

Winged Darkness

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A call from the abyss, the awakening of the forbidden... The chasm of darkness grows as he learns to love her, who is cursed by a demon... and the wings of shadow envelop him like a shroud. It is the beckoning of Winged Darknes... [LxZ] R&R! :D

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1 - Prologue

Prologue

Foreboding wind howled in the air as it curved around the frigid trees of the tall and dark wood. The leaves gave disturbing whispers as they hung on the branches shaped into crude forms. The wind continued to blow at the top of the trees and it worked its way down to their feet continuously howling. The branches swayed side to side, creaking, as the freezing wind pushed against them. Suddenly, one fell to the ground of dead leaves and was silenced. However, its stillness did not last long when someone laid a foot on top of it, and cracked it under his boot.

A cloaked figure walked in the forest, clutching his robe in the front, closing his chest off, in an attempt to hold the cold at bay. The leaves crunched under his feet, cracking and becoming mangled into odd shapes. His cloak blew backward as a sudden strong gust of wind blew and he looked up to find a small bald spot in the forest. However, on this bald spot was a stone platform surrounded by pillars of marvelous workmanship, but alas, it was withering away from the wind knocking against them. The man drew back his hood and looked to the center of this place. This man had fierce golden eyes that could frighten even the strongest of men and send chills down their spine. His hair was a fiery red while his skin was a shade of a sickly green.

He gave a crooked smile as he spotted an altar in the center of the stone platform. On this was a marvelous glowing stone, shedding a dark light into the forest, giving it an eerie feeling. Slowly he came forward and stopped himself when he was but a little distance away from where the glowing light would touch him. The cloaked man raised his right arm and snapped his fingers- the sudden sound echoing throughout the wood, disturbing the threatening conversation between the trees and the wind. As he did so, a dark light of his own was illuminated around just his right arm, as if to be shielding it. The man continued to step forward, closer and closer toward the stone.

At last he was within reach and he gently set his right hand onto the gem and gently lifted it so it would be lying within his palm. He gingerly curled his fingers around its smooth surface and covered it entirely so only light was coming through the cracks between his fingers. The cloaked figure smiled- it had worked. Savoring his victory, he opened his hand and looked upon the glowing star which lay on his palm. He admired its beauty, and grew anxious to put it to use.

However, the thoughts of his plans were cut short when he had heard flapping in the air. The man looked up and scowled to find flying figures coming toward him. They had discovered his intentions. Just as they were about to swoop down and grasp him, with a wave of his left hand, the man cast a temporary invisible barrier. They were warded off long enough for him to escape with the stone and start heading toward the boundaries of the forest. It wasn't long until he heard the continuous flapping of wings behind him, however. The man began to pick up his pace. He was *not* going to give up this stone... he had been anticipating this moment for far too long...

The forest was now howling and roaring, now sensing the disturbance in its midst. Now everything

became uneasy and tense as the chase was dragged on. The man looked ahead to find a barrier just at the boundry of the forest. Blast! He had hoped it would stay open when he had broken in before. He crossed his fingers after he had waved his left hand to open the barrier, hoping it would work as well as his right. To his relief, it had worked and there was an opening for him to go through. He leapt forward and crossed the barrier and into the quiet stillness outside the cursed forest which spoke against the safe havens of the world. The man looked back and smiled- he had lost the stone's flying guardians.

He crawled behind a large rock to rest a bit. The use of all this magic to break even more powerful spells wore him out. The man sat back, leaning his back against the rock and sighed with relief. Once again he opened his palm to find the stone, safely in his hand and still intact. He was delighted at the thoughts of his plans to use this marvelous thing. Just as he was about to stand up, the light around his right arm was overpowered by the darkness of the star and it smothered it, putting it out. Suddenly the man felt a stinging pain in his right arm, dropping the stone to the ground and quickly standing up.

He clutched to his arm, which seemed to shake violently, inflating and deflating in various places. Surges of energy dashed throughout his right arm as he continued to squeeze it with his left. Eventually he fell to his knees a ways away from the stone and leaned forward, putting almost all his weight onto his arm, trying to cease the strange phenomenon. Eventually it had eased after a blue fire had surrounded it temporarily and went out, leaving a cloud of smoke rising from it and an unpleasant sizzling sound. The man cursed under his breath as he lifted his gaze from his arm to the gem which lay on the ground.

It had glowed a bit brighter to the point where it had flashed and beams of dark light shot from it. Suddenly glowing orbs began to fly into the air and disperse from each other off into all directions. Eventually, the last orb had at last dashed off into the distance and the star at last dimmed its glow, but still its eerie presence remained. Now the man slowly stood to his feet, still keeping his eyes on the stone. He would not touch it again, for he did not want to become tainted even further with its dark light. However, it annoyed him that he had come this far only to have the stone slip out of his grasp. He turned his back to the stone and looked back at it one last time before running off into the shadows of the night, the wind blowing and howling, as if mocking the man to have disturbed the power of this one star.

2 - In the Beginning

In the Beginning

"...for beautiful glistening wings... and your soul..."

A man with pale blonde hair and pearl-white skin with eyes so dark they seemed black walked out of his small thatched roof home and walked forward before tapping his sandals. As he walked out he breathed in deeply, inhaling the wonderful scent of his rural village, and let out a content sigh. He looked around to find children skipping around the dirt roads as usual while their fathers tended to the crops and animals while their mothers took care of matters inside the house. The man stepped forward as a gentle gust of wind blew some of the hair slightly covering his right eye back to the side of his face, brushing his soft cheek.

The old village was busy that morning- when the sun peeked over the mountains to greet the blue sky, both banishing the dark of the night. Some farmers who were not in their fields at the time stood behind stands selling what they had harvested the day before. The road coughed dust in the air when passing horses would stomp upon it, where there would be riders returning from their trips to get supplies from the cities. There was a river running throughout the village where at the end was a water mill and as the young man walked along-side the river, his reflection danced along the surface of the water, bathed in the morning light.

At last he had come to the far-end of the village where he could see a small house with an enclosed fence next to it where there were many horses therein where they were in an open area. This house was on the edge of the village, which lay in a meadow surrounded by tall evergreens, so one could go out and lay under the shade. The man saw a small stable in the distance and he approached it, a smile crossing his face. As he drew closer, a young girl with golden hair tied back into pig tails came out of the stable struggling to carry a pail of milk. The man took amusement in this when studying the facial expressions she gave.

"Aryll, is Link in the stable?"

The young girl named Aryll looked up at the young man and smiled, "Yes, he is!" She said before resuming her grueling walk to the house next to the stable.

The young man walked in, at last being shielded from the sun's bright light, and once his eyes adjusted he saw his friend there. He was moving straw from a pile to where the large cows remained. The cows seemed to remain emotionless, moving their jaws slowly back and forth to chew on the straw given to them. Eventually the man raised his hand and smiled.

"Hey, Link! You're up to doing chores already?"

"Hey, Vaati! Why aren't *you* doing chores already?"

"Some farmer wives demanded they fish in my place today. They said they want to know what their husbands go through every day even though they farm out in the fields... those farmer wives, I tell you... they can be really tough sometimes." Vaati continued, "But it's nice... no work the whole day other than at late afternoon where I have to sell the fish before those wives cook dinner."

Link chuckled a little bit, stabbing his pitchfork into the pile of straw once again, "Well, that's no excuse for you to not do chores..." Link started.

"Oh, no, Link... you wouldn't!"

"I most certainly *would!*" Vaati could see Link's facial expression growing more and more suspicious, "It would mess up your daily routine. If you don't do anything today, you might become slothful the days to come! So..." Link paused for a moment, looking around the stable, "Milk the cows."

"Aw, Link!" Vaati whined.

He approached one of the cows anyway, and sat on the little stool next to it. He had taken another pail and placed it below the cow. From there he began to milk it. Even so, Vaati smiled. He looked toward Link once again to find him resuming his task. The cracks in the ceiling let only a ray of sunlight through and it touched Link's golden hair, making each lock shine brightly. His pale skin glistened as his blue eyes sparkled for a moment.

"You sure have changed since you first came into this village." Vaati suddenly said turning back toward the cow, "We were both eight right? It's been twelve years."

Link leaned the pitchfork against the wall, "Even if it has been twelve years, I still don't remember much from the time before I came here. All I remember is a bright light and that's it... then I remember waking up and finding myself looking up at mother's face." He stroked his hand along the wall of the stable, "Even if this place might not be my real home and family, I want to stay here forever."

Vaati took a fist and placed it in his palm, "Link, I got it! Maybe you were smitten in the face!" He started, "Like when you have scuffles in the street! You know how your vision sometimes flashes..."

Link interrupted him, laughing, "I really doubt it's that, but who knows!"

They were interrupted by a voice at the entrance of the stable, "Big brother, why did you let Vaati do my job?" She said stomping over next to Vaati, "That's my job! Shoo! Shoo!" She said pushing on Vaati's shoulder.

Link stared at the two as Vaati stood up chuckling at little Aryll as she plopped herself on the little stool, ready to milk the cow. The present time suddenly left him, fading to the back of his unconscious mind as his eyes saw another image.

A ball fell at his feet and bounced only a little ways when they had hit his sandals. He bent over,

reaching out his hands and gently placed them on the sides of the ball, while his sun-kissed hair, now bathed in moonlight, fell in front of his eyes. As he lifted himself up and raised his head, hair now drifting to the sides of his face, footsteps scurried over to him. The owners of those feet that had quickly ran to him were boys his age. He now stood in the middle of their group, eyes all on him. Thinking they would offer for him to play with them, he flexed his elbows, stretching out his arms and offering it to the boy in front of him, smiling.

"Get out of here, you freak!" He replied.

The smile on his face fell to a frown as another boy pushed him, "That mark on your hand only means you are trouble!"

"That's right!" Another added, "He came out of no where- coming into this village with no life behind him and that mark on his hand."

"Freaks like you shouldn't be here!!"

They pushed him on the ground, the ball flying out of his hands and bounced off away from them. Pain suddenly hit him in the stomach as he was scraped along the ground. A tear left his eye as he realized no adults would come for him, they were too busy celebrating in their festival. The mixture of voices drowned out his screams. The boys had left him, trembling on the ground holding onto his stomach that was tight with ache.

"Good for nothing..." One of them muttered as they walked away and picked up their ball to go play in another place.

Quick gasps passed his lips as he tried to stand himself up. However, his knees gave in and they collapsed, causing him to fall to the coarse sand once again. Suddenly he felt an arm wrap around his and help him up. He turned his head toward the face of the one who had lifted him to his feet. He smiled and said,

"I don't care about your mark either if it's good luck or bad luck. My name's Vaati. I'll be your friend!"

It had been exactly twelve years since that day.

"Link!"

Link turned his head toward Vaati, who had taken Aryll off and once again seated himself in it. She was wrestling with him, and was now clung onto his shoulders and wrapped her legs around his torso. It was surprising that the cow didn't react to this activity. Link smiled and put the pitchfork against the wall and held a fist in the air.

"Get him, Aryll!"

"What- that's not fair!" Vaati said in between chuckles.

The little blonde girl then pulled herself onto his shoulders and covered his eyes. Loosing one sense, Vaati lost his sense of balance and fell backward, as Aryll quickly moved. Link always thought she could be a monkey, that crazy little girl. Vaati acted like he was dead for a short while and the only thing that was heard in that very short moment of silence was the cow chewing on its straw. Aryll then crawled on top of Vaati and wrapped herself around him, thinking that would stop him from moving. However, Vaati got the upper-and when he set his fingers on her ribs and began tickling her. She shrieked and flew off him as Vaati stood up. Being the determined girl she was, Aryll charged at Vaati and wrapped herself around his leg.

"All right, Aryll, that's enough." Link finally said as he almost literally dragged Aryll off of Vaati's leg.

She then began giggling as she now lay on the floor, surrounded by straw. The other two eventually broke out into laughs again. Link took his hand and slapped it onto the back of Vaati's shoulder.

"Wrestling with a five year old and almost loosing... shows how much of a man you are!" Link blurted.

"Hey!" Vaati said slapping him on the back. For a moment, there was unorganized sound until Vaati took a deep breath, "The reason why I really came was to ask if you could help me out in preparing for the festival. The miller asked me to help him... lot's of fish to catch! You know how many people get fish at this time of year."

"Well, it's tradition to eat a fish the night of the festival, that's why they do it. I'll help you once I finish my chores here... but in return, you have to help *me!*"

Vaati sighed, "Fine, then..."

So that day, they had fed and milked the cows (with Aryll's help) and brushed the horses. They also had given them their daily share of oats, which was like a special treat to them and cleaned the bottom of their hooves. Link and Vaati also had spent some of their time training the new young horses. After washing and rubbing the saddles, rugs and reins, they moved on to Vaati's fishing chores. They spent

three whole hours sitting on the shore of the lake, listening to stories constantly from the old miller. They had come up with competitions on who could catch the biggest fish, while the old man rambled on.

When Link and Vaati had finished all their chores and finished doing their part for preparations for the festival, they rested on a hill looking down on their small farming village. They had picked some mint leaves to chew on from a small patch and now were looking down on the village, watching the people light torches and make last-minute preparations. Vaati looked around himself and saw the fireflies set ablaze and twirling in the air, turning in directions one would not expect.

"Link," He started, leaning forward and putting the stem of the mint leaf in his mouth, "Do you remember the Glimmering Princess?"

"The one who flies across the sky every year, returning from a journey? Yeah, I remember."

"Some say that she's going to return to the castle tonight! It would be good luck if she flew over our village... the glimmering light she leaves behind will surely bless the village with another good year."

"Hm..." Link said, as he stuffed another mint leaf into his mouth and began to chew it. He leaned back on his hands and looked up at the sky, seeing the glowing stars above him. They stared down at him, blinking just as eyes would, "I wonder what she looks like..."

"What?" Vaati said, rather curious of the question.

"She looks like any other maiden, right? When we see her, she just seems to be a light with wings flying across the sky... but I wonder what she looks like when you're actually looking into her eyes..." Link started, "I wonder if she's beautiful?"

"Oh, Link..." Vaati said stuffing a handful of mint leaves into his mouth and shivered from the sudden burst in flavor, "There you go day dreaming again... there's one thing for certain, though..."

"And what's that?"

Vaati turned toward Link and sneered, "We'll be seeing *plenty* of pretty girls tonight!"

A torch was set in front of the large pile of wood, and it had caught fire. It had later burst into a flame and the multitude surrounding it cheered for joy. This was the fiftieth time a bonfire like this was lit... it was the fiftieth year of the survival of this village. That is when the festival started, and as soon as the fire was lit, people began to burst into activity. Dancing couples moved around the fire as children played in a close distance while those who loved the thrill of shopping went to the separate booths to search for goods. Lanterns were hooked on strings, which went roof to roof. Torches were lined on the street so people would be able to see easily.

Link and Vaati stood and watched the pile of wood burn with flames that rose higher and higher. The very sight of it would send one into awe, wondering how a thing such as that could possibly exist. Suddenly all knowledge leaves one's mind, and they wonder about such marvelous things as questions fill their mind. Gazing upon these things brings one to realize how ignorant they are.

"Link, you and Vaati can go and do whatever you want," an old woman standing near Link said suddenly, "I'll take Aryll."

Aryll went ecstatic and grasped the old woman's hand, "Come on, grandma!"

Link waved his hand as he watched the old woman walk off with Aryll, "Bye, Grandma."

After she had gone off, Vaati slapped a hand onto Link's shoulder and chuckled, "That was the *exact* thing I wanted your grandmother to say..."

"What do you- ah!" Link was startled by the sudden mischievous look in Vaati's eyes.

His sneer, one would think, would be amusing if it was just spoken of. If you were to see it with your own eyes, you would then be greatly disturbed as well as suspicious. It was the mischievous look. The look telling you that he was going to do something no one would expect. Although Link knew very well what he was planning right after he saw those eyes reflecting the firelight.

"Girls, right?" Link said flatly.

Vaati nodded, "Now don't just stand there start looking! I'm going to see if I can find Malon anywhere..."

Malon was considered to be one of the most beautiful girls in the village. Every young man had his eye out for her. Oh, they would give anything to hold her hand and waist and move their feet along with hers in dance. Supposedly the thing that attracted them to her the most was her long fiery red hair and sapphire blue eyes. The way the men described her was that her face was so angelic, it seemed angels themselves flew down from heaven, carrying her in their arms and gently setting her down on the earth, a light still glowing above her head.

To Link's surprise, Vaati *did* find her and immediately, he commenced his "pretty boy prettiness".

"Malon! You are looking *very* beautiful in that festival dress tonight!"

"How flattering!" She replied, turning from her group of friends, "It took me a while to make."

"Oh, what talent you have! Surely you're single?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you like to marr-"

Even before he could finish the word, "marry", he felt a sharp and brief pain brush across his cheek. He was slapped by Malon. In fact, she had struck him so hard that he stumbled backward and Link had to catch him before he would fall to the ground. Vaati rubbed his cheek, with a tear forming in his right eye.

"Ow... That's going to be swollen."

Even so, one slap did not stop Vaati and he continued to flirt with every single girl in sight. Link pitied

him for all those bruises he received in the face, but he began to wonder if he deserved it. Finally, Vaati gave up and plopped himself on the ground.

"Gosh, this is harder than I thought..." He started, "I mean, look at me! You'd think for my beautiful face I would attract at least *one* decent girl..."

Link laughed, "Admit it, Vaati, I'm much better with the ladies than you!" Link then put his finger to his bottom lip, "Besides... your face is completely red right now..." He then began to chuckle, showing off his pearl-white teeth.

"Hey! That's not funny!"

They were interrupted by a call in the crowd, "Look! The princess returns!"

Immediately, everyone looked up to the sky, gazing into the darkness, plotted with silver stars. This shadow was soon overtaken and the stars put to shame when a glowing light suddenly appeared in the sky. It appeared to have bright golden wings, sending sparkles flying into the air as they flapped and shaped the wind. Link looked up in awe as she flew overhead, the Glistening Princess glowing bright as ever. He began to daze as the his surroundings suddenly seemed to disappear and all the talking fading into silence. The only thing he noticed, as if it was the only thing in the world, was the Glistening Princess.

"I wonder what her real face looks like..." He wondered.

3 - Tainted

Tainted

The sun rose with a gentle and light warmth in the cold of the morning. The birds greeted the sun, chirping their songs as they bathed in the dew in the grass. Light clouds cast dim shadows over the meadows, moving gently along the wind. Rays of light shone through the glass, and brushed Link's face as he lay sleeping and his face glistened as if he were an angel. He tightened his eyes for a moment, flinching, and then relaxed his face before slowly opening his eyes. Link saw the ceiling above him and he sat up from his bed, now looking to the wall. He had blinked twice before raising his arms and stretching and yawning. He slowly swung his legs over the side of the bed and used his hands to push himself off so he would be standing up. There was a lot of work to do that day.

It had been several days since the festival ended and Link had been working less as of late. Today was the day he had to catch up on his work. Link realized that when he opened the door to his room that led out into the hallway, which split off to separate rooms for their own uses. He headed toward the kitchen, where he smelled the scent of porridge. When he walked in to meet his grandmother and sister he let out a heavy satisfied sigh.

"Good morning." He said sitting down at the table next to his sister.

"Good morning, Link. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, very well, thank you."

"Ha, ha... someone is going to have a lot of work to do today..." Aryll said slouched over her bowl of porridge.

"Now, Aryll," her grandmother said, putting a bowl of porridge in front of Link, who had licked his lips and gathered up a spoon, "I expect you to help him as well, there is a lot of work to do."

"Oh, Grandma..." She started, "But I'm not old enough!"

"You were old enough to milk the cows." Her grandmother replied. She then turned toward the pot of porridge over the fire and realized she needed to get a bowl for herself. So she turned toward the cupboard and pulled a bowl out and went in front of the pot again.

"Psst... Aryll..." Link said whispering to her, as their grandmother was getting herself a spoon, "You can do the easy part and take care of the stalls okay? I'll take care of the horses, and when you're done I'll help you."

Aryll beamed and nodded, turning toward her bowl of porridge again. She had always loved Link, who she called her big brother even though he really wasn't. Her mother had died after giving birth to her and

when she grew up, aside from her grandmother, all she had was Link. When she would cry, he would take her in his arms. When she would laugh, he would laugh along with her. Link always took a portion of her chores when he was done with his, and lighten her load. It was always wonderful having him around.

Shortly after, Link had finished his porridge and he stood up, "I'm finished with breakfast, Grandma, I'm going to take care of the horses now."

"All right," she started, "be sure you be careful. I don't want those horses kicking you in the chest again."

Link chuckled in embarrassment. That was his worst mistake he had ever made in his profession. He was bedridden for a month with a horrible pain in his chest. He had tried calming down a stallion who had been spooked by a snake that had slithered its way inside the corral. The horse moved around in circles, whinnying and grunting. Link had tried to reach its front so he would be able to hold it by the reins, but he had accidentally went behind the horse and it had bucked him. Luckily he wasn't close so the impact wasn't as great and it didn't turn out to be fatal, but it still broke a rib or two.

Link's duty in the small farming village was to train horses and distribute them to different families who used them for means of transportation. These horses were especially needed by those who traded, and needed two horses to pull one covered wagon. He was very good at his job, and he trained the most beautiful horses, and the most loyal as well. One horse he had tamed for himself, Epona, a mare with a chestnut coat and, what seemed to be, and ivory main and tail where the roots of the hairs were jet black. He had found her wondering around in the wild, abandoned from her herd and nearly starved as a young horse. It was the hardest one to tame and train. In the process he had grown a deep relationship with Epona, and it was the same the other way around. By the time he was finished, he did not have the heart to put her up for sale. Every time he went to train horses, he would greet Epona and let her nuzzle him. He would kiss her muzzle and run his fingers through her main before moving on.

So he did this when he moved into the corral. Epona whinnied with gladness and began to prance in the air. It had been a while since she had last seen him, and she grew very happy. Link, grinning, tried to calm her down and bring her to put all four of her legs on the grass, but his expertise didn't work. As if to get him to the working mood again, Epona began to trot to the end of the corral. When she found the fence in the way, she placed all her weight on her back legs and lifted her front, from there she leapt over and trotted off near the woods. All Link could do was mouth a "wow" and follow on the path she had taken. That silly horse, he would always think, but he loved her nonetheless. He had a much harder time climbing the fence then Epona did. First he had placed his feet in between boards, but didn't place his hands down in time for support and he fell backward. Embarrassed, he remained on the ground thinking that this much delay from his work caused him to loose a little bit of his common sense. Epona seemed to laugh with her whinny as Link stood up on his feet and brushed the grass from his rear.

"Hey, don't laugh at me!" Link began, "You started this!"

He once again attempted to climb the fence, this time placing his hands on the top and swinging his legs over. Link had made it outside the corral and from there he began to jog toward Epona up the hill. The smell of the grass and pines relaxed him. He loved this rural life and wanted to stay with it forever. This kind of life may have meant that you must work hard and provide for yourself, but it was worth it for the peace of the village. He finished his thoughts when he had reached Epona and rubbed her muzzle,

feeling the smooth skin covered by short black hairs. She snorted with satisfaction and Link nudged her off toward the corral,

"You had better get back, I'll be there in a minute."

Just as Link was about to follow Epona, he heard an ominous whisper. He stopped cold in his tracks and whirled around, eyes searching for the source of the whisper. Link could have sworn he recognized the voice but as he drew closer, it grew less familiar. Terror struck him when he realized that this was the wrong forest... the forest he should never hunt in or trespass... it was the forest to the east, opposite of the one in the west. Just as Link was about to turn on his heel and run away, an overpowering force swept over him and he lost all control over his body. His spirit was pushed back to the corner of his mind, only to find that another force moved him toward the now raspy whispers, growing more and more desperate. It seemed that he was a puppet on strings as he walked toward the forest, growing more and more terrified. Suddenly pressure began to close in around him and the pounding of his heart echoed through his mind. Then the screeches came as he swayed side to side as the edges of the image his eyes showed him blurred. Suddenly he turned and noticed a glowing light. The whispers then continued to grow louder as Link approached the blurred light. Now he could hear what the voice was saying, in the midst of the terrible screams:

"Wi-ng-ed Dar-kne-ss..."

Link now knelt before the blurred light and when his knees reached the ground, his vision returned to normal and the sounds and voices faded, leaving a complete silence as his spirit was pushed forward again and he had control over his body. He looked down to find a glowing stone glistening brightly, bathed in dark light. Link would have stood up on his feet and fled, but something had prompted him to reach for the stone. His arms seemed to lose control when he reached for it, and it had glowed brighter. Sooner or later, he found himself bringing it between his palms. Link opened his hands and looked down upon the star, somewhat admiring its beauty. Suddenly its glow grew in intensity and it collided with Link's chest. Link had let out a quick gasp, but it had soon turned to screams when the star began to drive into him. Once again pressure began to close in around him as a stinging pain remained present. He had felt his skin close in around the stone when the ache had subsided somewhat and immediately, Link's hand went to his chest. The stone was gone... or perhaps... inside him.

Slowly he stood to his feet, but it wasn't long until he felt heavy and exhausted. Link then began to travel back downhill, to get as far away from the forest as he possibly could to return to his home which lay far below him. Link had almost reached the bottom of the hill when Aryll came out of the stable carrying a pail of milk. She looked toward the hill to see her brother staggering. Fear suddenly struck her when she saw Link's knees finally collapse and fall to the earth.

Everything was warm... but not the warmth of the sun on a spring morning, still overcoming winter's touch. It was an uncomfortable warmth where it felt humid and sweaty. Everything ached, especially the chest, burning with pain. Link suddenly twitched his hand and woke up, finding himself in his bed, but still accompanied by that uncomfortable warmth. It wasn't until when he woke up that he realized that he breathed heavily with his mouth open while he slept. Now Link's mouth was dry and had an unpleasant taste in the back of his throat. He immediately closed his mouth, but afterward he felt a sharp pain in his forehead and he proceeded to place a hand on it. Link knew it wouldn't do much good, though. Soon after, Link discovered his legs were very stiff, and he couldn't move very well. Finally he let out that

groan of pain.

"Oh, thank goodness you're awake!" Link heard a familiar voice say.

He looked to the side, and was shocked to see that his vision was slightly blurry. But what he saw through his stinging, watery eyes, he saw his grandmother walking toward him. Link could barely make out the image of her walking toward him. He flinched, knowing that he was terribly sick. Link's grandmother set her wrinkled hand on his, and moved it back to his side and away from his forehead, and replacing it with her own. She brushed her thumb on his brow before getting a wet piece of cloth and placing it on his forehead.

"You haven't broken your fever, but thank goodness you've waken up. That shows some progress, now doesn't it?"

"W-what happened...?" Link said, his voice very hoarse.

"You suddenly collapsed outside. Now I don't know why you have a fever, but my guess is that you were out late last night in the cold on the last day of the festival. You and Vaati do such silly things sometimes... I wonder if he's sick too?"

Now everything came back to Link. He remembered then and there what had happened previously. There was a glowing light... and it had forced itself inside of him, but could that be true? He knew that the result of being sick did not come from last night. Link remembered he had felt strange, and not being able to control his body. He remembered how frightened, yet confused he was at that moment. Everything happened in a flash, and sooner or later, he was lying there on a soft bed feeling terrible.

Winged Darkness.

Those two words were the last words he heard before he had collapsed. Link didn't know what they had meant, or even what they were referring to. Could it be referring to the stone? Endless questions filled Link's mind, and he was soon overwhelmed. He could not bare all these thoughts with sickness filling him, and he found that his headache had grown. Link groaned again, and afterward felt his grandmother's touch on his cheek.

"You go back to sleep. I'll return with a cup of water later."

Link thought it best to take her advice. Nothing cured a sickness better than sleep, and at least he would have the pain off his mind for a short while. Link steadily closed his eyes, trying not to move any other part of his body. He found it easier to fall asleep due to drapes covering the light wanting to reach him through the window. But he didn't want to see the sun now... not just yet. Now what Link wanted more than anything was to drift into the shadow of sleep, and depart to the land of dreams where all pain fled, and the subconscious of your mind awakened... dreaming of the things you long for the most. But this dream was not what Link expected... It was only a flash, but it was a disturbing moment. What he saw from the void of darkness was a greenish skull, red orbs glowing where the eyes would be, and green mist leaking out of the cracks between its teeth and wherever there was an opening. A voice began to groan over a high screeching sound, and suddenly Link had awakened again.

This time his muscles were stiff and he could not feel anything. He could not even feel that sheets were placed over him, or the softness that engulfed his head. Link found himself breathing heavily when he woke up and immediately forced himself to slow down when he had opened his eyes. He had clenched his fist on the sheets at his side so tight, he had failed to notice it until he had managed to relax his muscles. Link looked to the window to find that no sunlight tried to leak through the drapes; it was now nightfall. It had only been a short moment, but time had flown when he had fallen asleep. Link was still pondering the thought when he heard the door to his room creak open.

He saw two figures enter the room now. He could make out that one of them was his grandmother, judging by how similar she looked before, but the other was much taller than her. Link, raised his voice suddenly, and as if he were blind he said, taking in heavy breaths,

"Who's there?"

"Vaati has come to visit," Link's grandmother said, "He's been concerned about you all day."

"I even finished my chores!"

A small smile crept across Link's face as he stirred a little bit to be more comfortable in his bed. He closed his eyes for a short moment to give them rest and when the two had come to his bedside, he opened them. Their faces were a little more distinct now that they were a little bit closer. The blurs had now become shapes he could make out easily.

"How are you feeling?" Vaati asked.

Link observed himself. The pain had lessened a little bit and he did not feel that same intense, uncomfortable warmth. Instead he felt chills here and there and he began to want some more covers for himself. His head still hurt a little bit though as well as his chest. Nevertheless, he still felt terrible.

"Not very good..." Link said in his hoarse voice, "Grandma, could you get me more blankets, please?"

"Of course." She said calmly and walked out of the room.

When her footsteps had faded into the hallway outside of the room. Vaati had raised his voice, "Oh, your grandmother left a cup of water. You should drink it."

Link didn't say anything when he tried to sit up, for he preferred not to speak at all. However, his torso ached so much he could not lift himself up. Vaati had to place a hand on his back to help Link sit up without falling back and down to the pillow again. When Link had succeeded in staying up, Vaati had carefully took the cup sitting on the dresser next to Link's bed where a candle was lit and held it in front of Link.

"Can you hold it?" He asked still keeping his hand on Link's back, knowing that he were to lose his balance if he had removed it.

Link gently placed both of his hands on the sides of the cup as Vaati released it from his own grasp. Link gently set it to his lips and tilted it. He now found a cool liquid running down his throat, refreshing his

body. It hit him as if he were kicked in the stomach, since he had not had a drink of water since he had collapsed. He brought himself a little closer for fear of any water slipping out of the cup and not going into his mouth. When he had found that the flow of water had declined, and soon disappeared to a few drops, Link drew back as Vaati took the cup from his hands. Vaati then gently laid him down back on the pillow before setting the cup back beside the candle.

"I guess you celebrated a bit much last night, didn't you? Well you were more active than I... you were awfully hyper about those candies they sold in the booths on the streets."

Link could only smile recalling the night. He was very fond of sweet things such as chocolates, and pumpkin candies. However, Link knew that was not the reason why he was so sick. He had somehow figured it was the stone that was responsible, but he wasn't sure whether that was just a dream or even a daydream. The memory seemed so distant now.

"Is there anything else wrong?"

"What?"

"Your expression is different, as if you've seen something terrible."

"It was just a nightmare... nothing more." Link said turning his head toward the side and gazing at the wall his bed was beside. The image of the frightening green skull came into mind. What could it have meant?

"I have the blankets." Link heard his grandmother say as she entered the room, her footsteps growing louder with each step drawing closer to him.

She laid two blankets over Link gently, spreading them out so wrinkles were smoothed. Link now felt somewhat of a comfortable warmth and a heaviness on his chest, except this heaviness gave him comfort and not strain. Link relaxed his muscles, trying to remain not as tense, and closed his eyes, sleep growing heavy over him.

"I'll get more water." Link's grandmother said.

"I'd better leave." Vaati said, "My home is unattended to." He said following the grandmother out the door. However, before he left Link, who lay close to sleep, but awake enough to know Vaati's words, he said, "I hope you get better soon..."

4 - The Forbidden

The Forbidden

Link's grandmother closed the door behind her after she had stepped out of her small house. She stepped forward, carefully stepping over any rocks in her path and flattening the tall grass with her heels. She turned and made her way to the stable close by with a pail in her hand. The day was young, and the sun set gentle warmth on her skin in the cold morning as she walked. Slowly she made her way to the stable, taking her time and savoring the beauty around her. When she at last stepped over one last rock and pushed her foot through the last blades of tall grass, she found herself in the stable. Link's grandmother found herself in the shadows of the stable, with only a few rays of the sun leaking through the cracks on the roof. She lifted her head up when she heard the sound of hay being shoveled. There was Link, dressed for work for the day and his feet in sandals, already dirtied. Link's grandmother placed her hands on her hips and cocked her head to one side. Link eyed her and lifted the pitch fork from the hay and turned his whole body toward her.

"You shouldn't be up and out of bed!"

"Can't you see that I'm well?" Link replied spreading his arms out, "If I skip another day of work, my daily routine will fall apart! And you don't have to worry about me, grandma, I'm fine now."

His grandmother raised an eyebrow at him and tapped her foot. Link kept his gaze fixed on her and arched his mouth into a grin. When he placed both hands on the pitchfork again, he heard his grandmother let out a sigh.

"Fine... but you just recovered from an awful fever, don't overdo yourself." She said turning around, "And that means, don't get bucked off the horses..."

Link chuckled as he stabbed the pitchfork into the hay once more. After she had left and returned to the house, Link had finished his job in the stable. He placed the pitchfork against the wall and stepped down from the large pile of hay. For a moment his skin and hair was once again bathed in the radiance of the sun from the small rays of light, but he soon went into the shadows once more. However, the shadows were dispelled completely when he went outside under the morning sky. He looked toward the corral of horses and breathed in fresh air and closed his eyes and began to make his way.

The traumatizing event of the stone seemed nothing more than a nightmare now that Link was up and about. Even though the memory still haunted him in the back of his mind, to him, it didn't matter at the time. His fever had passed, and now he felt as fine as ever. Why would it matter now? He would much rather live in utter ignorance than know of what the stone might or was capable of doing. It had not affected him in his daily life at all... or so he thought.

Link finally reached the fence to the horse corral and observed each of the horses in it. He turned his head when he heard a neigh coming from one of the horses. It was Epona, and there she was trotting

toward him. When she reached him, she snorted with delight and bobbed her head up and down. Link rubbed her muzzle and smiled,

“I haven’t seen you in a long time, Epona.” He started, “What do you think- shall I ride you?”

Link lifted one leg over the fence with the other following. Now sitting, he set his hands on the wood on both sides and slid down. When his feet thumped against the ground, however, his knees collapsed and he fell to the grass. Epona snorted, as if to laugh and Link winced, placing a hand on his knee. He still smiled though, and laughed at himself before looking up at Epona.

“I suppose my legs are still a little bit weak!” He said, “But no matter! That won’t change my mind.”

Link took the brush and began to rub the rough bristles against Epona’s white mane. When he had finished brushing the hair on her back, he proceeded to bring the saddle. He placed it on her and brought the reins over her face. He pat her on the neck and held out his hand, which was full of oats, to her muzzle. Her lips wiggled and her tongue slipped out of her mouth and scooped up the oats. Link laughed at the feeling, because it had tickled his palm. When he looked up and toward the forest, the smile on his face immediately vanished. Something ominous swept over him, as if it was winter’s hand brushing across his skin. But it was neither winter, nor a wind’s breeze, but a chill. He stared, as if he knew something was there, but could not see anything as of yet. He continued to stare, as if trying to see what was beyond.

Link’s eyes widened when he saw the trees bend forward like something large and heavy rubbed against them. It stopped for a moment, and then moved quickly along the forest wall toward the town. Link dashed to the edge of the horse corral and jumped over the fence. He landed on the other side, one knee against the grass and a hand lowered to keep his balanced. He used that hand to spring up to his feet and run toward the house. He burst through the front door, nearly knocking it off its hinges. He passed his grandmother in the kitchen, who looked at him with confusion as he ran to the upper floor to his room. There, he found his hunting bow and a quiver full of arrows. Strapping the quiver to his back and taking the bow, Link immediately ran downstairs.

“Link, where are you going?” His grandmother asked.

“Grandma, keep Aryll safe, and don’t go outside! There’s a monster heading toward the village!”

Before he could hear a reply from her, he was already well out of the door and halfway to the corral. When Epona was in sight, he took his thumb and forefinger and brought it to his mouth and whistled loudly. As she trotted toward him, he looked toward the village and could hear an uprising coming from the village folk. When Epona came, he leapt onto her back and quickly brought her to a run toward the village. Fly... He thought. Fly fast...

Women took hold of their children’s hands as they cried for help. Husbands clung to their wives as they fled their homes, not even glancing back behind them. A chosen few men had taken action and mounted their steeds armed with their own hunting bows, defending the villagers who desperately fled. Link stopped at a cross road and saw Vaati who motioned to come beside him with the other men.

When Link looked straight forward down the road in front of them, his stomach turned in disgust at what

he saw. It was the monster who had caused even the trees of the forest to be knocked to their sides. It resembled a giant man, but much more distorted and deformed. It lifted its head from eating a dead horse, its mouth covered with its blood. The skin on its body seemed to be charred and burned as if it had been torched with flame in the past. Its arms were so long, the backs of its hands dragged on the ground as it hunched over and as its knees were bent. The skin on its face, especially the cheeks, sagged down, folding out the lip and revealing its yellow, bloodstained, and sharp teeth. On its head, it seemed to be that there was once hair, but now only a few thin, messy locks remained. But what struck them with the most fear were the monster's eyes. It seemed the irises were rolled back into the head, exposing the pale whiteness of the eyes. But it could still see... and not only see... but its gaze seemed to pierce through souls.

It charged forward with abnormal speed for its size, dragging its arms along the ground. It caused the men to separate from each other. Now they were on either side of the beast, but now it slowly turned toward one side and ignoring the other, as if the men in that direction no longer existed. It turned toward the side where Link and Vaati remained, but fixed its gaze on Link. It let out a low gurgle and licked its teeth with its pointed tongue.

Link's eyes widened with fear when he began to hear familiar whispers. He was then reminded of that day where he had encountered the strange stone, but then soon forgot that memory. Not only that memory, but he seemed to forget everything in that exact moment as he stared into the beast's gaze. His surroundings disappeared around him and he could no longer hear the cries and screams coming from the villagers. The wind ceased to blow and all feeling left him. The only thing that he could hear was his own heart beat... echoing in the darkness and fading... its thumps gradually getting lighter and lighter. Sooner or later, he could no longer hear it except for the whispers and groans surrounding him.

"Wi-ng-ed... Da-rk-ness..."

Eventually they had faded and there was nothing else to be heard. There was nothing to be seen. There was nothing to be felt. There was nothing to be remembered... it was as if his very existence had vanished, and he was plunged into an everlasting abyss that he could not escape.

What Vaati saw was that Link's arms were draped at his sides, and his head was down. His whole body seemed to be limp and unstable as the beast continued to stare at him with his eyes now glowing. Vaati called Link's name and turned toward the beast, knocking an arrow and firing it into its eye. It writhed in pain, letting out a gurgle backed up with a screech. Once again Vaati called Link's name, this time shaking him awake.

Link looked at the beast stumbling around in pain with an arrow through its eye, but strangely, not falling to the ground. The men across from them had fired their arrows into its back as well, causing it a great deal of more pain. Link turned his horse around and began to gallop with Vaati and the other men following behind.

"Lead it out of the village!!"

Soon after, they heard the beast stomping toward them and following them. Link heeled Epona's sides and quickly ran off. His heart was pounding, and his breaths were heavy as he heard the cries and moans behind him. He seemed to feel the gaze of the monster piercing two holes into his back, resulting

in an uncomfortable chill. Vaati looked back on his horse toward the beast behind them and rode off to the side.

“I’ll lure it to the cliffs!”

“Vaati, wait!!” Link called out.

Vaati turned as far as he was able and shot an arrow at the monster, which had growled in anger and charged toward him. The earth seemed to rumble from its stomps, and it seemed as if the ground would split asunder. However, as Vaati led it closer and closer to the cliff, the rumbles faded. Eventually they had stopped their horses, and cornered the beast on the edge of the cliff with Vaati in front of it.

Slowly it approached Vaati, blood streaming from its wounds, and letting out gurgles from its throat. Vaati had dismounted his horse and released it as he stepped backward from the monster, staring up at its distorted face. He looked toward Link as if it was a signal to fire. He and the other men had knocked arrows and once again aimed at the monster. They released the strings on their bows, and the arrows whistled through the air. The monster cried out in pain, but instead of turning to strike, it leaned forward and fell against the ground. In a brief moment, Link saw Vaati stumble on the ledge and it broke off and began to fall down the cliff. Link gasped and screamed for Vaati, seeing him fall with the monster down the cliff. When they had fallen, no longer did they hear the screams of panic coming from Vaati, nor did they hear the monster letting out its disturbing gurgles.

Link and the other men immediately dismounted their horses and rushed to the edge of the cliff and peeked over only to see a rapid river running through a canyon. The roar of the river echoed through the air, but nothing else. There was no trace of them; neither Vaati nor the monster. Link fell to his knees and clenched his fists, grabbing onto loose dirt. He gritted his teeth as his lips twitched. He inhaled deep and shaky breaths and trembled while his vision became blurred with tears. Link stared helplessly at the roaring river, desperately looking for Vaati, but he could not be found.

One of the men placed a gentle hand on Link’s shoulder. At that moment, a cloud moved in front of the sun, darkening the world around them for a moment. It darkened, just as Link’s heart was filled with the mist of despair. A cold wind blew against his face, and seemed to make his tears freeze with a chill. Since his mother had died, this feeling had not accompanied Link, nor did he expect it to until this very moment. He had forgotten the weight and burden it brought when the death of a loved one had come. Neither the comforting hand on his shoulder, nor the cloud finally leaving the sun’s face brighten him, to him, the world still seemed dark at that moment.

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Link sat in a chair by the fireplace in his home with a blanket around his shoulders and a cup of a warm drink in hand. He stared with a lifeless gaze at the flame, not even blinking, as if dead. No emotion was seen on his face; only a straight and unwavering mouth. His lower eyelids were slightly darker, and his hair was tangled and it fell in front of his eyes.

His grandmother sat across from him, to keep him company. Even though she did not do any sneaking of the sort, and made her entrance quite obvious, he paid no heed to her, as if she had not entered at

all. Link only stared at the dancing flames before him, ever changing and crackling as if angry. The memory of earlier that day haunted him. So many times he replayed it in his head, contemplating what he could have done to prevent Vaati from falling to his death. The more he thought of it, the more he resented himself for not taking action.

Link's thoughts were interrupted when there was a knock on the door. His grandmother stood up and answered it, but Link didn't move even one muscle. However, he could hear the conversation coming from the other room. He listened carefully to the quiet voices.

"Is Link at home?"

"Yes, but he really isn't."

"I understand he is still mourning, but the council demands his presence immediately."

Soon after, heavy footsteps entered the room where Link remained. Finally Link turned his head to acknowledge his visitor out of courtesy, but he did not give any greeting or any smile like he would usually have done. His visitor also did not give a smile or a greeting, but entered with a hard and serious face. Link's grandmother came behind him as he began to speak.

"Link, you are summoned to the village council. They require you come immediately, so fix yourself up to be at least presentable."

Link had only washed his face and combed his hair with his fingers. As he came downstairs, the man turned to leave, expecting him to follow. Link turned toward his grandmother and said:

"This won't take long."

As Link closed the door behind him, and looked up at the sky, he felt the chill of night. The moonlight bathed his face with its light, as if it poured its heart out, spilling its blood onto the plains. The stars glimmered as if tears were going to fall from them, as they watched the moon. Link looked forward to find his visitor waiting for him, looking back to assure himself that he was following. Link took a step forward then followed him without any stops.

Link eventually found that he was led into the heart of the village. Not a soul was out or even the noise of them coming from inside their homes. Link soon learned why when he was taken to a certain house he had not been to or seen very often. The man looked back at him, bidding him to enter. Link did so, and found himself surrounded by most of the townsfolk, sitting on seats either side of him. When he observed their faces, Link could not see any sight of relief or anything of the sort. Instead, he saw sadness turning into anger buried in their faces. He looked in front of him and saw the mayor sitting a desk with several people at his side. The man that had led Link here walked to the mayor's side.

"Link, the Nameless," The mayor began, "You were of the group that stayed behind to exterminate the charred beast?"

"Yes."

“And witnessed the death of Vaati?”

Link’s voice choked for a bit when he heard those words, but eventually he had replied, “Yes.”

The mayor paused for a bit and leaned back in his chair, “Do you have knowledge of where that monster came from?”

“From... the forest... I believe.”

Link looked around the room when he began to hear murmuring coming from the people surrounding him. They stared at him with cold and serious looks. The mayor raised his hand to silence them. When the last whisper was uttered, he once again spoke.

“And which forest was it.”

“It was the one to the east.” Link said before he heard even harsher whispers that followed.

“That forest is forbidden to all... our village has stayed at peace for all its years, because we have not disturbed the trees to the east. The only way that this event could have happened if there was a disturbance... did you enter that forest, Link?”

Link cast his gaze downward, looking at the wooden floor. Memories began to flood his mind as if a wave of the sea had tossed itself ashore. Suddenly he felt dark, and a shadowy feeling came over him. He placed his left hand, which bore the mark, on his chest and clenched his clothing.

“I remember once... I had wondered into those woods without knowing.” Link said removing his hand from his chest and as the crowd grew in volume, “There was a stone carrying a fowl glow and it had taken control of my mind. Before I had known it... the stone was forced into my chest.”

The mayor’s face turned to shock and disgust as the congregation stood up and began yelling at Link and at the mayor, announcing their own requests. A man walked from his seat to Link’s side and briskly grabbed hold of his left wrist and lifted it.

“This boy is a curse to this village!!” He started, “He came here only remembering his first name and with this black mark!”

Another shouted from his seat, “That mark guarantees his guiltiness! He is a curse!”

The mayor suddenly stood from his seat and raised both of his hands, “Silence!!” As soon as he had called out, the crowd silenced themselves and turned toward the mayor with eager eyes.

“Link, I know not if that stone you spoke of has any connection to the forest to the east, or if your mark is indeed a curse. However, you have intruded the peace of this village and you are responsible for the deaths that occurred today and have proclaimed yourself the forbidden. Leave this village and find the Glistening Princess if you wish for counsel on that stone to be removed from your body...” He placed both his hands on the desk before him and narrowed his eyes, “but never... return to this village again...”

hand in his, "Take care of grandmother."

Aryll smiled for a moment when he hugged her tightly one last time. At least he knew that two people in this village loved him, and always would... He stood up and mounted Epona and rode off into the night. Aryll watched him with unwavering eyes, seeing the silhouette going off into the distance. It was only a short time, but when she had watched him ride, it seemed to last forever until he had finally disappeared off in the distance, as if vanishing forever.

5 - Castle on the Plain of Clouds

Castle on the Plain of Clouds

When the sun rose the next morning, it wasn't as bright as Link would have expected. However, he still opened his eyes and saw the morning sky. He was curled tightly in a blanket, but was weakly protected by the cold air that surrounded him. Link's back and hip ached from lying on hard ground, and his head pounded with a migraine. He coughed and slowly sat up, trying to free himself from the knot of blankets that tied him down. At last he had gained freedom of movement and freed himself from the blankets. He rubbed his hand against his forehead, brushing his locks aside. Next to Link was Epona huddled up next to him for warmth. The fire that was built no longer had dancing flames, but only wood white and grey and covered with ashes. After Link has rolled up his blanket and put on his tan cloak again, he was off almost immediately.

The sun barely crept over the mountains as he rode on Epona. As he rode farther and farther away from his home, the more the memories haunted him. Scowling faces, expressions filled with pain... that was all that came to his mind. The death of Vaati haunted him the most out of all of them. Link had convinced himself to be a murderer, and unable to be forgiven of his sin.

Link slowed Epona to a walk when he had come to a chasm, surrounded by walls of rocks. He looked around himself wondering if the one stone supporting it all would somehow be forced out, causing the walls to fall on him. He denied it, but deep within he wished for that rock to burst. That went off his mind when he saw a little spring with a small waterfall pouring into it. It did not roar like a large waterfall, but it rather growled instead. Suddenly Link's throat became parched and he longed to quench his thirst. He stopped in front of the spring and dismounted Epona and patted her as she lowered her head to drink. Link fished for his cup and once he had found it, he approached the waterfall to fill it up. He had taken three cups of water before he wiped his mouth dry. He felt somewhat renewed. Link then looked out at the pond, bent down close to it, and took a single finger and submerged it. When deciding to put his whole body in, trying to do anything to change his course of mind, he stood up and undressed down to his undergarments. He put one foot in, and then the other. Finding that the water was cold he quickly ran toward the middle of the pond and submerged his whole body. He blew a couple of bubbles that floated to the surface, and then finally surfaced himself, wiping his hair back. He shivered and smiled at Epona who had snorted.

"It's cold!" He said, quickly taking hold of his arms.

Link dived once again under water and swam around for a little bit to attempt to warm himself. He soon realized that that couldn't do any good because his ribs had begun to ache. Once again he surfaced, and once again he shivered. Epona brushed her hoof back and snorted as if hysterically laughing at him. Link gave a small, brief smile until he noticed a rustle from one of the bushes behind Epona. He stared intently at it, anticipating the next action. He jumped in being startled when a figure had dashed out so fast, that the naked eye could barely register it. In the sky, a black figure with wings flew overhead. It was far too large to be a mere bird, and it was too dull to be the Glistening Princess. Link watched it as it

flew over the waterfall and out of sight, disappearing into the sky. When the figure had flown through the air, its wings had whistled lowly on the wind and its presence brought a certain mystery to Link's mind. The largest bird he had seen was a hawk flying over his head while he tended to his horses. However, when he had seen that bird, it seemed to be the size of a full grown man. Questions began to stir in his mind and eventually, he had thought so much that the pain in his ribs had come back from the cold of the water. Link shrieked and jumped hurriedly headed toward the shore of the pond.

Link had continued on shortly after he had dried himself and had eaten a small meal when he found that he was hungry. Several hours had passed since then, and he found himself no longer surrounded by towering cliffs, or rocks. All that was around him was grass dancing in the wind. The clouds weren't in the sky, but rolling along the ground, being pushed by the wind. As Link proceeded, it seemed that the amount of clouds on the ground became more and more numerous. Eventually the grass was no longer visible to his eyes, but the only thing he saw that Epona walked on was grass. To him, it appeared that they were in the sky as if walking in a dream. Link was convinced he was in a dream when he had looked in front of him and saw a castle towering overhead. He gaped his mouth open in amazement, for he had never seen anything like this before. And if that wasn't enough to gape about, he heard a voice calling out to him; that of a woman's,

"Well? What's taking you?"

The gates before him then opened with a long and loud creak, echoing through the air. Epona pulled back a little bit in being startled by the sudden movement. Now what lay before him was a grand courtyard, filled with statues of gargoyles, unicorns, and many other creatures Link had heard in children's stories. He pushed Epona forward, seeming to be completely oblivious to everything. The courtyard he entered seemed to be taken care of very carelessly, but still its beauty was able to captivate the eyes. Afterward, Link had reached two large doors that towered above his head. Once again he heard the woman's voice.

"Leave your horse and come in. Do not fear."

Link began to wonder if he was being enchanted at that moment, for the woman's voice sounded as ringing bells and the chorus of angels. However, he did not turn back, but did what the voice instructed him to. He dismounted Epona and rubbed her muzzle before approaching the large doors. He once again stared for a moment in awe, feeling like an ignorant child, not knowing what to do. Slowly he lifted his hands and placed them on the doors. When he began to push them, he was surprised to find that they were lighter than what they had appeared to be. They easily opened for him, but led into shadows. Link curiously peered in, trying to adjust to the sudden change of light. Then something had pushed him in, and the doors closed behind him. Link quickly looked at them, then looked forward to find in the shadows a grand hall.

"H-Hello?" Link called.

Link leaned forward and took a step, continuing to walk toward the stairs before him. He peered curiously, wondering what lay at the top of them. Now he really thought he was enchanted, but one side of his mind kept telling him that there was nothing that could be done about it.

"Oh, making this a dramatic entrance are we?" Came the voice again, but from the side.

Link jumped and darted his head, being startled from the sudden call, to see beside him. What he saw was a woman, blonde hair streaming down her shoulders and blue eyes glittering in the shadows. Her pale face, seemed to be as smooth as pearl and her lips red as roses. However she did not wear an elegant dress that one would expect a lady of the castle to wear. Instead she wore tight pants with loose fabric flowing at her sides. She wore a blouse of several layers, one layer of a darker color with its sleeves cut while the other lighter layer went down to her wrists. She rubbed her gloved thumb and forefinger together and tapped her boots before she approached Link, who was frozen stiff.

She looked straight into Link's eyes with a stern look and then drew closer. The woman was so close to Link that he had begun to lean backward, but still smelt her sweet scent of roses. Suddenly her gaze darted to Link's left hand, and with no consent, she tightly grasped it and lifted it to her eyelevel. She closely observed his palm for a moment while Link had sweat running down his forehead. He couldn't take his eyes off of her. The woman then flipped his hand around, and there she saw the mark on his left hand.

"Come with me." She said beginning to walk while holding his wrist.

"W-wait..."

"Wait...? For what?"

Before Link knew it, they were in a grand hallway with many doors on each side as far as the eye could see. The windows were tall and enormous, looking out onto the view of the world. The paintings on the ceiling were obviously executed with great care and the marble floors were polished enough to vaguely reflect them. Enchantment. That was the only word that came to Link's mind to explain the current events. His view of the hall was taken from him when the woman had led him through two large double doors that she had opened. They led to a circular room towering high above their heads and at the very top was a window for the sun to shine through. Climbing to that window were tall bookcases, hugging the walls with books of every subject on their shelves. In the center was a single plush armchair behind a desk with more books piled on top of it. The woman led Link by the table and let go of his hand.

Without hesitating to speak to him, however, she immediately went to the bookshelves. She began pulling books out of their places, muttering to herself, and pushing them back in. She went around the room and each time she rotated, she reached higher and higher. Eventually Link began to hear sighs and groans coming from her until she said loud enough,

"Oh, where is that book?"

Link stumbled and nearly fell over in amazement when he saw golden wings appear and spread out from the young woman's back. Her feet lifted up off the ground and she flew some ways up and intently looked at the shelf at her level. While she focused on her book he focused on her shining wings. The maid quickly flipped through the pages, and when she had come on a designated page, she widened her eyes and smiled. She gasped in excitement and put her finger on the page.

"Ah! Here we are!"

She then descended down to the floor, still looking at the book. When she had gently set her feet on the ground, her wings folded in and disappeared suddenly in a sea of small, glistening orbs of light. Link lifted his finger and pointed at the woman, and began to stutter. She looked up from her reading and looked around for a moment, a bit baffled.

“What’s the matter?” She said shaking her head slowly.

“W-wings...”

The woman paused for a moment, as if she didn’t know what he was talking about. Then suddenly she said, “Oh, yes... you’re part of the type of folk that doesn’t see these things. However I believe you’re kind of kindred call me the ‘Glistening Princess’ if I’m not mistaken. Well, I am a princess... Princess Zelda, to be exact... but I’m not really glistening all the time.”

“You’re the Glistening Princess?” Link said in a small voice.

“Zelda,” she corrected, “And why are you so amazed, did you not think that I actually had a face? Seeing that I’m a princess, I must be a person, and if I’m a person, I must have a face, so there’s no reason to be so baffled.”

“I’m just amazed.”

Zelda laughed before she lifted the book she held and looked at it once again, “Now back to the main topic...” She said and took hold of Link’s hand, “This mark of the three triangles,” she started, “is known as the mark of destiny... it is usually given by the three goddesses to a mortal who has an adversity... a trial awaiting them.”

Zelda brought Link to the small table and put the book there. She then took Link’s hand and placed it on the surface of the table next to the book. Link could not back away since Zelda pressed down on his wrist so hard. However, on the page the book was opened to, Link saw a drawing of the mark he had on his hand. Zelda stared intently at the back of his hand. As her eyes began to glow a gleaming light, the mark of the three triangles on Link’s hand began to resonate and gleam brightly. Zelda then turned her head toward Link and narrowed her eyes. She let go of his hand, and when he had lifted it to caress his wrist, Zelda turned toward him.

“This mark, tells me of something else.” She said slowly approaching him, “A curse that was placed upon you.”

Zelda lifted her hand and reached out her fingers gracefully. As she began to tense them, Link’s ears seemed to be pushed on, and a screeching sound closed in around him. His vision began to blur when the pain in his chest began to intensify. Link’s breathing began to get heavy and he lost his sense of balance. He reached for the table to support himself when Zelda came toward him and clutched the collar of his tunic. Link looked up at her as a drop of sweat rolled down his forehead and his mouth slightly gaped open. He opened and closed his eyes as if he was drowsy. Zelda then lifted him up so he now stood up straight.

“How did you come across that?” She said, “The Star of Winged Darkness?”

“Winged Darkness?”

Link had recalled that he had heard those two words before. As he slowly regained his strength, he gradually stood up on his own. Zelda’s grip loosened and let go as he stood up taller so that Link stared down at her. However he still did not say a word. Link had somewhat of a clue of how the star came across his path, but deep down, there were questions still unanswered. The situation for him began to be more tense, until Zelda finally sighed and spoke herself.

“Never mind. It’s clear that you won’t answer me.” Zelda said turning around, “Come, I’ll show you to your room.”

“My room?”

“Well,” Zelda said turning her head, “I’m afraid you’ll be here for a while, and I believe that the normal person doesn’t enjoy sleeping just anywhere without a feather pillow to lay their head on.” She continued on, “And your horse is already attended to.”

Link quickly trotted the large gap between him and Zelda and followed close behind her. As Zelda lead Link clear across the castle, there was an uncomfortable silence between them, both wondering if they should engage in the manner of small talk. He was dumbstruck by how large the castle was, being a farmer boy, and she was dumbstruck on how serious he was. She made glances back toward him to constantly find him looking around, but occasionally resting his eyes on her. Zelda quickly faced forward, and found that this silence was beginning to frustrate her. The volcano began to rumble... She once again glanced back at Link, still practicing his glances. The ground began to shake... Still there was no silence, and Zelda’s tongue began to quiver inside her mouth and she found herself inhaling. The volcano erupted... But fortunately for Link, the eruption wasn’t severe.

“Why are you so serious?” Zelda said turning her whole body around and stopping Link. She stared at him with a stern face, with a hard frown, and unblinking eyes.

“Well, it’s a long story, actually...” Link began recalling the events from before.

But before Link could begin to moop and reminisce about his regrets, Zelda interrupted, “There has to be another reason... and...?”

“Huh?” Link said widening his eyes and opening his mouth slightly, “Well...” His mouth then curved as if gazing upon something out of the ordinary, “You’re just so strange.”

“Strange?!” She snapped, “Perhaps it is you who are strange for thinking that I’m strange! In a sense—we’re all strange for thinking of each other to be strange!”

Link found himself taking steps backward to attempt to lessen the intensity of Zelda’s voice. What a personality, he thought. She seemed to be more stubborn than Vaati ever was. To his relief, however, she quickly turned herself around, but just stood there quietly. Then she pointed to the door to her right and said,

“This is your room.”

“Thank you.” Link said walking toward the door and taking hold of the handle.

He pushed the door open and peered into his room. He gasped and threw the door open all the way and thought he heard a chuckle of mischief coming from Zelda. In his room, he saw a wooden washtub that was crusty from being used often. The room had an indescribable stench to it and Link immediately covered his nose. When he looked beside the washtub, he saw a suspicious-looking chamber pot. He found himself letting out a groan of disgust.

“So, are you satisfied for the night? I’d say this room suits you well. And while you’re my guest here, you can empty that chamber pot.” Zelda said holding her hands behind her back, posing to be a gracious hostess.

Link quickly turned around, “This is not right!”

“Oho...” Zelda began, slowly turning toward Link, “Then stop being serious!” She then took hold of his wrist and dragged him further down the hall, “Here- I’ll give you a better room, but you must promise me that you won’t be serious here on out!”

When they had reached their real destination, Zelda had opened the door for Link and basically threw him in and closed the door behind him. Link blinked his eyes cluelessly, recovering from his level of shock. But when he happened to notice his surroundings, he agreed to himself that this was a much more comfortable room. There was a little plush armchair next to an unlit, yet beautifully decorated fireplace. Not far was a small desk for writing and such things as that. There was a large window looking out to the beautiful scenery close to it was a large bed covered with bed curtains. Much more suiting than a chamber pot...

He walked over a rug as he made his way to the bed. He pulled back the bed curtains to find a very comfortable mattress covered in white sheets and topped with a lovely feather pillow. A small sense of home hit him in the corner of his mind, and that brought him to remove his cloak, quiver, and bow to be a bit more comfortable. Link sat down on the bed and sighed, being satisfied, when his aching bones had comfort. Link then reached forward to pull the curtains in front of him back. When he did he saw the window and gazed out toward the scenery where he saw the sun setting and painting the sky the color of blood. And as it did a black cloud floated over the horizon...

6 - Castle Under the Black Curse

Castle Under the Black Curse

As the hours crawled by, the night began to smother the daylight and cut the sun to make it bleed as it brought the black cloud further over the horizon. The cloud appeared to be a hand reaching over all the plains and shattering the pure clouds of snow into nothing. The birds flew in one flock fleeing from the dark cloud looming overhead. As it drew closer, the more lifeless things became. This was not merely a storm cloud, as Link had first thought.

As the worry in Link's heart began to grow, he quickly stood up from his bed and faced the door to the hall. When he reached for the handle, a cold numbness shot through his fingers and raced through his arm. Link shivered as he touched the cold handle and began to push it slowly open. As he did, his breath turned to a white mist and his teeth began to clatter. The wider he opened the door, the more distorted things became. When he opened the door, Link stumbled out of his room from noxiousness and tried to balance himself on the door frame. However, he quickly lifted his hand with a gasp and found a slimy substance streaming from the door frame to his hand.

When he looked around, he found that the hallways that were once beautifully decorated with elaborate ornaments and decorations were now twisted and grotesque. Shadows loomed everywhere from the dark of the night, clouding the image of blood running down the walls. When Link stepped out, he nearly slipped from the blood on the floor and he covered his nose to shield it from the disgusting aroma in the air. The hallways seemed to move, swaying back and forth with its distorted walls and floors. Link narrowed his eyes and looked farther down the hallway into the darkness. The shadows were still... but something had emerged for a second but retreated back into the shadows. Link fell back in shock when seeing the figure. He knew that it was most certainly not Zelda, but some sort of monster or demon. In that brief moment, he saw that it was in a sick and twisted form, limping and letting out gurgling sounds. He dashed back into his room to retrieve his bow and quiver before proceeding.

Normally, Link would have just remained in his room to wait for this strange phenomenon to pass, but on the back of his mind, the thought of Zelda kept coming. He knew that he did not want her to get hurt, even though it seemed that she was well capable of taking care of herself, but that alone wasn't enough to calm his mind. Now was a time she was most in danger.

Link pursued the figure's path through the unwelcoming hallways. In the darkness, he could hear it breathing its crude breaths, but as each second went by, its volume became less and less until a door suddenly slammed; it was suddenly nothing. Link stood still for a moment and knocked an arrow before cautiously proceeding in the dark while reaching his hand out to feel. When his fingers lightly touched the wood of the door, he slid his hand down to the handle. Link pushed it open to find more darkness before him and took a step forward. When he was clear into the next hallway, the door behind him let out a squeak followed by a slam with a dooming echo. Link bolted his body back around and looked at the door with wide eyes. However, he couldn't see anything at all because it was far too dark. With his body stiff, Link looked around himself, feeling ill down to his stomach. His head became light and his limbs

began to feel numb. Panic twisted his mind to the point where his consciousness was almost nothing until a withered thing touched his shoulder. With a shriek, Link turned and pulled his arrow back when he saw the face of a sickly thing staring at him.

This thing was as tall as him, but deformed, decrepit, and hideous. Its skin was dry and wrinkled as an old man's but tough and hard. Its body was bony and frail, skin sagging where bone and muscle was absent. But Link still did not release his arrow, for he saw distinctly in this thing's black eyes was humanity. He still held his bow high, and prepared to strike at any time, but in the back of his mind he did not want to shoot this thing. Then, the withered creature spoke with a hoarse and timid voice.

"You haven't been taken." It said, "You still dwell in the day."

"What are you?!" Link gasped.

"You haven't been taken." It repeated, "You still dwell in the day."

Link lowered his bow and stepped backward, noticing that this creature still stared at him without blinking or moving its eyes at all. When he drew farther away, he noticed that the creature did not come after him or do anything else. Though no harm was done to him, Link's stomach turned in fright, and he turned to run as the hairs on the back of his neck shot up and the skin on his forehead tightened. Every moment, something seemed to chase him and every moment, the walls seemed to breathe on him and smother him with freezing air.

When he had at last made it to the grand hall, he ran down the stairs that climbed to the west part of the castle and stopped for a moment at the bottom of the stairs to catch his breath. When he looked up from the floor, there he saw Zelda staring blankly out toward the two large double doors that led to the outside world. Her arms, legs, head... everything was still, she did not move one muscle despite the horrors happening around her. Link stumbled toward her and caught himself when he was about to fall by clinging to her shoulder.

"Zelda...!" He gasped, "What is the meaning of all this?!"

Zelda briefly glanced at him, but then turned her head to where she was staring. Link looked in the same direction as well, and saw a dark, glowing orb float in front of them. Zelda sneered as her eyes seemed to flicker like fire.

"An unwelcome guest, I see..."

As she said that, a different sky spread from that orb of darkness and engulfed them, seemingly bringing them to a different world. They floated up in a sky surrounded by thick, black clouds swirling around them. Tiny lights shot up from below and dimmed as they reached the level to where the orb of darkness lay. Zelda spread her wings at that moment, to keep herself afloat while Link had almost fallen if he had not clung to Zelda's waist. However, his main concern soon turned to the orb, as it emanated a familiar energy. He stared as his heart and stomach turned with distress. When sparks had started to fly from the orb, Link's memories shot through his mind.

"Winged Darkness!" He cried, almost hearing the whisper echo through his mind, "Zelda! Don't look at

it! It'll ensnare your heart and mind!"

As if she had not heard his words, Zelda continued to stare, and as she did the fire in her eyes seemed to grow larger and larger until they became a shade of red. Her nails grew into claws and when she smiled, her teeth grew into fangs. She bore her fangs at the orb of darkness before her and began to try to fly to it. However Link tried to pull her down toward him.

"Zelda!" He shouted, "Zelda, no!"

Zelda reached down and dug her claws into Link's arm. Blood shot to the surface and streamed down his clothes like tears running down cheeks. Link winced in pain, but still held on to Zelda. With his unscathed arm, he once again reached for her and cried her name, more desperate than ever. He grabbed the back of her head and pulled her down and in, averting her gaze of the black orb. They then fell together, wind rushing up as they were pushed down. Link tightly clung to Zelda, in an attempt to keep her from falling away from him.

But suddenly the wind, the falling came to an abrupt stop and they were back in the dark, twisted grand hall. Link's back fell to the ground first and Zelda fell on top of him, being cushioned. She lifted herself as her eyes and fangs returned to normal. She then looked at the unconscious Link's arm and found that her claws ran deep into it. She quickly pulled them out and soon after her hands had returned to normal, but was now stained with scarlet blood. Zelda looked and saw that the orb of darkness had disappeared, but then looked at Link. She blankly looked upon his angelic, pale face, gently resting, but also strained from the events just moments before. Gently, she placed her hand under his neck and lifted him over her shoulder with ease. Carrying him, she disappeared into the darkness of the hallways...

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Link's eyes drifted open and slowly his consciousness swept over him in a wave of pain. He reached his left arm over to his right and clutched onto it, feeling that it was bandaged. He shot his eyes from half-open to wide and quickly sat up and looked at his arm to find it neatly wrapped in fine cloth. Link's attention was captured when a black shadow drifted in front of him. Link darted his head from place to place and found that he was once again in the library, but the darkness of the castle that had come at the sun's blood had not been lifted. Zelda sat on the small table staring blankly at nothing.

"We escaped from the orb of darkness..." Link recalled, "But why has the darkness not been lifted? What have we not done?"

Zelda paused for a moment as she wrapped her arms around her elbows and spoke without any emotion; not sadness, anger- nothing, "This is my punishment... my price... for consuming a demon." Zelda began as she turned toward Link, staring at him with her ghastly blue eyes, "By night, when I'm here, I'm surrounded by darkness and the horror of lost and consumed souls. By day I am the vessel of true power."

"Zelda..." Link gently whispered as he softened his eyes as he looked at Zelda.

She looked away from him with a hard and cold face, resting her hand on her knee and sitting alone.

Link began to wonder at her image, her loneliness, and the absence of her tears. Her heart seemed frozen, her face standing still in the unwavering time, and her limp hand hanging off her knee like a hung man. Link felt inclined to go to her, but the other side of his conscience held his ground, and he remained still. An empty distance remained between them accompanied by the uncomfortable silence. Zelda moved her lips and broke the silence with her deep voice,

“However, that orb of darkness was not of my price, but of Winged Darkness. Ever since the star has been unsealed, many of those have been wandering the world, being portals to the world of Winged Darkness.”

She straightened her legs and jumped down from the table and paced around the room, stroking her hand along the books until she at last came close to Link. Zelda lifted her hands and placed them at her side when she stood face-to-face with Link.

“You hold the Star of Winged Darkness.” Zelda began, “That is why you were banished from your village were you not?”

“How’d-”

“I know these things... I believe it would be the best in both our interests if you told me the whole story.”

Link gave a heavy sigh and closed his eyes, once again playing back the memories in his mind. Clenching his fists, he began to speak, “It began in my farming village... where I have been spoken of in awkward conversations and discussed in suspicious talk. I was found as an eight year-old boy with no previous memories and this mark on my left hand. Luckily, I was taken in to live with the woman I called my mother, who eventually died, my sister, and my grandmother.

“I had begun to live a life like a normal person until one day; I ventured into the forbidden part of the woods without knowing, and came across a stone of a peculiar aura. It spoke to me... saying ‘Winged Darkness’, and burrowed itself into my body. Shortly afterward, a monster with a sickly countenance appeared in our village and began to rampage and cause destruction. One of my dear friends died trying to get rid of it... I couldn’t stop him. The mayor and the village council blamed me because of my mark, and I was banished from the village, leaving my grandmother and sister behind. Eventually I found myself here.”

One word fell after the other until a pile of them drifted to Zelda’s ear. The words slipped out of Link’s mouth so easily. Zelda had stood up from the table she had seated herself on during the discussion and approached Link.

“So at last the Star of Winged Darkness is released in this world.”

Hearing those two words constantly kept stirring curiosity in Link’s mind. The ignorance in him became too overpowering to bear, and he spoke, seeking to dispel it.

“What is this Winged Darkness?”

“I’m not quite sure myself, but it is an intelligence, no doubt. And it seeks to exist in this world.” Zelda

began, "In an attempt to gain a human heart, it sends its servants to consume the living and their conscience. Its minions, much like the one you encountered at your village, are much like the orbs of darkness; only their eyes give the essence of her world of emptiness.

That stone you carry, the Star of Winged Darkness, is its last resort to gain a body of flesh and bone, a human heart... a spirit..."

Link clutched onto his chest, "So you're saying that it is trying to devour me?"

"In a sense," Zelda said turning toward the small desk, opening a drawer, and taking out an old, brown map, "which is why we need to bring it out of your body." She pointed to a specific spot on the map, "Here, in the Forest of Twilight in the far east... I hear such miracles are possible in the Pool of Purification."

"I have never heard of such things." Link said, "It must be-"

"I would suspect that deprived folk such as you would have never heard of the Forest of Twilight, or of the things that lead us there." Zelda glanced at Link's bow and then to his face, "Come this way."

Zelda turned her head, her hair twisting behind her as a shadow crossed her path and encircled her and disappeared into a green flame that disappeared with a moan. Link hesitantly followed her out of the library and was led down the dark, empty halls. The silence between them continued and dragged on as time's face stared at them. What had happened to the Zelda during the day? Being with this Zelda was like staring at her from across a chasm and not being able to reach her or touch her. Link couldn't lift his voice, for it seemed that the sound of it would be smothered by her intensive aura.

Zelda had taken a torch lit with blue fire and turned back to see Link catching up to her, the blue fire reflecting in the sea that was her eyes. Facing the wall of darkness before her, Link saw her step forward into it and saw her seemingly sink into the abyss. He followed, plunging into the emptiness himself. It seemed as if an eternity had passed as they traveled down the cold, stone steps and finding themselves to face more of the never ending time. However, time had stopped when Zelda's feet had reached level ground. She stepped further into the room held up by brick pillars and went behind a stone altar. She looked at Link, who had just come upon the level ground and now remained staring at her. She eyed him, then the altar. Reading her intentions, Link stepped in front of the altar and stood face to face.

Zelda's hand holding to torch glowed for a moment, and then let the flame go, but instead of dropping it still remained in the air, shedding its light brightly as streaks of shadows passed it in the air. The young maiden touched her hands together and slowly spread them apart, forming an orb of light in between them. She then positioned them as if she cupped something in her hand, and the light was pushed over the center of the altar. Her eyes were closed as it grew brighter and brighter.

"I need some of your essence..." Zelda whispered, "Don't worry... this won't kill you."

Something that seemed to be a little bit of mist came from Link's mouth as he stretched his head back. Zelda guided it with her hand as it formulated into another orb of light and led it above the center of the altar. She then brought her hands farther and farther apart, extending the light to a greater length. What seemed to be glowing fireflies came and danced around this coming shape and gained speed. Link

watched in amazement as he saw the look on Zelda's face become more and more focused. He then recognized the shape to be of a sword, and when Zelda had opened her eyes, its image became vivid. She brought her hands down as the sword drifted toward Link. The sword gleamed with a radiant light from its fine steel, and the gems embedded in its hilt glimmered brilliantly. It was flawless.

"This sword was created from both our essences." Zelda exclaimed, "Though it's nothing much... it'll do for now. You can't just survive on your bow."

Link placed his hands on the handle of the sword, stopping the light from gleaming as Zelda took hold of the torch. She moved beside him and glanced at him for but a moment, then turned toward the dark emptiness leading upward once more.

"We leave in the morning."

7 - A Thing Such As a Sword

A Thing Such As a Sword

Link delicately held the sword with both his hands, observing it as if he was an archeologist studying an ancient relic. It caught the morning light in its steel net, and reflected it brilliantly off its blade and onto Link's face. He slightly moved his hands, causing it to glimmer slightly and cast moving rays of light on Link's pale skin. Two essences... A sword created from two souls. Of course Link had not even seen such a thing let alone heard of the idea. What was he to do with such a thing? The more Link observed the double edged blade, the more oblivious he found himself to be. He glanced over at his side to find the sheath Zelda had given him, decorated with elaborate designs of wood shavings and engravings onto a rosewood surface. He gently brushed his fingers against it before he had gripped it with one hand and lifted it in front of him. The morning light that came from the blade came to a sudden stop when Link had slipped the sword into the sheath, hearing a smooth shing.

Link stood up, strapping the sheath to his back, accompanying the quiver and bow, then wrapped his cloak around his shoulders. Pulling the gloves down against his wrists, he walked to the door of his room. Opening the door to the hallway, he found that it wasn't twisted in such a way that it would turn his stomach, seeing the morning light shining from behind him and touching the walls. He stepped out, hearing only the echo of his boots run down the hallways. Silence, peace, and stillness. The walls stood at attention, remaining still and firm and the statues stared at Link as he passed. Walking from the west wing, Link made his way into the main hall.

The hall stood just as it did when Link had first arrived at the castle. Little light coming through the windows and barely obscuring the floor, statues with faces of loneliness but eyes carrying peace... the room had a feeling of solitude engraved in its walls. Link trotted down the steps that he had climbed before and approached the two large doors he had passed through the day before. Placing both his hands on the large ring hanging from the wood, he pulled himself backward. A crack of light emerged as the doors were cast ajar. Link squeezed himself through the small opening and there was Zelda before him on the cobblestone pathway, holding onto the reins of a white mare with Epona next to her as well.

"It took you quite some time to get down here." Zelda smiled, "Did you loose your way?"

"Hardly." Link said closing the door and approaching Epona. He was sure to squint away from Zelda, knowing himself that he still had a hard time navigating around the castle without Zelda. It was to be expected, he had spent only one night at the castle.

Zelda wore a dark cloak with a golden engraving on the back, flowing down to the tips hemmed with black seams. Though her hood was down, a violet scarf with golden seams was tied in a way to where it almost obscured her mouth, and covered the pin that held the cloak around her neck and over her shoulders. Streams of her golden hair flowed down over her cloak, going here and there in an unorganized manner at will. She mounted her horse and Link mimicked her action by mounting

began to scan the ground for more like it.

It had been an hour before Link had returned to the camp made in the late afternoon, and in his arms he carried firewood that almost went passed his head. Zelda raised her head and watched Link's every move like a hawk, and watched him stumble. However, no matter how much Link stumbled, she would not rise to her feet and help him. Somehow she thought it amusing, and she dared not impede on her entertainment. Rude, yes... but she didn't realize it. Link plopped the wood in the center of their camp and huffed a couple of breaths, looked up at Zelda, and smiled.

"Thank you." She said calmly, but not returning his smile, "That should last us the whole night."

Link sighed and began to gather rocks and place them in a circle. When he was satisfied with the placement of the stones, he positioned the firewood in a way to where there was plenty of space at the bottom then he placed the extra wood to the side.

"I won't light the fire now." Link said, "After all... the sun is still up!"

"Ha!" Zelda replied jokingly, "Well, pardon me! You didn't have to gather firewood and set it up right away!"

"But—"

"Don't!" Zelda simply said pointing and with that Link was quiet.

Silence.

Link seated himself on his blanket then glanced at the sheathed sword at his side. To entertain himself, he drew it from its sheath and watched it glisten in the sunlight. He let the blade fall and slide through the air. Woosh! He let it fall again. Woosh! Link began to swing the sword back and forth, almost hitting trees and slashing the tops of bushes. Zelda watched him for a little bit, but began to grow uneasy and irritated at his lack of technique and style. She then rose to her feet and approached Link, who continued to swing his sword obliviously.

The man was so fascinated and caught up with his sword that he was not aware of Zelda's approaching. When he turned and swung his sword. Zelda seemed to bring out a sword from nowhere and proceeded to block it. Link was a bit startled from the sudden clang! Zelda chuckled.

"Have you even handled a sword before?" She asked.

"No, I'm afraid not." Link began, "I'm rather skilled with a bow, though."

"Well, just being skilled at the bow is not good enough." She began, circling him, "You will eventually have to engage in hand-to-hand combat." Zelda distanced herself from him and from the camp, twirling her rapier with a slight motion of her wrist, "Come at me." She said.

Link hesitated for a bit, trying to register her intentions. Shortly after she had nodded at him, he proceeded forward in a small run, his sword raised over his head. Zelda waited for the strike, and when

Link swung downward, she lifted the rapier and blocked it with ease. Then hearing the large clang, she moved to the side, slipping Link's blade off hers and struck the flat part of her rapier onto Link's side. Link quickly placed a hand where she had struck him and backed away from her.

"See? You don't have technique or style." Zelda sighed and smiled, "So I guess I'll teach you some basics then..."

Zelda grabbed Link's arm and helped him stand straight up on both his feet. She stepped back as Link wiped the bits of pine needles and grass on his clothes. Zelda placed the tip of her rapier in the ground and faced Link, both hands resting on the hilt of her sword.

"You're leaving yourself wide open." She began, "You must know who is on the defensive or offensive at all times. Be aware of your actions... think ahead.

"When you charged at me, I easily evaded, but you didn't realize the fact that you had gone to the defense... and since you didn't realize that, you were left wide open. Never leave your back open to the enemy." She swung her sword upright and backed away from Link, "So what you need to do is block more, so you don't leave yourself wide open. When doing so, your blade is usually perpendicular to your opponent's. Now..." Zelda moved her body into a stance, "Come at me!"

Link mimicked his previous move and charged toward the ever so still Zelda. He swung downward, and she quickly dashed to the side, this time not clashing her blade with his. Link found his chance and began to swirl around for another strike, but Zelda had slapped the flat side of her sword on his stomach.

"That time you were too slow." She stated then commanded, "Again..."

Link came after her, repeating his same execution. He found himself doing this many times. Over and over again... like an hourglass being flipped over only to find its reflection below it, repeating its actions. Link panted and panted after a while and he found himself kneeling after every attempt, to gain some lost energy. Zelda would then urge him to stand, and he would charge after her again. Hours had crawled by and Link found himself collapsed on a bunch of pine needles— exhausted— as if every fiber of his energy was rung dry.

"Is that all your capable of?"

Link twitched on the ground and tried to lift himself. He began to think that learning this was all pointless. Why was Zelda so hard on him? He had his bow... Why would he need these skills when Zelda had her rapier? He had stopped attempting to lift himself, and crashed on the ground, a few pine needles flying in the air as he did.

"Do you wish to fail again?" Zelda's voice began to evolve from the carefree, soft tone to a stern one, "Do you want to relive that day you keep raging on about? That one day that makes you so serious all the time?"

Link lifted his head— the memories were rushing back to them.

"Think about it," Zelda began, "what if the ones you love or will eventually love suddenly fall into

danger's grip, and they turn to you? Will you abandon them? A mere bow cannot save what you wish to keep safe. If you have true courage, you will face your enemy eye-to-eye and guard those you wish to protect. If you don't, then you will relive that day you were banished."

Link had risen to his feet and used his sword to balance himself. Slowing his breathing, he looked to Zelda, clinging on the hilt of his sword, burying the blade in the ground. This time Zelda had charged toward Link, though she was much more controlled and graceful, however when she had met him, he had blocked her attack and swung his sword around to counter. Zelda had ducked from the flying blade and went in for another strike, but to her surprise, she found that Link had blocked that attack as well and while she lay in awe, he swirled around and threw his blade through the air. Then he had stopped at the point where he would have struck her.

"That's the idea." Zelda smiled.

"When you put it that way..." Link began, "I can't afford to fail again."

Zelda looked to the sky and saw it painted with a swirling color of orange and red, making it seem that the tips of the trees were on fire. She sheathed her sword, separated herself from Link, and brought her cloak over her chest again.

"The sun dies. You can build that fire now" Zelda stated as she began to walk away, "I need to take care of a few things... I'm not sure when I'll return, but wait for me until then. And make sure the fire stays lit the whole night."

So there stood Link, alone and watching Zelda disappear between the shadows of the trees. When she had gone into the midst of them and to the point where he could see her no more, he turned toward the dried wood and began to scratch two rocks together, causing sparks to fly into the air.

As the hours died into each other and eventually fell into the night, Link found himself staring into a blaze with his cloak wrapped around him for warmth and Zelda still had not returned. Epona lay next to him, with her muzzle resting on his shoulder. The crackling flames accompanied the sounds of the distant crickets, the howling wind, and the birds of the night. The orange light brushed Link's face and danced around in his eyes. It moved as if it were a hand twiddling its fingers and waving to the sky. Link sighed.

"We're so far from home, Epona... this is the farthest away I've ever been." He exclaimed, "And yet, the sounds of the night here resemble those from home."

Epona snorted and wiggled her head.

"Perhaps that's the wind's gift to us... It's carrying the village's voice." Link looked up to the sky, "We'll hear it, no matter how far we travel on this journey." Link's eyes slowly grew heavy and he fell into a black stream of unconsciousness.

8 - The Village of the Disappearing People

The Village of the Disappearing People

Link had awoken to find himself moving. For a moment, it didn't matter as would all groggy people find the most abnormal thing when first awakening from sleep. Then he began to piece his consciousness together. If he was moving, then he should be walking... but he was sleeping... and if he was sleeping, then he should be laying down, and if he was lying down he shouldn't be walking... If he wasn't walking, then he shouldn't be moving. Link blinked twice and bolted upright.

"Finally, you're awake." Zelda said.

"Zelda!" Link replied, "When did you get back?"

Zelda had been dragging Link around in his bed along the forest floor in hopes that he would wake up, and to her success, he had. She grinned.

"Oh, it was so cute." She began, "You were drooling and mumbling in your sleep."

Link glared at Zelda for a moment as he snatched his blanket from her hands, scrunched it up, and turned his back to her. The feeling of embarrassment hushed over Link like flies flying around his ears. Epona snorted and clicked her hoofs on the ground as if she was laughing. Link tried to ignore her as he placed the rolled up blanket on her back. Zelda chuckled to herself as she did the same. She let her cloak drift over her chest and she mounted her horse along with Link who had followed her actions. The strange, exotic birds of the forest chirped in harmony, almost in time with the horses' footsteps.

"So were your dreams pleasant?"

"Do you plan on harassing me some more?" Link said half-annoyed.

"No, I just want to know," Zelda replied.

"Well," Link started, "I dreamt of my home— back when everything was free. Back when the sky still rang with a crystal blue and the white clouds drifted along its hand. I dreamt of the wind singing us songs and the grass rubbing our backs. Vaati, Aryll and I lay on the hills, looking up to the sky, and let the sun bathe our skin all morning. The scent of hay filled our nostrils and the touch of fish echoed into our hands..."

Zelda listened intently to Link, painting the picture in her mind. She imagined herself next to Link enjoying his joys and feeling what he had felt. For a moment her spirit left her body and flew into that world— she felt light and energetic; Zelda could run for miles and miles and never tire her feet. A little wind ran its fingers through her hair and the simplicity of the air ran over her skin. Returning to her

senses with a simple smile, she whispered to Link,

“Keep dreaming good dreams...”

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Off in the distance while dust flew in the air from the barren ground, a small village seemed to rise up from the earth. Link squinted his eyes and leaned forward but a little to get a better view. To him, it was a foreign and exotic place with buildings closer together. There were no fields, no horse corrals, and there wasn't even a river with a windmill. As they drew closer, Link couldn't see any people roaming the streets like in his own village. Even the trees were silent— still. To Link, this wasn't peace and calm, but rather lifeless. And even though the silence hushed the air, this was no sign of peace.

“A ghost town.” Zelda exclaimed.

“What would cause them to leave such a place? There isn't even very much damage...” Link observed as he and Zelda entered under the town gate.

Zelda stopped her horse suddenly, standing in the middle of the village where a well stood in solitude. When Link realized he was the only one pressing forward, he stopped as well and looked back at Zelda. Just as he turned around, however, a wooden rod was not so far from his nose. He drew back suddenly, but found that he was surrounded by all manner of weapons. These pitchforks, blades, and rods were wielded by the townsfolk that had just emerged from their empty homes. Zelda was surrounded as well, but she calmly stared at them, trying to still her horse the best she could. Link slowly reached for his sword, but became frozen stiff when Zelda set her gaze on him.

“What is your purpose in our town, travelers?” A middle-aged man growled.

“What is your purpose in raising your weapons to us? We have not done any harm to you.” Zelda replied.

“Dismount your horses and remove your weapons.”

Zelda was the first to do so, and when she eyed Link again, he regained his freedom of movement. He followed her movements and removed his sword and placed it on the ground next to him. It was soon taken up by one of the townsfolk as more approached him and Zelda. Weapons were still raised to their chins as they took their arms from under their cloaks and began observing them. They had removed Link's gauntlets and pulled up his sleeves to reveal the pale exterior of his arms. They flipped them and turned them, observing every bit of the skin on them. When they had finished with both Link and Zelda, there was a bit of stillness, and the whispers that once surrounded them hushed in the wind.

The weapons were withdrawn and Link's sword and gauntlets were returned to him. Link rolled down his sleeves and slipped his gauntlets back on as the townspeople drew back from them except for the middle-aged man. He bowed his head.

“I apologize, but this is a precaution that we must take.”

“An awfully peculiar precaution-” Zelda replied, “Do tell.”

“Come with me.” The man replied, and motioned for them to follow him.

Link and Zelda followed him with quite a distance in between. The distrust around him was still evident, even though he welcomed them into the village. They were led up a hill with dust rolling down and rubbing the sides of the rocks. Link had coughed several times from the hazy, unwelcoming cloud. They were brought to a house decently sized— at least twice as big as Link’s home. Link and Zelda tied their horse’s reins onto poles not far from it, and approached the middle-aged man, who held the door open for them.

Every place of the inside was covered in shadows, except for the light that leapt through the windows. A small bit of their glance would shine on the little things everywhere, so it was enough to see. The man told Link and Zelda to sit at the small, square wooden table while he brought the fireplace to life. A little more light, this time of a soft, orangish color illuminated the shadows. He sat on the other side of the table and sighed as he relaxed in his chair.

“My name is Elliot. I am the mayor of Kakariko Village.” He began, slightly shifting in his chair, “This village wasn’t always in the state that it is in now.”

“I would assume...” Zelda replied.

“It began about a month ago... The woman that ran the village shop had suddenly disappeared one day. There was nothing strange that happened the day before— those that came to her shop agreed. However, she was just gone... there wasn’t any trace of her left. We never knew why until exactly a week later when one of the village men, who had just been married, disappeared. His wife, however, was a witness. She was returning home from the well after retrieving water. She had seen a man with a strange arm burst out of her home carrying her husband.”

“So that’s the reason why you checked our arms?” Link asked.

“That’s precisely why.” Elliot replied, “A demon with a strange arm has been kidnapping a member of our village each week... Our population has been quickly dropping. Tomorrow is when the demon will strike again.”

“Well, this ‘demon’ perhaps has the intelligence of a human... or else the space in between the kidnappings wouldn’t be constant. He’s doing this for a reason.” Zelda claimed, “My good sir, would it be against your wishes if we stayed the night in this village?”

“No, not at all, but why?”

“We perhaps may be able to stop this demon... Or maybe learn more about it.” Zelda exclaimed, “It would benefit both of us in some sort of way, I’m sure.”

Link turned toward her and moved his lips to speak, but his voice fell to interruption when a voice came from another room.

“Daddy, it was loud outside... Were more people taken away?”

A little girl carried herself into the room. Her blonde curls bounced on the side of her face, brushing her rose-red cheeks ever so gently. But her eyes... Her eyes did not hold the spirit of a child— they seemed to be drained, deprived, unfed... She looked at Link and Zelda blankly, and took a couple steps backward, her face hard and cold with her mouth still and straight.

“No need to fear them, Fera.” Elliot said in a higher tone, “Neither of them are the demon with the strange arm that has been kidnapping our people.” He stood up and patted her on the head, “Now run along to your room— there’s nothing to fear as of yet.”

The young girl glided out to the hallway, glancing back at Link and Zelda once more, giving them a taste of her cold glance and brushed her hand along the wooden frame. Fera’s tiny footsteps faded down the hallway and vanished into silence. Elliot turned toward Link and Zelda.

“I must apologize for my daughter’s glances.” Elliot started, “Ever since the beginning of all this, she has been too frightened to trust anyone. A shame for a child... to think that the unbreakable trust of one could be shattered like glass.” He turned his body toward the hallway, “It seems you have nowhere else to stay since you are travelers, and the innkeeper vanished but last week. I will allow you to stay here, so let me lead you to your rooms.”

Zelda stood to her feet and looked back to assure Link had done the same before they both followed Elliot once again. This long wasn’t as long as before, though; it was merely down the hall. Elliot pointed to two doors and informed them that those were their rooms. Then he parted from them, not even bothering to open the doors for them and left them with the knowledge that his wife would just drop off trays of food by their doors when it came to supper time. Uneasy and tight. Those were the two words that had come to Link’s mind. The demon with the strange arm returning to his thoughts, he faced Zelda, who had just turned the doorknob on the door to the right.

“Zelda, how would we benefit from this ‘strange armed demon’?”

“Have you yet considered it could be one of the Winged Darkness’ followers? With the release of the star, its influence is spreading rapidly throughout the whole world, I’m sure. We should question some of the villagers in the morning.” Zelda paused for a moment and cocked her head, “You’re beginning to say my name calmer and calmer now. You’re not screaming it like you did back at the castle.”

Link blinked his eyes. Why would she take note of that? In fact more strange was why did those words impact on him so much? Everything was so strange... Link brushed it aside, however, and simply replied with a small and light, “huh...” and opened the door to his room on the left and walked in, so walls could separate his eyes from Zelda. He looked around the room to change the course of his mind. This little room was cramped as well with little trinkets here and there, papers covering the floor, and dozens of portraits and pictures covered the walls and stood like statues on desks and surfaces. This was a study. Figures. Link was accustomed to this type of environment of slight poverty, being raised in a village where the farmer was the ideal carrier. There was a comfortable sofa for him to lie on, though. Dust flew from the cushions when he seated himself on it and he swung his legs up and rested his feet on the other side where the arm of the sofa was. He lay down, staring up at the cobweb-covered ceiling, counting the individual splints that hung from the wood. Then he realized that his satchel was still on

Epona's back outside...

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The day dragged on, and Link awoke from his nap when Elliot's pale-faced wife, dull and lifeless, came knocking at his door with a small tray of food. When she came, she said nothing, and only had her mouth hanging open a little and her dark eyes, which were over prominent lines on her cheekbones, blinking only a little bit. Her thin blonde hair covered her face when she left in the middle of Link's "thank you." He faced the closed door for a while, and then retreated to the back of the study. He took a bite of the bit of bread on his plate and his tongue twinged when he found that it was dry and brittle. However, Link's face did not show the same expression. Just then, he realized he hadn't eaten in a day or so, since he and Zelda began journeying from the castle. Even if this was a meal of a poor mayor to a poor village, he felt as if he ate like a king. But the welcoming here was hardly pleasing. Though he managed to find many similarities with this foreign place to his own home, there was still an emptiness of refuge.

Link had occupied himself for a little bit by reading one of the books off of the shelves— a fairy tale written for children. However Link couldn't read or write. The only thing he could understand were the pictures beautifully drawn on the book's delicate pages. One of them was of a castle, similar to Zelda's, but larger, more elegant, and grand with tall towers reaching up to the clouds. Eventually his eyelids grew heavy and he began to leave his stream of consciousness. He gradually fell asleep with the open book resting on his chest.

The night carried on to its further darkness. Link's sleep was not deep, however, for he woke up several times during the shaded hours. To drift back to sleep, he would stare at the ceiling, but he would shortly wake up soon after. Once he had awakened to hear footsteps outside his room. Keeping his eyes closed, he listened. They came from the room next door, so he had assumed it was Zelda pacing about. The door to his room creaked open with a high moan. Still he kept his eyes closed...

Zelda peered into the room, but still tried to keep her face obscured by the door. The moonlight from the window bathed the wooden floor and surfaces in front of the shadows. But most noticeable, was how the light fell upon the sleeping figure that lay on the sofa. She kept her face in the shadows and her hands as close to her as possible. When Zelda stared at Link's face, it reminded her of the time back at the castle, when he had saved her from Winged Darkness' nothingness... the way he had laid before her. Never had she experienced or witnessed that kind of act. Not necessarily the action, but the meaning of it. Zelda knew not of the sudden compassion that Link displayed for her. However, she surprised herself— she didn't feel anything to return it. Was she supposed to? Her heart was more confused than anything and yet, when Zelda stared upon Link's face she felt more at ease than ever before. But no matter how much she dug into that ease in her heart, she could find nothing else. No other emotion.

Was it because of her demon?

“You may do so...” Replied Elliot, his voice raspy and cracking.

“Thank you... and I am sorry for your sickness. I wish you the best of health.” She said before turning toward Link, nodding, and going down the hall once more.

Both she and Link strapped on their swords however the way they would go about it, and left their traveling cloaks behind. They exited the house and looked over the barren village with not a person in sight. Both of them climbed down the hill and down into the main village area, where they began to knock on the homes of the other residents.

Several hours had passed since that morning, and Elliot’s wife still sat by the bed, keeping her husband company. She rubbed his cheek with her bare hand, and brushed his nose bridge with her finger. He was sleeping. Fera came into the room and glanced at her mother and father.

“Good morning, Fera.” Elliot’s wife greeted, “Your father is sick today.”

The little eight year-old daughter said nothing. Elliot’s wife glanced at the bucket of water, slightly cloudy from the used rag, constantly being wet over and over again.

“Could you go out to the well for me and change the water? Be careful though...”

Fera said nothing. She only set her hands on the either side of the bucket, traveled down the hall, and exited the house. The dust blew in her face as she traveled down the hill and toward the well in the middle of the town. She tilted the bucket and allowed the water to spill all over her feet. She pulled on the rope and watched the bucket fall into the well. She waited and waited until she heard a quiet splash, then began to pull the rope again to reel the bucket out of the well’s darkness. Just then a shadow passed over her head and onto the rim of the well. Fera froze, and slowly turned around when large footsteps behind her crunched the ground beneath her feet had suddenly stopped. Her eyes wide with terror, the breathing of the one behind her grew more and more harsh as he reached out toward her, stretching his arm out far beyond any human could do, and gripped her at the neck.

Not far, Link and Zelda could hear the high shrill of the girl off in the distance. They glanced at each other for a moment and darted toward the sound. It was brief, but when they had sight of the center of the village, they caught the glance of a dark figure running off into forest a ways away. Zelda pulled ahead of Link and gripped her rapier.

“Is that a demon?”

Link gripped his sword, ready and determined with the skills he had been taught by Zelda before. His eyes were narrow and sharp, keeping the lookout for the figure that had suddenly run off. Eventually, they had plunged into the forest that was off in the distance from the village. Trees zoomed past in their peripheral vision. The wind howled and screamed against their ears and the leaves cried from the trees.

Then there he was— the figure that had run off so quickly. A green skinned man with fiery red hair and eyes glowing yellow as bright suns. He stood alone, a sneer on his face, looking Link and Zelda straight on. He grinned and greeted,

“Why hello, there!”