

## Breath of Decisions (Complete!)

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# Breath of Decisions (Complete!)

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## Summary

Link searched for shrines and freeing the divine beasts before taking on Calamity Ganon, but didn't search out his painful memories. To Zelda, this was a blessing once she discovered a terrible secret. Now that he is silently demanding to have his spot back, she will have to reveal that painful secret. A secret that will force Link to make a choice: Zelda's safety or Hyrule's loyalty.

## Notes

I wrote this before Breath of the Wild 2 and Age of Calamity. I have no idea how that would change things so I'll just mention it. In this story, Link met Impa, Purah, Robbie, freed the Divine beasts, got his master sword, and did most of the shrines, but not all of them. He collected all but two memories, and he never had the final talk with Kass in Rito Village.

# Nutcake Girl

## Outside Dueling Peaks Stable

She was going to do it. For years, Traysi had traveled the world and become reknown in Rumor Mill, and what she saw . . . but there was so much more she wanted. Higher pay for one. Her name known as the resource that wasn't afraid of anything. The brave new world now didn't work the same anymore. While she had traveled, more areas were coming together. People here and there were starting to connect easier. Even the sales of things like Goron Spice was being communicated to even Lakeside stable. When Hyrule had got itself together again, and there was no more Ganon? When the Princess' Knight woke up and she finished off Ganon, it was the end of her.

People were starting to get better news than her. Much better. The ones around Hyrule especially, surveying and asking around areas that so many stayed out of due to the ancient guardians that had been there. There were no bounds around the kingdoms or areas anymore. News on how pretty something had been, or unique stars in the sky falling . . .

She was going to do it. Absolutely. This was her chance. The Queen Zelda would be caught off-guard today. Heh. Queen. She kept herself firm as she approached. Since the catastrophe of Ganon, the world was so complacent. So open. She would be an easy target. *I will be ridiculed publicly but have endless opportunities for the good stuff! I will go down in history as the toughest journalist.*

She knew rumors. She knew when something stank. Zelda, she stank. She staaaank. There was something there. Although her knight hadn't remember her, she hadn't tried to stay around to help with any memories. Hardly saw him at all. Tip one. Guy goes to save girl, girl leaves. Nuh uh, stank. Tip two, Traysi had followed her trails more than once. Talked to some Hylians and Zoras and found out she was visiting the goddess springs during any downtime she had instead of resting up. She spent like all day inside of them, naked according to one person, praying constantly for hours. Oh yes, she stank like Staminoka Fish with Keese eye balls and field greens. She had a secret that she was trying to hide.

Traysi was going to find out what it had been, today.

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Today was Zelda's eighteenth . . . well, 118th birthday party. It was almost one year ago today that she had defeated the almighty Calamity Ganon with Link. Zelda did not want to celebrate the day, but many towns wanted her to. That day was now a day of celebration instead of accursed misery. Still, she continued to answer questions of those who wished or needed to speak to her. Some were humbled to meet her. Some thought she was nice. Others

thought her regal, while others thought her not regal enough. As her father had once said- No, Zelda. She would not go there. The past would not stir her today.

It would be a good day. She watched as some Gorons came, introduced themselves and placed some plans in front of her. She looked at it. "Quite adequate." She stamped them with approval. "You've no need of any Hylians to help?"

"No, Ma'am!" The Goron on the left said. "We just wanted to make sure it was okay with you. We haven't had . . . well, just thanks!"

Yes. She smiled politely, knowing what he wanted to say. "Thank you. Our plans are doing well too." It had been a year and still so much of their world was left shattered in pieces. Most of the monsters had been taken out, some were still claimed to be hiding somewhere, but with no more blood moon from Ganon, the monsters had stopped coming. People were free to roam the world, trade was being better established, and each day she had a crew of Hylians and associated members of other domains help. The ancients were being taken out of the ground they had been rotting in for so long. They were being demolished and their resources melted or recycled into other resources. While they all agreed to leave an area of ancients for future generations, to show how weary one should be of the ancient technology being only supreme, they didn't need reminders everywhere anymore.

The same with the ruins. Each day over the past year, they had been taken down too. Subtle reminders is what they needed, but the world wouldn't be marked with them all over either. One day, new building and new places would be established over them. Hylians could prosper again.

"Nutcake!" A woman of her twenties perhaps offered to Zelda. "Tabantha wheat, goat butter, sugar cane, and an acorn made this terrific treat for your birthday."

The way people spoke too. Zelda had been focused on using resources on the lands to change abilities, but the whole world had gone that way after the Kingdom was gone. There just wasn't any big shops anymore. Not enough people. Not enough trade. "Thank you very much for the Nutcake." Gracious and kind. "I am busy right now, but I will look at it later, I promise. Thank you very much for your generous time and attention."

"Oh, I don't need any thanks, I just wanted to ask you something."

Oh. "Yes?"

"Did you live and endure inside of Ganon for a hundred years, or did you just wake up before the end?"

What? Zelda blinked.

"Do you feel like you turned 18 or do you feel 118?" The woman continued. There was no sorrow in her eyes or voice, she was just staring. Examining her. "Do you feel any more confident of running this torn down Kingdom? People did fine for a hundred years, can you do anything else for us?"

Her questions.

“If you were joined, like a part of Ganon, were you a part of the Malice or were you incorporeal? Could you feel his power? Did it scare you or excite you?”

Her. Questions.

“No one trusts you. You are a figment, an icon of something that gives hope, but that’s all you are. Even in the past, you could do nothing. You let everyone down. Did you witness your father dying?”

“That’s enough!” Forget regal politeness. “You will remove yourself from my sight!”

“Why? Because you think you are better than me? You’re a hundred years too late, Princess. Sorry. If you had succeeded your name would have been Queen Zelda. Since your weakness couldn’t beat Calamity Ganon, you’re just a relic. You haven’t answered a single question. Are you going to push me? Are you going to do anything? Hey!”

“You need to stop being so mean to Zelda!” One of the Gorons held her hand. “It’s best to go away. Gorons have a lot of strength and I don’t want to hurt you.”

“So scared to answer a single question, you sick a Goron on me?” Yes, that was going into Traysi’s paper. Sure, she didn’t get a single answer but the silence still gave her so much to work with. “You shouldn’t be running this kingdom, you never did anything but hold back something you couldn’t stop, and I know you are hiding something! Ow!”

“Sorry,” The Goron apologized who squeezed too tight. “You were not moving, you won’t move, move! I’d hate to hurt you again.” He looked toward the other Goron. “What do we do? Risk breaking an arm to get her to move?”

Zelda walked away not wanting them to break the Nutcake woman’s arm. The woman struggled to follow, but Zelda continued to walk away.

She continued to follow again? Unheard of. Zelda turned around. “What is wrong with you, woman?”

She smiled creepily. “Legend said it always took two to stop Calamity Ganon. The blood of the Princess and her Knight. Forget all the tech, it was you two. You didn’t keep your end of the deal.”

Rambling and she spoke of nothing new. Zelda turned away so fast her hair whipped in front of her. She had a thousand other things to do. A day of celebration, not this. Not regret.

“It’s logical! It’s always been logical, but the royalty thought they were above everyone. Even in this time, you think you are above everyone. Well you aren’t, you are hiding something! I know it and I am going to find out what it is.”

“I do not look down upon others,” Zelda insisted but she couldn’t go much more. She knew she should be walking away and not dealing with her. Her father would have had guards pull her away by now. People like the Nutcake woman, they never brought good things. Often

Zelda had been told not to speak to those like that woman, unless her father agreed to it. She was just bothering her so much, saying such terrible things. Zelda wouldn't lose it though. Snark all she wanted, she wasn't getting Zelda's secret.

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## Inside Dueling Peaks Stable

"It makes sense that it be this one," A Hylian representative from Fort Hateno said to Zelda. "This was the place of the last stand."

"I know it was the place of the last stand," Zelda said a little more standoffishly than she meant. Her peaceful day was fading away fast. "I was there."

"Then this should be it," the representative insisted. "Reconstruction should be halted in here. Fort Hateno already has a reputation with what happened, it would only make sense future generations see it there."

Fort Hateno's ancient graveyard. "We will talk more of this. There is more than one that will decide." *Oh please, someone else come with a better problem.* She gestured for another person to come toward her. She looked like a presentable nice woman, however appearances were still deceiving. Especially from the Yiga Clan. To get this far, she would have been well tested though, and The Gorons were still hanging around. Besides, she'd dealt with one Yiga and this was not a place to pull anything off with her. "Hello? How may I help you?"

"I need these." She gave a drawing of a pair of glasses to Zelda. "My son has very bad vision. He won't be able to support his future family if he can't even aim a bow."

Oh. Glasses. Such a small thing it used to be. Such a small token in the Kingdom. Father would have been able to snap his fingers and someone would bring a lovely pair. How things used to be. "I will do what I can to see if I can help find some glasses. How hard is it to see?" How thick would they need to be? Oh, she couldn't answer. She only knew it was blurry but in that time, she had nothing else to compare it too. Assume the worst. "How old is he?"

"Fifteen."

"And was he born with bad vision?"

"No, of course not. He lost his eye while running from a monster."

"Lost his eye?" Oh dear. "Then his other eye?"

"Is blurry."

"Oh. Glasses may help, but that might be too much to ask of them," Zelda admitted. Hunting with one eye could be dangerous if he wasn't well trained already.

“The glasses would make him see, right?”

“It may help one eye, but if the other is gone, it might still be hard to hunt.” What to do? “If he has problems with his family in the future, he is invited to come see me.” That didn’t seem to appease her. “I’m sorry.”

“Then can you do anything for him?” The woman asked. “You have magical powers, can you restore his vision? The gods have blessed you.”

Oh. “I don’t think so,” she said. It wasn’t a magical wand she waved around to restore everything. After the battle of a hundred years, it felt like most of it was gone. She had used the last against Ganon. “I’m sorry.” The woman turned and walked away. She didn’t leave even her name with Zelda. Still. Glasses, she would see if she could find a pair of glasses.

She heard movement behind her and turned.

Link.

## One Memory Short

It wasn't the first time they'd met since Calamity Ganon. He had come by a few times randomly. He hadn't said or done much, like he was just trying to watch her, to remember. This time, the birthday was a good excuse. He was holding something in a small burlap sack. "For me? Thank you." He was more than a good guard in the past. He was a good friend back then, memory or not, so she gave him what he wanted.

She didn't pretend with him. He was the only person who saw every side of her personality, royally uncouth or not. "Today isn't going the way it was supposed to, Link," she admitted as she took the little sack gift. "I know everyone wanted me to have a wonderful day, to remember that we've made such progress in the last year, but it's very hard to do." She watched him take a seat at the table. "Perhaps I shouldn't have rejected an actual celebration for it, but it felt like it was too much. For not doing that, I feel like today I am being punished." She looked at his gift that was wiggling around in the burlap and opened it. "A frog and a recipe." She smiled as she grabbed the frog in one hand with the recipe in the other. He remembered the frog! He found a memory. "My theory was correct." She looked at the recipe. "Cooking it released the abilities." She glanced toward Link. "I guess you were right not to eat it raw." She laughed, a little beside herself he finally remembered that. "Thank you for the gift, Link. It truly makes me feel better."

It did. It was a small step, but it was a step. She had no idea how many memories he had retrieved specifically of her, but at least she knew he had one.

Then? The Nutcake woman was back. Not again. "I have no time for grievances for you to air, I am busy. Leave."

"Make me." She slammed her palms on the small table. "You can't reject me forever, the world deserves to know the truth."

"There is no truth and only pain in what you want from me," Zelda insisted, but then the crude woman tried to take her frog. Zelda pulled it away, but she kept reaching for it. Link stepped in and made her keep her hands back.

"What are you holding, and what's that in your other hand?" the nosy woman demanded.

"It is a frog and a recipe." Easily revealed.

"So you can answer that but nothing else I asked?" she demanded. "Do you feel 18 or do you feel 118, did you feel like you and Calamity Ganon were the same creature, did you feel its evil inside of you?"

She didn't answer, staying silent. *Trouble, Zelda, she's trouble. Be careful.*

Link took it upon himself to escort the woman out. Speaking about the calamity probably didn't make him feel better either.

"I don't understand," Zelda said as he came back. "Why today of all days has someone chose to ask me those questions? Do I really have to answer them before she leaves me be?"

She covered her nose and mouth with her hands. She glanced at Link who just shook his head. His eyes. There was something else to them. He hadn't just remembered the frog incident. *Could it be? Did he . . . remember everything?* Maybe. Until he said it, she wouldn't assume. "You're right. I shouldn't say anything that I don't want to. I simply remember the gossip mongers. I fear that she won't bring any more good than they did."

She looked on the other side of her. "Right about now, Urbosa would be saying something to me about it. She can't though." She wiped her eye briefly. "She never can again. None of them can. Sometimes I think 'what would father think of what happened to our kingdom'? Then I remember it doesn't matter. He could do nothing." Memories were being driven hard back into her mind. Oh great, the woman was coming back. Now what was she going to say?

"Is that what you do with the hero that defeated Calamity Ganon? Talk his ear off about your problems, really?" she criticized Zelda. "Like he doesn't have any problems and just wants to hear about you bawling about everyone being dead?" Then she left.

Thank the goddesses, she was finally gone. Now Zelda could focus on more important-

"Hello there!" A Zora came into the room. "I am Prince Sidon! Do you remember me?"

She had met him more than once. The Zoras lived a long time. She had met him both before fighting Calamity Ganon, and afterwards again about a year ago. "Yes. Hello, Prince Sidon."

"Ah, Link!" Sidon flexed toward him. "Still keeping up strong being the hero of the world?" Of course, Link didn't answer. Prince Sidon turned back to Zelda. "The Zoras need some extra help in our building materials. As you know we are building outwardly now to make the kingdom easier to access over the mountains, and we are in need of vast amounts of luminous stones."

"Yes." Good, something she could help with. "I am sure we can assist you in finding luminous stones." Even she knew where some had been at.

"We have some too," A different Goron said as he came in. "Hello!"

"Hello, Yunobo." Daruk's relation. Such a long way to travel. "It's lovely to see you again."

"I came for your birthday. Boss says I was excused for your birthday." He gave her a diamond. "Hylian's really like these."

"Thank you." He could have given her anything and she'd still be-

"Unless you want this instead?" Yunobo held out rock salt. He also held out topaz and a luminous stone.

"Oh, could I have that?" Prince Sidon asked him. "We need those."

"They are all over. Um?" Yunobo looked toward Zelda.

“Consider giving it to him as the gift to me,” she said to him. She watched as Yunobo gave it to him. It was good to keep associations between everyone strong. “I need to visit Gerudo soon.” The Zoras and Gorons were decent allies, but she should keep in touch with the Gerudos too. They were also bound to have problems, and their own leader was quite young. Younger than her.

Zelda glanced as Link laid a veil down on the table. He was warning her of the dangers. “I have traveled there before, I know its temperature dangers, Link.”

He picked the veil back up, but not gently. Did she misinterpret him wrong? Without his memories and experience away from each other, she may have messed up something. Did she belittle him? Oh, she hoped she didn’t do that. She had tried to watch for that kind of thing.

“I can go to make you feel better!” Yunobo said. “Gorons can go into Gerudo.”

“No, that’s quite alright,” Zelda told him. Gerudo was not close to Goron City at all, it was far out of the way. She didn’t want Daruk’s son to get into trouble.

She heard the sounds of the master sword being picked up and drug against the wood of the table before Link simply left.

Or so she thought. Looking out the stable later, she had seen him. Guarding. Guarding the stable? *Link. How much do you remember?*

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When the sun rose, she saw Link up and beside her bed. That was highly unusual. He often gave more space. “What is it?” He held up an article. Rito village was used as a central source for journalists to spread news quickly. It was happening more and more. At first it was the weather, then it was inventions, then it was unique people and interests. Her own volunteer watcher was from Rito. If it held Links interest, it couldn’t be good. *I don’t even need to look.* “I remember the gossip mongers of the past, Link. I assume it’s terrible. After all.” *Father had warned me what the kingdom thought of me back then. I was not fit to rule.* She still didn’t feel fit to rule, but as she was the last of the royalty, there was little choice.

Link laid it next to her. It must be something terrible that wouldn’t go away easily. It probably spoke of all the terrible things the woman mentioned yesterday. Trying to make her look cruel and unjust.

Nope! It didn’t even look like it was written by the Nutcake woman. “What?” The article heading was ***Best Choices for the Next Hyrule King, Part 1!*** She already placed it down. Just turned eighteen and this muck had to begin? “I am going to need something to eat.” Link was already ready with some hearty bass and rice. “That’s kind of you, Link.” Zelda moved from the bed with the food and sat at the same table with it. Link joined her as she ate.

She only scanned the beginning, knowing it would be a full list of reasons why she wasn't capable of ruling Hyrule alone.

Prince Sidon was considerably a good guess in their gossip since Zelda led 'unaided help of a gift for her turned to him'. Since he was also the Prince of Zora's Domain, joining a Hylian and the Zora's domain would strengthen their alliance with each other, each being ruled together. Sidon was also kind, women adored him, and Zora's Domain and Hyrule were not far from each other. They also shared a past time that Zelda remembered, which would be a strength to their bond. Part 2 would come out tomorrow. "I'm fine, Link. It's nothing I haven't heard before."

Link gestured toward the top of the article.

"Oh. You want to know that?" She had not told anyone but Impa those details but she wanted to keep a connection with him. If he felt he should know? "If you close your eyes, and simply hear your voice. That's what it was like," she told him. "I felt his darkness next to me, trying to press over me, to take over the light I was holding him down with. I felt it like a hot, radiating sun trying to burn me. Although, there was no skin. I was . . . bodiless, feeling more like a spirit than a person. Time existing and not existing, passing and yet standing still." She looked back at the table. "It changed me. I'm not the same anymore." She held her fork. That was a good enough explanation for him. "So much is missing now. You must know what I mean."

"Hyah!"

Zelda moved as she watched the table being split in two! Link was beside himself? *Are you kidding?!* She could not even feel the difference between Link and a Yiga clan member in disguise? Even the most basic spirit power was gone now. He was disappearing and fighting Link, but Zelda's heart felt so heavy after that. They tricked her into revealing her innermost thoughts.

Link came back but the damage was already done. Her personal words were now fodder for the gossip mongers. The only thing she could be happy about is that she didn't reveal too much, only her feelings.

Still? It irritated her! Those were her feelings. "I am going for a ride." She went toward the front and retrieved her steed, Endura. Link quickly followed beside her, getting his horse as well.

She rode her horse for some time at almost max power, stopping to give it a break and an endura carrot to feel better. "You want this? Of course you do, and you deserve it too." She patted her horse to show it some affection. Her horse loved those carrots so much she had called her Endura. Link got off his horse and came over to see her. "She knows when to ride like the wind for me. She deserves a treat. Does your horse want a carrot too?"

She felt Link's hand gently touch her shoulder. He did retrieve more memories, he was developing a softer spot for her. More personal than just 'she was princess'.

“I will be okay. I must be okay. If I’m not, the kingdom will insist I marry someone that fits their likings. Like my own feelings don’t count for anything, just like father . . .” She shook her head. “No, I won’t do that. I loved him.” Her eyes started to water again. “I loved them all.” Birthdays, blasted birthdays! Only useful to stir her heart and hurt. She looked toward a second carrot. “I don’t feel fit to rule Hyrule.” She stared at his eyes. “I never have been, even before this. I’ve tried for so long. I am just an ambassador trying to keep peace. Hyrule hasn’t had royalty and it survived just fine. Can’t I just be Ambassador Zelda?”

He moved back toward his horse and his hands slid slightly against the reigns.

She sighed and looked at her horse. “It’s not the same. None of it.” She brought out the article again. “Even a Yiga member can fool me now.” He moved closer with his horse. That’s right, he hadn’t seen the article. She gave it to him.

Link looked at the article and his eyes grew wide as he was shaking his head back and forth vigorously.

“Mipha’s brother as King of Hyrule,” she said. “I just don’t see it.”

“No.” It was rare he spoke up like that when he could have just shook his head. Link often picked a non-verbal cue when he could.

“I know. A choice by best facts and opinions of people. Not me.” She looked toward Link. “I do not plan on mounting any kind of husband right now anymore than I did then.” She smiled at her horse. “I much prefer her.” She watched Link drop the article. “I suppose I should head back.”

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Link followed her back at the slower trot. Hiring a Yiga to get Zelda’s thoughts out loud. If Link could have tracked him down, he would have taken him out. In the morning, the words he overheard while he was getting ingredients for breakfast would be shared with the world against her will.

When he first fought Calamity Ganon, his focus was on getting rid of the evil. He got strength from the monks in the shrines and pulled the divine beasts to him. He couldn’t remember his past, and the more he learned, the more tragic it seemed to be. All of that would only distract him from what was important. Getting rid of Calamity Ganon for good. He’d seen the destruction of Fort Hateno and even read several stories. Yet, he should have been doing something else in his quests. Something personal.

***Tell me, Link . . . do you really remember me?***

He should have been finding those painful memories, regardless of how much they would have distracted him. When she first came back, he could see it there, in her. Eyes of

welcoming he should have known. He was honest with her though. He didn't remember her, and so the former Princess Zelda had left to Zora's Domain on her own.

When he finally saw her, face to face though, he knew it was time to deal with his own memories. Calamity Ganon was gone, the Princess of Hyrule was saved as he promised King Rhoam, and it was time to discover himself. He'd had a few memories that hit him like a rock as he was helping to get rid of the divine beasts. Bits and pieces of the other Champions, with tiny nuances of her involvement. It was time to know more though, time to stop ignoring the bright areas of his memories.

Using his sheikah slate, he had to roam all over as he did with the shrines. From Gerudo to Tingle island. It only took discovering a couple of memories before he was going everywhere, looking for any sign or clue to find in those pictures. Pikango had been a traveler and he helped Link as he could.

Now, he was only one memory short. He didn't know if everything would be complete when he retrieved the last memory so he stayed silent on the subject. Princess Zelda had enough to worry about.

Dilapidated and torn down, he'd been there at the castle after the fact for more memories. There was a small area of sleeping bags and a table placed in the front entrance. Everything else still looked the same as when he went to find Calamity Ganon. Staying there couldn't have been easy, so he understood why she wouldn't stay there long. While she often stayed within Hyrule, she was always moving, and staying around in stables or small villages.

It took forever to run into her the first time he wanted to find her.

Link had known it hadn't been easy for Zelda. The day he was assigned to her in the past, he just did his best to stay up with her. Even if she didn't want his help. Back then, she spoke out loud to herself and less to him.

She had been his complete opposite. While he hated to speak, she chose to speak in the quiet all the time. After she started to see him as the knight he truly had been, she didn't talk as much. Before, when she hadn't cared, she had felt free to express herself. According to her own diary though, he had told her why he was so quiet. Most likely, he had to share something to make her share in that same carefree-

"Ooh, hang on!" She stopped her horse and got off, running away into the distant grass.

Link stopped his thinking, got off his horse and ran after her. The actions felt familiar, so familiar.

"Perfect! I was hoping I could get a hold of some of these soon." She was picking the most common type of mushroom in the region, the Hylian mushroom from the ground. "Now if I just had some hearty bass. I do have a hearty radish." She smiled at Link. "That's a meal in itself." She tucked the mushrooms away. "I want to cook plenty for my journey. When I don't have it I end up eating apples or simply mushrooms and it doesn't last very long."

She placed plenty of mushrooms in her satchel but what she just did was a dead giveaway too. He reached his horse, also taking plenty of mushrooms. When she got on hers, he kept looking back at her.

“What, the mushrooms? I will be leaving for Faron first before Gerudo. I’ll stop at a small village for a day, and then I’ll proceed through the stables and make my way to Gerudo.”

He knew it. Faron. Lurelin. She wasn’t putting Gerudo off and she would have been gone before he found her again. He’d go straight to Gerudo and she would have taken a detour out of the way. He shook his head as he trotted behind her horse.

Link had to deal with amnesia. He used his instincts and what people told him to keep going. That feeling? While he felt loss, the sensation of not knowing the loss-

“Rushrooms!”

Link watched her head off of her horse and count the big purple mushrooms on the side of the mountain. Just like before, it felt so familiar. She must have done that frequently. He got off as she started to climb up. “Aye,” he warned her.

“I am quite capable of getting my own rushrooms,” she insisted as she climbed.

Of course, she felt like she was capable of everything it seemed. Was she? No, but she strived to be. Link left the smaller one to her, but quickly climbed to get the rest. Seeing some ore up above, he went ahead and took a whack at it with his sledgehammer. Rock salt was prevalent, but sometimes the most common ingredients weren’t found when you wanted food. Link learned a long time ago to scour everything in each direction. Some of the best items to get for an area were from a different one.

While he was picking up his rock salt though, he started to hear a traveler stop to talk to Zelda. He seemed friendly, introducing himself, but Link wasted no time in paragliding back down. When he was back on the ground, Zelda was still traveling down from picking her rushroom.

“It’s nice to meet you.” Zelda placed her rushroom away and acted as polite as she could to the stranger. The traveler smiled, just wanted to say hi, and then he was on his way. After he was properly gone, Link gave her his rushrooms. “I have one,” she insisted. “You got six? How did you do that?” He tried to give them to her again. “Fine, we can share.” She smelled them. “Oh, it smells so good.” She looked toward Dueling Peaks stable, and then on the other side. “I wonder if Impa has had some in awhile. Maybe I should go share a meal with her. Half a day away, but it won’t be bad by horse.”

Yes. Impa.

And he would eat with them.

# Catching Up With Zelda

## Chapter Notes

If you play the game, you'll see this route actually works with your horse. I wanted to play the game to keep it true for this part. It took a little while to find it, but it existed.

Kakariko Village.

"I can't say how long it's been since I ate rushroom," Impa said as they all ate on the ground inside of her home. "How long since you've had rushroom, Paya?"

"Long time." Paya averted her gaze away from them. Nervous as always.

"Climbing on mountains for them isn't easy, I can tell why it's been awhile," Zelda admitted. "Link retrieved most of them. Ever the mountain climber he is."

Of course. It's where some of the best food and resources were hiding.

"Oh, this feels nice," Impa admitted from beneath her jingling hat. "You. Link. Paya. Having friends and family around is always nice. Sometimes terrible memories come, but the good of it is always worth it."

Impa was trying to signal the same kind of importance Link wanted to, but it was too strong.

"I am going to Gerudo soon, so I thought I would stop in to see you." Zelda chose to ignore it and was even throwing Impa off track of her plans like she had tried to do with Link.

Link was glad he knew which direction she was going though. Faron could get heavier rain and lightning.

"Oh! Master Link. Princess Zelda." Paya was trying to speak. "A visitor is seeking you."

"Yes, yes," Impa agreed. "An interesting article made its way out here."

Link already knew the article. Instead as he finished, he went outside toward the steps. He felt like he should be there. Impa's guards were down there at each side. Link stood in the middle. After a minute, they questioned what he wanted. He wanted nothing. He just wanted . . . he just wanted to guard. Neither of them bothered him anymore.

Link watched the village. Its peace had been disturbed more than once.

After he surveyed for some time longer, he felt more at ease and went back inside to check on Zelda.

“It was a rumor. What gives it any meaning?” Zelda asked in the middle of a conversation already. “The present? It was not given because of affection, Prince Sidon needed luminous stone and Daruk’s son had a piece. It made logical sense to just have him take it.”

“Be as it may, you are of age now, Zelda. You have been since you visited Mount Lanayru. It might be time to visit Mount Lanayru a little bit more? Unless there are more suitors for you?”

Not this, not now. Link was trying to get back his memories and his position. He didn’t want others interfering and distracting her.

“Why do I even need one? What good is someone to marry right now, what could they possibly do for the kingdom?” She reasoned. “No more good than I, and I am doing what I can.”

“Are you a Goron, dear?” Impa asked her.

A Goron? “Of course I am not a Goron.”

“Then to ensure the royal family continues, you must bear children. It’s a fact that cannot be denied,” Impa reminded her. “Are there any other suitors?”

“No, but I am sure that column is just beginning and there will be more choices for anyone but me to pick.” Zelda was gruff.

“Did your father push the concept at all?” Impa asked her.

Why was Impa pushing on this? Link stayed silent, but he didn’t want Impa pushing. His objectives wouldn’t be any easier if Zelda started courting men.

“The world saw me as an incompetent child, unfit to rule the throne. That’s what father said.” Zelda put down her food. “Once Calamity Ganon became a possible issue, all of that courtship nonsense was put to the side. Survival was much more important. Right now, restoration is important. Growth, trade and communication among all places. That is what is important, Impa.”

“Then you should share that point of view,” Impa said as she hit her lap. “Running away only leaves others to decide what is truth. If you let it go, you may end up in a deeper hole than you can pull yourself out of.”

“The meal was lovely, I am glad we could share it.” Polite but curt. “Goodbye Impa, I will see you later.”

Link didn’t waste any time following her out. Once they were on their horses and leaving Kakariko, Link heard everything that he has missed out loud.

“I couldn’t believe her!” Zelda said as she trotted faster. “Suitors? I have to go out and find my own suitors? Running the kingdom is hard enough! I don’t have time for dates or comparison matches, and I am not going to go to Zora’s Domain and date Prince Sidon just to make everyone happy. That has nothing to do with the health of the kingdom. A man could

do no more for this kingdom than I could. What could he do? Help people with their problems? Provide peaceful alliances with the Zoras, Gorons, and Gerudos? No. I already do that, so what could a man do? Get me pregnant to bear a child, that's it! Is that all I am supposed to be? Just a bit of royal blood to marry and bear a child for the sake of Hyrule's future beyond me? Ridiculous!" She held her reigns tighter. "I know that sometimes I don't feel the same. I feel guilt and filled with regret about what happened. I do even feel like- like I'm not fit to rule the kingdom. Sometimes. Maybe more than sometimes but- but neither do I think just marrying someone and bearing a child would solve any problems either! Ugh. Oh and for that final bit of reality's blade that is never dull." She held her hand out. Rain trickled into her hand.

Link stared into the sky. Of course. He stopped his horse, causing her to stop too. He found an out of the way place to change into something better. Coming back out, he went ahead and handed some earrings to Zelda that would make it less likely lightning would strike her if they ran into it. Most likely they wouldn't, lightning was rare.

They both set off again. It was already night. The day was interesting for him. Getting to hear and see Zelda again improved his understanding a little more, but it still wasn't enough to trigger anything. He had no memories of his childhood. Where he'd really been born, or who his father had been. He knew his father had been a knight and he followed in his footsteps. But not one memory of it. The champions. Almost all of Zelda. If he could just immerse himself into his older life, then maybe he could recover more.

Link looked toward the sky and could see the switch coming. Uh oh.

"I have zapshrooms but no cooking pot. I should have made some before we left. We should move, Link," she insisted as she made her horse gallop as fast as it could.

Link stayed beside her, watching the sky. He watched for the sizzle that usually meant it would be striking. Just a little-

Lightning struck right in front of Zelda, causing her horse to pull back on it's two legs.

Link chased after the spooked horse of Zelda. In the lightning it was dangerous to be out longer than normal, but a scared horse was not an easy one to ride. Patting it's neck wasn't going to get it to calm down fast enough in that weather. At least there was mountain around them, making it impossible for it to veer off as easily.

"Down girl, it's okay, we just need to make it to the stable, no, don't turn!"

It turned. The stable wasn't far but of course the horse had to turn at the soonest opportunity. "Hyah!" Link tried to help his horse gallop as well as possible. He had picked a faster one than Zelda had, but she had given hers an endura carrot and it was running on instinct. Link ducked a lightning strike as he continued onward.

This time, Zelda's horse didn't make it out of the lightning strike. It flipped off Zelda before the end. Link stopped his horse to get to her. The urgency died down as the weather went back to being just rainy. A brief lightning storm, not common out there, but it didn't last long.

He tried to move her, but the slightly injured Queen wouldn't leave her Horse's side. She patted its neck. It wouldn't survive.

"No. Not here." Her face was emotional and scrunched up. Probably crying, but he couldn't tell in the rain.

Link looked around. They were almost to Fort Hateno. "Uh." He needed to get her on his horse and back to safety. Not from any lightning, but from the memories brewing up. This was the worst place to be at right now. It was not . . . a good place. That familiar feeling of when he found a memory swirled around him.

***I'll be fine, just go!***

***Save yourself, Link!***

Link awoke. That area wasn't in any of the pictures, but it contained a memory. The memory that pulled it all together the night he died. This? This was a place of failure. Where he fought with everything he could but wasn't powerful enough to protect Princess Zelda. Yes, she was crying over her horse. It wasn't the horse alone she was weeping over.

He sat himself next to her as she laid down in his arms, weeping. The same thing she did near Scout's Hill.

Link just looked around. Their last stand. He wanted to stay there in the rain, figure things out with her longer, but others were coming.

Her guards were coming their way. Zelda wouldn't let her emotions run free anymore once they came. She needed that moment. She needed a lot of things. Not everything he could give her.

Not everything he could give her back then too. He just kneeled and remained silent whenever her father ripped her confidence to shreds. The spirit of King Rhoam knew the value of his daughter now, but he didn't back then. As the royal knight, he couldn't say anything against the king, only be humble. Even now, she was pulling away from his grasp and standing up. Shaky but finding her footing as her guards came toward her.

"I am fine, the lightning is gone," she insisted as they came to see how she had been. "I told you, I am fine."

"You're injured."

"A slight injury. It's fine." Her guard helped place her on the back of their horse.

"Is your horse alright?" The other guard asked him.

Was his horse alright? His horse was standing, content, and fine by his side. Link just gave a weak nod as he watched them trot away. He stood up and got back on his horse, catching up to her.

He didn't know where that memory came from, or why it's picture wasn't in the Sheikah slate, but it didn't matter.

He remembered it now.

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### Dueling Peaks Stable

When Link got to Dueling Peaks Stable, her guards were outside boarding their horses while he went in to check her over.

"It's a minor sprain and it will be fine," she insisted. "Oh, with all the power I discovered in myself, you'd think I could protect my horse." She sighed as she stared outside. "It was my fault, I shouldn't have had her out there in that weather."

The weather was fine, only a little rain, she couldn't have known. It wasn't her fault, but Link knew she was going to stop and try to find the legendary Horse God.

"I just had to give her an endura carrot before we left," she blamed herself again. "Oh, who am I kidding? She loved those so much. I had even named her Endura. I gave them to her every day." She stood up, but having been thrown violently from her horse, wasn't going to get far.

Link watched as her 'regular guards' came in to check on her injuries. He'd already done that. Even if she had ten of those guards, they wouldn't stand a chance with the creatures he once faced. Monsters were still out there too, they were there before and after Ganon. Monsters would be fighting for their lives, as well as the taste of their Hylian flesh. He tried to hide a sigh. All of them would be a full course meal for something like a Lynel. While the smaller monsters were mostly defeated, there were still several of the bigger ones that were out there. Hiding and waiting to ambush others. The wilderness of the Horse God would be the perfect place for them.

Anyone could ambush a bright but stubborn Queen currently hurt who would still insist on going there for her horse.

"I'll get word to Gerudo that it will be longer," one of her guards said. "Maybe in the meantime you should rest up and see a healer?"

Logical idea but Zelda didn't answer. "It was good to see you again, Link. I need to rest now."

He nodded briefly.

Memory. One more memory and Impa. He had to find it.

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### Eldin Region

Hot. Sweaty in the huge armor that weighed him down, but there was no choice to remove it in that climate. Maybe if he had a colder weapon. Maybe he could take it off, but if he was wrong, he'd be burned crisp rather quick. Not worth it.

Then he didn't care about the feeling anymore as he saw the area he was at. He pulled out his sheikah slate as he felt the last memory.

They had started to notice all the monsters coming out more often. Zelda had told him he wasn't immortal, but it was clear something had started to happen. It made the kingdom gear up even harder against Calamity Ganon's possible return.

He moved toward the closest shrine and teleported away.

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### Kakariko Village

"I see," Impa said as he explained what happened past the stables. "With Zelda there, her emotional state that day . . ." She didn't continue. She got up and led him to a painting. "This was it, wasn't it?"

Link stared at the painting. That was it. He had all of the memories now.

"What now, Link?" she asked him. "This is the end of the road for the memories you have now."

No. Link didn't believe that. He pulled out his master sword and maneuvered it in his hands. Zelda and Impa had known those pictures would stir his mind. Hollow pictures with no one in them taken with the sheikah slate.

He pulled up his sheikah slate and pointed to a blank slot.

"I can do nothing else," Impa insisted. "The memories you have of the Princess and the Champions, are what you are left with. There are no more pictures."

No. Link put his Sheikah slate back but in a huff. He didn't believe that.

"I see. Do you believe following Zelda will lead you to all of your memories again?" she asked. "Yesterday, you came here and guarded the entrance. Did you do that for a purpose? Are you trying to discover your old self, Link?"

Yes. Zelda herself, her presence right there had triggered the memory, not that picture.

It was time to go to the shrine near Dueling Peaks stable. Zelda would have to still be near there after her fall.

As Link arrived at the shrine near Dueling Peaks though, something kept bugging him. He had a sinking feeling that she wouldn't be there. She was injured though, she should be there. But when he looked inside?

Gone. Her and her volunteer guards were gone. “Agh.” He did remember her correctly, of course Zelda was too stubborn to stay still. She had to go save her horse. Link approached the stable man and asked when she had left.

He could get closer with a shrine to the Horse God, but that wouldn’t let him catch up to them. A horse might be the best idea. They would be traveling by horse and couldn’t do too much maneuvering. They’d have a more set path. “Ayyye.” He finally had what he needed and now she just had to be gone. With regular guards. Not even well-trained royal guards, just volunteers. Experience must have been minimal. How many times had she been doing these reckless things without a fully trained guard since he’d been away?

No. It was more like how many times had she been forced to. Guilt started to creep in.

It was time to go to her.

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### Near Puffer Beach

Riding out to the Horse God Fairy took an extreme amount of time. Zelda knew it would. While she knew she should wait for her injury to heal, she also had a duty. She had sent word through a volunteer messenger to reach Gerudo and let them know she would be a few days late. There was no longer a stop into Lurelin for a short reprieve. A place to eat delicious fish, talk to people in a community, and relax on the beaches safely. No, that time was now replaced with a grueling ride.

It would not have been so bad if she hadn’t been injured. She could have gone on foot against some areas with her guards and got a temporary horse on the other side of Dueling Peaks to make it there safely. However, she couldn’t do that with her injury. Her guards even had to help her on and off their horse. It felt shameful but she wouldn’t let shame disallow the horse.

Endura had been a great horse, listened well and had a gentle temperament. Just like Ember. Ember had been her truest riding horse. Also white like Endura, they both carried themselves well. She was over a hundred years too late to save Ember, but she wouldn’t fail Endura.

The Horse God or Horse Fairy was supposed to be Malanka. Malanya. Little was known about her, and most people would assume she was a legend. Zelda knew better though. Just because things were covered in the dirt of time, it didn’t make them false.

The journey with these drawbacks meant a couple of things though. First, it was too far for her current guards to go. They weren’t made for the guard life

Most of the relay messages from place to place was done with a single messenger, a Rito bird who cared great enough he traveled all over being her official messenger. His name was Nekk and he used to run the clothing store but felt a greater duty to her, so he quit and came to work with her permanently. Zelda didn’t know what she would do without his help. When he was there, he was usually treated with the same care as her by her guards. She always had some minerals or goods or food for him when need demanded. He never went hungry in her

presence, even if she had to climb a mountain and hammer out ore. Not the easiest feat for her.

Unfortunately, he was coming back with another new article and it was a rifting one. "I am sorry, Nekk," she apologized from the back of the horse of her guard Brigdo. Apparently he was guess number three for the one she should marry. He traveled great distances, gave up Rito Village for a life to be her guard, and was always watching out for her by sending important messages, or flying above her.

"Princess Zelda?" Nekk questioned. "I think I should make a special trip to this printing area it's coming from. I mean? Not that you aren't a beautiful . . . person," he said awkwardly. "I wanted to be known for something great and be able to get out there and see the whole world instead of staying up in Rito's roosting village."

"We all have our own reasons for doing things," she said gently. "I know it's not easy to deal with the rumors. It is unfortunately something everyone has to contend with. If you go over there and give your story, I won't stop you, but know that often times others will come out with something new or twist your own words against you. Sometimes, the news is highly rewarding and accurate. While at others, it's only sensationalism to entertain others."

"I just don't want Rito Village to get the wrong idea," Nekk said. "Most times I am out delivering messages, or I'm just circling close because this near to the ground in the mountains next to a horse feels . . . like I'm a baby Rito who hasn't learned to fly." He ruffled his feathers. "I'm always within shouting distance, but it's not like I even fight."

"I know." It was a drawback but that was okay. He was a messenger not a fighter. If they ended up in trouble, he could hear them and relay it out. Not go in and take anyone on.

"I know how you feel," Hino her other temporary guard answered. "I am not here for fighting, I study the moon and the nights and the weather. To be aware of your surroundings can be the difference between life and death." He sighed. "There is no more blood moon without Calamity Ganon, so exploring the world is the closest to the feeling it used to stir within me."

Zelda noticed Nekk staring back at her.

"Then if I'm not a fighter, and he's not a fighter. Is the other one a fighter?" Nekk asked. "You better have at least one fighter."

"I am not to be underestimated," Brigdo said to him. "I can and will fight for Zelda. Anything I can to help keep the monsters at bay from her."

"Brigdo is wonderful at his work," Zelda said politely, "as well as Hino. All of my guards have various talents for aiding me and I am honored by each of their commitments."

"Fine, but this is a long way out from the usual area," Nekk warned her. "At least you have one guard, loyal history if the article is right for Brigdo."

Oh no. "Not another one?" Zelda was moving out of her way to try and avoid the incessant things.

"I made an article?" Brigdo asked. "Really?"

"Yeah, it talks about how you were brave and standing between the bridge helping others cope while keeping back the monsters near Hyrule," Nekk said. "That kind of dedication would be fitting of a King."

Zelda kept her cool. She didn't want to belittle nor make Brigdo feel uncomfortable.

"Me as a King? King of Hyrule?" Brigdo's horse started to stir the wrong way, until Brigdo corrected it. Zelda looked over from Hino's horse. "Well, that is a real honor for anyone to think. But I mean, someone such as me ever marrying Zelda. Princess Zelda. Although technically since she is the last royalty, she is Queen Zelda. I mean either way she was the legendary, powerful woman that held on with such a force this many years."

Oh. He was blushing. Zelda still refused to say anything but Brigdo hadn't spoken like that since he had first seen her and took the position. At least she hadn't heard anything about Nutcake girl.

The world getting excited about some match with her was one thing. The world believing that she had Calamity Ganon's evil resting inside of her was another. That needed to be avoided as much as possible.

"I'll go scout up ahead," Nekk said as he lifted off again. "Down across the shoreline, right? I'll be back to let you know how it looks."

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"Whoah, whoah, whoah." Link stopped his horse again. "Ayye." It wasn't as easy as it looked. While he had memories of Princess Zelda and the Champions, he was missing so many more. It was the reason he wanted to get into her presence again in the first place. But more than that? His memories of the roads to take with horses was semi-good at best. He probably used to know these paths if he traveled around the world with Zelda. There were probably much better maps of everything. However, Link had been exploring areas using shrines, towers and his paraglider since his resurrection. While he kept horses, they weren't used half as often.

So it wasn't a surprise he somehow ended up in the thick of the mountains. He turned his horse around and continued moving. To make sure he followed Zelda's path, he had to follow the path the horse could get through. Either that or use a nearby shrine to the Horse God and hope that she made it that far. No, it was too risky. The Horse God through an alternate path was going to be four to five days away. There was no stable between, unless they went deeper South into Faron. While Zelda might have grown accustomed to riding great distances, she was moving in a more dangerous path no one tread across, increasing the chances for powerful monster encounters.

He rode his horse back down and backtracked, finding his way out of the rocky problem and into the Dunsel plateau. With a straight shot between full of dirt road, he gave his horse an Endura carrot and rode it faster.

The amount of monsters weren't bad, three moblins they could have avoided. He dealt with him though, knowing it would help the next people who went on that path in the future. Further on, there was a Hinox that was barely out of the distance of hearing. Zelda and the guards were probably being more quiet if they were aware of the dangers. Hopefully.

Link took the time to get rid of it too. Any monsters he saw along the way he tried to vanquish. Although it took time away, innocent people wandering that path could get hurt because he didn't take extra time to deal with them easily with his sword.

Past Atun Valley and the Floria Bridge, he seemed to be making decent time. He didn't take as long to rest or eat, opting for food for stamina and power and only the minimum hours of rest to reach her. Anything he could do to cut down time between would be best.

# Zelda's Secret

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## Puffer Beach

This place makes me nervous,” Brigdo noted as Zelda gazed out at the same thing. Ancient guardian stalkers were gracing the beach lines. Reconstruction hadn’t graced that area at all. Some stuck in the sand and some simply stopped with their feet in tact. Those felt the most dangerous. Traversing along ancient guardian stalkers always produced the worst feeling. There was no telling if any had survived and were just waiting for an enemy to show up to activate itself. Nekk wouldn’t be able to tell either from his further lookout. They each moved very carefully.

Then they all looked back as they heard a horse galloping on the beach! Why, who would be so reckless as to ride that way around ancient guardian stalkers! Someone that clearly didn’t know how to-

Oh, no. The opposite. Her heart swelled a little as she saw who’d been riding up toward them. Link. He seemed to get all over, it was hard to guess when they would meet again. She heard him slow down his horse. “Link. Whatever brought you all the way to Faron?” That look. He was mad about her leaving with her small injury? She’d moved with worse.

No, there was more than that. Oh. “You remember all the memories?” Yes, he did, he shook his head to confirm it. Now, she knew why he had followed her. He wanted her to let him come.

She knew the reason he was coming. Being around each other might trigger more than he could find in the photographs. He wanted to trigger the memories. All of them. Not just the ones he needed to make sense of what happened to Hyrule and his part in it.

Normally she would have been glad to take him back, but . . . she didn’t want him knowing her secret.

At least she had a small reprieve, Nekk was coming down from his surveying. “Did you see anything?” she asked him.

Oh. He didn’t look good. “There’s a Stalnox hiding in the way.”

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Link paid attention and watched the situation. The Rito bird had been a scout watching ahead for her. Zelda’s wisdom had shown through. She wasn’t someone who didn’t know what they were doing, she had reliable help. Her stubborn personality didn’t get in the way. He noticed her guards had changed too, he recognized them. One was the first person he ever met when he left the Great Plateau with the paraglider, and the other had read the moon. He had been helpful in knowing when a blood moon was coming back then.

Both were good men at heart.

But?

They wouldn't be able to scratch the Stalnox, take down that Hinox he passed, or take on an ancient stalker if one of them had been alive near the shoreline. Zelda was in dialogue with the Rito bird now. The only one that had a useful station was the Rito.

Link galloped ahead of them. He wouldn't play 'let's go around the entire area to a safer path' now that he'd found Princess Zelda.

When he went through the area, it was easy to see it. Right in the middle, it was so huge that there was no way to maneuver around it easily.

Link picked up his current sword, not his master sword. He didn't need it for that creature. Holding his sword he spun attacked him, whacking him several times and avoided his attacks back at him. He grabbed his bow and finished him off by his eye. Collecting the spoils, he got back on his horse and went back to Zelda.

"Are you kidding?" Brigdo couldn't believe it. "A Stalnox? Well? I-I know you helped with Calamity Ganon. Everyone knows that. It's tough to put it all into perspective though until . . ."

"A Stalnox is rare and strong, but if Brigdo had seen or experienced one before, it would put it into perspective," Hino noted.

Link was only vaguely listening. He was focused on Zelda.

"Thank you for your assistance, Link," she mentioned.

No. Not good enough.

"Would you like to come see the Horse Fairy God with us?" She invited him.

An invite was a way in. He nodded and went with them. As they moved, he continued to observe. Brigdo was glancing back at him sometimes, but mainly at Zelda. Not in a flattering way a guard should be looking at someone. Hino was studying the sky, which was dimming into the night, barely paying attention to the road. The Rito had flew back off ahead, probably checking out the situation further. The area had limited mobility around them and a fork in the road ahead. He watched the Rito bird come back and gesture which way to go. Now it was a straight shot along the path and to the bridge.

When they arrived, Hino got off his horse while Brigdo got off his. Link watched as Brigdo helped her down with Hino. She didn't need two people to help her down. He watched her footing. While everyone had acted fine, he noticed there were also some light rips in her cloth behind her good leg. She had ran into trouble, but had gotten away safely. She went forward having to be the one to ask Horse God Malanya for her services.

Link had visited the Horse God before, having run into her while exploring Hyrule. He wasn't surprised with Malanya's act of being scary. Zelda wasn't phased either.

Hino looked like he wanted to get out, and Brigo didn't look any better. Link watched the horse she had lost come back, and the brilliant smile that graced Zelda's face.

"Endura!" The horse came to her and she stroked its neck. "I'm so sorry. I'll be more careful with you from now on." Her horse nuzzled her back.

***"She is still a wild one, Link," Zelda said as she stroked the neck of her new horse. "I should have tried for something more like my first horse. Patience wasn't raised to be out here like this though." She tried to get on it. "How many times have you mounted a horse in your lifetime? From what you said of your father, I'm guessing several. How do you get so close to them when you can lose them in hard situations? Do you still form a bond with them, or do you ride them and then just let them be free?" She patted her neck again.***

Link snapped out of the memory. He was right, it wasn't just the pictures, venturing with Princess Zelda could be the key to getting everything back. He waited.

Waited for her words.

That familiar smile that graced his memory.

The smile she had when she first asked if he remembered her.

The eventual invite to be her royal escort again.

"I am glad you remember, Link. I have nothing else I can offer except to take some more pictures where we once dwelled more often," she said. "I don't know if it will do any more good, but I will write the locations for you. I also have some ancient parchment. It's more official, locked up and not burnt to cinders. It might help. I will try to retrieve it for you."

That? No. No, something was wrong. He remembered her, and she was just telling him to go? After defeating the Stalnox even? "Ah?"

Her other guards didn't say a word as they helped Princess Zelda back up.

What was wrong? Why didn't she accept him? Why were the guards acting like that was absolutely normal? As they started to leave, Link blocked the path and stared down Zelda.

Zelda. It should be Queen Zelda since she was the last, but she never insisted upon a ceremony. Never said anything about the position. Even Princess Zelda, it didn't seem to be required with several simply calling her Zelda. She'd been distancing herself from the royalties name, while at the same time trying to perform duties. Link looked down at his master sword. It was glowing? It should have been weakened enough not to have as much power, it's why he fought the Stalnox with something else.

There must be an Ancient Guardian nearby, still active yet not being noticed. Where was it hiding?

"There is nothing . . ."

Link looked back. She had started to explain.

“There is nothing here triggering your sword but me, Link,” she confessed. She looked at him, eye to eye. “I have malice in my heart.”

What?

“I am Princess Zelda,” she insisted to him. “A hundred years of being near evil, and . . . it was just too long. I think, I think it’s the real reason father still haunts the castle.”

Zelda. Malice. If people found out the truth?

“Knowing this, you can make your decision,” she said. She revealed that there was an unhealing wound of scratch marks on her front chest. To show how deep they ran, she pulled down her shirt slightly toward her collar bone.

Deep, red gashes, with a small amount of malice hiding inside of it.

“It builds,” she admitted. “I continually visit the springs of the goddesses for help. They slow it down and reduce it, but they won’t remove it.”

Malice within her heart. Her father still haunting the castle. They had to be connected. Link insisted they check out the castle first.

Zelda didn’t like the idea. She’d been avoiding it, not wanting to feel her father’s uncommunicating spirit.

Link moved closer to her horse. For some time, retrieving facts about the past was just that. Facts. Past. But for Zelda, regret for her father ran deep. It ran so deep, it may be the reason she couldn’t connect with him. He spoke to her at length, trying to make her see reason into going there. He could connect with her father and he let her know that. He was even able to get clothes from him. Maybe he knew something that could help her, and maybe King Rhoam was simply waiting on him to communicate instead this time. Waiting the same way Zelda had waited for him.

A slight nod. The slightest of nods. The kind of nod that said she didn’t want to, but she knew he never gave in. It was enough for him.

He whistled for his horse to get closer and started to help Zelda off the other horse. He heard a slight snipe from Brigdo but ignored it.

His duty was to her, not following along behind someone else’s horse. He didn’t-

***“Your duty will be to my daughter, Knight. Her royal guard.”***

***Link bent down graciously. He had been practicing to become the best knight, worthy of being of service to the castle. Instead, he had managed to outshine them all, having the sword that sealed the darkness. He was not only serving inside the castle, he was worthy of guarding King Rhoam’s own daughter.***

***“Zelda may not be easy at first,” King Rhoam informed him. “Keep on her. You will guard her but follow your King’s orders.”***

## *Understood.*

Link looked behind him at Zelda waiting for him to start to ride.

“A memory.” She seemed to know. “I’m happy you are getting them back, Link. The castle is quite far away.”

No, she wasn’t sneaking out of it. Link clicked his horse’s sides and they started to move.

King Rhoam himself showed Link how to handle Zelda. Respectfully but with a certain kind of demand. A subtle demand without words or belittling.

It didn’t take long for Link to excel in it.

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## Hyrule Castle

Night. Link helped Princess Zelda off her horse and went into the castle with her. Like he remembered before, it was a mess inside. There was only a sign of recent life near the doorway.

Zelda gestured toward the sleeping bags and candles. “We rest here. I do have an extra sleeping bag.”

Good. Hino or Brigdo could use the spare. Link gazed around the room. He didn’t see King Rhoam.

“I don’t feel him right now.” Zelda knelt down on one of the sleeping bags. “I couldn’t see anything even if I did.” Her voice was a little tight on that sentence.

Link knelt down on the sleeping bag next to her. He heard a mild protest from Hino, but it stopped. He noticed Zelda giving him a slightly strange look now?

“Not every pot in the world is yours to break, Link.” Zelda knew him well. “I have a spare sleeping bag I can get for you.”

No. That sleeping bag was next to Zelda. Yet, he played nice enough. Hino brought it to him. He scooted the other sleeping bags over away from Zelda, and then set the extra by her. He had the same spot, but a different sleeping bag.

“Did you honestly just move our sleeping bags?” Hino asked in surprise. “Just to sleep next to Zelda?”

Princess Zelda. Not Zelda, Princess Zelda. At the very least, The Princess. It was due to her. Respect. Respect for the royal family.

Respect for the royal family!

“Hino. Brigdo. Please go for a small walk outside if you may?” Zelda asked them. They agreed.

Zelda scooted closer beside him. “The world isn’t the same, Link. I haven’t officially taken the role of Queen and I’ve not forced anyone to call me Princess. Leveling myself up higher, in this time where I am the only royalty that exists. It makes no sense. I know why you are acting the way you are acting,” she said softly to him. “The castle, the champions, the knights. The more you remember what it was like, the more you can see how much it all went wrong.”

Link notched his master sword out of its hilt slightly and then notched it back in. He repeated the motion. In. Out. In. Out.

“The memories have been too often and its hitting you harder emotionally now. We can’t begrudge the time we live in. We get to be happy to live.” She moved back toward her sleeping bag. “There is no ranking, but you already know that you were great enough to be once assigned to my side.”

Link just sat there, thinking. She didn’t say much else. Just looked toward him with a sad smile. Memories coming so fast. Hearing Zelda had malice within her. King Rhoam’s ghost somewhere around there. His emotions were practically clawing to be near Princess Zelda’s side for the familiarity. She was right. He wasn’t officially her guard or knight. He lost that position when he was sent to the shrine of resurrection. When he slept to heal and the Princess tried to fight off Ganon to keep Hyrule safe.

For a hundred years.

For a hundred years. That number was hurting so much worse. Link looked around the castle. This area, he once must have traversed it so often. To and fro with Princess Zelda. At one time, he must have made his parents proud. He must have left his house in Hateno to work for the service of the castle. Yet, that thinking was just feeding into itself. He still didn’t remember his parents, let alone if they were proud. He didn’t remember traversing the castle. He didn’t know if his current house was the house he had actually left or not. But. Memories stirred emotion. A nostalgic longing to know. Know more about everything.

He talked with Zelda softly as the others were gone. He got very little answers, but he got enough.

“Being around each other might help or it might hurt,” she confessed. “I bring you not only memories, but you bring back a sometimes painful nostalgia to me as well. However, I have it in everything. Memories pour from everywhere, even my family’s dilapidated castle. If you want the honor of being called the royal knight again, it is yours. I, as on the only royal left, grant it to you. If or when you realize it isn’t what you want or where you belong in this new world, you are free to leave. No obligation to me, Link. You can also be as you’ve tried to be before.” She smiled at him lightly. “A decent person that just keeps me from being eaten by a Stalnox.”

To come to her side every once in a while in a crisis. Link shook his head. No.

“Link. Be certain,” she said once more. “If being around me and this barely standing castle puts anger into your gentle heart, then I don’t want you to do it. I don’t want you to stay. If you believe I am part of your new future, then . . . you can stay.”

Hurt or not, Zelda was almost all that was left of his past. He had been making a new future for himself. Building a sort of life, but his attachment to her was too great. The more he remembered, the tighter it became.

His former self sacrificed everything to protect her. His new self, it couldn’t just leave her out there with unqualified men who could probably barely raise a sword!

Besides. His new self was wherever he would make it. His home would be wherever he made it. He nodded toward her once more.

She was more than a past, she was his present.

“Okay,” she agreed, “but please get along with the others?” she insisted. “They are wonderful volunteers. No, they haven’t gone through all of the training a royal soldier would have, but they have good hearts. Besides, I take care of myself quite well. Just, not all the time. Like for an injury,” she groaned. “I also had to share my deepest secret with them. I had to open up and trust them. They haven’t let me down.”

Okay. Link consented to that. His past feelings of protecting Zelda and his position and what painful memories he had of running, it had boiled a little more than he wanted to admit. He wouldn’t let it boil over.

He agreed and got up to find them outside.

Link looked toward the both of them. He gave it to them straight. Thanked them for taking care of Princess Zelda. Thanked them for being present there but still told them that since he had accurate training, that if something happened, she would stay near him unless he commanded one of them to step up and take her. They understood that it wasn’t belittling. It was being safe.

They all went back inside and went toward their sleeping bags. He still stayed in the one near Zelda.

He slept lightly throughout the night, waking every once in awhile to see the princess safely still there.

Until he noticed the presence next to her.

King Rhoam didn’t wear his royal robes. He looked just like the nameless stranger he met when he first came out of the shrine of resurrection. Link got up and walked away, watching King Rhoam follow. He moved several rooms away, needing privacy to talk to the King.

Link stopped and turned back to see the King. This time, he bowed as he once did in his presence.

“I would have spoken to you last time you had come here for your memory,” King Rhoam insisted, “but you still didn’t have enough memories for you to . . . to be concerned in the same way. I needed to protect my daughter, Princess Zelda.” He wandered around slightly. “It’s all seen better days. Her heart swells with regret and my presence doesn’t help. I can’t bear to show myself to her after everything that happened.” He sighed. “Stand up, Link. You don’t need to bow to me. I haven’t been King in a very long time. I am just a spirit. A spirit trying to help his daughter before continuing on.”

Link stood back up.

“I’m not here to make her feel bad. I don’t blame her nor you. She and you saved Hyrule, giving it a future. She has a secret though. A secret so heinous, the kingdom itself will not accept it easily. The Champions have all left this realm. I should be seeking eternal rest yet I can’t. I saw what happened. Calamity Ganon is a sneaky one, Link. He is wiser than you know, and when she formed to become herself again, he snuck malice into her heart. There is every chance it may never leave her.”

Malice. The King knew. Link absorbed that information. Zelda had done nothing but protect Hyrule. She even kept back Ganon for him to come back to deal with him. There were few things the princess could do that wouldn’t be accepted, but? King Rhoam was right, people would not accept this.

Not malice. Not from Ganon.

“She didn’t know at first, but Ganon has left scars on her that never heal. After time they always bleed malice. She still tried to help the kingdom, but things are getting serious. She calls for me when she is here, asking what I want. She wants to know if I’m upset with her, or if she did something wrong to be cursed with malice.” King Rhoam looked saddened. “Alas, our communication between worlds is about as well as in life. I couldn’t reach her. I couldn’t tell her what Ganon did or how much I truly had loved her. I am afraid that time has a way of revealing all secrets.”

Malice. What kingdom would protect her with malice inside of her heart?

“I give you permission, to save her in any way you see possible. Whatever it takes, to know she will stay safe. Please, Link. Don’t let her down like I did.”

Link wouldn’t again. He wouldn’t die or give up. He promised the king that he would protect her.

“Princess Zelda is so special to the world. Don’t let this fear consume her either. She has a place, and the chance of being discovered has left her only half fulfilling it. While I want her to be safe, she is letting her position down. She is the last of royalty. She *is* Queen Zelda. You are the Chosen Knight of Queen Zelda.”

Link didn’t let that go. Not this time. He explained she couldn’t be everything while holding the malice secret inside of her. She helped the Kingdom, but running it completely would only throw more attention her way.

“Attention will come. Hyrule will one day know the secret, and sooner I fear than my dear Zelda wishes. Being established, doing good in the meantime, be who she is at heart? It will be the best chance of proof to survive when the truth comes out. You can’t hide her in the Hebra mountains forever alone to escape it, Link. My daughter must walk a line, a hard line. Starting with the castle. Do you understand?”

No.

“A hundred years and it’s so easy to forget. After all, the future of it is so far away. Yet, as time has showed, time moves fast. The distant future will be here years, centuries, a millennium after you perish. Yet, fate cannot be reversed. Ganon has and will come back as he has since it seems the beginning of time. With no royal blood with the goddess’ blessing, there will only be a knight. We know how that ends.”

Link nodded. He understood it now. Ganon would come in the distant future someday, past their life spans. If Princess Zelda didn’t re-establish royalty, then there would be no goddess power. She had to continue tradition. Had to have children. Her children had to have children. Everything had to proceed.

It was a hard line to walk. She couldn’t let her secret be revealed, yet she needed to truly reclaim the throne for Hyrule’s future.

Link returned back to their area of sleeping. He stirred the princess, not wanting to go over it with the others. She could explain later if she wanted to. When she woke up, he explained what happened with her father.

“Not regret or betrayal.” She sat up speaking softly. “He’s not angry with me.”

The betrayal or regret was on his side. Except for one thing.

“He wants me to be careful, and yet accept the throne. Bring royalty back to the castle and Hyrule.” She tightened up. “Me, alone. No other royal survived. Not even staff, everyone was annihilated.” Half anger, half depressed. “I am supposed to somehow take it all on and be a good royal and stay in the castle? Fix it up again? Restart it all over?” She scoffed. “Hyrule has done fine without me. We can fix this world, fix relations with all kingdoms through sharing and talking. Rebuild and reconstruct, but I don’t need to be in charge. I don’t need a castle, I don’t need a title, and he isn’t here anymore anyway.” That last part almost made her lose it. Yet, being Princess Zelda, she didn’t. She tightened up her resolve and kept herself from spilling her emotion.

Link followed up what the king said by telling her the king truly cared. He wanted her to make herself irreplaceable, if the truth came out.

Princess Zelda didn’t answer right away. “I . . . I can try to maybe . . . fix the front of the castle up more. I won’t take the title Queen unless I have to, and I won’t require anyone to call me Princess Zelda.” She waited about a minute for time to pass. “Without royalty, Ganon in our future has already won.” A long, exasperated sigh. “I don’t even wear a crown, and it already feels so heavy. Father is right, I can’t deny it. As much as I just want to move on, to stay safe myself, you’re right. I guess I wasn’t thinking. Father wouldn’t see it as anything

new.” Still berating herself as she looked around the tower. “It doesn’t need to be perfect right away. The front. Year by year, we’ll work on the rest. I guess, we can work on it as we are restoring Hyrule too.” She casted a sideways glance. “What do you think of the countryside?”

Link smiled. She had been working with the locals in digging the decrepit remains out of the ground. Rebuilding some of the lost villages that had been resorted to ruins that monsters trounced over the last hundred years. Most were built from scratch, with some of the damaged older pieces being preserved for posterity. Proof Ganon does and will come again.

“There are small little museums for what was there before,” she said. “With plaques. Warnings of what happened the first and second time, a Knight and Princess fought Ganon. When they were successful and when they . . . failed.” Tough to say. Probably not easy to read those plaques. “Being overconfident in technology, in doing things the same way as the one before isn’t the way to handle it next time. It takes two, and it doesn’t require any extra technology Ganon can take over. Two, and the future princess . . . I wrote her a warning too. If the plaques survive and she ever comes to read any of them.” She glanced at Link. “Forcing yourself to find the power isn’t the key. It’s being courageous. I didn’t find it within myself until I had the courage to fight back, and I’m so sorry it didn’t happen until you were in danger.”

Link nodded, understanding that.

“We can start moving some things to this room. Royal desks and chairs that didn’t get destroyed and that are still safe to use. Antiques. Royal rugs. That will make it feel more open.” She tried to smile. “I’ll start looking deeper for the royal funding.”

Link wanted to help. He was pretty good at putting puzzles together. Princess Zelda agreed, starting tomorrow she would tell him the ancient song that should uncover the hidden fortune.

“However, I am preoccupied now. I have to visit the springs. I visit them more often, I have to, to keep the malice amount down.” She curled up in her blanket. “Don’t overreact.”

# Snowling!

Spring of Wisdom

Don't overreact she said. Link had his back turned while watching Brigdo and Hina as well. They had better keep their backs turned. No one was turning unless he heard danger nearby.

Unsettling. This wasn't the same from his visions. His vision had her in a white robe during blessings. The same white robe she was in when she held back Ganon. She hadn't done that. Instead they were in the freezing mountains near Hateno. He had once rescued Naydra quite close to there. They all had to have extra warm outfits so they didn't freeze to death.

Princess Zelda had arrived with warm clothing, but she had taken it off. She stood naked in the freezing water, only surviving by the goddess' graces is what she told him.

*////“Chosen Knight of Hyrule,” she said with a flippancy akin to royalty that didn't care for a commoner. She flipped her hair.*

*Link watched her, she was angry with him following her. She always had been, she didn't appreciate his presence. Link wasn't there to make her happy though, he was there to make sure nothing happened to the Princess of Hyrule. It was his duty.*

*“I don't have a choice in this,” she said lightly. “I can't afford to be sick. Not with Ganon able to attack at any time, and father will not make you leave my side. But!” She flipped to look back at him, a stern warning with her finger. “You still have to face away and you shall not look at me unless an unlikely monster attacks.”*

*Link didn't know why she was angrier than usual as she started to remove her shoes.*

*“Turn around, Knight,” she commanded. “This isn't a blessing for power like usual, I am asking to be healed. I have a cold and father demands I get healed before it becomes serious.”*

*Link still didn't understand but he turned around. He usually stayed turned around anyway.*

*“Turn around back this way and I'll use my own sword on you.”*

*Feisty. He heard her get in the water and kept lookout as per usual, until he turned just right and caught a glimpse of her clothing she had worn. It was on the side. All of it?*

*Oh. That's why she wasn't happy. Link was careful to keep his eyes completely straight.*

*Princess Zelda was praying in the streams, naked.*

*Forget Princess Zelda being mad, if Link looked, King Rhoam would cut him down himself!*

*"I hate this," she admitted from behind him. "Once I start to pray, it's the same. If you hear a monster, you must take care of it. While I am in here, I cannot leave the area until the blessing is done. To leave, even due to my life in trouble is a sin against the goddesses. I? I am at my most vulnerable point. When I was younger, my mother used to help me with this. When I got older, I dealt with sickness like anyone else did. With Ganon's time coming closer, father won't let this go. So, please? Just. Don't look but don't go anywhere. Now more than ever, please don't leave."*

*Link nodded. She may not trust him yet, but her father gave her no choice but to trust him. A strange man, only slightly older than her. He would give her no reason to doubt him.*

*She would always feel safe and protected in whatever form her praying had to take.////*

Link snapped out of it again. He remembered that moment clearly. Princess Zelda had not got along with him yet, and she had no choice but to trust him at her most vulnerable position. King Rhoam insisted that even a cold could turn into a flu and weaken the chances of her finding her powers. Hyrule wouldn't fall because the Princess had a cold, he declared loudly to her.

Now, she did trust him, but she also had to trust Hino and Brigdo, and possibly Nekk who flew high above everything on lookout farther away. She had to trust them completely with so much. Even a small peek and she would have never known.

So even now, he was keeping his eyes casted toward Hino and Brigdo too. He was learning to trust them, but unlike Princess Zelda, he didn't *have* to put his whole trust in them.

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*Please take this away. Please.* Zelda begged for extra help. Freezing yet remaining focused. Hoping she could get something more. More help. New advice. *I will take my spot as the royal of Hyrule. I will bring it all back and I will have children and we will be well prepared for the next time Ganon arises. If you please, find it within you to release me from this curse Ganon has put inside of me. Please.* She felt malice ooze from the top of her chest. Nothing more or less than last time. No matter how much she pleaded, they never helped any extra. The same amount. An amount to leak away that was safe, that never hurt her skin or her clothes, but they would never remove the malice within her heart. Ever forming. Ever growing. A substance that never could be completely drained away it seemed.

Once, Hyrule had been covered thick in spots with it. After Ganon's death, it was no more. Only within the monsters, and only within her. Like he had kept back a slight amount, to make sure her life would remain a hell for standing against him.

She went back to the side and grabbed a blanket to dry herself lightly as she got her warm gear back on.

She would visit the other springs later. She couldn't visit the same one over and over, the goddesses had never appreciated that. If she wanted more help, she would visit another spring next time. She wouldn't revisit until she had gone to all springs.

She did it though. She did it to keep the malice back as much as possible, from growing too far. It was deep within her heart, but she didn't want it any deeper.

Zelda looked back down at her chest as she came toward Link first. "I have to visit Gerudo soon. I have placed it on hold for some time." He touched the top of his chest, signaling worry over hers. She covered her top up better. She hadn't completely dried off, she just wanted to get warm, so her clothing had stuck wrong. "It's always there. I'll be careful, I always am. Let's just get out of here."

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One Week Later . . .

*Cold. Cold. Cold.* That pervading thought wouldn't stop infesting Zelda's mind. She didn't complain about it, knowing exactly what she was getting into, coming to Hebra. It wasn't easy and there were no horses this time around. Hino and Brigdo decided to stay behind this time and watch the castle. Nekk was still nearby though, and she was following Link's trail closely. There was some climbing, but not a multitude of it. But- "Link."

He saw it. Up ahead were some tough monsters. He got out his sword and moved ahead. She gave it a minute as he took care of three moblins. This deep into the snow and cold, hardly anyone would be bothered by monsters. This was a good place for them to go. After he took care of them, he took care of an ice keese too.

Ice keese. It was getting late. Zelda could see her breath in the air as she watched Link signal her to come up again. "Maybe we should go back to the stable." No, the nearest stable was too far. Link was sure he knew the answer to her riddle now. She caught up with him and watched out for any ice keese or any other monsters lurking in the deep cold.

Then she saw it in the distance. A small home. No lights. It was easy to miss but they were headed straight for it.

"How about a game of snowling?" The man said with a smile, glad to see him. "One catch though. It costs twenty rupees to play." He looked toward Zelda. "Oh, you brought a friend? They can play too! It just costs them twenty rupees too. I am firm on the price."

Zelda examined the man. Link was doing that too. He held his finger up to her with a slight smile, like he was about to show her something. He gave the man twenty rupees. The man disappeared for a little while and came back.

Link bowled a strike, and the man gave him . . . 300 rupees? She couldn't believe it. He paid another twenty rupees and made a spare with two turns. He still got 100 rupees. Link was quite skilled. He bowled them all over except one and got fifty rupees.

Why one time, he bowled almost nothing and the man felt sorry for him and gave him fifty rupees just for trying? She was getting the hint quite quick. "Sir?"

"Pondo!" He said cheerily to her. "I am Pondo. I run the snowling game. What do you think? Are you happy with the snowertainment? It's all a snowball of a time. Would you like to

try?”

“No.” She approached him closer. “How do you fund your snowling?”

“Why?” he asked curiously. “Who are you to ask that of me?”

“Princess Zelda of Hyrule,” she answered.

“Oh? Ohh!”

Yep, he had found it. A trove hiding in the snow. He knew where the royal fortune had been. There was so much of it hiding, he only took what he could carry or when he ran out of money.

Link was right. This man in the middle of nowhere survived comfortably because of the neverending wealth. He didn’t gush it around, having only a small log house to call home. He took only what he needed, except when someone came to play. Then he gave them either fifty rupees, a 100 rupee, or a 300 rupee. He only charged to keep the game interesting, knowing no one would want to play a free game.

Pondo led them to the spot. “Down there,” he gestured. “I suppose it now makes sense where it all came from.” He moved downward. “The diamonds are on top to make it look like snow. Get down past them and you’ll see all the rupee colors.”

The royal fortune! Zelda carefully went down with Link. It practically filled a snow cavern. She carefully moved the white diamonds that were camouflaged in the snow, to see all of the colors. “With this, Hyrule can really repair itself, Link!” She shouted excitedly. “I can even pay salaries, just like I’ve wanted too.” She bent down. “I can get the front of the castle fixed, really get moving on repairing and restoring the lost areas of Hyrule. I can even pay to get miners to search for luminous stone for Zora’s Domain.”

She couldn’t help herself as she stole a quick hug from Link. “It’s all thanks to you, Link! I would have never found Pondo way out here in Hebra.”

They both smiled at each other. It was the best find ever.

Pondo didn’t seem to mind losing the fortune, he thought it was s’no’w problem. He probably had some stashed away somewhere, and it didn’t take much to support a person like him. He invited Link and her to stay in the cabin and rest for the night. Zelda normally wouldn’t accept the offer, but Link seemed certain it was okay. If Link believed it was okay, she would do that. Besides, it was bitter cold out there. She enjoyed Hyrule’s moderate temperatures. Gerudo’s heat was almost like a second home to her too, making the heavier heat of Goron City even more tolerable than the harsh cold of Hebra.

The next morning they made it through the cold some more, but Link called to her. He wanted something? He moved over toward a lit up blue shrine and gestured for her to come over. Oh. “We’ve been over this, Link. I’m sure it’s a great convenience for you to teleport with the sheikah slate, but only the Chosen Hero is allowed to be transported.” Still, he wanted to try. He had wanted to try before, but she had refused. The Chosen Hero completed

the shrines. They weren't destined to transport anyone else. Yet, he was being bold, and it was cold outside. It would be quicker to just agree to try so they could hurry and get going on their way. Staying in one spot made the cold worse. "Fine, okay. Try it."

She didn't expect anything. She really hadn't. The prophecy was for the Knight, not the Princess. Yet, when the blue surrounded her and she closed her eyes.

She had opened them and been at a completely different shrine. Just a short distance away, she could see the castle. The cold was melting away from her body as she felt the warmth of Center Hyrule on her skin.

Oh, Link was smirking and he had every right to. He was right. "I guess I should have tried it sooner. Stubborn me." Yes, he won that round and with deserved pride.

They walked across the fields. They didn't take all of the money, just enough that they could fit on their person. Mostly taking diamonds to get the most they could for now. They would return back and forth to take more as they needed it. Bringing or hiring someone to bring it all to the castle held more risk. The castle was still not secure. Security would be coming soon though.

Progress would be coming.

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# Only Getting Worse

## Royal Castle

“With the royal cookbooks and the best chefs, it tastes almost the same,” Princess Zelda said to Link.

Link agreed, consuming the wonderful food. Hino, Brigdo and Nekk were also not being shy with the meal.

The front of the castle had been fixed as well as some of the sides. While much was still in need of help, the money was being spread out across Hyrule, only some being used on the castle at a time. Now though? The kitchen area had been restored enough to cook again, along with the beauty of the dining room. While it used to house much more people, the massive size was still enjoyed by her and her guards. She was now paying a cook to make the royal recipes she had grown up with and had missed eating. Link had, of course, found the royal meals quite enjoyable too.

So far, the day was going well. Life in general seemed to be doing well. That is, until Hino came over.

“The food was remarkably good. I didn’t want to ruin it.” He gave her an article. “Just arrived this morning. Are you done eating?”

Zelda took the article. “Who am I being set up with this week?”

“It’s not that,” Hino answered.

Oh. That wasn’t good. Zelda only had to read a slice of the article. Nutcake Girl was finally making her move. She sat it down and Link scooped it up.

He made a grunt. No surprise. He whispered in her ear. “No one should have followed you there.”

“She must have been tagging along from a distance,” Zelda answered him. “For who knows how long.”

Link was right though, no one should have been following her. The goddess springs were sacred, and she was performing sacred blessings there. The article didn’t say anything about the malice discovery, but it was clearly made to make people question why she was returning to the goddess springs so much. *The world doesn’t know how often I visited, I could just say that it was customary to visit so much? Would they believe that?* Toward the end of her father’s reign, she had gone with Link and prayed at each blessing shrine, but it hadn’t been nearly as much. To cross all over the world took time, she couldn’t simply say it was a given. Could she? Maybe she should just ignore it. It was often the best way to handle gossip mongers.

She noticed Link's stare. She knew what that stare had been. *A deal is a deal.* Link preferred being her only guard. He worked better, and he didn't have to watch out for other fighters in his way. It was the same reason her father wanted only one to watch over her. Link had benefits too from it. He tended to recall more memories when they were isolated.

He also pointed out the obvious that neither Hino nor Brigdo had the same level of training. Link had tested Brigdo, but even an advanced moblin proved to be a hard thing to handle. In a world where only the strongest monsters seemed to still prosper, it posed a problem. Hino had very little fighting skills, his interest in the blood moon that no longer came had propelled an interest in weather. He was the best source of knowing when the weather would change. Had she been riding with him from Kakariko she would have known what had been coming.

Link had talked it over with her. They did have uses, but not the same uses she could see. Brigdo was a defending fighter. He didn't like to go out and fight, he preferred to defend his own area. He had no problem commanding people in his area to take action too. He was a good guard to protect the castle, and extra help when they were there. Hino read weather and for places that tended to have more extreme areas of weather that changed, he was quite useful. For places like Hebra or Gerudo or Eldin he wasn't of much help. He should be employed part time to protect on their journeys, but stay and watch for the castle too. Letting others know about the weather if it turned dire could be important if the castle went under attack.

Zelda hadn't wanted to do that though. She wanted a certain distance from Link. While he was a good soldier, he was also a fine man. She had always noticed that. Many people did. The last thing the Princess of Hyrule should be doing is ever looking at her Knight with anything but kindness. Even now, their bonding . . . it felt different. When Hino and Brigdo were with her around Link, she felt more reserved. When it was just them, she felt a different dynamic. A sense of them almost wanting to cling to each other. They rode horses closer together, he was constantly holding her ever closer when he took her somewhere by shrine, he was still trying to pay for things or give her food even though she had plenty. She was even now paying him the salary he rightfully deserved as a Knight.

Even the shrine travel, it was something the others couldn't do, so many times she still traveled the slower way. She couldn't explain it though correctly to Link just why. She didn't know herself how to feel about the extra contact again. Instead of explaining, she agreed to a compromise. A compromise she didn't think could happen. The same reason Link said 'no one should follow you there'.

If something happened that no one should know about, or that the others had fallen into suspicion? Whether it was favoring another kingdom or helping the tabloid for extra money, if there was suspicion. She would agree to it.

Link ate his roasted fish but he was glancing at her between. Waiting on her.

A promise was a promise. "Gentlemen," Princess Zelda started. "Brigdo and Hino, I would like to offer you new positions." She explained to each their parts, and they both looked delighted with the decisions. Brigdo had wanted to stay and defend, and Hino had apparently

wanted to concentrate more on the weather and the skies than wondering if a monster would be attacking over every new cliff.

Once that was done, Link was delightfully eating his roasted fish. Now they could travel through shrines, towers, and anywhere else an ancient travel portal had been located. It would be great on time.

Yet, Zelda wasn't so sure it would be good for them. The more people knew they could travel fast, the more they would request to see her. The more she associated with others, the more likely her secret would come out.

But she had to perform her royal duties to the best of her ability. For the future, no matter what happened, she should give her all.

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### Gerudo City

"Apologies," Zelda said immediately. Link had told her that Rija had known about him being a voe instead of a vai, but no one else did. "You do know of the interesting vai at my side?"

"Yes, I know that particular 'vai' is a 'voe'," Rija said. "I know it very well. Your Knight is welcome, as long as he doesn't reveal his identity."

Tradition. Zelda bowed. "Thank you for understanding." Link refused to let her just go into the city on her own. He'd rather dress up and break their laws then leave her be, so she had to make sure Rija knew.

"What's that?"

Zelda pulled herself back up, noticing the gesture Rija was giving her.

"That wound. You have a wound?" Rija had seen something. "I could only see some while you bowed, but you have a deep wound. A healer should look at it."

"It's being taken care of." Oh no. Now someone besides her guards knew about the wound. "An accident. It will heal."

"How would Link ever let you get into an accident?" Rija knew Link well.

"I moved away too fast with different guards at the time." Zelda hated to roll over on the other two, but it was a tough situation. "They tried. They were volunteer guards before I started to pay them, but they weren't trained for the same kind of combat."

"Well. I hope it heals." Rija looked at her funny. "Which creature made that mark, if I may ask?"

*Nothing makes these marks.* Anything that could would have torn her apart. "We were surrounded with many different monsters," Zelda said. "I don't know which one did. It will be healed soon though, I'm sure it's starting to scar already." *Zelda, you liar. This is not right,*

*I should not lie. But I cannot just tell her the truth. I don't know her.* She had known Urbosa. She didn't know Rija. Not one bit. Enough digging and the truth would come out. Zelda bowed, though not as low, and politely said goodbye. She swiftly left the city with Link right behind her.

They had both gone back to the Daqo Chisay shrine, right outside the city. "That was too close," she said to Link before they left.

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#### Center Hyrule:

They both had arrived near Center Hyrule. "Just too close," Zelda finished. "I can't risk bowing." She felt her marks through her outfit. It was just too dangerous. "I need to find different clothes for Gerudo's climate, that will still hide my top when bowing better." She looked at Link. "Yours most definitely wouldn't work. The belly would be fine, but the top is cut too low, it would show everything." Hmm. "Maybe I could buy a top and modify it? While it looks suspicious in a way, if I keep the belly area open it may look less like I'm trying to hide the top area." Link gave her a funny look. "What?"

"Ayye." Link didn't like that. "King Rhoam would have killed me if you did that before."

"If I think it's a better idea to bow safely with enhanced clothes, then I should," Zelda fought him on the idea. She watched his eyes wander around her clothes, probably seeing if she could modify them. "I know how to design and create clothes, Link." She had even designed the champion's clothes. "It would be better to modify Gerudo clothes, instead of change this outfit. There will be too many questions about why I changed it." Link had to admit she was right about that.

It had been so quick. They were still standing on the shrine, Link was used to fast travel, and Zelda couldn't blame him.

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#### Outside Gerudo City

"Oh, your back?"

Zelda looked around herself. Link was leaving back to the entrance like it was nothing to him. Meanwhile, of course the guards remembered the princess. Why was she coming back they would want to know. It was in their eyes as she passed them with Link. As they went into the city, more people looked at them until they came to the clothing lady. "I came back for an actual outfit. I decided it would be more customary to visit with your own traditional garments."

The clothing lady sold her the outfit, but still. The guards watched them more closely as they left this time.

“Maybe we should go to the bazaar,” Zelda suggested as they went out. Link shook his head. They guarded those entry ways 24/7 even a change would notice that they came back and strolled over to the shrine. “One day and people will already know.”

Link didn’t respond but headed toward the shrine.

It was bound to happen. Zelda knew that.

She just didn’t want it to happen that fast.

Royalty at the speed of light. The articles coming out were all about the traveling. Link said it was going to happen, no one traveled anywhere that fast, but it didn’t even take three days to discover their secret. People around Hyrule were coming to the castle to request her to visit certain spots where people had lived that were far outside the normal distance to keep them informed. Zora’s Domain had wanted her to find great spots of luminosity stone at night atop the towers. Gerudo wanted her to visit different areas to see if she spotted any hidden yiga clan members and could write down their location so they could be stopped later before they hurt someone. Rito Village and Goron City had not asked anything of her, but it was only a matter of time.

She was also expected to start visiting the areas to oversee all of the reconstruction. Everyday. It was all just a jaunt away. It honestly was, none of those tasks were hard or seemed hard to do. It was a great way to prove the royalty of Hyrule was on top of everything.

However. The more she associated, the more she opened herself up, the more she interacted, the bigger the chances her secret would be found. And for every good thing she did for the world, the articles from Nutcake Girl still made people wonder. Now they were wondering how she traveled through ancient technology if only the Chosen Hero was supposed to travel through it. Why couldn’t Link take anyone else? At least, it helped explain her presence at springs.

But one good thing out of so many things that could go wrong. *It’s under your clothes. No one can see under your clothes.* She told it to herself daily. She had even fixed a Gerudo outfit that allowed her to fully bow without showing off anything.

She was showing Hino, Brigdo, Nekk and Link it that night. She bowed and looked up. “Anything at all?”

“Nope,” Hino said with Nekk.

Brigdo and Link didn’t speak right away.

“Are you sure nothing is showing?” She asked again. She looked at the outfit.

“N-no! You look stunning in it, is all,” Brigdo settled with. He smiled awkwardly.

She looked toward Link. Of course, he didn’t like the belly showing. Royalty shouldn’t be showing like that, to him. When she was younger though, her and her mother wore those

outfits more often than he knew.

Link didn't say anything. Just a disapproving look.

My father isn't here to kill you, Link, so could it kill you not to baby me?" He wouldn't risk saying anything. "Is it safe enough, Link?" That's all she wanted to know.

Link stepped forward and looked. He wouldn't touch it. Too close. He finally gave a slight nod of his head.

"I won't bow more than needed." She could promise him that.

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## Goddess Spring

Link kept his back turned, the top of his sword on the ground and held it ready for anything. Especially with the extra noise Princess Zelda was making. This visit would not end as well.

"Please. Please understand," he heard from behind. "Please, this isn't enough. This is so much less. My devotion has stayed steady, I am continuing to pray and ask for help. I am here, for you, and for the kingdom."

Link heard it respond.

**Nothing lasts forever, unless it is meant too. You are healed enough, to continue your journeys.**

"I can see the malice upon my shirt. The wounds never heal but you always remove it. If anyone were to see it, it would be the end of me. Please. Please."

Link could hear her reaching the end of her rope. The goddesses were not letting this go anymore.

"It's a little less clean," she said to him, coming around him, now fully dressed. Yet, there were smudges of black. "Usually I change into a different outfit. Something cleaner. This time, I can't even tell I did."

Link noticed it too. Towards the time where she wanted to pray at the springs, the familiar black and pink often stained her clothes a little. He could still see it. "It will come out." He tried to say something to make her feel better.

"I know, Link, but if they get stained black and pink every time, then it doesn't matter if it comes out." She touched the top of her clothes and pulled her hand away. A small amount of malice stuck to her fingers. "If it were his, it would kill someone. It doesn't even burn me. That never made me feel good."

Link touched her hand. The malice didn't burn. "Evil makes it burn." That made sense. "You aren't evil."

"The goddess spoke to me like I was a child, begging for a toy. I ask for help not to be a bother, but because I don't know what else to do." She touched her clothes again. It was soaking deeper. "They want me to do something, to take care of it myself, but they won't tell me how. Who even knows about malice and monsters beyond fighting them for their lives?"

Who knew about monsters? Hmm. If the goddesses thought there was something she could do, then there was only one person they could go see.

A man that only came out at night.

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Skull Lake

"Aughahh!" The strange man said as he turned around and looked at Zelda. "Don't scare me!"

His back had been turned and Link and her had been quiet coming up. It hadn't been on purpose, but it was night. It was best to avoid making loud noises. "I'm sorry if I frightened you. Do you know a great deal about monsters?"

"Monsters?! I love monsters! I know everything there is to know about monsters!" He was almost jumping up and down. "My name is Kilton and I am the monster expert!"

A very happy person, Zelda could see that. "Kilton? Do you know about malice?"

Blank stare. "It's what monsters are made of. I thought you had something better to ask me." He seemed depressed now.

"Do you know how to get rid of malice?" Zelda asked him.

"Malice is what makes monsters, monsters!" He insisted. A small squeal. "Get rid of malice, you'll get rid of the monster!"

Yes, she knew that. "Do you know how to take some away without killing it?"

Kilton was quiet now. "You could chop off a hand and some would go with the hand? Unless it was a skeletal monster. Sometimes."

It was a nice try by Link. She looked toward Link as they walked away. "Thanks for trying."

Link looked absolutely disappointed. "You could do a shrine."

"Prove my worth to continue to be healed." It was an idea, except for one thing. "They were made for the chosen hero."

"If you went in and did a shrine, it *would* count," Link insisted.

Even if she did get a shrine's blessing, what good would it do? How much longer would the goddess help? "Do you know of any shrines you haven't completed?" Yes. That look said it all. He didn't.

"I can find one." His voice was so soft but determined.

"Then as I said before, you can leave my side anytime," Zelda reminded him. He could go explore to his heart's content. It would be better that way. *If I can't find a way to stop this.* She never wanted him to see her in that state. Then, she saw him raise his sword to her. "Do you wish to kill me to end this charade now?" No, that didn't fit.

Link lightly tried to touch where her clothes had black seeping through. Nothing happened.

"The sword was for Ganon and monsters, not malice," Zelda reminded him. "It couldn't do damage to any of the malice before Ganon left. The countryside was caked in the evil. I have that same evil inside, Link."

"Substance," Link corrected her.

Evil substance. "Please go and look for a shrine, Link," she told him. He seemed to catch on to what she was doing though.

He shook his head. He wouldn't go now. "Purah. Impa. Zelda."

Yes. "The last ones left besides you, I know." She looked toward her hands. "Relics of a lost time, we aren't needed for you to have a happy future." No budging. "You can grow now. Start again. You can explore the world, the whole of the worlds to your heart's content. Discover new places, maybe find a new career you like." Nope. "I can't change my fate. Purah will outlast us all. You can visit her, stay in touch."

No. Link wanted the same thing she wanted. A connection to 'home'. Three people he had known before the Great Calamity were still alive, while no one else knew of their troubles. The uniform he once wore was an antique almost next to nothing in price in Hateno. When she was gone, he would be down to two. Then he would lose Impa soon at her age. He had Robbie, but . . . he didn't know him. Purah and Link.

They would be the last ones. "The malice isn't bad, Link, inside of me. It's safe to touch. But. Hyrule, it won't . . . it would never let this go." There was only one choice left. The future of Hyrule was more important than her life. "I must go to Zora's Domain." Link didn't look at her kindly. "I need to talk to King Dorephan."

Link nodded, not quite knowing what to expect.

Link was a loyal knight at heart. No matter what.

He took her to Zora's Domain.

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Zora's Domain

“No way would it work, she’s already got her arms around another guy!”

Zelda turned and looked at who spoke. There was some water between her and the true ground away from the shrine. It shouldn’t take very long to get over there. She noticed a small crowd forming. They no doubt heard the rumors too. “Hello. May I please have a word with King Dorephan?” The ladies weren’t giving her the kindest looks, but Link seemed to know the way. He left the shrine and guided her up some stairs. She needed permission to be in Zora’s domain if she was going to simply show up within it so quickly. She should be able to make some kind of deal with King Dorephan. As she reached the top with Link right behind her, she heard his mighty voice address her. She greeted him with a smile. Yes, it shouldn’t be too hard.

She curtsied toward him, but did not lower her head. “Greetings, King Dorephan. I’m sorry to intrude on you. I wish to ask a favor?”

“Princess, no, Queen! Queen Zelda!” He laughed triumphantly. “Hello! No, please, stay as long as you like.”

“I won’t wear out the welcome. I wish to get an injury sealed, but first I would like to talk to you about something important,” Zelda said. “I seem to have the sunfly that won’t go away during the day.” He looked at her oddly. “Eager gossip mongers.” A hundred years might be too old for him to remember the sayings. “Journalists writing articles over each other about me and others I’ve met to make a name for themselves.” Ah, that seemed to meet with some reasoning. “I wanted to come by to tell you that I am sorry if, during this time of a hunt against me, that anyone in your kingdom gets pulled into speculation. Several people have been pulled through many articles already.”

“Ah yes, I remember. Yes,” he admitted. “Still? Sidon is a wonderful son of mine, and even through a hunting, one cannot forget important details included in it.” King Dorephan kept his focus on her. “I know the perfect healer for you. I’ll send for him right away to fetch her.”

That was not the response she was looking for. He seemed to be swayed by the article too. Link stayed close beside her as Prince Sidon came up the steps. As usual, he had a smile on his face.

“So you have had some trouble on the way here and need some healing?” He asked. “Look no further.” He indicated a pink Zora next to him. Not happy looking. “Well? Perhaps so,” he teased. “She is not the same as Mipha. No one is, her powers were legendary, but if you permit a one night stay in the domain, this healing Zora should have you well enough to move back on your journey.”

“Thank you for your hospitality,” she said. “If there is anything I can do for the Zora’s to show my thanks, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Oh, I am very sure we won’t,” the healer answered back.

As they headed down though, Zelda knew the decision she had to make. She wouldn’t be able to hold it back much longer. She went to the hotel, paid a fee for herself and Link paid for his own bed, intent on staying with her by her side. Of course. He was worried.

“Okay, where’s the injury?” The healer asked bitterly. “Come on.”

“It is in a sensitive, private spot on a Hylian,” she answered. She noticed Link then turn around. “Link, could you ask the King if we could talk in private later with him?” Normally, Link wouldn’t fall for that trick, but he understood it was to attain some privacy better.

After Link went upward, Zelda got off the bed. “I will be back, I am going to meditate on my powers before I see this through.” The healer was a little stupefied but didn’t much care either.

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## Ploymus Mountain

“I was running out of time.” Link may have made a fuss when she tried to climb a mountain for rushrooms, but climbing was a part of life. As well as this. She wouldn’t put Link into danger again for something like this. Neither Brigdo, Hino, or Nekk either. None of them.

She took her top layer of clothes off as well as the bottom. With only a thin shirt and shorts to keep her warm through the cold, she proceeded to shred her garments. She left them up near the Lynel that was rumored to be up there and slipped away.

There was only one more place left to find, and whether it would be shelter or her ultimate end, she had reached a point that she had to risk it.

Time was running out. Time was almost over.

And Link would not get involved this time. He had a second chance, and she’d make sure he took it.

# Can't Hide Secrets Forever

## Outside Gerudo City

The sands were a second home to her. Zelda stood in the middle of them, trying to listen to the words of Urbosa, but she was long gone. She heard a Gerudo call out to her in the darkness. She had picked up different clothes to try and keep others out of the loop of who she'd been. Zelda was running out of options. She needed someone to trust who had power, and finding that, wasn't easy. Gerudo was not a place to seek forgiveness, but it was Urbosa's home. Urbosa's land. Where Zelda had learned so much of what made her the person she had been.

She found herself coming face to face with the new leader of Gerudo. She bowed toward the young girl, Rija.

"An interesting blonde visitor who hasn't named herself has visited Gerudo. Many people visit Gerudo, but this one bears a particular resemblance to someone missing in Hyrule," Rija countered her. "What is your name and why are you in the land?"

Zelda pulled herself up, pushing her hands together, and had to take the risk. She would have to take a risk. She had two choices, and one she would not dare attempt.

Link had to be brought back after the defeat of Ganon, to help defeat him again. He could now find his bearings and make a new life. His battle was now over, and she would not bring him into this.

Her second choice was clear. "I cannot hide for long," she admitted. "Hiding who I am isn't easy when I speak differently and perform different actions than everyone else. Even you have spotted me. I have no choice but to trust in Gerudo, with my life . . . or with my death."

Rija pulled herself up more. "You are the Princess Zelda who went missing in Zora's Domain. Link has been looking for you. While King Dorephan declared you dead, he hasn't believed that. He'll find you, no doubt. He finds everything, and you are right. You can't hide yourself, not even in these isolated sands. Why are you running?"

"I knew Urbosa, personally," Zelda admitted to her. "I trust that her kingdom will choose the right choice, for I . . . I can't. I am most bias in it."

"Bias?" Rija asked. "Why?"

"Because it will mean the end of my life," Zelda confessed. "Although I have lived a hundred years, it does not . . . feel like it," she admitted. "I'm no wiser at 117 than I was at 17. I didn't grow, didn't speak, didn't form relationships. I just pressed down on the evil. Even now, the memories . . . down, just press down."

"You were inside of Ganon," Rija said to her. "A ball of energy against him. You were more a weapon than a person."

Zelda kept herself together. “I still am.”

Rija stood up. “Tell me. Tell me the truth of why you left Zora’s Domain and staged your death. Why you keep your own knight at bay. Tell me everything you have hidden, and I give you Gerudo’s loyalty to help you as I can.”

“Are you sure that you can make that promise?” Zelda questioned her. “Are you sure it’s safe to make that promise to me?”

“Lady Urbosa and you were very close,” Rija said. “It’s the reason you came here. You are seeking a fitting end or a new salvation, and you’ll only give that choice to Gerudo. Your second home.”

Rija was smart. Urbosa and her were so close. Zelda bowed lightly. “You are right. We were very close.”

“Then I would do Lady Urbosa’s memory wrong, if I don’t do what I can for you. Now. Say it. What is it that you’ve been hiding?” Rija held up an article. “Is this Nutcake Woman on the right track with her curious articles?”

“Yes, I’m afraid she is.”

“How on the right track?”

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Gerudo, Weeks Later . . .

“Vaa’saaq!” A clothes seller waved to Link. Link had been dressed in disguise as a female to enter Gerudo city. He had traveled to several places to look for Princess Zelda. There was no way she would choose to end the malice by a Lynel. Link continued to search for shrines, to find some kind of hope for Zelda when he found her. He found no shrines, nor Zelda. He had checked everywhere.

Then, he got word from Rhondson in Tarry town about something being off. She had visited Gerudo to show off her and Hudson’s new daughter, Allison. Gerudo was an open home and community, but there was a hush bigger than the Gerudo Secret Club down there. She could feel it.

Link checked it out. Something unfamiliar usually meant trouble, and since she didn’t give details, there may be a reason to her vagueness. Urbosa and Zelda were close. He didn’t know how close, but he remembered that she was sleeping on Urbosa aboard Van Naboor.

He went toward the back of the town, to the elderly Gerudo that often stayed beside the goddess statue. Link noticed right away that the woman who once starved for conversation was very quiet.

The statue was well taken care of, and there even seemed to be a small pond surrounding it now. He admired the statue, trying to lure the woman into conversation again.

“It was the closest she could get to the springs,” the elderly woman finally answered.

Zelda! So it was true.

“Don’t go after her,” she warned him. “Maybe after 100 years of service, she wanted to get away?” The old woman offered as an excuse to keep him away. “She never wanted that destiny. It was forced upon her.”

***/// “What if one day you realized that you just weren’t meant to be a fighter. Yet the only thing people ever said was that you were born into the family of a royal guard, and so no matter what you thought, you had to become a knight. If that was the only thing you were ever told I wonder then, would you have chosen a different path?” ///***

Link shook his head, he couldn’t fall for it. He knew why she left, but it didn’t matter. She wasn’t going to go through it alone.

“Hmm.” The elderly Gerudo glanced toward the ground. She seemed to get the hint Link wasn’t falling for it. “When I was young, I was a thing of beauty. Gerudos, we are beautiful. Look at me now.” She hesitated. “Your Princess isn’t the beauty you know anymore.”

She knew Zelda’s secret. It definitely had been the princess hiding there.

“She was back here, in Gerudo. The forgotten and unexplored area back here with the old Gerudo no one thought about, worshipping an old goddess statue. She stayed here until a woman came along and pointed out the same thing you did.”

Rhondson.

“Others have been looking for her. They have different reasons.” She touched the waters beneath the goddess. “Many believe Ganon will come back through her.”

No, that was impossible. Ridiculous. The princess held back Ganon, she wasn’t a vessel for him to return!

“You are the last Champion,” she told Link. “She didn’t want to get you involved in her mess again.”

No, it didn’t work like that. It was, it was one of the few things he was sure of from his memories. It was one of the few things he still had, that he didn’t need a whole lifetime of memories to fulfill. His role of Knight. The Princess’ Knight, that was him. He demanded to know where she had gone. The old woman warned him off again, but Link didn’t give in.

That’s when she brought it out. A recent paper of events.

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The Seven Heroine Ruins

*Of course they tracked me down. Gorons and the strongest Hylians alike. Zelda didn’t move from her spot contemplating her next step. Was that it? They were calling to her, they knew*

she was there somewhere. No running from them, they would take her out. *Zelda. You fulfilled your duty to the kingdom, be glad of that.* Yet, she wasn't glad of it. It shouldn't have been that way.

There was no happily ever after for Mipha. None for Daruk. Revali gained nothing, and certainly not beloved Urbosa. As hard as she had tried to avoid Hyrule from learning her secret, it was all for naught. Secrets could only last for so long before someone spoke up.

"Come out, Puppet of Ganon!"

Not even her name graced to her. Puppet of Ganon. They must have found out the truth. As soon as she came out, they would-

"Over there, I see blonde hair!"

Zelda tried to run, knowing it was useless, but staying still while they shot at her would never happen. She didn't get far before she was pushed down. She turned away, seeing the axe in the person's hand. A few more moments of her life.

That's when she heard a familiar clang. A clang she once heard when she had been run down by Yiga's before Calamity Ganon's resurfacing. Impossible. She looked back and saw him.

Link.

"You don't understand," someone tried to convince him. "She has malice in her. We know it's true, why else did she run? The Yiga's know it. She's going to be the resurrection of Ganon!"

Link didn't falter. He never did. As another one tried to approach, he quickly took care of them. Another person called out that it was useless, Link was the Chosen Hero who fought Ganon. He couldn't be this naïve.

There was less battling and an outcry of words. Warnings. Heeds.

Link stayed there, taking on any that tried to fight him. When they were defeated or left, he looked back toward her. He held out his hand.

He placed himself in the thick of it now. She took his hand and stood back up.

"So. You've found me," she spoke. "I have malice inside of me, and it won't leave. I have asked for all manner of help from the goddess and have received nothing in return. We talked to an expert. There is nothing I can do. Gerudo helped me as long as I followed their wishes, but I couldn't stay out of the spotlight forever." She shook her head. "Why couldn't you have just believed I was eaten by a Lynel?" She swallowed. "It would have been easier." He was now a part of it.

"Halt! No further."

Link watched as Rija tried to approach. He really didn't want to hurt someone so young.

“Unless you want to be placed in a similar position to Zelda,” Rija warned him, “I suggest you cooperate.” She glanced back toward Zelda. “You’ve run out of time. People know. It’s time to face the consequences.”

But Zelda never did anything, why did she have to have consequences?

“I know,” Zelda answered. “I can’t . . . run anymore.”

“Right. Link just involved himself, and that makes it dicey to you,” Rija answered, glaring at Link. “Considering your relationship with Lady Urbosa, Gerudo will try to be fair in treatment of you. I have been preparing for this day though. Princess Zelda? You are going to escort us into Zora’s Domain.”

## Zelda's Sentence

### Zora's Domain

King Dorephan sat with Rija on his right side, his son Prince Sidon on the left side, and Bluto on the other side of Rija with Kaneli on the far right of the Zora Prince.

"We didn't take this lightly," King Dorephan began. "You do have importance to your name. You helped with the Champions and held a very important part to defeating Calamity Ganon. No one wants to sentence a hero to death."

Zelda gently bowed, taking their words in grace.

"You've done nothing wrong," Kaneli spoke up. The Rito leader sighed. "You've done nothing wrong but you have the spirit of evil within you. Technically. You are whatever monster is."

"So you are a monster," Bluto finished for Rito. "You are a monster, and you should be treated like one."

"If it weren't for your contributions, you'd already be dead without trial," Rija continued. "There are reasons you are still alive though. We should exhaust all options."

"I have," Zelda confirmed. "I've gone to all springs. I have begged from each that I could. I am not a puppet of Ganon, they can confirm that. As long as I stay strong within my beliefs, he cannot come back through me, or through any other random monster here."

"There is another reason," Prince Sidon said tenderly. "Your kingdom, Princess Zelda, is in disarray. While the war affected everyone, all royalty was decimated in your kingdom. There is no leader for Hylians, and this is disturbing. From history, we know that Ganon does rise again. Far into the future, and there will be no one of royal descent to stop him."

"Your life is spared because Ganon must have someone to fight with your royal blood in the future," Rija said delicately. "Hyrule needs you in a different way. You have one week to decide who you want to marry and make those possible heirs with."

"... I see." *My bloodline. My heritage. I am forced to marry someone to become King just to contribute to the next fight with Ganon.* Zelda hung her head. "After I have wed and beared more heritage upon the throne, what then of me? Death? Imprisonment?"

"Only your future husband could answer that," Rija said. "You will be watched carefully though. No one will trust you."

"No one will put the new king on trial if he feels his child or children aren't more protected with you dead," Bluto asked. "I know it's blunt, but it's the truth."

“So marry well,” King Dorephan said. “My son would most certainly not send his children’s mother into a terrible place.” Prince Sidon was silent. “You can choose anyone in any kingdom, as long as they can bear your children.”

“That actually means not Gorons,” Bluto said.

“Not Gerudo either,” Rija offered.

“Hyliaans. Zoras. Ritos.”

“You have already been called the Puppet of Gannon,” Kaneli reminded her. “You are even displaying some malice above your neckline. When the truth has shifted far enough to your own kingdom, no one will trust you.” Zelda didn’t speak again. “There may be attempts on your life by others who don’t see you as Princess Zelda anymore. Therefore, until the new King of Hyrule is found, has claimed the throne and bears a child with you? You should watch your back.”

“Someone will be assigned to guard you, paid for by the Gerudo,” Rija told Link. “It is the Gerudos that insisted on this deal the most so they will bear the brunt of the pricing. From the guard to the wedding. We handle traveling expense and transportation. You may seek as far as you wish for the one that will rule the kingdom the fairest.” Rija smirked.

“Or, the Zora’s could help out,” King Dorephan pointed out. “If you don’t mind my son escorting you around in the meantime?”

*Prince Sidon.* “No, I don’t mind.” She would have to learn all of her suitor’s best skills, habits, the way they carry themselves, and what was important to them. She would need to choose a fine king. One that could raise the next generation well, and . . . and hopefully not decide to kill her. “Couldn’t I have a little extra time to get to know them better? Everyone I once knew that King Rhoam approved as good royalty material is gone.”

“Honestly?” Rija gestured to King Dorephan. “If you don’t pick anyone, you’ll go to someone who already runs a kingdom. For the best possible outcome.”

*King Dorephan? Wed to King Dorephan? Steady, Zelda.* At least Rija kept her promise of safety as much as possible.

“I know, I don’t know how it’s possible either, but he says he can,” Rija said. “Kaneli would also try.”

“No guarantees,” Kaneli answered. “But? With help, you’d be fine in the Rito process of having kids.”

“No help,” King Dorephan pointed out to her. “I have had a small wife before.” He looked happy. “I look big, but I am very gentle.”

“I think I’m ready to absorb this on my own,” Zelda insisted.

“Follow me,” Prince Sidon offered.

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## The Upper Side of Zora's Domain

Zoras. There was never real privacy in their kingdom. Zelda stared at the vastness from around the area. She had taken to walking and Prince Sidon was walking with her. She had gone in silence for some time, running through the different scenarios in her own head before choosing to speak to Prince Sidon. "What do you think of me, Prince Sidon? Do you think I'm a danger or not?"

He had that same happy smile she used to see on his little face when he was just a little Zora. "I believe you are not a danger!" He pulled his arm together in a strange way, like he wanted to flex, but he was cheering instead. "I believe that you ended up in a bad situation." He put his cheering gesture back away. "I believe that Calamity Ganon is a sore loser who wanted to take you down, knowing he was trapped and couldn't win."

Nice to see he was on her side. "Are you a viable choice?" He seemed surprised at her boldness a moment. "I don't have the convenience of being bashful, nor do I have time for other things like discovering love." She didn't in the past and she certainly didn't now. "I am trying to form options, but it does no good to consider options that would not work. It's wasted time."

"Fair. Father is an option," Prince Sidon told her. "I am sure you noticed that. He doesn't seem to mind whether you are a daughter-in-law or wife."

"As long as the Zoras get their hands on Hyrule," she said. "I understand. Everyone will have their own reasons for what they choose."

"Honestly, I have very little memories of you," Prince Sidon offered. "I remember that Mipha was kind and gentle. She tried to teach me as well as she could, being such a little Zora. What I do remember is that you got along well with her." He smiled. "You seemed to be good friends actually."

"We became friends," Zelda admitted. "I grew close to all the champions. I worked so closely with them all the time, it was impossible not to create friendships." She smiled. "Your sister was a wonderful person. I wish many things had turned out differently."

"I'm not a choice, and I am," Sidon answered. "I believe I would have to get to know you better. Father is completely a choice. He is salivating over Hyrule. The different fish, the new sources of water, the ability to be near water and on so much land at the same time. Zoras who crave more land than water would have so many more options. His biggest dream is for him to handle Zora's Domain, for me to take Hyrule, and when he has passed on, leaving me with both kingdoms."

"His dream. Your father will not mince words either." She stared below. "I appreciate the honesty."

"Will you choose father?" Prince Sidon asked.

"I will take every day I am allowed to have choice to make the decision," she answered. Every day.

"Understood. I am the same way," Prince Sidon revealed. "There are several I can choose from, many Zoras do like me. I don't know why, I suppose they like my spirit." He smiled at her with a toothy grin. "I have a fun spirit! I enjoy life and live it the best I can. I know father will press me harder soon, I am growing and he wants me to find someone before he gets much further along the final rivers of life. So?" He smiled at her. "That is another reason I am an option and not. I have to choose someone soon. I really want him to see and know his grandchildren. Then again? There are pretty Zoras out there." He suddenly backed away. "Not that I mean to offend."

"I understand." Zelda started to walk again. "Thank you for your honesty too."

"It's tough though, isn't it?" he questioned her. "No one else has to go through this."

"Everyone gets to decide when or if they want to marry." Zelda knew exactly what he was talking about. "They could choose to marry for any reason besides carrying on nobility. It's a fact we've known since we were very small though, wasn't it?" She stopped again to look over. "My father used to say 'Aren't you excited about your future, my sweet little Princess? One day you will marry a strong man, rule Hyrule together, and have a noble family.' Of course, it always sounded like a dream come true when I was small." She scoffed slightly, realizing she may be going too far. "I am thankful for the chance to let the kingdom move on and that my life was not taken." So far.

"You don't have to watch yourself around me," Sidon said to her. "I understand. I started hearing it when I was small, shortly after my sister left us forever. Before then it wasn't even discussed. I was too young, and she was obviously the perfect choice to continue. Mipha was older, she had amazing healing powers, and she was revered. Afterwards, I soon learned the reality of life."

She noticed he'd glanced back at her a couple of times oddly.

"On one hand, I would be expected to have little Zoras with you quite quickly," he said, "on the other? No one else really understands this burden. We certainly must have some qualities and experiences that match with each other."

Zelda watched the Zoras swimming in the water playfully.

"Consider me a courter," he decided. "It would be rougher, but if I am chosen, it would be not only good for the Zora kingdom. I wouldn't have to call you mother," he teased her. "I would keep you safe and sound afterwards too. I don't feel you are a danger with anyone, Zelda. Your malice is only a scare, it isn't a way for Ganon to return."

He was now using her first name. The puzzle had a couple of extra pieces.

Then the sound of a different piece coming out greeted the air. Zelda didn't want to turn around. She already knew that sound. He was right next to her, unable to be ignored. "Link." She didn't have to ask about which guard would be assigned to her.

Link glanced at Prince Sidon. The Prince smiled at him. He didn't smile back. He looked back into the waters of Zora's Domain, much like Zelda had been as Prince Sidon walked away.

"This outcome is the best I could have hoped for," Zelda spoke to Link directly. Better chances to make him leave. "Father planned on marrying me off back then too. I'm just getting a bit more rushed." Yes and everyone she personally knew for choice was dead. The next King of Hyrule would have no experience with the monarchy unless she took Prince Sidon. Which wasn't much of a choice in itself. "I wasn't sentenced to death, that leaves me happier." That sounded even more pathetic.

She was trying to convince Link this was all okay. It was all okay. None of them had wanted to sentence her to death. Things couldn't have worked out better, she was fine, and he should leave. There was no room for a hero there. No need for one.

She wanted him to believe that lie.

Not a single movement.

"Well, you won again," Zelda said to him specifically. "How did I not know Rija would pick you. Link." She plopped her arms over on the siding of the bridge. "Why? Why do you continue on insisting on being the knight you once were toward even the very bitter end? It's not like you were it for years, or that I can help you regain any of your memories about other times. Other people. I didn't even know your father or mother except through what I heard from others. I know of some of your time with talks through Mipha. And? That's it. That's it!" She declared to him. "So why? You weren't even my knight a whole year, you were given the position only because of father's fear!"

Nothing. None of her scolding, rebelling or persuasion had changed his mind or would. "They are all gone," Zelda said softly. "All of them. Every one but you." She ducked her head into her arms. "What if defending me, gets you hurt again? I couldn't take it, Link. I can't stand to repeat the mistakes of my past. Please. Step down from the position."

Link didn't answer.

"One lowly Monster Princess am I now," she said to him. "You are not only courageous, you are smart, Link." She didn't move. "You know why it is this way, and you know the eventual outcome." No more lies. He knew how it would end as well as she. While she pretended that it was okay, and that her father would have done the same thing?

It wasn't the same thing. King Rhoam would have found a successor to continue on the royal name, but Zelda would still be there to rule. It was a precaution, to make sure everything continued. What she was sentenced to, was to find the best king to leave on the throne for Hyrule. That's it. They weren't planning on her living long past that. She had one purpose, one. To pass on her lineage, so that the next time Ganon came in another future, someone could fight it. After that, she was done. A princess of a monster's malice would not stay on the throne for too long.

Link would probably be ordered to stay away at certain times, and then toward the end, assigned to stay away for good. To protect Zelda, he would have to go against the King or the people of the kingdom. He would be outcasted. More would come for Zelda's life, until he could handle it no longer. Either dying in the process again, or losing her. Her lineage was a curse and a gift. It had saved her life, but only temporarily, and with no other purpose than to find a new king and bring new blood to the throne. "If I don't figure out a way to cure this malice inside me, I am doomed to death," she admitted out loud, "but you are dooming yourself with me, with these damning actions you are taking now. You are worth so much more than this, Link! Don't throw your life away when you don't have to. Go back to the life you were trying to build, before you felt compelled to chase me down. It's not worth it."

She continued to stay in the same position, not moving. She had nothing else to say. He knew the dangers and he wouldn't back off. It was a choice she couldn't undue.

Finally, Prince Sidon came to check on her.

"You are most welcome to stay the night," he said toward her. He looked toward Link. "How is she doing?"

"I feel like a used sponge being wringed out by a man dying of thirst," Princess Zelda answered him none too politely. "Every worthy piece of water extracted from me before I am discarded to die in the desert."

Prince Sidon looked at her oddly, almost like Link sometimes did. "You aren't quite what I envisioned. Your way with words is . . . a little stunning."

Well, she wasn't feeling the royal Princess role right now. Hmph.

Prince Sidon moved beside her, giving her warning those are probably not words she should use though.

Why not? What would they do to her, kill her over words? They wanted her kingdom, and they wanted royalty back in Hyrule for future protection. Oh. Link's presence seemed to stir up the most emotion within her. All of her royal graces tended to be put on hold as she acted more humane. More personal.

Prince Sidon led her away to the hotel, where he would pay for her to sleep tonight. Link followed.

Zelda lied on the bed but didn't close her eyes. Link stayed near.

"If you would like?" Prince Sidon offered. "I will try and talk them into giving more than a week," he said to Zelda. "It is a very big responsibility to find someone so big within one week."

"Oh yes, please? If you feel inclined to do so, it could really help," Zelda said graciously. "Thank you, Prince Sidon." It was nice to see someone on the other team still on her side. If she ended up with him, maybe she could live long enough to find a real cure. Eventually her body relaxed in bed. Resigned herself to the day and she was able to sleep.

After all, Link was there too, and no matter how much she didn't like it.

It was always easy to sleep around him.

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To The Leaders

"One week is truly not long enough," Prince Sidon fought for Zelda's side. "She won't be able to even know by that time if she can truly stand to be married to someone."

"She escapes death for a short time," Bluto pointed out. "That's a blessing right there. Don't push this, Boy."

A little rude. Prince Sidon looked at his father. "Deciding with the heart in a week is ridiculous. She'll have nothing to do except think in the perspective of who would make the best king."

"Like those articles, those *Whose Who Should Rule Hyrule?*" Rija asked. "A good point. Prince Sidon draws a fair point."

Thank goodness, it looks like he did it. "Time to find the right person is essential," Prince Sidon continued. "Hyrule will have a better king."

"No," Kaneli corrected him. "It's just like you said, she would pick it like *Whose Who Should Rule Hyrule.*"

"That is how we will play it," King Dorephan corrected his son. "Hyrule itself will decide the King."

What?! "No, I didn't mean--"

But the damage was already done.

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Link guarded Zelda's bed nearby. This wasn't how he envisioned getting his sacred duty back. It would only partly protect her. Once there was a new King of Hyrule to watch over her, that was the end of the trail unless the new king wanted her to have a private guard. He watched Prince Sidon approach. She was sleeping. What did he want?

"I talked to the leaders of all kingdoms." He didn't look happy after saying that. "I need to wake up Princess Zelda. It had a negative effect I wasn't planning on."

That wasn't good. Link moved closer to her bed and found himself lying his hand on her head as he stared at Prince Sidon. He didn't notice until he took the action. Princess Zelda didn't seem surprised as she woke up.

"Prince Sidon, greetings again," Zelda said to him from the side of the bed. She stood up. "May I help you?"

“I tried to help,” Prince Sidon said again. “It backfired. You are no longer in control of who you will marry.”

What?

“Hyrule itself will be.”

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# Realization

Hyrule Castle, One Week Later

The leaders were all there along with over a hundred Hylians that made the journey out there from various places. There were ten chosen people there, awaiting Zelda. One of them to marry, and she still didn't know which one.

Neither did Link. The choices were nothing amazing. He felt comfortable with none of them running Hyrule.

The simple living area at the front of the castle had been cleaned out and up for the occasion. People lent chairs for others to sit on or brought their own, the ground was littered with different colors of carpeting, a mix to try and resemble the huge carpets for the royal weddings of the past. The priest was even there already, he was the one Link had found to marry Rhondson in Tarry town. Even the vocal voice of Rito was added for at the end of the ceremony.

Zelda kept her feelings bottled, but she wasn't feeling too well. It was obvious. He had little he could do for her. One step closer towards her end. Link had been hoping just like her that something would help. A goddess would interfere. Calamity Ganon was the hugest threat Hyrule had ever faced, and he had finally been taken down.

But a simple amount, a should be non-consequential amount in her heart could not be cured. Link had dreams where he tried to steal her away and move past Hyrule. Past the Goron mountains and only ended up crossing the ocean back to Faron, where all of Hyrule was there, yelling monster.

When she was married, to one of these men, he would be sent away. Told to leave.

What then? A hundred years to help save the one who held back Ganon, only to be dismissed for them to, what? What would the new king be like? Would they be caring or evil? If he left, the new king might hurt her. Chain her up. Abuse her and treat her like a monster. His hands tensed at the thought.

No. He had to stay positive. Maybe the leaders were right, the people of Hyrule may see something he didn't. Maybe.

He moved closer to Zelda, and gave her something to eat.

She looked at it and mustered a smile back at Link. "You didn't have to fix me a sweet, Link."

Sweets were expensive to make and didn't offer much benefits. But they tasted good. He stretched his hands out to give her the pie he made.

She managed to smile a little bigger. “Thank you, Link.” She stared out at the crowd. “Sorry. I’m not as happy as the average bride should be.”

Of course not. She had no choice in who she was marrying, or who it would even be. He watched her start to take bites of the pie.

“You have the left side, I’ll take the right, Link.”

Link started to eat the pie with her.

“You’re about to get married, and you are eating pie?” Prince Sidon questioned as he came over to look at her. He smirked. “You are a mighty fine one indeed! I don’t know any royalty that would act that way.”

That’s because Sidon didn’t know her like Link. Okay, memories aside, he remembered her enough to understand that side of her. She was polite and calm when she had to put on an act for others. When she wasn’t acting, she was her true self. Happy, explorative, blunt, and charming. She had ways of saying and doing things that became endearing.

Right now, it should be a time to be polite and calm and royal. It was her wedding day. It was also not her decision, and a part of Zelda knew she was stirring herself one step closer to an ending. An ending Link couldn’t even save her from.

Maybe if she cut her hair and dyed it a strange color. Hair didn’t dye though. Even certain outfits couldn’t dye. If she lived far away, up in the mountains? Stay in the cold forever. Stay in the isolated beach regions, while trying to stay away from isolated monstrous creatures. Live next to the Great Fairy’s den in the storms of Gerudo.

No. All wishful thinking, Hyrule would find it’s lost princess somehow, or she’d be in an area of too much danger.

“Did you mix cherry in this too? This is very good,” she said. She took a piece from the far side and shoved it at Prince Sidon. “Want a bite? Link made it.”

Prince Sidon just smiled at her. “I can see why Mipha got along with you. You will have to set your pie down when you get married.”

“I have to set it down when I change,” Zelda half agreed, “but there shouldn’t be a problem eating it as I get married. Unless?” She looked at Link. “No, that shouldn’t be a problem. Link can be on the left side just fine and eat, it shouldn’t ruin the ceremony.”

Prince Sidon started to laugh.

Link didn’t. She was serious.

And he’d be happy to share the other half with her. It was something to enjoy on that terrible day. Probably the last day he’d be her official guard before dismissal.

Some people stared a little amazed as Zelda decided to sit on the floor, eating the right side of the pie. Link joined her on the left, while he looked at the possible next King of Hyrule.

Nekk, The Rito bird messenger was there. It was clear he didn't want to be.

Kaneli, The Rito bird leader, was also there.

Brigdo had been. He was dressed in more decent clothing than usual.

Hino was there too, but he was more interested in his papers than what was going on around him.

Prince Sidon had taken his spot. He didn't seem affected, good or bad.

King Dorephan took a spot.

What, Hagie? Link almost choked on his pie as he caught someone he'd missed before. The man from Tarry town who wanted to pay him to take on the dangerous area of Ancient Stalkers nearby. He wasn't the kindest soul Link had met. He was only there because he either paid to be or people thought fortune could restore Hyrule.

Symin was there, Purah's assistant. He looked more like Nekk, wondering why he was there. Purah probably, wanting to help protect Princess Zelda however she could too.

Then there were two more people Link had never even met. Most likely, Zelda hadn't either.

"This will probably be the last food we share together."

Link's attention was grabbed by Zelda's words.

"As much as I rebelled against you getting involved," she said, "I am glad you were here, Link." She shoved another piece in her mouth and chewed it before swallowing. "As long as you were safely here."

Link nodded and took his last piece of pie. He would go and stand on the far right as the process proceeded.

"Wait, I have something for you." She brought out a small wrapped cupcake. "It may seem senseless after the pie, but it's important you have it."

Link took the cupcake, although that was a little unlike her. Something strange.

"Be sure to keep the wrapper. Royal packaged it," she said. "Guess I better go get ready."

Royal packaged it? People couldn't throw away royal packaging? That seemed even stranger. Link went ahead and undid the packaging. He ate the small cupcake but saw something inside the packaging.

He looked toward Zelda, who avoided his gaze. She had written down a phrase at the bottom of it. It said **Marriage Isn't What It Used To Be**. At the top it had a half smudge of chocolate from the cupcake. Link ate it off and saw the word Royal. **Royal marriage isn't what it used to be**. She was trying to tell him something, without risking anyone overhearing.

“I suppose this might be a good time to meet the new King,” Sidon offered to Link. “There are ten. Who do you think should be it?”

Link shrugged. Honestly, none of them. Link did as Prince Sidon recommended though. Maybe if he saw something wrong, he could sway the crowd.

Nekk insisted he wasn't interested, and neither was Hino.

Brigdo had been. “Oh yes, I would take very good care of her,” he insisted. “She would be happy. I would never kill her.” Then Link asked him a simple question and almost got the answer right away. “She'd be fine afterward, not in need of a Knight simply staying at the castle. Maybe after our first set of children. I mean, if I were to ever get the position.”

Yeah, dismissed. Link moved toward Hagie which had the same kind of answer, except without any ‘she would be happy’ or ‘I would never kill her’. He went with ‘whatever was best for Hyrule of course’.

Symin was decent. He told Link he was there for Purah, because there were not many options for King that knew Zelda. He, in fact, hadn't met her yet. When Link asked what the future held for him, he seemed certain Link would be just fine to stay.

“Except for, I suppose, I mean you can't be around if, if I am?” Symin blushed. “I mean, you wouldn't want to be anyhow! People need privacy. You know? But if I weren't doing anything, then that would be fine,” he teased Link. “In fact, you could be like a live-in nanny. In a way. Easier job, better pay. Guarding the next generation instead.”

Link didn't even bother standing in front of him a second longer. The other ones were the Kings and the ones she never met.

King Dorephan was honest. “If I rule Hyrule, then I will leave Zora's Domain to Prince Sidon,” he said. “Then when I am gone, he would inherit both kingdoms, turning them into one harmonious kingdom.”

All traditions and rituals lost among Hylians. Kenali said something similar. Link asked him about his future as a knight.

“Sidon can watch her,” King Dorephan said. “He is handy with his weapons, and there will be no need of disrupting your life further.”

That wasn't what Link wanted to hear. He insisted to him that helping Zelda was not a disruption, but he was waved off again.

Link approached Sidon again. He asked him the same thing.

Sidon didn't answer at first. “I imagine a personal guard would be smart if she did become my wife,” he admitted. “However, in the beginning, we are going to be coupling for little zorans *constantly*. You could be posted outside of her room. Or you could be guarding stables if we are out on royal duties,” he answered with a grin. “What luck, Link! Stables aren't

private, but if royalty took it over for the night, *you* could be guarding the entrance way to make sure no one intrudes on the conception of future royalty.”

Link’s mouth had dropped open and he shook his head, trying to get the image of *that* out of his head! He wouldn’t be her guard, he would be an outlooker to make sure the King and Queen had time together to-to-to snoogle?!

Zelda wouldn’t want *that*, it would be for the King! Yes, she was 100 something, but like him, they hadn’t changed so much on the way they acted on the outside. She wasn’t old and wise, she was stubborn and rebellious and it would be like, like just handing over a young Zelda to a stranger! Even if she knew them, there’s no way she’d want-

“I thought you would look like that,” Prince Sidon said, noticing his discontent. “You look like I just told you to tie Princess Zelda up and drop her off a cliff into a waterfall. You *cannot* stay with her after a King is proclaimed, Link.”

Link looked out to the crowd, some of whom were smiling pleasantly at him. He had come to know many of them, he had traveled great distances, and some of them had too.

“I am sure everyone knows you and what you did for Hyrule. For the world,” Prince Sidon offered. “The new King could choose anything. You have no control over whether you get to watch her, be lookout at a stable, or even become a pregnant Zelda’s prison guard.”

“Aye!” He knew that. Link knew it, but he didn’t want to hear the words. Especially in Prince Sidon’s cheerful manner.

“There’s only one way to protect her, Champion,” Sidon stated. “As I said. I am sure everyone knows you and what you did for Hyrule. If you ask me? That could be a good start for picking a King.”

What?

“And only the King controls what happens in the oceans *or* private wading pools with a Queen?”

Wait. Link looked out at the crowd again. No one could abuse her, misuse her, or kill her. No one could dismiss him from duty.

The words of King Rhoam came back to him again.

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## Three Was The Magic Number

After Zelda came back out . . .

As Nekk came up, a couple of people clapped. He denied wanting the spot or Zelda, apologized to her and everyone. No one seemed upset.

Kaneli had some Ritos in the crowd clap, about five. More than Nekk, but not much more.

Brigdo smiled and addressed everyone politely. He got about ten claps.

Hino looked up long enough to say he wasn't interested in the position, and that he was forced to be there. Then he warned everyone that lightning might be coming that night, it was long past due, so dress appropriately. His claps were mixed, it sounded more like it was in thanks of the warning.

As Zelda moved in front of Sidon, there were about thirty claps. Some Zoras, some not. It looked like Hyrule was suspicious of the Zoras too.

Zelda moved toward King Dorephan who got only a couple of claps, until Prince Sidon grabbed Zelda's hand.

Link notched up his sword instinctively. What was Prince Sidon doing grabbing Zelda?

"None of these men, although fine men, are right for the role of King," Prince Sidon said, "except one that was not in the line-up."

Link watched Sidon move Zelda over to him.

"As much as it might hurt the Zoras, there is only one true King. The one who helped defeat Calamity Ganon and the Divine Beasts." Prince Sidon smiled at him. "The one who was ranked **Who's Who Should Rule Hyrule's** number one spot. The Princess' Knight!"

Link's ears almost started to hurt as the crowd cheered and whistled as loud as they could for him.

Prince Sidon backed away from Link. "Let's ready the princess while the tally is decided officially."

Zelda, stunned, was easily led away by Prince Sidon. "Wait, this isn't what I was planning for."

Link looked again at the other men there. None of them would be great kings. Neither would he, but Hyrule didn't need a great king. It needed a leader who brought people and peace together. It needed Zelda, and the new King would try to take over her.

If he was King, he could still leave most power up to the Queen: Zelda.

“Link is a leader!”

“None of the others come close!”

“You can’t trust someone who already has a kingdom!”

“She doesn’t know anybody, this isn’t right! We need a decent King for Hyrule!”

“Hyrule! Hyrule! Hyrule!”

“King Link! King Link! King Link!”

Link watched as Zelda came out. There was something odd about her outfit. He couldn’t place it. It was a wedding outfit, white, standard. He watched her expression to see how anxious she’d been.

Plain. She didn’t look as anxious as she should and just smiled at him. “You are getting yourself into trouble again, Link. Fortunately, I have this under control.”

The cupcake message. Something was set up in her favor. Link nodded toward Sidon and the whole castle exploded into even louder cheering.

Zelda came up on the other side of him, a slight bow. She headed toward the center with him following after her.

The Priest started to speak. Link glanced at Zelda. She was trying to look somber and depressed, she should be if it were real. Still, he could see small signs that things weren’t right. The dress too. Link wasn’t an expert on fashion, but something felt wrong about the dress. About the whole castle. The event. Not just the fact he was marrying Zelda, warning signs were going off. His head kept seeing . . .

***////“How is the whole Ganon thing coming?” A royal priest asked as Zelda and he arrived in the main room.***

***“Well, thank you for asking,” Zelda said graciously.***

***“Wonderful. Afterwards we can put this whole mess behind us and get back on track.” The royal priest adjusted his glasses. “Do you know where your silent princess has gone? Is it still well?”***

***Zelda sighed. “I have taken care of the flower, but I must leave. I have urgent business to attend to. Come Link.”***

***As Link left, he heard the priest again.***

***“Fine my dear, but after your urgency and victory, you still need to fulfill your future roles. Have you told your suitors to wear blue yet?”////***

Blue! That was it. Blue. Blue should be all around.

“To name any children . . .” Kapson caught himself. “Sorry, wrong part from an earlier wedding.” He continued on again. He was almost done before-

“Stoop! Stop, stop, stop!” A very elderly man headed forth.

Link noticed Zelda’s act of a nervous attitude was no longer present. It was now real nerves.

“Hang on, let me get up there,” the elderly man insisted. He moved toward Kapson. “This is an official royal wedding. It must be performed in a certain way, by a certain individual, otherwise it is not legally royal.” He looked toward Zelda. “Ah. I trained for this day for a long time. It’s amazing I really made it this far.”

Zelda didn’t seem happy to see he made it thus far. “I thought all the royal priests were deceased?”

“No, no. Almost I am sure, but no. I am 121 and still . . . still somewhat kicking.” He noticed her dress, much like Link did. “That won’t do. Where is your royal blue dress?” He looked toward Link’s blue Champion Tunic. “The future King has his colors, but the future Queen will need hers.”

“No really, it’s-“

“I’ve got that blue color!” Someone insisted. “It’s not a wedding dress.”

“Any dress will do, as long as it’s royal blue. Where is the bouquet?” He then addressed. “There should be a bouquet with blue flowers of different shades, surrounding a silent princess flower.”

“Link,” she formally addressed him. “The plan is changing, you should step down. *Now.*”

Oh, so that’s what it had been. To be official they needed certain things, including a royal priest. Now, it was becoming official to her.

He already made his decision. With him as king, no one could hurt her. With him as king, no one could abuse their power over Hyrule.

“Link, please,” she insisted. “Plans have really changed, I don’t have control anymore.” Panicked. She had people now pulling her away to put on a royal blue dress.

Link stood there, watching as things started to change to the blue he was wearing. That’s right, he remembered. Zelda even made the outfits he and the others wore out of the same blue. The Champions were Royal Champions, that’s why they shared the same color.

Zelda was brought back out but saw Link still standing there. “Link, I’m not kidding. The plan has changed.”

Link shook his head. Prince Sidon was right, he wasn’t going to play lookout by a stable or by Zelda’s dungeon door. He swore to protect Princess Zelda, and he couldn’t do that

anymore as just a knight.

“Link. You aren’t thinking this through,” she accused him. “Even if I’m cured, *this* doesn’t end.”

“Stop the chat,” the Priest insisted. “Crowns, we need crowns. Without the official crowns, hmmm. Someone make crowns of blue flowers and place it on their heads.” He smiled at Zelda. “Blue can almost replace everything we can’t get, except for one thing. Me. It’s a good thing I’m here.” Zelda didn’t reply. “I passed on my teachings too should anything happen to me. This one though, the first to bring the King and Queen officially back? Oh, there was no way my apprentice was getting this one!” He laughed and then coughed, and then melted into a gag.

Link watched a bunch of linked blue flowers get placed on top of his head like a child’s invention. Zelda received the same treatment but hers looked better. It was just the rest of her that didn’t.

They both kept themselves steady as the marriage now started over, the proper way. There was even fire being burned on a torch. There was a lot of wording about fire.

He didn’t leave her side. He looked back toward Prince Sidon, his almost trademarked grin on his face.

While Link held Zelda’s hand and listened to the priest, he was scanning the crowd for any sign someone was going to go after her. She was classified a monster, and it meant not everyone might feel safe with her there. So far, no concerns. Most seemed satisfied with the situation. As long as he was King, he could take care of the new Queen.

“Link,” she whispered harshly. “I know you think this is the only way to protect me, but marrying me just pulls a load of problems onto you.”

Link didn’t respond.

“You are marrying a monster, Link.”

He was marrying a princess that needed his protection to become the queen she should be.

“Hyrule does not want me staying on the throne,” she warned him as another excuse.

Link didn’t see that. As long as he was king, it looked like everyone was delightfully happy. Even the other kingdoms didn’t seem that upset.

“Things will be expected of you, Link, things beyond fighting,” she tried to warn him once again. “Please. Stop this madness.”

It wasn’t madness.

“Link, you will live with so much regret,” she warned him.

He was less of a public speaker than the average person, but he needed to make her feel better. He took both of her hands and patted them gently.

“I can’t help you,” she told him. “Marrying me. Being around me 24/7. It won’t give you your old memories back. Maybe it will jog something, yes, but it will never truly let you have your memories. Start anew, away from me. Forget the past. Give yourself a new future, Link.”

Is that the only reason she thought he was doing this? It was one, but not even the biggest reason. She was Zelda, the Princess of Hyrule, actual title *Queen* of Hyrule, and daughter to the former King Rhoam. He lived to protect her and the kingdom. None of those men that would be the next king were fit to take on the troubles of restoring Hyrule.

Only Zelda. He would be king in name, but he would always be her knight.

“Link, you were my personal knight.”

“Now he’ll really be personal in the night!” A heckler said from the back.

Oh. Yes. That was probably bothering her too. It might be the real reason she was stalling it. Public speaking or not, he had to try. “I will never push, only please you, Princess Zelda.”

Zelda blushed at his comment and the crowd made some funny noises and a few whistles. Yes, he’d better fix that. Oh, that’s what he got for public speaking! He leaned closer and whispered. “Sorry. I meant nothing until you’re ready.” There. That was better. “Then, in whichever way pleases you.”

Oh. That one made her blush more, but he felt himself become a little warm with that comment too. Oh, this is why he never spoke.

It all felt a little unusual. He never pictured himself in a position to do anything but protect and fight for the princess. Romantically? Well, he was her protector, the thought should never even cross one’s mind.

Untouchable.

But now? He would be married to her. One day . . . she wouldn’t be untouchable.

“Link, you’re getting married,” Sidon whispered in his ear. “Stand up straight.”

Link stood straight up, almost getting lost in his own thoughts. He tried to regain his composure as he noticed Sidon next to him?

People did what they wished. Besides, it was a good thing he was there. Link paid attention and tried to put the near future more out of his mind. Zelda didn’t seem to notice, she seemed placated in the same fashion.

“ . . . I now pronounce you Queen Zelda Link of Hyrule and King Link Link of Hyrule. You may kiss the bride.”

Oh. The ceremony was over now, but the first intense thing was already on them. How should he kiss her? There didn't seem to be a rule, and he had just told her he wouldn't push.

Instead, Zelda leaned forward and took charge kissing him on the cheek. She blushed but seemed to stay in control. "I hope you don't regret your decision, Link."

He didn't, and how could he complain? She was a hundred times more gentle than the giant fairies when he upgraded his clothes. He just held her hand in his as the crowd kept shouting King Link over and over.

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Five Years Later

"... so that's why you don't wear much white, mother?" Zelda asked her mother.

Zelda smiled at her daughter on her lap. As tradition stated, she named her daughter Zelda. Hyrule had taken a great deal of time to be restored, and it was still being restored. It had grown so much more, and their relations with neighboring kingdoms had stayed healthy since Link and her often traveled between them.

In fact, they tended to take their son and daughter with them as well if the adventure wasn't too dangerous. Being at a castle was never really for either one, and in the chaotic time of reconstruction, it was better to be out there with the people.

Link believed the more they continued to see her, they would feel less threatened to the point she wouldn't feel incessant worry about the malice anymore. Hardly anyone called her a monster now. Mainly, the gossip mongers, but even she became old news to them.

"That's why you have to visit another fountain again too?" her boy, Bond, asked. "How come we have to stay when you visit fountains all the time?"

Link came up behind Bond and just laid his hand on his shoulder nodding no. A gesture she was accustomed to seeing from him. Link continued to follow most of her commands, but when there was something that seemed against her own welfare or health, she would get her 'knight's refusal'.

Bond didn't protest, just looked disappointed. He wasn't one to argue with his dad as much as Zelda or her daughter Zelda had been. He, however, would be an incredible prince someday. Brought up wise and with courage, he'd be watching over his sister, Princess Zelda.

Princess Zelda moved from her mother's lap over to her father and held her arms out to him. "I'll give extra hugs if we can go?"

Link still gave her his trademark 'no' look. She started to pout and he picked her up and touched her nose and smiled. She gave him a hug anyway.

“King Link, are you ready?” Brigdo asked. “I will watch your children carefully. Nekk will be watching from outside for you.”

“I’d rather you stay home.” Princess Zelda didn’t want to let her father go, but Link put her back down. He would spend time with them later. Instead of raising them with a firm hand and royal teachings, Link tended to raise them supporting the qualities they needed to be good people and leaders.

Maybe generations after them they would go back to stricter royal ways, but when a king was actually a queen’s knight, and a queen was actually classified as a monster? Tradition didn’t always have to be done in the same way.

Zelda kissed her children goodbye and headed out with him. “Do you have the warm outfit for afterward? It’s always so cold.”

He would bring it but it wouldn’t matter much. He would always be there to warm her up and make her feel better. He also never had to look away anymore when she was in the middle of a blessing, so he could watch all of the surroundings even better.

Although, Bond’s conceivance was certainly due to some distraction. Zelda was beautiful, his wife, cold and trembling, and while warming her up . . . there tended to be distraction. Link tried very hard to stay focused, but Princess Zelda’s conceivance seemed to be from distraction afterwards too.

He watched Zelda disrobe and start her blessings again. No distractions. He couldn’t get distracted again. He already got distracted recently again, and he couldn’t do it again.

“You have blessed me so many times, yet every time, I am grateful for everything you have done. You have helped our kingdom so much.” The blessings never really requested for anything else. Zelda hadn’t gotten worse. She just thanked them for everything they had done.

She never received a response back anymore, yet she still stayed dedicated. Dedicated as ever. However, Link saw something new. Instinctively, he hitched up his sword lightly, but didn’t disturb the blessing.

The water around Zelda started to glow slightly. Zelda didn’t move, well-trained in her art of blessing. She stayed still while the goddess statue spoke to her.

“The one who can wield the chosen power has now healed you.”

Link looked at Zelda. All of the malice, every scrap of it had disappeared from her chest and the scratches upon her had healed. He waited patiently for the water to stop glowing.

Zelda came out of the water and he greeted her with a blanket, warm clothes, and a bridal style hold as he moved her quickly away. He’d never heard that from the goddess, but he knew what it meant.

“I guess number three was the magic number.” Zelda couldn’t help herself.

Number three. His next son or daughter would wield the power. That child would be able to defend Hyrule well against any foe. In the meantime?

Three. Three children. Bond, Zelda, and now . . . “Distraction.”

“I think you were always meant to be distracted, when you weren’t supposed to be,” Zelda teased him. “King Link of Hyrule. Do you think it will be another prince or princess?”

Link just sighed as he tried to warm her up by getting her down as fast as possible. Yet. His heart felt so warm too. His wife was *finally* healed of Ganon’s torturous trick. She smiled so carefree. None of the royal charm she showed to her subjects, just her smile for him.

And . . . and well she was already pregnant anyway . . .

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After one distraction later . . .

If there was one thing Link never messed up, it was buying that old hundred-year home. He might not use it often, but it had been a life saver more than once. Zelda was cuddled up right next to him on their bed.

He just stared at her. Her long blonde hair as she slept so serenely. He ran his fingers through it. Three was the magic number.

Prince or princess, it wouldn’t be alone in whatever happened in its future. It had a brother and a sister to help. A mother and a father. And the knowledge. For a fact, Zelda and him would teach it so that it’s children, great grandchildren, or ancient grandchildren would know:

Power doesn’t come just from relying on the gods. It comes from within. With courage, wisdom, power and something else:

Love.

The End

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