thing that stuck out in his memory was the emotions he experienced. It wasn’t something that he expected to feel. He felt like the thing missing from his life was suddenly there. When he was comforting Solo, Link no longer felt empty and incomplete. He felt like he had a purpose. But now, the empty feeling returned. There had to be some connection to his emotions and the dream that he had.

He looked down at himself and realized that he was only wearing shorts and an undershirt. Blushing, Link quickly fetched his tunic from the pile of clothes on the floor and put it on. Solo, still dressed in the tunic Link gave her the day before, sat back down on the bed. Link on the end opposite her and looked out the window. It was still very early, and Saria probably wasn’t awake. He had to kill some time before breakfast. “You know, I had a really strange dream last night, too,” Link said, breaking the silence.

“Really? What about?”

“It was a little freaky,” he said. He knew it couldn’t compare to whatever nightmare Solo had, but he needed something to make conversation with. “I was in the market town, and I lived in this house. In the dream I was having a normal day, but everything was totally weird. I went into the house and...I had parents. I had *real* parents. And I was talking to them like we were a normal family. But then I started to realize that the whole scene was wrong. Everything disappeared and then I saw the woman...I think she was my mother. She never answered me directly, but I’m sure that’s who it was. She told me to find out about my parents and all my questions would be answered. And you know what else? The woman in this dream was the same woman who was in the dream that we both had.”

“That’s strange,” Solo commented. She remembered the dream she had in the field with Link and the woman, that one was still vivid in her mind. Solo wondered why Link would have another dream about the woman without her having it, too. Maybe Solo had found what she lost already: Link. He was the boy who saved her from that wretched life in the alley. Maybe finding him was a replacement for the life she lost, or the one she never had. Solo felt like she was finished searching, that her quest was done. But she could tell that Link’s was just beginning, and that he had a lot more to find. “What are you going to do

now?”

“I don’t know,” replied Link. “I think I should probably do what the dream told me. My dreams have always ended up being guides to my future. Maybe I’m supposed to find out about my family. I just don’t know who to ask.”

“What happened to you parents, anyways?” asked Solo. She was curious to know what relationship Link had with them.

“As far as I know, they died right after I was born. All I know is that my mother brought me to the Kokiri Forest when I was a baby. There was a huge war and she thought this was the only place where I would be safe. She died right after that.”

“That’s so sad,” said Solo. “So you never knew your parents? Who took care of you here? Were there some other grown-ups that took care of you here?”

“No, the Kokiri children took care of me. There are no adults here.”

“No adults? Then who’s in charge? Why aren’t there any adults?”

“It’s because the Kokiri never grow up. They stay children for their entire lives. That doesn’t mean that they act like little kids all the time, many are wiser than some of the adults out there. Only their bodies stay like children. But since I’m not a real Kokiri, I’ll grow up like a normal person. In fact, I’m bigger than everyone else here already.”

“That’s so weird,” said Solo. “It must be so much fun to never grow up.” Solo recalled all the times she watched the normal children from the shadows. She remembered how envious she was of them, how she would give anything to be as carefree as they were. Solo wondered what it would be like to be a child for her entire life. She could relive her childhood years forever.

“Solo, can I ask you something?” asked Link. Solo nodded. “Do you know what happened to your family, why you ended up being homeless?”

“I really don’t know...” she replied, thinking hard. “Living on the street is all I can remember. I don’t think I had any parents. Or maybe they died in that war and I was left alive.”

“Maybe. But you’re probably the same age as me and that would mean you would’ve been a baby if your parents died in the war. A baby couldn’t survive alone, somebody had to have taken care of you then. You don’t remember anyone?”

“No, I don’t. And to tell you the truth, I don’t think I want to know. I don’t need to know what happened to my parents. All that matters is now.” Solo didn’t believe in dwelling over the past. Worrying about what happened years ago never did any good for her. The only thing that mattered in her life was survival. But now that survival was a given, she could take the time to dig into the past. Yet, she still had awkward feelings about it. She wanted to concentrate on the future, something she could change. Solo couldn’t change the past.

“Oh well, that’s fine if that’s what you want to do,” said Link. “Or what you *don’t* want to do.”

“You know, I’m kinda bored. Is there anything we can do right now?”

“I don’t know,” Link said. “It’s still early, and breakfast won’t be for a couple hours. But later we’re gonna go to the castle and see Zelda. I hope you two can become friends.”

“Me too. Can I ask you something? Is Zelda *really* the princess?”

“Of course she is,” replied Link. “Why wouldn’t you believe her?”

“Well, I always expected a princess to wear fancy clothes, and have lots of expensive jewelry and a crown. She didn’t have any of that stuff. I always thought royalty were rich beyond anyone’s wildest dreams.”

“She is rich,” said Link. “But she doesn’t like to show it. In fact, she almost hates being the princess. Zelda doesn’t like the attention and responsibility that goes with it. She’s told me that she just wants to be a regular kid. She acts like a normal person most of the time and not like a rich snob. Sometimes she’s a little spoiled, but not too much.” Link leaned over to Solo. “Don’t tell her I said that,” he whispered.

“Okay. There’s one more thing I want to know, how should I act when I’m at the castle? Do I have to bow and say ‘your majesty’ and stuff like that? ‘Cause I don’t want to be put in the dungeon or something if I say the wrong thing.”

Link chuckled lightly, he never expected someone like Solo to be so concerned about etiquette and

rules. “Don’t get all worked up about that. You only have to call her ‘Zelda’, that’s her name. They’re not going to put you in the dungeon for saying the wrong thing. Remember, Zelda’s the princess and she’s the boss around there. Nobody is going to do anything to you. Zelda doesn’t care about etiquette. In fact, I would be more worried about *her* etiquette than yours.”

“Tell me, what does the castle look like inside?” asked Solo. She had seen the towering spires of Hyrule Castle from the outside many times, but she had no idea what the inside might look like. Solo imagined colossal, flowing tapestries made of silk and gold thread that covered the walls. She imagined huge crystal chandeliers hanging from the arched ceilings of the echoing halls. She almost couldn’t believe that she would actually be walking inside the castle today. Yesterday she had been homeless and digging in a trash heap for food; today she was going to meet the Princess of Hyrule. She wondered if anyone else had ever had such a drastic lifestyle change in such a brief period.

Link smiled. “Oh, I think you should wait and see for yourself. I wouldn’t want to ruin the surprise. Trust me, you’ll love it there.”

“I can’t wait,” Solo said, still imagining the inside of the castle. “So, you never answered my first question. What should we do until Saria gets up?”

“Hmm...” said Link, deep in thought. He looked around his house for ideas. His eyes locked on the far wall and an evil smile crept onto his face.

“What? What is it?” asked Solo, trying to figure out what Link was looking at.

“I’ve got a great idea,” he said in a sinister voice. “Look at the wall over there.” He pointed to the wall.

“What am I supposed to be seeing?” she asked in frustration.

Link stood up and brought her to the wall. He pointed to the large brown spider on the wall. This arachnid was nearly two inches long, and had a brown-striped, furry body. It was the biggest spider Solo had ever seen. “Is that cool, or what?” asked Link with a broad smile.

Solo gently poked the spider, causing it to crawl a few inches higher up the wall. “What are we gonna do with it?” she asked. This spider was a fairly interesting specimen, but there wasn’t much one could do with a run-of-the-mill garden spider.

“Saria is scared to death of spiders,” Link said with a maniacal smile. A small smile crept onto Solo’s face as it dawned on her what Link had in mind. “I think I’ll get back at her for what she did to me the other day.”

“What did she do?”

“She dumped a bucket of water on me,” replied Link. “I was sleeping-in late, and she decided to wake me up by pouring a huge bucket of icy water on my head. She thought it was so funny, but I promised to get revenge.” Link rubbed his hand together in giddy anticipation. “Now it’s my turn to have fun.” Link fetched a small jar from a cabinet and gently coaxed the spider into it. He held up the jar and showed the captive spider to Solo.

“So, what exactly are you going to do?” asked Solo.

“I thought maybe we could put it on her bed and see what happens when she wakes up.”

“How do you think she’ll react?”

“She’ll probably scream at the top of her lungs,” replied Link. “She’s so scared of spiders, she’ll probably pee her pants when she sees this.” Link cackled, carrying the glass with him as he left his house. Solo followed Link until they reached Saria’s house. He peeked his head inside; Saria was sound asleep. He smiled at Solo. This was going to be great. Link tiptoed into Saria’s house, Solo watching silently from outside. He tipped the glass and gently coaxed the spider onto Saria’s serene face. Once the spider was on Saria’s face, Link tiptoed back to the doorway. “Watch this,” he whispered with giddy anticipation.

The spider walked on Saria’s face, curious of its new surroundings. It decided to rest on her right cheek. Saria felt a strange tickling sensation on her face. There it was again, something was moving. She opened her eyes and stared directly at the monstrous spider. Saria jumped out of her bed and let out an ear-splitting scream. “Get it off! Get it off! Get it off! Get it off! Get it off!” she screamed, brushing her hands all over her face and body. “A spider! Get it away from me!” Saria screamed again. She saw the traumatized spider scurry across the floor. She grabbed a broom and smashed it. Her heart was beating

like crazy, and she...she felt wetness dribble down her leg. Link's prediction was right; she was so scared that she peed herself. Then Saria saw Link and Solo at her door. Solo was giggling like mad, and Link was on the ground laughing his head off. That was the funniest thing he'd ever seen.

Saria walked over to Link and scowled at him. If looks could kill, Link would be dead. "What did you do that for!?" Saria shouted at Link. He saw the look on her face and it only made him laugh harder. He tried to contain himself. Link had to calm down or he would pass out. But it was so funny.

"You should've..." Link said between his bursts of laughter, "...seen...your face!" He continued to laugh uncontrollably. "Priceless!" he said, pointing to Saria's face. He tried to calm down. Link took several deep breaths and sat up. His head hurt and his face was flushed. *That was so good.*

"You are so mean!" Saria scolded. "You know how I hate spiders! You made me pee in my pants!" *Uh-oh*, Saria thought, *I shouldn't have said that.* Link's face cracked and he fell into a bout of laughter again. *She really did pee her pants!* Link got a two-for-one deal with this prank. Solo stood there, giggling quietly. Link was right, this was funny. She had never enjoyed herself this much.

"You peed...your pants," Link laughed. "You're such a wimp!" He stopped laughing. He was lightheaded. *Okay, calm down*, he thought. *Too much air. Relax. Don't look at her face.* Link looked at Saria's face and tried not to laugh again. *Okay, she's going to kill you now.* "That's what you get for dumping water on me," Link said, after catching his breath. Link was still cracking a smile while Saria glowered at him.

"Get out of here!" Saria shouted, kicking Link to make him stand up. She pushed him outside. "Now I have to change. I hope you're happy." Saria stomped back inside her house and looked for some clean clothes. Saria couldn't believe that she'd wetted herself. She thought she had more self-control. It had been so long since she'd had an accident. She was going to make him so sorry he did this.

Link slowly stumbled back towards his house, Solo walking next to him. She'd watched the entire scene with utter fascination. She had never seen two people act like that before. Saria screamed and Link laughed. Solo did find the reaction on Saria's face surprisingly funny. Solo didn't understand why Saria was so scared of a harmless spider. Solo found it strange how those two could scream and threaten to kill each other and not actually mean it. Link and Saria were still friends even though they relentlessly tormented each other. Solo had a lot to learn when it came to pranks, sarcasm, and joking. She hadn't had much, if any, experience in those areas. The first practical joke she'd ever seen was hilarious, Solo hoped others would be even funnier.

Link and Solo both climbed into his tree house. Link lied down on the bed and Solo sat in a chair. "That was so good," Link said, still smiling.

"Why was she so scared of spiders?" Solo asked.

"Because she's a girl," Link replied. "And girls are afraid of spiders." Solo didn't understand that. Why would girls be afraid of spiders just because they're girls? Solo wasn't afraid of spiders. Were girls supposed to be afraid of spiders?

"I'm not afraid," Solo said.

"Okay...*Most* girls are afraid of spiders," Link clarified. Solo and Zelda were the only girls Link knew who weren't sissies. He could tell them or show them gross things and they wouldn't chicken out. Sure, Zelda and Solo were tomboyish, but he liked that. He could relate to them better. Link didn't want to see Zelda play with dolls or have a tea party. They did fun things like playing in the mud. Other girls would abhor getting dirty like that.

"Do you always play tricks on each other?" asked Solo. She would have a great time if Link and Saria always did this. Solo could watch the freak show that was their lives.

"Most of the time," Link said. "Unfortunately, she's usually the one who gets me. This was the first time I've ever played a *really* good trick on her. I wish I could see her face again. And I can't believe she peed herself! That's so funny!" Link started laughing again. He had to control himself, he had a headache from laughing so much. "I think we should let her calm down for a while. Let's wait a half-hour or so, and then we can all have breakfast together."

Meanwhile, Saria had changed into some clean, dry clothes. She was no longer fuming mad at Link, but she was still angry. She was really more embarrassed than anything else. She had messed up her

favorite nightgown. Where did Link even find that humongous spider, anyways? He was probably getting back at her for pouring water on his face. Saria couldn't dwell on that prank right now. It was breakfast time. She wasn't going to let this ruin her morning. They were going to have a nice peaceful meal. Saria would have to get back at Link later. She would think of something.

Meanwhile, Link tried his hardest not to laugh again. If he started laughing, he wouldn't be able to stop until he passed out. "Do you really think a half-hour will be enough time for her to cool down?" asked Solo.

"Oh sure," Link said, cracking up slightly. "She gets mad a lot, but it usually doesn't take very long for her to calm down."

"Do you think she's mad at me?" asked Solo, suddenly worried that she might have made an enemy.

"No, of course not," replied Link, brushing off Solo's question. "She's not mad at you; you didn't do anything. Besides, she likes you. Just do me one favor: don't let her talk you into playing a prank on me."

Solo gave a sinister smile. "Hmm...that sounds interesting. I'll have to think about that one."

"Trust me, it's not worth it," Link insisted. "I play much better pranks than she does. Saria is a really bad prankster."

"Okay, whatever you say. I hope Saria stops being mad soon, because I'm hungry."

"Don't worry, it'll be fine. We'll go over there in a few minutes and have breakfast."

During the first few minutes of breakfast, Link had to deal with Saria's piercing glare. But after a while, she finally let up and returned to her usual, jovial mood. Solo was mostly responsible for Saria's feeling better, Saria really liked her. Solo was already beginning to get better at conversations and being with people. It was definitely something she could get used to.

"You know, I had a really strange dream last night," said Link.

"Oh?" said Saria, raising an eyebrow. "Did it tell you to put a spider on my face?" she asked sarcastically.

"No," Link replied curtly. "I'm trying to be serious. It was really weird." Link searched through his memory and recalled the dream for Saria in as much detail as possible. This dream was so vivid in his mind, it was almost as if it had been an actual experience. Saria looked almost stunned after she heard the whole story from Link.

"Wow, that *is* strange," Saria commented. "What do you think this one means?"

"I assume it means that I should go looking for evidence of my parents. But I have no idea who to ask. I don't know if anyone who knew them is even alive anymore. I wish I knew who to ask, someone who was alive back then."

"Why don't you ask Mido?" Saria suggested in a burst of inspiration. "He was the one who took care of you when you were a baby. Maybe your mother talked to him before she died."

"Hey, that's a good idea!" Link said. "Why didn't I think of that? You think he knows anything?"

Saria shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, maybe. But it's worth a shot."

"You're right, I think I'll go ask him right now," said Link, standing up and getting ready to leave.

"Well, wait a minute," Saria said, trying to keep Link from leaving. "What's your hurry? Aren't you gonna finish your breakfast first?" Saria pointed to the half-eaten bowl of oatmeal on the table.

Link looked down at the oatmeal and back up at Saria. "I don't really feel hungry anymore. This is something I have to do. I need to know right now if Mido knows anything. I'll come back and finish breakfast later."

"Fine," Saria dismissed. "Go ahead, I won't stop you." Link smiled and ran out the door. He made his way over to Mido's house, trying to get up the nerve to talk to him. Link and Mido had an understanding now. They weren't enemies, but they weren't friends, either. Link stepped up to Mido's house and took a deep breath. He knocked on the door frame.

"Who is it?" said Mido from inside, in his usual smug voice.

"It's me, Link," he said with a sigh.

“Come in,” Mido said. Link entered and saw Mido sitting at his desk. “What do you want?”

“I wanted to ask you some things...about my past.” Link sat down in a chair near Mido.

“Like what?”

“Well...” Link said, pausing to think. “You took care of me when I was a baby. I know that my mother died after she brought me here...but did she ever say anything to you or the Deku Tree?” Mido could tell that Link was being serious now. He felt so honored that Link had thought to come here, even after all the things Mido had done to him.

“I remember that night very well,” Mido said, searching his memories. He paused, deep in thought.

“Well, what happened? Do you know her name, or where she was from? Anything?” Link insisted.

“Will you just shut up and let me tell the story? Anyways, the Great Deku Tree summoned me in the middle of the night. He said he had a special job for me. There was a woman and a baby. He told me that it would be my job to take care of the baby and the woman. I took you both to my house. The woman, your mother, was obviously in very bad shape. She was going to die soon. I tried to comfort her as best I could. She was so grateful that we accepted the task of raising you. She didn’t talk very much, but she did tell me a few things. She was from the village inside the castle walls, and her husband was in the military. Her name was Araia, and her husband was named Batai. She told me that you were born just a few days before the war came. They didn’t think they would be harmed because the castle was supposed to be the safest place in Hyrule. Then the invaders came. When they finally broke in, they ransacked the town and the castle. Your mother hid you in the bedroom just before soldiers busted down her door. Your father tried to protect you both, but they killed him. They then stabbed your mother and left her for dead. She didn’t want you to die there, so she escaped the village. She came here and gave you to us. Then, about four hours after she got here, she died. She tried to tell me something before she died, but the words never came out. To this day, I wish I knew what she wanted to say.”

Link sat there in stunned silence. He had never known any of this. Of course, up until today, he didn’t want to know anything. He knew his mother’s name: Araia. That alone was a breakthrough. But still, he felt that void inside him. This knowledge wasn’t enough to fill it. “So, that’s all you know?” Link asked. Mido nodded. “What did she look like?” Link felt that he already knew the answer to this question if his dreams were accurate, but it didn’t hurt to ask.

Mido thought deeply for another few moments. “She had long blonde hair and blue eyes. She was a very pretty woman.”

“Just like the dream...” Link mumbled to himself.

“What’s that?”

“Huh? Oh, nothing,” said Link, realizing that he had been thinking aloud. Link turned around to leave, happy that he found out this new information. But he hesitated for a moment, and turned around to look at Mido. “Mido, how come you weren’t being a jerk to me like you usually are?” asked Link. He was used to Mido always giving him insulting comments and whatnot.

“You didn’t look like you were in the kind of mood to be bothered,” replied Mido. What he didn’t say was that he was beginning to think twice about tormenting Link again. Link was now much bigger than Mido, and he wasn’t quite sure that he could boss Link around anymore. Link could probably beat Mido up if he wanted to.

“Oh. How come you never told me any of this before?” asked Link.

“You never asked,” replied Mido, shrugging his shoulders.

“Well...thanks,” Link said as he walked out the door. This was the first time he’d talked to Mido without being insulted by him. If Mido continued to act maturely, maybe Link could grow to like him. Link pushed away that disturbing thought as he walked back towards Saria’s house. Solo and Saria turned and looked at him as he walked inside.

“Well, did you find anything out?” asked Saria.

Link sat down and gave them both a delighted look. “It turns out that Mido knew quite a bit about my mother,” replied Link. “Her name was Araia and my father’s name was Batai. They lived in the castle village before the Great War. Invading soldiers came into the town and they ended up killing my father and tried to kill my mother. Somehow she made it here with me and left me to the Deku Tree. Mido was

the one who comforted her right before she died.”

“That’s so sad,” Solo commented.

“How come Mido never told you any of this before?” asked Saria. “I didn’t know he knew all that.”

Link shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. I guess it was because I never asked. Mido’s always full of surprises.”

“What are you going to do now?” asked Solo.

“I’m not sure yet. Maybe later on I’ll ask around town if anyone knew who my parents were. But right now, we’re going to go see Zelda. I can tell her about this, and maybe we can all look around together. We can go on a mission to look into my past.”

“Sounds like fun,” said Solo.

“So, when are you guys gonna go over to the castle?” asked Saria.

“I don’t know...around noon? Why?”

“I was just wondering. Oh by the way,” said Saria, “I need to tell you something important.”

“What is it?” asked Link.

“I’m gonna get you go for putting the spider on me this morning.” Saria gave a wicked smile, and Link gulped. “You won’t know how, when, or where, but I’m going to get you back. And trust me, it’ll be a doozy.”

“Oh, I’m real scared,” Link said in mock horror. “You’ll never come up with a prank good enough to get me. Remember, I’m the best.”

“Yeah, well, we’ll see.”

“Do you two always do this?” asked Solo after watching the whole exchange. She just couldn’t understand why Link and Saria liked tormenting each other so much.

“Yeah, most of the time,” said Link casually, turning to look at Solo. “But Saria always starts it,” he said with a grin, pointing accusingly at Saria.

“Oh sure,” replied Saria, rolling her eyes. “You’re just trying to put the blame on someone else. You know you always start everything.” Solo watched with amazement as Link and Saria began another exchange of bickering. They continually blamed each other for everything, and Solo wondered why two friends would possibly argue this much.

Solo stood up and walked to the door, Link and Saria not even noticing her. “I’m going back to Link’s house,” Solo said, interrupting the quasi-argument. “So you two can come get me when you’re done with your bickering.” Saria and Link gave Solo blank stares and then faced each other to continue their argument. Solo turned around and walked out the door, sighing at that unusual display. “They’re so weird,” Solo mumbled to herself.

Chapter Six: Friendship

Zelda ran around the castle, pestering every single servant who worked there. She wanted to make sure that they made everything perfect for Link’s surprise. Just a few days previous, the castle had gotten a shipment of live lobsters from the coast. They rarely got real seafood, and Zelda wanted to share it with Link. He had never had a lobster before, and she thought that he might really enjoy it. After all, Link was quite a food connoisseur. When Zelda invited him to banquets, he tended to eat everything in sight. She hoped he would like lobster.

Zelda also thought about the girl Link recently met, Solo. Who was she? Zelda knew that she and Link had a special relationship, but his new-found friend was starting to make Zelda worry. She began to doubt herself, as if maybe there were something about her that Link didn’t like; perhaps he was just too kind to tell her. Zelda had to make sure that Link knew how much she loved him. She would have to try extra-hard to please him, without making it look like she was desperate for his attention. She felt uneasy about inviting Solo over when she had originally planned on spending the day with Link alone. But she

decided that it would be too impolite not to invite her over. Besides, Zelda could use the meeting as another opportunity to get to know Solo better. Zelda wanted to make sure Solo knew that she was treading in dangerous territory. Zelda wasn't quite jealous, but Solo needed to know that Link was Zelda's boyfriend. Zelda just hoped that Link felt the same way about her.

Zelda decided to ask Impa advice on her problem. Impa always seemed to have the answer to all her questions, especially ones like these. Zelda had always seen Impa as a mother figure, considering that she never had a real one. Zelda knocked on Impa's door and opened it a crack. She opened the door and walked inside. Impa turned around from her desk and smiled lovingly at Zelda. "What is it, honey?" asked Impa.

Zelda walked up to Impa's desk and sat atop it. "I need to ask you something," said Zelda.

"Sure, what's the matter?"

"It's about Link. I'm a little... worried about him."

"What do you mean?" asked Impa. "Is he sick or something?" Impa wondered what was bothering her about Link. She knew that Zelda often worried whenever Link was sick, or if he showed up late. Zelda tended to overreact to seemingly innocuous problems and exaggerated their severity.

"I'm worried that maybe he doesn't like me anymore," replied Zelda in a quiet, saddened voice.

"What do you mean, sweetie? Why wouldn't Link like you anymore?" Impa figured that this was simply another of Zelda's overreactions. Impa saw that Link was totally crazy about Zelda, he would never dislike her for any reason in the Universe.

"Well, when I went over to his house yesterday, there was some strange girl sleeping in his bed. He explained it and said that she was a new friend he had met earlier today. Supposedly, she was some poor homeless girl who followed him home from the market."

"Oh that sounds so sad," commented Impa, imagining a girl who lived in destitution. "I always thought Link was a really kind person, but I never imagined him doing that for someone. Is the girl okay?"

"Yes, she's fine," Zelda sighed.

"What's Link going to do with her? Does she have a family or anything? I know Link isn't the kind of person who would willingly let someone go back to living on the streets."

"That's what I'm worried about," Zelda complained. "I'm worried that if he lives with that girl, then he might start to like her instead of me. He'll be able to spend more time with her and maybe he'll forget about me."

"It sounds like you're a little jealous," Impa said in a motherly tone.

"I'm not jealous," Zelda said defensively. "I'm just worried because people always tell me that boys will fall in love with whoever they spend the most time with. And if he spends more time with Solo, then he might fall in love with her instead."

"Solo? Is that the girl?" asked Impa. Zelda nodded. "Whoever told you that nonsense was a fool. Not all boys are like that. And you know that Link isn't one of them. He's spent most of his life with Saria, but he's not in love with her, is he?"

"Well, no..." Zelda mumbled.

"Link and Saria are only friends, very good friends. They might love each other, but it's like brother and sister. And how do you know that Link doesn't just want a simple friendship with Solo? I don't think he would ever love anyone else like he does you, especially Solo."

"How come?" asked Zelda.

"Because Link obviously feels some pity for her. Although he may overcome that pity to develop a friendship, he can't *love* her out of pity. A relationship like that would never work. Besides, I *know* that he doesn't love anyone else. I've seen the way he looks at you, and the way he talks to you. Whenever Link's near you, his eyes light up. He sees you almost as a goddess, and would never think of hurting you. What you don't realize is that he worships the ground you walk on. You're feeling concerned that maybe he won't love you anymore, but you shouldn't be. Link doesn't ever feel that way about you. As far as he's concerned, Link doesn't even see leaving you as an option. The thought doesn't even cross his mind because he's so absolutely sure that he loves you."

“Oh,” Zelda said, thinking over what Impa just said. It made perfect sense; Zelda wondered why she was worrying about Link in the first place. Zelda never noticed how devoted Link was until someone pointed it out to her.

“What I’m trying to say is that you shouldn’t worry about him falling in love with someone else; it’s not gonna happen. I think you should just try to make friends with Solo, and let Link do that too.”

“Well, I kind of am,” Zelda said. Impa raised an eyebrow. “I originally invited Link over for a surprise—you know, the lobsters—but then after I met Solo, I decided to invite her over, too. I thought it was the polite thing to do, and maybe I could get to know her as a person better. Plus,” she lowered her voice because of embarrassment, “I wanted to let her know that she would have to answer to me if she tried to take Link away.”

Impa sighed. “Well, I’m glad we had this little talk. I don’t think you’ll need to be threatening her. I don’t want to see any fights, all right?” asked Impa. Zelda nodded.

“Okay, I’ll be nice,” Zelda said. Now that Impa had helped Zelda understand, she no longer felt as threatened by Solo. Maybe she could start off on the right foot today.

Link and Solo walked leisurely through Hyrule Field. Solo had been here many times, but it never seemed this beautiful before. Without the worries of survival plaguing her, Solo could concentrate on the more comfortable aspects of life. She now noticed the natural beauty of the world, instead of seeing it as a torturous hellhole. “So, do you go over to the castle a lot?” asked Solo, once again trying to begin a conversation.

“Yeah, I go there all the time,” replied Link. “Usually everyday.”

“How do you get in? Because I always see guards there, and they throw everyone out.”

“Zelda is the boss over there. She told the guards to let me in. So I can come and go whenever I want.” They passed over a hill in the field, and the castle came into sight in the distance.

“That’s nice, but will they let me in too?”

“Of course. I have a lot of sway over there now. Didn’t I tell you? I’m a knight. A *real* one, not a fake one.”

“Really?” asked Solo in surprise. Link must’ve neglected to tell her that when he gave her his life story. “Do you have armor, and a horse, and a sword?”

“Well, kind of,” replied Link. “The king gave me a sword when he knighted me. And I have a Hylian shield, but no armor. They don’t really make it in my size. I sort of have a horse, too. I have a horse named Epona who lives at Lon Lon Ranch. Malon, the daughter’s owner, really loves the horse and wants her to stay there. Besides, I don’t have the materials to take care of a horse. So I just let Epona live there, and I go over to the ranch every now and then when I need the horse.”

“Wow,” Solo commented. “I never knew a real knight before, especially one as small as you.” Link gave her a playful glare. “Oh...I didn’t mean that you were small...”

“It’s okay. I’m sure I’ll get bigger sooner or later. It’s just a matter of time.” Link looked ahead of him to see that they were about to cross the drawbridge into the village. “Good, we’re almost there. Trust me, you’ll really like the castle.” Solo once again envisioned the inside of the castle as she walked ever closer to it. She really hoped that the inside was as beautiful as she imagined.

Solo grasped Link’s hand as they approached the castle’s outer gates. Link casually walked up to the guard, who smiled and gave a small salute. Without question, he opened the gate and let Link and Solo pass. Solo let go of Link’s hand after they walked farther down the path. “See, I told you he wouldn’t say anything. You have to try not to worry so much.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Solo admitted. They walked down the path and finally reached the entrance to the castle. Solo hid behind Link as he walked inside. When she entered the castle, Solo’s expectations weren’t disappointed. The smooth stone floor was lined with a beautiful red carpet lined with gold thread. On the walls hung blue and violet silk tapestries embroidered with designs that represented many of the facets of Hylian mythology. From the domed ceiling hung a beautiful crystal chandelier.

Light streaming through the entrance caused the chandelier's hundreds of crystal facets to sparkle with all the colors of the rainbow. Solo was taken aback by the beauty of this palace, it was like nothing she had ever seen.

Link walked up to one of the servants and whispered something to him. The servant nodded and ran down the hall and up the stairs. Link went back to Solo and whispered to her, "He's going to get Zelda right now. She should be down in just a minute."

Solo tried to calm herself, she was starting to feel a little nervous about meeting the princess in the castle. Her heart pounded and her palms were sweating. Solo had never been so anxious about meeting someone. She just feared that maybe Zelda would reject her offer for friendship. "Are you *sure* Zelda will like me?" asked Solo apprehensively.

"Boy you are nervous, aren't you?" Link commented. "Yes, Zelda will like you. Besides, you met her last night and she didn't have any problem with you. What makes you think she'll suddenly change her opinion of you?"

"I don't know. I thought maybe she was just acting like that because she wasn't in the castle. I've heard a lot of people say that the princess was spoiled, mean, and cruel. They said that she didn't like to be anywhere near poor people or peasants."

"Who would say a thing like that?" asked Link. The mere thought of anyone speaking of Zelda that way made Link's blood boil. It angered him that people would spread false rumors like that. "Zelda is nothing like that. You saw her last night. I think you can really become friends. She's more friendly and compassionate than any other person you'd meet." Link turned and look down the hallway upon hearing approaching footsteps. Zelda ran down the hall towards Link with her arms outstretched. She purposely collided with him and gave a tight hug.

"Oh Link, I'm so happy to see you," said Zelda cheerfully, planting kisses on his face. "I missed you."

"It hasn't even been a whole day since we saw each other, I didn't think you'd miss me *that* much," said Link, finally escaping Zelda's grip. He gave a playful smile. "But I appreciate the affection."

Zelda smiled at him. She loved to tease Link and just slightly embarrass him. The look on his face was so cute. "Well, why don't we go sit in the courtyard for a while? The servants are preparing the surprise, and it'll be a little while before it's done." Zelda walked down the hall, with Link and Solo following closely behind.

"So what is the surprise?" asked Link excitedly. He wondered what in the world Zelda had in mind.

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise," Zelda replied wryly. They turned around a corner and walked towards the open courtyard. "Trust me, you'll like it. And Solo, you'll like it, too. This surprise is good because you can enjoy it along with us." Solo was amazed when she walked into the courtyard. It was a beautiful, circular enclave in the center of the castle. The roof was open to the beautiful blue sky, which was dotted with puffy, white clouds. The walls of the courtyard were surrounded by a small stream flowing with clear, sparkling water. Solo saw a large goldfish swim down the stream and out of sight. The floor of the courtyard was actually a lawn, growing with impeccably cut grass and beautiful flowers of every color of the rainbow. This was one of the most beautiful places Solo had every seen, almost as beautiful as the Kokiri Forest.

The three sat down on the soft grass, sitting so they were all facing each other. "Trust me, you guys will love the surprise," said Zelda. She reiterated that fact so she could annoy Link once again.

"So you won't tell us what it is until later?" asked Link. Zelda nodded. Link hated surprises because waiting to find out what it was always bothered him. "I hope you didn't go through too much trouble, because I wouldn't want you to..."

"Oh, nothing's too much for my little Linkie-poo," Zelda said in a baby-voice.

Solo chuckled, and tried to contain herself. "Linkie-poo," she mimicked in a teasing voice. "That's so cute!" she said, breaking into laughter. "I still can't believe that you let her call you that."

"Oh give it a rest," Link sighed, rolling his eyes.

Solo chuckled again. "I'm sorry, but it's just so funny, a person like you with such a cute nickname. Linkie-poo," she said in a baby-voice, making kissing faces at Link. Link playfully pushed her. As embarrassed as he was, Link was happy to see Solo enjoying herself. "Do you have a cute name for

Zelda?”

“Um...not really...” Link mumbled, his face flushing slightly. He had never thought of that before; he just always called her Zelda. He never considered making up a pet name for her. “Um, I never really thought of one for her. I just call her Zelda.”

“And that’s fine with me,” said Zelda, putting her arm around Link and hugging him tightly. “Link can call me whatever he wants.” Solo smiled at the way she and Link acted together. There obviously had a deep affection for each other, and Solo wondered if she would ever be so lucky as to have someone like Link. Zelda released Link from her grip and sat back down on the grass. She looked at Solo and gave her a friendly smile. “Solo, I want to apologize to you.”

“Apologize for what?” asked Solo. She wasn’t sure what Zelda was sorry for.

“About the way I acted around you. I’m sorry about the things I said to you when I found you in Link’s house. It’s just that I didn’t expect you to be there.”

“You don’t have to apologize,” said Solo. “I’m used to being treated like dirt; nobody has ever cared about me. How you acted yesterday was a lot better than some other people have acted around me. It’s okay.” Solo really didn’t care about Zelda’s overreaction; she expected something like that to happen. Over the years, Solo had become virtually immune to insults. Now that she had seen how much Zelda cared about Link, Solo understood why she had overreacted in the first place.

“No, it’s not okay,” Zelda insisted. “I should have asked Link what was going on before I started jumping to conclusions. I didn’t act like a princess should.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Solo said. “You really didn’t overreact that bad. I would’ve expected you to act like that, considering that you found some strange girl in your boyfriend’s house.” Link’s face flushed slightly when Solo said “boyfriend.”

“Well, for what it’s worth, I’m sorry. I just hope we can become friends.” Zelda gave Solo a warm smile.

“I’d like that,” Solo replied. “I can still be friends with Link, right?”

“Of course,” replied Zelda. “Link is such a wonderful person. I don’t see why anyone *wouldn’t* want to be friends with him.” Zelda gave Link a cute and adoring look.

Link scratched the back of his head. “What can I say? Everybody loves me,” Link said with a smirk. “I can’t help it if I’m such a people person.”

“Oh quit flattering yourself,” Zelda said. Link playfully glared at Zelda and stuck out his tongue. “Fine, keep acting like a little kid.”

“Oh gee, I’m twelve-and-a-half, I wonder why I’m acting like a little kid.”

“Well, I’m almost twelve and I act more mature than you,” Zelda teased.

“If you want my opinion, you *both* act immature,” Solo said, garnering glares from Link and Zelda.

“So how much longer will it be before our surprise is ready?” asked Link, trying to change the subject. That surprise Zelda was teasing him with was really starting to get to him.

“Geez, that’s really bothering you, isn’t it?” said Zelda in a teasing voice. She just loved getting on Link’s nerves, the look on his face was so funny.

“I want to know what it is!” Link said, frustrated. “You know I hate surprises. I don’t like secrets.” Solo and Zelda both giggled.

“That’s why I’m making it a surprise,” replied Zelda with a smirk. “It took you this long to figure out how much I like annoying you? Quit driving yourself crazy over this. You’ll find out in a little while.”

“Fine,” Link said. “You know, I’ve been thinking something,” said Link unconsciously, as the memory of the previous night’s dream popped into his head.

“What?” asked Zelda.

“About my dreams.”

“What dream? The one that you and Solo had?” Zelda always felt apprehensive when Link had a strange dream. She had a feeling that he might have some kind of psychic powers. His dreams often turned out to be premonitions.

“No, last night, I had a different one.”

“Another dream?” Zelda said in surprise.

“Yeah, another one,” replied Link with a sigh. He was really starting to wonder why he was always plagued with dreams like this. They always meant something, but sometimes the answers weren’t as obvious as he thought they were. “It was strange. I was in the village, the one outside the castle. And I was walking home to my house. I lived in this house in the village, it wasn’t the house in the Kokiri forest. I went inside and there was a man and a woman there...and I think they were my parents. It was weird because everything was different, but it felt normal—until after a few minutes. I started to realize that the house and my parents were all wrong, and it wasn’t supposed to be that way.”

“What happened?” Zelda asked.

“The house I was in disappeared and I was standing in a field. My mother was there, and she talked to me. She told me that I’m getting very close to what I’m looking for. She told me to look for her.”

“How are you going to look for her?” asked Zelda. “Isn’t she...dead?”

“Well, yes,” Link replied. “But I don’t think she meant that literally. I think she meant that I should look around into my history and find out about how she was when she was alive. She told me to explore my origins. I just don’t know where I should look. I mean, I have no idea who I could ask about my mother. I already asked Mido, and he gave me a little information. Basically, she told Mido about herself while she was dying in his house. Her name was Araia, and my father’s name was Batai. They lived in the village outside the castle until the war came. The soldiers killed my father and tried to kill my mother, but she made it to the Kokiri forest in time to leave me there. But that’s all I know.”

“Wow,” Zelda said. She was as amazed by hearing this information as Link was when he first heard it. “You know your parents names, where they lived, and how they died. That’s already amazing enough. You’re lucky to know even that. What else are you hoping to find out? Shouldn’t you be happy with what you know already?”

“But I’m not happy with what I already know,” Link insisted. “I know they’re names and where they lived, big deal. I want to *know* them, I want to know who they were and what they were like. I wouldn’t have had that dream if there wasn’t more to be found out. I know there’s gotta be some way I can learn about them, but I don’t know where to go. I don’t know if anyone who knew my parents is even alive anymore.”

“There’s bound to be some people who knew them,” said Zelda. “What about that house you dreamed about, the one you lived in? Do you remember what it looked like?”

“Well, yeah. I remember it exactly. It was a whitish color with brown wooden posts. And it had beautiful stained-glass windows on the front. Why? Do you think it really exists?”

“It might,” replied Zelda. “After all, everything in your other dreams turned out to be accurate. The house in your dreams just might exist. And you remember what it looked like, so maybe later we could walk around the town and see if it’s there.”

“That’s a good idea! I don’t know why I didn’t think of that,” said Link as he slapped his hand on his forehead. “I remember what number it was, too: thirty-three. We could go look for house number thirty-three.”

“What if someone lives there?” asked Solo.

“That could be a problem,” said Link. He hadn’t thought of that. It would be only logical that the house his parents used to live in might be occupied by someone else now. He wondered how he could convince new owners of the house to let him look inside it, only to get an idea of what his parents’ lives were like. But the people around here weren’t usually very accommodating, so they might not let him look at the house. “I don’t know. I suppose we could ask nicely if they would let us inside.”

“I’m the princess,” Zelda said. “I can order them to let me in if I want to. I know that’s kind of rude, but I gotta use my power sometime. Of course, there is another problem: what if the house was there in the past, but it’s not here anymore? Remember, there was a war going on when your parents died. And my daddy has told me a lot about the war. The invading soldiers burned down half the village, and their house could’ve been one of them.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Link said. “But it’s worth a shot. We could go out and look, though.” Their conversation was interrupted by a young servant who walked into the courtyard. She bowed in front of the Princess, and bent over to whisper something in her ear. Zelda smiled, and the servant quickly hurried off.

Zelda stood up and gave a happy smile to Link and Solo, who were still sitting on the grass. “Guess what?” Zelda said. “The surprise is done. You can both come and see it now.” Link and Solo excitedly stood up and followed Zelda out of the courtyard and through the halls of the castle. “I bet you can’t wait to see the surprise,” Zelda teased, trying to milk the last bit of annoyance out of it.

“Can you tell us now?” Link asked as they turned a corner and walked up a stairway.

“Just wait one second,” said Zelda. She led them to her dining room, which Link had visited frequently. He was beginning to guess what the surprise might be. Meanwhile, Solo looked in amazement at everything as she walked through the halls of the castle. Everything here was so beautiful and grandiose, Solo could stay in this palace forever. Solo sat down at one of three velvet-cushioned, gilded chairs in front of the table in the dining room. Each sat on the same side of the table, with Link sitting between the two girls.

“Well, I’m assuming the surprise is going to be food,” Link said, his mouth almost watering. Zelda knew well that food was one of the things that Link enjoyed. Impa had always told Zelda that the way to a man’s heart was through his stomach, and it seemed to work for Link.

“You’re right,” Zelda said cheerily. “We’re having lobsters!”

“Lobsters?” said Link. He remembered seeing a live lobster in an aquarium once. It didn’t look like something that was edible. “You can eat those?”

“Of course you can. They’re really good. You’re gonna love them.” Meanwhile, Solo wondered what a lobster was. That word sounded vaguely familiar. Was it some kind of fish?

“Um... What’s a lobster?” Solo asked.

“It’s a really weird-looking animal,” said Link, trying to think of a way to describe it. “It’s... got lots of legs and a hard shell. You’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Okay,” Solo said. She tried to envision what a lobster would look like. It had to be something interesting and good. Royalty ate really great food, so a lobster had to be out of the ordinary. Three servants entered the dining room, each carrying a covered silver tray. Each servant placed a tray in front of one of the children. Solo smelled the food, it smelled kind of like fish. The servant in front of Solo removed the dome-shaped lid from the tray. What Solo saw caused her to yelp and jump back into her chair. What was that? Was this hideous creature a lobster? It looked like some kind of red monster that was going to attack her. Solo touched one of the claws. It looked dangerous, but it wasn’t alive. She stared at the cooked lobster’s eyes. This lobster definitely didn’t look like food. It looked more like a miniature sea monster.

Zelda giggled. “Don’t worry, it’s not going to hurt you,” Zelda said. Solo leaned forward and examined it more closely. This thing sure had a lot of legs. Link was equally confused. How was he supposed to eat this?

“Um, Zelda?” Link mumbled. “How do I eat this? Is there some special way to do it?”

“You see that claw cracker next to the silverware?” said Zelda, pointing to the utensil. Link picked up the claw cracker—that looked like a torture device. “You can use that to crack open the big claws and get the meat inside. But the best meat is in the tail. You just grab it and crack it open. When you get a piece of the meat, dip it in that melted butter and eat it.” Link and Solo gazed at their lobsters. They had to crack these things open? It looked like a lot of trouble to go through.

“Oh,” Link mumbled. Solo was worried about how she should do this. Did she have to have special manners or etiquette? After all, she was in front of the princess.

“I like these because they’re messy and I don’t have to have manners,” Zelda commented. Solo breathed a sigh of relief. She might as well dig in. “Go ahead, break it open.” Solo picked up the whole lobster and examined it. Zelda said the best meat was in the tail, so she’ll try that first. *How do I get the tail off?* Solo thought to herself. She grabbed the lobster with both hands and snapped the lobster in half, separating the tail from the head. This was really gross, but it was fun.

“That’s how you do it!” Zelda said. Link and Zelda both did the same thing. “Now crack the tail open and pull the meat out the bottom.” Solo put the tail down and looked at it. She grabbed the claw cracker and slammed it in into the tail, causing a loud cracking noise. The shell shattered, exposing the meat inside. Solo turned the tail over. She bent and cracked the tail open. She pulled off the softer membrane

underneath to expose the meat inside. She pulled out the tail meat in one large hunk. That was easy, and it was fun, too. Solo proudly held up the large piece of lobster meat that she'd extracted.

"Wow!" Link commented. He quickly followed Solo's example and extracted his piece of tail meat.

"Now dip it in the butter and eat it," said Zelda, already eating her lobster. Solo saw Zelda using her hands while she ate. Zelda didn't even touch the fork next to her plate. That must mean that Solo didn't have to use a fork either. She dunked the end of the lobster tail in the butter and bit off a mouthful. This tasted absolutely wonderful. Solo never thought that food could taste so good. Throughout her life, she had seen food as merely a necessity, just a means to keep her alive. Now food was also a pleasure. Solo ate her food slowly this time, savoring every bite.

Link was equally satisfied. He never thought that one of these strange-looking sea creatures could be so flavorful. All three of them dug into the lobsters, creating a large mess on the table and on themselves. None of them cared that their faces and hands were covered in butter and flakes of lobster meat.

"So, what do you guys think?" Zelda asked them. Solo smiled and tried to talk, but her mouth was full. She just nodded. Link was busy trying to open the claw; he looked up at Zelda's butter-glistening face and smiled.

"This is really good," Link said, trying to figure out the claw. He ripped off the whole leg and examined it. He saw two translucent tendons coming out of the severed limb. He tugged at the tendon and got a surprise: the claw moved. He realized that by moving the tendon, he could make the claw open and close. This was absolutely fascinating. He stuck the claw in Solo's face and opened and closed it. "Hey, look at this," Link said. "It's alive!" he said in a macabre voice, trying to scare Solo. She backed her head away. How did he do that?

"That is so cool!" Zelda commented, watching Link tease Solo with the claw. "How did you do that?" she asked, examining one of her lobster claws.

"You just pull on this thing," Link replied, showing Zelda the almost magical tendon. When he shoved it in Solo's face again, she grabbed it and took it away from him. She stuck out her tongue at Link.

"It's mine now," Solo teased. She shoved the claw in Link's face and gave him a taste of his own medicine. Zelda extracted her own claw and practiced opening and closing it. Then all three began to relentlessly harass each other with the large red pincers. None of them ever thought they could have so much fun playing with their food. They all got out of their chairs and began to have a sword fight with lobster claws. They had all eaten as much as they could, and now they were just goofing off. Solo had never had this much fun before.

Hearing an awful lot of commotion coming from down the hall, Impa decided to go to the dining room to see what was going on. She was taken aback by seeing the three children attacking each other with lobster claws. They were all laughing and giggling, they were definitely having a blast. "What are you three doing?" Impa said. Zelda, Link, and Solo stopped and stared at Impa.

"Oh, we're just playing," Zelda said in an innocent voice, hiding the lobster claw behind her back.

"Right. Well, you guys are making a mess, and you're having entirely too much fun. You need to get cleaned up."

"Oh, okay," Zelda said. She went back to the table and put the claw down. She took a linen napkin and wiped her face and hands clean. "Is that better?" Zelda asked. Impa nodded, trying not to smirk. She had to be serious, she couldn't let the children know that she thought this was cute. Solo followed Zelda's example and cleaned her face. Zelda gave Solo a strange look, they both knew what that meant. Link began to get nervous when he saw Zelda and Solo slowly approach him, each holding a napkin.

"Let us help you clean up," Zelda said to Link with a sinister smile. She tackled Link and pinned him to the floor. Zelda and Solo both licked their napkins and mercilessly wiped at Link's face. He vainly flailed his arms in attempt to get them to go away. Link was right, girls were always planning against him. "You got some stuff on your chin," Zelda said, licking her napkin and rubbing it on Link's face again. Impa watched Zelda and Solo torture Link. It was funny, but she couldn't let them do that.

"Okay, you two. Leave him alone," Impa ordered. Solo and Zelda stood up and let Link go free. He stood up and backed away from the two girls who were smirking at him. What else were they planning? He always felt nervous when he was the only boy in a group of more than one female. It seemed like they

systematically planned ways to embarrass him. Link sighed and retrieved his own napkin.

"I can wipe my face by myself," Link said, eyeing Zelda and Solo suspiciously. He then proceeded to wipe his own face and hands. Those two just made his mess bigger. Link gave the two girls a good glowering. "I see that you two are getting along nicely," Link commented. It was true, Zelda and Solo became friends from the moment they met. They both looked at each other and giggled. Link wondered what they were planning now. "Don't you two even *think* of anything," Link said.

Impa stood in the doorway, sighing and rolling her eyes. Children were so much trouble sometimes. "Why don't you go outside?" suggested Impa. They were a little too hyper, they needed to go somewhere where they couldn't break anything. "You're finished with your meals, and it's such a beautiful day. Go enjoy the nice weather." The three children quickly agreed and followed Zelda towards the exit of the castle. As soon as they were out of sight, Impa let out a loud sigh. Those kids were going to be the death of her. Why did she even take this job in the first place? *I'm too old for this*, Impa thought. She began to clean up the mess that the kids had made.

The kids ran out the front entrance of the castle and sat down on the grass. Link lay back on the soft grass, still enjoying the exquisite meal he'd had. Zelda always knew how to please him. He never thought that a monstrous creature that lived in an aquarium could make a good meal. "That was great," Link said to Zelda.

"Yeah," added Solo, also in a state of near-bliss.

"That lobster was great. How come you've never given me those before?" asked Link.

"Because we hardly ever get them," replied Zelda. "Ever now and then the castle get a shipment of them from the coast, but that doesn't happen very often."

"Oh," said Link. He stared at the beautiful blue sky for a moment, taken aback by its sheer enormity. He never really noticed how beautiful the sky and the clouds were.

"What do we do now?" asked Solo, breaking the few minutes of silence.

"Maybe we could go see if the house from my dream really exists," Link suggested.

"That's a good idea," said Zelda. "But do you think it's really there? Does the house actually exist?"

"It has to," said Link. "Every time I have one of these dreams, it ends up coming true some way. This one is no different, I can feel it. I know I had that dream for a reason, my mother wants me to find her."

"Well, I suppose we could go look," Zelda said. She stood up, followed by Link and Solo. "Where should we look first?"

"I'm not sure," Link said, trying to think of an answer to her question. Now that he had the opportunity to look for this house from his dream, he wasn't sure what to do. Link didn't think it would be a good idea to ask around. After all, how would people react to a little kid asking about a house he saw only in a dream? The three began to walk through the castle's front yard and towards the gate.

"Well, do you remember the number?" asked Zelda. "Because I think you said it earlier... it was thirty-something." Zelda tried to remember what Link had said earlier.

"Thirty-three," Link clarified.

"That's it. We can just go look for house thirty-three."

"That's as good an idea as any," Link said. As they approached the castle gates, the guard quickly opened them. He gave a respectful bow to the princess and closed the gates behind them. They entered the bustling market and stood still, wondering to which row of houses they should go first. "Well, what now?"

Zelda gave him a puzzled look and began to lead them towards the eastern side of the town. "Don't you know anything about this town?" asked Zelda. "The even-numbered houses are on the west side of town and the odd-numbered ones are on the east side."

"Oh. I guess I never noticed that." Link tried to envision the house numbers. He never did notice that the numbers were arranged that way, of course, he never had a reason to pay attention to the numbers, anyway. Zelda stopped and waited for Link and Solo when they reached the first alley and row of houses. Solo looked at these familiar rows of townhouses. This was near the alley that she had spent so much of her life in, that cold, damp, cobblestone alley. She shuddered at the thought. She felt uncomfortable being here again.

“Well, I guess we should walk down the street and see if we can find number thirty-three,” said Zelda. They walked down the first street, the number ranging from 223 to 121. House number thirty-three was obviously not on this street. “It’s probably down the corner somewhere,” Zelda said.

They rounded the corner to another row of identical looking houses. As they walked down the street, Link and Zelda failed to notice that Solo had stopped walking. She stood still, staring at the small gap between two houses. Link and Zelda looked at the last house on this street, number eighty-seven, when they realized that Solo was no longer following them. They both turned around to see Solo standing in the middle of the street, oblivious to everything. With great concern, Link and Zelda walked up to Solo and tried to find out what she was looking at. All the other two saw was a narrow alley littered with a few empty crates.

“Solo, are you okay?” asked Link in a concerned voice. Solo gave no answer, she just stared at the empty crates. “What’s wrong?”

After what seemed like an eternity of silence, Solo let out a loud sigh. Her eyes began to water, but she didn’t let herself cry. “This is…” mumbled Solo.

“This is what?” asked Zelda.

Solo took a deep breath and tried to finish her sentence. “This is…where I used to live. Right there.” She pointed to the small stack of crates.

“There?” asked Zelda. “By those boxes?” Solo nodded. Zelda looked at the pile of dirty crates and the hard stone ground. Zelda remembered Solo telling her about how she used to live on the street, in an alley between two houses. But the story never really sank in until she actually saw the place. Zelda knelt on the ground and touched one of the crates. She brushed her hand over the cold, stone ground; Zelda couldn’t imagine how anyone could sleep here. The physical contact with this alley made Solo’s story seem so real to her. Zelda now understood what Solo went through, it must’ve been horrible.

“I spent so many nights here,” Solo added in a whispering voice. “So many cold, lonely nights. I remember just a few days ago, when I stole a sausage from some guy. I thought I would finally have enough food for a few days. Then I woke up… and saw a dog run away with my food. An it bit me too.” Solo rubbed the still sore scar on her hand. One of the scabs had fallen off, but the whole area remained uncomfortable.

Zelda saw Link put a comforting arm around Solo’s shoulder, but Zelda felt no jealousy. She now understood the pain that Solo had gone through, and now understood why Solo needed Link. She needed him as a crutch, as a stepping stone into the rest of the world. This one moment gave Zelda more of an insight into Link’s personality than she had ever had before. Link didn’t simply love Zelda, he loved everyone. She saw how much of a caring person he was, how he did nothing for himself until the people around him were happy.

“It’s okay,” said Link, trying to comfort Solo. “You don’t have to ever live like this again.”

“I know,” said Solo. “It just…upsets me to see it. The other day when it rained… I came back here and there were men doing something by my alley. They told me to get lost, and I spent the rest of the day sitting outside in the cold rain.” She turned and looked Link in the eyes. “But then you came.” Solo stared at Link for a moment, then suddenly snapped back into reality as if from a dream. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be dwelling on this right now. Let’s continue looking for that house.”

“Okay,” Link said. Solo followed him as he and Zelda walked down the street towards another corner. “So far, we haven’t found the house, but it might be around this corner.”

“I hope we find it,” said Solo as they turned the corner. The numbers to these houses started at eighty-five and went all the way down. Link looked even closer at the numbers as they approached the forties. Link was slightly stunned when the numbers skipped from forty-one to twenty-nine. He quickly ran down the alley and back, looking closely at the number on each house.

Link held up his arms in frustration as he walked back up to Zelda and Solo. “There’s no number thirty-three,” Link said with noticeable disappointment. “In fact, there’s no numbers in the thirties at all.”

“Well, that doesn’t make much sense,” Zelda commented. “There’s houses in the twenties but no thirties. I don’t know what to do now.”

“It figures,” Link said, folding his arms across his chest. “I go through all this trouble looking for the

house that might have belonged to my parents and there aren't even any houses with numbers in the thirties. Just my luck."

"Well, maybe they renumbered the houses," suggested Zelda. "After all, the soldiers burned half the village down in the war. Maybe when they rebuilt it, they renumbered the houses."

"Maybe we should ask someone if they know something," offered Solo. "I mean, there has to be somebody who was alive back then."

"That's a good idea," Link said. "But who could we ask? I have no idea where to begin."

"We could go find some old people," said Zelda. "They're more likely to remember something that happened almost thirteen years ago."

"Well, how old are we talking?" asked Link.

"Well, not *that* old. Just adults, people who would remember the past well. Not people in their twenties, but maybe forties or fifties."

"Well, I suppose we could go look around," Link agreed. "But we need to decide who to ask. Most of the people in the town aren't very forthcoming. We should ask some of the people who are walking around the town; I mean, I don't wanna go knocking on people's doors and asking them."

"I wasn't suggesting that," Zelda countered. "Your idea is fine. Let's go to the town center and ask around."

Link nodded and the three walked down the winding streets until they reached the center of the market. They looked around at the crowd of people who ran back and forth among the merchants' stands. Link tried to locate a person who looked forthcoming. He saw a middle-aged woman walking a dog down the street. "She looks like a good candidate," whispered Link to the others. They urged him on as he approached the woman. She looked like she was in her mid to late forties, and seemed like a fairly nice person.

Link walked up to the woman and smiled. "Um, excuse me...ma'am?" stammered Link. The woman looked at Link and gave a warm smile.

"Yes? How can I help you, little boy?" responded the woman. Link silently cringed upon hearing her say "little boy." Link always hated it when people called him a little boy. He wasn't that small anymore.

He ignored the woman's innocent comment and replied to the woman, "I was wondering—if you don't mind my asking—how long have you lived in this village? 'Cause I'm looking for anyone who lived here before the war, and maybe somebody who knew my parents..."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the woman, "but I've only lived here for a few months, so I can't help you." The woman shrugged her shoulders and continued walking her dog.

"Well that was a waste," said Link after the woman walked away.

"Oh, it was just one person," reassured Zelda. "I'm sure someone here knows something, we just have to keep asking."

"Yeah, you're right," said Link. There was bound to be someone who lived here before the war. Link only had to find that person.

Chapter Seven: Discovery

After nearly an hour of asking, they still had no results. They met an old man who had lived in the town for almost twenty years, but his memory had faded so much that he couldn't remember the day before yesterday. With growing frustration, Link sat down at the fountain in the center of town and let out a loud sigh.

"We're not going to find out anything," said Link in a disappointed voice. Zelda sat down next to him and put her arm on his shoulder.

"It's okay," said Zelda. "Maybe there are other ways to find out what we need to know. Maybe everyone who lived here before the war moved away. Or maybe they're... all dead."

Link hadn't thought of that possibility. Maybe everyone who lived here then was dead. No, that didn't make any sense. There were always people who survived wars and remained in the towns, it was a matter

of principle. “Well, maybe we should just go home,” said Link, putting his head down.

Solo looked around the town and spotted an old woman sitting behind a cart. “What about her?” asked Solo, pointing to the woman sitting behind the rug-laden cart. “I don’t think we asked her, and she looks old enough to have lived here back then.”

Link stood up and looked at the old woman. “Might as well,” said Link unenthusiastically. “I guess it couldn’t hurt to ask one more person.” Link walked over to the woman’s cart, followed by Zelda and Solo. The woman was quite old, probably in her sixties. Her stand was laden with a wide assortment of multi-colored rugs and carpets from all over the country. Link walked up to the old woman and tried to smile.

“Well hello, sonny,” said the woman in a cheery voice as she realized that Link was approaching her. “How can I help you?”

“I was wondering if you could help me find out some information,” stammered Link.

“Oh sure. I have many rugs for you to buy, what kind are you looking for?”

“Well, I’m not really looking for information about rugs,” replied Link. The woman gave a slight hint of a frown, but motioned for Link to continue. “I was wondering if you could give me information about some people who used to live here. If you don’t mind my asking, how long have you lived in this village? That is, if you actually live here?”

The woman gave a pensive sigh and thought about the exact answer. “Oh, I’ve lived here most of my life—for about fifty years.”

Link tried to hide his sudden hopefulness. Maybe he would finally get some straight answers. “Do you remember any of the people who used to live here a long time ago?”

“Son, I remember everyone I’ve ever met,” said the woman, tapping the side of her head for emphasis. “Who specifically did you have in mind?”

“They were a married couple, who lived here about thirteen years ago. As far as I know, they lived here up until the Great War. I’m looking to see if there’s anyone who knew these people, ‘cause they died during the war; and I’m kind of anxious to find out about their past.”

“I remember everything about the war,” said the woman. “I lost a lot of friends and family members. What were the names of this couple? I can’t help you if you don’t give me names.”

“They were Araia and Batai,” replied Link.

“Let me think for a moment.” The woman looked off into space as she tried to remember the faces that went with those names. “Araia and Batai,” mumbled the woman. “Yes, I believe I knew a couple by that name.”

Link was nearly ecstatic upon hearing that. He tried to remain calm and hoped that this woman knew what she was talking about. “What do you know about them?” asked Link excitedly.

“They were a very nice couple, always so cheerful and friendly. It’s a shame that they died when the soldiers invaded, they were so young. I don’t remember Batai very well, I never saw him that much. He had some kind of big-wig job in the military, so he wasn’t around that much. But Araia really adored him. We would usually get together every few days to play cards, and she would always talk about how Batai was such a loving husband, and how he went out of his way to make her happy; especially because he often had to leave for weeks on military excursions. She really loved him, and I’m sure he loved her just as much.

“The thing I remember the most was when she was pregnant. That woman was absolutely huge. It was so unexpected because she was normally a small, skinny person. But that child made her so big, I’m surprised she could walk around. She was so happy when she found out that she was going to have a baby, because they had tried for so many years without success. I remember her asking me for some fertility home-remedies; I tell you, that woman tried everything. She was so ecstatic when she was finally going to have a child. When she was pregnant, she would talk for hours on end about what she would name the baby if it was a boy, because she desperately wanted a son.

“Then, when the war started brewing, everything changed. People started to pack up and leave town. Araia stayed here with her husband, because they thought it would be safer behind the castle walls. Then she had her child at the worst possible time, right when the war was starting to come into Hyrule. Batai left just that night on a military campaign, right after the baby was born.”

“Do you know if the baby was a boy?” asked Link, trying to verify if this was the correct couple.

“I think it was,” replied the woman. “But I’m not quite sure, because I wasn’t there. And unfortunately, the midwife was killed along with the others. Just a few days after that, the soldiers stormed the castle and attacked everyone in sight. They killed so many people, and burned down much of the village. I was lucky enough to have been able to hide from them. It’s such a pity that that woman and her innocent little child had to die like that. It’s such an unjust world.” The woman smiled and slowly came back into the real world. She usually bored people with her long anecdotes; memories did that to her. She was surprised to see that Link was still eagerly paying attention to her. “Do you have any more question, young man?”

“Um...do you know where they used to live?” asked Link. He had nearly forgotten to ask that question, which what he had originally intended to do.

“Hmm...I’m not sure why you would want to know that, considering they don’t live there anymore. But I think they lived somewhere in the west side of town. The house had really pretty stained-glass windows, but I can’t remember what number it was. But I doubt that the house is even there anymore, the soldiers burned down most of the town during the invasion. Now, I need to ask you something.”

“What?” asked Link.

“Are you gonna buy a rug or not? ‘Cause I’m losing customers by talking to you.” Link gave an embarrassed look and dug around in his pocket.

“Um...I...didn’t quite want...” he stammered. Link finally pulled a handful of rupees from his pocket and dumped them on the table. “Here, just take these. Thank you for your time.” The woman gave a wide smile and happily took the money. Link, Zelda, and Solo walked back to the fountain at the center of town.

“See I told you we would find out something,” teased Zelda. “You just have to be persistent.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I can’t believe that we were lucky enough to find someone who knew so much.”

“But she said that their house was on the west side of town,” said Solo. “And you said that it was on the east side.”

“Well, yeah. The odd numbers are supposed to be on the east side,” replied Link. “But I guess maybe they changed that over the years, or maybe I remembered the dream wrong. Either that, or *somebody* was wrong about the numbering system,” directing at glare at Zelda.

“I wasn’t wrong,” Zelda said defensively. “I live here, I should know how they number the houses. Maybe they did renumber them over the years. I suppose we could go look on the other side of town.”

“That sounds good,” said Link. “Let’s go.” Link walked away from the fountain, followed by Zelda and Solo. They went to the other side of the town and walked onto the narrow street lined with houses. Link looked up at the numbers on the houses and sighed. All the numbers he could see were even.

“See, I told you I was right,” taunted Zelda, sticking out her tongue.

“We might as well look, anyways,” sighed Link. They unenthusiastically walked down the street and paid careful attention to the houses and their numbers. Passing the first street without any luck, they turned the corner and proceeded down the next alley. “Nothing yet,” commented Link as they passed another row of houses. He was beginning to feel discouraged again. Maybe the woman had been wrong, or had played a joke on him. Or maybe she was just senile. It didn’t matter, Link felt like his one break was going to turn into more disappointment.

Link, Zelda, and Solo reached the end of the last street with no luck. Every house looked the same, and, like the other side of town, there weren’t even any houses with numbers in the thirties. Link threw up his arms in frustration. “I knew it,” he shouted. “Just for once, I think my luck will change, and it all comes crashing down.”

While Link was complaining, Solo couldn’t help notice that the street didn’t end, but it merely turned into a very narrow dirt path that passed tightly between two corner houses. “Um...Link?” said Solo sheepishly. Link looked at her and tried to hide his disappointment. “We didn’t quite get to the end of the street. They path goes down that way a little further.” She pointed to the small path. Link gave a surprised look when he saw the small continuation of the cobblestone road.

“I wonder what’s down there,” Link thought aloud.

“I have no idea, but I never knew that was there,” said Zelda. Solo had noticed that path before, but she had never walked down it. She had spent too much time trying to steal food or just wallowing in self-pity. The three walked curiously down the path, squeezing through the narrow space between the two perpendicular houses.

They were taken aback by what they saw. The street continued on for nearly another block and ended in a cul-de-sac. What caught their attention was the fact that the houses on this street were abandoned and in near-ruin. Many of them were scorched and burned beyond recognition, but a few still looked like houses, albeit uninhabitable ones. “I never knew any of this was here,” said Link.

“Me neither,” said Zelda. “Of course, I never walked around the town that much, anyways. These must be some of the buildings that didn’t totally burn down.” They walked down the street and tried to see if any of the houses could be the one they were looking for.

Link suddenly stopped in front of a house. He stared intently at the house’s scorched façade. When he looked at this house, he got a strange gut feeling. There was something about this place that told him he had found what he was looking for. Link stepped up to the scorched and boarded-up house. “I think this is the house,” said Link, with near total confidence.

“How do you know?” asked Zelda, not seeing what was unique about this particular house. It was just as scorched and in disrepair as the other houses, and there were no numbers on it.

“I don’t know how I know, but I know,” replied Link. He sidestepped to the window next to the front door and closely examined it. Most of the glass had been broken and fallen out, but a few tiny shards remained lodged in the frame. Link looked closely at the bits of glass; they weren’t clear, but colored. Each fragment of glass was a different color, indicating that these windows may have been stained glass. “These could have been stained-glass windows,” said Link, pulling a piece of colored glass from the window frame and showing it to the two girls.

As the girls examined the glass, Link turned around and looked at the house once more. He noticed a large, dense patch of cobwebs. He noticed what looked like nail-holes in the wall and brushed away the cobwebs. He was nearly shocked by what he saw. Underneath the cobwebs were the silhouettes of two numerals that were scorched into the surface of the house. There must have been two numbers nailed there once, which protected the area behind from the flames, but later fell off. The silhouettes read 33. Link gasped and the girls turned to see what he was looking at. They were also amazed by the new revelation.

“This is the house,” said Link. He looked at the wooden door which was boarded-over by nearly a dozen crisscrossed planks.

“How do we get in?” asked Zelda, gazing at the formidable looking planks. “We can’t go in through the window because there’s too much broken glass, we’ll get all cut up.”

“These boards are probably years old,” Link said, fingering the semi-rotten wooden planks. “I bet we could pull them off of here.” Link got a good grip on one of the boards and pulled as hard as he could. The board creaked, but only budged a little. “These things are nailed in tight, I need something to pry it off with.” Link looked around for something he could use as a tool. There was nothing. Link looked at Solo and Zelda. “Why don’t you two help me pull this board off?” Zelda and Solo looked at each other and nodded their assent to Link. “Okay put your hands on this board and get a good grip. When I count to three, pull as hard as you can, okay?” They nodded. “All right, one, two, three!” All three pulled on the board with all their strength. The wood panel creaked as the nails slowly pulled out of the doorframe. Suddenly, the board came loose, sending the children stumbling backwards. Link fell on his backside and grimaced. He stood up and looked at the progress they’d made.

“Oh look,” Link said happily. “We uncovered the doorknob.” Link pointed to the door. The board they pulled off had covered the doorknob and the middle of the door. Maybe it was unlocked. Link walked to the door and tried the knob. It turned. He pushed at the door and it creaked open. He looked through the narrow, horizontal opening between the wooden planks. It was too dark to see inside. Link turned around at the sound of Zelda wincing. He saw her clutching her right hand.

“What’s wrong?” Link asked.

“I got a splinter,” Zelda replied, showing her hand to Link. A large sliver of wood, about an inch and a half long, was embedded in her hand near the base of her middle finger. Link gently took her hand and

examined it. The splinter was jammed fairly deep in her hand, and only a small portion of it stuck out.

“Oh, I’ll get it out for you,” Link said in a soothing voice. This wouldn’t be too hard, he could probably pull it out with his fingers. Link grabbed a hold of the splinter and prepared to pull it out. “Okay, I’m gonna pull it out. Don’t move, it might hurt a little.” Zelda nodded for Link to go ahead. He pulled at the splinter and Zelda yanked her hand away.

“That hurt!” she yelped.

“It’s just a little splinter. Come on, be brave.” Link couldn’t believe Zelda was so touchy over an insignificant sliver in her hand. She had been through a lot worse than this. It always seems to be the little things that bothered her. “Okay, I’ll pull it out on the count of three,” said Link, once again grabbing the splinter. “One...two...” Link quickly yanked the splinter out of her hand before he said ‘three.’ Zelda never saw that coming. She opened her eyes and looked at Link.

“Well? Are you going to pull it out?” she asked.

“I already did,” replied Link, showing Zelda the large splinter. She looked at her hand and saw a small trickle of blood come from the tiny puncture wound.

“That wasn’t so bad now, was it?” Link said with a smirk. Zelda was surprised, she didn’t even feel him pull it out. Link turned and walked back up to the door. “Now that the door is open, I can just kick these boards to break them.” Zelda and Solo gave him quizzical looks.

“Yeah right,” Zelda said sarcastically. “You can’t break those boards.”

“Watch me,” Link touted. He took a few steps back and prepared to kick one of the boards. With a lunge, Link kicked one of the boards with his foot. The board flexed, but did not break, causing Link to stumble and fall. The two girls giggled.

“I told you that you couldn’t do it,” Zelda taunted. Link got up and glowered at her.

“That was just practice,” he said, feeling himself blush. That was a little embarrassing. He would have to make his second attempt work. Link took a deep breath and forcefully kicked a plank. This time it bent and snapped in two. “Hah! I told you I could do it!” he cheered, grinning widely. “Just a few more and we’ll be able to get in.” Link quickly administered a few karate-like kicks to the boards, causing them all to break. Now there was finally enough clearance to get inside the house. Link ducked his head under the few remaining boards and walked into the house. He poked his head outside to see the two girls still standing there. “Well, are you coming in or not?” he asked.

The girls looked at each other for a moment, then walked inside. The interior of the house was as desolate as everything else outside. The walls were covered with large streaks of soot, as if someone had swiped a giant brush with black paint all over the walls. Some of the interior support beams were singed and burned nearly halfway through; it was a surprise that this house was still standing. The large main room was a disaster; partially-burnt papers and household items were strewn everywhere. Someone had probably looted the place before trying to set fire to it. What was once a wood-burning iron stove was now a hunk of metal lying on its side. At the other side of the room was some sort of chair and a couple beds. They seemed as if someone had taken a hatchet to them and chopped them into a few large chunks. But what struck the children the most was the smell; a smoky, burning smell combined with the wet, musty odor of a long abandoned building combined to create a scent that was nearly overpowering.

“This place is a mess,” commented Link as he gazed around the ruins of the house.

“How long do you think it’s been since anyone’s lived here?” asked Zelda to no one in particular.

“Well, if this was my parents’ house, probably since before I was born,” replied Link. Considering the condition of the house, his hypothesis seemed fairly accurate. No one had even set foot in it for over a dozen years. Everything in the house was covered in a fine layer of undisturbed dust, and cobwebs filled every available nook and cranny. Link surveyed the inside of the house and began to imagine how the events unfolded that led up to this current situation.

“It looks like people tried to loot this house,” Link thought aloud. “And then they must’ve tried to burn it down, but I guess it didn’t quite catch fire very well.” By the interior’s appearance, it seemed that someone had tried to ignite a fire in the far corner of the kitchen; all the walls’ and ceiling’s scorch marks radiated from that point. The fire had probably spread across the floor and partially burned what belongings were left, but didn’t actually ignite the rest of the house.

Link stepped up to one of the scorched walls and rubbed his hand across its hard, gritty surface. The walls were made of some type of stucco or adobe-like material, explaining why it didn't catch fire.

"It looks like this might've been a nice house once," said Solo, examining the interior. She now wished that she had known about this place years before, then maybe she wouldn't have had to spend all those cold, rainy nights in the open air.

"So do you think this was your parents' house?" asked Zelda, pacing back and forth.

"Maybe," replied Link. He had a gut feeling that he was in the right place, but now he needed some kind of proof. "I really think we are in the right place," he continued. "Remember the number on the outside? There must've been some kind of metal signs nailed there before, but they probably just fell off. And they were the same numbers as in my dream. And the stained-glass windows and outside of the house were the same as my dream. Now I'm inside, and this *definitely* looks like it did in my dream, if it wasn't in such bad condition." He turned around and tried to envision himself inside the house in his dream. He stood in front of the door to orient himself, and closed his eyes.

"The kitchen was right over there," he said, blindly pointing to the destroyed kitchen. "And the beds and living room were over there," he added, pointing to the opposite end of the house, which was strewn with smashed and scorched furniture. He opened his eyes and looked at the two girls, who were intent on his every word. "And that's all I remember from the dream." He absently pushed around a singed piece of trash.

"It's so strange that you would have such a realistic dream," commented Solo. "How can you simply dream about something and have it end up being true? I always thought that dreams weren't real."

"I don't know," said Link with a shrug. "But I've always had dreams like that. Sometimes I have normal dreams, but I almost never remember those. It's happened quite a few times, when I have a dream that is a premonition of some kind. They just happen; all of a sudden, I would have nightmares for days, and then I what I saw in the dream would come true in some way."

"It's happened to me, too," said Zelda.

"Haven't you ever had a dream like that?" asked Link to Solo. "When it turned out to be a sign about something in the real world?"

"Not really," replied Solo. "Actually, I don't remember any of my dreams."

"None of them?" asked Link. He thought it was a little unusual that someone wouldn't remember *any* of their dreams.

Solo shook her head. "No, I can't remember any of them. I know I've woke up after having a strange dream, but I can never remember a second of them; not even what they were about. It's almost like I don't have any dreams at all."

"Well, I guess everyone's different," said Zelda.

"It really doesn't bother me," said Solo. "Dreams aren't real, anyways. Well, at least they're not supposed to be. I can get along fine living in the waking world. And speaking of the waking world, are we going to see if we can find anything here?"

"Oh yeah," said Link. "I'd almost forgotten where we were. Why don't you two look over by the kitchen and I'll look over here."

Zelda and Solo moved over to one side of the house, while Link went to the other. "What exactly are we looking for?" asked Zelda.

"Anything," replied Link. "Look for anything that might give us a hint as to who my parents were. Books, jewelry, anything." Link proceeded to dig around on the floor, pushing away all the singed trash and searching for something important. The only objects in this house that were even remotely intact were some of the furniture. The bed's mattress was burned completely to ashes, while the ebony frame was only mildly singed.

Not finding anything near the bed, Link proceeded to dig near the dresser. All of the drawers were pull out of the dresser and strewn about, obviously the result of looters. The few things that used to be in the drawers were scorched, but some of the clothing remained identifiable. The fire had probably been less fierce at this end of the house. Link gently moved away the trash, searching. Nothing caught his eye. *There has to be something*, he said to himself. *I didn't come this far to be disappointed.*

On the other side of the room, Zelda and Solo dug through the mess in the kitchen. The fire in this area had been much more intense than near the beds. The only items that remained intact were the iron stove and many of the kitchen utensils. The kitchen table had been entirely consumed, leaving only fragile bits or charcoal behind. Zelda and Solo both sat on their hands and knees, their faces and clothes becoming smeared with soot. “This is hopeless,” said Zelda with a sigh. “Everything is burned up, we’re not going to find anything here.” Zelda stood up and gave a look of hopelessness to Link.

He saw her face, and inwardly agreed to what she said. It didn’t look to him like they were going to find anything at all. “You might be right,” said Link dejectedly. “You guys might as well quit looking, we’re not going to find anything.” Upon hearing that, Solo stood up and brushed some of the larger pieces of charred wood off her clothes. All three of them silently congregated at the center of the room, each of them looking off into a different corner of the house.

“I’m sorry we didn’t find anything,” said Zelda, trying to comfort Link. “But at least we got to see the house.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Link. “I hope that this actually was my parents’ house. I guess I should be happy that I found out as much as I did.”

“Yeah, most orphans...” Zelda began, wondering if she should’ve called Link an orphan. “Well, you’re not really an orphan...but you know what I mean.”

“Guys, I think you missed something,” said Solo, finally butting into their conversation. She pointed to something in the corner near the beds.

“What?” asked Link. “I don’t see anything.”

“There, the thing over in the corner.” Solo sighed and walked over to the object that she saw. Link’s heart skipped a beat when he saw her gently extract a small book from a pile of ashes.

“How did you find that?” asked Link. “I already looked over there and I didn’t see that.”

“I notice a lot of things that a lot of other people don’t,” she said, handing the book to Link. “What is it?”

Link gently examined the half-burned book that he held in his hands. It was bound in a hard, dark-blue, cover and was filled with pages that were yellowed and singed. “I’m not sure,” said Link. With great care, Link opened the cover of the book. The pages inside were burned and blackened around the edges, but readable in the center.

Link gasped when he saw the writing on the first page, it read “Araia.” “I think this belonged to my mother,” said Link. “See, look what it says.” He pointed to the page, and Solo and Zelda looked at it. Zelda smiled, but Solo remained clueless.

“Um...I...can’t read,” Solo said, feeling stupid.

“Oh, well, I suppose I should’ve expected that,” said Link. “After all, I’m sure you never got the chance to learn how to read. It says ‘Araia.’ That’s my mother’s name.”

“Oh,” Solo replied, finally understanding the significance of what she’d found. “Well, what is it?”

Link carefully turned the page, trying not to make the paper crumble. At the center of one page, he saw what looked like handwriting. He couldn’t make out the words due to the smearing and scorching caused by the fire. “It looks like handwriting,” said Link.

“You think it’s your mother’s handwriting?” asked Zelda.

“It very well might be.” Link flipped through more pages, each of them still unreadable. However, as he reached closer to the center of the book, the area of the page that was burned decreased. Finally, he reached a page with readable handwriting. Some of the words around the edge of the page were burned away, but the writing in the center was clear and distinct.

Link was about to read what he saw when a noise from behind caused him to spin around and look towards the door. Two guards with their swords drawn entered into the house and glared at the children. “All right, hold it right there,” said one of the guards in a harsh voice. “What do you think you kids are doing here? This is a restricted area, and the house is dangerous. You kids are in big trouble.”

While Link and Solo stood, startled, Zelda put a mean look on her face and approached the guards. Link smiled when he realized what Zelda was going to do. “I demand to know what you’re doing,” scolded Zelda. The guards looked confused. “Don’t you have any idea who I am?”

The guards looked her over and almost did a double-take as they realized who they were standing in front of. They quickly sheathed their swords and stood at attention. “We apologize, Your Highness,” said one of the guards. “We had no idea it was you.”

“Well, maybe you should look more carefully before you coming running into a house full of kids with your swords drawn.” Zelda gave them a death-glare, and continued to talk in her “princess” voice.

“Some reported that there was a group of troublemakers messing around near these abandoned houses,” explained the other guard. “And we were sent to investigate. Your Highness, you shouldn’t be in here. This house is dangerous and very unstable, it could collapse at any time. In fact, I’m surprised it’s stayed up for so long. For your own safety, all of you need to leave.”

Zelda’s expression softened when she realized what the guard was saying made sense. “I suppose you’re right,” she said. Zelda, Link, and Solo followed as the guards escorted them outside.

“Thank you, Your Highness,” said the other guard. “Lady Impa and your father would have a fit if they found out you were here. And if anything happened to you, they would have my head on a platter.”

“Oh, please don’t tell them you found me here,” pleaded Zelda. The last thing she needed was another one of Impa’s three-hour lectures on responsibility.

The guard smiled. “Don’t worry, princess, we won’t tell anyone. You kids just move along and don’t come wandering around dangerous places like this anymore.”

Zelda smiled and ran off, followed by Link and Solo. After reaching the center of the market, they huddled in a secluded area. “That was nice how you handled those guards,” commented Link.

“Oh, they’re pussycats,” Zelda said. “Those guards wouldn’t have hurt us, even if I wasn’t the princess. They just try to act all big and mighty, Impa always talks about them being on power trips. So what are we going to do with the book?”

“Maybe we should take it back to the castle where we can look at it in private,” suggested Link.

“That’s a good idea,” agreed Zelda. “Let’s go.” The three briskly walked through the market and towards the castle. Link held a tight, yet gentle grip on the book. He knew it was important, and that this might finally answer all of his questions.

The children zoomed past the confused castle servants and ran straight for Zelda’s bedroom. They rushed inside her room and closed the door. Zelda motioned for Link to go to a desk in the corner of the room, which was covered in stuffed animals. She quickly pushed the animals off the table and pulled an extra chair up to the desk. Link sat down and gently placed the book on the table. Zelda and Solo hovered over Link’s shoulders, peering at the singed book. “Well, are you going to read it?” asked Zelda excitedly.

“Yeah, but could you give me a little room?” said Link. “I don’t like it when people are looking over my shoulder.” Zelda gave an apologetic look and back off a few steps.

“Can you read it out loud for me?” asked Solo.

“Of course,” Link replied. He turned to the first readable page that he had found earlier. He carefully studied the page and realized what he was looking at. “This is my mother’s diary!” Link exclaimed, nearly shouting.

“Are you serious?” asked Zelda in near disbelief.

“Yes, it has to be. I can tell by the way it’s written.” Link purposely paused a moment, and gazed at the page.

“Well? Are you going to read it?” asked Zelda impatiently.

“I don’t know,” Link said in a half-teasing voice. “This is my mother’s diary, and it might not be polite for me to read it to you.” Link cracked a smile when he saw the look of severe disappointment on Zelda’s face. “All right, I’ll read it to you. But you have to promise not to tell anyone.” Zelda and Solo both nodded, urging him to continue. He gazed down at the paper, and prepared to read it. “Some of the words were burned off, so we won’t get all of it.” Link took a deep breath and read what remained of the first entry:

...have no idea what’s going on in the real world. Mine and Batai’s job make us privy to a lot of

classified information... suspect that the war will be coming soon. Intelligence reports say that invaders are approaching from the south, and may attack within the next few weeks. I just hope that my baby won't be born into a world that's fighting a war, a war that has no meaning... going into my seventh month. So it'll only be a couple months before my baby's born... hope we can eliminate the threat before it escalates into full-blown fighting. But I have a feeling that it probably won't end up peacefully. The Oracles and I know that a dreadful time is approaching... too depressing to write about the bad things. I try to concentrate on the new life growing inside me. I know that he, or maybe she, will be very important someday. The baby sure is feisty, he kicks all the time. It's like he can't wait to get out. Batai is constantly telling me how I look as big as a house. And I feel like a cow, too. I'm not quite used to being this huge... he would complain too if he had to deal with bizarre food cravings and wild mood-swings...getting late. I should probably get some sleep.

"That's amazing," commented Zelda after Link finished reading.

"I know," he replied, so full of emotions that he couldn't quite think of a way to describe them. "It's a shame that some of it is too damaged to be read. But I guess I should be lucky that I found this at all."

Solo stared into space, completely dumbfounded by the words she had just heard. Hearing the diary entry set off so many unfamiliar feelings inside of her. It was as if she could hear the woman's voice speaking to her as Link read. She felt so connected now, connected to Link, to Zelda, and to many others whom she could not name. She wondered if either of them felt the same way. As the seemingly endless seconds ticked away, Solo's connected feeling began to fade. She needed to rekindle it. "Please, continue," said Solo in a quiet voice.

Link nodded and carefully turned the page. The next few pages were burned beyond recognition, and, after some more flipping, Link reached another readable page:

...having dreams again. But this time they were different. Normally they're from a third-person perspective, only as an outside observer. It necessary to remember these because of my job... was different. These weren't normal premonitions or predictions, they were more personal and they were first-person... in a field with flowers and butterflies. It almost reminded me of the Vin... kids were playing together in the field. I told them that they had to go home, and they were so disappointed...that they had to find what they lost. I told them that they had to find what they couldn't live without... woke up. I felt so strange after this dream. This was the first time that I had no conscious control; I was the one talking, but it was as if I wasn't thinking of what to say. This dream was almost like the ones I had when I first developed my abilities. I asked the Oracles what they thought of it, but they had no idea... that they never experienced anything like that before... hope that I'll figure this out sooner or later. I know I'll find out the truth, it's my job.

"That's the same dream Solo and I had," said Link, after letting the words sink in.

"That's unbelievable," Zelda commented. "How can somebody in the past have the same dream as people in the present? It's mind-boggling." Zelda tried to think about the ramifications of that possibility. She remembered Link's stories about his time-traveling, and wondered if this had any similarities.

"This is wonderful," said Link. "It's like I know her personally. This is the best thing that's ever happened to me."

"There's some things that still puzzle me," said Solo. "What was she talking about when she talked about her other dreams and developing 'abilities'? And what are the Oracles?"

"I think oracles are people that tell the future," replied Link.

"Do you think it's possible that your mother could tell the future?" asked Zelda.

Link shrugged his shoulders. "I guess it's possible. And it might explain all the dreams and premonitions I've had before. Maybe she had special powers and I inherited them from her."

"It looks like your finding this out just leaves you with more questions," said Solo.

"Well, maybe there's more in this diary," said Link, turning the page. He searched for another entry. He passed even more completely burned pages, the ashes crumbling from the slightest touch of his fingers. He found another entry near the end of the book and read it:

... were born today. I thought they would come earlier, but I guess it was a little early. I so happy to be a mother now... named my son Link. It just seemed like a good name. But my happiness has been

spoiled by reality. Batai says that the army will be invading probably within the week... the most startling vision I've ever had. The Oracles always said it would happen to me eventually, but I never knew it would be like this... of my own death. I saw the soldiers invade the town and systematically execute innocent civilians. Then I saw them come for me and my family. And it ended with them finally killing me; that's when the vision ended... know what I have to do now. I must protect my family from being killed when the soldiers come. I know that they'll be here, and there's nothing I can do to stop them... can't stop them from killing me, but maybe I can protect my chil...

Hearing that entry sent chills down Link and Solo's spines. Link and Solo could both feel the fear in that entry, the fear that Link's mother must have felt. It was almost mind-numbing. "That must've been terrible," said Zelda, feeling quite shaken up. "I couldn't imagine what it would be like to foresee your own death."

"Is there any more?" asked Solo, eager to hear more. When she heard this entry, she could clearly feel the fear. It was as if Solo had been there, writing it herself. She could hear Link's mother thinking, and she could hear the screams of the people who died in the war. Solo shook her head, trying to push the thoughts from her head.

Link flipped through the diary, and the pages crumbled once again. The rest of the diary seemed to be completely burned, leaving nothing. He breathed a sigh of relief when he found one last page in the diary. Most of the writing was gone and there was very little left, but he read what was there:

... is the day I have been fearing. Our sources report that the invaders have entered Hyrule, and are only twenty miles from the capital. They will be here soon, and I know my death will come... at peace with it. I accept my fate, it must be the will of the gods... I do know that it is the will of the gods that my children survive... must save them from a hellish existence... didn't want our neighbor's children to suffer... took one to the orphanage in Batarael... going to take Link to the Kokiri Forest. I know that the Deku Tree will protect him, after all... one of us. I'm hoping that their being... more than one place... give a better chance of survival... know now that my time has come. I pray that the goddesses will have mercy on my soul, and have mercy on the attackers, because they don't know what they're doing... probably my last entry... only hope that no innocent people will have to suffer needlessly... tell my... that I love them. May the gods bless whoever reads this...

Link wiped a tear that made its way down his cheek. He didn't want to cry in front of Zelda and Solo, but he couldn't help it. He could feel the sadness that his mother felt when she wrote this. He could feel the pain.

"There's something strange about what she wrote," said Zelda, pondering the words of the diary.

"Well of course it's unusual," said Link. "The woman foresaw her own death, that seems a little unusual to me."

"That's not what I meant," Zelda countered. "Did you pay attention to what the words said?"

"Of course I did."

"No, I mean the actual *words*. Did you notice that she wrote *children* instead of *child*?"

"Oh that's just semantics," Link said. "She could've written it wrong."

"I don't think so," said Zelda. "A mother wouldn't have written children by mistake. I think you've stumbled on something bigger than you realize."

Link was startled when he realized what Zelda was getting at. "Oh gods," he said, his face turning pale. "We have to go there...now."

"Where?" asked Solo.

"To Batarael," replied Link. "I think I know what I'm looking for. The dream is finally starting to make sense. In the diary she said children, that means she had more than one child. I think I might have a brother."

"That's amazing," said Solo. She was beginning to believe that Link was on to something; he might be right. "Do you want to go now?"

"Yes, we have to."

"Where is Batarael?" asked Solo. The name sounded familiar, but she wasn't sure.

"It's a few miles north of the castle," replied Zelda. "It's in a valley just at the base of the mountain

range.”

“Can we make it there on our own?” asked Solo.

“I don’t know,” replied Zelda. “Maybe we should go ask Impa. She could take us there in a carriage and we’d be in Batarael in no time.”

“Will Impa do it?” asked Solo.

“Of course she will. I’ve been good lately, and she said if I quit whining all the time I might actually get what I want. Now’s my chance to whine and get what I want.” Zelda smirked. Impa was no match for three puppy-dog-faced children.

“Well, we should probably go now before it gets too late in the day,” suggested Link.

“Good idea, let’s get going,” said Zelda as she excitedly rushed out of her room, followed by Link and Solo. As Link made his way through the castle, he began to feel incredibly excited and almost scared at the same time. This is what the dream had meant by finding what he had lost. He had an inkling as to what he was going to find out, but he had to make sure before he jumped to any conclusions. He knew that he would find what he was looking for in Batarael.

After enough whining and begging, the children finally convinced Impa to take them to Batarael. She had work to do, and didn’t want to help the kids with a wild goose chase, but she decided to do it anyways. Her weakness was that she couldn’t say no to Link, he was always so modest and selfless that he never thought of asking anything for himself. When he finally did make a request, Impa felt obliged to fulfill it.

The ride to Batarael was relatively short, but quite uncomfortable. Link never liked riding in carriages, he always ended up getting motion sickness. He felt nauseated whenever he was riding in something he had no control over. Rocky, mountain trails didn’t help much either. The path was extremely bumpy and there were many small rises and dips in the road.

“You don’t look so good,” commented Solo to Link.

He gave her an obviously forced smile. He tried not to get sick at the constant jarring of the carriage.

“I’m okay,” said Link, trying not to worry anyone. “I’m just a little uneasy from this ride.”

“Link gets sick whenever he rides in a carriage,” whispered Zelda, causing Link to shoot her an annoyed glare. Zelda took this opportunity to embarrass him further. She always loved seeing that look on Link’s face, it was so adorable. Zelda loved teasing him, and she knew that he liked it even though he acted as if he didn’t. “You should’ve seen the first time he rode in a carriage with me. Once we finally got out, he ended up getting sick and threw up all over Impa’s flower garden.”

“I didn’t do that,” argued Link. “She’s just twisting the truth, Solo.” Solo chuckled and Link looked frustrated as he realized that she didn’t believe him.

Impa stopped the conversation when she shouted into the cab, “We’re almost there,” said Impa. “The town is just past that hill.” The children excitedly looked out the window at the approaching town. They were slightly more elevated than the village, so they had an awe-inspiring view. Batarael was much larger than the familiar Kakariko, probably twice as big. They could see streets and city blocks arranged in a regular pattern, much unlike the random arrangement of houses in Kakariko Village. The houses were also much more colorful and decorative. The colors ranged from pastel earth-tones, to vivid colors of the rainbow. They passed through the town’s gate and under a sign that read “Welcome to Batarael.”

Impa drove the carriage into the center of the town and parked it in front of the market near a whole bunch of other carriages. Impa climbed down from the driver’s seat and helped the children out of the cab. Link, Zelda, and Solo were amazed by this beautiful town. Everything here looked so interesting and new. “Well, what should we do first?” asked Zelda.

“I’m not sure, but I think we should probably look around for the orphanage,” said Link.

“What exactly are you kids looking for?” asked Impa, still not sure why she went through the trouble of escorting them here.

“We’ll know when we find it,” replied Link. “You know, we should probably split up so we can cover

more ground.”

“I’ll take Zelda and you and Solo can go together,” suggested Impa.

“But Impa, I don’t want you to go with us,” complained Zelda.

Impa crossed her arms. “Oh really?”

“Well, it’s just that adults are boring,” said Zelda. “And I think this is something we need to do by ourselves. Besides, I’m old enough to take care of myself.”

“No you’re not, young lady. You’re still a child and you have to listen to your elders. It’s for your own protection.”

“Maybe I can help,” offered Solo meekly. Impa gave an inquisitive look. “Well...I’ve been a street rat all my life and I’ve taken care of myself just fine. I could go by myself, and Link could take Zelda with him.”

Impa thought about Zelda’s suggestion. Link was a very careful and protective person, he wouldn’t let any harm come to the princess. In fact, he had saved her life before. He was technically a knight and had studied martial arts, so he would make a good bodyguard. “Well, I suppose that would be okay,” conceded Impa. “Solo, are you sure you’ll be fine?” Solo nodded. “Then all of you go ahead.”

“You can stay here and watch the carriage,” said Zelda as they all walked away from Impa. Within a little over a hundred feet, they had reached the busy center of the town. The children huddled together as people rushed past in the hustle-bustle of daily activity.

“Well, should we ask around or just look for ourselves?” said Link, remembering the cold responses they had gotten from people in the castle village.

“I think we should probably just look,” said Zelda. Solo agreed. They looked down two long streets that stretched in opposite directions from the center of the town. One street led to the base of the mountain range while the other ended just in front of a thick forest.

“I guess me and Zelda will go that way,” said Link, pointing to the street towards the mountain, “and you can go that way.” He pointed to the street that led to the forest.

“What do I do if I find anything?” asked Solo. “Is there some place we should meet?”

“Um...I guess we should all meet back by Impa if we find anything,” said Link. Solo nodded, her agreement and waved to Link and Zelda as they walked down the opposite street. Solo turned and made her way down her street. She walked briskly down the avenue, trying to avoid colliding with other people. She didn’t mind walking around this town alone, she preferred to work that way. Strangely, she didn’t feel out of place in Batarael. Solo had a feeling of belonging here, as if this town looked familiar. She couldn’t quite remember if she had been in this town before, but it was possible. She may have been here once; she had stowed away on carriages before, maybe one of them took her here.

She couldn’t worry about that now, she had to help out Link. Solo looked at the various buildings, wondering if any of them could be an orphanage. She couldn’t read the signs, so she had to make logical guesses. An orphanage would be filled with children, and children play during the day. So it was possible that an orphanage would have lots of playing children in front of it. Solo smiled to herself, that was a good idea. She would look for a whole bunch of children.

Solo reached a cross-street and wondered if she should wander down it. It wasn’t a very long street, and she could see fairly well down it. There didn’t seem to be any orphanages on the cross street, so she continued walking down the main street. There were so many interesting buildings down this avenue. It looked like mostly businesses and government offices. People walked in and out of large, dome-shaped buildings, and bought goods from the myriad of sidewalk-salesmen. Solo resisted the instinctive urge to hide behind boxes and stakeout the food vendors. She realized that she no longer had to steal food. It was funny how memories came back to her like that.

Solo continued walking, still not seeing any sign of children. She was beginning to wonder if there even was an orphanage in this town. Either that, or it was down the street Link and Zelda were searching. As she studied the buildings, Solo also studied the people. They looked a lot more kind and inviting than the people in the castle village. They also looked like they felt safer and more secure. She smiled to herself. *These people would be so easy to pick-pocket*, she thought.

The density of buildings became lesser as she approached the end of the avenue. She saw the beautiful

forest ahead and it reminded her of where Link lived. He would probably feel at home in this end of the town. Solo saw that there were only a few more buildings ahead, along with a small graveyard. When she reached the end of the cobblestone road, Solo froze in her tracks. At the terminus of the avenue was a graveyard dotted with a few dozen identical tombstones. Next to the graveyard was a large tent that was erected over a large patch of scorched ground. That looked quite strange. Solo walked closer to the tent and realized that it covered what was left of the remains of a burned-out building. It was nothing more than a pile of charred wood and scorched ground.

Solo stepped ever closer to the tent, feeling a strange sensation come upon her as she did. When she approached the edge of the tent, Solo froze. She could hear them; she could hear the screams. Solo fell to her knees, nearly paralyzed with fear and sadness. This place looked so familiar, she knew what it was. Solo crouched down and put her hands over her ears trying to silence the screams and the roar of the inferno. She could hear the wood cracking and the ceiling collapsing above her. She was there again. With the force of a hurricane, the memories came at her. She now recalled the terrible nightmares she'd had. They were this. Oblivious to the staring onlookers, Solo let out a terrified scream as she relived the scene of death and destruction that happened so many years ago. Solo collapsed onto the ground and wailed.

Chapter Eight: The Vinculum

“That was a waste of time,” said Zelda cynically as they reached the end of the road without finding any sign of any orphanage.

“Well, maybe Solo found it on the other side of town,” suggested Link. This street had a couple government buildings and many residential complexes. They turned and started to walk back the way they had come, looking to make sure they didn't miss anything.

“Maybe. Then again, maybe she didn't. We could've gone through all this trouble for nothing.”

“I don't think we did,” said Link, paying close attention to the signs on the buildings. “I have an idea.” He pointed to an ornate stone edifice that was adorned with decorative pillars. A seal above the door identified it as the mayor's office. “I bet they'll know where everything in the town is.” They had both noticed the mayor's office the first time around, but wanted to search for themselves before they asked anyone.

“I guess we can go there,” agreed Zelda, dragging Link behind her as she ran towards the office.

When they had climbed the front steps, Link slowly opened the door and walked inside. There was a desk in the front and a few offices in the back. Link and Zelda walked up to the front desk. They looked around and didn't see anyone. Link saw a small bell on the desk, and rang it. No response. He rang the bell again with the same results. Link continued ringing the bell, shouting, “Hello? Is anyone here?”

Finally, a man came out from one of the back rooms. The man walked up to the desk and took the bell away from Link, who was still ringing it. “Yes, yes. Thank you for making sure the bell works,” said the man in a sarcastic tone. “How can I help you?”

“We're looking for the orphanage in this town,” Link replied. “Can you tell us where it is?”

The man looked at Link with a disbelieving glance. “You're looking for the orphanage?” the man asked in a mocking tone. “What's wrong, you little kids lost your parents and you want to go there?” he laughed. He turned his head and shouted into the back room. “Hey Miko, there's some kids here looking for the orphanage!” he shouted in a cynical tone.

“Hah!” came the response. The man at the front desk looked back at Link with a joking smile. The man frowned when he saw the angry, dead-serious look on Link's face.

“Oh, I'm sorry,” the man apologized, finally acting normally. “You're serious.”

“What do you mean ‘I'm serious’?” asked Link. He hated it when people treated him like a stupid child.

“Listen, kid. I don't know if I should be the one telling you this, but there is no orphanage any more. It burned down eight years ago.” Link's demeanor suddenly turned grim.

“It did?” Link said in disbelief. “Well, then where did all the children go? Were they sent somewhere else where I could go find them? There’s someone I need to...”

The man walked out from behind the desk and stood face-to-face with Link. The man’s face turned from light-hearted to solemn. “No, you don’t understand. I’m sorry to have to tell you this,” the man said in a solemn voice. “But no children were sent to other orphanages. Everyone died in the fire. There were forty-seven children and fifteen staff members. It’s the worst tragedy this town has ever seen.”

A tear came to Link’s eyes. “Everyone...?” he mumbled.

“Yes. Everyone died, there weren’t any survivors. The remains of the building are all the way at the opposite end of the main street. After the townspeople removed the bodies, they decided not to clean up the ruins. They built a graveyard next to the orphanage and buried all the children there. Now there’s a tent over the burned-down orphanage to protect it. The townspeople decided to keep it there as a reminder of the loss of life. I’m really sorry. You can go down there and pay your respects if you like.”

“Oh...okay,” said Link, almost unable to speak. He was moved almost to tears and walked quietly out of the building. Zelda followed Link, feeling the pain he was in. They both walked slowly down the street, towards the direction the man had pointed to. “I can’t believe it. After all that searching...and hoping. I find this.” Zelda put her arm around Link, trying to make him feel better. She had never heard him sound so depressed. Link was not only sad about not finding what he was looking for, he felt sad for the innocent children that died. He couldn’t begin to imagine the horror that they had gone through.

Link walked silently as they crossed through the center of town and down the second half of the main street. They both wondered if Solo was done looking or not. If they caught up with her, they would have to tell her that their search was in vain. Link felt a tear roll down his cheek as he remembered the words from his mother’s diary. Now he would never find out who was taken to the orphanage in Batarael.

They grew ever closer to the orphanage, the large tent was visible in the distance. When they came within a hundred feet, Link and Zelda noticed a lone figure sitting in front of the orphanage’s ruins. Link saw the unmistakable green color of his clothes. It was Solo who was sitting there. Nearly forgetting why he had come there in the first place, Link began to run towards Solo.

Link scuffed to a halt in front of Solo while Zelda ran to catch up with him. Solo was curled up in a tight ball, her face buried on her knees. She was sobbing loudly, and shivering violently. Link knelt beside her and gently lifted up her head. Solo continued sobbing and wailing, not noticing anything around her. The only thing she saw was the fire and the bodies of her dead brothers and sisters. “What’s wrong?” asked Link frantically. Solo was so upset, she could barely breathe. The terrible memories paralyzed her as she remember ever minute detail of that death-filled night. “Please, talk to me,” begged Link in as soft and soothing a tone as he could muster.

Solo sobbed and gagged, trying to choke out just a few words. No matter how hard she cried, she felt like she couldn’t speak. Zelda came and sat next to Solo, trying to give her some kind of comfort. “I...I...” stuttered Solo. “Re...mem...ber...this...place.” Solo sobbed again, failing another attempt at regaining her composure. “They...all...died.”

“Where?” asked Link. “Here? At the orphanage?” Solo tried to answer, but instead nodded. “Yes, that’s what the man at the mayor’s office told us. He said that it burned down eight years ago.”

“I know...” sobbed Solo. “My brothers...and sisters...burned to death...all of them.”

“That’s right, the man said that all the children and adults there died,” said Zelda sadly. “There weren’t any survivors.”

“There was...one,” said Solo, the memories flooding her mind relentlessly.

“Who?” asked Link, knowing already what the answer would probably be.

Solo sniffled. “Me,” she replied. “I...was there. I remember it...and the dreams.” She tried to silence the roar of the flames in her head. “I woke up...and there was the fire. Everyone was...dead.” Her voice took on an eerie tone, as if she were in a trance revealing the details of that night. “I tried to wake them up, but they didn’t move. Then...the floor fell and I hit the ground. I finally...crawled out of the house. I looked back...and saw the fire shoot into the sky. Everyone I loved...was gone. I wish I’d died with them...so I wouldn’t have to remember it. I didn’t want...to remember. I ran...I ran away from the fire. And I ran away from my past. I couldn’t...wouldn’t...think about it. So I ran from it...for my whole life.

And now I'm back...and I...remember it..." She fell into another fit of crying, crushing the relative calm she had gained just a moment ago.

"It's okay," said Link. "You're with us now. It can't hurt you anymore. There was nothing you could do to help them, you have to understand that."

"I...know." Solo did understand what Link was talking about. She knew that she wasn't responsible for the other children's deaths. She knew that there was nothing she could have done. But the memories of that night, the pain and the horror, made her feel guilty that she survived. Solo felt that she should have died with the other children, that she wasn't worthy to have survived. "I...shouldn't have lived. They died for nothing...and I didn't do anything...to deserve to live instead of them."

"Don't talk like that," said Link. "What happened was an accident; it wasn't your fault that they died. And you survived just out of luck. You should be grateful that you lived. You survived for a reason, and I think I might know what that reason is." Link wondered if this was the time to tell her his feelings and suspicions, but decided against it.

"I...want to go home." Home. It felt so good to say that. She had a home to go to. She didn't have to go live in an alley, alone.

"Yes, that's fine. We can go home," said Link. He wanted to do whatever he could to make Solo feel better. "Zelda, why don't you go get Impa and tell her to come over here and get us?"

"Okay," agreed Zelda. she gave Solo a comforting pat on the shoulder and ran off to get Impa.

"Don't worry, everything will be fine," said Link, holding Solo in his arms. He and Solo sat in silence, waiting for Zelda and Impa to return.

Link thought about everything that he had found, and what he was going to find out. He wondered if his suspicions were true, or if they were merely wishful thinking. He sat back, feeling more confused than ever. The thoughts were sending chills down his spine. He felt cold, and his skin tingled all over as if he were being prodded with a thousand tiny needles. Link gently massaged his temples, his head was starting to hurt. The last thing he needed was a headache. He noticed that Solo had stopped sobbing, and was sitting peacefully in front of him, half-asleep.

Now Link felt tired, too. His eyelids grew heavy; he wanted to sleep, but knew he had to stay awake. He watched the people rushing past him, their bodies turning from distinct persons to a fuzzy blur. The noise of the town seemed to become lower, as if he were listening from behind a wall. Now the whole world was spinning. It was like the whole world was underwater and he was watching from above the surface. The pain and the tingling grew unbearable as the world slowly faded into indiscriminate blur.

The world was gone now, its noisy streets and pedestrians replaced with nothingness. Link felt at ease in this nothingness. But he realized that it was not nothing, there was something here. He could feel the presence of a person, or maybe more than one person. Link realized that the pain was gone, replaced with a feeling of bliss. For a split-second, he wondered if he was dead.

No, you're not dead, said a voice. It came from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. He could hear the voice with his ears and feel it in his mind. It was a kind, loving voice; a voice that made him feel comfortable. *You're far from dead; you're truly living now.*

"Who's there?" said Link, his voice echoing in the seemingly empty space. This experience seemed familiar to him. It reminded him of his previous visions: the goddesses, and the confrontation with his own dark side. But this was different, it was something new.

You always did ask too many questions, said the voice, light-heartedly. The foggy figure of a person appeared in the distance. It slowly approached Link, and gradually faded into visibility. The person stopped in front of Link and smiled. It was a kind-looking woman, not much taller than he was. She had long, platinum-blond hair, and deep blue eyes that seemed to look directly into his soul. He knew who this person was. "I'm sure this will be more to your liking," said the woman, smiling. "This is what I used to look like, but no longer. In this place, there are no bodies or people. There are only thoughts, emotions, and ideas."

“Where am I?” asked Link.

“You’re in a place that you, and others you know, will learn to know well. It is a place where we come to share our thoughts and feelings. We call it the Vinculum.”

“Vinculum?”

“Yes,” replied the woman with an almost-chuckle. “It’s a word that means ‘something that binds, or ties things together.’ We Oracles thought that it was an appropriate name for this place.”

“Who are the Oracles?” asked Link. He remembered seeing that word in his mother’s diary entry.

“You’ll find out in good time. First, there are things I must explain to you in order for you to understand it. You know who I am, yes?”

“I think I do. You’re my mother...Araia.” Link hoped that he was assuming correctly, it felt like the right answer.

The woman smiled. “You’re a very perceptive person. Yes, I am. I trust that you found my diary in the old house?”

“Yeah, I did, but...”

“It was burned up, I know. Link, you have reached a point in your life when you are on the verge of a monumental change. Now I’m not talking about adolescence and being a teenager, it’s something more. You will see things that you never saw before, hear things you have never heard, and thinks ideas that you never thought were possible.

“I know what you’ve been going through the last few years. You’ve been having nightmares, nightmares that turn out to be predictions of the future. That’s how it begins. I had those same dreams when I was your age. What started out as dreams, will turn into something you could never even comprehend before. You will become an Oracle.”

“You never answered my question,” said Link, nearly annoyed. “What is an Oracle?”

“So impatient,” sighed Araia. “Just like your father. The Oracles are a group of special people with certain extra-sensory abilities. We possess a consciousness more evolved than normal people, we see things differently. In time, so will you see things differently.”

Link gave a frustrated look, she was still avoiding his question. “Haven’t you ever heard ‘good things come to those who wait’?” asked Araia.

“Yeah, but I never liked waiting.”

“Okay, fine. I was trying to be a little mysterious to create a better atmosphere to tell you this, but you just want the facts. You remind me of me.” She chuckled. “The Oracles are just as the name suggests: we see the future. We can sense people’s emotions and intentions, I’m sure you’ve noticed that about yourself by now. The first Oracles appeared after the True Triforce was discovered many millennia ago. Yes, we know the truth about the Triforce. All of the Guardians are also Oracles. Anyways, we kept to ourselves for many years. Most Oracles didn’t know there were any other people of their kind, they felt alone in the world.

“Some time ago, we’re not sure when or by whom, someone created the Vinculum. The Oracles first realized that there were others like them. They started to share their ideas and emotions. Our powers grew greater as we gradually discovered what we could do. By combining our thoughts, we discovered new things. Who do you think created new technology? Only with our ideas could the world advance. Gradually, we grew more accepted. Although people didn’t know the extent of our powers, they knew that we were special. They used us as prophets and as advisors. Do you know who the king’s top advisor is?” Link shook his head. “It’s not his foreign minister, or his vizier, or his minister of war. It is the Prime Oracle.”

“Prime Oracle?” repeated Link.

“Yes. We decide which of us would be best to serve the particular ruler. The rulers know there are many of us, but they don’t know the details; they don’t want to know. After we pick the candidate, the king approves him, and that person becomes the Prime Oracle.”

“So, the Prime Oracle uses his powers to assist the king or queen? Like predicting the future and stuff like that?”

“You’re very bright. But that’s what we do. That’s what *I* did. You see, I was once the Prime Oracle. I

gave the king advice, but his pride got in the way of his better judgment. When I and his military leaders told him about the impending war, he chose to disregard our advice. Instead of preparing to defend ourselves, he wanted to try an offensive. Needless to say, the offensive didn't work. By the time he realized his mistake, it was too late to evacuate the castle village. I foresaw the attack on the village. I also foresaw my own death. I wish that there had been more that I could've done, but even my powers are limited. All of the Oracles eventually foresee their own demise, and they told me it would happen to me. It's unnerving to say the least. I knew that there was nothing I could do to save myself. However, I had the opportunity to save you. That is why I took you to the Kokiri Forest, to save you. Any mother would've done the same.

"Link, you must realize that you are destined for great things. Kasuto told you that, everyone you've lost has told you that. Even Zelda told you that."

"Zelda?" said Link. "When did Zelda say that?" He'd know Zelda for quite some time, and he could never remember her saying something akin to that.

"Do you remember the future? You experienced a completely different version of Hyrule, about five years from now. You see, Zelda, like you, was also an Oracle. On that timeline, during those seven years you were locked away, she realized the extent of her powers. She knew that you would eventually emerge to become the savior of Hyrule. And, of course, that happened. But do you know why she sent you back?"

"She said it was so I could relive my childhood, the childhood I never had."

"That's part of it," continued Araia. "But it's not the whole story. She sent you back so you could create a future where Ganondorf's reign never occurred, a future of peace."

"Then what happened to everyone who stayed in the future?" asked Link. "Did they all disappear?"

"That gets complicated. Things are never clear-cut when it comes to time travel. When you were sent back, the world of your childhood and the world of your adulthood split into two separate realities. The future you saw still exists and will continue along its own path. This new future that you will create will also continue along its own independent path."

"You mean the two times will still exist? Independently? I don't understand."

"Maybe this will help," said Araia. She waved her hand and the whiteness around them was replaced with a sandy beach. A long stick appeared in Araia's hand and she began to draw in the sand. She drew a line in the sand, and drew two X's at each endpoint of the line. "This was your childhood," she said, pointing to the X at the beginning of the line. "This is where you began your journey. The future you created was directly connected with the future you saw. This is the future you saw." She pointed to the X at the other end of the line. "Before Zelda sent you back, whatever you did in the past directly affected the future. That is how time normally works. However, when Zelda sent you back, she created an alternate timeline."

Araia brushed away the line with her foot, leaving the two X's behind. Under the first X she drew a vertical line, stopped, and continued the line horizontally, creating an elongated "L" shape. From the second X, she drew a horizontal line that extended to the right of the X. "This is the new timeline."

"It's two lines," pointed out Link.

"Yes. Before Zelda sent you back, the past and future were directly connected, they were linear. Whatever you did as a child had consequences in the future. But now, the connection between your past and that future has been severed. What you do now cannot affect the future that you saw. From the second you closed the Door of Time, you created this new timeline that you live in now. But the alternate future continues to exist in parallel to this time." She extended the two lines to emphasize that they were parallel. "These two times are essentially independent and cannot affect each other. Whatever you do now will affect this new future, and will not affect the alternate future. But that's not the whole story."

"There's more to it?" complained Link. Just when he was beginning to understand what she was saying, she had to make it more complicated.

"Of course there's more," said Araia with a sly grin. "It's a mother's job to confuse her son. You see that these timelines seem to be parallel right now, but they really aren't. They only *appear* to be parallel." She used the stick to extend the lines by a few yards, drawing them ever closer to each other as they extended into the distance. "At the moment, these two timelines appear to be parallel. But at a point in the

distant future, they will converge and become one again. So they aren't as independent as you might think. They won't affect each other directly until they intersect at a point in the far future."

"How far in the future?"

"We're not sure. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. Although the Oracles can predict the future, we can only see so far. It's like this." The sandy beach disappeared and was replaced with a mountain range. They were standing at the summit of a mountain that extended into the clouds. He looked out ahead of him and saw the world spread out in the most beautiful display he had ever seen. The blue dome of the sky and the world below him was so crystal-clear that it seemed unreal. Never had he seen something in so much detail. "This is how we see the past. It is crystal-clear, and definite. We can see everything that happened in the past with absolute clarity. There is no ambiguity. However, seeing the future is quite different. Turn around."

Link turned around and looked in the opposite direction. The world below him was no longer crystal clear. A thick haze covered everything, leaving most of his view fuzzy and indistinct. The only things he could see clearly were those which were only a short distance ahead of him. "This is how we see the future," explained Araia. "The farther we try to look, the fuzzier our vision becomes. If we look far enough, we can't see anything at all. What is in the near future, we can see relatively clearly. However, it is like being in a fog. We can make out general shapes and events, but specific details are unclear. This means that we can only make general statements about what will happen in the future."

"I see," said Link. He now understood what Araia had explained to him. "You can see the future, but it's fuzzy. You can only make out a few things. It was like the dreams I've had."

"Exactly. Now that you understand the concept of time, I'll tell you why Zelda sent you back. I told you that she did it to create a new future where peace reigned. That is one reason why. But she did it also for a more important reason, for you two. You and Zelda are destined to be together, you are beginning to realize that now, and she knew that in the future. She sent you back so you could start the relationship that you two never had. But she also made a great sacrifice in doing so. By using her power to send you back, she sealed her own fate. What you don't know is that Zelda also traveled back to the past with you. She used her power to enable you to retain the memories of that future, but by doing that she eliminated all possibility of her remembering the future. Zelda knew that only one of you would be able to remember, and she chose you."

"So she came back with me?" said Link, surprised with this new revelation.

"Yes. As a result, Zelda doesn't exist in that parallel future, just as you don't. However, her memories aren't completely gone. They still exist here, in the Vinculum. Her memories are within the minds of all the Oracles, within our collective consciousness. Just as you, her powers are beginning to develop now. When she is ready, she too can join us in the Vinculum. It will take time before she can significantly develop her powers so she can willingly come here."

"How did I get here?" asked Link. He knew that he hadn't come here by his own actions.

"That was my doing. I used my power to draw you here, but you ultimately chose to be taken here."

"How does the Vinculum work? Are the Oracles here all the time? Because I don't like the idea of people knowing my thoughts."

"That's not how it works. The Vinculum is a place where we share our thoughts, but only the thoughts we want to share. Nobody can read what you're thinking if you don't want them to. The Vinculum merely acts as a conduit for us talk to each other. It is what connects us. People come and go when they please. Some choose to stay for long periods, others only come by every now and then to catch up on the news."

"What about you? Why are you here? Aren't you...dead?"

"Yes, I am dead. At least, my body is. When an Oracle dies, their soul goes to the afterlife where every other person's soul goes. However, the person can choose to go here instead. The only drawback is that the decision is final. I chose to come here, so I cannot go back to Heaven where the other souls are. My soul will live here for all eternity. It was a great sacrifice for me, because I could not spend the afterlife with Batai. He was not an Oracle, so he could not come here."

"But aren't the goddesses all powerful? Can't they enable you two to be together? After all, they created the Universe, so they can do anything."

“Let’s not get into a religious debate,” said Araia. “The fact is that the goddesses *can* do anything. You have spoken to them, they told you that. But you have to realize that, save for a few important instances, they do not get involved with their creation. They sit back and watch. Because if they began influencing the course of the world, it would take away our free will. So they don’t do anything. Believe me, it’s a good thing that they don’t get involved and take sides.

“But we’re getting off the subject. What you need to know—why I brought you here—is that you and Zelda are both Oracles. That is why you’ve both had those dreams in the past. Over the next few years, you will both discover abilities you could never have dreamed of.”

“Like what?” asked Link.

“You need to find out that for yourselves. Now that I have explained everything to you, I am going to tell you the reason you are here today. In the dream you had, I told you to find what you have lost. Do you know what that is?”

“I’m not sure...”

“I think you know in your heart what you are missing. For your whole life, you have had an empty feeling inside of you. You felt alone, like there was a void in your soul. I know you thought that Zelda had finally filled that void, but she wasn’t enough. There was something else missing. You have always had a feeling in the back of your mind that you were missing something important. From this day forward, that emptiness will disappear. You and Solo had that dream for a reason. I enabled you to finally meet each other because you are destined to be together.”

“But I love Zelda. I don’t want anyone else. I want her.”

“That’s not what I mean. Solo will fill that void in your soul. And you will fill the void in her soul. It wasn’t a coincidence that you two met. You didn’t simply take her off the streets and into your home because of pity. I am going to tell you something that will change your life forever. Solo has come into your life in order to complete your soul. I think you already know what I am about to say. Link, Solo is your sister.”

“She’s...my...sister? Are you sure?” He couldn’t believe what he had just heard. Was Solo really his sister? Was that even possible? He wasn’t sure if he could believe that. But somehow, it had to be true. He could feel it.

“Of course I’m sure. I would know my own children. She’s your twin sister.”

“That’s why your diary said children instead of child.”

“Yes. Before the invaders came, Batai and I realized that we would have to get you two out of the castle before the soldiers came and killed everyone. We decided that it would be best to separate you, in order to ensure that at least one of you would survive. Batai took Solo to the orphanage in Batarael. Then the soldiers came and killed Batai and tried to kill me and you. I was finally able to take you to the Kokiri Forest where you would be safe.”

“Why did Solo go to the orphanage? Why did all those children have to die, and why did she have to live on the streets for so long? Why couldn’t it have been me on the streets? I didn’t want her to go through that. I could’ve handled living like that. Why did she have to suffer?”

“Don’t feel guilty. It wasn’t your fault. That was just an accident. None of us had any control over that. Unfortunately, I couldn’t foresee that aspect of her life. I didn’t know that she would end up living in a box and eating garbage. Don’t you think I would’ve given her to the Deku Tree like I did you if I had know what she was going to go through? It pains me everyday to know the suffering that she experienced. But the suffering has only made her stronger. It doesn’t matter, though. She is with you now, and you will protect her. Now it’s time for you to leave. You have to go back to the world and figure this stuff out on your own. As much as I’d like to stand behind you, telling you what to do, you have to discover your powers by yourself. There is one more thing you need to know: Solo is also an Oracle. She is beginning to realize that now. You, Solo, and Zelda will discover your powers together. You all have a lot of learning to do.”

“Can I come back here, and see you again?” asked Link. He was sad, he didn’t want to leave. He was talking to the mother he had never known. He wanted to stay here and get to know her.

“Of course you can, honey. In a few years, you will all be able to join the other Oracles in the

Vinculum. It will take much time and practice, but you can do it. But you must be patient. The abilities with develop themselves as you grow. I just want you to know that I love you and Solo more than anything else in the entire Universe. I gave my life for you two, and I would gladly do it again. Until she can come here on her own, I want you to tell her that I love her. And I want you to tell Solo that you love her. I know you do, and she needs to know that. She has never had anyone in her life, and she needs to be loved. Solo needs to know that there are people who care about her. Make sure you tell Zelda that Solo is your sister, because women tend to get jealous when men start hanging around other women. Zelda needs to know that you love Solo because she is your sister.”

“I’ll tell her that. Can I ask you one more thing?”

“Sure, son. What is it?”

“What is Solo’s real name? What’s the name you gave her when she was born?”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” replied Araia.

“Try me.”

“Solo chose that particular name for herself because she couldn’t remember her true name. As far as she knows, Solo is her true name. But if you want to know her given name, it’s...” Araia paused to emphasize her point. This only annoyed Link. “Her name is Zelda.”

“Are you serious?” asked Link, wondering if his mother was trying to tease him.

“Yes I am. When you two were born, we decided to name you Link and to name your sister Zelda. Trust me, it has nothing to do with the princess. It was just a coincidence. But I think Solo will want to keep the name Solo, because calling her Zelda would be a little confusing.”

“I can’t believe it,” said Link. “Solo is my sister, and her name is really Zelda. And I’m in love with *Princess* Zelda who is not related to me. So...I love Zelda the princess...and Zelda is also my sister, the Zelda who calls herself Solo.”

“That’s right.”

“That’s so confusing,” said Link. “I think maybe we’ll still call her Solo. Calling her Zelda would create too many misunderstandings. Why did you have to go and name her that? Just to confuse me later in life?”

“No I didn’t. Batai and I picked names that we thought were good. Zelda happened to be a very popular girl’s name back then. I didn’t know that it would happen to be the name of the Princess of Hyrule, she hadn’t even been born yet. You can deal with that problem when you go back. It’s time for you to leave. I love you son, and I love your sister. I will see you again.”

“Link? Link?” said a concerned voice. Link tried to make out who it was, it sounded familiar. The place he had just been in had disappeared. He was beginning to regain the sensations that belonged to the physical world. He was no longer in the Vinculum, he could tell that he had returned to the real world. Link opened his eyes, everything was an indistinct blur. He tried to focus, but it hurt to see.

“Link? Are you okay?” asked the voice. Link couldn’t see who it was, he tried to nod that he was okay. “Solo, Saria, he’s awake.”

Solo walked up to Link and watched him try to sit up. Link opened his eyes again, this time he was able to see more clearly. He saw that it was Zelda who had been sitting next to him. He sat up and looked at the three concerned girls. He rubbed his temples with his hand, he had quite a headache. That whole experience had left him feeling weak and tired. But the knowledge he had gained far outweighed this minor discomfort. He was surprised to notice that he was in his house, in his own bed. He didn’t remember going back to his home.

“Are you okay, Link?” asked Zelda, her voice full of concern. Link looked at her and smiled.

“I’m fine,” he replied, perfectly calm and in a state of near-bliss.

“What happened to you?” asked Solo.

“That will take quite a bit of explaining. First, you tell me: what happened to me? How’d I get back here?”

“After I went to get Impa,” began Zelda, “we came back and saw you laying on the ground, totally unconscious. Solo had stopped crying and was trying to wake you up. We finally just took you back here and put you in your bed to try and see when you would wake up. That was five hours ago. You were out for quite a while.”

“Yes, we were worried about you,” added Solo.

“Solo, are you feeling better?” asked Link, remembering how upset she had been in front of the burned-down orphanage.

“Yes, I’m fine now. Zelda and I talked about it for a while. All the memories I had kept inside of me were finally let out. I feel like a huge weight has been taken off my chest. What happened to you? You just passed out all of a sudden.”

“It’s very complicated,” replied Link. “I had...I guess you could call it an ‘out-of-body experience.’ I was in a place...where I saw my mother. And I learned a lot of things.” Link looked at Solo. “Solo, I need to tell you something. We had those dreams for a reason. From the moment I first saw you, I knew that there was something special about you. And I’m sure that you felt the same way about me. Now, I’ve found out what the reason is.”

“What would that be?” asked Solo.

“Yes, tell us,” urged Saria.

Link took a deep breath to calm his nerves. “Solo, you are my twin sister.” The expressions on the girls’ faces turned to astonishment, and Solo’s jaw nearly dropped to the floor.

“Are you...serious?” mumbled Solo, trying to think if she had misunderstood what Link said.

“Yes, I am,” said Link.

“I knew it!” exclaimed Saria. “I just knew that they had to be related. You two look so alike that it couldn’t be a coincidence.”

“How do you know that for sure?” asked Zelda. Somehow, she knew in her heart that what Link said was true. She felt relieved that she no longer had to worry about Solo, and no longer had to feel jealous. She knew that the jealousy had been unfounded, but she felt like that anyways.

“That story will take quite a while to tell. You should all sit down for it. I learned some very important things in my vision.” Link began to recall the entire account of his experience, the girls listening intently. He told them about the Vinculum and the Oracles. He told them about his mother and what she had done. When Zelda and Solo found out that they too would become Oracles, they were in disbelief, yet they accepted it. Somehow they knew that it was true. It explained all the feelings they’d had in their lives. When Link had finished the story, all three girls sat in stunned silence. They could hardly believe what Link had told them. It was so amazing that he’d had such an important vision. Zelda knew that something like this would happen to Link eventually. Zelda and Solo both began to wonder about their own psychic experiences. Zelda knew that she might have some kind of power, but she never had any real evidence until now. She was looking forward to exploring this new facet of her existence.

“That’s absolutely amazing,” said Solo finally. She now understood why she’d always had that empty feeling inside her. She didn’t know quite how to react to this new revelation. It wasn’t everyday that she met someone for the first time and found out that he was her brother. She had found it hard enough trying to get to know the strange boy who rescued her. Now she had to get to know this boy as a brother. What should she do first? It would take a long time before she could know him, but somehow she felt like she already did.

“It’s going to take a lot of work for you two to get to know each other better,” said Saria.

“I still can’t believe it,” said Zelda. “She’s your *sister*? I never thought that our little search would end up like this. And to tell you the truth, I thought it was a wild goose chase to begin with.”

Link glared. “Well, this just proves that you should always take me seriously. I knew that I had special powers, maybe I can read people’s minds,” said Link in a purposely chilling voice.

“About that,” said Zelda. “How do we know when we’re having one of those visions? The idea of being psychic seems a little frightening to me. Our lives are confusing enough, and this just adds to it.”

“Well, my mother said that it would develop over time,” responded Link. “I’m assuming that it would just be another part of growing up. We’ll just have one more thing to deal with. I think it’ll be interesting.”

Aside from simply growing up, we'll have something more develop within us. It'll be nothing less than exhilarating. Now I have another purpose in life: to get to know my sister."

"Oh, that's so sweet," commented Zelda. "Of course, you know what's going to happen now."

"What?" asked Link.

"You and Solo are going to hate each other. Brothers and sisters always fight, so now you two can't be friends anymore." Zelda said all this in a joking manner, but knew that that was sometimes true.

"Oh come on," said Link. "You know that's not gonna happen. Just because we're siblings doesn't mean we can't get along."

"I think this'll be a wonderful experience," said Solo. "For so many years, I always wished that I could have a family. I saw children playing in the streets, having a good time. I saw brothers and sisters, and mothers and fathers. I always wanted to have that, or at least to have someone who cared about me. Then when I met you, I finally had someone who cared about me. My only wish was to have someone who cared about me, and now I've got that. But now that I've found out I have a brother, both of my wishes have come true. I have someone who cares about me and he's also my family. I couldn't ask for anything more. I...love you...brother." Solo opened her arms and gave Link a loving embrace.

"Oh, that's so cute!" commented Saria. "Group hug!" Upon hearing that, the three girls ganged up on Link and squeezed him as hard as they could. It was so much fun seeing him squirm in their bear-hug.

"I can't breathe!" shouted Link. They girls released him from their vise-like grip and giggled relentlessly. Link took a deep breath and coughed a few times.

"We just wanted you to know that we all love you," said Zelda.

"There's one more thing I want to know," said Solo. "You told us all about how your-our- mother took me to the orphanage and all that other stuff. She told you all about the things she did back then. But, did she tell you what my real name was? 'Cause I really can't remember...and I'd like to know."

"Oh...that," said Link. "That'll probably be harder to believe than anything else I've told you. It's probably better that you don't remember it, because it would be a little confusing. Your name is Zelda."

"No, really," said Solo. "What's my real name?" She didn't believe what Link said, he had to be trying to play a joke on them. Zelda had an equally frustrated look of disbelief on her face.

"I'm totally serious," responded Link. "That's your name. Our parents must've decided to name you that just like any other parents would. How were they supposed to know that I would meet someone in my life who had the same name?"

"Now I know what you meant when you said that it would be confusing," commented the princess. "But I've never met anyone with the same name as me."

"Yeah, it'll be a little confusing having two Zelda's around," said Saria. "I don't think I can get used to that."

"You know, I think I'll stick with the name I already have," said Solo. "It's good to know what my real name is, but it's actually kind of foreign to me. I mean, that's not the name I grew up with. I've called myself Solo for as long as I can remember, and it would be weird going by anything else. I wouldn't be myself if everyone called me Zelda. I'll stick with Solo."

"Well, that'll do away with some confusion," said Link. "Now we just have to figure out what to do next. Since you'll be living here, you're going to need a place to sleep. I can build a bed for you." Link rubbed his hands together with anticipation. "That means I get to use saws and hammers and all sorts of sharp and dangerous tools."

"Link really gets a kick out of playing with all his hammers and saws," explained Saria to Solo.

"Is he any good at building things?" asked Solo. She didn't want to sleep in a bed that Link built if he was a lousy engineer.

"Yeah, he's great when he gets it right," said Saria. "Most of the times he's really good at building things. Of course, he wasn't always that good with his hands. It took him a while before he got the hang of it. You should see the projects he botched."

"Hey, I never botched anything," Link said defensively. "Those things were just for practice."

"Whatever you say," said Saria in a sarcastic tone. "You know, such a wonderful thing has happened today. It's not everyday that two strangers meet each other and find out that they're brother and sister. I

think we should celebrate.”

“What? You mean, like a party?” asked Link.

“Not necessarily a party,” replied Saria. “Just something for the four of us. Why don’t we go over to my house? I can make cookies for all of us!”

“Ooh, I like cookies,” said Link, licking his lips.

“I’ve never had cookies before,” said Solo.

“Well, you’ll like the ones I make,” said Saria. “Come on, let’s go. I’ve got everything we need at my house.” Saria, Solo, and Zelda stood up to leave, but Link held Zelda’s hand, causing her to stop. Zelda looked at Link, wondering what he wanted. Saria stopped at the door and urged Link to get up. “Are you coming or not?”

“Why don’t you two go ahead of us?” said Link. “I want to talk to Zelda alone for a minute. We’ll meet you guys there in a few minutes.” Saria nodded her assent and left Link’s house, followed by Solo. Zelda sat down next to Link and gave him an inquisitive look.

“What is it you wanted to talk to me about?” she asked.

Link took a deep breath and wondered how he was going to word his what he was going to say. “Zelda, I just wanted to talk to you about what’s happened.”

“Well, their isn’t that much to say. I think it’s wonderful that you have a sister. It’s mind-boggling that you could just stumble upon her by chance.”

“It wasn’t by chance,” said Link. “It was supposed to happen that way. We didn’t meet by chance. I would’ve like to have know her all my life, but I guess it wasn’t supposed to happen that way.”

“Yeah you’re right,” agreed Zelda. “I just think it’s amazing about the whole thing with the Oracles. It’ll be a lot of fun figuring out what we can do. But tell me, what is it you really wanted to talk to me about?”

Link sighed, Zelda always wanted to get to the point. “It’s about me and you. When I first met Solo, I was worried that I might be falling in love with her instead of you. I felt that there was something about her that was different from you. Now I know why I felt that way, and I’m relieved that everything turned out okay.”

“I was worried for a while, too,” said Zelda. “I thought that maybe...that maybe you didn’t love me anymore.”

“That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. I want you to know that I would never stop loving you for any reason. People have told me that I’m too young to be deciding who I love and who I want to be with. They tell me that I should wait till I’m an adult, and wait till I’m mature. But I’ve been an adult, and that wasn’t any clearer than it is now. In fact, I more sure of this now than I’ve ever been in my whole life. This isn’t some puppy-love between to immature children. I know that this is the way it’s supposed to be. I’m not sure why yet, but I know for a fact that we are supposed to be together. Of all the crazy things that are going on in my life, you are the one thing that I can count on. Zelda, you are the most perfect person I’ve ever met. You’re the one person I feel this connection with, the one person I’m supposed to be with. I want you to know that I love you more than anything in this world, and nothing will *ever* change that. I would do anything for you, and I would die for you.” Link took a breath and awaited Zelda’s reaction. He had finally said it. The both knew they loved each other, and Link had told her that before. But he had never said it all in one definitive statement.

Zelda was amazed at what he’d said. She never knew that Link could be so wonderful and insightful. She had felt the same way, but had never had the courage to say it all. “I feel the same way about you,” said Zelda, wiping a tear from her cheek. She leaned over and gave Link a loving embrace, also kissing him on the cheek. This time, she didn’t hug and kiss him to embarrass him or see him blush, this hug was the most sincere thing she’d ever done. She didn’t want to ever let go. “I never thought you could be so insightful. You summed all of my feelings too.”

After what seemed like forever, Zelda finally let go of Link. They both looked deep into each other’s eyes, into their very souls. Zelda grasped Link’s hand and made him stand up along with her. “Come, on,” she urged. “Let’s go get some of those cookies.”

“Sounds good to me,” replied Link, following Zelda out the door. As he walked the short distance to

Saria's house, Link thought of everything he had done in the last few days. He had made the most important discovery of his life, and rediscovered his feelings for Zelda. He now realized what had caused that empty feeling in his soul, the feeling that had haunted him on all those lonely nights. For the first time in his life, he finally didn't feel that void. The void inside his being had been finally filled. He had finally found the sister he always knew he had. Somewhere deep inside him, he had always known. Link walked inside Saria's house, where she and Solo were already beginning to prepare the cookies. Zelda walked over to the other girls and began to assist them in their cooking. The only thing Link could do right now was look at the three girls. They were his family: his best friend, his sister, and his one true love. They were the only people he ever needed. The void in his soul was gone, now replaced with love and friendship. The predator that stalked him for all those years was gone. Link sat down at the table and smiled to himself; he had found what he was looking for.

The End