

Love Will Leave You Crying

By: Kasuto of Kataan

Part One

It's funny how things work out. Well, maybe not funny. I guess it's more like...disappointing. I always thought that I had all the time in the world. I always thought I'd be young forever, and be able to tell him whenever I wanted to. I suppose that I'm a victim of my own procrastination. I kept telling myself that I would confess my feelings later; that I would tell him tomorrow. But whenever tomorrow came, I put it off again. After a while, I just assumed that he knew. But of course, he didn't. He had no idea; and he still doesn't. Maybe it's better that he doesn't know, I don't want him to be upset. All I want is for him to be happy. Besides, it's my fault that I never said anything. Sure, we've always been friends, but I thought that it might become something more someday. Somehow, I always knew that it would. But, I guess I was wrong. Now it looks like it will never be anything more than a simple friendship. But maybe that's the way it was always supposed to be. I still blame myself for not telling him. After all, it is my fault. Now I have to live the rest of my life with this shadow hanging over my head. I could've told him, but I never did. Why? Why did I have to be so stupid? I should have just told him when I got the chance. But I put it off...again and again. There was always more time, more time for me to think it over. But now there is no more time...it's too late. He'll never know how I feel, and I'll never know how he feels. Maybe it's supposed to be this way, maybe I'm not meant to know. I'll just have to live not knowing, and regretting it for the rest of my life. I wonder why I have to live with this burden... with this pain. Sometimes I wonder why I have to live at all. The only thing that keeps me from crawling into some hole and wasting away in my own sorrow is him. I'm still here for him. It would make him sad if I was gone, and that's the last thing I want. All I want is for him to be happy, my feelings don't matter. At least I can get some comfort from his happiness. He already has the love of his life, and I can be happy through him. Even if he doesn't know how I feel, I can accept that. He is happy...what I want does not matter.

Link opened his eyes and squinted at the bright sunlight streaming through the window and directly onto his face. He rolled over to get out of the sun's glare and sat up on his bed. It was his usual time to get up in the morning, and his stomach was already starting to rumble. It was time for breakfast. Yawning, he stood up and stretched his arms and legs. He bent over to the pile of clothes on the floor and picked out something that was decent enough to wear. *Saria would have a fit if she saw this*, thought Link with a smile. He looked over to the bed that was on the other side of the room, it still seemed so new; he'd only built it a few months ago. The blankets on the other bed moved up and down with the rhythmic motion of breathing, a slight snoring sound accompanying those movements. Solo was still asleep. *She's worse than me*, he thought.

He walked over to the bed and stood over Solo. She was rolled on her side, her face partially obscured by her long, unruly hair. The golden strands of her bangs moved back and forth in the small breeze created by her breath. Link almost chuckled when he saw the tiny spot of drool on the pillow near her mouth. She was snoring and Link had to wake her up. "Solo, wake up," said Link, shaking her gently. She only turned her head and made an unenthusiastic groan. Link sighed. "Get up! It's time for breakfast!" he shouted. The same groan was his answer. Somehow, this was funny. It seemed as if they alternated roles each morning; sometimes Link would sleep in and Solo would wake him up and vice-versa. Today was Link's turn.

Link walked back over to his own bed and grabbed the pillow. He grasped it tightly in his hand and heaved the pillow across the room, causing it to impact directly onto Solo's previously serene face. "What are you doing?!" she yelled, pulling the covers completely over her face.

“I’m just trying to wake you up,” replied Link, trying not to smirk; although she couldn’t see his face anyway.

“Well, I’m tired and I want to *keep* sleeping,” she said from under the covers, the annoyance prominent in her voice. “Why can’t you just let me sleep in for one day?”

“Because it’s your turn to get the fruit and stuff for breakfast. It’s not nice to make Saria do it all the time.”

Solo pulled the covers off her face and stared at Link. Her eyes were tired and slightly bloodshot, now Link understood why she was so crabby. She didn’t look like she had gotten much sleep. “Can you do it for me just this once?” she begged, showing Link the most pitiful expression she could muster.

“What’s wrong? Why don’t you want to get up?” asked Link. “We all take turns.”

Solo moaned. “I just don’t feel good today. My stomach hurts, and my head hurts, and I had really bad cramps all night. And I’m not really in a good mood.”

“You always say that,” Link countered.

“Well I’m serious this time!” she shouted, her frustration growing greater. She felt generally rotten today. Her whole body hurt and she felt sick. Solo also wasn’t in a good mood, she felt mad and depressed at the same time. She just wanted to stay in bed for the rest of the day, where she wouldn’t have to do anything. “Please, just leave me alone.”

“Fine,” conceded Link. He didn’t know what was bothering Solo, but he knew that he shouldn’t be pestering her right now. She was in one of those moods today. It seemed as if she was becoming more and more moody everyday. One minute she was happy and the next minute she was angry or depressed. Link couldn’t understand why, so he just tried to avoid her when she was in one of those moods. At least Saria wouldn’t be moody, she was always calm and rational. “I’ll do your stuff for you today,” said Link. “But you owe me.”

“Thanks,” said Solo.

“Are you going to have breakfast later? Do you want me to come get you when it’s done?”

“Not really,” replied Solo. “I’m not that hungry and I don’t feel like eating. I just want to stay in bed for a while.” She positioned herself under the blanket once more and struggled to get comfortable again.

Link put on his boots and walked towards the door. Before he left, he looked at Solo again. “Are you sick?” he asked. “Because if there’s anything I can do for you…”

“No, I’m fine,” Solo interrupted. “I don’t think I’m sick. I just feel a little under the weather.”

“Well…okay. I hope you feel better.” Link turned around and left his house. He was beginning to get tired of always having to bail Solo out. It seemed like she never wanted to do her chores and Link ended up doing them for her. At first, she did more than her fair share. But in the last few weeks, she hadn’t done anything. She’d constantly give Link her puppy-dog face to guilt him into doing her chores. He didn’t mind helping, but Solo had to do her work sometime.

Link wondered if her melancholy attitude had anything to do with her new boyfriend. After she had finally settled in months ago, Solo thought it might be fun to try and have some kind of social life. She began to hang out with the kids in the castle village, already forgetting how jealous she had been of them in the past. She no longer watched them and wished to be one of them, she was one of them. After a while, she had developed an affinity for a boy her age who lived in the town. The boy, named Akuyo, also seemed to really like Solo. They became instant friends, but Solo never referred to him as her “boyfriend.” They still teased her about him, even though she insisted that Akuyo wasn’t her boyfriend. Link thought it was cute that she finally had a boyfriend, and that gave him the opportunity to tease her about it. Gone was the time when Solo could relentlessly torment Link about his relationship with Zelda, now Link could finally bug Solo. Link hadn’t met Akuyo, but he seemed to make Solo very happy. So far, Akuyo had treated Solo almost like a goddess. She would come home everyday raving about how he gave her such pretty flowers and how he was such a nice person. But since the last few days, she didn’t seem to be as happy anymore. Link wondered if Solo and Akuyo had gotten in an argument, which could make anyone upset for a while. Link didn’t want to pry into Solo’s personal life.

Link entered Saria’s house to see if she had gotten up yet. He quickly scanned the house and noticed that she wasn’t there. *Where could she be?* Link thought to himself. *It’s not her turn to pick the berries.*

Link wondered if Saria had just gone out on a walk, which she did from time to time. Link decided that maybe he should go and try to find her. Saria only went on walks when she was in a bad mood. He made his way across the Kokiri's tiny village and towards the entrance to the Lost Woods. None of the other children ever went here, for fear of disappearing or being cursed. Link and Saria both knew the tales of the Lost Woods were myths, so they never feared walking there. Link leisurely made his way towards the secret place where he and Saria had sat and talked so many times. If she was depressed, she would probably be there. As Link walked towards the Forest Meadow, memories of the things he'd done in the past—or the future—came back to him. The place seemed so strange now. There was nothing here but trees, shrubs, and the pleasant chirping of birds. All the evil forces that had once infected this world had disappeared. All of the strange creatures he had fought were no longer here. It almost seemed as if those things had simply been a figment of his imagination; maybe all those supernatural beings never existed in the first place. He shook those thoughts out of his head, he didn't have to worry about that anymore. The world had returned to normal long ago. He no longer had to live as the Hero, he could live as a normal person.

Link walked up a long stairway nestled in the trees, which led to the Sacred Forest Meadow. This had always been the special place where he and Saria would go if they wanted to get away from the rest of the Kokiri children. None of them ever came up here, fearing the legends of monsters. Link strode into the meadow to see Saria sitting in a large tree stump. Her back was to him, and her head was lowered so he couldn't see it. Link walked up to her, knowing that something was wrong. Saria would usually come here to play her ocarina, where she would be free from the criticism of others, no matter how badly she played. But Link could hear that she obviously wasn't playing her ocarina; she must have been really depressed. He could hear faint sobs coming from the girl ahead of him. As he came closer to Saria he stepped on a twig, causing her to turn around. Saria looked startled when she saw Link and quickly turned back around, trying to hide her face in her arms. The quick view Link had gotten of Saria's face disturbed him. It wasn't her usual, jovial expression. Saria looked sad and tired.

Link knelt beside Saria and put his arm on her shoulder. "What's wrong?" asked Link in a soothing voice.

Saria's face remained buried in her arms, slight sobs still coming from her. "Nothing, I'm fine," she mumbled. She lifted her head and sniffled, trying to wipe the tears from her face. She looked at Link, and he felt saddened by her reddened eyes and tear-streaked face. "I was just a little upset."

"Why are you upset? I'm your friend, you can tell me anything." Saria knew that Link was genuinely concerned, but she couldn't tell him what was troubling her. She looked into Link's eyes, he didn't really want to know what was specifically bothering her, he only wanted her to feel better. Saria wondered what she should tell him. She couldn't lie to Link, she had never lied to him before. But she couldn't tell him the truth, either.

"I...I...can't really say," stammered Saria. "I mean...I don't really know..." She sniffled again, trying not to cry. She didn't want to upset Link with her problem; all she wanted was for him to be happy. Bringing up her problems would only put a strain on their friendship.

"It's okay, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to," said Link. He hugged Saria. "You know you're my best friend—really my only friend—and I don't want you to be sad. I just want you to know that you can come to me about anything. I've always been there for you, and I always will." Saria looked into Link's caring blue eyes. He was such a wonderful person, and it was amazing that he didn't have a hundred girls chasing after him. Saria felt privileged to know him.

"Well...I'm just upset about somebody...I thought I loved," said Saria, wiping another tear from her face. Link's face softened.

"Oh, is it some boy you're crying about?" asked Link. Link never thought Saria to be someone with a love life, but she was just like any other person. "You can tell me about it, it's okay."

"I didn't really love him at first..." mumbled Saria. "It took a while. But after I got to know him, I thought I might want to spend the rest of my life with him. But...but he didn't feel the same way. He found someone else and now he's in love with her."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I never knew you had problems like that." Link wondered when Saria had ever

managed to get a boyfriend. A lot of the Kokiri dated each other but most never married. Only those rare couples actually had a real marriage. People from the outside wouldn't understand why the Kokiri children got married, they looked too immature for that kind of commitment. But the Kokiri only looked childlike on the outside, their minds and souls were just as mature as other adults, if not more so. "Did you ever tell him how you felt?" asked Link.

"No," sniffled Saria. "I always thought there would be more time, so I put it off. When I thought it was the right time, it was too late." Saria looked at Link's caring face again and looked away. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't burden you with my problems. I'm sure you have enough things to worry about."

"Nonsense," replied Link. "That's what friends are for. Can I ask you something?" he whispered. Saria nodded. "Who is it? Who's the one you like? I promise I won't tell."

Saria looked into Link's eyes; he was always curious and wanted to know things. Saria couldn't tell Link that he was the one she pined for. But if she didn't answer him, he might end up bugging her about it for weeks. Maybe she should give him some fake name, but she didn't like the idea of lying to him. "It's...his name...is not important. You really don't need to know who it is. It might upset you."

"Oh...Is it somebody I know?" prodded Link. "Because it has to be somebody from the forest and I know everyone here. Can you give me a hint?"

"Yes, it's somebody you know," replied Saria, rolling her eyes. She felt her mood improving; Link seemed to always give off an aura that brightened everyone's day. "I'm not like you, I don't go running off in the middle of the night looking for adventures. Obviously it's one of us. But no amount of prodding will get me to talk." Saria folded her arms and huffed.

"Oh please," begged Link. "Just give me a little clue. It's not Mido, is it?"

"Oh gods no! Why would I like Mido?" Link shrugged his shoulders and Saria giggled. "You know who he is, but you'll never guess." Saria was charmed by Link's naïveté; the answer was right in front of him, but he didn't see it. Link couldn't understand that he was the person Saria loved so much, but she knew that it was better for him not to know. Link could be so adorable when he was clueless. "Maybe you'll find out someday. But now's not the right time. Besides, I'm the one in pain here. You should be comforting me."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Link, realizing that he had been pestering Saria. "I'll comfort you." Link gave a big grin and had the I'm-gonna-hug-you look on his face. Saria prepared herself as Link leaned over and clutched her in a tight embrace. "See, I'm comforting you," he teased, purposely squeezing her, but trying not to be too rough.

Saria smiled inwardly and wrapped her arms around Link. "Thank you," she said. To Saria, time seemed to stop. She was living entirely in this moment, and she didn't ever want to let go. Link hugged her as a friend, but she felt more. She wanted to hold him for the rest of her life, to tell him how much she loved him. She wanted Link to tell her that he loved her, and that he felt the same way. But she never heard those words. She reveled in the feeling of his strong arms surrounding her tiny body. He was so strong, yet he was so gentle with her. He was everything that any person could ever want, and she could not have him. That wonderful moment when Saria lived her fantasy finally ended. Link released his embrace and Saria came back to the real world. "Thank you for making me feel better," said Saria. "I'm really glad you were there for me."

"That's what friends are for," said Link. "Do you want to get back to the house? It's almost breakfast time."

"There you go with your stomach again," said Saria, giving Link a small poke in the belly. They both stood up and Link began to walk her back to her home.

"I'm a growing boy," he replied.

"Yeah, if you grow any more you won't fit in your house." Saria looked up towards Link's face. He was nearly a foot taller than she was, and he dwarfed the rest of the Kokiri. Link pulled a small pouch from his belt and began to fill it with berries he picked as he passed the many bushes. "I thought it was Solo's turn to get the berries today," said Saria.

"It is her turn. But when I got up this morning she said she didn't feel like getting up. Once again she talked me into doing it for her."

Saria took Link's hand and motioned for him to stop picking. "You don't have to take her turn. I've still got a whole bunch of apples left and we don't need any berries today. We'll just stick with what you've already gotten." Link nodded and tied up the bag. "Do you know why Solo didn't want to get up?"

"I'm not really sure," replied Link. "She said that she felt sick to her stomach or something, and that her whole body hurt. I have no idea what's wrong with her, she won't tell me. She's been acting like this for the last week or so."

"Maybe she's just in a bad mood," said Saria. "It could be her boyfriend...what's his name?"

"Akuyo," replied Link.

"Yeah, maybe she's upset about him or something. Has she said anything to you?"

"No...All she does is rave about him. Solo seems to really like him. If she had problems, she would've told me. I'll ask her about it later."

Link and Saria emerged from the Lost Woods and walked back to her house. When they entered, Saria put a half-full bushel of apples on the table and smiled at Link. "See, I told you we had plenty of apples," said Saria.

"Geez...that is a lot," remarked Link. "I guess we can let Solo get away with this one."

"Well, speak of the devil," said Saria, pointing towards the door. Link turned around to see Solo standing in the doorway, yawning. She walked over to the table and sat down.

"Looks like you finally decided to get up," said Link.

"Yeah," replied Solo unenthusiastically.

"So what's wrong?" asked Saria. "Are you sick?"

"I don't know," replied Solo. "I just had a headache and stuff when I woke up. But I feel a little better now."

"Saria thought it was because of your boyfriend," said Link.

Solo smirked and blushed slightly. "What, you mean Akuyo?" said Solo. "He's not really my *boyfriend*. He just, you know, a friend."

Saria smirked. "Don't try to hide it, we can tell how much you like him," commented Saria. "You're always talking about him. Are you in love with him?" asked Saria in a dreamy voice while making kissing faces.

"Stop that!" said Solo, trying not to let her embarrassment show. "I'm not in love with him. We're just...friends. Nothing more."

"Well, if he's not the problem, then why have you been acting so moody lately?" asked Link.

"I don't know. I guess I've just been in a bad mood. Of course, I don't know why...everything's been going pretty good lately." She shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe I'm just crazy or something."

"You don't need to tell us *that*," said Link with a large sarcastic grin. "We already know you're crazy." Solo rolled her eyes at another one of Link's inane comments. She was beginning to wonder if having a brother was all it's cracked up to be.

"*You're* the crazy one," said Solo, pointing to Link.

"Well, what are you doing today?" asked Saria, trying to change the subject. "Don't you have a date or something?"

"It's not a date," insisted Solo. "We're just going to go to the lake for a picnic."

"Ooh, sounds romantic," teased Link. He was thrilled to be able to have someone to tease Solo about.

"And then afterwards," continued Solo, giving Link a cock-eyed glance, "I'm gonna go over to Malon's house. She's teaching me how to ride a horse." Solo looked over to Link. "Epona misses you."

Link sighed. "I go over there sometimes," said Link. "It's not like I'm abandoning her."

"Epona *is* your horse, why don't you bring her to live over here?"

"I don't exactly have the facilities to take care of a horse," replied Link. "Malon has stables and all sorts of stuff that I don't have. She's a lot better equipped for it than I am."

"What kind of stuff do you need to take care of a horse?" asked Solo. "We've got grass, that's about all they need."

"No, they need love and care, too. And I don't have time for that yet. Maybe later I'll build some kind of stable or something for her."

“Whatever. Anyways, Malon thinks I’m a natural at horse-riding. She says she hasn’t seen anyone learn so quickly. But I think it’s just because she’s a good teacher. But I’m going over there after I see Akuyo.”

“Sounds like you’ve got a pretty full day,” said Saria.

“Yeah, I like to keep busy.”

“What are you doing today, Link?” asked Saria. “Besides lying in bed all day.”

“Hey, I’m not *that* lazy,” countered Link. “I’m gonna go over to Zelda’s house today.”

“You mean the castle,” said Solo. “It’s a little bigger than a house. You should call it a castle ‘cause that’s what it is.”

“Fine miss smarty-pants,” replied Link sarcastically. “I’m going over to the *castle* today. Zelda wants to...umm...to take me...” Link trailed off.

“What? She wants to take you what?” prodded Solo.

“She wants to take me shopping in the market with her,” blurted out Link. “For clothes and stuff.”

“Ouch, sounds like a death sentence,” winced Solo.

“Yeah, you know how we girls are when it comes to clothes,” added Saria.

“What are you talking about?” asked Link. “You’ve worn the same thing every single day for your whole life. What would you know about clothes?”

“Well...I...I mean, that’s what I’ve heard...” mumbled Saria.

“That’s what I thought. But yes, I know it’s pretty much the same thing as a death sentence. Last time she was looking through about a million carts for the whole day. And not to mention she has enough money to buy everything.”

“Why don’t you try to talk her into something else?” suggested Solo. “Like a picnic or something, like me and Akuyo are doing.”

“No, she’s too stubborn. Once Zelda has her mind set on something, it’s really hard to get her to budge. But I guess I could try.”

“That’s the spirit!” cheered Saria. “For once try to get her to do something that you want to do.”

“What Zelda wants *is* what I want,” replied Link. “I only want her to be happy. Maybe I can get her to do something else today, along with the shopping.”

“Well, I hope you two have fun with your little love-muffins,” commented Saria, garnering glares from Link and Solo.

“I told you, he’s not my love-muffin,” protested Solo. “He’s my friend, and I don’t love him love him. I...well, you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, we know what you mean,” said Saria in a half-sarcastic tone. “Just so I know, when do you guys plan on getting back?”

“Geez, I don’t know,” replied Link. “Zelda will probably be shopping till the market closes at six, so expect me back after then.”

“I have no idea when I’ll be back,” replied Solo. “My picnic should only be a couple hours, but I’m going over to Malon’s house afterwards. I might spend the night or something.”

“You spend more time at Malon’s house than you do with your boyfriend,” said Link.

“What’s the surprise in that?” replied Solo. “Malon’s my best friend, and I like spending time with her. She’s such a wonderful person, and always listens to me. Akuyo’s fun to be with, but he gets a little annoying after a while.”

“Just like Link,” said Saria with a smirk.

“No, Akuyo is much worse. But he’s a nice guy, he just talks too much. I think we’ll have a good time today, he says he has a surprise for me at the picnic.”

“I hope you guys have fun today,” said Saria, as she finished setting the table for everyone. Sometimes she wished she had a life outside the forest, wondering what it was like living outside. She had been outside the Kokiri Forest a few times, but those had only been for a short time. Saria realized then that she could actually leave the forest and not face certain death, as she had been told her whole life. Although she knew she could leave any time she wanted, Saria never did. She felt somehow discouraged from leaving the forest; not really afraid, but simply unsure. She didn’t belong in the outside world. Saria

hoped that Link and Solo could find happy lives outside the forest, knowing that they would eventually leave permanently. Saria tried to enjoy every moment she had with Link. He left much more frequently lately, leaving Saria alone for whole days. She realized that she had taken their close friendship for granted so many years ago, taking for granted the time they spent together. Someday in the near future, Saria would only see Link in regular visits instead of waking up to him everyday. At times, she hoped that they could spend their lives together as a couple, but now she knew that would never happen. Although she had the mind of a mature adult, she remained inside the body of a young child. No grown man, as Link would be soon, would want to spend his life with a child. Sometimes Saria wished she wasn't one of the Kokiri; she wished she was a Hylian like Link. Maybe if she grew up as he did, he might take more of an interest in her. Saria cursed her child-like appearance. But Link already had someone in his life, so Saria's hopes had already been crushed. Now she only hoped that Link would find happiness with Zelda. After all, Saria only cared about Link's happiness. Her own feelings did not matter.

She's such a wonderful person. Being around her is like being in the presence of a goddess. I feel almost overwhelmed when I stand next to her. No other person in the world could compare to her beauty, to her personality, or to her loving heart. Sometimes I wonder if she's too good for me. It's not because she's royalty, but just because of the way she is. I could never even begin to compare to her. I just hope that she'll put up with me. Sometimes I wonder if she's an angel sent from heaven, or one of the goddesses themselves. I love her so much, for every possible reason under the sun. I couldn't begin to describe her with words. Her hair is like delicate strands of pure gold, that seem to glisten in the sunlight. Her eyes are beautiful blue gems that glow with life. It's as if I can see into her soul when I look into her eyes. They look so beautiful, the color of the ocean. She has the most beautiful smile that could melt anyone's heart. And she has such beautiful skin, it's so soft and smooth. It's like a baby. Her hands are so tiny and delicate, and I look at my own hands which are so big and covered in calluses. Her skin looks so beautiful, it almost glows. Wherever she goes, an aura of happiness follows her. She fills everyone she sees with love, especially me. She's so...perfect. That is the only word I can use to describe her: perfect. I know that people say that "nobody's perfect", but I think she comes pretty close. She is my definition of perfection.

Link entered the familiar lobby of Hyrule Castle, still amazed by the multitude of crystal chandeliers and silk tapestries. Upon hearing footsteps clamoring from within, Link turned to see Zelda running down a hallway. She was wearing a dress that he had never seen before, it must have been new. He wondered why she wanted to go shopping if she was already wearing a new dress; women were such an enigma to him. The dress was a beautiful crimson color with gold thread interwoven throughout. The dress began from just below her shoulders and went to her knees. Link had never seen her wear anything like this before, it seemed much more revealing than other dresses she's worn. He'd never noticed this side of Zelda before, she was beautifully attractive. He had always loved her exuberant personality and loving heart, but now her physical appearance was added to the list of things he liked about her. He watched her run down the hall, and it almost seemed in slow motion. Her beautiful golden hair flowed with each bouncing step she took. Zelda was an angel coming down the hall; she was the most beautiful sight Link had ever seen. Just seeing Zelda made his palms sweat and his heart skip a beat.

Zelda finally reached Link, nearly colliding with him. She clutched onto his arm and gave him a light kiss on the cheek. "Oh, hi Linkie-pooh!" she said cheerily. She took a few steps back from Link and gave him a questioning look. "What do you think of my new dress?" She turned around to make sure Link saw every inch of her.

Link felt suddenly speechless. He had no idea how to answer her question. There were really no words he could use to describe her. What could he say? That she was the most beautiful person she had

ever seen? That all the angels in heaven couldn't even compare to her? He didn't want to sound like a total sap.

"Well?" prodded Zelda, turning around once more.

"I...you..." mumbled Link, receiving a playful glare from Zelda. "You look...fantastic." Finally, that was the only word he could think of.

"Oh thank you, I knew you would like it."

"Can I ask you something? How in the world did you get away with wearing that thing? I mean, it's a little...um...revealing. Impa or your dad would have a fit if they saw you in that."

Zelda sidled up to Link and put her mouth to his ear. "They don't know about it," she whispered. She grabbed his arm and started to drag him outside. "Come on, let's get out of here before someone finds out." Link smiled to himself, that was another thing he liked about Zelda. She was always so rebellious, trying to find little ways she could get into trouble. Link never tried to stop her because he thought it was fun. It was always interesting to see what little schemes she could come up with next.

"You look really nice in that," said Link as they walked down the path towards the market.

"Thank you," replied Zelda, smiling. She knew that Link would really love her new dress. She could tell that he liked it even more than he was letting on.

"If you already got a new dress, why are we going shopping now?"

"Because it's fun!" cheered Zelda.

Link frowned. "Well, I don't really like shopping that much. I just buy what I need and leave."

Zelda grabbed Link's arm when they entered into the market and ran over to the first merchant's cart she saw. "Ooh! Look at this!" cried Zelda, picking up some random piece of clothing from the cart. Link looked at the cerulean blue dress and sighed.

"Yeah, that looks nice," said Link unenthusiastically. He looked around to see if there was anything around that he do to entertain himself while Zelda dug through piles of clothes.

"How 'bout this one?" asked Zelda, holding another dress up to her body.

"Isn't that the same one?" This dress looked exactly the same as the one she showed him just a moment ago. He honestly couldn't tell the difference between most of these clothes; they all looked the same to him.

"No, silly. This one is a different color." Zelda took the other dress and held it up next to the new one. Link squinted and tried to discern the difference in color.

"They're both blue," he replied.

Zelda sighed. "You obviously have no sense of color. This one is cerulean, and this one is aquamarine." She shoved the clothes in Link's face, trying to get him to see a difference.

"I've never even heard of those colors before. They're both blue."

"You're hopeless!" said Zelda, finally giving up on trying to get him to notice the difference. *He must be color-blind*, she thought. Zelda started digging through the pile again, making excited noises whenever she came across an article of clothing that she thought was cute. "Ooh! What do you think of this?" she asked, holding up a silk scarf with a tiger-stripe design.

"That looks nice," commented Link.

"Just nice? Is that all you can say, 'nice'?" Link shrugged his shoulders.

"It's...friendly and casual, yet...forceful and dynamic," said Link, trying to come up with some phrase that would satisfy Zelda.

"That was better, but you still need work."

Link stood next to Zelda as she haggled with the dealers for better prices, trying to look like he was enjoying this. "Can't we do something else?" complained Link. He looked over at a cart across the town center that had loads of jewelry hanging from it. "How about I go over there?" he asked, pointing to the other cart. "I'll go buy you a present."

Zelda looked at Link and smiled. "Oh, you don't have to buy me a present. Putting up with me is enough. If you want to go look around on your own, go ahead. I'll come find you when I'm done."

Link breathed a sigh of relief and walked through the town center. He saw a merchant who was selling a whole variety of delicious-looking pastries and other baked goods. He approached the cart and

his mouth watered at all the sweet desserts that lay before him. “These, look good, yes?” said the merchant in some weird, foreign accent.

Link had his eye set on a chocolate pastry topped with an ungodly amount of frosting. “Ooh, how much is that one?” he asked the merchant, pointing to the pastry.

“Oh yes, that is good one. It cost five rupee.”

Link dug into his pocket and pulled out a blue rupee. He handed it to the merchant, who in turn gave Link the pastry wrapped in wax paper. “Thank you, come again,” said the merchant cheerily as Link walked off. He unwrapped the pastry and took a bite. It was so sweet and still felt warm from the bakery.

Link approached Zelda, who had moved on to another cart. She had a handful of dresses, scarves, and other assorted items. Zelda turned around and giggled when Link approached. Link held out the half-eaten pastry and offered it to her. “Want some?” he asked. Zelda giggled again. “What?” he asked, feeling self-conscious.

“You have frosting on your nose,” said Zelda as she wiped the small blob of frosting from the tip of his nose. “You can go ahead and eat it, I don’t really want any.”

“Go ahead, try it. It’s really good,” he insisted, patting his belly.

“No, really. If I start eating too much of that, I’ll start getting fat.”

Link looked down at his belly; it looked normal for a boy his age. “It’s not making me fat,” countered Link as he finished off the pastry.

“That’s ‘cause you’re a boy. Boys don’t get fat from sweet stuff, but girls do.”

“So? I wouldn’t care if you were fat. I’d love you no matter how you looked.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet,” said Zelda, kissing Link on the cheek. “But I’d like to stay normal weight for myself.” She held up the multitude of dresses she’d purchased and showed them to Link.

“Are you done now?”

“No, there’s a whole bunch more places to go. It’ll probably be a couple hours before I’m done.” Link sighed in frustration, having a girlfriend was a lot of work. More specifically, putting up with a girlfriend was a lot of work. “Tell me, what do you think of these?” she asked, holding up a pair of white tights.

“Ooh, those would look nice on you,” said Link, imagining Zelda in a pair of tights. That would definitely be a sight to behold.

“No, silly. I was gonna get these for you.” Link’s face turned beet-red upon hearing that comment. Zelda looked Link up and down and smiled. “Your cute little legs would look perfect in these tights.”

“No way! I am *not* wearing those!” countered Link. He remembered being an adult during his time-travel adventure, and he remembered the tights he’d worn. He had no idea where his adult clothes had even come from, he just woke up one day wearing them. He had felt so effeminate in those things, and dreaded wearing them. Of course, his situation had never actually given him time to purchase new clothes. *Those sages really had a sick sense of humor*, thought Link. He wasn’t going to make the mistake of wearing tights again; it was a good thing that Zelda didn’t know about that. “There’s nothing in the world you can do to get me into those tights.”

“But they would be so *cute* on you!” whined Zelda. “You have the perfect figure. Your legs are so cute, and you would look so darling in them.”

“No, I made a promise to myself that I would never let you dress me,” said Link. Zelda frowned and gave a look of annoyance. “I mean, I love you and everything, but I don’t want you to dress me. Besides...in my honest opinion...I think *you* would look better in those. Your legs are so soft and smooth...and they’re just perfect...” Link trailed off as he stared at Zelda.

Zelda tried to keep her face from turning red, but she didn’t do a very good job. “Okay mister, you just quit looking down there. I don’t want you turning into some kind of drooling maniac.” Link broke his stare and returned to normal. Zelda would never say it, but she had worn this particular dress with the intent of making Link drool. She had always wondered if he found her truly attractive, and he obviously did. Now she had to be careful to create the right balance between physical beauty and inner beauty, but she knew Link would never like her only because of her physical appearance.

“Sorry, I was just admiring you,” apologized Link. He mentally scolded himself for drooling over her like that. He wasn’t going to let himself turn into some kind of lusting pervert. “You’re just so pretty, I

never really tell you that enough.”

“The look on your face is just fine,” said Zelda, pinching Link’s cheeks. She turned around and put the tights back onto the merchant’s cart. “You don’t have to wear those if you don’t want to. I want to browse for a while longer. You can just wander around while I keep shopping. Don’t wander off too far, though,” she teased.

Link left Zelda to her shopping and went to sit in front of the fountain at the center of town. “Letting your woman tell you what to do, huh?” said a male voice from behind Link. He turned around to see a group of five teenage boys standing behind him. They looked about his age, maybe a slight bit older. Judging by the clothes they were wearing, they were probably members of some street gang. The leader wore unusual-looking black clothes with tiny silver skulls sewn into them. His hair was long and tied back into a ponytail, with a few streaks of green painted into it. The rest of the boys wore similar clothing and hairdos, each one looking more ridiculous than the last. Link also noticed their faces; many of them had multiple earrings and nose-rings, one even had a ring in his upper lip. Link almost felt sick to his stomach, he had never seen so many grotesque body-piercings in his life.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Link, annoyed. The guys sat down next to Link, almost surrounding him. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable.

“It just looks like you’re letting your girlfriend control you,” continued the boy, who seemed to be the leader of his clique.

“She doesn’t control me,” defended Link.

“Maybe not, but you should get a little more control over her. You shouldn’t let your girl run around and do whatever she wants. She’s your property, you need to let her know who’s boss.”

Link was extremely angry now, but he tried not to let it show. “She’s not my property. She’s a person, nobody owns her.”

The leader let out a loud chuckle. “We got ourselves a nice little pretty-boy here,” he said to the rest of his group. They responded with laughs of their own. Link wondered what the purpose of their taunting was.

“Don’t you guys have anything better to do?” asked Link, giving them all glares.

“We just saw your girlfriend and wanted to compliment you on getting a nice catch,” said the leader in a condescending tone. Link was growing increasingly angry as they talked about Zelda like that.

“I don’t want you talking about her like that. Just get out of my face.”

“Ooh, touchy, touchy,” teased the boy. “You don’t look like a man who can handle a woman like that. Why don’t you let us take care of her for you? We know how to take care of a woman.” The other guys made lewd noises to emphasize their point.

“Get out of here!” Link shouted. “I’m getting sick of listening to you. Go bother someone else.” Link stood up and prepared to walk away.

“I guess you’re right,” said the punk. “I guess she wasn’t as good as we thought. She does look a little skanky to me.”

“What did you say?” asked Link in a very slow, angered tone. No one talked about Zelda like that.

“I said she looks a little skanky to me. You know, it looks like she’s been ‘around’ if you know what I mean. It looks like she’s already been taken for a few rides, you should dump her and find someone else.”

“*Don’t you ever talk about Zelda like that!*” shouted Link right into the boy’s face.

“Oh, so that’s her name. You’re going out with the princess, no doubt. Looks like my little guess was right.” Link gave a confused but still angry look. “Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? Boy, that girl really has your mind warped. The princess is the biggest whore in the town.”

Link felt like his blood was boiling. If he’d had his sword with him, those kids would be dead. “You shut up!” he shouted, pushing the punk hard, causing him to tumble backwards. This only caused him to laugh louder.

“She’s the village horse, everyone’s had a ride!” he shouted, laughing maniacally. “She’s just like a doorknob, everybody’s had a turn!” Link had had enough. He wasn’t going to let some street punk slander Zelda like that. Link approached the punk and pushed him harder again. His laughing expression changed to anger. “You wanna fight me?” asked the punk in a threatening tone. “Well, you got a fight

buddy.” The gang’s leader swung his fist at Link, but he effortlessly avoided it. With lightning speed, Link planted a kick into the his stomach, causing him to double over in pain. Link had been taking martial arts training for the last two years, and these punks were no match for him.

The other gansters saw what Link had done and pulled small daggers from their belts. The four punks approached Link from all sides, two of them holding knives. The boy to his left lunged at Link with the knife, and Link stepped out of the way. He grabbed the kid’s wrist and twisted it, causing him to scream in pain and drop the knife. The punk tried to punch Link with his free hand, but Link already slammed his own fist into his face, causing him to topple over. The other punk with the knife tried to lunge at Link from behind, but he sensed his presence. Link reached his arm behind him and grabbed the arm that the boy held the knife with. In one fluid motion, Link flipped the punk over his shoulder, slammed him into the ground, and kicked the knife from his hand. Link gave the boy a quick kick in the ribs to make sure he didn’t get up. He turned around to see that the last two punks had stopped dead in their tracks. They only stared at Link with frightened faces. “You wanna piece of me?” asked Link in a menacing tone. The three guys who lay on the ground struggled to get up and quickly tried to scurry away. The two standing punks turn around and ran as fast as they could.

Link watched the punks run off and noticed that a whole crowd had gathered around him. He felt extremely embarrassed and self-conscious to see all these people watching him. “Way to teach those delinquents a lesson!” shouted some bystander in the crowd. Link didn’t feel proud of what he’d just done. He weaved his way through the crowd of people only to run directly into Zelda. She stood there, with a look of complete shock and horror on her face. She had dropped all the clothes she was carrying and now they lay scattered on the ground.

“What...did you do?” asked Zelda, almost in disbelief of what happened.

Link felt so ashamed that Zelda had seen that. “Those punks...” he mumbled, trying to think of a way to explain it. “They were talking about you, calling you names...really bad things. And they made me mad, and we got into a fight. I...I didn’t want to...”

“Why did you do that?” shouted Zelda. She felt completely overcome by anger and frustration. She was glad that Link had defended her, but she was angry that he had done something so drastic. She felt like hugging him and screaming at him at the same time.

“I didn’t mean to...the guy tried to punch me...”

“Why didn’t you just walk away? What possessed you to almost kill those boys? Don’t you have any common sense? I would’ve expected you to act with a little more decency than that. You shouldn’t go around picking fights!”

“But Zelda, they called you a...”

“I don’t care what they called me! You should have more self-control! A sane person would have just walked away. I don’t want you going around picking fights just ‘cause someone talked about me behind my back.” Zelda picked up the clothes she bought and began to walk back towards the castle.

“Zelda, they had knives! They were trying to kill me! I *had* to defend myself.”

“They wouldn’t have pulled knives if you hadn’t started the fight in the first place!”

“You’re overreacting.”

“I’m not overreacting! Just stay away from me! I don’t want to be with some boy who’s gonna go around and pick fights with everyone he sees! I thought you were different, but I guess you’re just like everyone else. Just some mindless ape who wants nothing but to show off his girl and pick fights.”

“Zelda please, you’re taking this the wrong way. What’s gotten in to you?” Link had never seen Zelda act like this, and it was beginning to scare him.

“I said leave me alone. Stop following me!”

Link stopped Zelda and gently took her arm. He looked into her face and saw pain and frustration. “Zelda please, just relax.”

Zelda glared and pulled her arm away from him. “I hate you! Go home and don’t come back!” She turned around and stomped back to the castle. Link stood in the middle of the path, completely stunned. *I hate you.* Upon hearing those words, it felt like his heart had ripped in half. His whole world had come crashing down. Did Zelda really mean what she said? Link almost couldn’t believe it. He turned around

and began to walk back through the market. His face had turned to a pale, lifeless expression. Zelda said that she hated him. Link couldn't believe it. He prayed that Zelda was only mad and blowing off steam. Still, something inside him made him think she really meant it. Something made him think that maybe she had been lying to him all along. His soul felt completely empty now. All the life inside him had been sucked out by those three little words.

Link looked in front of him to see that he had entered the Kokiri forest. He couldn't even remember walking there. His mind was completely blank, save for those three words being repeated in his head over and over: *I hate you*. Link didn't feel like living anymore, he didn't even feel alive. He wanted to just crawl into a hole and die. Link walked up to his house and climbed the ladder. He wondered for a moment if he should go talk to Saria; she always had something to say when he had a problem. But he didn't feel like talking to anyone. He didn't care if Saria wanted to help him with his problems, he didn't care about anything. Link walked over to his bed and collapsed onto it. He buried his face in the pillow and cried. He had never felt so empty in his entire life, everything he cared about was gone. The only person he ever loved said that she hated him. Link didn't care anymore. He cried and didn't care if he ever stopped.

Part Two

Malon hefted the bag of feed and dumped it into the trough in front of the cows. She loved the animals so much, but taking care of them was a little more than hard work. The cows gratefully mooed and began to devour the grain Malon had given them. "Oh, you guys like that, don't you?" said Malon, patting one of the cows' backs. Now she had to feed the chickens. Malon put the sack of feed back into the corner of the barn and picked up a bucket of corn kernels. She exited the barn and walked to a dry patch of ground where she always fed the chickens. She could see the many birds scattered throughout the ranch. Malon grabbed a handful of corn kernels and threw them onto the ground. Then, as if by magic, a huge flock of chickens came running towards her from all directions. Within seconds, dozens of clucking chickens were pecking at the ground. Malon dumped a few more handfuls of corn onto the dirt to make sure the chickens had enough to eat. She heard some more clucking behind her and turned to see if there were any chickens who were left out. She looked up to see that the source of the clucking was coming from the tree that grew right next to the feeding spot. She looked up at one of the lower branches to see three perfectly happy chickens staring down at her. "What are you guys doing up there?" shouted Malon to the oblivious chickens. "You know chickens aren't supposed to fly. Get down here this instant. It's supper time." Malon threw another handful of corn onto the ground, causing the chickens to flap their wings and float down from the low branch. The chickens happily pecked at the ground while Malon stared at them with disbelief. "How do you manage to get up into that tree?" Malon felt proud of her flying chickens. Everybody knew that chickens could fly a few feet, but no one knew of any that could fly into a tree. Of course, no one would ever believe her if she said that her chickens perched on tree branches.

After feeding the chickens, Malon returned to the barn and put the corn back into the corner. It was time for her to take a break. She always liked getting her chores done early so she could relax for the rest of the day. She walked over to the corral to check on the horses. These were the animals she loved the most. The horses looked so graceful, galloping across the vast ranch. Malon approached her favorite horse, Epona. When Epona saw Malon, the horse happily trotted over to Malon and gently nuzzled her. "Oh, Malon loves you too," said Malon in a baby-voice. She lovingly patted Epona's head and fed her an apple she'd been holding. "How's my little baby doing?" The horse grunted happily. "You miss Link, don't you? Well, I'll make him come over later. But guess who's coming over today? That's right, Solo is coming over. You remember her. She loves you too." Malon climbed onto the horse's back and tried to get comfortable. Epona was nearly full-grown, but they still hadn't fitted a saddle for her. But Malon always like bare-back riding; it seemed like more fun. The only equipment on the horse were the reins that she held on to.

Malon decided to take Epona for a couple laps around the ranch. She grabbed the reins and slapped Epona, causing her to begin running. Epona galloped across the ranch and Malon cheered as they completed the first lap. "Woo-hoo! It's a new world record, achieved by Malon the Magnificent! And the crowd goes wild!" Malon made fake cheering noises. She always had a knack for entertaining herself. Malon slowed the horse as she made it to the halfway point around the corral. The horse walked at a more leisurely pace and Malon simply enjoyed the beautiful day.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, Malon noticed a figure walking near the entrance of the ranch. It couldn't be Ingo, he wasn't due back from his vacation yet. As she got closer, Malon saw that the person in question was wearing green clothes and had very long, blonde hair. "Oh, Epona, Solo is here. Giddyup!" The horse began to trot and they reached Solo in only a few seconds. Malon quickly dismounted Epona and ran up to Solo. As Malon approached Solo, she noticed that Solo was covering her right cheek with her hand. Upon closer inspection, Malon realized that Solo had been crying. She could see the small trails of tears flowing down her face. Malon ran up to Solo and put her hand on her shoulder. "What's wrong?" asked Malon with great concern.

Solo took a deep breath, and tried to gain control of herself. "I...I..." sniffled Solo. "Is there anywhere we could talk? Alone?" The serious tone in Solo's voice made her very concerned.

"Sure, let's go in my house," replied Malon, leading Solo the short distance to the house. Malon noticed that Solo never took her hand off her cheek, which made her feel suspicious. They entered the house and Malon sat down in a chair at the table. She made sure that Solo sat right next to her.

"Is...your...father home?" sniffled Solo, trying not to break into tears.

"No, he's out," replied Malon. "He won't be back until late tonight. I'm here alone." Malon leaned over and put her hand on Solo's shoulder, looking deep into her eyes. "Solo, tell me. What's wrong?" Solo shook her head silently. "Please I'm your friend. What are you hiding?"

"Do you promise...you won't tell anyone?" begged Solo.

"Sure, you can tell me anything." Solo reluctantly removed her hand from her right cheek, causing Malon to gasp in horror. "Dear gods! What happened to you?" There was a small cut in the middle of Solo's face with a small amount of blood oozing from it. What horrified Malon the most was the large red mark that covered nearly the whole right side of Solo's face. A purple bruise was already starting to form in the middle of her cheek, and would only get bigger.

"I...he..." mumbled Solo, attempting to answer. But she couldn't take it anymore. Solo burst into tears and collapsed into Malon's arms, who hugged her gently. Solo wailed and cried while Malon tried to comfort her.

"Who did this to you?" asked Malon in a soothing, concerned voice.

Solo continued crying, but made an attempt at calming down. She took a few deep breaths and tried to talk. "He...Akuyo..." mumbled Solo.

"Your boyfriend did this?"

"He's not my boyfriend! I hate him!" shouted Solo, who began crying again.

"Did he hit you? 'Cause if he did I'll..."

"Yes," interrupted Solo.

"Why would he do such a thing?" Malon couldn't believe how anyone could want to hit Solo. She was so sweet and wonderful, and never did anything to hurt anyone.

Solo wiped the tears from her face and looked into Malon's caring eyes. Seeing those beautiful blue eyes made her feel calm and soothed. "We were having a picnic at the lake, and everything was fine. But then he...he told me he loved me and tried to kiss me. And then..." Solo sniffled again, but regained control. "But I pushed him away and told him that I didn't want to kiss him. I said that I didn't love him and that I just wanted to be his friend. Then he...he..." Solo started crying again.

"He hit you," finished Malon. Solo nodded. Malon felt absolutely furious, but tried not to let it show. How could somebody hurt her little angel? She felt like finding this boy and wringing his neck until he turned purple.

"He was wearing a ring and...it cut me." Solo touched the cut on the side of her face.

“Stay there, let me help you with that,” said Malon, standing up and walking over to the sink. She filled a bowl with water and took a clean cloth from the drawer. Malon walked back to the table and sat in front of Solo. She dipped the cloth in the cool water and gently cleaned the small wound on Solo’s face. Solo winced as Malon touched the tender bruise on her cheek. “I’m sorry, sweetie. I’ll try to be more careful.” Malon gently blotted at the wound until it was clean. “There, I’m done.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I thought Akuyo was a nice boy, what possessed him to hit you?”

Solo felt upset again, but didn’t cry. Somehow, she felt secure talking to Malon. There was something about her voice that made Solo feel safe and calm. She felt like she could tell Malon anything. “When I told him I didn’t love him,” began Solo, “he call me a lying bitch. And then he backhanded me as hard as he could. He didn’t even apologize, he just ran off. It’s my fault. If I had just let him kiss me, none of this would’ve happened.”

“No, it’s not your fault! Don’t ever think that what he did to you was your fault. You had every right not to let him kiss you. You don’t have to let him do anything you don’t want him to do. Akuyo was the one who was wrong; he hit you and he’s gonna pay for it.”

“No, please don’t do anything,” begged Solo. “I don’t want to cause any more trouble. Besides, it’s not like this hasn’t happened before.”

“You mean this has happened before?” asked Malon, feeling furious. “He hit you before?”

“No, not him,” replied Solo. “But other people. Back when I was alone, I was always being kicked around. I remember a long time ago, it was after I first wandered into the castle village. I hid myself in the luggage of some carriage and I got out when we got to the village. It was a nice place, I spent most of my time in an alley. But then it started to get cold, and when winter came I always had to find a new place to hide so I could stay warm. Usually I could hide in a stable or something for most of the winter. That year I’d followed some guy home from the market, I knew that he owned a farm so I thought it would be a good idea. He lived on a huge farm outside Kakariko. I went inside his barn and stayed there for weeks. It was so much better than the alley I’d been sleeping in, and it was warm in there, too. He kept all the pigs in that barn, and I slept next to them to stay warm. The pigs were really nice, I think they liked me. And I had never had so much food in my whole life, at least while I was homeless. I actually had something to eat everyday. Every morning he’d bring in buckets full of the leftovers and scraps for the pigs. Sometimes it was spoiled food, but I really didn’t care, considering I didn’t have anything else to eat. Besides, you really can’t taste the spoilage once you get used to it. It really was the best placed I’d ever stayed in. That was, until I got caught. He came in to move the pigs into another barn one day. And because the pigs were gone I had nowhere to hide. I remember the look on his face; I could tell he was a bad man. I tried hiding in the corner, but he walked up to me and grabbed me hard by the arm. He started yelling and cursing and asked me what I was doing in his barn. I told him I was cold and I needed somewhere to live because I had no home. I begged him to let me stay in his barn, but he just told me to shut up and punched me in the face. I remember how bad it hurt, I could barely open my mouth for days.” Solo gently ran her fingers across the tender wound on her cheek. “This doesn’t hurt at all.”

“That’s so terrible,” said Malon, feeling like crying. Malon wished she knew who this other person was who assaulted Solo so long ago, then she could teach him a lesson. “How did you even survive if it was winter?”

“After he threw me out, I just went to the next farm over. The owner never found out I was there. But we don’t need to talk about this now, that was all in the past. Please, don’t do anything crazy to Akuyo. I don’t want to cause any more trouble; I’ve been through enough.”

“Fine, I don’t want to do anything that’ll upset you further.” Malon didn’t like it, but she obeyed Solo’s wishes. She didn’t want to make her more upset, Solo had been through enough. “Have you told Link about this?”

“No, I came straight here,” replied Solo.

“Why didn’t you tell him first? He’s your brother, he needs to know.”

“Because he would overreact. If Link found out, he would go and kill Akuyo. I came here because I knew I could trust you; I knew you wouldn’t do anything crazy. Is it okay if I stay here for a while?”

“Sure, you can stay here as long as you want, I’m happy to have you here.”

“You sure your father won’t mind?”

“He won’t mind at all,” replied Malon. “He likes it when my friends come over.”

“Malon...thank you for being there for me.” Solo leaned over and hugged Malon. She felt so safe in her arms, and didn’t want to let go. Malon just held Solo, and gently patted her on the back.

What is wrong with me? He was trying to defend me and my honor. Why did I blow up at him like that? It was like I was being possessed by something. I told him I hated him. Why did I say that? I don’t hate him, I love him more than anything else in the world. What has gotten into me? I didn’t mean to say that, I was just mad. But I wasn’t mad at him, I wasn’t mad at anyone; I was just mad. Why am I feeling like this? I can’t forget the look on his face when I said that, that look of heartbreak and agony. It’s haunting me. I told him I hated him. I can never forgive myself now. I’ve ruined his whole life because I let my emotions take over. He probably hates me now. He probably won’t ever want to see me again. I drove him away when I needed him the most. Why was I so moody? I can’t understand. I want to go hug him and tell him I love him, but he won’t want to hear it now. Now I’m responsible for his sadness, I can’t forgive myself for that. I want him to come back, I want to tell him I love him. I want to tell him I didn’t mean to say that, and that I would never hate him. But I know he’s stubborn, he believes everything I say. Now if I tell him I really love him and that I don’t hate him, he’ll get confused. Now he won’t know if I’m telling the truth or not. He’ll think I’m just humoring him. I’ve lost his trust and confidence, and I don’t know how to get it back.

Impa was in her office completing another mountain of paperwork. Why did she have to have two jobs? She hated having to do paperwork and take care of the princess. She could make her secretary do all the work, but she didn’t trust the secretary, who was a complete moron. Impa would have to find someone else. Impa let out a loud sigh of frustration. She wondered when Zelda would get back from her little shopping trip. Impa smiled to herself, amazed that Link could put up with Zelda. It was hard enough for Impa to raise her, and Link’s life must be even harder. That girl always wanted new clothes, and she always insisted on dragging Link along with her.

Impa’s musings were interrupted when she heard the loud slamming of a door come from outside her room. It sounded like it was coming from down the hall, maybe Zelda’s room. Impa opened her door and walked down the hallway to Zelda’s bedroom. She put her ear to the door and heard quiet noises coming from within. She knocked on the door. “Zelda, are you in there, honey?” asked Impa. Her only response were a few muffled groans. Impa knew instinctively that something must be wrong. She opened the door to see Zelda lying on her bed with her face buried in a pillow. Impa approached Zelda, hearing muffled sobs coming from her. Impa sat down on the bed next to Zelda and put a comforting hand on her. “Zelda, what’s wrong?” asked Impa in a soothing voice.

The response was only more muffled crying and wailing. Zelda was completely ignoring her. Zelda only wanted to cry, she couldn’t think of anything else to do. She felt like her whole life had just collapsed. She could feel Impa’s concern, but didn’t care. She didn’t want anyone’s pity.

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?” asked Impa with growing concern. Zelda turned her head on the side to look at Impa. Zelda still sobbed, and Impa was heartbroken at the sight of Zelda’s tear-streaked face. “Honey, please, what’s bothering you. Is it Link?” That was the only thing Impa could think of. However, she couldn’t imagine how Link could do anything that would drive Zelda to tears. The mention of Link’s name only made Zelda cry harder.

Zelda finally sat up and hugged Impa hard. She rested her head on Impa’s shoulder and continued to cry. She had to get a grip on herself, she had to calm down so she could tell Impa what was wrong. Impa always knew how to solve her problems. “I...I...” choked Zelda, but she couldn’t make any words come

out. She felt so ashamed of herself. “I told Link...” she sobbed.

“What honey? What did you tell Link?”

“I told him...” Zelda let go of Impa and sat on her bed. Impa saw the look of pain and suffering in Zelda’s face, and almost wanted to cry herself. “He...he got into a fight.”

“A fight?” asked Impa. That didn’t sound like Link, he wasn’t the type to be picking fights. “Some kids...were badmouthing me to him...and he got into a fight with them. And...he beat them up ‘cause they pulled knives on him. And then I...I yelled at him. I yelled at him.”

“Honey, it’s okay, you were just upset. And I’m sure whatever punks provoked Link deserved what they got.”

“I know...but I told him...I told him I hated him...” Zelda fell into another bout of crying upon remembering how Link looked when she told him those words. Zelda cried loudly and Impa embraced her again. Impa rubbed her hand along Zelda’s back, trying to soothe her.

“It’s okay, honey,” said Impa. “He knows you didn’t mean it.”

“No he doesn’t!” sobbed Zelda. “He believes everything I say. And now he thinks I hate him. And he’ll never want to see me again. I totally ruined everything. I don’t deserve to live after what I did to him.” Zelda wailed and cried, not because of her own sadness, but because of what she did to Link.

“Shh. Calm down, it’s not as bad as you think. You might’ve upset him, but he’s not gonna hate you because of it.”

“Are you...sure?” asked Zelda, looking at Impa with a tiny glimmer of hope in her eyes.

“Yes, I’m sure. You need to understand how boys think. He’s probably very upset, and he’ll probably cry for a while. But after he regains his composure, he’ll begin to think of ways to fix the problem. That’s how boys are: they’re problem-solvers. He’s going to think that he did something wrong and he’s going to try to find a way to fix it.”

“But he didn’t do anything wrong, it was my fault.”

“I know that, but that’s not how boys think. He’s going to think he did something wrong, and he’s going to try to find a way to apologize. He’ll probably come back here later today or tomorrow on his hands and knees begging for your forgiveness.”

“But I don’t want him to apologize, I should apologize.”

“When he comes, you can tell him that. Just tell him that you didn’t mean it and that it wasn’t his fault. You just blew up for no reason and you didn’t mean to take it out on him. Tell him that and he’ll accept it.”

“Can I go over there now?” asked Zelda. “I don’t want him suffering, he’s probably crying at home.” “He needs a little while to calm down,” said Impa. “If he doesn’t come to you tomorrow, then you can go to him. Just be patient, he’ll be back.”

“Okay,” replied Zelda, hugging Impa once again. “Thank you for helping me. You always know what to say to make me feel better.”

“It’s my job, sweetie,” said Impa, kissing Zelda on the forehead. “You look tired, why don’t you rest for a while or take a nap?”

“Okay, I feel a little worn out.”

Impa stood up and got Zelda’s nightgown from atop her dresser and threw it on top of the bed. Impa looked over Zelda’s dress and made a disappointed noise. “Where did you get that dress?” asked Impa, looking at Zelda’s almost-skimpy red dress. Zelda shrugged her shoulders.

“I bought it the other day. What do you think?” Zelda turned around gracefully and tried to show off the dress. She knew she was in trouble, but tried to act completely innocent.

“That dress looks a little...small to me. What ever possessed you to wear something like that?”

“I thought Link would like it.”

“I’m sure he did,” said Impa, wide-eyed. “You know, of course, that your father wouldn’t approve of that dress.”

“Yeah, I know. That was a big selling point,” responded Zelda rebelliously.

Impa leaned over to whisper Zelda’s ear. “I don’t mind you wearing that, but I recommend that you don’t let your father see you in it.” She sat back to a normal distance. “I was quite rebellious when I was a

child, and I did things like that. I did some stuff you wouldn't believe."

Zelda raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Like what?" Zelda never saw Impa as the rebellious type. She always imagined her as an authority figure who always enforced the rules. Zelda couldn't even imagine her as a child.

"I'm not gonna tell you *that* any time soon. I don't want to give you any ideas." Zelda huffed. "Now you take a nap. We can straighten out your problems later." Zelda finally agreed and slipped into her nightgown. She got into bed and tried to relax. After giving Zelda a kiss on the forehead, Impa left the room. Impa was right, Zelda needed some sleep. The emotional turmoil left her feeling worn out and tired. She closed her eyes and tried to fall asleep. She hoped Impa was right about Link.

Saria made sure to wait a while before she carried out her plan. She would finish with her daily chores at home, and then she would do what she had been scheming all week. As much as she hated being alone, Saria had waited days for Link and Solo to both be gone at the same time. Saria took a bucket, sponge, some rags, and a feather duster from a cabinet in her house. Holding the cleaning utensils in her arms, Saria walked the short distance to Link's house. She was going to give his whole home a good scrubbing. It annoyed her so much that Link and Solo both left all of their clothes and possessions laying on the floor. They had a dresser and cabinets, why didn't they use them? Saria had been on Link's case for years to just tidy up once in a while, but he never listened. The only way Saria could satisfy her desire for neatness was to clean Link's house when he wasn't home. It always annoyed Link so much when she did that, and that was half the fun.

Saria climbed the ladder and stood on the porch for a moment. She made sure she'd brought all the materials, and, when she was satisfied, Saria pushed through the curtain that covered the doorway and entered Link's house. Saria was startled to see that Link was home and sitting on his bed, causing Saria to drop the sponge and the duster. She carefully placed the water-filled bucket on the floor before she dropped that, too. "Link..." said Saria in a shaky, surprised voice. "I didn't know you were here. I thought you were out with Zelda." Link made no attempt at responding. He just sat silently on his bed, staring into space. He had his legs pulled up to his chest with his head resting on his knees. "Link, are you okay?" asked Saria, slightly concerned. Link was like a statue, he didn't move or make a sound. The only hint that he was alive was his slow breathing and the occasional blinking of his eyes. "If you're having a problem, you can tell me about it." Saria grabbed a chair and pulled it next to the bed. "Link, you're scaring me." Link turned his head to look into Saria's eyes. She was almost frightened by the expression on his face; one of anguish, sadness, and pain. His face was streaked with tears, and his eyes were red and bloodshot. His eyes looked so empty and lifeless, it was as if there was no soul behind them.

Saria saw Link's lips move slightly, whispering something inaudible. Saria leaned closer to Link. "Talk louder, I can't hear you," said Saria in as calm a voice as she could.

Link swallowed and tried to moisten his lips. His mouth and throat were so dry, and his voice was hoarse from crying. He didn't feel like talking, but he couldn't let Saria sit there. "She hates me..." whispered Link, Saria barely able to hear him.

"What do you mean?" asked Saria.

Link looked at her like the answer was totally obvious and she was missing the point. "She told me she hated me."

"Who? Zelda?" That was the only person Saria could think of. Only Zelda saying something like that could make Link so utterly depressed and unresponsive. But that wasn't in Zelda's character; she loved Link more than life itself. She would never say that she hated Link, it had to be someone else.

Link sniffled and nearly slipped back into his trance. "She hates me," he whispered again.

"No, Zelda would never hate you. She loves you, you must've been mistaken."

"She said it. She told me. She wouldn't lie. She hates me."

"She doesn't hate you," insisted Saria. "Maybe she was just upset about something." Saria had no idea what had happened, but knew it had to be something bad for Zelda to say that. Still, she wondered if there

was some other explanation.

“Zelda said it. I must have done something wrong. I know I did. There were some guys at the market...they were making fun of her. I pushed the guy...he pushed me, and we got into a fight. I beat them all up, and Zelda got mad. She said she hated me.” The tone of Link’s voice and how he recalled the events gave Saria an eerie feeling. His voice was devoid of emotion, and he spoke only in a bland monotone.

Now Saria wondered what had gotten into Link. He wasn’t the type of person who would beat people up. The boys he talked about must have really said something bad about Zelda for him to start a fight about it. But that didn’t explain why Zelda said she hated Link, he was defending her. She should have thanked him. “That doesn’t make any sense,” said Saria. “You were defending her. What did they say that drove you to fight with them?”

“They...” Link closed his eyes, fighting back tears. “They called her a whore.” Link cried for a moment, the first sign of emotion that Saria had seen thus far. “She’s nothing like they said. I didn’t want to fight them, but they pulled knives on me. I had no choice. What if they had gone after Zelda?”

“I’m sure you did the right thing,” comforted Saria. “You know those punks deserved it.”

“I did something wrong. I made Zelda mad, I was wrong. But what they said...the things they called her...I couldn’t let that go. She’s nothing like they said. She’s so wonderful, so smart, so kind, so beautiful; nothing like they said. She’s the most breathtaking person I’ve ever met. She’s so...perfect. She’s perfect. It must’ve been my fault, she wouldn’t do anything wrong.”

“Link snap out of it,” said Saria forcefully. “You have to get a grip on yourself. Zelda is not perfect, no one is.”

“But she’s perfect to *me*,” insisted Link. “That’s all that matters.”

“Listen to me. You have to realize that Zelda is not perfect, and if you see her as that, you’ll only end up crying. You can’t see Zelda as perfect and infallible, because she isn’t. She makes mistakes just like you and me.”

“But it was *my* fault,” insisted Link. “I made her mad, and I have to apologize. But she said she hated me, and I don’t know what to do.”

“Did you ever think that maybe she didn’t mean what she said? People say things that they don’t mean when they’re mad. I’m sure she didn’t mean it, she’s probably more upset right now than you are.”

“No she’s not. She’s a perfect angel, and she meant what she said. I’m surprised I didn’t see it earlier. I’m nothing compared to her. I don’t know why I bothered in the first place. A person as good as her, a princess, would never love a worthless peasant like me. I don’t deserve her, she deserves someone better than me. I can’t even begin to compare to her.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Saria, almost shouting. She was fed up with Link’s self-pity, she didn’t want him destroying himself like this. “Don’t talk like that! You know you’re not nothing. If you think of Zelda as perfect, you’re putting her on an unreachable pedestal. If you think of her as perfect, then you’re bound to think less of yourself. You have to stop that. You have to see Zelda as what she is: a normal person. She is just like you and me, she makes mistakes and does stupid things. And you are not worthless compared to her. Everyone is just as good as everyone else, no one is better than anybody. Stop thinking that you’re worthless. You are far from worthless. You’re the kindest, most loving and sensitive boy I’ve ever met. Zelda is not perfect, and neither are you.”

“Maybe she’s not perfect,” conceded Link. “But she’s still wonderful. And I know I did something wrong. I have to apologize.”

“Well, you do what you think is best. I’m sure that Zelda is feeling the same way. You have to go see her and things will work themselves out. You can’t let one fight ruin your relationship. Just remember that sometimes people say things that they don’t mean. Zelda was probably just in a bad mood, and she took it out on you.”

“Why would she take it out on me?”

“Well, there’s one reason I can think of,” replied Saria. “She knows that you love her more than anything. Maybe she yelled at you because she knew you would love her no matter what she did. Listen to your feelings. You know how Zelda feels. Have you been paying attention to that, or have you just

been wallowing in self-pity?"

Link thought about that. He knew Zelda's feelings, he could feel her emotions. Sometimes it seemed like they knew what each other was thinking. Why hadn't he thought of that? Somehow, deep inside, he knew that Zelda didn't mean what she had said. He was so devastated by her words that he never even bothered to think of her true feelings. It seemed like it always took a third person to point out problems such as this. Link looked at Saria and smiled. "Thank you. You always make me feel better." Link leaned over and gave Saria a hug. Saria enjoyed the feeling that she had made Link feel better. There was nothing in the world that could make Saria happier than she was at this moment. Link released his embrace and looked towards the doorway where Saria had left her cleaning supplies. "What were you going to do with that stuff?" he asked, pointing to the bucket and rags.

"I was..." mumbled Saria, blushing slightly. "I was going to clean your house. This place is a pig sty."

"Do we have to argue about this again? You don't live here, so you shouldn't have to worry about our mess."

"But it bugs me so much," whined Saria. She would have to secretly clean his house some other time. Link stood up and stretched, causing Saria to gasp. "What happened to your hands?" cried Saria, quickly taking hold of his hands. Both sides of each hand were raw and irritated. There were huge red streaks across his palms which were oozing blood. In between the large lacerations were dozens of tiny, pink scratches, a few dotted with blood. Link quickly pulled his hands away and closed his palms.

"Nothing happened. I..." he trailed off.

"You did what?" prodded Saria.

"After I got back, I tried to think of the best way to apologize to Zelda. I thought she might like it if I picked her some flowers." He pointed to his desk. In the corner was a jar stuffed with over a dozen beautiful red roses. Next to the jar lay a sharp paring knife and hundreds of tiny plant scrapings and thorns. "I scraped my hands while I was picking them. I had to cut the thorns off to make sure Zelda wouldn't hurt herself." He looked down at his bloody hands. "It doesn't hurt. It's just a scratch."

"It's far from a scratch. Your hands are all cut up. And don't try to be macho saying it doesn't hurt, because I know it does. Come here, let me help you." Saria took Link over to the bucket and sat him down in front of it. She took the sponge and dipped it in the warm water. She gently dabbed and cleaned Link's hands with the fresh water until all the blood had been washed away. She dried his hands with a clean rag and then released them. "There. At least your hands are clean."

"Thank you," said Link. "Thank you for everything."

"It's no problem. I can't stand seeing you upset, it hurts me. You put water in that jar, right?" Link nodded. "When are you going to give those to her?"

"A little later. I thought I'd wait a while. I think I'll go over tonight. I need a little time to collect my thoughts."

"That's fine, I'm sure everything will work out fine. I'll leave you alone for a while." Saria smiled and took her supplies, leaving Link's house. She felt proud of herself that she had the ability to bring Link out of such a deep depression. She was happy that he finally felt better. Hearing that Zelda had said she hated him broke her heart. But, for a moment, she wondered. She wondered if it was possible that maybe Zelda didn't like him, that maybe she herself would finally have a chance to confess her love to Link. But that thought had disappeared quickly. That was selfish, she didn't want Link to break up with Zelda. That would devastate him, and all Saria wanted was Link's happiness. She was glad he was happy again. She only needed to worry about his happiness, she again neglected her own feelings. She didn't care about them. Only Link mattered.

Part Three

Impa was sitting in her office once again, trying to finish the paperwork. She didn't even know what half the stuff was and how it even applied to her in any way. Sometimes she suspected that the lazy workers in the castle dumped their own work on her hoping that she wouldn't notice. If Impa ever found out that somebody was doing that, that person would have hell to pay. "Oh, forget this," said Impa in frustration, pushing the papers away from her. She leaned back in her chair and put her feet up on the desk. Life was too short for paperwork. *Maybe I'll take a little nap*, mused Impa to herself. She tried to relax and closed her eyes. It was so quiet up here, maybe she could just drift off to sleep. Zelda was taking a nap and that should keep her at bay for a couple hours.

Impa's quiet relaxation was suddenly interrupted by a loud, shrill scream. Impa immediately shot out of her chair. She knew that the scream came from Zelda. Impa opened her door and ran down the hall to Zelda's room. She burst through Zelda's door and rushed inside to see Zelda sitting on her bed, crying and trembling. Impa quickly ran to Zelda's side and knelt next to her. "Honey, what's wrong?" asked Impa, taking Zelda's hand.

Zelda sniffled and tried to talk. She felt scared and embarrassed, almost ashamed. "I...I..." choked Zelda, but she couldn't make any words come out.

"Just calm down and tell me what's the matter," soothed Impa.

"Help me. I'm bleeding."

"Huh? Where? Did you cut yourself?" asked Impa, looking Zelda over, trying to see if she injured herself.

"I...I...didn't hurt myself. My...I mean it's..." Zelda covered her hands with her face and cried again. She had no idea what was happening to her and was scared out of her mind. Impa was frantic, trying to figure out what was wrong. "I didn't mean to yell at Link..." cried Zelda. "Are the gods punishing me? I didn't mean to..." Zelda continued crying and couldn't bring herself to tell Impa what was wrong.

Impa put her hands on Zelda's shoulders and looked her in the eyes. "Why would you think the gods are punishing you? Just tell me what..." Impa trailed off when she discovered what the problem was. Impa sighed with relief and hugged Zelda, gently stroking her back. Zelda continued to cry, still unaware of what was going on.

"Honey, honey, calm down," said Impa in a soothing voice. "Everything is fine. No one is punishing you. Nothing is wrong with you."

Zelda gave Impa a look of disbelief and shook her head. "Of course there's something wrong with me! How would you know what I'm going through?" shouted Zelda.

Impa knew this day would come eventually, but somehow she had always denied it. Sometime she wished she had explained this to Zelda earlier so she would be prepared, but she had always put it off. This would be the job for a mother, but Zelda didn't have one. And Impa was the closest thing Zelda had to a mother. *Her father is going to freak when he finds out about this*, thought Impa. "Honey, I know exactly what you're going through because the same thing happened to me. This explains why you got so mad at Link, and why you've been so...moody."

"I haven't been moody," protested Zelda. But she thought for a moment, and realized that she had been experiencing mood swings lately. She thought that maybe she'd just been unusually emotional. Zelda patiently awaited Impa's explanation.

"Sweetie," began Impa, "I should've explained this to you before it happened, but I just put it off too long. This isn't one of my lectures, so I want you to listen to everything I'm going to say. Do you promise you will?" Zelda nodded. Impa took a deep breath and began to explain everything to Zelda.

It makes me so mad that somebody hurt my little angel. How could somebody even think of hitting her? She is such a kind and loving person, and never did anything to hurt anyone. She has only made my life

better since I met her. I remember when Link first introduced me to her. The first thing that struck me was her smile, it was so happy and carefree. I've never seen a smile like that before; she seemed to radiate joy. Just being near her could make anyone happy. I also noticed how beautiful she was. Her hair is what struck me the most, it was so long and delicate. All those gorgeous golden strands that went all the way to her knees seemed to glow like the sun. I remember that day so well; the breeze gently blew at her hair and it looked like an angel had come down from heaven...just for me. That's why I call her an angel, at least I call her that to myself. I could never say that to her out loud, she would think I was weird. After I got to know her, I began to realize how I felt. Speaking to her, listening to her, and just standing next to her makes me feel so loved and so happy. I'm so honored that she chose someone like me to be her friend. I was worried that she wouldn't like me because...because I'm not really sure how to have a friend. I know some kids down by the market, but they're not my friends. I just say "hi" when I deliver the milk. I've never really talked to them. Until she came along, my only friends couldn't talk back; the cows, the horses, and the chickens. She's the only real friend I've ever had, and that means so much to me. I don't think she realizes that like I do. It's so wonderful to just listen to what she has to say, to have her tell me about her day. I could listen to her talk forever. And she listens to me, she cares about what I think. No one has ever cared about what I thought. She respects my feelings and she respects me. But I feel like she's more than a friend. I don't think she feels the same way, but it doesn't matter. I think I love her...no, I'm sure I do. I've never been more sure of anything. But I can't tell her how I feel. What if she rejects me? What if she stops being my friend? I couldn't live with that. If I told her that I loved her, she would probably shun me and tell me I was sick or disgusting. I don't want to disgust her, I want her to like me. I know I'm not supposed to feel this way, maybe there's something wrong with me. Most people I've met have told me I'm weird. Maybe I am sick and there is something wrong with me. But I can't deny my feelings. I know that I love her. I just wish that she would feel the same, but that would never happen.

Malon and Solo sat inside the house and were just finishing lunch. Solo was glad that she came here first, she knew that Malon would make her feel better. Link would've overreacted, and that would have made everything worse. But Malon knew how to react, she knew what to say to make Solo feel better. "Thank you for everything," said Solo as Malon sat down in the living room. There were two soft, comfortable chairs in front of the fireplace. The fireplace wasn't going, but it was still nice to sit there.

"You don't have to thank me," insisted Malon. "I enjoyed making lunch for you."

"I never knew that you knew how to cook," said Solo, still able to taste the meal she had just finished. "I've never had cornbread before. It was really...interesting. You're a really good baker."

"Thank you. I'm glad you liked it. I've never actually cooked for a guest before, usually it's just me and my father. How are you going to tell Link what happened? You know he's gonna be furious."

"I know," replied Solo. Normally she would have felt upset upon being reminded of what happened, but talking to Malon was somehow different. She felt safe talking to Malon, she felt invincible, as if nothing in the world could hurt her. "I think I should just go and tell him—maybe tomorrow. I'm just afraid that he'll try and kill Akuyo, and I don't want that. I don't want revenge. I can forgive him for what he did, I just never want to see him again." Malon admired how noble Solo was. Even after she had been abused by Akuyo, she still wanted to forgive him and didn't seek vengeance. Malon wasn't sure if she could do the same thing. She wanted the boy who hurt Solo to feel her pain, she wanted to beat him so badly.

"It's amazing how you can still forgive him after what he did. I envy your ability to do that. I don't think I could do the same. I'll tell you the truth, I want to go give that coward a piece of my mind. The only reason I don't go beat the life out of him right now is because you don't want that. I respect your wishes. I hope Link will do the same. But you can't let this boy get away with that, he deserves some kind of punishment. What he did was criminal, and there's no justice in him getting away with it."

"I know, I don't want him to get away with it either. I just don't know how to go about getting justice. Who should I tell? I doubt that he could be arrested or anything."

“We can tell his parents,” suggested Malon. “I’m sure they would punish him more than anyone. Have you met his parents? Are they the type that would disapprove of hitting a girl? ‘Cause I know that some men beat their wives and children, and that they wouldn’t find anything wrong with what Akuyo did.”

“I’ve met his parents. And they would definitely disapprove of hitting people. They’re total pacifists and they abhor violence. They think that people who resort to violence are idiots. I think Akuyo will get in a *lot* of trouble. But I don’t want to tell them now, I want to wait until tomorrow. Is it okay if I stay the night?”

“Of course you can stay the night,” said Malon. “Tomorrow I’ll take you back home and I’ll help you tell Link what happened. It might be easier for him to handle if there are more people there to calm him down. Then we can go to Akuyo’s parents, he won’t get away with this.”

“Thank you so much. I knew I made the right choice when I came here. You’re my best friend. I knew that you would never judge me or make me feel bad. I remember what it was like living on the street. Nobody ever cared about me. They just pushed me around like a piece of trash. I never talked to anyone, no one ever talked to the dirty homeless girl. Most people didn’t even know that I existed. There weren’t even any other homeless people I could relate to. I was the only one. I was always alone and afraid. I never knew where my next meal would come from. Sometimes I didn’t eat for days. I usually stole whatever I ate. Sometimes I had to dig in the garbage, but the dogs usually got to that before I did.”

Malon was heartbroken by this story. Solo had never been so open to her before. Hearing this almost made Malon want to cry. “I’m sorry, I never knew it was that bad for you. I mean, I knew you were homeless most of your life, but I never realized it was that bad. I feel so honored that you’re willing to tell me this. And...thank you...for calling me your best friend. I’ve never really had a friend before, you’re the first. I think of you as my best friend, too. I can’t believe that I was able to live so long without meeting somebody like you. You make me feel so happy and needed. No one has ever needed me before. No one has ever cared about my opinions until you came along. Thank you for being my friend. I...I...” Malon trailed off.

“You don’t have to say any more,” said Solo. She stood up out of her chair and gave Malon a loving hug. They both needed each other, and would never stop being friends. Solo and Malon released their embrace and sat back into their chairs. Solo chuckled slightly and Malon gave her a questioning look. “It’s nothing,” said Solo.

“What? What’s so funny? Tell me,” insisted Malon.

“Well, it’s more ironic than it is funny. It was a long time ago, when I was still on the street. I lived in the castle village for a long time. I always had to steal from vendors and merchants so I could have something to eat. Most of them were totally clueless and never knew that I was even there. I have to say, I’m proud that I never got caught. But that’s not the funny part. I remember that every now and then I would see a little girl delivering milk to the houses. Sometimes when she went inside, I would run and steal one of the bottles before she got back. I did that all the time.”

Malon smirked when she finally understood what Solo was getting at. “I remember. It seemed like every other day I would come up a bottle short. I always wondered what happened, but I never suspected a thief. Sometimes I just thought I was crazy and imagined it. So you’re the one who stole my milk all those times.” Malon pointed her finger and gave Solo a playful glare.

“Guilty as charged!” shouted Solo, holding up her arms and plastering a big sarcastic smile on her face. “I just thought you should know that it was me all along.”

“Judging by my estimate...” said Malon, pausing to think for a moment. “You owe me fifteen hundred rupees. Pay up.” Malon jokingly held out her hand.

Solo turned her pockets inside out and shrugged her shoulders. “I’m a little short today. I’ll pay you back later.”

“That’s okay, I’ll make you work it off. You can clean up after the horses for the next twelve years.”

“You’re not serious, are you?” asked Solo, worrying that perhaps Malon wasn’t joking.

“Of course not. I wouldn’t make you pay all that back. You stole because you had to. Besides, it’s just milk. It’s not like the cows are gonna run out of it any time soon. And you’re my friend, so I forgive you.”

But I have to give you credit for being such a good thief. You know, the Gerudos would be proud of you.”

“Gerudos? Who are they?” asked Solo.

“Their just some people that live out in the desert. They’re a whole race of thieves. And they’re all women. I think they would like you.”

“Thanks, I’ll take that as a compliment. You know what? I was wondering about those riding lessons you’ve been giving me...”

“Yes? You’re a natural,” complimented Malon. “I’ve never seen someone who had so much skill but knew nothing about horses.”

“Well, I think it’s time for my next lesson,” continued Solo. She stood up and slowly made her way towards the door, never looking away from Malon. “I bet I can beat you to the corral!” shouted Solo as quickly as she could, opening the door and running outside.

“I’m gonna get you!” shouted Malon as she chased Solo out the door. She was carefree and having so much fun. Maybe this would turn out to be a good day after all.

Zelda sat on her bed, almost amazed at what Impa had told her. She found it hard to believe that what was happening was a normal part of growing up. It all sounded like a giant ball of lies to her, maybe the grown-ups were just telling her this to calm her down. But Impa would never lie to Zelda, so she believed her. Impa told her stories about when she was the same age, and they sounded exactly like she was feeling right now.

“Honey, do you understand everything I just told you?” asked Impa, hoping that she’d played the role of mother decently.

“Yes,” replied Zelda, folding her arms and huffing. “But I still don’t like it. So basically, this will happen every *month*? I mean, once a year I can handle, but I don’t think I can take once a month. How do I make it stop?”

Impa chuckled. “There’s nothing you can do to stop it. It just happens.”

“Well, maybe growing up isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. I don’t wanna grow up, I want to be a kid forever.”

“I don’t think you can do that.”

“But the Kokiri do it,” whined Zelda. “They never grow up. Isn’t there some kind of potion I can take to turn me into one of them?”

Impa put her head on her hand and sighed. “It doesn’t work that way. You just have to learn to live with it. I have, every other woman in the world has. It’s just another part of growing up. I’m sure Link’s had his own problems.”

“Not like this,” muttered Zelda.

“Boys have just as many problems growing up as girls do. If anything, they have it worse.”

“Like what?”

“Well...” replied Impa, trying to think of a reply. “His voice.”

“What about it?” Zelda couldn’t think of anything wrong with Link’s voice.

“He sounds normal now, but just wait a while. As he gets older, his voice will change and get deeper just like an adult. But that doesn’t happen overnight. It’ll take months. And while it does, he’ll sound...squeaky.”

“Squeaky?” asked Zelda, trying to imagine Link sounding like that.

“Yeah, squeaky. Like a mouse. Trust me, he’ll sound really goofy. But don’t make fun of him when it happens, his self-esteem will probably be low enough that he won’t need any teasing from you.”

“Oh okay. But you still didn’t tell me why this all made me mad at Link.”

“Oh, that. Well, most women tend to get a little moody when it’s, um...that time of the month. That would explain why you blew up at Link. It wasn’t his fault or your fault, it was just one of the facts of life. After a while, you’ll be able to control your mood swings.”

“So it wasn’t my fault that I got mad at Link?” asked Zelda. Impa shook her head. That was definitely a relief. Now if she could only find a way to explain this to Link, then everything would be okay. “I guess I’ll have to warn him that I might have mood swings. But you could’ve warned me ahead of time. It would’ve been easier to handle if I had known what to expect.”

“Okay, why don’t you quit whining and go get cleaned up? I have to go talk to your father.” Zelda rolled her eyes and got up to leave. “And don’t think that you can use mood swings as an excuse to get out of trouble!” shouted Impa as Zelda left the room, causing Zelda to silently curse. “I’m smarter than that, young lady.”

Impa walked out of Zelda’s room and down the hallway, making her way downstairs and towards the king’s office. *I think I handled that pretty well*, mused Impa to herself. *I never had any “facts of life” talk when I was a kid. Stupid traumatic childhood.* Impa made her way into the elaborately-decorated throne room. The king wasn’t there, he never like sitting on a throne. He didn’t like being elevated above the rest of the people, literally or figuratively. Impa turned and walked up to a door inside the throne room which led to the office where the king normally did his work. Impa knocked on the door and waited patiently. There was no response. She knocked again, saying, “Open up, it’s me Impa.” Still no response. Impa sighed and opened the door walking into the office. She folded her arms and put an annoyed look on her face. The great king of Hyrule was leaning back in his chair, causing it to tilt precariously, and his feet were outstretched and panted firmly on the desk in front of him. He was peacefully napping and barely audible snores emanated from his nose. *Harikana the drowsy*, mused Impa, *That’s what they’ll be calling him a hundred years from now.* Impa walked up to the king and shook him gently. The only response she got was a moan. “Hari, wake up!” said Impa, forcefully shaking him.

The king awoke with a start, removed his feet from the desk, and attempted to look like he was really doing work. He shuffled through some papers and started stamping things. The king looked up to see Impa staring back at him and breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh, it’s just you,” said the king, the relief evident in his voice. “I thought for a second that you were another one of those damn bureaucrats with more paperwork. Do you know how many ‘official documents’ I’ve had to read and stamp with the seal today?” Impa shook her head. “One hundred and twelve! I’m a king, there should be people groveling at my feet begging to do this work for me.”

“I think you’re being a little overdramatic,” said Impa.

“Right.” He picked up a stamp that was embossed with the official seal of the king of Hyrule and showed it to Impa. “Do you know how worn out this thing is? I swear, I’ve been stamping all day. I really need a vacation. A very *long* vacation.”

“Yeah, well I came here to talk to you about something serious if you can stop complaining for a second,” said Impa, rolling her eyes.

“I’m sorry, I got a little carried away. I just have a bad headache.” He rubbed his temples and sighed. “What was it that you wanted to tell me?”

“It’s about Zelda,” said Impa calmly.

The king’s eyes grew wide and he looked worried for a moment. “There’s nothing wrong with her is there?” he asked worriedly.

“No, Zelda’s fine,” replied Impa, making calming gestures. “It’s just that... Well, I just got done having a very important talk with her. And I think you should probably do a follow-up later.”

“Oh? What kind of talk?”

“You know, the important talk that a mother normally has with her daughter...when she reaches a certain...point in her life. You know, *the talk*.”

The king’s eyes widened. “You mean? She...her...?” Impa nodded, knowing what the king was thinking. He buried his face in his hands, he wasn’t expecting this to happen today. “My little baby is growing up, isn’t she?”

“She’s thirteen. She’s not a baby anymore,” pointed out Impa. “Don’t worry, I handled it. I explained everything and helped calm her down by telling her about my own experiences. She’ll be fine. I think I handled it very well. You just need to go give her the whole reassurance thing; you know, tell her you love her and maybe shed a little tear because your little girl isn’t a little girl anymore.”

“I guess I wasn’t prepared for this. I remember when Mari and I got married, and we discussed every detail about having children. When we found out she was pregnant, we talked about what we would do when they . . . grew up. I guess we liked to plan ahead. But we agreed that if we had a son, I would give him the talk, and if we had a daughter, Mari would do it. But when Mari died having Zelda, I wondered who would be her mother. I’m glad that you took that job. You were always such a good friend to me, and you took the job upon yourself without me asking you. I’ve never really talked to you about that, but today I realized how much I appreciate it. Zelda never had a mother, and you were the closest thing she had to one. Of course, you know Zelda sees you as a mother figure. Sometimes, it surprises me that she has never called you ‘mother.’ But I think she realizes that you aren’t her true mother, and she calls you by your name out of respect for you and . . . Marimeia. Thank you for being her mother when she didn’t have one. I don’t think I would’ve been able to handle the job of father and mother myself.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” said Impa, trying not to let her emotion show. “You were always my friend, and I always thought of you as a member of my family. You’re like a brother to me. And when Mari died, I couldn’t let Zelda grow up without having a mother. I grew up with no parents, and I didn’t want that to happen to her. And . . . Zelda became the daughter that I always wanted.”

“Impa, can I ask you something? Why didn’t you ever have a family of your own? I mean, I know you were married and he died, but why didn’t you ever start a family?”

“Well, I’ve never really told anyone this,” began Impa, trying to fight back tears. These were bad memories, but it made her feel better to talk to her friend about them. “I remember when I married Darien so many years ago. We wanted to start the perfect Sheikah family, but things didn’t quite work out.”

“You mean your marriage?” asked the king. “I was always in close contact with you and Darien, I never saw any sign of problems.”

“No, it wasn’t like that. I loved him more than anything, and he loved me. We wanted to have children so bad. But . . .”

“He died in the war. Did he die before you had the chance to start a family?”

“No,” replied Impa. “By then we’d realized what was wrong. We never started a family because we couldn’t. More specifically, *I* couldn’t.” Impa choked back tears. “You see, I . . . I can’t have children. That’s why I never had a family. I’m totally sterile.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I never knew. I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories for you. I . . .”

“It’s okay,” interrupted Impa, wiping a tear from her face. “I don’t mind. I’ve just kept it bottled up inside me for so long. But Zelda was what saved me from insanity. When I took it upon myself to raise her with you, I began to see her as a daughter. Zelda took the place of the child that I could never have. I couldn’t ask for anything more. I have an adopted daughter, who I love just as much as if she were my own flesh and blood. Zelda gave meaning to my life when I thought I’d lost it all.”

“I know what that’s like,” said the king. “She is the only reason I’m still alive today. If she had died along with Mari, I would’ve just withered away. But she was the person who gave me a reason to live. I guess we’ve both depended on her for that.” The king sighed. “Now my little baby is growing up. She’s not the little girl anymore who comes running up to me asking me to bounce her on my knee. She’s her own person. You know, she reminds me so much of Marimeia. I never realized it before, but she’s the spitting image of her. Zelda has Mari’s eyes. And their personalities are exactly the same. Zelda definitely takes after her mother. She’s so independent and rebellious, always trying to bend the rules and see what she could get away with. Do you remember when she put pink paint in her hair so she wouldn’t have to wave to people in a parade? I couldn’t bring myself to punish her because that would be exactly the kind of thing Marimeia would do.”

“Yeah, well, you weren’t the one who had to wash that stuff out of her hair,” said Impa in a purposely annoyed-sounding tone.

“Well, being the mother figure has its responsibilities,” said the king with a grin. “And one of them is washing pink finger paints out of your little girl’s hair.” He let out a small chuckle, lightening the mood. “Thank you for everything, I know I don’t say that enough. I’m glad you handled the whole . . . situation. I don’t think I would’ve been able to talk to her about that, seeing as I have absolutely no personal experience with that kind of thing.”

“Well, I just came in to tell you that. I didn’t know it would turn into such an emotional trip down memory lane. There’s one more thing you need to know. You know how women tend to get moody at that time?” The king nodded, he remembered when his wife got that way. “Well, earlier today, she took it out on Link without even knowing it. She told him she hated him, and both of them were completely devastated. Zelda was so upset, she thought that she drove Link away and he would never want to see her again. I’m sure Link was devastated, but Zelda was also so distraught. She was almost inconsolable. But now I know why she acted like that, I just hope Link can understand.”

“I’m sure he will,” said the king. “What Zelda said will probably devastate him, but he’ll get over it. I’m sure he’s like most guys. He’ll probably cry about it for a few hours, and then he’ll think it was his fault even though it wasn’t. Whenever a woman gets mad, the guy always thinks it was his fault even if it was the woman’s fault. He’ll probably come crawling on his hands and knees begging for forgiveness any minute now. I know, I’ve done that on more than one occasion. Link is such a nice boy, and I’d hate to see him upset. But he’ll understand, I know he will.”

Part Four

Link’s mind raced with a thousand thoughts at once as he made his way to the castle. Somehow, he knew that Zelda didn’t really hate him. But there were still the hundreds of what-if thoughts in the back of his mind that made him question that. He wondered if maybe Zelda really didn’t like him, and that she had just been too afraid to say it. *No, she wouldn’t do that*, thought Link. *She loves me and I love her. I just made her mad. I know I did something wrong and I just have to apologize.* Link tightly held the vase that contained the dozen roses he had picked. He looked at his bandaged hand and winced. All those cuts didn’t hurt when he got them, but he hadn’t exactly been in a very happy state of mind. Now he regretted neglecting himself. He’d sustained so many life-threatening injuries, but it seemed like it was always the little ones that bothered him the most. But he didn’t really mind going through pain, it was a mere annoyance. It was worth it, he had picked such beautiful flowers for Zelda. He hoped she would like them. Link knew that girls liked getting things like flowers, they made apologies so much easier. He never understood why they liked flowers so much, but he didn’t argue with that fact of life.

Link took a deep breath as he walked through the threshold of the castle. He looked around and wondered if he should go find one of the servants to go get Zelda. After all, it wouldn’t be right if he just went barging into to her room on his hands and knees, begging for forgiveness. Link breathed a sigh of relief as he saw Impa walking down the hallway. He ran towards her and Impa saw him coming. “Oh, hello Link,” said Impa in a kind voice. She saw the flowers and the nervous look on his face. “Where did you get those roses? They’re beautiful.”

“I...I picked them myself,” replied Link. “I thought Zelda might like them, and maybe it would make it easier for me to apologize to her.”

“Honey, I need to talk to you about that. You don’t need to apologize to Zelda for anything.”

“But I made her mad,” said Link. “I got into a fight and I made her mad, and I don’t want her to hate me.”

“Link, she doesn’t hate you. She got mad because she’s going through a lot of stress, and it had nothing to do with what you did. Believe me, she was just as upset as you after she said that. She wants to apologize more than you do.”

“She does?” asked Link. He wondered why Zelda would have to apologize, Link didn’t think that she had done anything wrong. “Then why did she get mad?”

“Zelda has been having...woman problems lately.”

“Woman problems?” asked Link. “I don’t understand.”

“I’ll explain it to you later. But all you need to know now is that she just had a little mood swing. Zelda doesn’t hate you.”

“Mood swing? Well, can I see her?” asked Link anxiously.

“Yes, I’ll get her in just a minute. But I need to ask you something. Zelda said that you got into a fight because some street punks were making fun of her. What did they say?”

“I...I don’t want to talk about it,” said Link, trying not to think about it.

“I’m sure you don’t want to bring it up, but I need to know. I know you’re not the type of person who goes around picking fights. Those kids must’ve said something terrible for them to drive you to do that.”

“It wasn’t just what they said. I fought them because they started it. Two of them pulled knives and I had to defend myself. And I was afraid that they might try to hurt Zelda, I wasn’t thinking of myself. Do you really want to know what they said about her?” asked Link. Impa nodded. “They called her...they said she...they said she was the biggest whore in Hyrule. And I wanted to kill them after they said that.” Link felt his blood boiling again upon remembering what was said.

Impa felt like exploding when she heard Link’s account. She couldn’t imagine how Link must have felt. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know it was that bad. I certainly hope that that’s not a rumor that’s going around. Now I’m glad you taught those delinquents a lesson. You know, it is a serious crime to assault a Hylian Knight. They could get in a lot of trouble if we caught them.”

“No, I don’t want to do that. It’s not worth the trouble. I don’t care what other people think. I just want Zelda to like me. I don’t want her to hate me.”

“She doesn’t hate you,” Impa reassured. “And she’ll love those flowers. You just wait here while I go get Zelda.” Impa quickly ran off and went upstairs. Link waited patiently for Zelda to come downstairs. He felt relieved but slightly confused when Impa said that he hadn’t done anything wrong. And what did she mean when she said Zelda had just had a mood swing? He certainly hoped that this wouldn’t be a regular occurrence.

Link’s eyes brightened when he saw Zelda come running down the hallway. Link held out the flowers and began to speak, his voice trembling, “Zelda, I’m sorry I...” Link’s apology was interrupted by Zelda colliding with him and hugging him hard.

“Oh, I’m so sorry I yelled at you,” said Zelda in a frantic voice as she planted kisses all over his face. “I didn’t mean to yell at you, you didn’t do anything wrong.”

Although Link didn’t mind the attention, he finally got Zelda to back down a little. “I came to say I was sorry,” said Link. “I didn’t mean to make you mad. I...” he handed Zelda the vase. “I picked you these flowers.” Smiling, Zelda took the bouquet of flowers and gently inhaled their beautiful scent. The smell of the roses was so sweet and delicate. Zelda could feel Link’s love in this small bouquet of flowers. Zelda leaned over and kissed him again.

“Oh I love these flowers,” exclaimed Zelda. “I love roses so much, how did you know that? And look what happened to your hands, you poor thing. You went through all that trouble for me.” Zelda set the vase down on one of the many decorative tables in the foyer. She noticed that they were alone and turned to Link with a serious look on her face. “Link, you don’t have to apologize to me for what you did. I realize that you were simply defending me and my honor, and I’m glad you did. Besides, those boys were going to hurt you and I didn’t want you hurt. The reason I blew up had nothing to do with you or what you did. I was...I wasn’t myself. I guess it was just some mood swing, or so Impa tells me. I can’t imagine how much it must have devastated you to hear me say that I hated you. But I didn’t mean it at all. I love you more than anything in the whole world, and I would never hate you. I just let my emotions take control. You know that I love you, right? And I was worried that you would hate *me* after what I said.”

Link looked into Zelda’s eyes, which were now starting to glisten with the beginnings of tears. “Don’t cry,” said Link in his calm, soothing voice. “I love you too. You are the whole reason for my existence, you are the only person who makes me feel truly alive. I couldn’t live without you. Somehow, after you blew up, I knew that you didn’t really mean it. But I still cried about it, wondering if maybe you really meant it. But now I know that it was silly for me to doubt you like that. I would never stop loving you for anything, even if you didn’t love me back.”

“Well, I *do* love you back,” said Zelda, smiling and putting her arm around Link’s waist. “And I’m sorry for blowing up at you like that. Impa told me that it was part of...growing up.”

“Was that the ‘woman’ problem she was talking about?”

“Well, yes,” replied Zelda, nearly blushing. “But I don’t think you need to know the details. I’ll try to avoid any more mood swings in the future.”

“Okay, you don’t need to explain anything to me. There are some things that guys don’t need to know, or don’t *want* to know. I really don’t care.”

“Impa was right about another thing,” said Zelda with a smirk on her face. Link had grown to know that it couldn’t be good for him when she had that look. “She told me that if a woman yells at a man for something, no matter what it is, he will always think it’s his fault...even if it was the woman’s fault. And she said that the guy will always come crawling back, begging for forgiveness. That’s just what you did.” Zelda looked at the flowers and then grinned at Link.

“You know me all too well,” said Link. He knew that Zelda and Impa were right. It was something built into the male consciousness that he had no control over. “But you’re right, it’s true. I came groveling back, but it was worth it. I would do anything for you.” Link looked deep into Zelda’s beautiful, cobalt eyes and smiled. It was the kind of smile that needed no words to explain it. Zelda gazed back, almost mesmerized by Link’s face. She never realized how handsome he was. His face had such an air of innocence to it, an innocence that made him seem so perfect. Ever so slowly, their faces grew closer. Then, as if in slow motion, their lips met. Time seemed to stop, they were the only people who existed in this moment. Link and Zelda’s lips touched, initiating a kiss that was different from anyone that had ever had before. This wasn’t a simple peck on the cheek or a friendly gesture, it was so much more. It was something magical, as if their souls were mingling. Link felt the tender touch of Zelda’s lips and lost himself in the moment. Zelda wondered if this was the romantic feeling Impa had told her about. She had always said that a real “first kiss” would be something to remember; she would definitely remember this. Zelda now realized what it was really like to kiss someone she loved. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, their lips released and their faces moved back. Time returned to normal, and their minds seemed to clear. It had only been a fraction of a second, but it felt like an eternity, an eternity they never wanted to end.

“I love you,” said Zelda, with more seriousness and sincerity than she had ever felt in her life.

“I love you too.”

She is such a wonderful person, I feel so lucky to know her. I never thought I would have a friend as good as her. But it’s not just being a friend that I like about her. In fact, I love everything about her. Her eyes are so deep and full of life, it makes feel so safe when I look into them. And her hair is so pretty, too. I don’t know why it enchants me so much. Her beautiful auburn hair just burns in the sunlight, giving off such a beautiful glow. Her hair is so much prettier than mine, it makes mine seem all grungy and ugly. And she simply looks so beautiful. I’ve never met a person whose body had such graceful beauty. It’s amazing how her delicate good looks seem to hide the true strength within her. She is so strong and powerful, but she looks so small. She could probably pick me up and carry me if she wanted to. But what I like the most about her is her personality. She is so warm and caring, and makes everyone around her feel better about themselves. I love simply talking to her, she has so many things to say, and she always listens. She is so kind and caring, loves every person and animal in the world. Her voice is so soothing and calming. Her voice would make anybody’s heart melt. And when she sings...I can’t even describe it. It’s like a whole chorus of angels singing just for me. There’s only one thing I could possibly say that would sum this all up: I love her. I know I do, I’ve never been so sure of anything. But I could never tell her my feelings, I don’t want to ruin our friendship. If I told her how I felt, she would shun me and tell me to go away; just like everyone else has in my life. I couldn’t take that kind of rejection; I would die. It’s just better if I keep my feelings inside, that way no one will get hurt.

Solo sat atop Epona, gazing at the magnificent twilight that remained after the sun had sunk below the horizon. The sky was already dark and the brightest stars were shining. Soon, the orange glow in the horizon would fade and the countryside would be cast into darkness, barely illuminated by the silver crescent moon. Solo dismounted the horse and led her into the corral for the night. Malon followed, enjoying the breeze and the scent of the crisp night air. “It’s such a beautiful night,” said Solo, gazing up

at the stars. "It's a shame we have to go inside."

"No one said we had to go in for the night," responded Malon. "It's still fairly warm out. Who says we can't stay outside? I think I would be great to sleep under the stars, there so beautiful and breathtaking."

"You mean we can really stay outside for the night? That would be great! We could have a little camp-out."

"Ooh, that sound like fun," said Malon. "I have some big blankets in the house that we can use as sleeping bags. Come on, let's go get them." Malon quickly made her way back to the house with Solo following closely behind.

"We can have a campfire, too," suggested Solo as she entered the house.

"That's great," said Malon, digging through drawers and pulling out a few very large blankets. She handed a couple to Solo and kept two for herself. "We've got tons of firewood outside. And the kindling is right in this drawer." Malon opened a drawer in the kitchen and pulled out a small box. Solo took it and followed Malon outside. Malon and Solo left the house and walked to a nice soft spot in the yard. They each laid down one of their blankets to sit on. "I'll go get some wood from over there, you just wait here." Solo watched Malon walk to the side of the barn where much of the firewood was kept. She saw Malon effortlessly pile logs into her arms and carry them back. Sometimes Malon amazed Solo. She could be so physically strong one moment and so gentle the next. Malon's diminutive size and average-looking physique gave no hint of her true strength.

Solo smiled as Malon returned and dumped the wood onto the ground before them. Solo smiled at Malon as she arranged the logs. "You looked so beautiful when you were carrying those logs," said Solo in a dreamy voice. "You look just like a normal girl on the outside, but you're really so strong. That just amazes me."

"Thank you," said Malon, thankful that the dark night didn't reveal her blushing face.

Solo's eyes widened and she felt shocked and embarrassed. She didn't realize that she had said that out loud. "I...I'm sorry...I was thinking aloud." Solo tried to hide her embarrassment, hoping that Malon didn't take it the wrong way.

"It's okay, you don't need to apologize for anything," said Malon as she tried to get the fire going. She gave a proud smile when she had finally ignited the kindling and set it underneath the logs. Malon sat down next to Solo and smiled at her. "No one has ever said that to me before—called me beautiful. I mean, my dad has, but that's different. No one has ever given me such a compliment. I was always just the strange little farm girl who delivered the milk. No one ever wanted to be friends with me. Maybe it's 'cause I talk to the animals. But they understand me, they just can't talk back."

"I don't think you're weird. There's nothing wrong with talking to the animals. I think it's cute. And I meant what I said, too."

"Thank you," said Malon. "It just felt good hearing the compliment come from you. I always thought I would be the weird loner who never had a friend. I always knew that I was a rather...unusual person. I just hoped that I would have a friend someday that would understand me. I remember when I first met your brother in the market. I was waiting for Dad to get back from his milk delivery to the castle. It figures that he had fallen asleep. But I talked to Link and asked to go find my dad for me. But I was just rambling on endlessly, and he must've thought I was a total nut-case."

"He told me about that," said Solo. "He didn't think you were weird at all. Believe me, he's my brother and I can testify that he's the one who's a nut-case." Malon giggled, she always thought that Link was a little strange. "You wouldn't believe the stuff he does, like he refuses to where clothes that have been put in his dresser."

"Are you serious?" asked Malon.

"Yeah. He was always a slob and kept all his clothes in a pile on the floor. But I really don't mind that because I'm the same way. But unlike me, he flat out refuses to wear clothes put in his dresser. You see, Saria is a neat-freak and is always on his case about cleaning up his house. Sometimes when we're not home she'll sneak in and clean up the whole house. And she folds up his clothes and puts them in the drawers."

“That doesn’t sound so bad. Why would that bother him so much?”

“Because he’s really superstitious about some things. On two separate occasions when Saria cleaned his house, he sprained his ankle really bad on the same day. So now he thinks it’s bad luck to put his clothes in the drawer. And he might be right, he hasn’t sprained his ankle again. Personally, I think his system works fine. Well, I wouldn’t really call it a ‘system,’ it’s more like an organized mess.”

“How does he know which clothes are clean and which ones are dirty if they’re all laying on the floor?” asked Malon.

“He smells them,” replied Solo nonchalantly.

“Eeww,” remarked Malon, sticking out her tongue in disgust.

“Yeah, it can be gross. Especially when we get our clothes mixed up. Because we both wear just about the same thing, sometimes our piles get mixed together. And when I go check my clothes to see which ones are clean, sometimes I end up with one of his stinky, sweaty tunics that he exercised in everyday for a week without washing it. And believe me, that is *not* a pleasant smell.”

Malon chuckled upon imagining that awkward situation. “That sounds so nasty. Boys always smell bad. They should be the ones who wear perfume, not girls. I know Link is a sweet, kind boy, but I don’t understand why Zelda would want to be so close to him, especially when he’s all sweaty and smelly.”

“I guess people lose their sense of smell when they fall in love,” laughed Solo. “But boys aren’t all that bad. Can I ask you something personal?” Malon nodded and Solo moved a little closer to her. “Is there anybody that you...you know, have a crush on? I just thought it might be fun to talk about.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, there is somebody I have a crush on. Actually, I think I’m in love with the person,” replied Malon.

“That’s so sweet. It’s not Link, is it? ‘Cause he already has the hots for Zelda, and you’d have no chance with him.”

Malon smiled and giggled slightly. “No, it’s not Link. I mean, fairy-boy is nice and everything, but I don’t think I would fall in love with him.” Malon wondered if she should stop this conversation now, or continue it and see what would happen.

“Well, who is it? Is it somebody I know?” asked Solo excitedly. She knew that Malon would never give her the answer she really wanted to hear, but it was nice to know who Malon really liked.

Malon rolled her eyes and tried to think. “Yes, it is somebody you know. But I won’t tell you who it is.” Malon gave a look of stern determination. As much as she yearned to tell Solo the truth, she could never bring herself to do it. That would only lead to pain and rejection.

“Oh, can you at least describe him?” begged Solo. She desperately wanted to at least know what her object of affection was like. “What’s he like?”

Malon’s cheeks burned bright red, but luckily the darkness of night obscured them. “Well, this person is very nice. They’re so sweet and kind, and they always make me feel better when I’m down. This person always listens to what I have to say, and never judges me about anything. But they don’t know how I feel, and I’m afraid to tell them. This person is so wonderful, but I’m so afraid of rejection. What if this person doesn’t like me back? I wouldn’t be able to live with that.” It felt so good for Malon to let her feelings out. Although she had not been totally honest with Solo, that was the best she could do. She couldn’t really reveal everything, that would be too traumatic. The object of her affection could never love her back, it wasn’t meant to be. Malon knew it wasn’t natural to feel this way, but she never cared about what was natural. She knew it was right.

“That sounds so sweet,” said Solo, deep in thought and touched by Malon’s revelation. Although she was happy that there was someone Malon loved, she was also disappointed. But she couldn’t dwell on that, Solo knew it wasn’t meant to be. “But it’s kinda sad that you can’t tell him you love him. You shouldn’t be afraid of rejection, you should do what your feelings tell you. Don’t put it off, because someday it might be too late. If you love someone, you have to tell them.” Solo was amazed at how insightful she had just been. Sadly, she wished she could take her own advice.

“I know I should tell them,” replied Malon. “But you don’t understand the problem I’m having. This person would probably hate me if I told them how I felt. I’m having a really... unusual problem. The person I love would probably think I was sick or perverted, and I don’t want that. Besides, it would ruin

our friendship. I'm just glad you cared to listen to me. Most people wouldn't want to bother listening to me ramble."

"I like listening to you talk," admitted Solo. "You can always tell me anything you want." Both girls sat silently, both mulling over their feelings. They both wanted to admit their feelings, but they both also feared rejection. Solo looked over and noticed that the campfire had gone out. Now only the glowing red coals remained. They must've have been talking for longer than they thought. It was now pitch black outside and all the stars shone brightly. The only light around came from the hot coals and the tiny, silver crescent moon. "The fire's gone out," said Solo in a sleepy voice.

Malon looked over at the snuffed-out campfire and sighed. "We must've been talking for quite a while. I always lose track of time on nights like this. It must be past midnight by now." Malon pulled the blanket over herself and lay flat on her back, Solo doing the same thing. They both stared at the beautiful night sky. It was so crisp and clear, and at times they both felt like they were soaring through space. There were so many stars, each one twinkling in its own special way.

"The stars are so beautiful," said Solo in an awestruck voice. It felt like her mind was being lost in the sky's vast expanse. "And there are so many of them. I wonder if anyone has ever tried to count them all?"

"That would be impossible," replied Malon. "There's too many. But you're right, they are beautiful. Sometimes I come out here at night and look at the stars. I'd just lay on my back and stare at them all night. Did you ever really *look* at the stars? They're amazing sometimes. It seems like every single one has its own special characteristics. They all have different colors and sizes. Some are blue, or white, or even red. And every now and then you see a shooting star. They say that if you make a wish on a shooting star, it will come true. And there's a lot of shooting stars this time of year, we might be lucky enough to see a few." Solo laid back and listened to what Malon had to say. She just loved listening to her talk and listening to her voice. She felt like she was in heaven. Then, as if her prayers were being answered, she saw a bright orange flame streak across the sky. Both of them took their chances and made a wish. *I wish she would feel the same way as me*, thought both of them in unison. Each wished for the same thing, not know that the other felt the same way. "Did you make a wish?" asked Malon.

"Yes," replied Solo. "I hope it comes true. If I can only have one thing in my life, I want this wish to come true."

"Me too. I've always wished on shooting stars before, but they've never come true. But I'm with you, I hope this wish comes true. There's so many things I want in life, but I know I can't have them. I remember when I was real little, and my mom got sick. I wished and I prayed that she would get better, but she didn't. She just died. And ever since then, I've never tried wishing for anything. I've been let down so many times that I only wish for what I can achieve by myself. But there are so many things I can't achieve on my own. I remember when I was a little girl, my dad always told me stories about mythical knights who slew dragons and rescued princesses. I always wanted a knight in shining armor to come to me. But I knew that would never happen. I realize that I don't want a knight in shining armor anymore. There's only one person I want, and I don't know if they feel the same way. It really tears me up inside. There are so many things I've accomplished in my life, but this one easy task seems so difficult."

"I know how you feel," said Solo sleepily. "I've tried to do a lot of things in my life. And it always seems that the easy things are the hardest." Solo got comfortable and snuggled up in her blanket; it was so warm and soft. Solo yawned, the peace of sleep was dragging at her eyelids. "I'm really tired now."

"Me too," said Malon, yawning. "It was nice talking to you, and I'm glad you listened. Good night."

"Good night, Malon." Solo rolled onto her side and closed her eyes, letting the calming embrace of sleep claim her. Malon still lay flat on her back, listening to Solo's slow, rhythmic breathing. She sounded so peaceful, Malon was happy to be with her and to be her friend. Malon stared at the starry sky, becoming lost. She didn't feel like sleeping, her mind was too rife with thoughts to relax. She stared for what must've been hours, watching the moon and the stars move slowly across the sky. Malon turned to her he side to see Solo sleeping with her back towards her. There was something beautiful about her when she slept. She looked so peaceful and graceful. Watching the movement of the blanket caused by Solo's rhythmic breathing was almost mesmerizing. "Are you awake?" whispered Malon. There was no response,

Solo's breathing remained the same. Malon laid back and stared at the sky again. "I wish I could tell you how I felt," whispered Malon, barely audible. "But you would never feel like I do. It's not supposed to be. I know it's not natural and it's not right, but I can't deny my feelings. I hope my wish comes true. Maybe you'll just wake up and return my feelings. But who am I kidding? You would never feel like that." Malon prayed that her wish would come true, that was the only thing she ever wanted. She wished she could sleep. She was so tired, but her emotions wouldn't let her relax. Malon looked over once again at Solo, she was sound asleep. She tried not to think of her problems. She wanted to sleep so badly. Sometimes things that seemed so easy were the most difficult. Malon closed her eyes and tried to relax. She thought of calming things, her ranch, her favorite animals, and her mother. No matter how stressed-out she was, thoughts of her mother always had a calming effect. Malon was so young when she died, but still remembered her well. Malon remembered how she would sing her lullabies to make her fall asleep at night. Malon pictured her mother, and her fears and apprehensions seemed to melt away. Finally, her mind was at peace. She no longer worried about her troubles, she could deal with those in the morning. Malon drifted off into the quiet embrace of sleep.

Link was walking through the forest, not paying much attention to the beautiful foliage or the musical chatter of chirping birds. He was too busy wondering what Saria wanted. When he had gotten up early this morning, he found a note pinned to his doorframe. It was from Saria, telling him to meet her in their special place in the forest. As he walked through the familiar maze of the Lost Woods, he was reminded of the encounter they'd had just yesterday. He was worried that Saria was upset about something else, so he hurried along at a faster than normal pace.

When he reached the meadow, he was relieved to see Saria sitting on a tree stump swinging her legs happily. As he approached, he saw that Saria looked like she was deep in thought, not even noticing Link's approach. He walked up to her and sat down next to her on the large stump. He gave Saria a confused look; her face registered an expression that was almost sad, but mostly thoughtful. "You left a note on my door," said Link. Saria didn't seem to notice his comment. "What did you want to see me about?" Saria turned to look at Link, her face seeming to tell him that there was something she wanted to say but couldn't. "Are you upset about something again? 'Cause you can always talk to me."

Saria took a deep breath and pondered one last time if she should go through with this. She had been sitting in the meadow since the early hours of the morning, trying to think of what to say. She had gone over the whole imaginary exchange in her mind, assessing all the possible responses Link could give. She seriously wondered if their friendship would be ruined by what she was going to say, but realized that Link would never be that shallow. Link was too good a friend to abandon her over this. Saria looked at Link's caring face and decided that it was now or never. "There's something I want to tell you," said Saria, but she choked after the first sentence. She tried to calm down and think.

"What is it?" asked Link. "You don't have to keep secrets from me."

"Well, this is kind of a secret. I've been thinking about this for so long, it almost seems like there wasn't a time when I *didn't* think about it. This has been bothering me for so long, and it's almost driven me crazy. I don't know quite how to say it, though. I'm just worried that if I tell you, it might damage our friendship, and I don't want that. You've been my best friend all my life, and I don't want anything to happen to that. But this is too hard for me to keep bottled up inside me."

"Don't ever think that anything you could say would make me stop being friends with you," said Link in a reassuring voice. "If something is bothering you, tell me. Even if it's about me, I don't care. Was it something I did?"

"No, not really. You never did anything wrong. It's really been my fault. You went with your heart, and I should have too." Link wasn't quite sure what Saria was getting at, but he knew it had something to do with what she had been upset about yesterday. "I spent so long worrying about this, and it has only made my life more miserable. I can't keep it a secret anymore, I've been denying it to myself."

"Does this have anything to do with what you were upset about yesterday?" asked Link.

“Yes, it does,” replied Saria. “What I told you yesterday was partly the reason I wanted to talk to you. Do you remember what I said? About the person I loved, but never told him?” Link nodded, he remembered being confused by that statement. “Well, it is somebody you know... it’s...you. Link, I love you.”

Upon hearing those words, Link gave a look of shock. He tried to speak, but he couldn’t make any words come out. Saria loved him? He almost couldn’t believe it. He wondered why she never told him this before. “You...” mumbled Link, “love...me?” His mind began racing with a thousand thoughts at once. He knew he loved Zelda, but now he found out that Saria loved him too. What was he going to do? Saria was his best friend, but he never loved her the same way he loved Zelda. Saria was like a sister to him, but apparently she felt differently.

Saria sighed and a tear ran down her cheek. “Please don’t hate me for saying this. But I had to tell you. I’ve loved you for as long as I can remember. I always assumed that you felt the same way, but I guess I assumed wrong. Every day I would make a promise to myself that I would tell you, but I always ended up being too afraid to do it. I always thought there would be more time, that there would always be tomorrow. But when tomorrow came, it was too late. I waited so long, then you finally found Zelda and I knew it was too late for me. I love you so much, but I can accept the fact that you already have someone else. I don’t want you to lose Zelda because of me. All I want is your happiness, that’s all I care about. I just had to tell you this because we shouldn’t keep secrets from each other. I know you and Zelda were meant to be together, and I want to see you two be happy.”

Link was almost driven to tears after hearing Saria’s confession. He had never guessed that Saria felt like this. He felt sad that he didn’t return Saria’s feelings, he saw her as a good friend, but nothing more. “I didn’t know you felt like that,” said Link solemnly. “I really don’t know what to say...I always thought we were just friends. Now I feel like I’ve let you down, I’m sorry I never saw it. I guess I was just stupid and insensitive. It figures, I always ruin everything.”

Saria’s eyes welled with tears as Link gave such a display of self-pity. She leaned over and hugged Link tightly as he was about to fall into tears. “No, stop blaming yourself,” begged Saria. “Don’t ever think that that it was your fault. You went with your heart, like I should have. It was my fault for never admitting my feelings.” Saria began to sob onto Link’s shoulder, and all he could do was let her cry. He hated seeing this little girl who had always been such a good friend be so sad. He didn’t want her to cry. Link patted her back and tried to comfort her.

“Please don’t cry,” asked Link. “I don’t want you to be upset. I don’t know what to do. I never knew you felt like this, and I don’t want to betray Zelda. She’s such a wonderful person, and I don’t want to lose her. She’s everything to me. But you’re just my friend. Not that that’s not just as good. You were always there when I needed you. You were the only one who never laughed at me or humiliated me. When everyone else told me to go away, you took me in and made me part of your family. You were the only family I had for most of my life. That’s why I couldn’t love you like Zelda, because I see you as so much of a family member that it would be wrong for me to think of you that way. I hope you understand. I don’t want to lose my only friend after so long.” Link sniffled, but controlled himself. He needed to be strong for Saria.

“I do understand,” said Saria, letting go of Link and sitting back down. “I still want to be your friend. Please don’t let me lose that. I want you to know that all I want is for you to be happy. That’s all that matters to me. The only thing that kept me sane for so long was seeing how happy you and Zelda were together. I guess I just lived through you and her. Seeing you and Zelda happy together made feel happy because I knew that I had a small part in it. I realized that if I had told you how I felt before, maybe you and Zelda wouldn’t be together. And now I know that you two are supposed to be together, and I don’t want to ruin it. I’ve accepted the fact that we can’t be together. It’s not meant to be because I’m a Kokiri and you’re a Hylian, we could never be compatible anyways. I just want to continue being friends, if that’s what you want.”

“Of course that’s what I want,” said Link. “I don’t know what I would do if I lost you as a friend. You’re the best friend I ever had, and I want to keep it that way. Somehow, I always suspected that you felt that way; the way you acted around me, the way you talked to me. But I guess I always denied it, I

thought I was crazy for thinking like that. Thank you for telling me, I don't want us to keep secrets."

"Thank you for being there for me," said Saria. She felt like a thousand-pound weight had been lifted from her chest. She always knew that a relationship between her and Link would never work, but she had dwelled on it so long that she lied to herself telling herself that it was possible. Now that she had spoken to Link, she felt at ease with herself. She now accepted the fact that she and Link would never be together. Now that she stopped denying it to herself, she could finally breathe freely. For the first time in years, that shadow was no longer hanging over her head; she was at peace.

"That's what friends are for," said Link. "Come on, we should get back home." Saria and Link both stood up and began to leave the Sacred Meadow.

Saria had a thought, and grabbed at Link's clothes to stop him. He turned around to see what she wanted. He couldn't help but smile at the little-girl face she put on. "I was wondering if I could ask you something," said Saria in a sheepish voice. Her face turned to a slightly red hue and Link wondered what she was planning. "Well, when we were younger we were both about the same size and strength, you know, because we were little kids. But now you've grown a lot bigger, and you're much stronger now. And I've stayed the same size and weight."

"What are you getting at?" asked Link, becoming frustrated that Saria was beating around the bush.

"Okay, you can lift heavy things, right?" Link nodded. "Well, I'm not that heavy, and I've always wanted to do this. Will you...um...will you give me a piggy-back ride home?" Saria gave Link the cutest most pathetic look she could muster.

Link rolled his eyes and smiled. Sometimes he forgot that Saria still enjoyed being a child. "Okay, hop on," replied Link as he knelt down so Saria could reach him. She cheered with giddy, child-like anticipation. Saria held onto Link's shoulders as he grasped her legs and stood up. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes!" cheered Saria. Link then began to walk quickly through the woods. Saria cheered with delight as they weaved between the trees and shrubs. She now saw the world from Link's perspective, and was amazed by it. "So this is what the world looks like to you."

"What do you mean?" asked Link.

"You're twice as tall as me, I wondered what it would be like seeing everything from this high up. It's almost scary."

"I guess I never noticed."

Saria tugged at Link's hair causing him to yelp in pain. "Go faster!" exclaimed Saria. Link smiled to himself and began to hurry through the forest at an even quicker pace. Saria squealed with joy as they weaved through the trees. She couldn't remember having so much fun; she'd almost forgotten what it was like. Saria could finally be a child again and not worry about her problems.

Part Five

Malon opened her eyes to the sun's glare and squinted. She so loved the smell of the morning air, and the sounds of the birds chirping. The sweet dew was still clinging to the grass, it was still fairly early. Malon felt a comforting warmth next to her and opened her eyes to realize that Solo was lying right next to her, still sound asleep. Solo lay on her stomach with her arm draped across Malon's chest. It had gotten colder than expected overnight, and they had unconsciously moved closer to each other to stay warm. Now they were both up next to each other, and Malon could feel the warmth of Solo's body. Somehow, she felt comfortable and safe next to her. She wished she could stay like this forever. Malon was happy that Solo wasn't awake, fearing that it might cause an awkward situation.

Malon froze when she felt Solo's arm move. Solo rolled over and yawned, finally sitting up and opening her eyes. She looked over to see Malon right next to her, and gave a look of surprise. "I'm sorry," said Solo in a nervous voice. "I guess I must've rolled over in my sleep. I didn't mean to..."

"It's okay," interrupted Malon. "It got a little cold last night, you probably just wanted to stay warm."

“Well, it’s still kinda chilly, why don’t we go inside?” suggested Solo, rubbing her arms. Malon nodded and stood up. They both gathered up the various blankets that they’d placed on the ground. Malon neatly folded hers and rolled them into a tight bundle. Malon giggled when she saw that Solo had merely bunched up the blankets into some type amorphous blob. “What’s so funny?” asked Solo.

“Nothing. It just that you just bunched all that stuff up into a little ball. Didn’t anyone ever show you how to fold a blanket?”

“Not really. Link isn’t in to tidiness and stuff like that; blame it on him. Besides, it’s more fun this way.” Malon shrugged her shoulders and began to walk back to the house, with Solo following behind. When they got inside, Malon motioned for Solo to dump the blankets in the corner next to the washtub, which she did happily. Solo then went to the table and sat down. “So, what’s for breakfast?” asked Solo hungrily.

Malon walked to the stove and started a fire in it, and began rustling around in a cabinet full of pots and pans. “Well, just the usual. I usually make eggs and bread for breakfast. And there’s some bread left from yesterday, it should still be good.”

“Eggs sound good,” said Solo. “I never really have those at home. Nobody in the forest has any chickens, so we never get any eggs.” Solo extracted a pan from the cabinet and placed it on the stove. Solo watched as Malon quickly and effortlessly prepared everything to make the meal. “Do you need any help? ‘Cause I feel a little weird just sitting here watching you do all the work. I can’t really cook, but there’s gotta be something I can do.”

“It’s okay, I enjoy doing things for you. I like making people happy. Besides, I’m pretty good at cooking and I just want to show off.” Malon gave Solo a half-grin. She went over to the counter and fetched a basket and a bottle of milk that sat there. “My dad must’ve gotten home last night. He always gets the milk and eggs early and then I actually cook it.” Malon cracked half a dozen eggs into a bowl and began to mix them up. Solo didn’t know why, but she enjoyed watching Malon do her work. It made her seem so real and down to earth.

“Does your dad ever cook?” asked Solo. Malon couldn’t help but chuckle. “What? What’s so funny?”

“No, he doesn’t cook,” replied Malon. “He tried making breakfast once, but he ended up filling the house with smoke. The eggs were so burned that I couldn’t even scrape them off the pan.”

“Sounds like Link,” commented Solo. “Saria told me about the time he almost burned the house down making bread. But he’s not that bad at cooking in a pan, he usually does pretty good with that.”

Malon poured the scrambled eggs into the pan and began to cook them. “Daddy’s just real clumsy when it comes to kitchen things. He can raise the best horses in Hyrule, but he can’t cook. I hope you don’t mind your eggs being scrambled, ‘cause I really can’t cook them the other way.”

“Oh, that’s okay. I don’t mind, food is food. Is your dad usually up in the morning?”

“Most of the time. But he’ll probably sleep late because he got home so late. Sometimes he goes out to deliver a horse and doesn’t get back till four in the morning. I don’t bother trying to wake him up because it’s like trying raise the dead.”

“That definitely sounds like Link,” said Solo with a chuckle. “I try to wake him up and all he does is groan. Of course, I’m the same way, so I guess I have no room to complain. Will he be up later?”

“Probably after noon. He has some appointments later today, and he never misses those. You know, he really likes you. I guess he’s happy that I finally found a real friend, ‘cause he’s always telling me to go out and meet people. But I never liked meeting people, and I never really opened up to anyone. You’re the first person I’ve ever really told my deepest feelings to, and I appreciate that you listen.”

“Thank you,” said Solo. “I really appreciate your compliments. It’s so flattering and almost embarrassing, because I’m still not really used to it. It’s been hard trying to adjust to a normal life with family and friends after I’d been alone for all those years. I’ve never really told anyone, but I still keep to myself about some things. Part of me is still afraid of rejection; I’m still afraid that everyone I love will just decide one day to push me away and tell me to leave like everyone else has in my past life. I know it’s stupid to think that, but I can’t help it. You’re the first person I’ve ever really opened up to, even Link doesn’t know some of the things I’ve told you.”

Malon finished cooking and portioned the eggs onto two plates as Solo talked. Malon went to the

table and presented the plate to a very hungry Solo, who quickly took the fork and began shoveling food into her mouth. Malon giggled to herself, and Solo shot her a confused look. “What?” asked Solo defensively, her mouth half-full. She knew the giggle just had to be at her expense.

“Nothing. It’s just that you’re so funny when you eat. It’s kind of refreshing that you really don’t care for manners. I mean, I’m not saying that you have bad manners, you’re just different...”

“I understand,” said Solo. “Personally, I never saw a point to manners. They don’t really accomplish anything. Did you know that I had never even seen a fork before I met Link? I remember the first meal I had there, I wondered what in the world that thing was for, ‘cause I always just used my fingers. I felt so embarrassed, but he never made a big deal about it. And then when I went to meet Zelda, I was terrified that I would do the wrong thing and she would kick me out or something. Imagine my relief when it turned out that she hated etiquette more than me.” Solo scraped her fork on the plate and realized that she’d eaten everything. “That didn’t last very long.”

“Do you want some more?” asked Malon, preparing to stand up.

“No, it’s okay, I’m fine. I just didn’t realize I was such a pig,” said Solo, chuckling at her own expense.

“I think it’s kinda cute,” said Malon, becoming suddenly fascinated with the remaining bit of egg on her plate. Solo blushed slightly at the comment, not quite knowing why. “Wait, that came out wrong,” added Malon nervously. “I mean that there’s just something about you that I really like. You’re not like other people; you’re unique and different. You’re so interesting; just knowing you seems like an adventure.”

“No one has ever called me interesting before,” said Solo, wondering if she should feel flattered. “I’ve been called weird, strange, and crazy, but never interesting. I’m glad you think of me that way. I guess being weird isn’t so bad if somebody’s there to appreciate it.”

“Well, I’m not exactly normal myself,” said Malon, collecting the plates and putting them in the sink. “Ingo thinks I’m nuts because I talk to the animals. But they know what I’m saying, they just can’t talk back.” She walked over to Solo, took her hand, and led her to the door. “Come on, let’s go outside. It’s such a nice day and I don’t want to waste it. Besides, I’ve got to feed the chickens.” Solo followed Malon outside and into the barn, where she went and got the bucket of chicken feed. They both saw Ingo sweeping out the stables with his usual glum expression. “Hi Ingo, I didn’t know you’d gotten back,” said Malon cheerily as she was on her way out. Ingo’s only reply was an unenthusiastic grunt.

Solo looked back at the barn after they had left. “What’s wrong with him?” asked Solo, recalling the almost mean look on Ingo’s face.

“Oh, don’t mind him. He’s always like that. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Ingo in a good mood.”

Solo watched with near fascination as Malon went about her business feeding the chickens. She had never seen her do normal ranch work, and it was somehow intriguing. Solo was almost startled when a whole flock of chickens suddenly came out of nowhere. Dozens of clucking birds pecked at the ground where the corn kernels had landed just a fraction of a second before. Malon smiled at Solo’s near-horror. “Sorry, I forgot to tell you,” said Malon. “They tend to do that when I feed them.” She threw out another handful of corn, and then walked over to the tree. She looked up and almost screamed. “Oh quick, Solo! Look in the tree!” Solo hurried over to Malon’s side and looked where she was pointing. Solo’s eyes widened when she saw three chickens perched on a low branch. “See, I told you they could fly! No one ever believes me, but you saw it with your own eyes so you can’t deny it.”

Solo simply shook her head, at a loss for words. “I don’t know what to say. I didn’t know that chickens could fly.”

“My chickens can,” said Malon proudly. “Well, at least those three. The rest don’t.”

“Maybe they’re magical,” joked Solo. “We should show them off, and charge people money to see them. I can see it now: Malon’s Freaky Chickens,” suggested Solo, visualizing a large, colorful banner. “You could make a lot of money.”

“No, I don’t think we’ll be doing that,” replied Malon, trying to get Solo to return to reality. Solo followed Malon back to the barn where she returned the bucket. Solo got an eerie feeling as Ingo watched them leave the barn again. For some reason, the look Ingo gave Solo when Malon wasn’t looking made

her feel uncomfortable.

“That guy gives me the creeps,” shuddered Solo after they were safely outside.

“Who? Ingo? Don’t worry about him, he’s just a little...strange.”

“I think it’s more than that,” insisted Solo. “He gave me such a strange look when you had your back turned. I know he was directing it at me, and he purposely did it when you weren’t looking.”

“What kind of look did he give you?” asked Malon, becoming suddenly concerned by the tone of Solo’s voice.

“I’m not sure how to describe it. It was almost...predatory. He’s watching me and I don’t know why.”

“Ingo’s harmless,” insisted Malon. “I don’t think he’d ever do anything. He’s probably just in a bad mood. He’s always in a bad mood. You think a vacation would soften him up, but I guess he’s just that way.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Just don’t think about it. But now that he’s back, he can take over some of the work I had to do while he was gone.”

“So, what does that mean?”

“That means we have the whole day to ourselves!” said Malon, grabbing Solo’s arm and leading her on some kind of wild goose chase through the ranch. After a few minutes of mindless running, Malon finally slowed down and sat on the ground near the outer fence. Solo sat down on the grass, trying to catch her breath; she hated physical activity.

“What was that all about?” asked Solo.

Malon shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I just wanted to go somewhere where we could be alone. I thought we could just talk for a while.”

“That sounds fine. I never say it enough, but I really like talking to you. During all those years alone, I always wished I had someone to talk to. The only person I ever talked to was myself, and those conversations were a little one-sided.” Solo smirked and gave a slight chuckle.

“You have a really twisted sense of humor,” commented Malon. Solo nodded. “When are you planning on going home? ‘Cause you can stay here as long as you want, but I’m sure Link is probably wondering where you are.”

“Oh, he’ll be fine. Besides, it gets a little boring at home.”

“Yeah, I can understand that. But you know you’re gonna have to tell Link what happened sooner or later. I don’t think you realized it, but your bruise has gotten bigger.”

Solo felt the side of her face where Akuyo had hit her. “It has?” asked Solo. It didn’t hurt, and it didn’t feel any different than before. Solo had almost forgotten what happened, Malon made her feel so happy that she didn’t even think of any bad things. Solo’s expression became more sullen, and Malon frowned in response.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you again,” apologized Malon, hanging her head.

“No, it’s okay. You didn’t upset me. I figured it would happen. And to tell you the truth...it doesn’t bother me that much anymore. What would’ve hurt me is if I had been in love with him...but I wasn’t. He was just a buddy, or an acquaintance. And physical pain doesn’t matter, I’ve been through worse. The only thing that does make me upset is how people I do love are going to react. I know Link will goes nuts when he sees this. He’s usually not an angry or violent person, but when somebody he loves is hurt, he doesn’t take that lightly.”

“He’s a rational person,” said Malon. “He wouldn’t do anything he would regret. And don’t worry, we can both talk him down. What did you mean when you were talking about being in love with Akuyo? I can understand that you would feel devastated if someone you loved did that to you. I always thought that you had feelings for him.”

“No...I never did,” replied Solo.

“But you always talked about how much you liked him.”

“I know I did. And for a while I thought I actually did like him. But I think I was just saying that because I didn’t want to face reality. I never really loved him, it was just a lie. And after a while, I started to believe it. But when he smacked me, I came back crashing back to reality and realized that I didn’t love him. I just used him as an excuse to escape reality. Can I ask you a question? How do you know when you’re in love with someone? How do you know when you’ve found the right person?”

“I’m not really sure,” replied Malon, feeling blown away by the question. This was a far cry from normal girl-talk, this was a deep and serious question. Malon had to think of the right way to answer it. “I’ve never had any previous experience with this before, but I think I can make a guess. Love really isn’t something you can categorize or easily define. It’s a feeling, and everybody feels it differently. And there are different kinds of love. There’s love between parents and children, and love between brothers and sisters. Those are easy, you know them and do them without even thinking. But then there’s when two people fall in love, that’s something different. You automatically love your parents and siblings, but *loving* someone is something else. You have to choose to fall in love with someone. And sometimes it’s hard to tell when you’ve found the right person. But you’ll know when it happens. The one you fall in love with is the person you feel safe with, someone you feel connected to. The person knows what you’re thinking, and how you’re feeling. This person will never judge you or make you feel bad, and being with this person makes you happier than anyone else in the world. There’s an unspoken bond, you don’t even need to talk. People who love each other understand each other, they understand each other’s feelings and emotions. And when you love a person, you’re connected to them. It’s like you’re not even two people, it’s like you’re both two parts of the same person. The person you love is your soul-mate, and no one else can be that. You have only one soul-mate, and finding that person can be hard.” Malon looked at Solo to indicate that she was finished. During her whole soliloquy, Malon had been in some kind of blissful state, actually feeling the things she’d said. Malon almost upset herself explaining these things. She knew what love was, and she had found it. But this thing that was so simple and wonderful was more difficult than she could ever imagine. Love seemed so close, yet so far away.

“That was so...insightful,” said Solo, totally mesmerized by Malon’s explanation. It was as if Malon had read all of Solo’s thoughts and repeated them back to her. “I’ve always felt the same way about it. There are some things I want to tell you. Will you listen and wait till I’m finished before you say anything?”

Malon’s heart skipped a beat, and she began to feel anxious. “Sure,” she replied. “You can tell me anything.”

“After Akuyo hit me, I came over here because I knew you were the best person I could go to. But I did it unconsciously, I didn’t even decide to come over here; I just did. I remember the first time I started going out with friends. Link thought it would be a good idea for me to go out and meet some people. And I thought it was nice to have some buddies, but they were never real friends. And then Link kept bothering me about Akuyo, he kept saying that I needed a boyfriend. He said that all the girls my age had boyfriends. I started to think that I was weird for not having a boyfriend, so I decided to make Akuyo my boyfriend. But it never felt right to me, it was all so fake and forced. I never wanted to be his girlfriend or anything more than a friend. But I felt like I had to because people would think I’m not normal, I had to because of the way I feel. The only reason I went out with Akuyo was so I could try to deny and bury my feelings, to try and convince myself that I didn’t feel the way I did. And it worked for a while, I forgot my feelings. But yesterday, when he hit me, all the feelings came back. I realized that I was wrong for trying to delude myself, I can’t deny my own emotions. It’s kind of strange, my feelings are now giving me a whole new set of problems. Now I don’t need any of those other superficial friends, because I have you as a friend. You mean more to me as a friend than anyone else ever has. I know I can trust you with anything. We have a trust between us that no one else has. But now I think it’s more than that. I’ve never felt like this for anyone else before, no boy or girl. I’m not sure how I should say this...” Solo began to choke on her words. She tried to talk slowly and articulately, without letting her emotions turn her into a trembling wreck. But her self-control was eroding, she just wanted to run to Malon’s side and hug her without ever letting her go. But she couldn’t do that, she had to talk, to say this. “This is the hardest and the easiest thing I’ve ever done. But I know I have to say this. I don’t want to ruin our friendship, but I’m worried that I’ll go insane if I don’t get this off my chest. Please don’t hate me for this, I can’t help what I feel. I can’t fight my emotions anymore.” Solo closed her eyes, afraid to see the reaction she was about to get. “Malon...I...I love you.”

Time came to a stand-still as those words were spoken. Solo opened her eyes to see a look of total shock on Malon’s face. Malon tried to mouth a response, but no words came out. There was nothing she

could say to Solo's confession. Malon never in a million years expected those words to come from Solo's mouth, the words she had longed to hear for so long. But now Malon sat totally speechless, utterly unable to say anything. She felt like her heart had stopped, like everything in the universe had suddenly halted so they could experience this one moment for eternity. Solo saw the look of shock on Malon's face, and tears began to run down her cheeks. "I knew it!" scolded Solo to herself. "I knew I shouldn't have said that! Why would you ever feel the same way? You're a girl, and I'm not supposed to feel like this about you. You're right to be disgusted with me, I don't know why I even said anything." Solo cried, hating herself for what she said. "I've ruined everything! I'm sorry I said that." Solo stood up and gave the still shocked Malon a look of sadness and remorse. "I'm sorry I disgusted you. I understand that you don't feel the same way. I had to say it, please forgive me. I'll understand if you don't want to be my friend anymore. I...I have to go." Solo quickly turned around and began to run. She had no idea where she was going, barely able to see with her tear-filled eyes. Solo simply ran, feeling totally ashamed of what she'd just said. She couldn't believe that she had told Malon she loved her. Solo could see the repulsion in Malon's face; girls didn't like other girls. It was wrong. And Solo had ruined her best and only friendship for it. She didn't care if she ever lived to see another person ever again, she wanted to run forever.

As Solo began to sprint away, Malon suddenly snapped back into reality. Those three words that she had dreamed of hearing were finally said, but now Solo thought Malon hated her. Malon didn't want this, she couldn't let Solo run away thinking she hated her. Malon saw Solo making a staggering run towards the entrance to the ranch. She stood up and sprinted towards Solo as fast as she could. Malon could run short distances incredibly fast, and she had to catch up with Solo. She couldn't let Solo destroy herself like this. Malon grabbed onto the back of Solo's shirt as they both were about to round the corner of the barn. Malon brought Solo and herself to a grinding halt, gently pinning Solo against the side of the barn. Malon put a hand on each of Solo's shoulders, pushing her against the barn forcefully enough to keep her from running off again. Solo sobbed quietly and turned her head, trying to avoid eye contact at all costs. Malon still couldn't think of anything to say, instead she let her body take over. Malon let go of Solo's shoulders and touched her chin, gently turning Solo's face to hers. Malon softly brushed back the hair from Solo's tear-streaked face and stared into her deep blue eyes. Tears still welled in Solo's eyes, her expression one of confusion and uncertainty. Malon pushed hair back and brought her hands forward to gently caress Solo's cheek. The feel of Malon's gentle fingers sent shockwaves of emotion through Solo's body. Malon held Solo's face in her hands and brought it to her own. Then in a moment that seemed to last forever, their lips touched ever so slightly. The gentle feeling of Malon's soft kiss seemed to remove all of the bad things Solo had just been feeling. For a split-second, Solo wondered if this was really happening; she was being kissed by the one person she had professed her love to. She had felt so ashamed for loving Malon, but now it felt so right. It didn't feel wrong anymore, and she didn't care what anyone else thought about it. Then, as quickly as it had begun, their lips broke and Malon again found herself looking into deep cerulean pools that were Solo's eyes. "I love you too," said Malon, finally able to speak. She had waited so long to say those words, to finally let her feelings out. For the first time in her life, Malon felt truly alive.

"You...you do?" asked Solo, feeling like this was some kind of beautiful fantasy.

"Yes, I always have," replied Malon, feeling her own eyes starting to tear up. "I never said anything because I thought you would hate me. I felt so ashamed of loving another girl; I never thought you would feel the same way. But now I don't care what anyone thinks, now that I know how you feel. You were the person I was talking about yesterday. You are the one I have always loved, you are my knight in shining armor. No one else, no boy or girl, could ever compare to you."

"You mean you're not disgusted with me? You don't think I'm gross for liking another...girl?"

"No, of course not," replied Malon, tears flowing freely down her cheeks. "Nothing you could ever do would disgust me, you're so wonderful and beautiful. Everything you do enchants me. I have never felt anything for another girl, but I think I can make an exception for you." Malon gave a warm smile, no longer feeling ashamed of herself. She opened her arms and embraced Solo tightly, resting her head on her shoulder. "I've wanted to tell you this for so long, but I never got the courage. I've been in love with you from the day we met, and I always wished that you would feel the same way. This is the only thing

I've ever wanted, and I finally got it."

"Thank you for understanding me. I thought I was the only person in the world who felt this way, thanks for not leaving me alone." Both released their hug and stood silently for a moment. There didn't seem to be any words they could say to augment this moment. For the first time, both of them felt utterly content. "What do we do now?" asked Solo. "I've already said everything I always wanted to. It doesn't seem like there's anything left to say. I really don't have any experience being in love. I really don't know what to do...I see Link and Zelda always being so sweet and mushy with each other, and it almost makes me sick."

"We'll just take it one step at a time," replied Malon. "Things will work themselves out. Love is supposed to be simple, not complicated. Will just discover it as we go along."

"There is one problem, though," pointed out Solo. She leaned over and talked quietly into Malon's ear. "What are we going to tell everyone? It'll be kind of hard to hide our feelings, and I don't want people to think we're...weird. Gods know I've been shunned enough in my life, I don't need to be hassled about this too. I most worried about what Link will think. What if he won't want to be my brother anymore? What if he tells me I'm sick and disgusting and he kicks me out? I don't think I can handle that."

"Quit worrying yourself," reassured Malon. "Link is your brother, he would never do anything like that. If anything, he should be supportive of you. He knows what it's like to be in love; he'll be happy for you. Trust me."

"Okay, I believe you. I just don't know what will shock him more: this, or the mark on my face. Knowing him, he'll probably go nuts about both."

"Well, if he give you any guff, I'll take care of him. I can take him." Malon gave a sly grin and pounded a fist into her palm.

"Now *that* would be interesting."

"No, what would be interesting is if he thought you might start hitting on Zelda," said Malon with a wide smile. Solo gave a very annoyed look and pushed Malon with her palm.

"That's gross. I only like you," said Solo, turning her nose up. "I would never go with any other girl or boy, it's only you. I didn't fall in love with you because you were a girl, it was because of how you are. I fell in love with your charm, with your personality, and with your soul. It's Malon I love, not Malon-the-girl. I would've felt the same way if you were a boy."

"Me too," said Malon. She gently grasped Solo's hand and smiled. "I'm so happy I found you. Why don't we go back inside? I can finish cleaning up and then we can go back to your house."

"That sounds like a good idea," said Solo. They both leisurely walked through the ranch, admiring the beautiful day. The sun shone brightly in the blue, cloudless sky. Everything suddenly seemed brighter and happier. This seemed like the happiest day of their lives, for once their thoughts weren't plagued with problems and doubt. Everything was clear-cut and perfect today.

They passed by the barn, almost at the house, when they came across Ingo who was standing in the middle of the path. "Oh, hi Ingo," greeted Malon cheerily. She was in such a good mood that not even Ingo's sour demeanor could spoil her mood. Ingo gave a cold stare, which caused both girls to stop. "Is something wrong?" asked Malon.

Ingo once again glared at Solo, causing her to shudder. "Yes, something is wrong," replied Ingo coldly. "I saw what you two did." He turned to give a disgusted glare at Solo. "I knew this little tramp was nothing but trouble. I could see it from the first moment I saw her. Now I know why."

"Don't you call her that!" screamed Malon. "How dare you call Solo a tramp!" Solo merely stared, at a loss for words.

"You have no room to speak!" shouted Ingo. "You're not exactly guiltless either. Look at what you let your little hussy of a friend do to you. You had better hope your father doesn't find out about this. You disgust me, Malon. I always knew there was something wrong with you, this must be it. If I was your father, I would slap you silly. Filthy harlot!" Ingo spat onto the ground at their feet.

Malon's eyes welled with tears; she had never felt so hurt by anyone in her life. "I've treated you with nothing but respect," said Malon, her voice filled with rage. "No matter how mean you've been, I've always had the common courtesy to treat you like a normal person. And you have the audacity to talk to

me like this? Who gives you the right to tell me how to live my life? I will do whatever the hell I want!”

Ingo’s eyes narrowed and he quickly slapped Malon across the cheek. Malon tumbled backwards and put her hand to her face, completely stunned. “How dare you speak to an adult like that!” shouted Ingo. “Have you no respect for your elders? I’m doing you a favor! Your father would kill you if he knew what you were up to. It is children like you—both of you—who are responsible for the troubles of society. If it was up to me, I would have you locked up until you changed your mind. Look at you, you’re repulsive!”

Malon’s eyes gave a look of anger and betrayal. She had never known Ingo to be such a bad man, this was the first time she had ever seen his true nature. Not thinking of anything else to do, Malon turned and ran towards the house, crying. She wailed loudly as she ran into the house and closed the door. Solo, still standing outside, turned and stared at Ingo. Her eyes burned with fury and pure hatred. Solo clenched her fist and gritted her teeth, trying to keep herself from doing something rash. “You bastard!” screamed Solo. “How dare you hit her like that! I should kill you right now!” Never in her life had Solo been filled with such rage and hate. She had been abused many times in her life, but had never felt hatred like this before. Ingo had struck the person she loved, and that made Solo’s blood boil. Seeing the pain on Malon’s face was totally unbearable, she could not let Ingo get away with this. “If I didn’t care for Malon so much, I would kill you where you stand!” Solo clenched her fist and drove it into Ingo’s gut, causing him to double over in pain. Solo never realized that hurting another person could feel so good. She wanted to make Ingo feel how much he hurt Malon. As Ingo stumbled backwards, Solo delivered a powerful kick to his left shin, causing him to fall over. Solo jumped on top of Ingo’s body and began to pummel him with punches, unable to control the raging hatred inside her. “I’ll kill you!” screamed Solo, tears streaming down her cheeks. “Nobody hurts Malon! You’ll pay for this dearly!” Solo swung her arms wildly, only half the punches actually landing. Ingo was in such shock, all he could do was try to shield his face. Then, as she felt herself being lifted off of Ingo’s chest, her tight fist landed squarely on Ingo’s nose, causing a torrent of blood to come flowing from it. The sight of Ingo’s blood gave Solo an eerie sense of satisfaction. She swung her arms and legs wildly as she realized someone was pulling her off of Ingo. “Let go of me! I’ll kill him! Let go of me!” shouted Solo.

“Calm down,” said Talon in a soothing voice, as he held Solo tightly. Upon hearing Malon’s father’s voice, Solo stopped kicking. She suddenly snapped out of her hate-filled trance and looked at what she’d just done. When Solo had calmed down, Talon let go of her and led her into the house, Solo’s face covered with an expression of pure shock. When Solo entered the house, she saw Malon in the corner and immediately ran to her side. Malon was trembling and crying in the corner, with her legs drawn up to her chest and her head buried on her knees. Solo could see the large red handprint on her cheek.

“Malon, I’m sorry,” said Solo, brushing back Malon’s hair from her face.

“What happened?” asked Talon in a voice of half-worry and half-anger.

“He…” mumbled Solo, but could not finish her sentence. Malon released herself from the ball she’d been in to wrap her arms around Solo and hug her. Malon buried her face in Solo’s shoulder and let out wailing, muffled sobs. “It’s okay,” soothed Solo.

It was then when Talon saw the large handprint on Malon’s face. He was suddenly filled with a sense of unbridled rage. How come somebody dare hurt his precious daughter? Now he knew why Malon had come in crying, and why Solo had been punching Ingo. “He…hit my daughter,” said Talon, the fury ever-present in his voice. Solo nodded in response. His first instinct was to finish what Solo had started, but his rational side told him he would regret it. Talon took a deep breath and walked towards the door. He tried to control his rage, and hoped he wouldn’t blow up. He was a calm and forgiving man by nature, but somebody hurting his daughter seemed to break that nature. Talon walked outside and approached Ingo, who was still in shock and trying to recover from the beating he’d sustained.

Ingo smiled wickedly as he saw the enraged Talon approach. Ingo had always been an expert at manipulating Talon in any situation, so twisting this story would be no problem. “It seems that that pesky little girl attacked me,” said Ingo. Talon gave no appreciable response and continued to approach Ingo, the anger visible in his eyes. “Is something wrong, sir?”

Talon extended his arm and thrust Ingo backwards, his back slamming hard into the barn. For the first time, Ingo’s eyes showed fear. Talon calmly grasped the front of Ingo’s shirt and lifted him completely

off the ground. Ingo coughed and hacked as he realized that his breathing was being partly cut off. “How dare you strike my daughter!” shouted Talon in a voice that would make even the most stone-hearted warrior tremble.

“But sir...” choked Ingo, “I...”

“Silence!” Talon struck Ingo across the face with his free hand. “There is no excuse for what you’ve done! I hired you to work on this ranch, not to raise my daughter. I don’t give a damn what she did, you have no right *at all* to touch her!”

“Let...me...explain...”

“You will explain nothing,” said Talon, his voice turning from a loud shout, to eerily calm and deliberate. “What you have done is inexcusable. You’re lucky I’m such a nice man and I don’t kill you here and now!” Talon lowered Ingo to the ground and placed his hand around Ingo’s throat, ready to squeeze at any moment. “You have exactly ten seconds to get your pathetic excuse for a human being off my ranch. If I ever see you again, if you ever come near my daughter, if you ever say my daughter’s name, if you ever even *think* about her again...so help me gods I will give you a punishment worse than death. By the time I’m done, you’ll beg me to kill you.” Talon released Ingo from his grasp and took a step back. Ingo merely stood there, in complete shock. He had no idea what to do. Talon merely gave a casual look and tapped his foot. “Ten...nine...eight...” Ingo’s face turned white as a ghost and he turned around and ran. Talon smiled to himself as he saw Ingo scurry out of the ranch like the coward he was.

After making sure Ingo was gone, Talon returned to the house to see Malon still sobbing on Solo’s shoulder. “What happened to Ingo?” asked Solo.

“He’s never coming back,” replied Talon. He ran up to the two girls and kneeled in front of them. Malon released her hold on Solo and hugged her father tightly. “Daddy...” cried Malon.

Talon gently rubbed Malon’s back and tried to calm her. “It’s okay, baby. Ingo will never hurt you again. I’m sorry I wasn’t there to help you.” Malon gave no response, she simply held her father tightly. “What would drive that man to do something like that?”

“It was...my fault,” sobbed Malon. “I can’t help it...It’s how I am.”

“Don’t apologize,” said Solo, wallowing in self-pity. “If I hadn’t have said anything, none of this would have happened.”

“Why did he do this?” asked Talon.

“It’s because of me,” said Malon, finally regaining the ability to speak coherently. “It’s because I disgusted him. I can’t tell you...I would disgust you.”

Talon turned Malon’s face and looked into her eyes. “Honey, nothing you could do would ever disgust me. Tell me what happened.”

Solo turned her head, not wanting to see what Talon’s reaction would be to Malon’s revelation. Solo slowly walked to the other side of the room and sat down with her back facing Malon and Talon, she didn’t want to know what Talon’s reaction would be. Malon looked at her father and realized that he was telling the truth; he would never judge her like that. “I...Ingo saw us...” mumbled Malon. “Please promise me you won’t hate me, Daddy. Please...?” Talon nodded. “I told Solo that I loved her...and I kissed her. Ingo must’ve seen it.” Solo buried her face in her arms and didn’t look up. She felt so exposed and vulnerable.

“That’s it?” asked Talon. “That’s why he did that? I always knew that man was a poor excuse for a person, I should have never hired him.”

“You mean...you’re not mad at me?” asked Malon.

“Why would I be mad at you, sweetie?”

“Because...me and Solo...I said that I...”

Talon took Malon’s hand and spoke in a soothing voice. “Honey, I would never hate you for something like that. Ingo was wrong for what he did. You have to know that I love you more than anything in the world, and I would never stop loving you for any reason. One of the things you need to learn in your life is to trust your feelings. You should always go with your heart, no matter what anyone else thinks. It took me years to realize that. I’m glad that you have found that out at such a young age. Love is such a beautiful thing, don’t let anybody make it less than that. It doesn’t matter who it is that you

love, as long as that love is true.”

“So I don’t...disgust you?” asked Malon, still unsure that she heard her father correctly. She never imagined that he could be so understanding, especially after the reaction Ingo gave.

“Of course not. I love you more than anything. It’s my job to guide you in life, but it’s not my job to tell you what to do. You’re almost an adult, and you have to make your own decisions. If this is the decision you’ve made, then I’m happy for you. I would be disappointed if you ignored your feelings just so you could do what other people wanted. You’ve always been so independent, and you never let people tell you what you could or couldn’t do. I’m proud that you’ve made the decision that you know is right.” Talon looked over to Solo, who still had her head down. “Solo, come here. I don’t want you to feel bad.” Solo reluctantly lifted her head and walked over to Talon and Malon. Solo came and sat down next to them, Talon putting an arm around each girl. “You two have made a choice that you feel is right, and I respect that. Don’t ever let anyone tell you you’re wrong. It doesn’t matter what others think.” Talon looked at Solo. “Even though it may be awkward, Malon couldn’t have picked a better person. Thank you for defending her, it makes me happy to know that someone out there is looking out for my little girl.” Talon smiled at Solo and they all gave each other one group hug. Solo felt so thankful that Malon had such a loving and understanding father, other people would’ve probably punished them.

“Thank you, Daddy,” said Malon, kissing her father on the cheek. “Thank you for not rejecting me. I was so worried that you would...stop loving me and not want me to be your daughter. I was worried that you would disown me or tell people that I wasn’t your daughter. Most of all, I was worried you would never be proud of me...because of how I am; or that Mom would have hated me if she were still alive.”

“I’ve been proud of everything you’ve ever done,” said Talon. “And I know your mother would be, too. You followed your heart, and that’s all I care about.” He looked at Solo once more. “You take care of my little girl. She needs you. You’re more than a friend to her, and you can be there for her at times when I can’t. Welcome to the family.”

There was a large blanket spread out in a clearing in the woods. The midday sun shone through the small opening in the canopy of trees, and Link and Zelda basked in the warm light. Saria sat on the other end of the blanket in the shade, watching Link and Zelda with fascination and curiosity. The sight in front of her was so sickeningly sweet that she wanted to leave. Link sat with his legs folded, and Zelda was looking up at Link with her head in his lap and her body lying in front of him. Link was holding a small tree of grapes that he took from a picnic basket, and he was feeding them to Zelda one by one. “Does my little shmoopie want another grape?” asked Link in an almost nauseating baby-voice.

“That would be lovely, Linkie-pooh,” replied Zelda in an equally-nauseating baby-voice. Link dropped one of the purple grapes into Zelda’s mouth and she smiled up at him.

“Can you two do this somewhere else?” asked Saria, sticking out her tongue in mock-disgust.

Link and Zelda both glared at Saria as if she had interrupted a very important moment. “It was your idea to have this picnic,” retorted Zelda. “You just have to live with it.” Zelda stuck out her tongue and Saria rolled her eyes.

Link took a piece of an apple from the basket and dangled it above Zelda. “Does shmoopie want a piece of apple?” asked Link in that voice again. Zelda nodded and he baby-fed it to her. “I love you, shmoopie.”

“You’re shmoopie,” teased Zelda, giggling.

“No, you’re shmoopie,” said Link.

“No, you’re shmoopie, shmoopie, shmoopie...” repeated both of them in unison, giggling madly.

“You’re both nuts,” commented Saria. “You do know that, right?” Link and Zelda nodded their heads briskly, grinning widely. “Where on earth did you come up with ‘shmoopie’?” asked Saria, amazed that Link could even think of such a sappy pet-name.

“I heard it somewhere,” replied Link, shrugging his shoulders.

“And you’re my little Linkie-pooh, aren’t you?” said Zelda, poking Link’s chest with her finger. Now

they were deliberately trying to annoy Saria. Luckily, she took it all with good humor.

“Maybe I’ll think twice before I fall in love. Especially if *this* is what it turns people into: a bunch of cheesy saps,” commented Saria.

“Well, we like being saps,” protested Zelda, finally sitting up. “Don’t we, Linkie-poo?”

“Of course we do,” replied Link, tickling Zelda’s chin.

Their conversation was interrupted by some rustling coming from the trees behind them. All three looked to see Malon and Solo walking towards them hand-in-hand. Saria breathed a sigh of relief.

“Finally, some normal people,” she muttered to herself.

“Hi guys!” greeted Zelda cheerily as Malon and Solo sat down on the blanket.

“Praise the gods! Thank you for saving me from these two,” said Saria, pointing to Link and Zelda.

“They were starting to make me sick with all their fluffy, sappy baby-talk.”

Link’s smile lessened somewhat when he saw that Solo had a bandage on the side of her face. “What happened to you?” asked Link with great concern. “Did you get hurt?”

“That’s what we needed to talk about,” said Solo. “Basically, we have some good news and bad news.”

“Gee, way to go putting a damper on things,” said Link in a sarcastic tone.

“Do you want to hear the good news first or the bad news first?” asked Solo.

Link thought for a moment. “I’ll go with the good news.”

Solo took a deep breath and tried to think of how she was going to say this. Would her brother be as understanding as Malon’s father? Malon squeezed Solo’s hand to give her reassurance. “There’s some things I need to tell you about myself, and about Malon. Do you remember Akuyo and the things I told you about him?” Link nodded, he remembered all the times Solo had spoken about him. “Well, you need to know that I never saw him as more than a friend. I know you probably thought I had a crush on him, or I loved him, but that wasn’t true. I just lied to myself, I never really loved him or had feelings for him.”

“That doesn’t sound like good news,” said Link.

“Let me finish. The reason I went out with Akuyo in the first place was because I didn’t want to face reality. I thought maybe if I spent enough time with him, my feelings would change. But my feelings only got stronger. There is somebody I’m in love with, but it’s not Akuyo.”

“Well, who is it?” asked Zelda excitedly, eager to know the juicy details.

“Yeah, tell us,” insisted Saria. Link merely looked and patiently awaited Solo’s answer. He knew what she was going through, used to being prodded for information by Zelda and Saria.

“I...we...” stuttered Solo. She took a deep breath and tried to relax, the fear of rejection once again coming over her. “Malon and I are in love. With each other.” Solo awaited everyone’s response. Saria and Zelda’s jaws dropped in utter disbelief, while Link merely sat there scratching his head. He shrugged his shoulders, while Zelda and Saria continued to stare. Malon and Solo both felt their faces flush, and knew they must’ve looked like complete idiots.

“Well, I guess there’s nothing wrong with that,” said Link casually. Everyone turned to look at him with looks of shock, including Solo and Malon. Link hated being stared at, now he could feel his own face flushing. “Well, there *isn’t*,” he insisted. “It’s not *that* unusual. I mean, look at the Gerudos. They’re a closed society composed totally of women. And how many of them do you think have *wives*?” That point made each of them ponder for a few moments. “I doubt that many of them go out with guys. I bet you Gerudos with husbands are considered weird.”

Zelda and Saria sat silently, not sure how to address this situation. “So you’re...in love...with *Malon*?” asked Zelda in near-disbelief. Solo nodded. “That’s a little strange. But...I suppose if that’s how you feel...” Zelda wasn’t sure if she felt happy, or just unsure. She had never met two people like this before, and didn’t quite know what to make of them.

“I think it’s cute,” commented Saria, garnering astonished looks from the group. “Well, what did you want me to say? Love is a precious thing, and I’m happy they found it. If you love someone, you must pursue it before it’s too late. I found that out the hard way. I feel happy for you both.” Solo and Malon smiled at Saria’s understanding.

“I guess I have no problem with it,” said Zelda finally. She realized what it felt like to be in love with

Link. It was such a wonderful feeling. She didn't want Malon and Solo to be deprived of that, even if they were of the same gender.

"I'm perfectly okay with this as long as you promise me one thing," said Link. "Please don't hit on Zelda." Link gave a large sarcastic grin and Solo playfully punched him in the shoulder, using a little more force than she had meant to. Link winced, but his grin didn't fade.

"You have a sick sense of humor," commented Zelda, shaking her head.

"Well, now that this is out of the way, what was the bad news?" asked Link.

Solo sighed, wishing the happy moment didn't have to be spoiled. "I'll tell you, but you're not going to like it. Link, promise me you won't overreact, just sit down and let me tell you before you go and do anything stupid. Okay?" Link nodded. Solo gently removed the bandage from her face, and Link gasped in horror at the large purple bruise on her face.

"What happened to you?" exclaimed Link.

Solo wiped away a tear and tried to calm herself. "He did it," said Solo. "Akuyo did it."

His face filled with rage, Link shot up, but Malon grabbed hold of him before he could move. "That son of a bitch!" shouted Link. "I'll kill him! Let go of me! That punk is going to pay! I knew I shouldn't have let you see him."

Link kicked and struggled like a caged animal, however Malon was much stronger than Link anticipated and she easily restrained him. Malon forcefully pushed Link down to the ground and stared into his eyes. "Calm down," said Malon in a soothing, but forceful voice. "You promised Solo you would listen. We already have a plan. Just listen." Link agreed, albeit disdainfully. He looked at Solo and awaited her explanation. However, the only thing he could think of was beating the life out of the boy that did this to his sister. He didn't care what Solo said, this boy would pay dearly. Link could feel the anger surging within him, but he tried desperately not to let it show. The only expression on his face was a hateful grimace.

"Link, I know you're furious," said Solo matter-of-factly. "Believe me, I know exactly how you feel. Ingo slapped Malon and I almost killed him." Solo looked at the spot where Malon had been struck, the red mark had nearly disappeared. "And I regretted losing control like that; I don't want you to lose control, it'll only make things worse. I don't want revenge on Akuyo, he just had problems and I can forgive him. Vengeance never accomplishes anything."

"Of course it does!" retorted Link. "If I don't get revenge, he'll never pay for what he did. You need justice for what he did."

"Justice is what I plan on getting," said Solo. "I've already made a plan. You see, his parents are strict pacifists, they hate violence in all its forms. And they would not approve of what Akuyo did. I know the parents might not like it if we confronted them, but it's the only logical way to solve things. They're probably the only ones who can set him straight."

Link nodded, the plan did seem fairly sound. "I guess that's an okay idea," moped Link. "Can't I punch him just once?" begged Link. "I can't stand it that he hurt you. It makes me so...angry and hurt. I feel like I've let you down." Link's lip began to quiver, and he rushed to Solo's side and hugged her; something no one expected him to do. "I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I should have been there to protect you and I wasn't. Please forgive me for not being there." Solo hugged Link back, never realizing that he might blame this on himself.

"Link, it wasn't your fault at all," insisted Solo. "It was Akuyo's fault for being mean, and we'll take care of that. Don't blame yourself for this, there was nothing you could've done." Link gave his agreement and sat back down. "In a way, that might've actually been good. If Akuyo hadn't have hit me, I might never have come to realize how I really felt. I would have just continued lying to myself. Besides, I've been through worse in my life, this is just a little scratch. We can go over there later and then we'll make everything okay. Is that all right with you?"

Link thought for a moment and finally agreed, "Okay. Whatever you want is fine with me." Link knew how emotionally fragile Solo must have been, so he did not want to do anything that would upset her further. Link still desperately wanted to beat up Akuyo, but he kept his self-control. "We'll do this whenever you want to. When do you want to go?"

“It depends...” replied Solo, eyeing the open picnic basket. “What’s in the basket? I’m kinda hungry.” Link rolled his eyes and handed the basket to Solo, who quickly began digging through it, looking for something good to eat. She extracted two apples, giving one to Malon and devouring one herself.

“Is food all you care about?” asked Link, trying to lighten the mood. Solo nodded, her mouth too full to give an adequate response.

“She’s worse than Link,” remarked Saria.

“I wouldn’t go *that* far,” said Malon.

“It’s about time you said something,” said Zelda. “I was beginning to wonder if you forgot how to talk.” Zelda smirked and Malon blushed.

“Oh...we’ll, I guess I just didn’t have much to say. I just feel a little uncomfortable, that’s all.”

“Don’t feel uncomfortable,” said Zelda. “We’re all friends here.”

“I know,” said Malon, still feeling embarrassed. “Are you sure you’re not...disgusted with us? Because I’m just worried that you guys think I’m bad and you’re just humoring me.”

“Why would we do something like that?” asked Zelda.

“Yes, we like you two,” said Saria. “We would never shun you because of something like that.”

“Yeah, it’s a little unusual, but I guess we can live with it,” added Zelda.

“I was most worried about Link,” continued Malon. She looked at Link with her big, blue eyes, and it melted his heart. She had a look of such worry, but also of love. “What if he didn’t want me to be with Solo because...of who I am? I love her more than anything and I would die if we were driven apart.”

“Don’t ever think anything like that,” soothed Link. “I would never judge anyone like that. You obviously make Solo very happy, and that’s all I want. I know you were her best friend in the whole world, Solo talked about you nonstop.” Solo blushed when he said that. “I just didn’t know that you two felt more than that. And if that’s what you want, then I won’t get in the way. If you two love each other, than maybe that’s the way it’s supposed to be. I’m happy to have you as part of my family.”

“Thanks for your support,” said Malon, brightening up significantly. She was so afraid of ridicule, but the support from her friends made her feel untouchable. She didn’t feel so strange anymore. No longer afraid of being scorned, Malon leaned over and hugged Solo tightly.

“Aww, that’s so cute,” commented Link, getting a slap on the shoulder from Zelda. “Come on! I finally have a chance to tease Solo about a boy...I mean, girlfriend, and I don’t want to miss out on that. Do you know what I’ve been through with these two?” asked Link, pointing accusingly at Saria and Solo. “They always make fun of me when you call me ‘Linkie-poo,’” he pouted.

“You know you like it,” said Zelda, poking Link’s cheek. He wasn’t denying that, there was something strangely calming about how Zelda called him that. But he also knew that Zelda got a kick out of seeing him be embarrassed slightly. “Are we all happy now?”

Everyone looked at Zelda and nodded their agreement. “Solo, I need to ask you something,” said Link. He didn’t want to upset her further, but there was something he needed to know. Solo nodded for him to continue. “How come you didn’t come to me after Akuyo hit you? I’m not mad at you or anything, but I would’ve thought you’d come to me if you had any problems. You know I’m always here to help you.”

Solo sighed. “I know. But the reason I didn’t go straight home was because you would’ve done the exact same thing you did earlier. I didn’t want you to go crazy and try to kill him. I know you’re calm now, but I was worried that you might do something you’d regret while you were still angry.”

Link thought about what Solo said. It was just then that he realized he almost lost control when he found out what happened to her. Link usually wasn’t the type to get angry or do rash things, but there were a few things that could drive him over the edge. Abusing his sister was one of them. “I know,” said Link. “But it’s kind of hard not to get angry when somebody’s done something to you. It hurts me so much to see what he did to you...it makes me feel like I’ve let you down. And it makes me so mad that he was such a coward and so dishonorable to hit a girl. I just think that’s...unconscionable. It infuriates me that anyone could even *think* of hurting you. You never did a thing to hurt anyone.”

“That’s how I felt,” said Malon, no one expecting her to make any comment. “I felt like it was somehow my fault, but I realized that it was only Akuyo’s fault. He was the one who did wrong. You shouldn’t beat yourself up for that. What counts is that you’re here for her now.”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself,” said Solo. She dug around in the basket again, extracting a small roll. She began to eat it and tried to talk at the same time. “You shouldn’t be so hard on yourself,” said Solo in a muffled voice. “It really doesn’t bother me. In fact, I’m almost glad it happened because Malon and I would’ve never found out about each other’s feelings. So it was kind of a blessing in disguise.”

“I never thought of it that way,” said Link, deep in thought. “I guess sometimes, bad things can end up being good. It’s kind of like what happened between me and Zelda...”

“Ooh, what happened between you?” asked Solo nosily. Zelda hung her head sadly, but Link indicated that she shouldn’t be upset.

“We got in a little...argument,” replied Link. “There were some kids in the market, and they called her things—bad things. After some arguing, one of them took a swing at me and I defended myself.”

“Did you beat the crap out of them?” asked Solo, swinging her fists and punching air.

Link’s face flushed slightly and a half-smirk appeared on his face. “Well, yes. But it’s not something I’m proud of. I only did it because I thought they might try to do something to Zelda, especially after the things they said about her. But then Zelda yelled at me, and said...” Link paused for a moment. Although he knew Zelda hadn’t meant him, recalling her words was still painful. “She said she hated me. I was so depressed, and I thought I had lost her forever. Then, after a while, I thought it was my fault. It turns out that she felt the same way; she thought it was *her* fault. But it was really just a misunderstanding. Impa told me she was just having a...mood swing. I always thought women were complicated, but I never thought it was *that* bad.”

“Mood swings? What kind of mood swings?” asked Solo.

“She’s says it’s part of growing up,” elaborated Link in a disbelieving tone, “but I think it’s just an excuse. Nothing could ever be so bad as to make someone act like that. Maybe Zelda’s just crazy.” That comment resulted in a jab in the ribs from Zelda’s elbow.

“Zelda, what exactly did you tell him?” asked Solo.

Zelda looked at Link and both their faces turned crimson. Zelda didn’t want to tell him, and Link didn’t want to know. “Nothing much...” replied Zelda. “Just that he should expect the occasional mood swing. At least that’s what Impa told me would happen, and she wouldn’t lie to me.”

“What exactly did Impa tell you?” Solo asked. Zelda leaned closer to Malon and Solo, who waited for Zelda’s response. Zelda flashed a glare at Link and he pretended that he wasn’t listening. Zelda whispered the gist of Impa’s talk, causing Solo and Malon to both giggle madly.

“I could’ve told you *that*,” said Solo.

“A lot of good that does me now,” responded Zelda in an unamused voice. “Do you know how terrified I was? I thought I was dying! You could’ve given me a little hint, you know. That’s what friends are for.”

Solo shrugged her shoulders. “Sorry, I thought everybody knew. It’s not really a secret. I figured it out for myself.” Solo showed an almost wicked grin, “But I guess a sheltered child such as yourself would know nothing about real-world matters.”

“I am not sheltered!” protested Zelda.

Link and Saria both watched the exchange in fascination, neither of them quite understanding what the three were talking about. Saria really didn’t care, but Link couldn’t take the agony of not knowing. “What are you girls talking about?” asked Link in frustration.

Zelda, Solo, and Malon merely looked at Link and smiled. “Nothing,” replied Zelda teasingly. She leaned over to him and pinched his cheek, treating him like a little child. “It’s not anything my little Linkie-pooh needs to know about. It’s a girl thing, and you don’t want to know. Besides,” said Zelda in a baby-voice, “I like when my little Linkie-pooh is all cute and innocent. You have just the most precious look on your face when you’re confused.” The three older girls giggled madly, only embarrassing Link further. He always hated it when he was outnumbered by females, and four-to-one was almost too much to handle. Sometimes he regretted the fact that all his friends were girls, what he wouldn’t give for a normal friend that was a guy. No matter how hard he tried, he could never understand the opposite sex; they were so strange. Why couldn’t they be normal like him?

Saria watched the exchange and couldn't take the suspense anymore. "I'd kinda like to know what you're talking about. I'm a girl, I can understand." The three looked at each other, silently wondering if they should tell her. Finally, Zelda whispered the "secret" to Saria. Her eyes grew wide and she almost couldn't believe what she heard. "Are you *serious*?" asked Saria in disbelief. Zelda nodded, enjoying the fact that not knowing was near-torture for Link. "No way, that doesn't happen." She knew they had to be lying to her.

"I'm totally serious," insisted Zelda. "You're almost as cute an innocent as Link." Saria's face turned red, and Link flashed her a look that seemed to say, *Now you know how I feel*.

"Well, I'm glad I'm a Kokiri," said Saria in a voice of relief. "After hearing that, I don't want to grow up." She shuddered, and put down the pear she had been munching on. "I don't think I'm hungry anymore."

"What did she say?" whined Link.

"Geez, will you just drop it?" scolded Zelda. Link shook his head, he wasn't going to give up.

"I just want to understand you," said Link in a surprisingly sincere voice.

"Fine...you want to know? I'll tell you." Zelda whispered the whole story to Link and his face turned pale, looking like he was going to be sick. "See, I told you that you didn't want to know," said Zelda haughtily.

Link clenched his stomach and tried not to be sick. "I had no idea *that* happened." Now Link regretted being so nosy. Maybe next time he would believe Zelda when she said he didn't want to know. "That's horrible. How can you deal with something like that?" Zelda shrugged her shoulders. "I am so glad I'm not a girl. That would suck so much."

"That's a really nice thing to say," said Zelda sarcastically, folding her arms over her chest.

"Well, it's true. I guess I'll have more respect for women now. I guess that explains why Solo's been so pissy lately." That remark caused him to receive a death-glare from Solo.

"No, she's just like that by nature," commented Saria, surprising everyone with her sarcastic remark. No one ever thought of her as the type to be making wisecracks. Link made an attempt at laughing, but he didn't feel quite up to it. The thought of what Zelda told him was still nauseating.

"Zelda, next time I want to know one of your 'secrets', please don't tell me," said Link.

Zelda rolled her eyes, amazed at how thick-headed Link was sometimes. "That's what *tried* to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. Maybe next time you'll believe me."

"I guess so," said Link.

They all sat there silently for a few moments, none of them thinking of anything in particular. Solo tried to keep silent, but she couldn't take the suspense anymore. Being silent wasn't doing her any good. She had to speak. "Is there anything other than apples and pears in that basket?" asked Solo, instantly creating a light-hearted mood. "'Cause I'm kinda sick of fruit. That's all we ever eat. Don't you have any cookies or something?"

Saria looked around in the basket, which now contained only an apple and a few loose grapes. "No, there's nothing left," said Saria. "We ate all the cookies before you got here. And they were really good, yummm," she teased, rubbing her belly.

"That is so cruel," said Solo. "You could've saved some cookies for us."

"It's not like we knew you were coming," responded Saria. "I would've made extra if I'd have known."

"Well, why don't we go inside?" suggested Malon. "I can make cookies. If you have the right ingredients, I can bake up a whole batch in no time."

"Now that's what I'm talking about," said Solo cheerily, standing up and rushing everyone to pack up everything. "See, Malon knows what I like. Let's go home and she can make us some cookies. But I get dibs on the good ones. If Malon doesn't mind."

"Nothing's too good for my little angel," said Malon, giving Solo an adoring look.

"That's so sweet," teased Link as he stood up and collected some of the remnants of the picnic. He grinned at Solo, who gave him a look that only a brother could understand.

"Can you two go for one minute without tormenting each other?" asked Zelda. Link and Solo shook

their heads, sibling rivalry was so much fun. Saria packed up the basket, while each of them carried something in their arms. The group then proceeded to make the short distance back towards Saria's house. "Let's try to enjoy this day as much as possible," suggested Zelda. "After we finish with the cookies, then we can go and finish this business with Akuyo. I want to put all this behind us."

"Me too," said Solo, holding Malon's hand.

"Don't worry, I'll be there every step of the way," said Malon reassuringly. Solo simply smiled, happy that she had such a wonderful friend. Hand-in-hand, they followed Link and Zelda back through the forest. Saria purposely walked slower, falling slightly behind the rest of the group. She smiled at the way they interacted with each other. Link so obviously adored Zelda, and she loved him dearly. It made Saria feel so happy to see everything work out well. And she saw Malon and Solo chatting with each other. Their coupling didn't seem strange to Saria, they were so obviously made for each other. She felt so happy for all of them. And for once, Saria didn't feel jealous that she didn't have a person to love. She felt genuinely happy, happy that her friends were happy. It was then that Saria realized that it was not merely Link that she loved, it was all of them. She loved all of the people she saw before her, each one made her happy in their own special way. She knew that everything had finally worked out to the way it should be. Saria smiled warmly. For the first time in so long, love did not leave her crying.

The End