

Who Are You?

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A story that starts as a simple visit from a cousin and a snowstorm that expands into an adventure the likes of which Zelda and Link would never imagine. This story encompasses many different characters, so you never know who'll you see next.

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1 - I'm Just Me

The snow was blowing hard, and piles of white were building up on top of the frozen moat surrounding Hyrule Castle. Princess Zelda looked out the window at the white world outside and wished that Link was there with her. He had been away for awhile, visiting the Zora's who had come to the castle with a message from their king. He had requested that the king of Hyrule send soldiers over to help the Zora's prepare for the winter by creating ice blockades around the springs to prevent them from freezing. Link had volunteered, and although the project was finished by now, the snow had trapped the Hylian hero and the other soldiers in the Zora's Domain.

Just thinking about all that water, and how cold it must be gave her chills, and she drew her robe tighter around her shoulders. She walked away from the window and sat down in front of the fireplace in her bedroom. The warmth of the fire was comforting, and she knelt before it and placed her hands near it, trying to warm them. A knock at the door brought her to her feet.

"Come in," she called. In stepped her handmaiden, Lyla. Lyla was a young girl, about sixteen, and Zelda, who was only two years older than her, felt like a big sister to the young girl; for whenever Lyla had a problem, she would always come straight to Zelda for help.

"Your majesty," the young brunette curtsied as she stepped in the room, "The captain of the guard is here. He says it's urgent."

"Send him in," Zelda said as she raced to get into something more decent than her nightgown. The captain stepped in, a stern-faced man with a clean-shaven face and neat, orderly hair. His chain boots clanked on the floor as he entered, telling Zelda he was standing behind her. She turned around with a smile on her face. Although she didn't mind him, Zelda had always found the captain to be too....duty bound.

"Yes, Captain Steiner," Zelda asked.

"Your Highness," Steiner began, his voice monotoned, "We have discovered a sinister-looking rogue behind the castle. She claimed she had been caught in the storm and was searching for a haven. Well, I told her to stay outside until--"

"You left her outside?!" Zelda asked, her voice carrying a touch of scorn, as she raced to the door. "Captain Steiner, if you're as chivalrous as you say you are, then you should have brought her in. This snow is too deep to leave people out in. Go let her in immediately!"

"But, your highness--"

"Now!" Zelda ordered, "And if she is sick from this weather, you will help take care of her until she is better."

"Yes, your highness," Steiner said as he bowed and quickly left the room. Zelda sighed. She didn't like to yell, but that, she found, was the only way to get anything done when it came to Captain Steiner. She put on a blue dress, a heavy, silk gown and one of her favorites, with a small silver circlet. She stepped into the hall, and was met by Lyla.

"A soldier reported that the rogu- I mean, guest has been brought around to the front entrance and let inside."

"Good," Zelda said as she walked down the stone halls toward the grand entrance. Lyla followed behind, her young face red with excitement.

"Your highness," Lyla started, but Zelda cut her off.

"Lyla, how often must I tell you to call me Zelda?"

"I'm sorry, your- I mean, Zelda. It's just, I'm so used to speaking officially. I have been taught to do so all my life."

"I understand that," Zelda said as she reached one of the doors that led into the hall, "But, we are friends, are we not?"

"Yes, of course," Lyla said hesitantly, as if saying such a thing would cause trouble.

"Then, we shall speak to each other as friends, alright," Zelda responded, placing a hand on the girl's shoulder and giving a small smile. Lyla nodded with a smile, then went to open the door for the princess.

Zelda stepped through the door and into the hall. It was large, with long banners with the Hyrule Family Crest on them spread throughout the room. The long balcony stretched all the way around room, with a long, sweeping staircase in the middle, right across from the main doors. A crimson carpet went from the doors up the stairs and around the balcony, and the entire room was lit by two dozen torches.

She looked down off the balcony and saw a single, familiar-looking woman, standing with Hylian guards around her.

"Announcing, her royal highness, Princess Zelda," the crier announced as Zelda came down the stairs. She nodded to him, then turned to the woman. She dismissed the guards, who went to their posts along the doors and stairs. Zelda wanted badly to rush to her cousin, but knew that everything had to be done properly.

"Welcome," she began, "I am Princess Zelda, and this is the Castle Hyrule. I am sorry for any trouble the guards may have caused you," and at this, she threw a quick glance to Steiner, who blushed, but did not move from his attention position. "I can see that you're weary, so please allow my hand-maiden and myself to show you to your guest room."

"Your highness," Steiner began to protest as the three walked up the stairs, but then fell silent when Zelda gave him a deadly glare.

When they had gone upstairs, Zelda brought her to a large bedroom. She dismissed Lyla, and shut the door behind her, then ran to cousin and gave her a hug.

“Cousin Lulu,” she cried, “I’m so happy to see you!”

“As am I,” the woman said. She stood about as tall as Zelda, and they had similar features, but they couldn’t be more opposite. While Zelda was a lighter person, with golden hair and and skin, her cousin Lulu had raven black hair, red eyes and pale skin. The red eyes were a result of a spell, one which she had taught to Zelda when they were younger. She always had her lips and nails painted purple, and her long hair was partially held up by hair ornaments which jingled when she moved, while the rest either hung down straight, or in thin braids. She always wore black, form fitting dresses, most that were low cut enough to make a school boy blush. The bottom of the dress was supported by many belts, which looped loosley around her legs. The edges of the dress were fur-trimmed, though Zelda didn't think they would help keep her too warm.

After they exchanged greetings, the two sat near the fireplace, drinking tea.

“So, as soon as I heard about what happened, I rushed right over to see you,” Lulu explained. “Who would have thought that the Gerudo would have risen up like that?”

“I know,” Zelda agreed, “But enough about that, tell me about this fia'nce you wrote to me about.”

Lulu blushed slightly, then smiled. “His name is Wakka. He’s a sailor and a fisherman, but he also has a history in the military. He’s a bit lacking in the imagination department, but he’s a nice man overall. Now, what about this boy you were telling me about? What’s he like?”

Now it was Zelda's turn to blush. “Well, he’s the strong-silent type.”

“He doesn't talk much?”

“Oh, he does, he just doesn't talk unless he's part of the conversation.”

“So he’s well mannered,” Lulu nodded, “What else? What does he look like?”

“He’s tall, with blonde hair, and the most amazing blue eyes,” Zelda answered, then added distantly, her mind's eye seeing Link standing before her, “And they sparkle just a little, when he smiles. And they have so much emotion behind them; it’s as if his soul is right there. He’s so kind and gentle, very brave and smart and strong.”

“Zelda,” Lulu said, snapping Zelda out of her daydream, “It sounds like you really love this man.”

“He saved my life,” Zelda replied, almost defensively, “But I wouldn't say I love him.”

Lulu gave Zelda a knowing look. She knew better. “I understand,” her cousin said. “So, have you given it to him?”

“What? The blue feather? You can't be serious.”

"Of course," Lulu said, referring to a Hylian tradition. When one wished to propose, one would give the spouse-to-be a blue feather. They were very rare, and most people didn't do it any more, but Zelda's mother had kept one in a wooden box for her daughter to give to her future husband.

"So, have you ever considered it?"

"Once," Zelda said, "Just once."

"Just once?" Why?"

"I haven't felt the way I did that night, and that night was perfect."

"Tell me the details," Lulu said.

Zelda had settled in for bed, with the only light in her room being the small lamp she used for reading. She was reading a book of Sheika lore, and felt herself drifting off when she heard the most beautiful sound. It was autumn, and the nights were still warm, so she had left the window over the garden open. The sound came through, soft and sweet, and Zelda climbed out of bed to investigate. Below her, sitting in the garden on a stone bench was Link. He was quietly playing on his ocarina a slow song, the Minuet of Forest. Zelda slipped on a robe and snuck down the stairs to the entrance of the garden.

Link seemed absorbed in his music, so Zelda crept quietly up behind him, and sat down next to him. He stopped playing and looked at her with a smile.

"Your highness," he said quietly.

"Don't stop," Zelda said, "It sounds lovely."

"Of course," Link replied, then continued the song. When he had finished, he turned back to her.

"How was that?"

"It was wonderful," she answered. The she looked up into the star-filled sky. "The sky is beautiful tonight."

"Indeed," Link said, a certain awe in his voice, his eyes not leaving her face. The two sat silently, gazing into the stars.

"So, Link, have you ever thought of leaving Hyrule? For no reason other than to see what's out there?"

"Not really," Link replied, "I've traveled a lot, and I've seen a lot, so I guess the thought of traveling just because has never crossed my mind."

"I want to," Zelda said. "I want to travel all over, and see all the sights."

"That does sound fun," Link said, turning to look at the princess.

"Perhaps we could go together," Zelda sighed happily, then leaned on Link's strong shoulder.

"I would like that," Link said, "I think we should go this spring, when everything is new and clean."

"Yes," Zelda agreed slowly, looking up at Link. She looked into his pure blue eye, and he returned the gaze. Before Zelda knew it, she was leaning forward, her lips ready for the one thing she had been waiting for for a long time. Link also leaned forward, his eyes closed, and then they kissed.

It was the most perfect feeling Zelda had ever had. It felt pure, and wonderful. She knew then and there that this was the man she wanted to marry. After that kiss, they sat together for a short time, Zelda leaning on Link's shoulder Link playing Zelda's Lullaby on his ocarina. She smiled when she heard the song and Zelda felt herself drift off to sleep. She awoke to find Link placing her in her bed. She decided not to ruin the moment, and laid still. Link placed the blankets on her, then kissed her lightly on the forehead. "I'll love you forever, my princess," he said quietly, then left the room. Zelda smiled, then went back to sleep.

"And that's what happened," Zelda finished.

"And why haven't you proposed?"

Zelda stood up with surprise. "Because, I haven't...I haven't felt that it would be right."

"Why?"

"Because he's so perfect, and I'm just me."

"You're a princess! What's not perfect?"

"Exactly! Because I'm a princess, I won't be able to be free, whether I'm married to Link or not. We'll remain in this castle forever, and never be happy with our life together."

"Then leave," Lulu said simply, pouring herself more tea.

"What! What do you mean?"

"I mean, leave. Give up the crown, and leave."

"I can't just do that! I'm the sole heir, and the only member left in the immediate royal family."

"Well then, I don't know what to tell you. All I can say is this, your going to let boundaries keep you from your perfect match. The Zelda I knew when I was younger would never let boundaries stop her from getting what she truly wanted."

One day earlier....

Link wiped the sweat from his brow. He and the soldiers had been working hard at the ice blockers for

hours. They had been working for three days, almost on end, putting up the large wooden structures, and the waters were freezing cold. The Zoras had given them all tunics that would allow them to breathe underwater, but they didn't keep them very warm. Three of the soldiers had already taken ill, and Link was beginning to feel sick as well. Fortunately, the Zora had discovered a group of hot springs, and after some work, they were all able to connect a spring to the main water flow, filling the pool in the Zora's Domain with rejuvenating warmth. They had finished up for the day, and Link decided to visit the hot springs and see if they could really make him feel better. The springs were in a cavern a short distance from the main lagoon, so he didn't have to move that far. His steps were stiff and sore from working in the cold waters, but he was welcomed by the sight of the springs. Steam rose up from numerous pools, and Link breathed in the cleansing heat. The water started to calm his muscles the moment he hit them, and he felt instantly relaxed. The waters spread warmth throughout his body..

The springs ended up being more relaxing than he had anticipated, and he ended up dozing off. He awoke with a start when he heard a cry. He quickly threw on his clothes and followed the cries to a small stream of water coming from the main spring. The sound of rushing water got louder as he approached, and he found that this stream led right into an underground gorge. The cries were coming from a soldier who was hanging onto a rock jutting out from the waterfall above the deep, black chasm. The man's lips were blue, and his eyes clenched, while his grip on the rock slowly slipped away.

"Hold on!" Link called, then ran to the edge of the stream. The stream was not wide, but very deep, with a swift current. Link scrounged around for anything for him to grab onto when he had gotten the man and needed to get back. Along the edges of the stream was some jetsam that had washed up, and he dug through it until he found a fraying cord of rope. He hoped it would be long enough to throw to the man. He tossed it as far as he could, only to have it come up short.

Link quickly realized that the only way to save the man would be swim out to him and save him. He braced himself against the chilling water, and dove in. The cold water sucked the breath from him, but he didn't care at that point. The current was swifter than he thought, and it slammed him into the rock. Link gasped as the wind was once again knocked out of him, but climbed onto the rock, and crawled over to the soldier. He grasped at the man's hands, trying to pull the man up. At first, it seemed like he would make it, but Link's grip slipped, and the man fell. Link reached down and grabbed the collar of his armor. The soldier grabbed onto Link's forearm, and helped to pull himself up. The two fell back onto the stone, and Link immediately got up to check the soldier. He saw the tips of the man's fingers were almost as blue as his lips. He was suffering from hypothermia. Link had to get him to a doctor immediately, or he would die. Placing the man on his shoulders, he tore off one of the sleeves of his tunic, and tied the man's wrists together around his neck so the man wouldn't slip off of Link's back on the return swim.

Link dove once again into the water, this time swimming against the current but it was powerful, and kept pulling the two back towards the gorge, as if it were a great beast, trying to devour the hapless pair. Link swam on, and stretched as far as he could for the edge, but his arms and legs were growing numb from the icy waters, and he started to dip beneath the crashing stream. Suddenly, two, silvery hands reached down and grabbed his left wrist, though Link barely felt it, then another pair grabbed his right. He felt himself being lifted out of the water, and placed on the stone floor. The man on his back was taken off him, and a blanket was wrapped around his and Link's shoulders. Link's teeth chattered together as he tried to get to his feet, but they fell out from beneath him.

“Don't try to stand,” he heard a voice say, and then looked up to see a Zora standing above him. Behind him, two other Zoras were tending to the man, wrapping a second blanket around him and giving him some red liquid to drink. Then they carried him towards the hot springs. Link's vision was a bit blurry, but when his eyes refocused, he realized that the Zora that had saved him was Loku, a good friend of his. Normally speaking, Link couldn't tell the difference between Zoras, but Loku made it easy with the strange, swirling black tatoos all over his arms, as well as on the sides of his torso and on the left side of face.

“Thanks Loku,” Link coughed as he took a deep, much needed, breath.

“Don't mention it,” Loku answered, patting Link on the back. “Just don't play hero unless there's someone else to play hero for you next time. You're lucky we heard that man's cries, otherwise you'd both be frozen solid at the bottom of that gorge.”

After Link got some feeling back in his legs, Loku took Link's arm around his neck and helped the water-logged hero back to the main cavern. The two sat together in the humid cave on the edge of a cliff, looking into the blue waters of the underground lagoon.

“So, have you asked her yet?” Loku asked suddenly.

“What?” Link asked.

“Have you asked Zelda the big question?”

Link jumped with surprise. “What!? You can't mean...No, I could never-“

“Well, why not? I know she loves you.”

“How?”

“You remember that time when you brought her here because she was a diplomat for her father?”

“Yes,” Link said, recalling that adventure quite clearly.

The waterfall pounded into the lagoon, its roar deafening. It was the spring thaw, so the water flow was much larger than normal. Zelda gazed into the waterfall and watched the light of the sun and the torces in the cavern dance in the crystal clear water. The dazzling sight held her in almost a trance, so she jumped when Link tapped her on the shoulder.

“Link,” she sighed when she saw who it was.

“So, how did the meeting with the king go?” Link asked, sitting down on the edge of the cliff.

“It went well,” Zelda answered, doing likewise. “It is now official. If ever we are attacked by an outside force, we can count the Zoras as allies, as long as we keep Lake Hylia and the waters near Hyrule Town clean.”

"Sounds reasonable," Link nodded. He ran his fingers through his blonde hair and sighed.

"I'm going for a swim," Zelda suddenly declared.

"What?" Link asked.

"I'm going for a swim," she repeated. Then she grinned mischievously, and Link could see a plan forming in her eyes. "I'm going to get changed," she said as she stood up and walked off. Link watched go, a curious look on his face. What could she be up to? He thought to himself. After a few minutes, she returned, dressed in one of Link's tunics.

"What are you doing," Link asked, chuckling when he saw the tunic was too big for her. The green sleeves went down to her elbows, and the bottom went down to just above her knees.

"I couldn't find anything in my luggage, so I borrowed some of yours."

"Hey," Link started to protest, but before he could say anything else, Zelda pulled Link's hat from behind her back and put it on her head, then raced off. Link jumped up and ran after her. She looked back as she ran and giggled, then went around a curve in to passage who's water was flowing down from a higher cavern. The shallow stream led to the top of a large waterfall. Zelda looked down and saw the deserted lagoon below. She heard Link's bare footsteps splash through the water behind her. She turned around and smiled wide at him, then dove off the edge into the lagoon below.

Link gasped when he saw her dive, and ran to the edge. He saw a splash, and a few seconds, Zelda's head appeared above the water. She waved to him, and Link just smiled and he dove in after her.

He burst into the water, and swam down deep. Zelda looked around, confused and a little panicked when he didn't come up after a few seconds. Suddenly, she felt the hat slid off her head, and she turned around to see Link holding the dripping wet hat in his hand, a triumphant look on his face. She looked at him with a sly look, then reached for the hat.

"No fair," she said, "You can't sneak up like that."

"Well, you shouldn't steal hats," Link chuckled when she grabbed one end of the hat. Link tried to pull it back, but he only succeeded in bringing Zelda closer. The two floated silently in the water for a moment, staring at each other, and then, before he knew what he was doing, Link was leaning towards Zelda, and she was doing likewise. Link lightly touched his lips to hers, unsure if she wanted that, but when she didn't pull away, he kissed her. It was amazing. Link closed his eyes and saw nothing but sparks flashing before his eyes. They broke apart, and Link was left breathless. Zelda smiled slightly, then ducked beneath the water and swam towards the end of the lagoon. To Link, the way her hair was flowing in the water and the way the light shone on her beautiful face reminded him of the mermaids he had heard tales of in books, and but when he saw her climb out of the water and wring out her sopping hair, he knew that she was more beautiful then anyone else he had ever seen. As she walked off, Link laid back and floated on the water, looking up to the stone ceiling, his mind whirring with feelings and energy. Suddenly, a tatoood Zora face leaned over his head and chuckled.

"You know, if Princess Ruto ever found out-" Link jumped with surprise, blood rushing to his face and

his stomach doing back flips.

“Did you see that?” Link gulped.

“Of course I did,” Loku answered in a know-it-all fashion, “Though, maybe I should have left you two love gills alone.” He leaned up against a stone wall, and folded his scaly arms behind his head as Link climbed out of the water, his clothes dripping wet. He started wringing them out, and brushed his hand through his hair, trying to get rid of the excess water.

“Well,” Link said, as he wiped off his still red face, “No one was forcing you to watch.”

“True,” Loku agreed, “But I do so enjoy romance scenes,” he sighed dramatically.

“Shut up,” Link grumbled. The whole thing had been wonderful, Link wouldn't deny that, but Loku was quickly draining all romance from it. He sighed and decided to ignore his friend's taunting, thinking only on the beautiful princess.

“You never did apologize for that,” Link pointed out to his Zora friend.

“You're right,” Loku admitted, his voice sounding apologetic. “I mean, I found out about all that not two weeks later with Coral.”

“You mean that one girl,” Link asked.

Loku nodded, “She can be very forward sometimes, but she's gorgeous and sweet otherwise.”

Link rolled his eyes. He still didn't know how one could determine outward beauty when it came to Zoras, since they all looked the same; there had to be some kind of difference. Perhaps it was scale shine or something.

“The princess Zelda, is quite a catch though,” Loku commented before standing up. “Tell me why you haven't proposed yet.”

“Because, she's a princess, and I'm a dirty peasant.”

“You're the hero of Hyrule, I think that boosts your status up a bit.”

“Perhaps,” Link said quietly. “I need to get back to the castle,” he said after a moment.”

“That's the spirit,” Loku cheered.

“Not because of that, but because...I..uh,” but Link couldn't think of an excuse. He coughed slightly, then went to get packed. Little did he know that a huge blizzard was brewing above Hyrule field.

Link followed the Zora River down to the entrance of Hyrule Field, but was met with an icy blast of snow. The clouds above were almost black, they were so dark, a fierce bitterly cold wind was blowing. Link pulled the cowl of his hood around his ears and face as tightly as he could, but it didn't help. The cold air

seemed to pass right through his cloak, tunic, skin, and then cut straight through his very core. He shivered violently, trying to keep of the horrible chill.

“Maybe I should have waited to leave,” he chattered to himself. His body hadn't quite recovered from the icy swim, and this storm wasn't helping.

Suddenly, the sky burst open, releasing a blinding flurry of snow. It stung him, and the strength was completely sapped away. He fought on, trying his hardest to keep moving. He knew that if he fell now, he would not wake up. He kept going, and the white kept piling up, first to his calves, then to his knees, and before he knew it, the snow had reached his waste. He trudged on, but the field continued to stretch out before him, with Hyrul Castle Town still the in the distance.

When he could see the torches on the walls of the city, he took a step forward, but the bank was deeper than he expected, and he fell forward, with a pile of snow collapsing ontop of him. Link tried to move, but he was too cold and too tired. His eyes slowly closed, for what he knew would be the last time.

2 - To Capture A Princess

Zelda sat alone in her room, lost in thought. The wind was whistling across the chimney of the fireplace, and the snow had completely covered the glass panes of her windows. The fire was dying, its dim light casting long shadows across the room. It was growing colder, and Zelda was able to see her breath, but she didn't think about it. She was too preoccupied with what Lulu had told her. Should she give up the throne? Would that be best for her and Link? She wasn't sure. What would her father think? Who could possibly take her place as heir? There was just too many questions.

Zelda rose from her sofa and crossed to the fireplace to put more logs on the fire. As the flames grew once again, it reminded her of when she had gone to the Death Mountain Crater. She had been disguised then as Sheik, a guise she had made to avoid the watchful eye of Gannondorf. At that time, she felt free, without the pressures of royalty, though the weight of the world was on her and Link's shoulders. She longed to be like Link. She longed for the days when she could explore Hyrule without being referred to as 'Your Highness'. "Perhaps I should relinquish the throne," Zelda said quietly, "It would be easier," she told herself, but then she shook her head, "No, that would not be right. It is my duty and destiny. I have no right to quit because it would be too hard."

A sudden movement off to right brought her attention. She glanced around, but saw nothing. She turned back to the fire and sighed. Must be a shadow moving in the flame, she thought to herself. She climbed into bed with Lulu's words still in her head. What would she do?

The next morning, Zelda awoke to a scream, followed by a crash. She jumped out of bed, wrapped her robe around her shoulder's and stepped into her slippers. Racing across her room, she threw open the door.

There was Lyla, huddled on the floor, staring fearfully at something. "What's wrong," Zelda asked, looking around, panicked. Lyla just pointed behind Zelda's back, and Zelda followed the girl's finger. Sitting on the sill of a window was a small, black crow. Zelda sighed heavily. "I thought it was something important," she mumbled. "It's just a crow," Zelda reassured the frighten girl.

"It tried to attack me!" Lyla exclaimed. "I was going into your room, and it fluttered out of nowhere and attacked me!"

Zelda opened the window and shooed the bird outside. "I suppose they can be a bit frightening," she said, then helped Lyla pick up the tray of food she had dropped.

"Your highness, you really don't have to," Lyla protested.

"I want to," Zelda answered, picking up a piece of bread.

"Thank you," Lyla said gratefully when they had finished.

“Just be sure to not drop it on your way back to the kitchen,” Zelda smiled as the girl walked away. Zelda went back into her room to restart the fire and wait for breakfast. She laughed quietly to herself at how scared Lyla was of a little crow. Wait a minute, Zelda thought, what's a crow doing here? They had migrated months ago. And how did it get in? The windows all would have been closed to keep the chill out. It all seemed very strange.

“I'm sorry,” Lulu apologized, her face showing a worried look, “I think that it might have been my fault.”

Zelda had come to speak with Lulu after she had eaten breakfast, which Lyla had brought back from the kitchen without incident. When she had entered, she had found Lulu looking through a book, though Zelda couldn't understand a word of it.

“Just a spell book,” Lulu explained before putting it away. Zelda explained what had happened, and Lulu seemed to grow concerned each passing moment.

“I think I have an answer,” she said again. “You see, the sun is shining, so I opened a window because it's so stuffy in here. I left it opened, and the bird must have flown in.”

“But where did it come from,” Zelda asked.

“Where is this Link you were telling me about?” she asked, ignoring the question, something Zelda noticed with more than a passing interest.

“He's away, working in Zora's domain.”

“What a shame, I was hoping to meet him when I got here.”

“He should be back soon. The snow has already started to melt, so he should be able to leave within a day or so.”

“Good,” Lulu smiled. “Speaking of which, did you think about what I told you?”

Zelda sat silently for a moment, thinking once again about it, then nodded and spoke, “I have decided to follow duty. I will not abandon my family's legacy.”

Lulu's face showed a smile, but Zelda thought she saw a spark of irritation in her eyes. It was there for a moment, then gone, but Zelda couldn't dismiss it. This was too strange.

“Good, I am glad to see that you have made a decision. I must apologize, though, for my forwardness yesterday. It really was not my place to say such things.”

“It doesn't matter,” Zelda answered, “You put things in perspective for me.”

“I am glad I was able to help.”

Zelda stood up to leave, and smiled at her cousin. Although she seemed to be genuinely concerned with her well being, Zelda couldn't help but feel a strange feeling in her stomach. Something just didn't seem

right about the whole thing. Zelda went out of the room, only after being asked by Lulu to close the door on the way out. Zelda decided to see Steiner, hoping that he had received a message about Link.

Steiner's answer had brought disappointment once again, and Zelda sighed heavily as she returned to her room. On the way, she passed Lulu's room, and heard Lulu speaking out loud. Zelda smiled, thinking it to be a spell, and she peeked into the room, curious about what her cousin could be casting. Inside, she saw her Lulu at the window, speaking to a crow.

“And if you ever get caught like that again, I will wring your neck, do you understand?” she chastised the bird. Her fists were clenched tightly to her side, so tight that her knuckles were white. “I have gone to great lengths to claim this throne, but that stupid girl is making things difficult. If she will not leave on her own, I must make sure she leaves, permanently. Fly to that wretched man and tell him that he is to strike tonight. If he refuses me, then his love will die. Now go, and do not fail me.”

The bird fluttered off, and Lulu turned around and sat down on the sofa. “Things are coming together nicely,” she smirked to herself. “The only problem is this Link. If what they say is true, then he must be dealt with immediately. I can not allow him to interfere.”

Zelda had heard enough. Her eyes widened with shock as she snuck back to her room. She had to get away, Link's life hung in the balance. Lulu was not the person she used to be. A conspiracy to get rid of Zelda was being concocted in the woman's mind, and Zelda was in danger of losing everything. She had to make preparations. If she ran, then they would kill Link for sure, and if she stayed, this man would kill her tonight. Perhaps this would be the time to take on her alter ego again. Zelda would be powerless against a trained assassin, at least she guessed he was, but Sheik could handle herself nicely. Zelda smiled grimly, knowing what had to be done.

Link awoke with a start. The chill that had filled him was gone, and he felt warm again. He glanced around, thinking that his frozen misadventure was simply a dream, but upon inspecting his surroundings, he realized that was not the case. He was lying on a small wooden cot, a thick blanket was wrapped around him. The room was dark, but by the light of the small fire in the middle, Link could make out the the furnishings of a small, wooden hut. It had a thatched roof, and from the ceiling hung all kinds of herbs and spices. Their fragrance hung in the air, and seemed rather stifeling at first, but Link quickly got used to it. A large table stood across from the bed. Books and papers were strewn across it, and even more papers were on the floor. A cauldron sat on the stove, and a mortar next to it. Link climbed out of the cot and placed his feet on the floor. He saw his boots were gone, but after looking for them, he found them under the cot. A make-shift nightstand was at the head of the cot, and Link looked through a stack of things there. Suddenly, he came across a familiar book. On the leather bound cover was a single tear drop.

“The Sad Story,” Link read off the cover. The short title sounded familiar, but he couldn't think of where-Wait a minute! Link thought to himself. I know this book; but, didn't I give this too-

Before he could finish his thought, the door to the hut burst open. A cold flurry of snow and wind flew in, blowing a figure inside and nearly knocking it over. It wore a heavy cloak and hood, with a steeple-point hat on top, and strapped onto the figure's back was a crooked and ragged ended broom. The figure fought to shut the door, and when it had finally succeeded, started muttering to itself. Link cleared his throat, and the figure stopped and turned around.

"Oh, you're awake," it said. The voice sounded so familiar to Link, but just couldn't picture who it belonged to. The figure pulled off her hood, revealing her face. Link jumped with surprise when he saw who it was. Before him stood Maple the witch.

She still had her youthful face, with a dark rouge on her angular cheeks and nose, and a dark eye shadow that almost matched her green eyes. Her black hair still had its green tint, but was longer than the last time Link had seen her. She glared at him, then walked towards him.

"Are you just stupid?" she growled at him. "What kind of idiot goes out in a blizzard like that?" At this, she started poking him in the chest, "It's a good thing I was out there or you would have died." Link chuckled to himself when he heard that. That makes you an idiot too, was all he wanted to say to her, but he kept his mouth shut. He knew how temperamental the young witch was, and how she'd probably throw him out for saying something like that.

"Well, thank you for saving me," Link said gratefully.

"You're welcome," she said quietly, almost sounding disappointed. Now I can't yell at him, she thought to herself, he's being polite. She walked over to the cluttered table and placed a bag that had been in her hand on the rough wood. As she started taking out different jars and bottles, she stopped, then turned around and looked suspiciously at Link.

"Say, don't I know you?" she asked. She started walking around him, inspecting him. "Yeah, I do know know you," she nodded. "But from where? With the shape of the hat, and those ridiculous clothes, you'd think I wouldn't forget your name, but I know I've seen you before." Suddenly, she snapped her fingers and her eyes brightened.

"I know, I met you in Labryna!" Then her face grew dark, and there was an angry glint her eyes. She spoke with a quiet, deadly tone in her voice, "You're that wretched little brat who kept knocking me off my broom and stealing my stuff."

Link stood speechless. He had hoped she had forgotten about that, because part of what she said was true. He did run into her while she was flying on her broom, but it had always been her own fault, and the only reason he ever took anything that belonged to her was because he scooped up everything he could before she took it from him. That's not to that say he didn't feel good when he walked away from their little confrontations, at least, when he left with more things than he had started with.

Before Link could react, Maple swung her broom around smacked him on the side of his head. It didn't hurt, but it still sent him sprawling to the ground. He rubbed the side of his face where the broom had hit and got to his feet. He was met with another whack, this time on top of his head, then another, and another.

"Steal my things and get me in trouble will ya!?" she said as she hit him again.

"Ow! Will you-Ow! Cut it-Ow! Out?" Link said, wincing with each hit. Finally, he had enough and caught the broom on its next downswing. He gripped it tightly, then spun around and pulled it right out of Maple's hands.

“Oh, now you're stealing my broom, too?” Maple said, her face turning red with anger.

“No,” Link said, getting frustrated. “I would just like to speak without getting hit with a broom, if you don't mind?”

“Well, what could you possibly want to talk about? What valuables I have so you can steal them as well?”

“No,” Link shot back, “I was wondering what you're doing here in Hyrule.”

Suddenly, Maple's face dropped. She looked down at the floor, a sad look on her face. “Well, Grandmother Syrup, she...well she, croaked.”

Link felt a wave of sadness sweep over him. Syrup had always been strange, if not scary, but she was also very kind, helping Link when she could, so the thought her dying was painful.

“I'm so sorry,” Link consoled the depressed witch, “I know what it's like to lose a loved one.”

“I said she croaked, not died,” Maple snapped, acting like Link should have known better. “She's got a frog in her throat!”

“You mean she has a sore throat?” Link asked, though with this strange pair, Link had a good feeling that that was not the case.

“No, she lost a contest with a witch named Ursula, and now when she speaks, she sounds like a frog! It's so horrible!” And with that, the young witch burst into tears. Link wasn't sure about whether he should console the girl or laugh. Although it was positively ridiculous, Link couldn't help but believe her.

“That doesn't explain why you're here,” Link said as he patted her on the back.

Maple wiped her eyes, then looked up at him. “I came here to find a reversal, you know, a cure. I heard there was a woman who lived around here that made potions and stuff, so I came to see her. But when I went to her house, there was a sign that said she was gone for the winter. So now, I'm trying to find a cure while I wait for her to get back.”

Link thought for a moment about where she could get help in looking for a cure, when he remembered that he had to get back to the castle. Perhaps there were some materials there she could use.

“Tell you what,” Link said, trying to cheer her up, “You help me get back to Hyrule castle and I'll get you into the castle library. There's bound to be something there you can use.”

Maple looked at him, her eyes practically shining. “Would you really do that for me?”

Link nodded his head, causing the girl to squeal with excitement. “Thank you so much,” she kept saying as she prepared to leave. Link gathered his things together and went outside. Maple came out a moment later, broom in hand, and locked the door. Link stopped when he saw her stick a key into the

wooden door of the hut, but then realised that this was Maple who lived here.

Maple sat side-saddle at the front of her broom, then patted the back, looking at Link. Link stared at her, then realized what she meant. Link had never been a fan of flying, but he was in a hurry. He hopped onto the back, and as soon as he did, the broom lifted off the ground and flew high into the air. As they flew, Link couldn't help but ask a question.

“So, what were you doing out in that storm?”

“I was collecting pure snow from the air, before it touched the ground. Pure water is a great catalyst.”

“Oh,” Link said, not really understanding what she meant.

“What about you?” she asked in return.

“I was trying to get to the castle from Zora's domain, but the storm caught me by surprise.”

“I always thought you were dense,” Maple mumbled.

“What?” Link called, the whistling winds making hearing difficult.

“Nothing,” she answered.

The two flew on, soaring over Lake Hylia, its waters frozen with the winter chill. The snow sat on top of it, so it looked like a huge white plane, rather than the largest body of water in Hyrule. Link gripped onto the broom, suddenly realizing just how high up they were. After awhile, though, he relaxed a bit, and was able to enjoy the sights of the white Hyrule Field. Soon, Hyrule Castle could be seen in the distance, though Link had no idea that trouble was brewing within its walls.

Zelda ran a brush through her golden hair, thinking about her plan. She would change over to Sheik at dusk, then hide in the dark until her assailant came, thinking she was asleep. After that, she would hide in the shadows and await her would be murderer. When he made an appearance, she would attack and capture him. It was a good plan, but she was still frightened. Never had she so blatantly attacked like this; though, she couldn't help but feel a certain excitement about the whole thing. Now was her time, now was the time to show that she could take care of herself. She only wished Link could be there to see it. Zelda could only hope that he was still alive.

Suddenly, she realized that she had told Lulu exactly where he was. She could order that he die first! Zelda rushed to see Steiner once again, hoping for good news. As she did, Lulu met her in the hall.

“Hello, where are you running off to?”

“I was going to see Captain Steiner,” Zelda stuttered, trying to find a way to hide her knowledge. “I was hoping to see him about...about when Link was getting back. I heard a rumor that he and some other soldiers were going to Death Mountain to make sure the Gorons were alright,” she lied.

“How appropriate,” she heard Lulu mutter. “What a shame,” she added quickly, “I think he's avoiding

me," she chuckled. "Well, see you tomorrow," she said cheerfully, "I'm doing some studying, so I'll be holed up in my room for the night." And with that, she went down the hall and into her room. Zelda shivered as she walked past, then continued on down the hall.

When she reached the guard barracks, she went searching for Captain Steiner. He was looking at a group of maps on his wall and seemed deep in thought, so Zelda quietly knocked on his desk. He turned around, a confused look on his face, but when he saw Zelda, he regained his usual look of discipline.

"Your highness," he said, bowing. "I'm sorry, I mean, your Majesty."

"What?" Zelda asked.

"That's right, you don't know," he explained, "Your father has left for the distant country of Holodrum, and won't be back for a while. So, you are now Queen Zelda, at least until he gets back."

"Why wasn't I told," Zelda asked, her voice sounding slightly panicked.

"I was actually coming to see you and inform you. Your father would have come, but the meeting was last minute; something about a big tree. Anyway, he left you in charge."

Zelda stood flabbergasted. Although she now had nothing to worry about tonight, since guards would probably be posted around her bedroom door, but she had been looking forward to her little adventure, and now it was ruined, unless...

"Captain Steiner," she said suddenly, "You are to follow all of my instructions and orders to the letter, correct?"

"Indeed, your majesty," he answered, saluting her.

"Well, then, do not inform anyone else of the change, not even my guest. Also, do not place any kind of guard around me. I want everything to remain as normal as possible, understand?"

"Yes, your majesty," Steiner answered, bowing again. Zelda could tell that he wasn't thrilled with the idea, but knew that he would listen to her.

She nodded, then walked back out the door. She turned and looked back in, "Oh, and if you receive any news about Link, I want to be informed immediately." Then she thought about it, "But not if it's after dark." With that, she left the barracks and returned to her bedroom..

The sun started to set over the field, its orange rays reflecting off the white snow, which had been slowly melting all day. Zelda stared out, pondering the things that could happen tonight. This could very well be my last sunset, she thought to herself. But then, it could also be the last sunset for my assassin as well.

The hours passed slowly. Zelda didn't feel very hungry, and spent the time as Sheik, practicing fighting, so as to be prepared. It had been a while since she had fought, but she still felt confident enough in her abilities.

Around midnight, her attacker had still not shown, so she threw another log on the fire to brighten it, and returned to her hiding place. She had cleverly hidden herself in the shadow cast by the wardrobe that stood in the corner next to her bed. Having moved it over to the side, she pulled it forward, and after much tugging and rearranging of the other furniture had managed to position a perfect hiding place, sheltered by the bedside stand, wall and wardrobe. In all her moving around, she didn't realize that she was being watched, that she had been watched since she returned from seeing Steiner. Her assassin had been waiting.

Link dropped off of Maple's broom, sighing heavily. "Don't sigh like that," Maple ordered, "I got you here, didn't I?"

"Yeah, but it's midnight. We could have gotten here sooner if you didn't stop every thirteen minutes to pick herbs."

"I'm sorry," Maple answered exasperated, "But if I'm going to cure grandma, then I'm going to need ingredients."

Link just rolled his eyes and walked quietly across the snow covered garden. Maple put her broom on her back and followed behind. Link showed her to the library, and, after explaining the situation to a librarian, he left Maple in her capable hands. He immediately went to seek out Zelda. As he approached her door, he stopped, thinking her to be asleep. Perhaps I should surprise her, he thought, maybe bring her breakfast tomorrow or something. He decided on that, then started back down the hall, when he thought he heard voices behind Zelda's door.

Sheik saw the shadows shift and form into a man. He stepped out of the very wall itself, emerging from the shadows cast by the fire. At first, he seemed to be nothing more than a black figure, a silhouette, but then colors appeared and gave the form life.

There stood a tall man, a strong, sleek build. His pale face was outlined by his long, wavy, raven-black hair. A red cloak was on his shoulders, and a red cape was wrapped around his mouth and shoulders, then fell down to his calves. The ends were tattered and torn, and looked like flames. His shirt and pants were pitch black, and on his feet were metallic, golden boots. On his left hand was a claw that was the same coloring as the boots, the fingertips sharp and threatening. Despite his threatening appearance, Sheik could see that deep in his dark red eyes there was a certain sorrow. It hurt to look at them, even though he wasn't looking directly at her.

He stepped around the room, looking under the bed, around the fireplace, everywhere but the wardrobe. Suddenly, he approached the wardrobe, a determined look on his face. Sheik prepared her dagger to strike, but then he opened the wardrobe instead, moved around the clothes, then shut it again. He turned around, and Sheik saw her chance to strike.

She jumped out from behind the wardrobe and brought the dagger up, stopping it just against his neck. "Give me one reason not to kill you," she said quietly, her voice sounding very much like a man's. She had done that magically, to hide her identity. Not even Link knew it was her the first time she introduced herself as Sheik. The man didn't even jump, instead standing there quietly. Something was wrong, Sheik thought, he's too calm.

She found out why a moment later why. Her feet were pulled out from beneath her, and she fell to the floor. The man pulled free and sprung nimbly to the other end of the room. Sheik fell backwards, but got her hand under her and was able to spring back forward. The two faced each other, and once again, Zelda found it hard to look the man in the eyes.

“Now, your majesty, we can do this the easy way or the hard way, but either way, you will come with me.”

Sheik gasped. How did he know it was me? There's no way he could have know, unless he had watched her, and knew that she was disguised. That would also explain why he wasn't startled by her surprise attack. Sheik stood there, then brought up her dagger, understanding how dangerous a man he was.

“I was afraid of that,” the man said, his voice sounding sad. He drew a thin epee from his belt, then stood ready to attack.

Neither one moved, each waiting for the other to shift. Sheik then thought about the throwing daggers she kept on her belt. She could probably grab them and throw them before he reached her, so, still looking at him, she reached down as quick as a flash, and threw them at her attacker. They sailed through the air at an almost blinding speed, but before they were even close to the man, he simply sank into the floor. Zelda's eyes widened when she saw him drop, but saw nothing but the long shadows cast by the fireplace where he had been standing. She knew that she shouldn't let her guard down, but it seemed that he was gone, at least for the moment.

The door to her room suddenly burst open. Sheik swung around with her dagger ready, but stopped when she saw Link standing in the doorway. He looked shocked at seeing Zelda as Sheik, but Zelda felt relieved to see him, alive and well. All she wanted, more then anything was to go to him and tell him everything. As they went to each other, a golden claw rose out of the floor and grabbed Link's ankle. Link was jerked down, and melted into the floor the same way the assasin had. Zelda cried out, reaching for her disappearing love's hand, but she was too late. The floor swallowed him up, like a pool of quicksand. Zelda knelt on the floor, completely stunned by what had happened. Suddenly, the man reappeared, a grim look on his face. Zelda noticed that the man no longer had a cape, then saw where it had gone. Behind him, lying bound and gagged on the floor was Link. He was completely bound by the shiny red fabric, from his ankles to the bridge of his nose. Link tried to move, but it held tight. The man looked down at his prisoner, then back at Zelda.

“Now, Zelda,” the man said, his voice seeming irritated, “I don't like to use hostages, but I will. If you do not come with me, your friend here will die a very slow and agonizing death. That cape is bound so tight, his blood flow is being slowed. He also cannot breath enough to overcome the slowing blood flow. If you do not wish to watch him suffocate, I suggest you do as I say and come with me.”

Sheik stood there, knowing what she had to do, even though the cost would be great. Link looked up at her, his eyes sad, and he did his best to shake his head, but found that impossible. If he could speak, though, Zelda knew that Link would say not to worry about him, but Zelda knew that she couldn't. She loved him, and could not bear to know that she was alive because her true love died by her own choice. She pulled off the bindings around her head, allowing her hair to cascade down and revealing her face, then nodded sadly.

"I will go with you," she said quietly, but then asked accusatorily, "But how do I know that you'll keep your word?"

The man waved his hand slightly, and the cape fell away from Link's face, though it still bound the rest of him. He coughed as he breathed in fresh air, then looked at Zelda.

"Don't do it," he practically screamed, tears forming in his eyes. "Don't do it," he said again. "I love you. I won't let you die for me! I can't live without you!"

Zelda couldn't help but smile as she walked over to her trapped love. She knelt down, and kissed him on the lips one final time, then whispered quietly in his ear, "I'll love you forever, my hero." She stood again, and walked over to the man and nodded. Link's struggled to get free as he watched the two walk into the shadows on the wall. A moment later, the cape binding him disappeared into a red whisp of smoke, and he lay there for a moment, staring into space, hopelessness and despair creeping over him. She loved him, but he was powerless to protect her. Now she was gone, gone forever. Tears were streaming down his face as he stood, then he ran to the wall where they disappeared, and punched the wall again and again until his knuckles began to bleed. His despair and rage played out, he sank once again to the floor, sobbing quietly.

3 - The Wheels Put In Motion

Zelda, still wearing the clothes of Sheik, stepped out of the wall, followed closely behind by her captor. The two had passed through the black world of Shadows, and had stepped into what seemed to be the remnants of an old castle. The walls were smooth, a dark grey that looked old, and were cold to the touch. They walked down a short hallway, and stepped under a grand arch into a huge room. It was rounded, with a stained-glass rotunda above it. The glass was decorated with a black rose and thorns, and a light behind it shone through, giving the image a haunting flare. The floor of the room was shiny, like that of a ballroom, and in the center of the floor was yet another black rose, thorny vines coming out from behind it in a spiral pattern. The room was lit by torches that burned green and reflected off the floor, giving the room an eerie, green glow. These torches hung between the seven pillars that stood an even distance from each other. More thorn vines grew up these pillars, with small, black roses on them. The entire room looked like a macabre garden, both beautiful and frightening. Zelda looked around, enchanted by the dark room, and didn't notice the man who had captured her had walked up beside her.

"It truly is beautiful, is it not?"

"Indeed," Zelda answered awestruck. She turned to the man when she remembered who he was, and saw him kneel down to something behind her. She turned around and saw a woman. She was dressed in a long, black robe, and the bottom was so long that it trailed behind her. The sleeves hung far below her hands, and the lining was a purple color. The collar went around her neck, and looked like bat wings. Framing her face and rising off of her head was a black chaplet that resembled horns. Her eyes were almond-shaped and filled with a wickedness that was accentuated by her evil smirk. In her left hand was a long staff, which was the same height as the woman. The staff was made of onyx, and an orb that rested on top that looked like an emerald, though its color was pale, and a strange smoke filled the green sphere.

She approached Zelda, a triumphant look in her wicked eyes.

"Welcome," she said gracefully, though a strange twinge in her voice gave Zelda shivers. "This is Hollow Bastion, and I am Maleficient."

Zelda realized that this woman was using Zelda's welcome when Lulu had arrived at Castle Hyrule. "Why am I here?" Zelda asked, her voice sounding unafraid, though it quivered slightly. Zelda could sense the power this woman held, and the evil presence around her frightened her more than anything.

"Patience, my child" Maleficient replied, her voice mocking a soothing tone. "All shall be explained. I had you brought here for a very specific reason."

At this, the man stood up and glared at the wicked woman. "I have carried out my part of the deal. Now carry out yours!" The Maleficient's only response was a maniacal laugh.

"You don't order me, Sir Valentine," she replied calmly, though Zelda heard a dangerous undertone of

anger in her voice. "But, a deal is a deal," she continued, sighing as if it were below her, "Here is your love."

She turned to one of the pillars and raised her hands. Zelda saw that the bottom of her robes were cut into a pattern that billowed like flames when they moved. A bolt of electricity shot from the orb on her staff and struck the pillar. As it did, the gray colors melted away, revealing an icy blue beneath. Slowly it melted into a tall pillar of glass, and at the bottom, frozen in a standing position, her eyes closed, was Lulu. She looked like she was asleep, and Zelda couldn't believe her eyes. The man rushed over to the pillar, but when he touched the glass, he was thrown back by an invisible force, landing on his side and sent sliding across the polished floor.

Maleficient sneered at the man, who tried to get to his feet, the very air knocked out of him. "You, you said," the man panted, "You said that if I brought the princess you would free her!"

"Yes, but I still have need of you. The way I see it, I am the one in control here. You are in no place to expect anything from me."

The man clenched his fists, then pulled out his blade and dove for Maleficient. "You witch!" he screamed as he dove for her, his sword leading. Maleficient stood calmly, and without moving at all, shot a beam from the orb. It struck the man squarely in the chest, and he hung in the air. The electricity of the beam coursed through him, and his body jerked and trembled with each passing current. The man grunted for a moment, forcing back a scream, but then it forced its way out, and he released a terrible roar of pain.

After a moment, though Zelda felt it to be much longer, the beam disappeared and the man fell to the floor, thin wisps of smoke rising from his groaning body.

Zelda couldn't help but run to him. She knelt beside him, and checked for a pulse. He was still alive, but wasn't moving. Zelda looked down at him, then looked up to Maleficient. She was cackling wildly, holding her stomach. Zelda rose to her feet, and the wicked woman stopped laughing and looked at her.

"Why am I here?" Zelda asked again, this time anger in her voice. She stood straight, ready to attack the woman herself. Maleficient looked at her, her eyes widening slightly.

"I have brought you here to make you a proposition," she explained slyly. Zelda could tell she had something evil in mind. "I want you to rule Hyrule under my instruction."

"What!?"

"Yes, I want you to follow my orders in ruling Hyrule. Then, when the time is right, I shall have you hand the entire kingdom over to me. By that time, the kingdom shall be the way I desire, and I will rule it as I see fit," she explained calmly. Zelda just stared into space, her mind reeling. She couldn't imagine Hyrule in the hands of such a powerful and ruthless queen. "Now, will you help me? If you don't, I have ways to make you, just like that worm over there," she said, pointing at the man. He was struggling back to his feet. Zelda helped the groaning man by letting him lean on her shoulder.

"I will never allow such a thing!" Zelda shouted, when she had helped the man to stand completely.

Maleficient smirked again, and turned to the pillar next to Lulu's. Another beam came from the orb on her staff, and again the stone melted away.

"I knew you would refuse, my dear, so I took the liberty of inviting a special guest; though he wished to refuse my invitation, so I was forced to insist."

As the stone melted away, Zelda saw that her fears were true. Frozen in glass was Link. His handsome face and strong body seemed cold and lifeless to her; she couldn't bear to see him like this.

"Release him," she demanded, then realized that, like the man, she was in no position to demand anything.

"I will release him, after you agree to assist me."

Zelda thought about it. If Link were conscious, he would want sacrifice himself, and Zelda knew that that was the proper thing to do. She could not allow the people of Hyrule to suffer in exchange for one man, but Zelda couldn't help but want him free, even if it cost the kingdom.

When Zelda didn't answer right away, Maleficient grew impatient. "Perhaps I could help make a decision," she suggested, then turned to the pillar and shot a beam at it. Electricity ran through it, and Zelda thought she saw Link's eyes wince slightly.

"Stop!" she cried, running next to Maleficient, "Please, don't hurt him!"

"Then make your choice," Maleficient answered, "He is in quite a bit of pain, and will most likely not survive for much longer."

Zelda didn't know what to do. She couldn't choose, though she knew what the answer was. She just couldn't bring herself to do it. Images of Link flashed through her mind, all the times that she had been brought joy through the young man's actions. She wanted more than anything to go back to the that time in the garden, but only sorrow filled her heart when she knew she couldn't. There was no hope for the two of them.

Suddenly, a bright light appeared on her right hand. Zelda gazed at the glow in wonder, confused. Then the light took form, and Zelda understood what had happened. Glowing warmly on her hand was the Triforce of Wisdom. The man stared in wonder, then said quietly, "Unbelievable."

Zelda felt the power flowing through her, the warm strength of the Golden Power. Suddenly, she felt the power flow out of her, as if separating itself from her. The light of the Triforce drifted into the air, breaking apart and scattering into a thousand tiny pieces, then came together. It became unbearably bright, and those watching had to shield their eyes. When the light dimmed, there was a fourth being in the room.

She stood about as tall as Zelda, and looked remarkably like her, though this woman had longer hair that shimmered like waves in the sea, and her eyes seemed a bit more alluring than Zelda would ever want them. She looked to Zelda, then spoke in a mellodic voice, beautiful and mysterious.

"What is your wish, my master?"

Zelda's eyes widened with surprise, then realised that this was a friend. "Please," she asked desperately, "Please save them," she answered, pointing to Link and Lulu. The woman nodded, then turned to the glass prisons. Maleficient, who had stopped to watch the development of this situation, moved in front of the woman, and Zelda saw the wicked being prepare to attack. Then, the ground began to shake, slightly at first, then slowly built to the point where Zelda had a hard time keeping her and the man on their feet. A rushing sound was heard down the hall the pair had entered by, and Zelda turned around to see a rushing wall of water coming down the hall. It was moving fast, and Zelda tried to move out of the way. When she was unable to, though, she found that panicking was unnecessary. The wave passed right through them, like they weren't even there, and continued on. It passed through the woman as well, but when it reached Maleficient, it roared over her, blasting her against the stone wall, right between the two glass pillars. She did not get up.

The woman opened her mouth and began to sing a single, beautiful note. Zelda didn't understand, but then the note started to go higher, until it reached an unbearable pitch, and Zelda and the man fell to their knees on the floor, trying to cover their ears. Zelda's eyes were wincing shut when she heard a loud cracking sound rising above the piercing sound. She looked up to see a large crack forming and then climbing up Lulu's pillar. It reached just above Lulu's head, then the entire thing shattered, the glass disappearing into thin air before it ever touched the ground. Lulu started to fall forward, her eyes still closed. He had been hurt bad, but the man on Zelda's shoulder grunted and ran forward.

"Lulu," was all he said as he ran to her and caught her. "Lulu, please, say something," he begged.

The note stopping when the glass shattered, the woman turned to Zelda, nodded her head once and disappeared. "Wait," Zelda called, "What about Link?" Link's pillar hadn't been destroyed; not even a crack could be seen on its smooth surface. Zelda ran over to the pillar and placed her hands on the glass, not caring what would happen to her. She gazed at his still form, but then felt a hand on her shoulder. She turned around and saw the man standing there with Lulu at his side. She was smiling, but then she grew serious.

"Zelda, dear, we must go, immediately," she explained.

"Go where?" Zelda asked, turning back to Link. "I'm not leaving without him." A sudden shift off to the side brought the attention of all three, and they saw Maleficient moving.

"Quickly," the man said again, "We need to go!"

"We can't leave him!" Zelda shouted, but before she could say anything else, the man ran over, wrapped his arms around her waist, and dragged her away. She fought to break away, to get back to her love, but found herself unable. She was too overcome with grief, and gave up on trying to get free.

Lulu was on her knees, now fully conscious, and was muttering something as she placed her hands on the black rose on the floor. A black circle appeared around it, and began to spread into a large black hole. The man, still holding the weeping Zelda, stood next to Lulu, and together, the three melted into the floor, and away from Maleficient's grasp.

Zelda didn't notice the travel through the strange portal, which Lulu had opened in the floor for their

escape. The group appeared in a field of brown and gray grass. The sky overhead was clouded and the trees around the area were bare, their gnarled branches pointed and stretching out for the skies. Zelda looked at the grim surroundings and felt that it matched her mood. She felt nothing but loss and despair now. Then she turned and saw him, the man who had taken her from Link.

“You!” she shouted, leaping towards him. She grabbed onto his arm and hair and started to pull and kick in frustration. “I hate you! I hate you! You vile, disgusting-“

The man broke away, then grabbed Zelda's wrists. “That wasn't Link,” he declared loudly. Zelda kept struggling until his words sunk in.

“What do you mean?”

“He's right, Zelda,” Lulu said stepping in, “That wasn't Link. It was a Shadow Spirit.”

Zelda thought on it. Lulu explained that a Shadow Spirit was being of evil that could be shaped into any form its creator chose.

“So Maleficent made one to trick you into helping her,” Lulu reasoned, “She probably couldn't find the real thing.”

“That's good, I guess,” Zelda sighed. “But now, I have more questions, who is he and where are we?”

“My name,” the man said quietly, “is Vincent Valentine. I am a Hallow Knight, and a servant to his majesty, the King of Hallow Bastion.”

“So, is that where we are now,” Zelda asked, “Hallow Bastion?”

“No,” Lulu replied, “Hallow Bastion is the capitol city of the land we are in. This is the land of Macabrenon.”

“Macabrenon,” Zelda echoed, the name sounding familiar to her. “Where is it on a map? You know, compared to Hyrule.”

“Below it,” Vincent replied simply. When Zelda looked confused, he explained. “Macabrenon is a land that is a reflection of Hyrule, though, as you can see, it's a bit darker then the world you know.”

“So, it is an evil realm?” Zelda asked, starting to get nervous. She glanced around at the threatening trees and dead fields, imagining horrors that could be contained within them.

“Well, it does have monsters,” Lulu admitted, “But most are friendly enough. And though the land looks dead, it's just as fertile as Hyrule's land.”

“So, to put it simply,” Zelda sorted through the information, “It's like Hyrule, only the people and lands are darker.”

“That's about right,” Vincent nodded, leaning up against a tree. “So, now that we've gotten you up to

speed on your situation, now I have a question for you.”

“Yes,” Zelda asked, curious about what he wanted to know.

“How long have you been able to summon eidolons?”

“I beg your pardon,” Zelda asked.

“You summoned Siren,” Vincent explained, “I want to know how long you've been able to do that.”

“That was the first time,” Zelda said, guessing that he was talking about that woman who had helped them.

“Strange,” Lulu added thoughtfully, “Usually, summoning abilities come forth at a much younger age. I wonder why they were released now.”

“A question we can answer at a later time,” Vincent interrupted, “Right now, we need to get to Hallow Bastion, and see the king. He needs to be informed of Maleficent's return.” Without another word, he walked off into the spread of trees.

“Is he always like that?” Zelda asked Lulu as they followed behind him.

“Most of the time,” Lulu said, looking at him, “But that's why I like him, and that's why we're engaged.”

“Engaged?” Zelda asked, surprised, “What about Wakka?”

“Who?”

“Never mind,” Zelda answered dismissively, remembering that it wasn't Lulu she had spoken to before.

Zelda thought about what had happened within the past few hours, about how much her life had changed because of one visit and a snow storm. Would this be happening if Link had gotten back sooner? Zelda knew there was no way of knowing if things would be different, and no way of knowing whether Link was alive, but decided that Link was stronger and smarter than that, and she trusted him to stay alive. He had to. She wanted to marry him, she would deny it no longer. She wanted to spend every moment with him, and she wanted to share her life with him. That was all she wanted. She only hoped that Link felt the same.

The three of them walked for about half an hour, and Zelda was beginning to grow weary when they came out of the tree and saw the city of Hallow Bastion. Its great, black onyx walls rose from the ground and they jutted in and out in a strange crooked pattern. Metal spikes were spread out on top of the wall with no real pattern or order. On each spike a pumpkin had been placed, a face carved into each. Lights of different colors shone from inside each one, giving them different seeming emotions, anywhere from comical to frightening.

The gate's bars were crooked as well, mishapenly dropping from an onyx arch. Zelda was almost frightened to approach it, but Vincent walked right up to gate. It opened slowly, creaking eerily as it was

raised up, seemingly all by itself. He turned around, almost dramatically, and spoke to Zelda in a loud voice.

“Welcome, your highness, to Hallow Bastion!”

Maleficient walked down the long halls of Hollow Bastion, her footsteps echoing off the stone walls. She had been summoned by her leige, probably about how the princess had escaped. She knew that he would not be pleased, and he was the only person that Maleficient feared and even more so when he was angry. He would be angry now. She stopped in front of the large stone doors that opened into his throne room, preparing herself for what was to come.

The doors opened on the own, and she heard her master's voice, a powerful, commanding tone, simply order, “Come in, Maleficient.”

She stepped through the doors and into the center of the huge stone room. Her master sat on a bare, stone throne. She looked at his face, his pale, handsome face. It was emotionless, his pale skin accentuated by his long, thick, silver hair, but his brilliant green eyes spoke volumes about his current mood. Maleficient couldn't deny that she found him attractive, for he was, but she would never admit it, for fear of his anger. He gazed at her, an angry scowl buried deep in his eyes, and when Maleficient could bear the silence no more, she spoke.

“You called for me?”

“Indeed,” he answered quietly, “We need to talk.” Maleficient knew what was coming. “Where is the princess?” he asked, Maleficient knowing he knew she had escaped.

“She is not here, Lord Sephiroth,” she answered, bowing slightly. She could predict what was about to happen.

“I know, Maleficient. I also know who is responsible for her escape. Who do you think it is?”

“It was me, my lord.”

“Yes, it was,” he replied quietly. “Now, did the knight and his love escape as well?”

“Yes, my lord,” Maleficient answered through gritted teeth.

“Well, Maleficient, I will not say I told you so, but you should have seen this coming. I could tell instantly by the way you forced the knight and princess to do your bidding that they would look for an escape, and you practically permitted it.”

“I did no such thing,” Maleficient responded, her tone rising, “The princess took me by surprise.”

“See that it doesn't happen again,” Sephiroth said quietly. “If you do, I promise you, Maleficient, that you will wish you were dead, but will be unable to achieve that sweet release.”

“So, what do you wish for me to do? They are beyond my reach now.”

"That is quite alright," Sephiroth answered with a smirk, "I'm not interested in them anymore." Maleficient raised her eyebrow, slightly confused. Sephiroth saw the need for an explanation. "I want to take care of Link now. I foresee him becoming a pest, and since he doesn't know where Zelda is, or how to find her, he'll be within our grasp, endlessly searching this world for her. First, however, I need to claim the throne of Hyrule. With Zelda and her father gone, now is the time to scoop up the power. Then, when Link is removed, none can stand against us."

Maleficient smiled slightly, her eyes showing her wicked mind was working. She returned to the ballroom, the place Zelda had slipped away from her. She walked up to the glass pillar and waved her hand. The pillar melted away, releasing the cold form of Link. He opened his eyes, then shuddered slightly. The imposter Link shrugged his shoulders and the green of his tunic changed into a deep black, and his blue eyes melted into a blood red. He scowled at Maleficient.

"You know I can't stand that look, Maleficient," the Shadow Link growled, referring to the green tunic. "It's too nice. Too much like Link."

"Yes, but it was required," she said, laying a hand on his shoulder. He shrugged it off, then glared at her again.

"And you didn't have to really shock me!" he growled again.

"That too was necessary, but well worth the pain." Shadow Link looked at her confused. "Your reward for aiding me is the one thing you have wanted for a very long time."

The wicked Shadow needed no further explanation. He smiled as he drew his blade. "I will relish seeing my dear other half's blood on this blade," he chuckled.

Maleficient was pleased. With this wicked servant on the job, she no longer had anything to worry about. Now, she could focus on other things.

4 - Into The Darkness

Lulu, Vincent and Zelda entered the dark city, Zelda getting shivers from the dark walls and crooked buildings. Vincent led the way through the dark streets, which had a strange, thin layer of mist just above their cobblestones, and Zelda stayed close to Lulu, unsure of what to expect.

“We should be at the castle soon,” Vincent said quietly over his shoulder. Lulu nodded, and Zelda just sighed. Everything was so complicated. Just yesterday, everything had been normal, peaceful and quiet. But now, she was in a strange land, following a man that had been sent to kill her. She just wanted to wake up. Then she thought of Link, and didn't know where he was. Was he even alive? What if Maleficient had really gotten to him? A tear trickled down Zelda's cheek, and Lulu, seeing her cousin's distress, placed a comforting arm around her. They stepped onto a wide street, which zig-zagged into a strange jagged shape. Further up the street, Zelda could spy a huge castle looming in the fog.

Its tall towers and parapets, rising through a thin layer of mist, had structures matching the crooked look of everything else in town. The bricks were black, and looked rather slick, probably from the mists around the castle. A deep-cut moat around the castle edge was flowing with a strange, almost green, water. A drawbridge was stretched across the moat, and as the three crossed over it, Zelda heard the wood creaking under their collective weight. The wood looked old, and seemed to have a case of termites and dry rot, but Lulu explained that it just looked and sounded that way through a spell. The actual castle gates were closed, the bars bent to resemble a bat while the gate was shut. Vincent pushed slightly on the gate and it opened silently, though the hinges looked rusted. They crossed through the gate and into the courtyard. Instead of passing through the main door, though, Vincent led them around to the side. A small door stood in the wall.

“It's a servant's entrance,” Vincent explained, “I don't want to attract attention right now. We need to be as unobtrusive as possible. Maleficient could have spies even here.” By the look of the place, it wouldn't have surprised Zelda one bit.

Vincent knocked twice on the door, then three times. It opened by itself, and he waved the other two inside. They stepped inside the doorway, and into a dim passageway, lit by a few lanterns. The group followed it to a spiral stair, whose steps looked slanted and about to fall off. It made Zelda nervous at first, but then she remembered that the rest of the city was the same way, so they were probably solid. This, however, was not enough reason for her to not grip the handrail tightly while climbing, though.

The top seemed to be a dead end, but Vincent slid the wall away, like a curtain, and stepped through an elevated exit into another hall. When Zelda followed, she turned to see they had come from behind a portrait hanging on the wall. She was startled as it slid back into place on its own, and quickly caught up with Lulu and Vincent.

“Where are we going?” Zelda asked, breaking the long silence.

“To see his majesty. We need to report all that has happened,” Lulu reminded her.

"We also need for you to meet him," Vincent added, "If we are to overcome this threat, we shall have to work together, both Hyrule and Macabrenon. Therefore, meeting with the king will be key."

"I see," Zelda nodded. She was nervous, but also quite curious about what the king of such a dark land would be like. She imagined him being something like Vincent, tall, dark and handsome, though she couldn't be sure of that. He might be just as strange as his capital city, so Zelda only grew more nervous with every step.

"Why are the halls so empty?" she asked, hoping to relieve some of her anxiety.

"It is Hallow's Eve," Lulu answered, "The day before our biggest holiday. Everyone in the castle is off duty for the next few days in celebration. There are very few in the castle who do not have somewhere to be on Hallow's Day."

Before Zelda could answer, Vincent stopped in front of a set of large, ornate wooden doors. The doors were carved with bats and spiders, thorns and pumpkins and Zelda thought that it was strangely pleasing. The wood shimmered slightly in the light of the flickering torches, giving the carvings an eerie light. Vincent knocked on the doors, and they opened slowly. As they creaked open, Vincent turned to Zelda.

"Now, the king will need to be informed of Maleficient first, then you should ask for an allegiance. His majesty likes to know the details of things before getting the big picture."

"I can understand that," Zelda answered.

"Good," Vincent nodded.

"Oh," Lulu added, "When you see him, don't act...surprised."

"But why-?" but she couldn't finish her question. Vincent led the group through the doors and into the throne room.

The throne room was rather small, with one set of double door to the left of the throne. A square table, with nine chairs around it, sat in the middle of the room. The group approached the table, and as they did, the doors slammed shut behind them. Zelda jumped and turned around, her breath leaping out of her. Vincent and Lulu kept walking, but threw knowing smiles to one another. Zelda followed hesitantly, the hairs standing up on the back of her neck. She was about to reach Lulu when the lights suddenly went out. She stumbled about in the dark, looking for her cousin, but succeeded in only stubbing her foot against the table. She placed her hand on the table, then used it to lead herself around. She had just reached a corner when a hand grabbed her's. It grasped tightly, and Zelda realized from the feel of the hand that it was skeletal. She jerked away in revulsion, then felt another boney hand on her shoulder. She turned around slowly, but saw nothing but black behind her. Suddenly, a ghastly white skull appeared out of thin air, then whispered one word.

"Boo."

Zelda screamed, not loud or long, but a scream of fright none the less. The face disappeared, as well as the hand, and the lights came back up.

Standing before her was a tall thin man, or more precisely, a skeleton. He was dressed in a long pinstripe suit and pants with a bat bowtie. His skull wasn't as scary now, and though there were no eyes in his sockets, they still seemed kind. He had a huge grin on his skull, and behind her, she heard Lulu and Vincent sharing a chuckle.

"So, do I still have it?" the skeleton asked Vincent, approaching him and shaking his hand.

"Yes, your majesty," he answered. "You still have it."

"Thank you, thank you," the skeleton replied, bowing graciously. He walked up to the throne and sat down. "So, who is this young lady?" he asked.

"I am Princess Zelda of Hyrule," Zelda answered, remembering her manners. She wanted to make a comment about him scaring her, but decided to restrain herself.

"And I am Jack," the skeleton replied, "Jack, the Pumpkin King. A pleasure to make your acquaintance. Please, call me Jack."

"Likewise, and thank you Jack," Zelda said. She knew what it was like to want to be referred to by first name.

Vincent stepped forward, next to Zelda. "Your majesty, I hate to interrupt, but I bear grave news," he said. He paused for continuing, and Zelda couldn't help but wonder if the news was hard to say or if Vincent was just being dramatic, " Maleficient has returned."

Jack sat quietly, his cheerful face suddenly taking on a serious and contemplative set. "Are you sure of this?" he asked, looking up at Vincent.

"Indeed, your majesty, I have spoken with her myself. She had captured Lulu, and used her to force me into following her plans."

"It's good to see you both safe," Jack answered, "But how does she play into this?" he asked, indicating Zelda.

"Maleficient was going to try to conquer the land of Hyrule through Zelda, and threatened to kill her love if she didn't."

"Was he saved?"

"It was not really him," Vincent answered, "We believe that he is still alive."

"Good," Jack nodded, though Zelda still wasn't sure. She still had no idea where he was, let alone if he was alive. "I don't want to see anyone hurt." Jack sighed, then rested his elbow on the arm of the throne and his skull in his hand, tapping his boney finger on his chin. It made a quiet clicking sound that filled

the the small throne room. After a few moments, he snapped his fingers, which sounded more like cracking knuckles than a finger snap. It gave Zelda chills.

"I will call a meeting of the Hallow Knights. We shall decide what to do then."

"Very well," Vincent said, bowing slightly. "But, when?"

"Well, I think we shall have to wait. The situation is dire, but remember that today is Hallow's Eve. I am required at the celebrations tonight and tomorrow, and no one likes to discuss such heavy matters on a holiday," the Pumpkin King reasoned. "It would be easier to focus if the holidays were over."

"But, your majesty, this situation is dire. We need to lay plans now," Vincent said, sounding almost exasperated.

"I understand Vincent, but I also know you. You can be too serious sometimes. You just got back, your fiance was kidnapped and her highness has been through a great ordeal as well. I think it would be best for you all to rest, at least for a little while."

Vincent was about to say something, when Zelda jumped in. "I agree," she said, "We cannot be of any help if we are tired, Sir Valentine." It was strange saying it, for she had never really referred to him by his name before, "Besides, you would be giving Maleficient one more victory by letting her interrupt your most important holiday." She didn't like saying that, and to a certain extent, she was lying. She didn't feel a rest was truly necessary, but she also knew about people like Vincent. Steiner was the same way, and would work himself to exhaustion sometimes.

"Excellent," Jack said jovially, "I'll expect to see you at the celebrations tonight, then! Lulu, could you please help her dress appropriately, though?" he asked, looking the princess up and down. "I'm afraid, even dressed as you are, you will stand out in a crowd here in Hallow Bastion." Zelda looked down at her clothes and remembered she was still in her sheikah clothes. She grinned sheepishly at the king. "Perhaps you should see Sally," he suggested. "Yes, that's an excellent idea! She fix you up in no time."

Lulu nodded in agreement, "Indeed, there is no better seamstress in all of Macabrenon."

"Be sure and tell her when you see her," Jack said. Lulu walked to the doors behind the throne, and Zelda followed behind, giving her farewell to Jack. She turned back to see Vincent walking out the main doors, a dark look on his face. As they walked down the hallway, Zelda couldn't help but ask, "So, will Vincent be alright?"

"Yes," Lulu sighed fondly, "He just pouts like that when he is ordered to stop working. He also doesn't like being referred to as Sir Valentine, so you may want to refrain from saying that."

"Alright," Zelda agreed. "Now, who is this Sally?"

"Oh," Lulu said, seemingly at a loss of words, "She's the king's wife."

"Is she...you know, a skeleton as well?"

“No, she's not. She's a..a,” Lulu said, searching for the right word, “She's a doll.”

“A what?”

“She's a rag doll,” Lulu said, giving up on finding a better word. “She was made and brought to life by a scientist named Doctor Finklestein. He stitched her together and stuffed her with leaves, then gave her life.”

Zelda listened to the description, and it seemed a bit repulsive. How could someone make a person by stitching together cloth? And how did she move if she was filled with leaves?

“She has a heart and brain,” Lulu added, guessing at Zelda's confusion, “And speaks just like anyone else. It's just that she was made instead of born. She is an excellent seamstress, partly because she is very creative, and partly because she's had a lot of practice. You see, because she's stitched together, there are times when she can...come apart. So, she just stitches herself back together and keeps going.”

It all sounded rather gruesome to Zelda, even more so by the way Lulu explained it so easily, like it was nothing really extraordinary, but it seemed to fit in with the rest of the strange land, who had a skeleton for a king, and purposely looked creepy and twisted. Yes, it all seemed very normal in this world.

The two reached a door, behind which they could hear the whirring sounds of a sewing machine. Lulu knocked on the door, then opened it gently. Inside was a long room with clothing racks along the walls. In the center sat a woman hard at work at a sewing machine. The woman had long, red hair, but instead of falling down in strands, like normal hair, it was like long strips of red cloth. The dress she was wearing was just a conglomeration of different colored and patterned scraps of cloth, sewn together with large, visible stitches. The woman looked up to see her two guests and smiled. As she rose from her seat, Zelda saw that her skin was almost a dark blue-green and there were stitched circles around her wrists, elbows, ankles, neck and the corners of her mouth.

“Oh, Lulu, how are you?” the woman asked quietly.

“Fine, Sally,” she answered, “I can see you're busy, but I'm afraid I have a request for you.”

“It's quite alright,” Sally replied, pushing the dress she was working on aside. “Now, how can I help you?”

“I need you to make two dresses for my cousin here,” she explained, motioning to Zelda, “She needs one for Hallow's Eve and Hallow's Day.”

“No problem,” Sally smiled, “Could you come stand here?” she asked, leading Zelda to a stool. Zelda stepped up, and Sally took measurements. After she wrote down the numbers, she turned back to Zelda. “Now, was there something in particular you had in mind?”

“She needs something for the party tonight and the ball tomorrow,” Lulu reminded.

Zelda did have an idea, so she cast a spell, changing her clothes from the sheikah outfit into her normal,

white gown. "Something like this, if you don't mind."

"Yes, I can see that," Sally said thoughtfully. "And for tonight?"

"How about—" but Zelda stopped herself. She was going to say simple, something plain and conservative. Then, when she thought about it, she realized that now, she had no one to worry about. There was no one to tell her what to wear, no one to decide what was right or not. Now, Zelda would never wear anything inappropriate, but she now saw that she had gained some freedoms by coming here. "I think," Zelda started again, "I think I want something like that." She pointed towards a book of dresses lying next to the sewing machine. The dress was actually a black and red corset, but two long straps rose from the top of the corset and wrapped about the neck. There were no sleeves, but instead there were long, fishnet gloves that came up to above the elbow. The bottom of the dress went down to the feet, and the fabric was a dark, blood-red damask with black-work that looked like spiderwebs.

Sally looked up at Zelda, thinking, then turned to one of the clothing racks. She looked through it until she found a dress that looked exactly like the one Zelda wanted. "I made this last year," Sally explained, "I had made it for another woman, but she never claimed it. I think it might fit you just fine."

Zelda felt rather strange, wearing a commission from someone else, but at least it was popular.

As she changed, she couldn't help but feel like she was doing wrong. Link was probably worried sick about her, and here she was, trying on dresses and going to parties like nothing was wrong. If only there was some way to contact him, to let him know she was okay.

"Well, there isn't," she said to herself, "And since there isn't, there's no use in feeling guilty about it. It's not your fault you can't get back and that you're here, so stop worrying." But no matter how much she reassured herself, she just couldn't dismiss the small pang of guilt in the back of her mind.

Zelda stepped out from behind the changing curtain in her outfit. Lulu nodded in approval, and Sally checked the fit and look. When she was satisfied, Lulu paid her and led Zelda back to her own room. Lulu felt that Zelda needed to do something about her hair, so she fussed with it for a while.

She ended up shortening it, just above neck-length and dyed it red. After that, she used a face paint around her eyes and made it look like there were spider webs edging her now red violet eyes.

Needless to say, when Zelda saw the complete turn around, she was slightly disturbed, but then decided to follow the old saying, "When in Labryna, do as the Labrynnians do."

As the two headed back to the main gate, Zelda once again felt the pangs of guilt, but was able to push through it, telling her self that he would probably want her to not worry about him.

Upon returning to the city, Zelda and Lulu found it bustling with life, or rather, death. All the citizens were walking corpses, and although Zelda was again shocked, she quickly found herself adjusting. Besides, not all of the people were dead. Lulu grabbed Zelda's hand and led the way to a small building with a sign reading, "The Ball and Socket," explaining that it was the best place to go for a pre-Hallow's Eve party.

Inside, more corpses were at the rough, wooden tables, and a skeleton band was playing up on the stage. Lulu sat down at a table with a skrawny man. His long arms and legs were almost bone thin, and his pale face was even more gaunt than Vincent's. A spiky patch of brown hair with blond roots sat on his head, and two, thin pony tails ran down his back all the way to his hips. Along his left arm was a metallic claw, just like Vincent's. He turned to look at Lulu, and Zelda saw that his eyes were cold, a deadly, sadistic cold. Behind his red eyes, Zelda saw a madness, one that she felt drawn to.

"Zelda," Lulu said, "I would like you to meet Albel Nox, another knight in the Hallow Knights."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Zelda said politely. Albel didn't respond, and just snorted indignantly. Lulu frowned at the man, then raised her voice.

"Albel, how dare you be so rude!?"

"Easy," he responded, "By sitting here and ignoring you worms."

Zelda gasped. Never had she heard such a rude statement. Before she could stop herself, she slapped the man across the face, leaving a red mark on his cheek. He turned to her, his red eyes burning as hot as the slap on his face.

"That's awful brave of you, worm. Perhaps you aren't as pitiful as I thought."

"Excuse me!? How dare you?! You nasty person! You are positively vile!" Zelda couldn't believe the things coming out of her mouth. Never would she have said such things when she was home.

"And you have the biggest mouth I've ever seen," he answered coldly, "At least, for a woman."

It was all Zelda could do to fight back an explosion of rage. Her face was turning red, and when she caught a glimpse of Albel's smirk, her fist flew forward at his face. Before it got close, his hand flew up and caught her by the wrist.

"I would watch your temper, madam," he said, twisting her wrist and then releasing it.

Zelda huffed as she stormed off, Lulu following behind with a stunned look on her face. "Zelda, what was that?"

"I don't know," she answered, "But I must admit that it was quite exciting."

"Zelda, are you feeling alright?"

"I don't know," she said, placing a hand on her head. Never had she felt that way. If she had been home, she would have been forced to contain such emotions, but here, far from home, she was able to express herself as she wished. Perhaps this new discovery was something she needed to control, but why should she? If she could be the way she wanted to, without anyone to tell her how to act, as long as she remained a somewhat noble person, why did she have to put up with that sort of behavior? Well, no more. The sweet Zelda was gone, at least for now, and in her place was a tough as nails, cold-shoulder bearing, Zelda, ready to show this world just how dark and cold she could be.

“Oh, I'm terribly sorry,” Zelda apologized as she bumped into a corpse waitress in a wedding dress. Perhaps being rude was tougher than she thought.

Lulu got Zelda to a table, then said that she needed to be excused. She told Zelda to meet her by the water fountain in the town square at thirteen o'clock. Before Zelda could ask what she meant by thirteen o'clock, she walked off, leaving Zelda in a club surrounded by the living dead. She looked around, confused and somewhat frightened, when a cloaked and hooded figure approached. The cowl of the figure's hood was pulled so tight that it completely covered his face. Zelda shrunk back a bit, especially when the figure sat down in the chair across from her. The light above them revealed the lips of the stranger and illuminated his lavender-colored eyes. The man's lips and chin were an ebony color and a few strands of white hair fell out the front of the cowl.

“Can I help you?” Zelda asked, still unsure of her visitor.

“No, not really,” the man said, “I would simply like to enjoy your company. Besides, the other tables are full.”

Zelda chuckled slightly, then decided to be nice. This gentleman seemed so much better than Albel, so she would pursue the conversation.

“Are you from around here?” she asked shyly.

“Yes, but you aren't.”

“How can you tell?”

“Your skin, it's a golden color. People around here are generally pale.”

“Well, if I may say,” Zelda returned, “From what I can see, you aren't exactly pale yourself.”

The man chuckled, then said, “That is true, I suppose,” and with that, the man removed his hood, and when Zelda saw him she gasped. Sitting before her was a dark elf. His face was an ebony color and his eyes a vibrant lavender. A thick mane of white hair framed his face.

“Yes, I am a dark elf. Please, think what you will, but please, don't think ill of me.”

Zelda knew well the stories of dark elves, and their wicked ways. She was about to jump up and leave, but then realized that if he was dangerous, he wouldn't have realized himself in public. Besides, she had only stories to rely on, and she didn't like to judge by appearances anyway. Besides, he was rather dashing. No, what was she thinking? She was practically engaged!

“So, how long have you been here?” the elf asked.

“Several hours,” Zelda answered. She wasn't too sure on what to say, so she just answered honestly.

“Well, welcome to Hallow Bastion.”

“Thank you.”

“If you're new here, why don't you let me show you around town, if that's alright.”

Zelda thought about it. She had wanted to see the city, and would not want to go by herself, but could she trust a dark elf, even if he did seem genuinely chivalrous?

“I would love to,” Zelda decided. She was a big girl, she could take care of herself.

“Excellent,” the drow exclaimed. He rose from his seat and offered his dark hand to her. She grasped it in her's and followed him out of the club.

“May I ask your name?” Zelda said, realizing that she didn't even know the man.

“My name is Drizzt Do'Urden, Third Knight of the Hallow Knights.”

Zelda smiled at her handsome and dashing guide as he led her around the dark city of Hallow Bastion.