

Act 1

Lake Hylia

The lake water is still. Orange highlights and purple shadows cover the scene like a delicate, ornate linen tapestry. In the stillness of the valley, before the shore of the island, a wave emerges, the surface punctured with a gasp - as plain as leaves falling in autumn, as ordinary as a cuckoo crowing at daybreak, as common as a housecat killing a mouse.

A figure treads water briefly before staggering ashore, dripping and falling to its knees. No fairy follows. From the tree on the island, down jumps another figure, slowly approaching - Sheik.

In the blink of an eye the other stands up, sword at Sheik's throat.

Sheik looks down the sword. Its blade reflects the fading sunlight, the familiar Triforce glimmering on the deep blue hilt. Meeting the figure's look, a gray face with glowing red pupils, Sheik steps backward slowly - every step followed by the figure, the Master Sword following Sheik's throat. They stop, looking eye to eye.

Breaking the stillness, a horse howls from the distance, drawing their attention.

In the dusk's dark - orange sunlight only touching the tallest reaches of the nearby trees - the two figures still locked in pose can make out a figure on horseback approaching from the field. Sheik finds this split second to throw a Deku Nut, disappearing.

Now kneeling behind a fence, Sheik looks to the island from the hill. The dark figure looks around lazily before collapsing again.

Looking to the north gate, Sheik sees exactly who it is that arrived, as this new figure, having dismounted behind the laboratory building, walks across the bridges to the island: Ganondorf. Sheik watches him walk across the bridges toward the island, briskly, although with a slight limp.

Sheik's mind races, but before any thoughts can cohere, Ganondorf has approached the red-eyed figure on the island, which, kneeling, bows - extending the Master Sword to Ganondorf, who tears it away.

Slowly standing, the doppelganger places a hand on Ganondorf's hip, leaning closer and looking up to the King of Theives.

In a graceful motion, Ganondorf grabs him by the throat, outstretched arm dragging it to the side, for a moment the two are still and silent - then, Ganondorf plunges the Master Sword into its gut.

No blood, no struggle. The figure looks down, then back at Ganondorf. The dark figure seems to slowly fade until it is nothing but a small black whisp which blows away in the slight breeze.

As if picking up after an unruly child, Ganondorf rummages through a bag the figure had dropped near the shore. Throwing several items into the lake, keeping a few, he then picks up and slings around his shoulders the now sheathed Master Sword and walks across the bridge to his horse.

Sheik moves quickly, silently down the fence, maintaining cover but watching Ganondorf emerge from behind the laboratory building on his horse - turning to head toward Hyrule Feild.

The horse picks up slowly marching, but as he approaches the entrance to the lake, he looks across the valley - directly at Sheik.

Just a knowing stare, held for some seconds before he turns and whips his horse to begin back to his Keep in the ruins of the capitol.

Both reeling yet mind almost numb, after a short while, Sheik hears another light splash in the water, and a whispered voice.

"Sheik!"

It is Ruto.

Sheik walks over, almost in a daze, kneeling at the edge of the water to meet her.

"What just happened!"

Silence.

"Sheik!"

Sheik stares at the ground, as Ruto begins to tear up. There is silence - but for Guay in the distance and a single frog chirping.

Ruto speaks now angrily: "What have you done, you Sheikah! What have you done! Where is my... My husband!?" almost shaking, Ruto growing furious.

Sheik doesn't respond. The silence tells Ruto everything.

"You sent him! You did this, Hylian scum!" Ruto now yelling, Sheik still staring at the ground.

"He can't be dead! He can't be! If he is..." Ruto sobs.
Sheik offers no comfort, not even recognition.

Ruto screams now, her voice echoing across the lake: "Good riddance to your Royal Family! Good riddance to the King! Good riddance to the Triforce! Good riddance to all of it!"

Ruto, sobbing, running out of breath, turns away from the motionless Sheikah, sobbing. "If he is dead, my husband - I hope you soon follow! Let Ganondorf kill you!"

Ruto dives, disappearing immediately under the lake's surface, leaving Sheik in silence. The ripples on the water calm before any thoughts can cohere. Rays of sun no longer fleck the treetops as night begins its quick descent.

Sheik stares at the ground.

Guay call listlessly in the distance.

A lone frog chirps on, mindlessly.

Meeting

A rapping at the door of the guard house wakes Lukas, he bolts upright from the crate, dropping a book from his lap onto the floor and grabbing his spear to stand at attention. As the door opens, he kicks the book behind a larger crate in the corner.

An enormously tall man clad in black armored clothing and dark green skin walks in and Lukas tenses. The man walks in, followed by two royal guardsmen who close the door and stand by it as the man approaches. Standing in front of Lukas and looking around the room, Lukas watches him silently, glancing to the guards, although they simply look straight ahead.

"You must be Lukas." The man says, his deep voice echoing against the tile and brick, as he turns his eyes, the whites of which seem to faintly glow yellow, toward Lukas, who immediately nods. Lukas tries to suppress a yawn, but turns, lifting a hand to his mouth and yawning. "Excuse me." Lukas says.

The man ignores this, looking at Lukas. "I heard that you have been working here for quite a while." The man says.

"I have, yes. Eight years, a bit over."

The man takes a few steps closer. "You are very dedicated to the royal family, and reliable, Lukas. It is respectable. Not but two days missed, for illness, in those eight years, am I correct?"

"Sounds correct, sir."

The man looks back to the guards at the door. One of them steps forward and walks to stand by him, still looking ahead blankly.

"I have much to do tonight, Lukas, so I will introduce myself some other time," the man says, "I have been advising the King on matters of staffing. I am of the opinion that someone like yourself is long overdue for a promotion toward a better line of work."

Lukas just looks past the man at the door, feeling a bit faint and remaining silent.

"What do you think, then?" The man asks. "Doesn't that seem only fair?"

Lukas, after glancing up to the ceiling briefly, replies, "If the King approves of it, I have no protest."

The man steps forward, holding a hand back to the guard behind him, who produces an envelope which the man grabs.

"As I said, I have much to attend to, even though it is quite late." The man extends the envelope to Lukas, "The details of your new position. You are free to go home for the night," he says, then, gesturing to the guard behind him, who stands still as stone.

Lukas looks at the envelope for a moment, then at the man, who smiles faintly. Lukas grabs the envelope, holding it in a partly extended arm for a few moments, looking at it, before eventually returning his hand to his side.

The man turns and begins to walk out, the guard at the door opening it. "As I said, I will meet with you again soon and introduce myself better. Good night." he says, waving a hand as he walks out the door - the guard waiting a moment and leaving as well.

Lukas and the guard to replace him now stand in the guardhouse, Lukas looking down at the envelope and feeling it somewhat heavy, tracing the outline of a key.

Briefly looking to the guard, who simply stares at the wall blankly, Lukas picks up a shoulder bag from the wall behind him and walks out.

Having walked through the empty, dark streets to his apartment, Lukas sits at the small dining table and opens the envelope, laying the key on the table and reading the letter inside. Reading it, Lukas finds that he is to be the night watchman of the Royal Library.

Outlined are various mundane tasks, but, rubbing his eyes, he feels suddenly quite awake after reading a certain detail. He will have, with the key enclosed, access to the entire library, including a few rooms whose names seem oddly contrived: the Pre-Hylian Texts Repository and the Vault of the Prophecy.

Lukas sits by the lamplight, staring at the key.

After some time, he changes out of his usual uniform, donning more comfortable clothing and placing his spear in the closet. Standing in front of the closet, he looks back at the key on the table. Staring for a while, he walks over, grabbing it and putting it in a pocket, grabbing his shoulder bag, he leaves the apartment.

Sheik and Impa Plan

Impa sits at the foot of the steps leading down from her home, long rented by Anju and her husband. Impa now sleeps on their couch.

She looks off to the center of Kakariko. Jugglers practice in the clearing. Cuckoos cluck away. For a while, Impa stares up at Death Mountain blankly.

She hears footsteps approaching on the dry grass, stands up and straightens.

"We can sit." Sheik says, walking in front of Impa to sit cross-legged on the ground. Impa sits back down on the stair. She crosses her arms on her knees and hunched forward slightly, looking down at the ground - not dejected, but like the ghost of a commander examining war plans. Impa knows that something has gone wrong if Sheik has decided to meet in the open.

After a short while, Sheik speaks - slowly and methodically. "Ganondorf has sealed the Sacred Realm. He has the Master Sword and Triforce of Courage. Darunia is missing, likely sealed with Rauru and Saria." Sheik pauses. "Ruto remains - I do not know if she is awakened, but I doubt it. Regardless, she won't speak to us."

The two sit for a long while, Impa still and stiff, Sheik strangely loose, watching bugs scuttle past, the up to the treetops waving in the wind. Finally, Sheik speaks again, his voice cracks just slightly "I do... wish I could apologize to her."

With this, Impa suddenly understands what Sheik does not want to say. Link is dead.

The sun beats down on them, everything seems too bright for a moment like this. Eventually, Sheik stands and turns, looking up at Death Mountain. "There are still two unawakened... And..." Sheik looks down. "And you." Impa says. Sheik looks at her, then away. Sheik stands. The two lock eyes, Sheik's cold as steel. "Tonight, I'll deal with Bongo Bongo. Find Nabooru, don't worry about Koume and Kotake yet, just bring her here." Impa stands up, turning and looking at her home. "I will be back within a day. We'll come up with something." she says, turning back.

Sheik is gone.

Notes From Outlanders

round Woodfall South then East
wilderness impassable,
through hoards of stalchilds, lizalfos, boe and poe
there is an oasis of peace - a kingdom of plenty
protected by vast walls of faintly purple-blue stone,
the city spans some miles,
fed by aqueducts
which nourish farms,
turn massive turbines to unknown ends,
feats of engineering like by gods,
a land of wealth and good will
amongst monsters

I did see myself, this city-state. A hefty sum to guides, who know some way to ward off the monsters, will get one there. I have chosen and am set to immigrate myself. The land of my birth has soured on me, and a fine career seems assured. Managing imports and exports as the kingdom softens its isolation, at the behest of their Council, after a gracious appeal.

In the center of the city, I must admit my new home to be first made me nervous - not unfamiliarity or strife, but because the buildings stretch so tall, my own quarters being just below the top floor. I admit I have never quelled my fear of heights. Still, I will adjust, I'm sure.

If anything, as well, the size and complexity of the state is enough to allow me to mind my own business. Not like here, in this rotting society, where everyone acts like spies - not a day passing without being hailed and confronted with some accusation or judgment. Everyone here has gone mad with spite. I can't imagine why, beyond a shift in the air - perhaps those scornful souls I leave behind will turn to Lizalfos or stalchilds themselves, transformed by their own mania.

That, at least, is my joke. Maybe, like a madman, I partly believe it - regardless, it lets me rest affection for this, my homeland.

Impa Saves Nabooru

Nabooru, fallen, hangs her head, trying to gather her senses - unaware of the fight that just took place, her body still aching from the imprisonment. The armor that had trapped her slowly turns black, bluish flames burning the black into a purple smoke that quickly disappears.

Impa stares in shock. She had expected the armored beast to be guarding Nabooru, but not like this. How long, Impa wondered, had she been trapped in this armor?

The Gerudo looks up and yells - "Who...! Who are you? What are you doing here?!" Nabooru coughs and gags, shaking, unable to get up.

Standing there, looking at Nabooru on the ground, Impa suddenly realizes how much she has to explain. Nabooru is unaware she is a sage, unaware that there was a Hero sent to find her - depending on how long she was sealed...

"I said who are you!" Nabooru barks, interrupting Impa's racing thoughts and attempting to stand up yet collapsing to her knees once again, wincing.

Impa snaps back to the moment, approaching Nabooru, slowly, softly saying: "We have to get out of here, Nabooru." The walls shake - dust falls from the ceiling, as if channeling Nabooru's confused anger as she yells "Get away from me!"

Nabooru pushes the empty air as if shadow boxing. Impa recoils and chokes back a strange sensation. A tingling behind her eyes and a pit in the back of her throat - fear, but something else as well.

"I don't want to hurt you, Nabooru. It is not safe to be here, we have to go -"

"There is nowhere safer for me to be!" Nabooru yells. She calls out for reinforcements that won't come: "Guards! Someone get rid of this Sheikah!"

Impa can't think straight. The room quakes again. *Damn it*, Impa thinks. Of course Nabooru will not listen.

Impa realizes she is nearly crying, unsure of why.

"Guards!" Nabooru yells as Impa, dizzy and at a loss, begins to back away. Impa is afraid, seemingly just as much, if not more than of Nabooru's anger, of her pain and confusion. *But at least she is alive...* Impa backs away further, her back to the wall.

"Where do you think you are going!" suddenly, with a burst of energy, Nabooru stands up - running and pinning Impa to the wall, Gerudo dagger at her throat. Impa lets out shriek. As soon as the cold metal blade rests against her chin, hot tears pour from her eyes. "What did you do to me, sheikah?!" Nabooru demands.

Impa begins sobbing, attempting to hold still, but going limp. "You need to be quiet," Impa lets out, "Koume and Kotake will come, we need to go..." Impa slides down the wall, her neck scraped by Nabooru's blade ever slightly as the gerudo lets down

her guard.

"What do you know about them?" Nabooru stutters, "what's going on?"

Impa, unable to speak, makes a meaningless gesture, as if trying to communicate everything all at once. She is crying, she can't think.

Nabooru now stands transfixed, staring into empty space as if a hurricane of memories just emerged on the horizon of her mind.

Koume and Kotake, the witches that raised Ganondorf, the man who would replace her. Those witches who came out of nowhere and were quickly hailed as leaders – true and righteous wielders of Gerudo magic. What made them leaders? Nabooru had dedicated every moment of her life to the Gerudo, was respected by everyone... None of it adds up – and none of it explains this Sheikah being here.

Dizzy suddenly, hit with pangs of her imprisonment as a throbbing in her head, Nabooru steps back.

"Sheikah... were you here to kill me?" she asks.

Impa, sitting collapsed and dispondent, wordlessly shakes her head.

"No..." Nabooru trails off.

Nabooru now falls to her knees in front of Impa, her mind racing but unable to make sense of it.

For a long time, the two women sit silently across from one another, as if children tired out from play fighting. The eerie silence becomes earsplitting, the only sound in the chamber each others' strained breaths and their own racing heartbeats.

Nabooru breaks the silence first, her breathing a bit more normal, but she still is nearly immobilized with the aching in her arms. "Tell me, sheikah. Why did you come here?"

Impa, now staring blankly at past Nabooru, just replies: "You won't believe me."

"What?" Nabooru asks indignantly, exhaling a laugh. "After all this, you won't even tell me what brings you here?"

In a sarcastic imitation of a commanding tone, she says "Tell me, coward!" as she lethargically points her sword at Impa.

Impa is silent, motionless. A much less powerful quake rumbles the floor. Nabooru asks - "There are no guards coming for you, are there, sheikah?"

Impa stares a while longer. "There are not." she says flatly. "I haven't seen another Gerudo for miles."

Nabooru, resting her arm, letting go of her sword. "So, tell me, sheikah, why you are here then?" looking at Impa, who does finally look back at her.

Impa sits upright, but still stammers. "There is too much. I don't understand it all myself. We have to get out. I can explain more, but-" she trails off, "Please, Nabooru, we have to leave. We need to find a way to defeat him."

Nabooru has turned oddly calm and speaks softer now, her voice barely now echoing through the chamber. "You come from Kakariko, don't you, sheikah?"

Impa nods. "Impa. My name is Impa."

Nabooru now stands and breathes deeply. Sheathing her sword, she stretches. Her body aches, but it is dulling.

Impa says, "We have to go back to Kakariko. Regroup, plan something..."

Nabooru looks at her. "Listen. In a day's time I will come to Kakariko. I will bring whatever Gerudo are still loyal to me. Expect three dozen."

Impa, having somewhat gathered herself, stands up. Nabooru begins to head toward the door on the opposite end of the room. "We should go together." Impa says.

Nabooru turns. "I have delicate work to do. Those witches have guards and messengers communicate on their behalf, and have their loyal women do their bidding. They will not leave their chamber unless someone tries to enter or something has happened at the fortress. I'm not worried about them for now."

Nabooru approaches the door on the far side of the chamber. That wasn't all of why Impa wanted to stick together, but Impa, having composed herself a bit, figures she can get out on her own. She looks at the gerudo woman, "Nabooru, I know you have no reason to trust me," she starts.

Nabooru interrupts. "I don't trust you, sheikah - but it doesn't matter. Right now, it seems that trust is a luxury neither of us can afford. We can survive without it, though."

With this, Nabooru turns away and walks out the door.

Impa nods a few moments late. After hearing Nabooru's footsteps fade beyond the door, she stands for a long while. She breathes deeply and slowly, gathering herself, then turns and leaves from the way she came.

Gerudo Arrive

Mid day outside Kakariko Village, Impa sits a few steps up on the path to the village. She has seen the Gerudo caravan approaching from past Lon Lon. She doesn't look at it.

She wipes dirt from her clothes and listens to the water flowing ahead, trying to take her mind off of last night. Her back aches from sleeping on the bare floor of a tattered tent outside the gate. Her stomach empty, she drinks water from a flask as if it were a meal.

Eventually, Nabooru heads the caravan across the stone bridge over the river and approaches. Some Gerudo look out of the covered wagons. Nabooru and four other Gerudo on horseback stop at the gate.

Nabooru briefly looks at her comrades and dismounts, approaching Impa.

"You're hurt?" Nabooru asks in a tone that sounds like an interrogator but her face betrays worry. Impa does not look at her. "They will not let you in, nor let me back. You can set up a camp outside, though." Impa flatly states.

"What? Your own people won't listen to you?" Nabooru asks.

Impa sighs. "They are not my people. They are just people." she says, staring over to the river.

Nabooru waits for Impa to look at her, but she doesn't. Nabooru glances back at her followers. One of them asks, attempting to sound indignant but moreso sounding fearful, "So we camp out here like sitting ducks?"

All look to Impa, who doesn't respond. Nabooru replies, defending herself but also Impa "We left the fortress and crossed the field with no issues. If Ganondorf wanted us dead, we would be corpses. I know it is a strange situation, but we can manage."

She comes closer and leans to Impa, speaking more softly. "No one in the village will speak to us, even briefly?"

Impa shakes her head. "Nor to me."

"This doesn't make me look good, you know." Nabooru scolds but, seeing the look in Impa's eyes and noticing that Impa seems wounded, asks with genuine care: "Did they hurt you? Why?"

"They did not." Impa says.

Nabooru asks "Why did they kick you out?"

Impa again shakes her head. "They are fearful."

"Fearful?" Nabooru asks, a bit frustrated again. "We are on the back foot, why fear us?"

"It isn't you that they fear." Impa says.

Everyone stands silent for a while.

Nabooru asks, loud enough for her people to hear - "So, the people of Kakariko will have no issue with us setting up down the river?"

Impa simply says, "That is fine."

Nabooru asks "Is there any known danger around?"

Impa replies "There is not."

Nabooru turns to her people who seem skeptical but tired. "As I said, if we were targets, we would have been attacked already. We will be fine camping a ways down. We will stay alert. Lets set up near the bend." Nabooru points.

Trusting Nabooru, the caravan heads south along the river.

Nabooru stays behind with Impa. After waiting for a while, Impa not moving or speaking, Nabooru sits next to her. Intending to question Impa further, she can sense now isn't the time. Instead, they sit for a long time in silence.

Eventually, Impa looks to Nabooru. They look at each other for a moment, but Impa's eyes return to the river as though the look were just a formality. In contrast to her demeanor, Impa does say warmly, "I'm glad you all made it okay."

Nabooru gives her a look — not confused, exactly, but as though looking for some kind of tell. "Well, I have been better." she makes a sound probably intended to be a laugh. "I am glad we met no trouble on our way, although I am surprised we did not."

Impa is quiet.

Nabooru stands up and stretches.

"I am sorry." Impa says, somewhat defeated.

Nabooru waves her hand "Its probably better off we don't camp in Kakariko. We don't care for Hylians. I can tell things are different, but the feeling is probably mutual - there is less potential for conflict this way."

"That is true." Impa says, seemingly comforted.

"So." Nabooru says. "Is this ugly rag your home?" Nabooru gestures to the empty, tattered tent Impa spent the night in. Impa shrugs. "I found it in the woods. An old friend will be bringing a few of my things from the village soon."

"A new tent?" Nabooru asks. Impa shakes her head.

"You plan to live out here like some hermit?" Nabooru pokes, but Impa says nothing. "Well, Sheikah. We have a spare tent and cot for you. You're welcome to join us."

Impa seems to wince slightly but says "I appreciate it." She looks at Nabooru, who says, "We could use another lookout."

Impa nods. "I can do that. I do have to wait for my friend to bring my things, but I will help you set up if you need help."

Nabooru asks, "How much do you have, do you need a cart?"

Impa shakes her head. "Just a few things."

Nabooru looks at Impa, who now looks down at the steps. "We will be cooking right away, none of us have eaten yet. I'll bring

you a meal." Nabooru says.

Impa finally looks up at her. "I'd be grateful."

"All right then." Nabooru says, hands on her hips. "I'll be back in a bit with some food. We will have to tear down that eyesore though," she says, gesturing to Impa's tent, "my people won't stand for it." Impa does smile faintly at this.

Nabooru nods to her and turns. "I'll be back in a bit. I trust you can defend yourself from the Guay and the bugs for a while." she says over her shoulder. Impa lets out a small laugh.

She watches Nabooru walk toward the bend in the river where her women have begun setting up large tents, then back over the field. She sighs, stretching her legs. Anju will be arriving with her belongings soon.

Anju Visits Impa

As Impa and Nabooru sit around a fire, Nabooru notices a sound - footsteps coming from the village gate. Standing alert, she turns around with a hand on the hilt of the sword on her waist. Around the corner, a woman appears and holds up her hands at the sight of Nabooru, moving slowly closer. "I am looking for Impa. I am a friend of hers."

The woman does not see Impa yet, but Impa stands and walks over. The woman is Anju. "Impa, I can only stay for a moment but I had to tell you." Impa gestures to Nabooru that Anju is safe.

Nabooru skeptically relaxes, folding her arms. "Well, join us then," Nabooru begins, but Anju says "I can't risk being seen. I've already done too much bringing Impa's things earlier." Impa beckons her behind the tent. Nabooru follows.

"Impa, I am so sorry for all of this," Anju says, distraught, but Impa stops her - "It's not your fault, Anju. I don't want you in any trouble." Anju shakes her head. "Kakariko is being evacuated tomorrow. We are all moving to Lon Lon."

Nabooru looks at Impa, who is speechless.

"Evacuated? Is there a danger making you flee?" Nabooru asks. "No." Anju says. She looks down. "Something attacked the village last night, destroying much of it. Impa saved us, but some blame her for the attack. I'm not sure why. Either way, they say it is too much to rebuild. What remains will be demolished, and Lon Lon will be the new capitol."

Impa stands in silent shock, Nabooru no less confused. After a while, Impa starts to ask "Does Ingo-" Anju interrupts her, "Ingo is dead."

Impa stares off to the woods behind Anju.

She takes a deep breath, trying stop her mind from racing.

"Did Ganondorf kill him?"

Anju is silent for a while. "Nobody knows what happened. Talon said that he thinks Malon killed him, but Talon was drunk."

They all stand quietly.

"Is there anything else?" Impa asks. Anju shakes her head, and Impa places a hand on her shoulder, as she does, Anju chokes back tears and embraces Impa. Arms around Impa's shoulders, Nabooru catches a glimpse of a tattoo on Anju's shoulder as her short sleeve folds. A Sheikah eye.

"You have always been such a good friend to me, Impa. I wish everyone could see that." Anju says.

"It's okay." Impa says gently. "Do what is right for your family and neighbors." Anju pulls away. "I have to go. Please take care, Impa. I will try to visit you again soon."

The two look at each other for a moment. Impa simply nods. Anju bows to both of them, then walks quickly back up to the village.

Standing for a few moments, Impa and Nabooru wordlessly return to the campfire. They watch the fire in silence for a long time. Impa's gaze wanders off toward Ganondorf's tower on the horizon.

Nabooru, looking at Impa concerned, softly asks "Was whatever attacked that village part of your people's prophecy? A servant of Ganondorf?"

Impa looks back at the fire, quiet for a while.

"It was not. It was a servant of the royal family. Ganondorf may have found some way to control it, but I don't think so. It would have destroyed itself before turning on Kakariko."

Nabooru looks at her, but Impa is deep in thought.

"Ganondorf uses Gerudo magic. It is older than the royal family or the Sheikah." Nabooru says.

"I know that." Impa says.

"Still, I don't think he had any hand in it."

Nabooru looks skeptically. "Well, why would people blame you, if you saved them?"

Impa looks at her, but then looks past her, staring off for a while. "I think it was trying to kill me. They were just caught up in it. I think..." Impa hesitates. "I think it saw me as a traitor to the royal family."

Nabooru looks at Impa again, but she just stares into the fire. She waits for a while, eventually asking, "Those people at the ranch, do you think they are working with Ganondorf?"

Impa shakes her head. "Ingo did, but he is dead. Malon and Talon are good people, I don't think they'd work with Ganondorf willingly. The move to Lon Lon makes sense, the village was nearly completely destroyed. People are likely living in tents."

She pauses. "The demolition though, is suspicious."

Nabooru nods in agreement, "That sounds like how Ganondorf operates. He rewrites history. If he can't, he destroys it." Impa finally looks at Nabooru, who is now staring into the fire.

Impa says, "I still don't understand why he hasn't killed us by now, though." Nabooru is quiet.

"The sacred realm is sealed, the Hero of Time is dead, we are the only two remaining sages, but not awakened. He likely has all of the Triforce." Impa thinks out loud.

Nabooru finally looks at her and says, "Impa. I respect you, but I don't believe in this prophecy you have talked about. Everything I have seen has shown me that, not only has it failed to predict any of this or offer any guide, it has just made things more confusing, especially when you try to fit the facts to it."

Impa is quiet.

The kettle they both forgot was on the fire begins to whistle. Nabooru takes it off, pouring hot water into two cups on a log between the two, putting a tea bag into each.

Impa's eyes follow the steam up to the night sky, where she stares for a long time.

Impa's Guest

Taking a deep breath, heart beating quickly, Impa lays on her back, moonlight pouring in from the top panes of the tall windows with sheer curtains closed. In front of one, on a counter that stretches the length of the room a candelabra drips wax onto the deep red wood countertop spread with books, makeup and many glass bottles – some empty, some filled.

"I forgot how good it is when I don't drink." Says the woman next to her, sitting up on the bed and looking at Impa with a sultry smile. Impa just watches the candles, the woman looks as well. "I suppose I also haven't been with a woman in a long time. Not since I was a kid." she giggles.

Impa looks over at this, although doesn't meet her eyes. The woman leans in closer, and the two do share a long kiss, the woman's long blonde hair draping over them. Impa turns away after a while, saying "I do have to get to sleep soon."

"Alright, alright." the woman says, turning and swinging her legs over the side of the bed, grabbing her clothes and putting them on.

Impa grabs her gown and puts it on as well, standing up and heading over to the counter, grabbing a pouch and walking around the bed to meet the woman. Now dressed and picking up her purse and jacket before standing up, the woman hesitates as Impa approaches.

"I know you didn't want any money, but I do insist." Impa says, offering her hand, four purple rupees twinkling.

"Oh! Wow, really?" the woman says, looking up to Impa, beaming. Impa nods, "Its not an exchange, alright. I just don't need it."

The woman laughs a bit, then says in an exaggerated formal tone, "Certainly it is no exchange, ma'am. I thank you kindly for your charity to a humble urchin like myself!" she stands, gently but quickly grabbing the rupees and putting them in her purse. The two smile, and the woman looks up at the taller Sheikah, pulling her in for another kiss. They kiss for even longer, this time the woman pulls away first.

"I'll walk you home-" Impa starts, but the young woman has already started walking to the door furthest from the bed, saying "I can see myself out," the woman turns, winking at Impa, "I assume this leads to the side alley. I know my way around this castle pretty well," she giggles again, "I visit often at night."

Opening the door, which indeed leads to the side alley, she turns back once more and says "My name is Alina, by the way. Most of the men who invite me here like to call me Zelda, though." she smiles at Impa, who stands a bit awkwardly.

"I suppose that's besides the point. Any way, I had a great evening. Thanks again for dinner, too. I do hope to see you around, Impa." She says, offering a brief wave and, before Impa can respond, she has quietly left and closed the door behind her.

Impa just walks to the candelabra, grabbing a snuffer and extinguishing each candle. She looks up, at the moon through one of the top window panes.

She should get heavier curtains, and see if she can hire a carpenter to build a frame for them so she can close them over the windows entirely - the bright moonlight is why she has to wear a sleep mask, and she'd much rather not have to.

Ganondorf's Letter To The Goron

On an uncommonly cold and dark night on Death Mountain Trail, two goron sit staring intently down the path to Kakariko. Still and focused, they wait. As a wolfos howls from beyond Kakariko, they see it: the glow of a lantern moving up the trail. One of the goron tenses, the other shivers and shuffles backwards, but is grabbed by the other who says in an angry whisper, "We have to make sure!"

The shorter and younger, fearful goron almost covers his eyes but is slapped by the other - "Look, it is true!" round the corner of the trail, tattered cloth illuminated by the sunset glow of the lantern, and two beady, bright yellow eyes beneath a hood float up the trail as if looking for something.

As the older goron is entranced the younger runs back to Death Mountain Crater clumsily. The Poe is unphased, but as soon as the older goron turns to walk away he sees a glint of moonlight flicker. A whisp of air and a flash of something passes his face, and from the corner of his eye he sees the poe pincushioned by an arrow. As the poe drops its lantern, it begins to fade into a tiny purple flame. The goron looks back at the source to see the sillhouette of a tall man limping towards him.

There is a bright flash, stopping the goron who was preparing to fight. His limbs are numbed and his ears ring, unable to move. The figure approaches and wordlessly extends an arm with a letter, shaking faintly. After a few seconds, the goron's arms loosen enough to grab the letter, dumbfounded. As his clumsy, rough fingers grasp the frail parchment, from the tips of the figures fingers to its torso, it evaporates in thick black smoke that unceremoniously evaporates into the night air.

Standing partially stunned from the flash, partially from this bizarre occurence, the goron glances back to the trail to catch the purple whisp of the Poe glint out of existence. Stumbling, he makes his way back to the Crater, walking with the letter still held in a partially outstretched arm. He shakes his head in bewilderment.

The next morning, as the dawn light begins to illuminate the upper floors of Death Mountain Crater, five goron gather on the suspended plaza. They have passed around the note received the night before, the last of them just reading it now.

Goron brothers, time is short.

This is not a threat, but a warning. I am sure you heard of the pillaging of Kakariko by some malicious creature. The Poes that inch their way up the trail are just the beginning. Things are changing quickly, and we do not have much time to act.

You have no doubt been trying to make sense of Darunia's disappearance, the Kokiri boy, and the Volvagia incident. I myself do not fully understand. As more monsters close in, as Kakariko turns ever darker, you will see that I do not lie. Hear me, brothers. You may think I have gone mad, but I speak the truth.

The village at your mountain home's feet was founded generations ago not as a friendly neighbor. It was founded to surveil and control you. To cover the Royal Family's secrets - their occultists used a vast network of ritual chambers beneath Kakariko. They meddled with a magic which sought to control the process of life, death and rebirth.

Darunia was not what he seemed. That Kokiri boy and Volvagia were part of the occultists' plans as well. You were used, like everyone else.

I have no ill intent to the Goron people. I want this land to prosper. However, I have been sabotaged at every turn. The occultist Sheikah are weakened - their leader gone, and generals killed. But those who remain will unleash even more gruesome monstrosities upon you, upon all of this land, if we do not act.

I have a plan, but I need your help. As soon as you can, send someone to Lon Lon, to find a girl named Malon. For the survival of the Goron, and for all of this land, we must act quickly.

- Ganondorf

Ruto Speaks With Makaru

Ruto sits on a boulder in front of what used to be the Great Fairy fountain nested in the corner of the lake above Zora's Domain. Across from her, at the dock where she used to feed Jabu Jabu, are many Zora; some older ones standing around talking casually, the younger ones playing.

A Zora approaches her and bows. "Makaru." Ruto says.

"Good day, Ruto." he says, pulling up from his bow. He moves closer. Ruto watches the Zora across the lake, asking, "How is he?"

Makaru turns his head to the crowd then looks back to Ruto. "We will have to announce something soon. It will be less than a month. Maybe as little as days."

Ruto stares off, her gaze cold but her brow furrows. She looks down. Makaru looks down as well. They stand, listening to the younger Zora playing, their calls echoing from the tall stone cliffs.

"I'll call for you later." She says.

Makaru bows again before turning away. He hesitates before leaving - "Will you be okay?" He asks.

Ruto doesn't respond for a while. Eventually, her eyes turn from a look of sadness to anger. "It's not your place to be concerned with that. Go."

Makaru nods and leaves.

Ruto stares at the ground for a while. She eventually gets up, walking into the grotto with fists clenched. In it, a few Zora are using pickaxes to dismantle the fountain. Ruto scowls at the gold Triforce emblem still embedded in the tile under her. "Hey." She says to a Zora picking away at one of the torch pillars. He turns around and she grabs the pickaxe from his hand.

"Get rid of these first." she says, and strikes the Triforce laid into the tile, wincing at the blow, although only a few tiles crack. Instead of swinging again, she drops it wedge-down, putting her foot on the back of the blade and begins stomping each individual tile with the wedge.

She rips one of the corners of the triangle from the floor, having freed it with the blade. Her eyes are cold but growing teary. The emblem bends under her foot as she lifts. Stepping off it, dropping the axe, she pulls it up completely. Finding it light, she throws it into the empty fountain. It clangs, bouncing a few times then slides to the center of the fountain. All the Zora are quiet.

She stands for a while, then turns and marches out, saying back to them sternly, "I want this done tonight. Break that thing to a million pieces, along with any more of those cursed triangles you find."

Impa Bathes

As the sun rises higher in the sky, Impa kneels beside the river. She finishes wringing her laundry, hangs it over a dowel, and walks to her tent at the North end of the camp. She hangs her clothes on a clothesline next to her tent.

As she kneels to look at a tear forming in one of her garments, Nabooru walks over from down the camp. "Hey, Impa."

Impa looks up. Nabooru, now standing next to her, places in front of Impa two tall, wire-wrapped glass bottles and two towels.

"I meant to give you them earlier – the bottles are soap."

"Oh." Impa simply says. She stares for a while at the soap and towels, then looks at Nabooru, "Are people bathing... in the river?"

"Back home, we had a communal bath, but-" Nabooru pauses, looking up, past Lon Lon. "Well, we are having to adjust how we do things. We've decided in the short term to make some shower stalls." Nabooru looks down to Impa, "There are two constructed already. When you want to, hang a left down the south of the camp, before the river bend."

"A shower does sound good." Impa says, although Nabooru has already turned and is walking back into the camp.

Impa finishes hanging her clothes, leaving the fraying garment draped across the basket.

She struggles a bit opening the door to her tent – the Gerudo tents have a wood-framed panel that seals the flap of the entrance. Impa usually leaves it alone except when going to bed, as it's easier to close from the inside, but she had figured out how to close it this morning. After a few moments she gets it, and walks in to quickly grab a long gown and lazily closes the flap behind her, not fastening it shut.

She starts heading down the side of the camp bordering the woods rather than through the middle of the camp. As she approaches the southern end, a young Gerudo girl approaches from ahead. Noticing Impa carrying towels and soap, she says excitedly "We've put up the showers! I just finished the last one!"

Impa looks to the girl as she points to four large stalls tucked just a ways into the woods. They are wooden-framed with fabric walls, simple curtains on rods on the front, large buckets peeking from the roofless tops.

Impa, impressed, walks up to one and the girl follows: "You get your own water ready, so it is cool. If you don't use it all, let the rest drain so that bugs don't breed in the buckets." the girl says proudly. Impa raises her eyebrows to the girl. "Thank you, these are so well built!"

The girl smiles, "I designed them myself. We had a few different kinds before, but I think I made them a lot better. Everyone else agrees. I hope you enjoy!" the young Gerudo shrugs with pride and walks back into the camp.

Impa opens a stall and sees two buckets neatly set at the base of a short stepladder.

She picks up the buckets to go to fill them from the river. Returning, she steps up, filling the bucket on top. Closing the curtain, she begins undressing, ignoring the bruises on her arms and legs, grabbing the bottle of soap and setting it on a shelf near the nozzle. Stepping under, she breathes deeply and pulls the lever. The cool water flows through the nozzle onto her, and she jumps a bit as the water hits her. She isn't surprised by the water, as much as by how even and fine the flow is – better than even the showers in the castle.

Impa washes herself, appreciating the shower. Her mind does wander. The Gerudo must plan on being here a long time if they built these, they definitely don't seem temporary.

Staring and thinking, Impa realizes she hadn't yet asked how the Gerudo were able to leave the fortress peacefully – or if they were. Maybe they fought their way out?

Koume and Kotake must know about so many Gerudo having left. But do they know Nabooru is alive and freed, having lead them?

If they do, they surely want her dead. They would have come after her by now if they knew she was alive. From what Impa had heard of the witches, Nabooru couldn't have faced them alone, and even the forces she had gathered likely couldn't have, with the two witches having such powerful magic.

She'll have to ask Nabooru at some point, she thinks.

She turns down the lever and the water stops. Turning to get her towel and dry off, she pauses. Remembering what the young girl said, she turns the lever back on. Leaving it running, she dries off and slips on her gown.

For a moment, she frowns at the Triforce pattern on the cuffs, but shakes herself to focusing on the present. Gathering the towels, bottles and her clothes she opens the curtain as the last drops of water slowly drop behind her.

Walking back and returning to the clothesline by her tent, she hangs up her towels and wet clothes. Standing for a while, she watches the clothes and towels swing lightly in the mild wind, her mind quiet now.

She breathes deeply and stands there silently for a while, even closing her eyes. She does hear the sound of Gerudo in the camp hammering, some quiet talking, none of the voices Nabooru's.

The camp is pretty large, almost a small village. Nabooru had said to expect three dozen Gerudo. It might actually be closer to four.

Echoing up from the south end of the camp, she hears young Gerudo laughing and talking loudly, and cuckoos the Gerudo brought as well.

Ganondorf Visits Ingo

"He's here!" Ingo yells up the stairs to Malon with glee. After a while, Malon opens the door and walks down like an annoyed mother.

Ingo stands stupidly facing the door, and as Malon approaches him, the knock comes - three slow knocks. Ingo opens the door excitedly, failing to collect himself.

"Sir! How wonderful it is to see you! How can I help you today?" Ingo says. Ganondorf and the Poe Collector stand at the door, Ingo shoots a suspicious and disgusted glance at the Poe Collector.

Ganondorf says nothing, simply walking in and sitting down at the table in the middle of the room. The Poe Collector stays at the door, closing it and standing in front of it. A strange flash of purple smoke is exuded from him, as if he were a machine letting off steam. Ingo and Malon join Ganondorf at the table.

"What an honor it is to have you visit, sir!" Ingo says in a manic, high pitched voice. "Would you like a glass of our finest milk?" he asks, almost yelling the question.

Malon sits lazily, her chin resting on her hand. Ingo turns to her, glaring. "Malon, you should sit up straight for our company!"

The command is ignored, Malon yawns. Ingo stands up and walks over to get some bottles of milk. He nearly drops one bringing them over to the table. "Sir, I insist!" He places them in front of Ganondorf and sits back down, looking expectantly at Ganondorf, who sits still as stone.

"Perhaps one for your.... friend... as well?" Ingo asks, looking over to the Poe Collector for as brief a glance as he can, as if the mere sight of him makes Ingo nauseous. There is silence, except for the occasional coo of a cuckoo in the loft.

Ganondorf looks over to the Poe Collector, his deep, yet oddly soft voice belows, "I can not deal with this man."

Ingo's pale complexion somehow turns paler. He looks to Malon, who is paying no attention.

A barely human voice, like that of an insect attempting to speak, echoes from the Poe Collector: "He is quite unserious."

A gust of wind that effects nothing else in the room blows the cloths draping over the Poe Collector. "He is very entertaining, however. Perhaps he would make a good Jester." The Poe Collector's voice drips.

Ganondorf exhales a single, hollow laugh. "I don't think I have much use for a Jester. If I had one, I would probably kill him."

Ingo stands up abruptly as if trying to escape the situation. He promptly faints.

Malon, head still resting on her hand, sighs and gets up, dragging him over to and propping him up on a crate. She returns to the table, again sitting back in the same casual pose.

Ganondorf and the Poe Collector look at each other.

Ganondorf turns to Malon. "I guess we will deal with you then," the giant man looks at the girl and stammers, "I am not sure how much of our discussions you are aware of..."

Malon interrupts him nonchalantly. "I've read all the letters. It is a fine plan. A fine city could be built, but I'd do a few things differently."

Ganondorf is stunned. He turns, the chair creaking, and looks to the Poe Collector again, who exhales a sputtering, whispering laugh. Ganondorf turns back to the girl. "Well, we are here to discuss the short term. Kakariko will fall within a few days, are you prepared?"

Malon, still never having made eye contact with Ganondorf, says flippantly "There is no preparation to do. They will come, we will provide them what food we can. They can build their own temporary housing and construction will begin immediately according to the blueprints. The Goron will gather materials."

She finally meets Ganondorf's gaze.

Ganondorf looks to the Poe Collector, who lets out a cackle. "Who said this girl was plain! How smart! How wise! How excellent!"

Malon and Ganondorf are unphased by the remarks, which seem redundant. Ganondorf stands up and walks to the door, another plume of purple smoke bellows from the Poe Collector. Malon simply stares off.

"Well, then, girl - " She interrupts him again, "My name is Malon, you know it."

Ganondorf smiles, impressed. "Well then, Malon. When Ingo recovers-"

Malon again interrupts him - with a girlish smile, she says "He won't be recovering. I poisoned him before you arrived."

Ganondorf is stunned. There is silence for a while.

Eventually, The Poe Collector begins to shake, amulets and bone fragments adorning him rattling, and he lets out a long, inhuman laugh. The laugh seems to echo as the door swings open.

Ganondorf and the Poe Collector turn and walk out, leaving the door hanging open behind them. Ganondorf calls back from outside, "Thank you for your time, Malon."

Malon watches the open door, hearing the two mount horses. She watches them ride past the door, then gets up, walking over and closing it quietly.

Impa Wanders

Impa is sitting outside her tent repairing a tunic, with her back to the ranch and the village gate. She has been trying to distract herself from the caravans leaving Kakariko. A few trips have already been made to and from Lon Lon.

Anju was on the first, and she was able to come with another villager to drop off two cows and nearly a dozen cuckoo that they said they couldn't bring with. Impa had wondered if Anju had convinced the village to leave them, but either way, the camp definitely needed them – they had no cows and only a few cuckoo.

Oddly, she had noticed Goron helping the process - peculiar because they rarely leave Death Mountain, but not shocking considering how much has changed so fast.

"Impa." Nabooru's now familiar voice rings from across the camp, she is walking briskly over. "You have to see this." Impa turns as Nabooru approaches, gesturing to her and the two turn back, Impa walking alongside her.

They stop a couple tents over, standing between two and Nabooru hands Impa a spyglass, pointing toward Lon Lon. "Do you see? Ganondorf and some girl, maybe the girl Malon you talked about? And..." Impa looks on, focusing in to the entrance of the ranch.

There, indeed, stand Ganondorf and Malon, both watching a covered wagon being loaded by... "Moblin?" Impa utters, confused and worried.

The two hear what a snarl and rocks kicked down the stairs leading into Kakariko and run to the end of the camp to see a Moblin coming down from Kakariko, although it isn't hostile, seeming to speak with a Goron. Impa and Nabooru stare on for a bit more before retreating back into the camp.

Impa again points the spyglass to Lon Lon and sees Ganondorf on horseback offer a casual wave to Malon, and begin heading back toward his keep alongside another figure on horseback clad in a purple shawl.

"What do you think?" Nabooru asks. Impa confirms that Ganondorf and the other figure are returning to the castle and returns the spyglass. "I... I have no idea..."

Impa slowly paces back to get a look at the gate to Kakariko, where the first along with another Moblin and two more Goron have begun carrying one of the covered wagons up the stairs to the village. She hadn't seen the Moblin arrive, but hadn't paid much attention to the process playing out.

Impa turns away. "I really don't know. It isn't right."

Nabooru looks at Impa who is quiet for a long time, staring at the ground.

"We have to do it tonight." Impa says.

Nabooru is taken aback. "Are you healed enough?"

"It doesn't matter." Impa replies, suddenly angry, panicked.

"He knows we are here. He is doing this all out in the open. He is mocking us." she says, looking at Nabooru with a rage that Nabooru has not yet seen.

"I'm doing it tonight, with you or not." Impa says again before angrily turning back and about to head south through the camp. Nabooru calls her and follows. "Impa, we have no plan -"

"It doesn't matter!" Impa now yells, stopping. "He can't do this!"

Impa freezes up.

"She is dead." A voice rings out.

Impa's voice.

She doesn't recognize it. Suddenly, everything changes. Time slows to a crawl. The sun turns gray. Shadows everywhere grow in size and darken to pitch black. Nabooru inches nearer but feels a burning sensation all over. A purple glow begins to brighten around Impa, who stands fists clenched and hunched forward.

"Impa? Who is dead?" the pain on Nabooru's flesh penetrates deeper, her muscles aching. She sees two other Gerudo nearby feel it too. "Impa, stop it!" she yells.

Almost as soon as the words leave Nabooru's mouth, everything is back to normal. The Gerudo nearby stare at Impa. Two Goron and a Moblin at the gate of Kakariko stare from the gate.

Nabooru watches as Impa blinks a few times, as if she's come out of a trance. Impa looks around, seemingly confused, she rubs her temples, eventually looking over to Nabooru with an oddly sad expression.

"I'm going for a walk." Impa says a bit deflated but sternly. She turns away angrily, walking through the tents.

Nabooru looks around to a few Gerudo looking to her. She grabs her arms, flexing and rubbing them, trying to shake off the pain. "She means us no harm. I don't think she understands what she did." Nabooru assures them. They just look back worriedly, but she repeats: "It is fine, okay?"

After looking to each other, then back at Nabooru, the women seem to accept Nabooru's statement and slowly get back to what they were doing.

Nabooru follows after Impa quietly just to see where she heads off to. She sees Impa cross the river at a wooden bridge the camp had set up, heading southwest across the field.

Nabooru thinks of stopping her, but she just watches for a bit longer and turns back, heading through the camp to her tent, closing it behind her.

Malon Speaks With Head Carpenter

Malon sits under the shade of the pole barn, looking to the construction happening along the east end of the ranch. Anju sits next to her, and the head carpenter stands in front of them.

The carpenter addresses Malon: "For taller buildings we will need more stone, the first floor entirely stonework." Malon pauses then looks up quickly - "Oh! I'm sure there will be plenty from the work on the new trail by Death Mountain." The carpenter watches his men working. "We need carved slabs." he says bluntly.

"Write me the dimensions and how much - the Goron certainly know how to cut them, Moblin can haul them." Malon says. The carpenter looks over a bit skeptically as Malon pours herself a cup of tea - "Do those Moblin even know what rupees are?" Malon waves her hand dismissively. "They don't need money, they're happy to work as long as they have Dodongo to eat. It's better to have them busy with some chores anyway."

The carpenter turns back. "I'll talk with my foreman, we'll have an order written up before night. I'm going to get back and help." He begins walking to the construction underway. Malon, a bit snidely yells after him "Thank you very much!" He waves back at her dismissively.

She sips tea before turning to Anju. "So," she begins, but is interrupted by a large Guay calling above. She looks at it angrily as it slowly flies past. Unusually loud, but not hostile. Malon sighs. "I hate those birds. So ugly, and dumb as worms..." She looks at Anju, who just looks at her blankly. "Well, miss... what was your name?"

"Anju."

"You had some issue to discuss?"

Anju shifts a bit. "I wanted to ask about your commitment to the villagers."

"What do you mean? I'm building houses for you all." Malon says, looking perplexed and a little indignant. Anju pauses for a while.

"Do you know about the Sheikah?" Anju asks quietly.

Malon, now looking away sort of shrugs, "I guess so, they had something to do with that Kokiri boy and the towns burning down

- I haven't really heard much. I know that woman with the Gerudo camp is one of them, and the Hylians don't seem to like her. Sheikah seem to caused a lot of trouble wherever they go."

Anju just looks down at the table and another Guay calls out loudly. Malon gets up, frustrated. "We've got to figure out some way to keep these birds out of here! That sound is so annoying!" Malon seems to forget Anju was even there and leaves without a word, walking towards her house.

Anju watches her leave, but as she looks past the girl to the house her eyes widen. Ganondorf, on horseback, is at the gate. Beside him, also on horseback, a figure in a purple shroud. The figure is hunched over, blown by a wind that doesn't match the direction of the surroundings. Under the hood, a bright red orb glows.

Anju quickly gets up, walking through the temporary homes on the west side of the ranch - several rows of hastily constructed shacks. She makes her way to hers, quickly entering and closing the door behind her.

Nabooru and Impa have dinner

"It's me." Impa's voice is gravely as if she had spent hours screaming. When she had returned at the southern gate a Gerudo had told her to find Nabooru in her tent. Nabooru gets up and opens the tent.

"You can come in." she holds the tent door open and steps back. Impa hesitates – she had never seen any one of them let another person into their tent. Nabooru repeats herself somewhat sternly, "I invited you, so come in."

Impa comes in slowly, standing awkwardly as Nabooru closes the tent. Nabooru walks over, sitting in front of a vanity desk of meticulously tied driftwood. Four face-sized mirrors, hooks with jewelry, various patterned cloth ribbons adorn it.

A cone of incense burns in a small bowl on the vanity next to one of the mirrors, filling the tent with the smell of sandalwood and vanilla. A bold combination, Impa thinks, remembering her days mixing soaps and oils. It works, though.

"Sit, Impa." Nabooru gently gestures to her cot, fine white silk sheets - a comforter with inlaid silver and gold weave chain sewn into it is neatly folded at the foot of the bed. Impa again hesitates, but sits down slowly as if afraid she will break something. The cot's frame doesn't so much as creak the slightest, just the soft sound of fabric shifting.

"I am sorry about raising my voice at you earlier." Impa says, looking down at the comforter's intricate inlay patterns, half avoiding eye contact, but half transfixed by the quality of Gerudo craftwork.

Nabooru is quiet for a while. A breeze from slats in the tent's fabric whirls gently around in the tent, almost chilly. Impa eventually raises her eye to see Nabooru sitting calmly.

"Have you seen the sun fade slow? The purple glow, the shadows grow?" Nabooru asks. Impa looks into space, trying to think of what Nabooru means by this. She looks back to Nabooru "I don't know what you mean. Has Ganondorf done something?" Nabooru expected as much.

"No, it was just some lines from poem I read earlier." Nabooru says. Impa notices many books stacked under the vanity. "What does it mean?" Impa asks.

Nabooru evades the question. "You've been out all day, you have not even eaten, have you?" Impa now notices the empty feeling. "No." she says.

"I'll get you some dinner." Nabooru asks. She gets up and looks out of her tent, gesturing to a Gerudo outside, then closing it again and walking to the back of the tent.

Nabooru grabs two large pillows from atop a chest, setting them down in the middle of the tent, gesturing for Impa to sit on

one, elegantly lifting and moving a short table through the somewhat cramped tent, setting it down between them and sitting down the pillow, legs crossed.

She leans over to the vanity to grab a kettle and two cups. "It isn't hot anymore but already steeped." she says, pouring herself some, placing the other cup across from her where Impa came over to sit.

Impa asks "Any water? I'll pass on tea tonight." Nabooru, drinking tea, points to a flask near the tent's doorway.

Impa grabs it and unscrews it, instinctively about to drink from it when Nabooru gently says "Cup." Impa just-visibly flinches and grabs her cup, pouring it full of water and sealing the flask, placing it a bit too carefully on the table. The two sit for a while.

As Impa pours herself more water, a bell chimes behind her. Nabooru gets up and meets someone at the door of the tent, setting a tray on an end table nearby and leaning out to whisper something to the Gerudo. She closes the tent again and brings the tray to the table, setting it down.

The sun has almost fully set outside, and the red-orange hue of the tent has shifted to a dull blue. Nabooru lights two oil lamps on the vanity, leaving one and bringing the other to the table. Impa sips water as Nabooru sits back down, lifting fine metal covers from the plates on the tray. Steam wafting, she places them before herself and Impa before sitting down again.

As Impa finishes her water, she feels that lump in her throat again. Not again - and the dull ache behind her eyes. Putting one hand to her face as if to silence herself, closing her eyes.

She feels Nabooru grasp her other hand. Any other time, it would be shocking - Nabooru has had moments of kindness, but the touch is unexpected. Yet Impa barely reacts. As Nabooru's palm closes around hers softly, Impa closes hers just slightly. "We don't have to talk. But please eat." Nabooru says softly.

Impa looks down at her plate. Never has she felt more hungry. She lets go of Nabooru's hand and the two eat in silence, aside from the occasional Guay or frog in the distance and the gentle, almost imperceptible flapping of the tent.

Nabooru grabs the flask and walks to the door to the tent, as she steps out she hesitates before closing it behind her. She looks at Impa's back turned for a moment before saying "I'll be right back," and closing the tent.

Impa turns and adjusts her pillow - she stretches her legs out and leans back against the cot, watching the flame of the lamp flicker. She leans forward, raises the wick, then reclines again, leaning her head back on the comforter, feeling the now much cooler breeze coming in. She closes her eyes, feeling the night air pass over her face.

Nabooru returns, placing the plates and covers back on the

tray and glancing over at Impa briefly. Impa opens her eyes, stares at the ceiling then closes them again. Nabooru takes the tray out and away and Impa is alone again for a few minutes.

Is there even a reason to try anymore? she thinks. Sheik is gone. Link is gone. The Goron are working with Ganondorf - alongside Moblin no less. Malon is as well, who knows, even the Zora might be.

Nabooru returns again, closing the tent and quietly putting away the table, placing the lamp on a chest at the foot of the bed. She moves the pillow she had sat on next to Impa and sits by her side, the two of them facing the vanity. They sit in silence for a long time. Impa's gaze wanders from the vanity to Nabooru sitting next to her. Nabooru is breathing slowly, her eyes closed.

Impa's eyes follow the creases of Nabooru's pants, past the light hair on her arms, up to her jewelry - her fine gold necklace and earrings. Just as Impa looks at them, Nabooru reaches up and takes them off, laying them in front of her, then takes off her bracelets. She gets up, placing her jewelry on hooks on the vanity. Impa watches her hands reach back and unfasten her necklace, placing it on a hook as well.

Nabooru lights another cone of incense, placing it in the ceramic bowl and watching the flame flicker out to an ember then returning to sit next to Impa again.

Nabooru breathes deeply and slow, watching the smoke with Impa, the breeze having died down. Impa closes her eyes, taking in the smell of lavender. Years ago, she used to gather it outside Lake Hylia along with sage and chamomile for lotions and soaps. She never got around to trying to make incense.

The two sit side by side in silence for a while. Nabooru finally speaks, just above a whisper, the two of them still just staring ahead. "I do truly thank you, Impa, for saving me."

Impa is quiet but straightens up a bit. Nabooru looks to her, then back ahead. Impa hesitates, then says "I had to." she says, almost wincing.

Nabooru, as she has often been, a bit too gracious: "I think you would have, even without being told to." She looks back at Impa again, and Impa notices the absence of the usual barely-audible twinkle of Nabooru's earrings and necklace.

Impa has nothing to say. Would she have? She can barely imagine how things could have gone any other way. "You would have. You are a selfless person." Nabooru says, catching Impa's gaze again for a moment, before looking ahead.

"How many other Sheikah are left?" Nabooru asks.

Impa pauses, then says "There were quite a few, but they hide being Sheikah." Impa takes a deep breath. "None of the ones I know are alive have much experience or knowledge beyond some rituals and oaths. It is just a tradition for most of them. With

things having changed so much, though, they will probably leave it all behind to live normal lives. I can't blame them."

Nabooru looks to Impa. "What about you though?"

Impa has no response.

"There is more I need to know, if we are going to go through with this together." Nabooru says. Impa nods.

"Earlier you said 'she's dead'. Who did you mean?"

Impa quietly looks ahead, but Nabooru leans toward her, a bit demanding, "Hey, look at me. Who is it?" Impa does look at her, but her gaze avoids Nabooru's eyes. She doesn't respond.

Nabooru leans back, a bit exasperated. She leans to grab the flask of water, when Impa says "Zelda. The King's daughter."

Nabooru stops for a moment, then slowly pours them both some more water, setting a cup in front of Impa. Impa takes it and drinks.

"I'm sorry." Nabooru says, as she drinks as well. Impa doesn't say anything, just finishes her water and sets the cup down.

After a while, Impa says - "I was her bodyguard her whole life. We were always pretty formal, we knew each other well but - " Nabooru looks down at the floor.

Impa continues, "I don't know. I know you don't think much of the royal family, or Hylians, and it is fair that you don't. I'm sure to you, maybe even to the Zora and Goron as well, the royal family was just a curiosity. We Hylians always fought amongst each other so much, and..."

She pauses. "It was always precarious. But, I did really think it could last. Rauru and Zelda especially seemed so confident, and when Ganondorf arrived, started to work his way into the King's good graces, it just seemed to prove the prophecy right. Now, though, I really do wonder if, in a weird way, Ganondorf was just a scapegoat."

Nabooru looks at her skeptically. "Impa, he destroyed your capital."

Impa is quiet for a while, she just says, "It was foretold the capital city would become a wasteland. I don't know. Ganondorf isn't acting like an all-powerful man who has complete control and immunity. He is acting like..." she trails off.

"A pawn? Of someone else?" Nabooru asks.

Impa nods, adding "Or some *thing* else. I don't know what, though. It could be so many different things. Koume and Kotake, something from the Shadow Realm, some faction of Hylians or Sheikah..."

Nabooru says, "It isn't Koume and Kotake. They see him as a traitor to the Gerudo just as much as I do, and just as much of a traitor as me. They might even hate him more than I do."

Impa seems to ignore this.

She has a hand lifted to her forehead, covering her eyes. "The thing that made me angry, though, that hurts so much..." she trails off. Nabooru raises an eyebrow at this and looks at Impa, seeing her lips curling into a frown.

Impa is quiet for a long time. "

You can say it." Nabooru says, assuringly.

Impa lets down her hand, her eyes glassy but her expression stiffens. Nabooru braces herself as the wind picks up, flowing through the tent. She swears a faint purple halo glows around the Sheikah. Still, Nabooru, tense but unphased, says "It's okay, Impa."

Impa leans back against the cot as the wind stops.

The tent darkens slightly.

"I just feel... used."

Morning at the Camp

Impa wakes up to the orange-yellow glow of the sun filling the tent. She doesn't remember falling asleep. She turns over, noticing the blanket is not hers. The sight of Nabooru's vanity and the Gerudo tapestry reminds her where she is, but things are still foggy.

On the floor there is a fine cushioned mat with a light sheet. Impa is sore and groggy, but she does feel a strange, light feeling too. The brightness of the tent's roof tells her it must be nearly noon, maybe later. For a while, she just lays on her side, her eyes tracing the driftwood of Nabooru's vanity.

Not much time passes before she hears the small bell at the tent chime once, a shadow visible through the canvas wall of the tent. After a few moments, the flap opens, Nabooru walks in with a tray and large jug suspended from a rope sash around one shoulder.

Impa stretches beneath the comforter, "You should have woken me up." Rolling up her sleeping mat and folding the sheet, "You needed the sleep." Nabooru responds. She looks up at Impa. "How are you feeling?"

Impa doesn't respond right away, she has only started to wake up enough to realize how strange it is to be laying in Nabooru's bed, Nabooru laying out breakfast on the small table in front of the bed. "I slept well. Thank you for letting me spend the night, it's too much."

Nabooru looks at her and smiles a bit, "Well, I figured I ought to keep an eye on you. Wouldn't want you wandering off again." Impa smiles back.

Nabooru places the jug on the table - "Coffee." she says. "We will have to send someone try to barter with Lon Lon for more soon, as this was the last of it. So if you do have some, appreciate it." Nabooru begins to leave the tent, looking back.

"I have a lot of things to discuss with people. More work needs to be done as well, I will probably be busy all day. Don't stick to yourself all day, the women all respect you." She looks at Impa, who looks back, Nabooru repeats, "Don't sit around all day alone, alright?" After a short pause, looking down then back to Nabooru, Impa nods. "I won't."

Impa pours herself a cup of coffee and begins to eat.

Impa Meets A Few Gerudo

Leaving Nabooru's tent, Impa turns around and for a while struggles to close it fully. It has a more complex mechanism than even her own tent. After a while of inspecting it, she finds that a flap outside the frame conceals a rope that when pulled one direction, seals the flap and locks the frame in place - when pulled the other direction, in one quick motion it unseals it.

She isn't quite sure how it works - some kind of pulleys and counterweights in the double layer of the tent. Regardless, she leaves the tent door sealed, standing up, about to think about what she will do with the day.

Almost as soon as she stands, the young girl from the showers walks up to her. Her high-set stubby ponytail points up at the sky behind her. Long, coarse bangs framing her stout face, her eyes are intensely green, almost glowing.

"Good morning Impa," she says. The girl notices Impa taken just a bit off guard at the girl knowing her name. "Nabooru told us about you!" The girl smiles. Impa is surprised to find herself feeling embarrassed. "Well, anyway," the girl says, "everyone is thankful that you saved her, and you shouldn't worry too much. The lowlands are definitely strange but I think its fun to be out here."

Impa doesn't really know what to say. She just says, "Well, I'm glad you like it here." The girl looks at Impa's clothes and Impa is again made somewhat bitterly aware of the embroidered triforms on most of her clothing. The girl goes on, "I think we should stay here. Some of the older Gerudo want to go back, but those witches were too mean. Nabooru is so much nicer."

Impa does smile at this. The talkative girl says, turning to the river, "Nabooru is just like this river. It keeps moving, but its still always there for us." Impa raises her eyebrows at this - an impressive metaphor for a kid to make. Then again, kids can be strangely wise. The girl adds, "It was a long five years that she was locked up. I was just a kid when she left. I'm so glad she's back."

Impa's heart sinks, she almost feels dizzy. Five years?

The girl turns to Impa, still cheerful and smiling, extending a hand. "My name is Zarah. I hope you stick around." Impa stares at the girls hand for a while, then slowly shakes it.

"What are you gonna do today?" The girl asks. Impa looks south down the camp's middle path.

"I'm not sure yet." She says, still feeling almost faint, although the young girl doesn't seem to notice, or, if she does, doesn't bring attention to it.

"Do you wanna meet my best friend? She's about your age."

Impa rubs her forehead, then covers her mouth with her hand and looks at the girl. Seeing the girl's friendly, expectant expression, Nabooru's voice almost audibly plays back in her head

- don't sit around all day alone.

"Sure." Impa says, taking a deep breath.

"OK! Her name is Dreza. Her and I are setting up the kitchen tent today, around the corner down there." the girl points a few tents south. "Wanna go?"

Impa nods, "Sure, you lead the way." The girl turns and the Impa follows her down past two tents, turning right where a Gerudo - must be Dreza - is fastening a canvas wall to a frame with a roof. "Hey Dreza." Zarah says. Dreza is focusing but says "You're back. Where'd you go?" Zarah says, "I found Impa!"

Impa again feels awkward - she usually doesn't like attention, and Zarah is making it seem like the whole camp looks up to her now. Dreza turns around, looking at Zarah, then at Impa, although only briefly before turning back to fastening the wall. "Could you help me out Impa?"

Zarah walks over to some chests and crates across from Dreza, filled with pots and pans, taking them out and putting them in some shelves under a counter. "Sure." Impa says, a bit late, appreciating Dreza's candor and walking over to help.

Happy Mask Salesman's Journal

After all that has happened, I expect this shanty town to any day burst into flames as well. Still, the children enjoy masks, and the folk of Kakariko who now join us in this strange ranch have rupees to spare. While food is rationed by that girl adequately, some part of me does detest it - rupees will be worth as much as dirt if rationing continues. In the mean time, I have plenty of money to order new masks, but never did I imagine the economics would be such that my stock might overwhelm me. I have procured with plenty, now, many masks worth several hundred rupees. Yet demand is shrinking, and while I possess more powerful, ornate and ancient masks than I could have ever dreamed of, I feel uneasy.

It is not just food rationing, but the construction of mortgage-less homes, the banning of rentals and loans. I worry this system may expand, not only devaluing the rupee, but inevitably lead to a collapse in rupee supply as the procurement of them becomes pointless. While such a situation would correct the local economy, it means that imports will eventually become prohibitively expensive, if not impossible.

I have addressed this all with that girl, Malon. The feint of her concern is clear under a mocking, shoddy mask. Everything about her is indecent. In speaking to a few others, I have found the carpenters share my worry. It is well and good in times of crisis to provide for the people, but we agree it is irresponsible and short sighted to set the people up to be reliant on grace and charity. Of course the carpenters and merchants like myself have an interest in profitability for our own sake - but this is the Goddess-given right of all men: to exercise his wit and skill to get ahead in life.

I would not go so far as the carpenters to call this all some instance of evil, seducing the people into complacency and, as the head carpenter oddly whispers, preparing to "steal their souls". This is a bizarre notion - a metaphor taken too far. Still, the basis of it is correct: without motive to strive, people become lazy and petty. Such is evidenced by the stagnation and directionlessness that characterized the last decade of the royal family, I am loathe to admit.

I will continue to speak to others about these concerns, although I fear that the zealotry of the head carpenter may get out of hand. Perhaps he should be checked so as not to poison my argument.

A Foggy Night

Impa, Dreza and Zarah sit under the roof of the pavilion had spent the evening building just outside Impa's tent. The three of them just finished eating. Impa looks up, impressed with their work – the roof is maybe four or five times as large as Nabooru's tent.

Impa pauses, realizing it was odd to measure it that way. She wonders what Nabooru had spent the day doing.

The sky is overcast now. A few raindrops fell here and there, although it has stayed pretty warm and become more humid – a light fog forming across the lowlands' field.

The three of them rest quietly at a large round table and benches that Dreza had been working on at some point over the past few days. Dreza gets up, going back into the camp. Impa looks at Zarah, who is working on macrame, unusually quiet, although Impa doesn't have a complaint about that.

After a while watching the girl, Dreza coming back, striking a long match from a tin box and lighting a torch by the table.

"Its pretty beautiful." Impa says, looking back up at the roof. Zarah, not looking up, says "We'll have to weigh down the roof more, it gets so windy here." Dreza looks up and nods, about to sit down but she instead asks, "Either of you need more water? Tea?"

Zarah doesn't look up but does place her large round canteen on the table toward Dreza. Impa says, "I know I shouldn't, but I'd love some coffee. Actually, I'll come with you." Impa stands, Dreza grabs Zarah's canteen and they walk to the kitchen tent together.

As they walk through the camp, most of the tents are lit up inside. Light radiates from them dimly, with rays almost visible in the humid air shining out from the slats around the tops of the tents. The camp is quiet, although a few Gerudo can be heard toward the south end talking. Impa and Dreza arrive at the kitchen, Dreza heading over to large barrels with clean boiled water.

Impa gets the tiny portable stove fashioned from an oil lamp that she had used earlier to boil a cup of coffee, scooping some grounds into a metal cup. They return to the pavilion, seeing Zarah gone. "Must have gone to her tent." Dreza says, sitting down and sliding the tin of matches to Impa, who lights the small stove with the metal cup over it. She pours water over the fine grounds. "Does she have her own?" Impa asks.

Dreza doesn't really respond, instead looking out at the field where the fog has already grown much thicker. Impa, seeing her looking, says "It gets like this on summer nights."

Dreza just stares out. Eventually she says, "Oh," looking to Impa, "Zarah, yes. She has her own tent."

Impa, waiting for the cup to start boiling, looks at Dreza, who

does turn to her. "Her parents have a separate one?" Impa asks. Dreza looks confused. "I mean," Impa stammers a bit, "you know, the people that birthed her?"

Dreza looks up past Impa to the sky. "Yes, of course."

Impa looks at Dreza a bit longer before looking back at her cup. She knew the Gerudo society was a lot different, but she is definitely thrown off. "I don't mean to be rude, I guess. Do kids usually stay with the people who birthed them? How old is Zarah?"

Dreza looks back at her, then at the coffee. "Um. No they don't stay, we all look after the younger ones. Zarah is sixteen, though. We don't have any young ones in camp." Dreza pauses. "Well, some are younger than Zarah, but they don't need raising, they're all in training now."

The two watch the cup, Impa nods. They both look out at the field. Its gotten dark quickly, and the fog is dense. Its started rolling in to the camp. "I love the creeping fog." Impa says. The torch crackles behind them. Dreza sips water, then says, "Oh." Impa turns to her, seeing Dreza look down at Zarah's canteen and stand up. She looks out at the fog for a bit more then walks toward the camp. "Will you be back?" Impa asks. Dreza looks back and nods before going to find Zarah.

Impa looks out at the fog. She swears she can almost see it moving across the field. Her coffee starts boiling, and she takes it off the burner, turning it off. Realizing she has no idea what time it is, she thinks maybe she will save it for the morning.

A guay cackles over Kakariko village. Whats left of it, anyway. Impa listens. The fog makes everything so quiet, Impa has always found it peaceful, even though most people think it is eerie. She does see a few lights floating around up north, but they are just fireflies. A wolfos is barely audible howling somewhere north past Death Mountain.

Impa does hear faint footsteps and turns to see Dreza returning with Nabooru. Impa greets them with a bit of a wave.

Dreza stands and Nabooru sits closest to Impa.

"Do you think you'll be ready to go into the old capital tomorrow?" Nabooru asks.

Impa raises her eyebrows a bit. "I thought you wanted to wait."

Nabooru doesn't look at her, she is quiet for a while. "I don't know. I think we should. It is too strange that he hasn't done anything." Impa looks at Nabooru, who is rubbing her hand a bit nervously - Impa hasn't seen her like this before, she seems... scared. "Did something come up?" Impa asks quietly.

Nabooru looks at her, but looks away again quickly. "Not really. I just-" she pauses for a while.

"If you are ready, I can be ready too." Impa says.

Dreza stands, she runs her hand through her short dark green

hair. Surprised that Dreza chimes in, Impa looks at her as she says, "He might be weak, maybe even dying."

Impa looks at her, eyebrows raised again and eyes wide. She looks at Nabooru. Nabooru says, "I'm not a mage myself, but I know Gerudo magic. I can *always* sense it no matter where it is being used. If I meditate, I can usually even figure out where it is being used."

Nabooru breathes deeply. "He isn't using it. Not even for small things. I can always tell. Even if its used to lift a feather. He isn't doing anything, and hasn't for a long time."

Nabooru looks out into the fog in the direction of the canyon. "Back at the fortress, something big is happening, I can't tell what, but..."

Impa stares for a while at the cup, steam rising, and watches Nabooru's hands, now folded and still. She looks up to Nabooru, who eventually looks at her, fearful. Impa doesn't ask any questions. "All right. We go to the capital tomorrow." she says.

Nabooru holds her gaze for a long time. Impa eventually asks again, "You're ready for this?"

Nabooru looks into the fog again and nods silently.

"Good thing I didn't start drinking my coffee. We'll have to rest well." Impa says. Nabooru turns to her and smiles a bit, then turns to Dreza, saying to both of them, "I don't know what will happen." before turning back to Impa, saying "I'm going to bed. I'll meet you out here in the morning." Nabooru stands.

Impa nods. "Rest well, Nabooru." is all she says, Nabooru and Dreza turn almost as soon as she finishes the sentence, walking back into the camp and splitting without a word or even a look.

Impa breathes deeply, looking at her coffee then out to the fog. For a while before going to her tent to sleep, she sits alone and appreciates the stillness and quiet.

Impa and Nabooru Approach Ganondorf's Keep

At the ruined gate to what was once the capitol city of Hyrule.

It is evening, not quite sunset, in the distance across the plain, trees cast long shadows, but here, the energy emanating from the black castle within the ruined city darkens the air outside of the gate. No shadows are cast, just a dull gray and purple hue. Above, the sky fades to an opaque gray haze toward the castle.

Impa and Nabooru stand by to their horses. The two of them face the gate and then each other. They don't say anything for a moment, then walk toward and jump over the wrecked drawbridge. Impa notices the oily purple sheen on the water below. The two hug the wall and make their way into the city.

As they pass by the old guard house attached to the outer wall, Impa pulls ahead. "I'll lead." Nabooru nods, looking around.

Every step they take, no matter how light, crunches loudly as if the ground is made of half-decayed bone that cracks beneath their feet. Every step, breath, and even the soft movement of their clothing echoes through the streets.

The two of them approach the old Market hub. The buildings she knew so well black and brown, collapsed and shrunken. The whole ruined city feels frozen in time, as if it was just days ago, not years, since the fires and earthquake drove everyone out. Impa sternly looks past the plaza toward the tower.

"Look." Nabooru tries to whisper, but her voice still echoes, reverberating from the walls of the buildings - she points and Impa looks to the right. In front of the buildings' hollowed facades, which stand like gnarled masks, ReDead stand - more than a dozen - shoulder to shoulder, all facing the ground. Impa looks to the left, and there are just as many on the opposite side.

The two of them walk tentatively through the center. None of the ReDead move, no shrieks ring out. The two women have no choice but to walk through the open Market. No shuffling against walls, no dipping through alleys or burned structures.

They slowly walk past the fountain in the center, now both trying to avoid looking at the ReDead but keeping alert. Their footsteps crunch and echo.

Impa looks to the east. The Temple of Time is gone.

As they approach the entrance to the yard of the castle, suddenly, the ReDead burst into flames. In slow motion, they mimic pain and struggle before collapsing and extinguishing.

Nabooru looks to Impa, who stares steely then turns to enter the Castle yard. They walk ahead, the ashy cobblestone beneath their feet turning to dark brown earth, the smell of burned wood and cloth in the Market is overpowered by the smell of sulfur and soil blown by a wind whirling through the yard.

As they walk through, they both look up to the black castle,

following its intricate buttresses, awnings, lookout towers. It is massive, barely narrowing as it reaches up – it is as if an entire city's worth of people could live in the colossus.

Nabooru and Impa stand in the middle of the yard below for a while. The howling wind whips from every direction. They look at each other and walk side by side up the slight hill toward the entrance. As they approach, their eyes are drawn to the steep drop at the top of the climb. Below, lava swirls, the castle floating above motionless.

They approach the edge of the steep cliff. A massive empty doorway yawns across the chasm, pitch black inside. Seeing no way across, and nothing to grapple with their hookshots, Nabooru turns to Impa. Impa is standing, staring into the gaping doorway. A purple halo slowly grows around her and Nabooru takes a single step back and braces, but doesn't feel any pain – rather, the wind seems to die down, or rather seems to stop blowing on the two of them.

The aura around Impa glows brighter and begins to seep across the ground toward the ledge, the light twitching as if it forms vague tendrils. The earth begins to shake slightly, then a bit more and Nabooru instinctively backs away from the ledge, but Impa stands still staring into the doorway. Suddenly and violently, something seems to erupt just down the edge of the cliff, Nabooru can't see but hears dirt and rocks falling down the incline toward the lava below.

Before Nabooru can react, she sees greenish gray bricks, surrounded faintly by the same purple aura, assembling themselves into a path reaching toward the castle. As each brick snaps into place with a light plume of ash, the aura around it dissipates. Nabooru glances to Impa, who is motionless – her hair and clothes not blown by the wind, as if frozen in time. Nabooru looks back to watch the unfolding bridge assemble, bricks sliding and scraping across the ones laid before like slugs before clicking into position.

After just a few moments, the bridge is complete, and the purple light flickers and twitches violently before disappearing altogether.

As Nabooru feels the wind again, Impa seems to snap back to reality, turning back to Nabooru. "Are you ready?" She asks.

Nabooru nods, again unsure if Impa even is aware of what happened. Nabooru draws her sword and the two walk across the bridge, passing through the yawning doorway, although Nabooru does look over her shoulder.

Behind them, the bridge seems to exhale and settle, every brick locking into place more tightly, the remaining cracks breathing a final light cloud of dust as they close. Nabooru wonders briefly before looking away, will they really walk back

across that bridge again?

In Ganondorf's Tower

Passing the threshold from outside they descend long, wide stairs adorned with a red carpet and lit by torches on the walls that seem to mock them. Nabooru notices that no wind flows in from outside, and it is silent – not even the burning torches crackle, just the soft sound of their footsteps on the carpet. The flight is not so long – it just feels longer from how wide the steps are.

At the end, the long hall widens to another massive archway. Nabooru and Impa walk through into an enormous hall. Their footsteps echo through the silence. In the middle, a pillar of dirt looks to have erupted through the stone floor, reaching upwards into the arched ceiling. A giant steel door buried into the pillar faces them, rusted and dusty.

As soon as they stop,
the moment the last echo of their footsteps quiets,
an almost deafening screeching and clanging begins,
both of them flinch.

The dirt on the pillar begins to crumble,
and fall to the floor as the chamber shakes.

The clanging gets even louder,
almost unbearable,
as the dirt falls in larger clumps,
underneath it:

metal walls surround whatever the steel door defends.

The walls are partitioned by massive studded iron beams.

Some of the flat walls slowly slide up
while others slide down.

The clanging gets louder, with each loud crack
more dirt falls to the floor,
until eventually the pillar of metal is fully revealed,
its walls sliding.

The door begins to open.

Nabooru and Impa, now covering their ears
as the sound of it has become painful,
watch and brace themselves.

The door slides up agonizingly slowly,
a freezing wind flows from it.

The two of them look at each other, then back to the door.

They can barely stand the cacophany,
yet it goes on.

They watch as the door inches slowly up
excruciatingly slowly,
each centimeter

letting the frigid gust grow stronger.

Finally, with a bang that shakes the room,
the door locks into place,
opening into another pitch black void.

Despite this, the noise remains of the now-revealed metal pillar's walls' continuing to slide.
Ear-piercing whirring and random thumping.
The two look to each other again,
holding their ears and both wincing -
they have no choice, they walk toward the door.

As they approach, the wind grows stronger and colder. Their breath is visible, but the small clouds of their exhalation are blown around their heads. Closer and closer to the precipice of the door's massive arch, the gust grows so strong they can barely stand. Nabooru grabs the frame of the door, her hands instantly bleed as they grasp the metal - whether from the cold, or as if it is covered in microscopic shards of glass. Drops of blood blown by the increasing wind hit painfully, like liquid bullets falling onto her arms, face - almost more painful than the bleeding hand, yet she holds on tightly and looks back to Impa, her eyes streaming with tears, her ears feel like they will bleed from the noise that now penetrates her unprotected ears. Impa, still holding her ears and bearing forward, looks to Nabooru who grabs Impa's arm with her free hand and pulls her. It takes all of Nabooru's strength to pull Impa closer, and as Impa grabs her waist with one arm, she extends her other to grab the frame of the door.

Both of them now holding each other around the shoulder with one arm and fighting through the burning on their hands, looking down to avoid the arrows of blood darting toward their faces now even more rapidly, they pull as hard as they can, slowly gaining inches until they can both wrap their forearms around the other side of the door frame.

Their arms bleed, letting go of each other to wrap both of each of their arms around the frame of the door and pull themselves through, as if hoisting themselves up a vertical ledge.

Their bodies swing toward and slam against the frame of the door, scraped by invisible razors and pins, they both feel their feet leave the floor but pull harder. Now, flecks of ice have begun to shoot through the void ahead (or what feels now like above).

Nabooru screams, barely audible over the now deafening wind and screeching of the metal. She realizes she can't inhale because of the strength of the wind, just as she is able to swing a leg around the frame. Her thigh burns. She looks to Impa, wanting to grab her arm and help but she can't.

Impa pulls her knees up against the frame, struggling, but eventually straightens her arms, pulling her torso up.

In an instant, the two of them are flung into the darkness as the wind stops completely.

Curling and bracing, they hit a stone floor and slide as the door behind them falls shut.

Ganondorf Confronts Impa and Nabooru

Both of them lay in pain, eyes closed for just a moment before looking around.

A long plenary room surrounds them—walls of massive gray stone pierced by tall arched windows. A dark wooden table runs the room's length, ending at a matching closed iron door.

They glance at each other—no blood. A glance downward: no wounds. The iron door behind them looms in silence, layered with dust—as if it had never moved.

They rise slowly. Nabooru studies her unmarked hands. Impa scans the chamber. No one else. Just the long table and neatly arranged chairs.

Impa crosses to a window. Orange sunlight spills in, strangely warm.

She looks out - they must be dozens of stories up, maybe near the top of the tower. The sky is awash in orange and pink, deep purple clouds on the horizon. All of Hyrule can be seen from here. Nabooru joins her. For a long moment, they watch. It may be the most beautiful sunset they've ever seen.

As they look out, their breath slowing. They stand wordlessly, feeling strangely weightless after what they just experienced. After a while Nabooru looks to Impa. A tear rolls down Impa's cheek, as she looks down at their hands.

"This won't be the last sunset you'll see, Impa. I'll make sure of it. Even if it is my last." Impa looks to her, tears now flowing more. She turns away.

"I don't deserve it." Impa almost chokes the sentence out.

The fact that she recedes closer to the window and stares at the sky betrays she wasn't talking about the sunset.

Nabooru looks at Impa for a while, then comes closer.

"Will you look at me?" she asks softly. Impa struggles to not break down, but turns to Nabooru, who leans even closer, looking up at her. Nabooru rests a hand on Impa's, like when they shared dinner. Their eyes meet and they stand silently for a while.

"May I?" Nabooru asks softly.

Impa blinks, but nods.

At the other end of the long hall, the iron door flies up and open, banging loudly and echoing through the chamber.

The echo dies slowly and the two turn, Nabooru drawing her sword and Impa swiftly takes out a bow, arrow drawn and point to the door.

There is silence, then they hear slow footsteps on the stone floor coming from beyond the door. The two of them tense and slowly step, silently, closer to the door.

As Impa and Nabooru make it halfway down the chamber, nowhere to hide, they see him emerge from the shadows: Ganondorf.

They freeze, but Ganondorf continues walking into the room, down a short flight of stairs at the end and faces them from maybe two yards down the table.

"Good evening. I'm glad you are well." Ganondorf says, strangely with no mirth in his voice - not a hint of irony.

Impa and Nabooru stare him down, keeping an eye on each other out of their peripheral vision. They walk slowly towards him.

"I do have food on the way. Although I assume you aren't hungry." Ganondorf says calmly.

In one motion, Nabooru quickly glances to Impa, catches her gaze and gestures with her head - she runs to him and Impa draws her arrow back, also moving forward.

Impa lets the arrow go. As Nabooru hangs right then lunges with her sword ahead, she sees the arrow pass through Ganondorf's chest - but just as her blade should connect, she feels no resistance and stumbles forward. Her blade goes right through him as though through air and the three of them are still.

Ganondorf's arm extends to the nearest chair, pulling it back. "An illusion?" Nabooru yells, looking around. "You coward!" she yells at the doorway, then looking at the ceiling, "Show yourself!"

Ganondorf sits in the chair and leans forward. "There is no illusion, it is me. You two should have a seat, you seem tired."

To emphasize his point, he knocks on the table in front of him.

Nabooru and Impa stare.

A figure silently arrives at the open door, clad in a tattered purple shawl and layers of cloth, a red orb glowing beneath the hood.

It descends the short stairs and somewhat clumsily veers to the opposite side of the table. Pendants with sigils, fine chains suspending vials and ornaments clatter as it walks with no sound to a chair and sits perpendicular to Ganondorf. As the figure sits, some kind of purple flames or smoke rises, seeming to seep from the cloth.

Impa draws a chair near her and sits.

Nabooru is enraged, she swipes at Ganondorf's head but her blade simply passes through. Again, she swipes, this time vertically chopping but her sword simply passes through Ganondorf and hits the chair he sits in, being lodged in it.

A strange,
buzzing,
crackling voice comes from the Poe-like being:
"Mind the furniture." It cackles, pendants and jewels shaking.

It points to Nabooru and she is rather weakly pushed backwards, not enough to fall. This makes her even more angry. "Nabooru-" Impa stands as Nabooru reaches for her sword, still stuck on the wood of the chair. The Poe's outstretched hand turns from pointing to opening its palm in a halting gesture and Nabooru is pushed backward further, a bit more forcefully.

"So it is you that did this all!?" She yells.

Impa looks to the Poe, then to Nabooru. Ganondorf calmly says, "He is just an advisor. Don't be rude."

Nabooru, infuriated but at a loss, yells "Give me my sword!"

The Poe seems to giggle, gesturing to Nabooru's sword which raises and slowly drifts to her, hilt towards her. She grabs it angrily but just stands and stares.

"It won't be of use here." It says, this time its voice a high pitched creaking sound barely recognizable as speech.

Impa again says to Nabooru, rather calmly, "Nabooru, let it be."

Nabooru looks at her, shocked, then at the Poe. "What are you doing? Are you controlling her!? What is going on!" she yells.

The Poe cackles again - "I can not control people too well, I'm afraid. Certainly not a Sheikah."

The hall is silent except for the flickering of the flames around the Poe creature and the torches on the walls. The sun has started going down and the room has dimmed.

"I doubt you want to spend all night here, so sit and lets talk." Ganondorf says.

Nabooru, almost gagging, wanders back down to the end of the room where her and Impa entered, looking at the ground. She paces for a while while Impa sits back down.

"Nabooru, please." Impa says softly. Nabooru finally stops pacing and looks at her, then back at Ganondorf and the Poe, who both ignore her - almost as if trying to be polite. Nabooru finally sits down in a chair at the farthest end of the table - not wanting to join them, but feeling nauseous. She looks at the others again, then just puts her head down in her arms. "What do you want?" She asks, head still down.

Ganondorf and the Poe look at eachother. Impa looks at Nabooru, concerned, then back to the two men - if the other is even a man.

"You didn't hurt her did you?" Impa asks. Ganondorf and the hooded figure shake their heads.

Nabooru kicks the leg of the table.

"Well, what do you have to say?" Impa asks Ganondorf.

Ganondorf begins, but stops. He stands up and walks to the window. "It is getting late, maybe we should talk another time. I am sure you are tired-"

Nabooru picks her head up "Fuck off!" she yells. "Green-faced son-of-a-leever's-asshole motherfucker!"

The Poe laughs at this.

"Nabooru-" Impa starts, but Nabooru stands.

"Why should I sit and listen!?" she redirects her anger to Ganondorf "I should have slit your throat when I had the chance - you'd have been better off dead! Fuck you!" Nabooru spits on the floor and flings her sheathed sword - not trying to hit Ganondorf, but out of anger that she can't use it. She turns and paces back to where she sat but just stands facing away, fists clenched.

"Cuckoo-shit bastard." she mutters. The Poe laughs again.

Ganondorf sighs. "I have no issue with you two, and I didn't work all these years just to be the King of a pile of rubble."

Ganondorf continues. "I'm sure you have gathered that the prophecy is broken." Ganondorf looks towards Impa briefly. He turns and walks back to sit at the head of the table.

"The curse of the royal family has been undone. Aside from the two of you and Ruto, the sages are sealed, as is the so-called Sacred Realm."

Impa looks blankly down at the table.

"I sealed them with the Master Sword, along with the Triforce." Ganondorf says. "As you likely know, the Temple of Time and sword are destroyed. As such, the Sacred Realm is sealed forever. With this, and with all other Sheikah dead, the curses will now slowly lift from this land. Soon, I will no longer be able to leave this prison. But I did what had to be done."

Impa continues to stare at the table in front of her.

Nabooru sits silently with her head down.

Ganondorf goes on. "There have been some unexpected consequences, however."

The Poe rattles.

Impa finally asks, "You can't be killed? That doesn't seem so bad for you."

Ganondorf pauses for a while.

"Nor can either of you." he says flatly.

At this, Nabooru and Impa both stare at Ganondorf, who is leaning forward with his hand on a raised fist.

After a bit of time, the Poe rattles again, as if coughing, and adjusts in its seat with another puff of purple smoke emanating from it.

A long time passes, the four of them sitting silently in the chamber. Nabooru's head in her hands, she at some point mutters to herself, "Bullshit." Impa simply looks out the window across from her. Ganondorf closes his eyes after some time, tired. Maybe even falling asleep.

The door Impa and Nabooru entered from gently slides open, quieter, although still the same jarring sound of metal on stone.

"Malon will come to meet your camp within a few days."

Ganondorf looks at the Poe then back at the two women.

"Go."

Nabooru storms out.

Impa gets up and follows her. Before she can look back the iron door has closed without a sound. They find themselves in the field, outside the drawbridge to the city.

Returning From Battle

It is night. Early still, as the sky isn't completely dark. The moon can't be seen, and Impa feels sparse drops of rain again. Impa and Nabooru's horses have been waiting patiently. Nabooru is kneeling on the grass, head down.

Impa takes a step forward but hesitates. Nabooru gets up quietly and grabs her horse's reign, beginning to walk. Impa quietly follows, her white horse just behind.

The rain has started to fall a bit more by the time they reach the bridge. Nabooru comforts her horse who seems afraid of the bridge. She pets his head for a while then walks to the other side and whistles, facing him, and he hesitates before walking over. Impa follows. Nabooru doesn't look at Impa, and Impa doesn't really try to look at her either.

The earth on the way to the camp is muddy, the night sky now dark. They head along the trees around the camp to a makeshift stable at the south end to get out of the rain. The camp is quiet, a few tents have lamps dimly glowing. Impa and Nabooru silently tend to their horses, Nabooru feeding hers, Impa stroking her horse's mane.

They both hear some movement, a flap a couple tents down opens a crack, then fully - warm light illuminates the raindrops and wet grass as Zarah walks over briskly, barefoot through the rain. As she reaches the stable she looks at Impa, seemingly not seeing Nabooru.

Zarah is holding a large glass jar and holds it out toward Impa - "Look! Before it rained, I found these! We'll hardly need lamp oil again if I can find out how to keep them alive!"

Impa notices what she first thought were just raindrops illuminated by the lamplight are fireflies in the jar. "You can hold it and look." The Zarah says, offering the jar to Impa.

Impa smiles and holds it up, looking at the fireflies. "Blow a bit through the top or shake it, some of them aren't always shining, I don't know why." Impa looks at her, then back at the jar. Zarah had replaced the metal lid with a coarse mesh. Impa blows through the mesh and several more fireflies light up and begin hovering in the jar.

The light is impressive, it does actually cast a warm yellow glow on Impa and the girl. "You might be onto something." Impa says, smiling at Zarah, who beams back. "I'll have to do more

research. I should be getting ready for sleep, but I wanted you to see." Impa laughs lightly and hands the jar back. Zarah takes it and turns, "Goodnight!" she says cheerfully as she walks quickly through the rain back to her tent, closing it behind her.

"Goodnight," Impa says, a bit late and too quiet.

Impa realizes she is alone in the stable. She takes a deep breath and exhales, looking up to the sky. The clouds only cover half, they seem to be slowly drifting to the Southwest, over Lake Hylia.

I wonder how long before they name it something else, Impa wonders. She begins walking slowly back towards the North of the camp.

A lamp glows in Nabooru's tent. Impa stops at Nabooru's tent without thinking. Through the rain and the vents in the canvas Impa can smell myrrh. She hesitates, but rings the bell by the tent flap once.

Impa waits for a few seconds, before leaning toward the canvas wall and quietly says "You don't have to let me in, I just want to know you're in there." After a pause almost long enough that Impa would start to worry, Nabooru's muffled voice returns: "I am. Goodnight."

Despite everything that happened today, this hurt the most. Faintly, Impa had hoped Nabooru would at least come to the door. Really, she had hoped to be invited in. In honesty, she wanted to fall asleep in Nabooru's tent again. Knowing she is lingering too long, and pushing it a bit too far, she can't help it, asking, "Will you be alright tonight?"

Just the sound of raindrops on the tents. "Nabooru-" Impa says, almost wincing at herself for not leaving it be. Nabooru, a bit louder says "Goodnight, Impa."

Impa turns and makes it a few steps before stopping.

She just can't. She stands there helplessly. She wants so badly to turn back. To ask one more time. The answer will be the same, though. She begins to tear up.

She twitches. Her stomach growls.

Impa crosses the mud around the fire pit and opens her tent, sitting down on her cot across from the opening without closing the tent or even taking her boots off. She grabs her matchbox

from the chest by her bed, lighting a lamp, her hands shaking a little.

She sets the lamp on the chest and takes off her boots, tossing them toward the entrance, angry with herself for having tracked in mud on the plain canvas floor. Nabooru's tent had a carpet.

At least it isn't cold or windy, she thinks.

Impa stands in the corner across from her bed and undresses, grabbing a towel and drying herself off before kneeling to pull her box of clothes from under the cot. She puts on underwear and pulls a nightdress over herself and stands up, walking past the open doorway to get the large flask she keeps in her tent but freezes up in front of the open tent door.

On the chest to the right of the entrance is a tray with a plate with a metal cover. Next to the plate, a napkin, fork and a small ceramic vessel. Impa kneels and sets aside the cover of the plate, her stomach growling again. A large bowl of rice, still steaming a bit, jerky, a cup of dried berries, two rather large baklava. Her vision is blotted by tears welling up. The rain has almost stopped.

Impa picks up the tray, setting it in front of her as she sits cross-legged on the bed. She picks up the ceramic vessel, opening it through tears.

As she opens it, a scent drifts out and she sees several cones of incense. Lavender and rose, from Nabooru.

Act 2 Open

Malon Meets Impa

Impa wakes to the sound of the bell at her tent door. It has been a few days since they returned, and Impa hasn't seen or talked to Nabooru, who has seemed to avoid her. Impa has let it be, though, and mostly spent the days with Dreza and Zarah improving the camp; sometimes going out on horseback to wander the southern field.

Groggy, Impa gets up and first pulls the cord that opens the slats along the tent's frame and top of the walls – she had forgotten to last night and it seems like a hot day already.

Still in her nightgown, she unhooks and pulls open the tent door. “Good morning Zarah” Impa tries not to grumble. A bit too loud for her, Zarah says “There's a lady looking for you! Should I tell her to come back some other time?”

Impa snaps awake - “Oh no, don't say that! Tell her I'll be right out. If we have any tea, coffee, rice, maybe baklava, get her some.” Before Zarah can respond, Impa hurriedly closes the door and gets dressed.

She emerges after a bit and sees Malon sitting at one of now four large tables under the pavilion.

As Impa approaches, two young Gerudo girls in the pavilion leave, continuing whatever they were talking about and laughing somewhat obnoxiously. Impa sits across from Malon, who says “So nice to meet you, Impa!” – Malon's loud, cheerful voice throws Impa off and she simply nods and bows slightly.

“Seems like it is going to be hot as Death Mountain Crater today. It must be nice to live right next to the river.” She says, gesturing to the river beyond the fence behind her. “Will the Gerudo leader be joining us?”

“Ah, well -” Impa pauses for a bit, realizing it is probably past noon. “Her name is Nabooru. She is probably out hunting Pea Hat or fishing.”

Malon casts a look, still smiling, but her eyes show an almost imperceptible annoyance. “I see.” She says flatly.

“Well -” Malon starts, but looks behind Impa, who turns just in time to see Zarah, carrying a large tray, a large jug in each hand, Zarah drops the tray. Impa sighs “Excuse me -” she says, getting up and almost running to the girl. “Zarah-” the girl had set down the jugs to pick up the tray – Impa grabs the jugs and quickly

goes to her tent to get two cups.

Impa heads back to the table with Malon, who seems to have ignored the situation.

Impa sets down everything at once. She uncorks one of the jugs and pours a cup, seeing it is coffee, placing the other cup close to Malon.

"Sorry. We do have coffee, and-" she uncorks the other and smells it. "Soap." she says flatly to herself.

Malon is quiet for a moment, then laughs loudly. Impa winces and forces herself to laugh.

"I'll have Zarah get you some water if you don't want coffee-" Impa stares, but Malon is holding up a canteen. "I brought my own water." She says, smiling.

"Ah." Impa says, awkwardly shifting and sipping some thankfully cold coffee. Setting it down and watching Malon look off into the distance, Impa folds her hands, tapping a bit nervously.

Zarah walks up from behind Impa, who jumps a little. The girl sets between the two women a full tray of freshly baked baklava.

"Oh my!" Malon says. "Thank you so much, dear!" Zarah simply bows slightly and begins to turn away.

"Zarah," Impa says, "Could you bring some water?" Impa hands the jug of soap to her. Zarah rather dramatically rolls her eyes and heads back to the kitchen tent further in the camp.

"Well," Impa says to Malon, "it's good to finally meet you."

Malon doesn't say anything. She just stares off up the river almost as though she didn't hear.

"I've heard about you for years but never made it out to Lon Lon." Impa offers. Malon doesn't respond for a bit, but her demeanor darkens just a little. "Well", Malon says, "a lot has been happening. For a long time."

Impa doesn't know what to say. Realizing she is gripping her cup tightly, her fingernails hurting, Impa quickly pulls her hand away as if the cup were boiling hot. She looks at Malon, who is facing away but looks at Impa from the corner of her eyes. Her

eyes are so green – Impa thinks. Are they glowing?

“Well, how are things at the ranch?” Impa asks.

Malon looks back toward Lon Lon. “Well, it is much more than just a ranch now.” she says. Impa waits for her to say more, but she doesn’t.

“Are people adjusting well?” Impa asks.

“Oh, yes.” Malon replies shortly, drinking from her canteen.

Impa hears some clattering from the kitchen. Her restlessness grows, she starts tapping her finger again.

“It’s such a nice day.” Malon says.

Zarah returns again, dropping a jug down rather loudly next to Impa, who again jumps a little. Before she can say anything, the girl is walking away.

Impa uncorks the jug of water, pours a cup and drinks almost all of it. Setting it down, she realizes the other cup has the coffee she poured for herself.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I meant this to be your cup, I can ask Zarah to bring another-” as she looks up, Malon is looking at her.

“I brought my own water.” Malon says with a smile.

Impa looks down at her cup.

A bit of a breeze has picked up.

Impa sips water.

The two sit silently for a while. “Did you have anything specific you wanted to talk about?” she asks.

Malon furrows her brow – “Do you want me to leave?” she asks.

“Well, no, I just... I figured you might have some ideas you wanted to talk about.” Impa says.

Malon looks confused. “Ideas about what?”

“I’m sorry.” Impa says.

Malon looks toward the river again. "D'you all swim down here?" Malon asks. Impa feels strange. She stands up, replying. "Well, I guess I haven't yet."

Malon digs in the bag next to her. "I'd swim every day if I were so close to the river." she pulls out a metal cup, reaching toward the jug of coffee. "Maybe I'll come join you all for a swim some time, what do you think?"

Impa watches Malon pour herself coffee. Impa doesn't say anything for a while, eventually saying, "I guess, sure."

Malon looks up from her cup and smiles again.

"Wouldn't that be nice. Just us girls! Maybe some fish too I suppose." she giggles. Impa lets out a forced laugh that is a bit too loud, almost choking on her water - or was it tea? Or coffee?

Leaning over to pour herself some water, she says, "To be honest with you, Zarah woke me up just after you got here."

Malon turns to face Impa, looking concerned. "Oh," she says lightly, "Did you sleep alright?"

"I suppose I slept long enough, but it was so hot. I forgot to let a breeze in." Impa replies.

"Ah, I see." Malon says softly. "Sweaty nights are just terrible. Good thing you live right next to the river though."

Impa sits back down. She looks to Malon, who sips coffee. Setting down her cup, she digs in her bag again. Impa breathes deeply and takes another sip of her water, tapping her foot.

"I really do hope everyone is alright at Lon Lon." Impa says. "I may not have been around much the past few years but, Kakariko was my hometown and..." she trails off.

Malon picks up one of the baklava with a purple handkerchief and takes a bite. "Oh these are just delicious! Do you mind if I take a few home with me?"

Impa stares at her. "Sure, of course."

Malon takes another handkerchief from her bag and wraps a few baklava in it, putting it back in her bag.

"Have you had lemonade? We just found someone who gives

us a great deal on lemons." Malon asks.

Impa pauses – this girl is so strange.

"I had it a few times as a child, yeah." she says. The two sit in silence again, Malon finishes the baklava and shakes the crumbs from handkerchief.

"Well, I think I'll head out." Malon finally says. "I do want to see how the new trail is going." She wipes her metal cup with a purple handkerchief and stows it in her bag.

Looking to Impa and seeing her questioning look, Malon says "Since the village..." she pauses.

"With the old gate over there now barred up, the Goron and Moblin are building a new trail to Death Mountain of course. I suppose I should let you know they will be using bomb flowers, so don't be worried if you hear explosions up the way. They should be before dinnertime, though."

Malon stands up, looking north. The gate to Kakariko a ways up is indeed boarded up now. Further north, just visible, must be Goron and Moblin construction.

"Anyway, it was real nice to meet you, Impa." Malon says, not turning around or looking at her, but starting to walk out of the pavilion.

"Nice to meet you too." Impa says a bit quietly.

Malon turns and bows rather dramatically, "I truly hope it was!"

"I'd love to visit more. Especially to go swimming! I know that some folks don't like you but I think you're a sweetheart."

Impa looks at Malon, feeling a bit condescended by the girl who must be nearly a decade her junior but says instinctively "Well, thank you. You're welcome any time." Realizing it isn't really her place to decide Impa adds, "Well, to see me anyway. Hopefully next time Nabooru will be around."

Malon nods and bows again slightly. "Well, enjoy your day then, Impa." she says, turning and heading to her horse across from the old Kakariko gate. She grabs the reigns and walks her horse past the gate. "Thanks." Impa says, too quiet for Malon to hear.

Impa hears Zarah's familiar almost-skipping gait and turns around to see her heading over. She stretches, rolling her head and shoulders as Zarah steps in front of her.

"Who was that lady?"

Impa breathes deeply. "I'll tell you some other time. I need to go back to bed." Zarah frowns. "I wanna go to the Lake today though! You said we would!"

"I didn't sleep well. We have all day, I just need a bit more sleep. You should let the rest of the camp know, the Goron and Moblin are building a new trail up North, they'll be using bomb flowers so it might be loud. Hopefully I can get some more sleep through it."

Zarah responds with a sigh - "Okayyyy. "

Impa heads back to her tent. Hopefully its cooled down a bit in there with the breeze, she thinks as she opens her door and heads in, finding it did at least a little and sealing the tent.

She does hear an explosion ring out from Death Mountain, but it doesn't reach the camp as loudly as Impa expected, probably coming from the North side of the mountain, muffled a bit by the trees which grow more on that side.

Malon Oversees Goron-Moblin Cooperation

Several Goron stand on ledge looking over a rickety fence on Death Mountain, a few Moblin behind them. Down the hill, three Moblin, in a fast motion push massive shovels quickly and effortlessly, plowing the dirt off the edge of another newly formed section of a nearly-finished switchback trail. Two Goron are heading down dragging a sled of bomb flowers.

Malon sits fanning herself, sitting under an umbrella in front of a massive Moblin shanty a ways out from the foot of the mountain slope which has been cleared of trees, likely used to built the shanty. She sits alone, having been here for a while watching the progress on the trail.

She gets up, walking past the shanty. A few Goron and Moblin sit on the ground under a lean-to around the corner of the shanty. One Moblin stands above a fire watching a Dodongo grilling above it on a metal grate. The two sitting Moblin grunt occasionally, the three Goron sit eating quartz pellets from a large bag in front of them.

Malon looks south to the horizon, raising her hand to measure - the sun will begin setting in an hour or so. She walks to the group behind the shanty, twirling her umbrella. "It looks lovely, boys!" The two Moblin look up briefly but look back to the fire.

Malon looks over to the fire as she hears a wet pop. She looks as of blood rather loudly bubbles from the socket of the upside down Dodongo's eye. She glances to the two Goron - "Just lovely." she says.

The Goron look at her. The older one speaks - "I do worry the kids will go too wild rolling down it."

"Ah well, maybe you can make another one just for fun!" Malon says. "It does look like your Dodongo issue is under control." She waves to the fire.

The Goron replies thoughtfully "That is true. Bomb flowers have been growing all over the old trail now too."

Malon flatly says "Glad to hear."

She turns to the trail once more, just as she does another series of explosions ring out - she doesn't flinch, despite even the Goron jumping a bit at it. "I'll be heading back now, dears." She

says warmly, although her eyes stare rather coldly at the Moblin clearing more debris. "It looks like just a few more blasts and you'll be done." The Goron simply says, "Aye, ma'am."

Malon turns and walks back to her horse. She climbs on and tugs the reins, turning southeast and twirling the umbrella a bit pensively.

Glancing south to the camp, she can just make out a Gerudo with a long, red, high ponytail leaving the pavilion and heading further into the camp.

Malon lightly tugs the rein and her horse slowly starts heading toward the bridge across the river, crossing it, she stares back at the mountain as her horse saunters them back to Lon Lon.

Impa and Zarah Prepare

Impa wakes up, aching a bit. The breeze through the tent slats don't help much and it is humid. Her sheet clings to her as she grabs her flask from the chest that is her nightstand.

She sits up and drinks water, she can hear the Gerudo girls from earlier in the cafeteria giggling between quiet talking. Standing on her toes to look out one of the open slats – seeing the girls in the cafeteria at one table, Zarah alone and focusing on something at another table.

Impa can tell from the shadows she slept longer than she wanted to, but they still have time to go to Lake Hylia for just a short while before the sun starts to set. Impa turns and stands for a while. Eventually, she walks out to meet Zarah at the table. She does look back toward Nabooru's tent, a yellow sash above the door indicating she is out.

Zarah is practicing tying knots. “Well, you ready?” Impa asks. Zarah looks up “Ah, yeah – finally you’re up! I thought we wouldn’t get to go.”

Impa begins to defend herself but just says “Well, let's get going then.” gesturing with her head toward the south of the camp. “Yeah! Alright!” Zarah tosses her things into an oversized, rather shapeless canvas bag that seems filled with other things, standing and slinging the apparently heavy bag over her shoulder. “Are you bringing all that?” Impa asks.

“Well, yeah.” Zarah says, already walking down the camp toward the stables. Impa walks quickly and catches up, saying “It seems a bit unweildy.”

Zarah hoists the bag further up her shoulder - “Un-what?” Impa sighs. “It seems heavy, are you sure you need all that?” Zarah replies as the two start walking “Well idunno, you never know, I want to be prepared. What if I get bored? Or we get attacked by Wolfos?”

Impa laughs a bit. “There aren’t any wolfos on the way, or at the Lake. We probably can’t stay for very long.”

Zarah groans “I wanna stay, we could even camp out! I bet there are keese there at night!”

“We’ve got all the time in the world. We can go back again.” They approach the stable that have been built up more sturdily. Zarah comes over and hands Impa the bag. It isn’t that heavy, but

awkward. "What do you even have in here?"

Zarah responds cheerily - "There is rope, some frames and seives, a couple fishing rods, a bag of jerky and nuts, some pastels, my chisel set, a few extra cups in case we run into anyone thirsty, a blanket, towels in case we want to swim-" Impa waves her hand, "Okay, okay, well-" Impa sets the bag down and opens it, Zarah looks a bit disappointed.

"Let's leave the seives and frames, alright? We won't need them until we get back anyway." Zarah shrugs, looking a bit defeated.

Impa takes them out and hands them to Zarah. "Go put those away, I'll sling the bags and be ready to go when you get back." Zarah grabs them awkwardly and heads back into the camp. Impa slings and ties the bag and guides her horse out of the stable out the south gate toward a bridge the Gerudo use.

Impa drinks from her flask, realizing it is almost empty and she didn't pack an extra. She pets her horse and turns to head back to her tent, Zarah is on her way back. "I need to grab another flask and some more water, I'll be right back." Impa says, Zarah stops, putting her hands on her hips and watching Impa quickly walk past "Okay well hurry up!" she says. "Hey, watch your tone." Impa says over her shoulder, to which Zarah lets out a "Hmph!"

Impa gets to her tent, grabbing her spare flask. She seals the door and heads down a few tents along the fence. Entering the kitchen ramada, she approaches the water barrels and starts to fill a flask.

Topping off the first flask and corking it, she notices the seam of the sleeve's purple and gold fabric is fraying and separating. She stares a bit at the triforme pattern embroidered into the gold strips of fabric that border the purple body of the fabric panels.

She stares at it for a while before eventually and tearing the sleeve off - setting it on the counter and grabbing the other flask, filling it then heading back to the stable, where she sees Dreza tending to a horse.

Impa just now realizes Dreza was the woman she saw Nabooru walking up the river with fishing rods the other day - the only time Impa had seen Nabooru the past few days, and the only other person she had seen her with.

She watches Dreza hang a rope from a hook on the stable - the rope has pea-hat scales hanging on it, each scale with a hole that holds it on the rope like an oversized necklace.

"Did you just get back from hunting?" Impa asks. Dreza looks at her and tilts her head a bit, she doesn't make eye contact but looks off thoughtfully. "Yeah." she says.

Impa asks, "How did it go?" Dreza rubs her chin, seemingly thinking for a bit, then says "Pretty good." She looks at Impa and asks "What about you? Are you leaving?"

"Zarah really wants to go to Lake Hylia. She said she got permission so, we are going to go just for a short trip. I thought we'd gather some lavender and I'd teach her to make soaps."

"Oh, that's great, Zarah does like you." Dreza smiles. "By the way." she adds, "She doesn't need to ask permission, she probably just wanted to make you feel comfortable."

Impa tilts her head a bit. Dreza goes on "She would already be doing her Rite of Travel, but we don't have enough horses for all the girls. She's very good at fighting, she definitely can handle herself."

Impa is surprised. "Good at fighting? She's so young." Dreza laughs. "She's very good, probably the best fighter we have of any age."

Impa starts, "She always seemed a bit clumsy-" from behind Impa, Zarah chimes in "So I drop a tray once and now I'm a klutz!" Impa laughs a bit and Dreza smiles.

"I'm going to make lunch. Did you pack something?" Dreza asks.

Zarah starts but Impa answers "She's packed enough for a few days." Dreza turns and starts to walk to the kitchen, saying "Well, have fun then."

Zarah has already started walking to Impa's horse. Impa joins her and helps her up. The two cross the south bridge and head toward Lake Hylia.

Zarah and Impa Visit the Lake

Impa and Zarah pass through the gate into the vast clearing, the lake's surface not quite visible. Zarah, excitedly says "Look! Tektites!" Impa looks as a few of them bounce aimlessly some distance North. "Let's leave them alone." She says, veering away. Zarah whines a bit "I love them though! They're so cute! One of these days I'm going to learn how to ride them." Impa glances back, raising her eyebrows a bit - knowing her, she probably will, Impa thinks.

As they pass over a small incline before the slow slope down to the lake's shore, Impa sees the lake's water has receded a couple yards, which she finds strange, but they make their way down and south. "Who lives there?" Zarah points to the house in front of the old bridge. Impa remembers the scientist that worked for the royal family, unsure if he still lives there. "Don't be rude, Zarah. It's probably someone that doesn't want to be bothered."

Approaching the scarecrow, Impa stops and hops down. She puts her hand out to Zarah, who jumps down on her own, running over to the scarecrow. "We need to make these for outside the camp!" She says, investigating it. A ways down the lake, she sees the fisherman looking out from his door and waves to him. He waves back but goes back inside.

Impa unties and hoists down the bags. "Alright Zarah, the sun is already almost setting so we better get what we came here for." Zarah walks back over, taking a small empty bag from the larger one. "Yeah, yeah. You make this seem like a chore, you know?" Impa pauses and chokes up a little as Zarah wanders toward the shore. "The water doesn't look as pretty as I thought it would anyway." Impa watches Zarah pick up a rock, tossing it into the mud left behind by the receding water. It lands with a plop and slowly sinks a bit. "Yuck!" Zarah says.

Impa takes a deep breath and walks behind Zarah, the two heading toward a patch of Lavender growing past a small white fence. "Does someone take care of these plants?" Zarah asks. Impa never thought about it. It was so long ago that she used to come here, she vaguely remembers being told by the scientist that anyone was free to fish or take whatever they wanted. "I think someone does, yeah." She says, watching the lavender blow in the gentle wind.

Zarah talks as she gathers some boughs. "Well, I wouldn't swim in it but, it is SO much cooler down here by the lake." Impa is staring off toward the island in the middle of the lake. The bridges leading to it have fallen into disrepair. Zarah turns

around, about to ask about the island but pauses, instead asking a bit quietly: "Are you okay?"

Impa doesn't respond. She looks down into the lake. The water is still and blue, but has just a bit of a green hue to it. At the edge of the lake, leading up to the muddy shore, striking green algae blooms. "I'm alright. Did you find the sage?" She says, watching the water just barely lapping the mud. "No," Zarah says, "But I think that's it up the ridge." Impa hears Zarah start walking up behind her.

Impa looks to the other ends of the lake and across it. Further parts of the shore have shoots of some plants growing from the water, to the North she thinks she sees lily pads. "Hey, are you gonna help out?" Zarah yells back. Impa snaps out of it, "I'm coming" she says, walking up to meet Zarah towards the top of the hill where the forest starts.

Impa and Zarah grab some boughs of sage, and Impa walks over to Zarah. Zarah looks up at her and Impa, leaning over the girl, points to the forest. "Those trees are Juniper. Have you seen them before?" Zarah shakes her head. "What's so special about them?" she asks, walking up to one of the trees.

"Oh!" Zarah exclaims "This bark is so weird! And there's gunk coming out of it!" Impa smiles a bit and walks up to join her. Zarah looks up at the branches, pulling at one. "Gross, they're sticky!" Impa laughs, then asks "You brought soap right?" - "Yeah, oh what are these weird balls?" Impa comes closer and takes out a serrated blade from her belt, reaching up to saw one of the branches. "They're berries." She says. "They're hard as rocks though!" Zarah says. "Well, they're still berries." Impa says, looking to Zarah. "I'll cut down some branches, can you go get another bag?" Zarah nods and heads back toward Impa's horse and the scarecrow, then trudges back up with an empty canvas bag.

Zarah holds the bag open and Impa puts some branches in it. "These have to dry for a couple weeks, maybe a month." Impa says, Zarah responds: "What!? It better be really good, that's forever!" Impa pauses a bit. "It's not forever." She says.

Zarah closes the bag and ties it, turning to go back down the slope. Impa stands there quietly looking at the lavender blowing in the breeze. She breathes deeply, watching Zarah.

The girl drops the bag by the scarecrow and walks toward the muddy shore. Impa watches her pick up another rock, this one a

lot larger.

Zarah throws it into the water this time, the algae just barely moves and almost instantly closes around the hole, muffling the sound to a dull thud - barely a splash. Zarah laughs, picking up another rock and yelling back "Impa did you hear that!?" She throws another which does the same and she laughs again.

Impa just stands for a while. Eventually, she walks down to the scarecrow. Zarah had started to try to walk into the mud but quickly thought better of it. The girl looks back at Impa. "You wanna go home, huh?" Impa just nods. Expecting protest, Zarah instead quietly walks back to her and her horse.

"I'm sorry I said the water was ugly." Zarah says. Impa tears up at this and puts her hand over her eyes. "I'm sorry, Impa." Zarah says quietly. "It's okay," Impa says, "It's not you I just..." her voice cracks.

"You miss Nabooru?" Zarah asks.

Impa is stunned. "How did you know that?" she asks, looking at the girl. Zarah just shrugs.

"We should head back soon. My curfew." the girl says. Impa smiles a bit - she doesn't know Impa knows she doesn't have one.

"You're right, yeah." Impa says, wiping her tears. She picks up one of the bags and starts slinging it over her horse, Zarah gets the other bags ready.

"You'll talk soon, Impa." Zarah says. Impa nods, grabbing another bag and hoisting it up.

Impa pauses, wiping a tear. "Thank you, Zarah." Zarah smiles and hands her the last bag. Impa tosses it over her horse. Zarah climbs up on her own. Impa stares at the girl who smiles and says "Let's go, then!" Impa shakes her head. She climbs on and pats her horse, who is already turning to head out.

"Wait, who is that?" Zarah says, pointing to the lab building.

Impa looks. There is a horse behind the building - she can tell, with a saddle and gear. No owner around. Impa stares for a while. "I guess we can take a look." she says, and they set out toward it.

Approaching, Impa feels strange. They slow down near the building, and Impa glances at it up close now. The windows are

broken, and she notices the door is ajar. She feels uneasy, but as she slows to a halt by the building, Zarah jumps off.

"She's so pretty!" Zarah whispers excitedly. Impa glances at the girl but is distracted by the building's disrepair. She doesn't know why it concerns her so much.

Impa gets down too, watching Zarah inch slowly along the building. "Here, girl. Where's your owner?" she calls to the horse softly. It is several yards away, not responding, just grazing it looks like.

Impa is transfixed by the building, deciding to investigate. "Zarah, do you see anyone?" Impa asks. "No, not out here. Is anyone home in there?" Zarah asks, although she is now past the building and seemingly didn't notice the broken windows. "I'm not sure, I'm going to check. You sure nobody is out here?" Impa asks again, Zarah says "Nope."

"I'm gonna check the building, call for me if you see anyone okay?"

"OK I will. I think the horse might be abandoned. She looks sad." Zarah says.

Impa moves around the corner and heads to the door, which is cracked open. She slowly pushes it open further, then stops. She knocks on it, but doesn't expect a response. None comes. She steps inside, looking around. The building is just a single room. Empty shelves line the walls, an empty table and chair sit in front of a recessed part of the floor toward the back. Impa slowly walks to the back of the room, turning her head and seeing nothing and no one.

As she approaches, she sees that the recessed part of the floor is a deep hole - along the back wall, a meter with no measurement numbers extends down. Reaching the edge of the cavity and looking down, it is too dark to see the bottom. For some reason, she walks over to the window, grabbing a shard of glass from the floor and returns, dropping it down.

It falls some way down, then shatters at the bottom. "Hey, Impa!" she hears Zarah call from outside, "Come look!"

She stares down the hole in the floor for a bit more, then turns and leaves the building.

Turning the corner, she asks "Is everything okay?" but, seeing

Zarah petting the horse she just begins walking over.

Approaching Zarah and the horse, the girl says again, "Her owner's gone." Impa simply says "Huh."

Impa and the girl seem to look at the horse as if expecting her to say something. She seems calm and stoic, if not appreciative of Zarah's company. Impa steps over and hesitates before lifting the back of the saddle. Under it, she reads "Property of Ingo."

Impa looks at Zarah, then back at the saddle. "You think you can ride her on your own?"

Zarah looks back, wide eyed. After a bit she says "Yeah, definitely! Are we going to bring her with?!"

Impa smiles at her, "You've ridden before, right?" Zarah nods. "Alright, well. I think we can bring her with us. Its probably better, maybe her owner will come looking." Impa says, knowing he won't.

Zarah pets the horse again, "What do you think, girl?" she seemed to watch Impa and Zarah talk. The horse exhales and almost seems to bow. Zarah walks over and climbs up, Impa watches, holding her arms out just in case but the girl mounts expertly and the horse remains calm.

Sitting and leaning forward to pet the horse and grab the reigns, Zarah says "Come on, girl." and the horse starts to turn around from facing the lake to the field. Impa realizes Zarah knows what she is doing. "Alright. I guess lets go before it gets late." Impa says, Zarah nods as she returns to her own horse, mounting and joining Zarah and the new old horse, who have already slowly started walking toward the gate.

They pass through the outer gate, clouds stretching across the field beginning to turn from yellow to purple. Riding quietly to the east, both pick up the pace a bit.

Malon Surprises Anju

Sitting at a desk in a cramped hut on the west end of Lon Lon, Anju leans over several books, writing on some paper. Guay call angrily in the evening sky, beyond flapping curtains of a small window facing west behind her. Her desk and chair are old and regal, out of place in the quickly-constructed, single-room shelter. She hears a knock at the door, echoing the faint hammering of construction to the east.

Sighing and getting up, she cracks the door open. Malon is standing there, initially looking very dire but quickly changing to a brighter demeanor. "Hello, Anju! Are you busy?" Anju pauses skeptically - every other time she has spoken to Malon she had to remind the girl of her name. "Honestly, I am very busy, but-" Anju says, Malon's eyes darken but she maintains a smile. Anju sighs lightly. "I have some time, what is it?"

"Perfect!" Malon almost yells. "I wanted to invite you for dinner!" the girl beams, Anju feels almost panicked but tries to remain polite. She simply says "Oh." - This young girl before Anju, in all likelihood, either had someone, or had herself killed Ingo just over a week ago. Anju wracks her brain for excuses, but Malon, again, loudly and somewhat commandingly says "Well, come on then, Talon and I would love you to join, we just finished cooking!"

Anju stares at the girl, who smiles at her. Malon's green eyes seem to glow. "What, you don't think I plan to do to you what I did to Ingo, do you?" Anju freezes, stunned.

Malon grins, "Ingo was a terrible, wicked man. You, Anju, are a smart and powerful woman. I'd love to get to know you more." Malon bows and looks up at Anju, who looks terrified, but eventually breathes deeply and says "Let me freshen up, I'll be out to join you in just a moment." Malon bows even more deeply then stands back up, running her hands through her hair coyly. "I'll wait here then." she says. Anju nods and closes the door.

Anju simply stands for a while, breathing deeply with her eyes closed, trying to stop her mind from racing. After a few moments, she hears Malon speak to someone outside - "Well hello there, sir. I was here to invite your wife to dinner, would you like to join?".

Anju's hears her husband grumble something and shortly after, the door opens. Anju turns to him, but he simply shuts the door and makes his way through the narrow space between the bed, stacked chests and dresser and flops down on the bed. With an audible crack of his back, lifting his arms, closing his hands

behind his head without saying anything, he closes his eyes without a word.

Anju simply walks to the door, taking one long, deep breath in, holding it, exhaling. She leaves the shed and, now silent, Malon leads a bit ahead and the two walk to the farmhouse past a dozen or so more huts, some larger, some with villagers sitting outside or wandering in or out of them. None of them look at Anju or Malon, but not out of fear, they are just going about whatever routines they've established here.

Malon and Anju stop at the gate between the farmhouse and barn. Malon brandishes a ring of keys, unlocking the gate and pushing it open, gesturing to Anju, "After you, Anju." Malon says with a smile. Anju does a small bow and walks toward the farmhouse door. As Malon closes and locks the gate, Anju steals a glance down the path to the field, seeing that another gate with very tall iron and wood doors has been built, a tall fence also made of wood reinforced by metal enclosing the tree line and wrapping through them around the ranch out of sight.

Turning back, Malon is looking down the path as well. "We just finished having it built." Malon says, turning and walking to the door. Anju looks back to the gate between the house and barn. Malon sees her looking and says, "We will be building another gate at the east end, so people can come and go freely." Malon opens the door, beckoning to Anju, "Let's eat, I'm starving." Malon smiles. Anju walks over and heads in, Malon follows, closing the door behind them.

Dinner At Malon's Home

To the left in the large open room of the farmhouse, two men sit at a large table in front of a kitchenette. Anju looks at Malon, who says, "You know Talon. This is his-" Malon pauses, just barely, "friend. Have you met Anju, Baron?" the man looks over - he is similar in build to Talon, although cleanly shaved and a fuller head of hair - aside from that, the two could almost be brothers. "I have seen her around, good evening." he says, although doesn't make eye contact.

Talon and Anju exchange a look and wave to each other with a smile. "Glad to have you, Anju." Talon says warmly. Malon says, heading to the kitchenette, "You can sit anywhere, I have to grab the dishes."

Anju pulls up a chair closest to and diagonal from Talon, across from Baron, who is trimming his fingernails. "We haven't talked in a while, Talon. You've been working like there's a deadline looming." Talon smiles his usual bashful smile, saying "Well, there kind of is."

Malon, getting plates from the cupboard dryly says without looking over, "Not kind of." to which Talon's smile fades a bit, although not entirely. "There is, there is." he says. Anju nods, not prying. She has calmed down seeing Talon in good spirits.

Anju looks to him, saying "I'm sure you know how thankful everyone is, but I should thank you personally-" hearing Malon clear her throat rather loudly, she adds "You and Malon have been too kind." Talon just smiles. Malon says from the kitchen "Just kind enough, I think."

Talon chuckles a bit, he says "I didn't ever expect anything like this, but it seems to be working alright." Anju nods. She can tell Talon likely has drunk a bit, although he isn't very drunk.

Malon brings two rather massive plates to the table, setting one in front of Talon and Baron each. The steak, beans and vegetables steam and Anju feels her stomach growl. Baron's plate has no steak, instead rice. Malon returns to the kitchen, calling back "Tea or water, each of you?" Baron, filing his nails, says "Water." Talon doesn't say anything but gestures to Anju, who asks "Hot tea?" looking to Malon, who is serving another plate and replies "Cold." Anju says "Tea then, thank you so much." to which Malon visibly shrugs.

After a short time, Malon comes to the table with three tall glasses, giving water to Baron and Talon, handing the tea to Talon

who sets it by Anju. Malon turns back, grabbing two plates from the kitchen, setting one by Anju and taking the last to the end of the table rather far across from Talon. Baron and Talon had started eating. Malon does as well, and so Anju begins too.

The four of them eat without any words, except Baron asking Anju to pass the salt. The food is delicious, and they eat while, in the loft above, cuckoos occasionally hop and coo. After finishing, Anju compliments Malon "You are an amazing cook." Malon, having stood up and already placed her plate in the sink, ignores the compliment but grabs Talon's empty plate as he stands up. "Anju, Baron, are you finished?" Baron gets up, his plate empty, saying shortly "Yes." and walking around the table. Anju offers her plate, empty except a slice of buttered bread. Malon stacks it on Baron's and returns to the kitchen.

Talon stretches and asks Baron, who is now opening a door to the room near the front door below the stairs "Are you tired?" Baron waves at him and quietly says "No." while walking into the room, leaving the door open. Talon walks toward the door turning back to Anju and smiling with a wave. "Sorry to not stay," he pauses a bit, "Baron and I are tired." Anju says "Good to see you, Talon." Talon replies from the doorway "same to you," as he gently closes the door.

Malon, having quickly washed the dishes already, asks Anju "Do you want any more tea?" Anju says "Yes," and Malon brings the pitcher to the table, sitting across from Anju. Anju pours herself a glass.

"Nothing to be nervous about." Malon says flatly, the sentence jarring Anju. "I appreciate it, Malon." she says. Malon sips water.

For a while, there is only the sound of cuckoos milling about in the loft. The two sit quietly drinking for some time before Malon looks at Anju.

"We should talk a bit more upstairs." Anju looks at the girl. She must only be in her early twenties, but acts so strange. Malon stands up and walks toward the stairs. Anju hesitates, but stands. She pauses again, but walks over to Malon, who turns and walks up the stairs. Anju follows quietly. Malon furnishes the large key ring and unlocks the door at the top of the stairs, walking in. Anju turns the corner and follows.

Malon Confides in Anju

The room is massive. Bookshelves line the walls. To the left of the door, a drafting table holds a map of the land and a few notes pinned to it. Against the back wall, cornering in the bed, a large table is covered in books, maps and what look like blueprints. Ahead, lit by the sunset light through the windows to the south and lingering daylight to the west, four large chairs face a short, dark table, two facing the door, the other two mirroring them across the table.

Malon makes her way to the chair across the table nearest a window on the west wall. Anju joins, sitting slowly in a chair diagonally across from Malon. "Is this your room?" Anju asks, unable to hide awe in her voice. Malon pours herself water from a pitcher on the table, saying "Yes, it is a bit of a mess right now though." Anju simply stares at the girl, but her eye is quickly drawn to flickering purple on the shelf behind Malon.

Anju's eyes widen as she sees, along with the books and decorative silverware, kettles and some apparently Gerudo vases and Zora stone-carved sculptures, two rows spread across two of the adjoining bookshelves display bottles of various colors of glowing Poe Souls.

"Do you like my collection?" Malon asks. Anju jumps a bit and looks to the girl, who is lighting a candle. Anju is stunned. Forgetting she was holding a glass of water, condensation drips down her hand in the rather humid room. Malon sets the candle on the table just as Anju sets her glass down. Malon quickly reaches to the table by her side - she grabs a coaster, stands, and leans over to pick up the cup and place it on top.

Anju doesn't speak, and Malon walks over to the south wall, opening fully a window in the corner that was open a crack. A cool breeze comes in as Malon walks to the other side of the shelves and opens another window wider.

"Nothing to say?" Malon asks, glancing at Anju briefly as she walks past her toward the door. Anju quickly turns and watches the girl, who opens another window along the west wall by the door. Anju turns back around before Malon does. She listens to Malon's light footsteps across the carpet come back around and says, "You have so much... stuff." Anju says, rather awkwardly.

Malon returns to the chair she was in. The faded pink cushion of the dark wooden armchairs almost towers over her. "A bit of everything, yeah." Malon says in a much more casual tone than Anju has ever heard from her.

"A lot of the things are gifts," Malon says, "boys are always trying to impress me. I don't mind though." she laughs. Anju just stares, but she does lean back a bit.

"The Poe I caught myself though." Malon says proudly, pointing left she makes a motion like drawing an arrow, looking at Anju as she pretends to release it, then grabbing her cup of water. Anju grabs hers as well and the two drink.

"How old are you, Anju?" Malon asks. Anju pauses at the question, looking at Malon, who looks at her while she drinks from her cup. Anju replies rather flatly, "Fifty two." A bit peeved by the question, she shoots back to Malon "You?"

Malon sets her cup down, saying "I thought you were older." rather flippantly before replying "I'm twenty five." Malon looks at Anju, "We're opposites, then." Malon smiles.

Anju raises an eyebrow. The candle flickers from the breeze that is quickly cooling the room, and Malon trims the wick with a small, ornate scissor from the table, moving the candle down across from Anju. Anju can't quite place the scent.

"Do you like whiskey?" Malon asks.

Anju looks at her indignantly and the girl laughs. "I'm joking." Anju crosses her legs, folding her hands in her lap. "I suppose I should get to the point then." Malon says, quickly becoming more serious. She grabs some papers from a short, small rack next to the chair, looking at them briefly before setting them on the table.

Malon stretches then reclines in her chair as well, lifting one leg and untying her boot. "I am a bit worried that you Sheikah will be causing problems."

Anju, having finally resigned herself that she can only expect the unexpected from this girl, replies "None of us have any power, Malon."

Malon has started taking off her other boot and says "I know. It isn't that I'm worried you will do something. I'm more worried that the other Hylians might start a witch hunt." Malon places her boots together in front of the other chair, crossing her legs and taking off her socks.

Anju looks at the Poe bottles. "Why would they? They believe all the Sheikah are dead except for Impa."

Malon replies, "Some of them do - others are suspicious. I wouldn't tell you I was worried for no reason."

Anju is indignant. "Why do you act as if it is our fault?" she asks rather sternly.

"Because it is." Malon says even more harshly, casting a dire glare at Anju, who shoots back "What am I supposed to do about it?" Malon looks at her for a while then sighs.

"How many people are suspicious? Are they planning something?" Anju asks. Malon shakes her head. "I'm not sure how many, but most of the people from the old capital. They aren't planning anything but we can't afford rumors and conflicts."

Anju replies, "We can't, no. What is this deadline Talon mentioned?"

Malon looks back at Anju. "Have you met Ganondorf's advisor?" Anju pauses. She looks back to the bottles of Poe.

"He isn't a Poe." Malon says, Anju quickly replies "I know. I have not met Nemek, I don't plan to."

After a while, Malon says "Well, you don't really have a choice."

Anju sighs, her fists clenching a bit.

"What do you know about him?" Malon asks. Anju doesn't reply.

Malon adds, "I'm not asking for him, I'm sure he knows what you know. I'm asking for myself. I don't speak for or ask anything on his behalf."

The two are quiet for a while. Anju eventually says "I don't know much of anything. Before you visited me today, I was trying to find information but I don't have any texts old enough to go into details. Any texts that would be far beyond what I could ever access and probably now either destroyed or buried under Kakariko."

Malon leans forward at this. "Buried under the rubble?" she asks.

Anju simply says "Deeper." Malon puts her hand to her mouth

in thought.

Anju adds - "I don't know where. I don't know how to get to them. I'm not even sure they exist. Rauru and the others kept a lot of texts somewhere, but there is a lot that was never written, only passed down. As far as I understand, everyone who knew anything is... gone."

After some more silence, Malon says "You know, I don't work for Ganondorf. I'm not sure what happened but, I think he might be dying. He has visited me, but he's only offered encouragement and recommendations, never demands or threats."

Anju shakes her head. "Things are as they are. What is the deadline for?"

Malon leans back. She stretches again, rubbing her back with one hand and rolling her head. "Nemek says that monsters are going to get worse and we will have to fortify. It won't happen quickly, probably over a year or more, but he said we should be prepared. Do you have any reason to doubt that?"

Anju replies, "No."

Malon stands up, walking to the large table in front of the bed. "We are going to separate the Sheikah into a partition to the North." Anju is quiet.

Malon looks back to her, then approaches, standing above her.

In a sarcastic commanding voice, as if imitating some official speech, Malon says, "Within a week, I will announce I've found out there are Sheikah among the Kakariko villagers. I will tell everyone that, out of an abundance of caution, all former Kakariko residents will be split off and moved to a Northern partition and be surveilled by my guards."

Anju walks over to her chair and sits, looking at the water left in her cup.

Malon does add, a bit more softly. "I don't know anything about you Sheikah. I was raised to respect the royal family from a distance, here. Despite everything that happened, most of which I don't know, I respect you. But I also respect Ganondorf. And Nemek."

Anju quietly nods.

Malon says, "I'll walk you to your home."

Anju stands, and Malon extends a hand.

Anju looks at her, then down, and offers a handshake before the two turn to leave.

Dreza Consoles Impa

As the sun begins to set Zarah and Impa return, having ridden quietly. The two pull up to the stable, both dismounting and guiding the horses in.

Impa begins untying and setting down their bags in front of Zarah, who waits watching. The bags are full of lavender, sage and juniper fronds, one having Zarah's things buried under them.

"We still have some time left today, we could get started on just some of it." Impa sighs—a bit too loudly. Zarah immediately picks up on it and changes her tone. "Okayyy" Zarah groans and picks up the bags. Impa softens. "It was really nice to show you the lake," she says. "We'll get started on the soap and oils tomorrow afternoon, alright?"

Zarah whines "Afternoon? Are you going to sleep all day again?" Impa laughs. "We'll see. I'm pretty worn out." to which Zarah lets out a dramatic fake snuffle. "I guess I'll go sit in my tent and wait til the sun comes up." Impa rolls her eyes. "Don't have too much fun." She says.

"Okayyy. Well, goodnight then." Zarah says, walking quickly to her tent while digging through one of the bags.

Impa walks through the camp, passing the empty fire pit she steals a glance at Nabooru's tent. Closed, an orange sash hanging on the hook at the top of the frame. Impa looks away quickly and opens her tent, dropping her bag on the cot, flopping down onto it herself.

She smells incense, probably Nabooru's. Vanilla and rose. The faint smell almost overwhelms her, but, she says to herself, "Its not forever."

She closes her eyes and basks in the cool breeze amplified by that tent's slats. She can also smell cooking coming from the kitchen, some kind of soup, but also the smell of baklava baking.

She lays a bit longer, occasionally she hears some pots clanging. She breathes deeply, sitting up and drinking some water. With her head in one hand she stares out the tent at the empty cafeteria tables, trying to will herself to get up and make some rice. She doesn't feel like sleeping, but her body is tired. She digs through her bag listlessly to see if there is any jerky or snacks left, but she knows there aren't.

She sees a shadow move outside and hears her tentbell ring.

Looking up she sees Dreza, facing away and politely waiting.

“Hi there.” Impa says, not getting up. “How are you, Impa?” Dreza asks, still facing away. “It’s alright, you can come in if you want.” Dreza looks slowly over her shoulder and Impa gestures for her to come in. She does, awkwardly, and stands at the door with her arms crossed. “Just wanted to know if you wanted some stew. We also have oats made.”

Impa leans back and lets out a long sigh of relief. “That would be amazing. I was about to go cook myself something but, its been a long day.” Dreza raises her eyebrows a bit and looks confused.

Impa says, “I’ve only cooked for myself a few times since the camp was set up, I’m so thankful but I really should be cooking for myself more.”

“You are welcome here, why cook for yourself?” Dreza asks, looking concerned. Impa stammers a bit, only just now realizing maybe she might be being rude. She’s never seen a Gerudo cook for only themselves actually, she’s only actually ever seen two or three of them cook large meals for the whole camp. “Oh, you’re right,” she says, standing up. “Sorry, I’m not used to it still I guess.”

“Dreza, by the way, I was meaning to ask. I’ve seen that you know Nabooru pretty well.” Impa says.

Dreza pauses. “Ah, yeah. We were born from the same.” she says, smiling and loosening up a bit. Impa lets out a rather silly “Oh!”, Dreza laughs.

“Well, I do have to go around to others, I’ll bring you food, did you want oats, or just stew?” she asks. “Both, please. Thank you so much.” Impa says. Dreza puts her hands up as if Impa said something ridiculous, turning to leave.

Dreza does turn back, “Oh, Impa.” Dreza digs in her pocket and holds out her hand, offering Impa’s purple and gold flask wrap “This was in the kitchen.” Impa quietly grabs it. “Thanks.”

Dreza looks at her for a while but Impa evades. “Well, I’ll be right back.” Dreza says and leaves.

Impa holds the sleeve but can’t look at it. She sets it on the chest by her bed and sits for a while. Some guay call in the distance. She grabs the vessel Nabooru gave her and lights a cone of incense, sitting and watching the smoke. After a bit, the

bell rings. "Dreza? Come in."

Dreza comes around the corner and Impa reaches over, pulling the other chest closer, gesturing for Dreza to set the tray there, which she does.

"You need some real furniture." Dreza says. "I'll make you some." Impa looks up, "You're too kind, Dreza." Dreza shrugs. "Better than being too cruel I guess." Impa smiles.

"Dreza, do you have a moment?" she asks.

"I have to bring food to a couple more women." Dreza pauses. "You should eat at a table outside."

She turns but looks back, seeing Impa doesn't intend to. Dreza sighs a bit and says, "When she is done eating, Nabooru will be going to take a walk down the river."

Impa looks up at this. Dreza smiles. "You should join her, she'd like that." Dreza leaves quietly.

Impa sits for a while, thinking. Dreza must have talked to Nabooru about it, of course. She gets up, bringing her tray out to the cafeteria.

One torch burns in the middle of the pavilion, two on either end nearest the camp. It isn't quite dark out yet. Impa thinks a bit too long about where to sit, but decides to sit nearest the empty fire pit facing a bit away.

She eats quietly, after a while she down the alley of tents Dreza ring the bell on Nabooru's tent. The door opens a bit and Dreza peeks in, then out again holding a tray and leaving to the kitchen.

Impa looks away, feeling strange. After a while, having nearly finished eating, she gets up to go to her tent to get her flask.

Returning and sitting down, she pours herself a cup of water and drinks it. She does look down the aisle and see Nabooru disappear just past the south edge of camp visible down the aisle of tents. She sits for a while, finishing her water then gets up, her body which was so tired before feels strangely light. She walks down the camp toward the south gate.

Nabooru and Impa Meet By The River

As Impa walks through the southern gate, she looks off to the southwest. The sun still just barely peeks through the line of trees on the horizon to the south. She turns the other way, up Zora river. Breathing deeply, she starts to walk a bit quickly up the river, worried it might get dark soon.

While Octorok and wolfos have not been seen and Gerudo fish and train along the river daily she still is wary, having brought her knife and deku nuts just in case.

Walking along, she notices a few shanties that must have been built by Gerudo. As she rounds the bend of the river, she notices the gold glow of a torch illuminating the side of one of them ahead. She stops and listens, but doesn't hear anything. Rounding the bend along the north edge of the river, she does see a torch lit in front of a shanty.

Just beyond the shanty is darker, but she can see Nabooru, sitting on a boulder facing away. She doesn't seem to be fishing tonight, just sitting in a lotus pose. Impa walks up a bit more slowly. As she approaches, pauses, about to speak, but instead she knocks three times lightly on the wall of the shanty.

Nabooru turns, although she doesn't look directly at Impa. "I'm not busy, you can come over." Nabooru says. Impa walks over. Nabooru pauses, but slides over a bit. Impa sits, facing the opposite direction but the two do make eye contact briefly, Nabooru looks back at the river. For a while they don't say anything. Impa eventually speaks up, "You've been pretty busy."

Nabooru looks over to her then back to the river. "You have too." The gentle sound of the river and the faint crackle of the torch on the other side of the shanty seem to talk for them. "I was wondering when you'd come see me." Nabooru says.

"I figured you didn't want to see me." Impa says.

Nabooru sighs. "That makes sense. I'm sorry for the way I acted on the way back. I just-" she trails off. "I just don't know what to think. Or feel. Even still." she says. Impa shifts a bit, she looks to Nabooru, who is looking down and away.

After a while, Nabooru speaks again. "Before we went into that damned tower. The bridge." She pauses. She turns to Impa and looks into her eyes, "Something came out of you and made that bridge."

Impa looks confused. "You didn't mean for it to happen?" Nabooru asks. Impa looks away and seems to think. "I don't

understand what you mean." she says after a bit, looking back to Nabooru. "The bridge was... it looked like it had always been there."

Nabooru scratches the back of her neck. "Impa. That day you stormed off, and wandered around all day. That day too, when you were angry, something came out of you and - I don't know really how to describe it. It hurt me and the women nearby. It seemed to make time stop. You don't remember that?"

Impa leans forward, resting her face in one hand and shakes her head. Nabooru asks her - "Did anyone tell you exactly why you weren't allowed back in Kakariko Village?"

Impa is silent. "Impa?" Nabooru asks quietly.

Impa responds - "I guess not exactly. I assume-" Impa thinks for a bit, "I figured that maybe the Hylians had turned on Sheikah, maybe Ganondorf was spreading rumors. And, I am the only one who they know is a Sheikah." Nabooru sits quietly, watching Impa closely.

Impa suddenly stands up, looking pale. The color seems to sap from everything just as it does from her face. The slight breeze grows cold. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt anyone-" Impa starts, but tears cut her off.

Nabooru calmly gets up, grabbing her hand - "It's okay. Sit down with me, okay?"

Impa sits, almost falling backward, she puts her head in her hands. Nabooru wraps an arm around her shoulders. "It's okay, Impa."

"I don't want to hurt you-" Impa sobs. Nabooru holds her a bit tighter. "I know, Impa - and I know you won't. You are good."

Impa breathes heavily and trembles.

"You are good." Nabooru says softly, running her other hand through Impa's short hair a few times, holding her. Impa eventually leans into her.

"I didn't mean to do it." She sobs.

"It's okay." Nabooru says again.

Impa turns her face into Nabooru's neck and wraps her arms

around her. "I'm sorry." she mumbles. Nabooru holds her head with one hand, the other on her back. "There's nothing to apologize for. Its okay." Impa sobs again, her tears fall down Nabooru's chest.

For several minutes, they sit there on the boulder, Nabooru softly holding Impa.

After a while Nabooru says "Here, lets sit on the ground, okay?" Impa nods, having calmed down a bit. She starts to stand, and Nabooru does as well, but Impa just slides down the side of the boulder. Nabooru sits next to her and grabs her hand again. Impa now just stares down at the grass.

It has gotten darker, but it still isn't fully night.
Frogs have started chirping further down the river.
The color has slowly come back.

Impa holds Nabooru's hand, leaning into Nabooru, she can smell vanilla. She takes a deep breath, tilting her head just enough to see Nabooru also looking down, breathing slowly as her thumb rubs the top of Impa's hand.

Impa lets go, wiping her tears. "I'm sorry."

Nabooru looks at her. "I'm glad you came out to see me."

Impa tears up again at this but smiles and wipes her tears. She looks down at the grass again.

"I thought I'd be the one comforting you this time." Impa says. "I owe you so much." she says, crying more but this time without sobbing. Nabooru simply says "If we are keeping score, I owe you a lot more, you know." Impa laughs a bit.

Nabooru goes on, "I'm not, though."

Impa shakes her head, "Neither am I."

She looks at Nabooru, who smiles. Impa can tell she had cried some as well. For a while, they listen to the river and the chirping frogs that have now turned into a steady hum.

Nabooru Reassures Impa

After while, the two had settled, leaning against each other. As the night grows darker Nabooru gets up, heading into the shanty and coming back with two blankets. She half unfolds one on the ground in front of the boulder, giving the other to Impa. Impa wraps it around herself.

Nabooru heads back into the shanty and lights a lamp, bringing it over and setting it into an indent on a smaller boulder in front of them. She sits on the folded blanket with Impa.

"What about you?" She asks. Nabooru smiles - "Well I thought maybe we could share. We don't have to though." she says. "Oh." Impa says. She extends it with an arm and Nabooru leans back, grabbing the end and draping it over her shoulder. Impa leans back as well a bit awkwardly.

"What, now you're shy to lean on me?" Nabooru teases a bit. Impa smiles and leans into her, elbowing her side lightly and wrapping the other end of the blanket around her knees. Neither of them is cold enough to actually need the blanket but they huddle together as if they were. Impa stares at the grass now lit by the lamp light. They sit for a while more without talking.

"Do you know any Sheikah that you can talk to about... Whatever it is that happened?" Nabooru eventually asks.

Impa nods, "Anju, the woman who came to tell us about the evacuation." Nabooru asks- "Do you think she will know more about it?" Impa shrugs.

"I heard you met with the woman from the ranch." Nabooru says.

"Oh, yeah. Malon." Impa says.

"How was that?" Nabooru asks. "It was pretty strange. I don't know how much she knows. She didn't really talk about anything important, then she left."

"Would she bring Anju to visit you?"

Impa shrugs, "Probably. I think maybe she is a bit in over her head, she is very young and a bit full of herself." Nabooru says, "Just like Zarah."

Impa defends the girl "I definitely like Zarah more. Malon seems power hungry."

Nabooru shifts a bit. "Zarah is too, you know." Impa gives Nabooru a skeptical look but doesn't push it. Nabooru knows more than about the Gerudo than she does. Impa just says "Huh." and leans her head back.

"Did you know anything about-" Nabooru pauses. "About what would happen if Ganondorf did whatever he did?"

Impa shakes her head and sighs "I don't know, Nabooru. I really don't know that much. Especially now, I feel like I don't know anything."

Nabooru is quiet.

They sit together for a long time not saying anything. Eventually Impa sits up and turns to her. "Since you've been interrogating me, do I get to ask some questions?"

Nabooru glances at her then looks away. "Depends."

Nabooru looks at her but struggles to keep looking, her eyes wander off.

"I didn't forget." Impa says. The Gerudo finally looks and holds her gaze. "You're a kind and brave woman, Nabooru. I respect you." Impa says, leaning forward.

"And I you." Nabooru says, smiling, moving her hand to meet Impa's, their fingers interlocking, both moving closer.

"May I?" Impa asks quietly. Impa's other hand moves up her shoulder, up her neck, to her cheek, Nabooru's hand tightens around Impa's.

They both lean forward, their lips at touch just barely, both holding their breath. Impa lightly brings Nabooru's face to hers and they kiss lightly. Impa pulls back just barely, looking at Nabooru, whose eyes are closed. She returns her lips to Nabooru's more strongly, unlocking her hand from Nabooru's and softly caressing her waist, her other hand moving down to the other side of her waist. One of Nabooru's hands moves to Impa's thigh.

After a few moments, Nabooru pulls back to breath. They look at each other and smile.

"I thought it was too much, too soon." Nabooru says, her eyes wander a bit. One of Impa's hands moves higher up Nabooru's side, the other tightening a bit.

"Everything has been too much." Impa says. Nabooru's free

hand wanders to the back of her neck and resting on her shoulder, pulling her closer again. Their lips meet again, Nabooru's hand slides down Impa's chest, wrapping around her back and pulling her closer, her other hand gripping Impa's thigh more tightly. As they kiss slowly Nabooru opens her eyes lightly, Impa does as well, they look into eachothers eyes then close them again, Impa's lips tightening a bit in a smile. Nabooru's do as well and she pulls back a bit, resting her forehead against Impa's.

They sit for a while, holding eachother, eyes closed, feeling the cooling air, hearing the hum of frogs and the flowing river.

Eventually, Nabooru leans against the boulder behind them, Impa follows facing her. They look at eachother, admiring eachother and smiling.

"How are you feeling?" Nabooru asks. Impa smiles, "Good," she says, lifting a hand to lightly stroke the back of Nabooru's neck, "I kind of thought you'd deny it."

Nabooru smiles at her and nestles her head under Impa's chin. "Well," she says, "Dreza did scold me."

Impa exhales a faint laugh, adjusting her arms to wrap around Nabooru. Nabooru kind of shakes her head but doesn't say anything. The two lean into eachother a bit more, breathing slowly, Nabooru occasionally nuzzling Impa's chest.

After some time, Nabooru sits up, grabbing her flask and drinking some water. Impa finds hers, forgetting for a moment that she set it down earlier, and drinks as well, letting the blanket fall behind them.

"Join me to sleep?" Nabooru asks. "Of course." Impa says. They smile and kiss lightly again, Nabooru turns and folds the blankets while Impa gets up, standing and stretching, drinking more water. Nabooru takes the blankets and disappears into the shanty for a moment. She grabs the handle of the lamp, picking it up and looking to Impa, who wordlessly walks to her, handing her her flask. She clips it to her belt then grabs Impa's hand, the two turn and start to walk back to the camp.

Just past the shanty, Nabooru lets go of Impa's hand, with it she lifts a douser hanging from the torch, extinguishing it and turning back, taking Impa's hand again as they make their way down the river to camp.

Malon Investigates Kakariko

The moon hangs in the sky above Death Mountain. Two figures on horseback make their way up the newly-constructed switchback trail. Malon, and the purple shrouded figure, side by side, ascend the trail wordlessly. In the woods to the North, Wolfos howl, pendants and chains rattle on the shrouded figure as the horses' hooves clatter against the solid, flat stone of the trail.

As the two round the last turn, Malon hears a skulltula before she sees it, looking up along the wall formed by the stone cliff face she sees the gold of its body glimmer in the moonlight as the two pass.

They approach two tall scaffolds that form a gateway further into Death Mountain. The scaffolds bear, in random placement, long gray tied fabric flags that blow in the crossbreeze. Malon stops her horse, with the shrouded figure continues, but also stops, looking back, the red glowing circle under the hood facing Malon, who looks up past the gate off into the night sky.

After a while, the two carry on, rounding the ridge of the mountain. They pass over the old trail to Kakariko. Malon doesn't look down. They pass over the ravine and enter the open-ended chamber of rock - to the left, Goron City is quiet and dark. They turn right and out from the overhanging stone, begin to descend the old trail.

They reach Dodongo's cave, the rest of the trail being impassable by the horses, they both in unison jump down. Walking down a bit and out from the smooth gravel path and over a layer of rough debris, large boulders that stretches down the trail underneath, still discernable by the cliff face.

The two carefully continue over the debris that continues on to the where the village once was, buried under yards of rock. Sometimes stepping, sometimes crawling over boulders or large rocks, it is slow and tedious going, but the two carry on quietly except the occasional slip of a boot against stone, rocks and pebbles crunching or tumbling, and the ever-presenting ringing and light clattering of the shrouded figure's many adornments.

As the round a corner of the mountain eastward, Malon sees the ruined windmill still peaking from the rubble, one blade gone, another still reaching out diagonally from the axle to one side, as if it were an arm waving for help.

As they approach it the rubble is a bit more manageable - no

longer climbing and crawling over boulders, they watch their step but are able to walk to the windmill. As they reach it, they stare for a while at the open mouth of the windmill's lookout to the left under the axle. It now forms a doorway in, sunken just a few inches into the surrounding rubble.

Malon tilts her head, crossing her arms and looking at the doorway, then to the hooded figure, which stands still. She lets down her arms and walks to the doorway, placing a hand on the wall above it and leaning in, standing a while as if listening. The hooded figure approaches behind her, stopping next to her. The night is silent and still. Not a breeze reaches them, no Wolfos howl, no bugs scurry, nor bats or guay fly past above.

After some time, Malon steps down into the doorway. Her boots crunch loudly and a few pebbles fall down the stairs. The sounds seem to echo down past the corner, but she doesn't hesitate, beginning to descend the stairs. The shrouded figure follows.

Anju Is Emboldened

Impa wakes to the sound of Nabooru's bell ringing. She had only heard it a few times, but it always sounded so much more familiar and right than the one in her own tent. She looks down to Nabooru, who is curled up to her left facing her but sleeping peacefully. Impa can't help looking at her for a while. The bell rings again, though - twice now. Impa sighs, Nabooru shifts slightly and turns over. Impa sits up and lightly tosses the bedsheet over Nabooru, getting up and going to the door, wearing a nightgown Nabooru had given her.

She struggles a bit to open it - it is slightly different than the one on her tent. She can see Zarah's shadow against the tent. Impa begins to open the door but hesitates. Zarah calls from outside "Is Impa in there?" Impa pauses and sighs, opening the door a crack and peeking out. "Hi!" Zarah says rather loudly. Impa puts a finger to her lips and lets out a "Shh."

Zarah then leans forward and speaks in an exaggerated whisper: "Excuse me, ma'am, I was looking for Impa." Impa rolls her eyes. "What?" she says. Zarah holds a hand to her mouth, whispering "Impa has a visitor. Should I tell her to leave?" Impa sighs. She puts up her hand toward Zarah and looks over to Nabooru, who is still fast asleep. Impa turns back "I'll be right out. It's Malon again?"

Zarah shakes her head. "Do you ladies require tea and perhaps a fine pastry?" Zarah says mockingly in a deep voice. "Its fine, tell them I'll be just a second." Impa says and closes the door and begins getting dressed in her clothes from the day before, hearing Zarah walk to the pavilion.

Impa emerges from the tent, again struggling a bit to open and then to close it. She gets it shut and turns to the pavilion. Anju is sitting there. Impa walks over quickly and Anju smiles, standing up and the two hug. "Glad you're around." Anju says, letting go and sitting down. "Where else would I be?" Impa asks while stretching, still groggy. "Oh, let me get us some tea and water." Impa says, Anju nods.

Impa walks to the kitchen ramada. She grabs a pair of pitchers. As she turns to fill one with water, Dreza walks in. "Good morning Impa." she says and flashes a smile. "Ah, good morning Dreza, how are you?" Impa responds a bit stiffly. "Good. And you?" Dreza asks. Impa turns from filling the pitcher looking at Dreza who raises her eyebrows expectantly. "Very good," Impa says, "I think, anyway." Dreza offers another smile and walks out.

Impa grabs a tray from the stack on the water barrels, setting it down and placing two cups on it face up, another two face down, then the pitcher. She picks up the other pitcher and fills it from a smaller, but still large, barrel on the counter which has tea. Filling it and putting it on the tray, she carries it out back to the cafeteria. Anju waves to her, she approaches, setting the tray down and a cup in front of both of them, pouring herself water.

"You seem to know the camp well, and the Gerudo already." Anju says, pouring herself water as well. Impa sets her cup down and breathes deeply. "I guess it has started to feel like home. Isn't that funny?" Impa says.

Anju smiles. "I'm glad." Impa nods and replies "It's really been good, all things considered."

"Are things alright at Lon Lon? How are you?" Impa asks. Anju replies - "I'm well. Everyone is still very on edge, but things are getting a bit back to normal. Malon has set the carpenters to build permanent houses. Maybe a dozen are already built."

"That's impressive." Impa says. Anju nods "Well, what else is there to do? Just about everyone has been pitching in help. Goron as well."

Impa asks "Did Malon send you?" Anju shakes her head. "No, I came on my own. If anyone else has an issue with it, they can gossip all they want." Impa nods, saying "They tend to, no matter what."

Anju adds, "The elders are also tired of the dramatics." Impa replies a bit flatly "I'm sure." Across the river and into the field a ways, some younger Gerudo are playing some kind of football, occasionally yelling or laughing.

Impa breathes deeply, she can smell Anju's familiar juniper perfume. "Oh, Anju. The Gerudo girl that welcomed you. I don't know if she told you, her name is Zarah. I went with her to Lake Hylia. We gathered juniper and lavender, I figured I could teach her to make soap." Anju raises an eyebrow. "She did mention that." Anju smiles, "Among some other things. That girl has a strange energy." Anju pauses, "Strange, but good." Impa nods.

The two sit and watch the Gerudo girls playing across the river for a while. It is a bit of a windy day, but exactly the wind that is welcomed on hot days like this. Anju adjusts her hair a bit and looks to Impa.

"I heard you have an interest in one of the ladies." She says, again raising her eyebrows and smiling just a bit. Impa laughs a bit awkwardly. "Did Zarah say that?" Anju nods.

Impa looks back toward the camp as if looking for Zarah. "Well, we will have to have a talk later." Impa says jokingly, turning back to Anju. "I do have an interest, yes. I don't know how far it will go." Anju nods lightly, the wind blowing her hair past her kerchief.

They sit quietly for a while, sipping water. Impa pours herself tea after finishing her water. Impa begins to offer Anju one of the extra cups for tea but pauses, "We don't have any black teas right now. Sorry about that." Anju waves her hand, "That's fine, I'll have some anyway. Never hurts to try it every once in a while." Impa pours her a cup.

Impa looks off again at the Gerudo in the field. Most of them laid down mats and are stretching or sitting in huddles. Zarah isn't with any of them. Impa sips then says to Anju, "I think I might favor green tea nowadays." The two are quiet for a while. "Oh," Impa starts - "Has Malon said anything about the Zora?" Anju shakes her head, Impa notices that Anju is looking to the boarded gate to Kakariko. Impa stands up. "I'll be right back." she says.

Impa goes to her tent, opening it quickly she goes to the chest by her bedside. She picks up the flask sleeve, putting it in her back pocket and walking out, closing the door behind her. She pauses outside. The Gerudo across the river, having packed up, walk south along the river. Impa sees Anju, still looking toward the gate. She approaches slowly.

"I should pay my respects." She says. Anju turns and looks at her, her expression blank. Anju stands, and the two walk north to the gate.

Impa Mourns

They reach the boarded gate. Behind some cracks, boulders litter the stairs. They both stand there for a long moment, side by side, facing the gate, staring at the ground. After a while, Impa reaches into her pocket, taking out the sleeve. Anju has closed her eyes. Squatting down and finding a nail in a pile spilled in front of the gate, and grabbing a large rock, she stands up. Anju opens her eyes and watches Impa slowly nail the sleeve to the wall.

Impa takes a step back, dropping the rock, which hits the ground with a thud. Taking a few more steps back, by Anju's side again, the two stare at the gate, the wind blowing loudly. Impa folds her hands and looks down at them, then closes her eyes. The two stand there for a long time.

Eventually, Impa opens her eyes. She is alone. There is no wind. The sky is gray. Everything is gray. The earth below her feet is black. She doesn't panic. She doesn't move. She doesn't even breath. Looking up at the gate, it stands before her in a vast, empty plain, nothing around or behind it. Nothing anywhere. The horizon stretches endlessly. Nothing.

She hears a rattling echo across the plain from behind her. She turns around. The figure with the purple shroud stands some yards away, facing her. She stares into the glowing red circle. The earth beneath begins to crack, peel, pieces floating upward like flower petals falling in slow motion. Impa continues staring into the glowing red, it almost burns but she doesn't look away.

"Nemek." She says.

"Impa." The figure says back, using her own voice.

"Don't use my voice, rat." Impa says.

The figure laughs a rattling, buzzing, screeching sound.

"Are you having fun?" Impa asks.

"Oh, yes." Nemek lets out in a slow growl. It laughs again. Louder, longer and higher pitched, the sound echoes across the endless, empty landscape. The horizon slowly begins to curve upward from all around.

"Are you ready to let go?" Nemek says, its voice a growl of anger, a shriek of horror, and a moan of pleasure all at once.

"I am." Impa says, staring into the red, her eyes now tearing up and searing with pain.

"As you wish, Impa." Nemek says, laughing again.

The horizon begins to close in on itself faster, until the gray sky above is gone. The red circle grows, larger and larger, now an orb which lights the horizon which is now closing in, splinters and shards of the black earth now bumping up against Impa from all directions. The black, glistening walls of the sphere close in further and the flakes of earth begin to buffet Impa more strongly, the sound of them hitting the opposite side of the orb is like shattering glass. The red orb flickers until eventually Impa's body, now floating, begins to be pelted so strongly that her clothing is torn and she begins to bleed. She can't tell if the pieces are going through her like bullets, but they must be. The walls close in even faster, the orb now flickering madly and shrinking, Nemek's voice emerges from the cacophony of shattering glass, deep and everywhere, it says "Don't look away, Impa." She doesn't blink, though her face is now cut, the walls closing in further, she can feel her entire body being destroyed, her bones breaking, tears and blood streaming down her cheeks. Dust blows into her open eyes but she keeps them open, staring at the now tiny red dot. Impa feels the orb closing in, pushing against her feet and the back of her head, it shrinks further, pushing her head down and her knees against her chest. She finally closes her eyes, the tiny red speck having faded out of existence. Her head between her knees, she feels the bones in her legs snap, one pierces her ribcage as she feels her spine crack and fold forward, her shoulderblades contract and the bones in her arm snap, she loses consciousness as she feels her own blood and flesh begin to press against her face, everything goes black and silent.

Anju and Impa Discuss

Impa opens her eyes. The wind blows through her sweaty hair. She looks to Anju, whose eyes are still closed. They slowly open, but she doesn't turn to Impa immediately. She reminds Impa of Zelda.

"Do you remember?" Anju asks. She turns to Impa and looks in her eyes. "What you did the night you came back to Kakariko?" Impa looks into her eyes. Impa nods. "I do."

Anju looks down, the wind blowing her long skirt. She looks back to Impa - "It was the right thing to do."

"I know. I still wish things could've gone differently." Impa says.

Anju turns back to the camp. "I'm just glad it's over." She says.

Impa says a bit flatly - "One thing ends, another begins." Anju nods. The two walk back to the camp.

Anju and Impa sit in the pavilion. Dreza approaches with a tray, two plates of food. "Thank you." Impa bows a bit, Anju as well. Dreza waves her hand dismissively, "The sun rises with no thanks." she says, with the tone of something she says every day. Impa and Anju looking at each other. They both turn to look at Dreza, but she has started walking away.

Hungry, the two eat graciously together. Three young Gerudo sit at a table diagonal to them.

Impa didn't catch any of what they had been saying, but one loudly says "I'll tell Nabooru if you don't!" Without turning or pausing, Impa listens. The three of them laugh, and one, presumably Asheti, says "She probably already knows." One of them groans and the other giggles. Asheti goes on - "It'll happen to you too, you know!" One of them says smugly "Not me."

Impa listens, eating quietly with Anju. One of them teases Asheti a bit - "Oh, Nehru will miss you so!" the girl makes kissing noises, the other laughing. "She will!" Asheti says defensively. Impa smiles, not knowing exactly what they are talking about, but remembering when she was that age. Asheti says "What about you two, will you miss me?! Some best friends!" At this the other two quiet down, one of them says a bit softly "Of course, Asheti. It is just a month though, you'll be fine."

Impa furrows her brow a bit. She looks at Anju, who seems to

have just heard the last bit. The other girl chimes in "Well when I start to bleed I hope neither of you miss me!"

At first Impa's eyes widen with concern but then she realizes what they are talking about and laughs quietly. Anju says "I don't miss it."

"I bet not." Impa says. Anju does look a bit more serious - "Don't be too jealous. You're still young." Impa looks at her, but she continues eating.

Impa looks down at her food, but pours herself some water and drinks. The portions weren't large, but she feels full.

As Anju finishes eating, the girls across the pavilion leave.

Impa says "There is something I do need to tell you." Anju looks at her and nods. Impa hesitates. "I don't know if it is true." Anju sips some water. Impa is quiet for a while. She looks across the field, toward the black tower in the distance. She breathes deeply, and begins "Nabooru and I spoke to Ganondorf-" she stops, hearing footsteps approaching and noticing Anju looking behind her.

Turning, she sees Dreza, who quietly picks up the tray, Anju having already put her plate back on it. Anju asks Impa - "Are you finished?" Impa says, "Oh, yes. I wasn't as hungry as I thought." Dreza puts her plate on the tray, and walks back into the camp.

Anju leans in a bit - "Did he come to you?" Impa shakes her head. "We went to him." Anju looks at the ground under the table. Impa continues.

"He said he can't be killed. Nor can Nabooru or I." Anju just stares, her eyebrow does move up slightly.

"He didn't say anything about Ruto, but she certainly won't talk to me. I doubt she would talk to Nabooru either." Anju seems to think. After a while, Anju sits up, she seems to start to say something but stops, folding her arms.

The two sit for a while. Anju seems deep in thought.

Eventually, she asks "What else did he say?" Impa shrugs slightly, "Not much. It seemed like that was all he had to say. He told us to leave afterward, we maybe only were there a few minutes. When he appeared, we did try to strike him, but our weapons passed through him as if he weren't even there."

The sit for a while, Anju again thinking deeply. "Oh," Impa says. "Have you seen the Poe - Ganondorf said it was his... advisor." Anju shakes her head slightly, still looking off into the distance toward Lon Lon. "It didn't look like a Poe entirely. It said it was a Sheikah."

Anju doesn't respond. Impa, almost to herself, reflects- "It had this strange voice, and one huge red eye." Anju looks at her after she says this. "Nemek." she says.

Impa shrugs and looks confused "What?". Anju says, looking at Impa "One red eye, like Bongo Bongo. It is Nemek."

Impa doesn't look any less confused. "There are more of Bongo Bongo?" she asks. Anju shakes her head, looking off to Lon Lon, she says "No, but..." She pauses. "I'll have to think about things and read. I still have some books packed away." Impa looks at Anju, who just stares off to Lon Lon. Anju says "I have to go."

Anju stands up, and Impa does as well, following her to her horse. "Anju, do you think what he said true?"

Anju sighs. "I don't know Impa." Anju looks to Impa. "I really don't know. I'm sorry to leave so quickly, but-" Impa stops her, "It was good to see you, and we'll see eachother plenty more times." Anju nods.

"Anything you can find out helps. I just want to understand what's going on." Impa says. Anju just nods again, climbing onto her horse.

Anju looks down to Impa with a concerned look. "Take your mind off it for a while Impa. Please. No matter what it all means, there is not much we can do. We have to appreciate what we have."

Impa nods. "Thank you, Anju." Anju smiles. "Take care, Impa. Don't worry too much. I'll be back in a few days." They look at eachother for a moment, and Anju pulls the reigns, heading out quickly, looking straight ahead to Lon Lon.

Impa watches for a few moments before turning back and passing through the pavilion, keeping herself from looking west and watching Anju cross the feild.

Impa stands for a while in front of the empty fire pit.

Interlude

Impa turns to Nabooru's tent. It must have only been an hour or so talking to Anju, but it felt like days for some reason. Nabooru can smell vanilla and rose. She very lightly rings the tent bell and hears Nabooru ask - "Impa?". Impa replies "Yes." and Nabooru says "Come in." Impa opens the door and the smell of incense almost melts her, she smiles and walks through the door.

The warmth of the tent and still air is comforting after being in the wind. Turning to close the door behind her, Impa sees Nabooru reclining in bed reading. Impa latches the door, slowly learning how Nabooru's tent works. She lazily walks to the bed and lays on her side next to Nabooru, facing her. Nabooru continues reading but with one hand lifts the sheet over Impa, who nestles her head into Nabooru's neck. Wrapping her free arm around Impa, with the other hand, in one motion, she grabs and lifts the bookmark then curls her fingers, placing it on the page she was reading and closes the book, reaching behind the bed to set it on the floor underneath.

"You been up for long?" Impa asks, looking up at Nabooru. "Not really," Nabooru says, looking at Impa, "You?" Impa pauses and says "No, not long. I could use just a little more sleep." Nabooru smiles, hugging Impa's shoulder then sliding down the bed, leaning onto her side to face her. "I could too, but you know what would help me fall asleep?" They look into eachothers eyes, Impa smiles and asks- "What?"

Nabooru's face comes closer. "May I?" Impa laughs and wraps her arms around Nabooru, the two kiss gently, breaking occasionally to smile. After a bit, Nabooru yawns and turns over, reaching back and grabbing Impa's hand. Impa wraps her arm around Nabooru and the two lie there, feeling eachothers' warmth and breathing, the wind outside muffling sounds from outside. They both fall asleep easily.

Makaru's Offering To The Gerudo Camp

Impa and Nabooru sit by the river as several young Gerudo further up laugh and yell. Impa looks up the river to them, where three stand in a line, and older Gerudo stands to the side ahead, and a several more teenagers watch from off to the side, sitting on rocks or leaning against the riverbank.

The older Gerudo has quieted them down and counts down from three. As she yells "Go!" the three girls begin trudging against the current up the water that is just above waist deep. Impa noticed one of the girls from the cafeteria earlier, although she doesn't see Asheti or the other.

Nabooru turns to Impa, saying "Maybe we should have moved a long time ago." The two watch the girls wade upstream as others to the side cheer them on, though Impa does look away. "The royal family wouldn't have let you." she says. Nabooru is unphased. "I meant before the royal family." she says. Impa scratches her eyebrow, just letting out an "Oh."

Nabooru suddenly stands up quickly. "Look." She says. Impa quickly stands as well, looking up the river as Nabooru points - the Gerudo up ahead also have quieted and are looking. Four Zora are walking down the side of the river - although they have two younger zora with them that are talking cheerfully. Two other Zora slowly follow in the water. Nabooru and Impa approach the group of Gerudo as the Zora near.

The older Gerudo looks to Impa, who just waves to the Zora. Some of the Zora wave back, and some of the younger Gerudo yell greetings. There isn't a clear leader. Nabooru looks at Impa, asking "What do you think?" Impa shrugs. The two walk along the river to meet the Zora who are walking.

The Zora approach, most of the Gerudo have gotten out of the river on the other side, although some now stand a ways behind Impa and Nabooru. "How are you all?" Nabooru asks. One of the Zora smiles and pulls ahead, extending a hand to Nabooru. Nabooru shakes his hand, adding "I hope we aren't intruding too far." The Zora waves his hand "No, no. We felt maybe it was rude to not meet you all sooner." Impa sighs with relief.

The leader of the Zora continues, extending a hand to Impa, saying to both of them "I'm Makaru. I consult with Ruto and the King." Impa shakes his hand, although her mood does darken a bit at the mention of Ruto. A bit louder, addressing also the older Gerudo behind Impa and Nabooru, "We brought you some fish from upstream, past the domain. Moon fish almost never make

their way down here." He gestures to the Zora in the water that have now come up to the river's edge, one of them lifts to the surface a netted bag with two live fish in it. The fish are clearly alive but don't struggle.

Impa and Nabooru approach and both are shocked at the size of the fish. "Are those Hylian Loaches!?" One of the younger Gerudo asks loudly, walking up with a few others and looking in awe. Impa corrects the girl "It's Hyrule Loach - not Hylian Loaches." The other girls laugh, as does Nabooru. Makaru says, "Once you take them they'll probably start flopping so be careful. They might just be fish but they can break your nose. You can take them down the river and keep them in a trap. Just make sure the trap is away from the river." Nabooru responds - "Of course, yeah." She looks to the group of girls, "Who wants to swim them down to camp?" Four of them immediately jump in the water and move toward the Zora, who laugh.

"Like Makaru said, be careful. They can really hurt you. Two of you should hold the leash and go slow." The Zora lifts up a large dowel, stained with some kind of waterproofing, that has a thick rope leading to one of the nets. "Each of us have two nets. Six fish." he says.

The older Gerudo approaches the river and starts to get in. "Let me see how they handle first." She gets in and the Zora holds both nets with one hand, handing one of the dowels to the Gerudo. "Okay?" he asks, she nods. Gerudo girls from across the river have now crowded around and some of them have gotten back into the river. The Zora releases the bag and it floats downstream past the Gerudo's legs. As soon as one of the fish touch her leg they start flopping violently, although the woman doesn't struggle to bad to hold the dowel, some of the kids laugh at how fast the fish became ornery after being handed off by the Zora.

"We'll definitely need two for each net." The Gerudo says a bit flatly. "Nehru, Danari, Silas, Terra, get the others and be careful." she says, the girls approach and the two Zora carefully hand them the dowels, this time under the water. The girls clearly struggle but can manage. The older Gerudo tells a couple of the girls "Go get the trap ready, we'll meet you down there in a bit. Everyone else, lets go. Don't complain to me that your break is short, either - you all wanted another race."

The older Gerudo turns to the Zora, "Thank you. We were just wrapping up but - we will see you again?" The Zora look at Makaru, who the Gerudo woman also looks to. "Yes. We've been

adjusting. A lot has been changing, even for us. We won't be strangers so much though, it was nice to meet you-" he says, the Gerudo responds "Issrah". "Issrah. Hope you like the fish." Makaru smiles, the Gerudo looks to Nabooru, who says "Thank you Issrah," turning to Makaru, "and thank you as well."

Issrah and the rest of the Gerudo make their way downstream. Nabooru turns to Impa, who has been quiet. Impa looks at her a bit pensively. The younger Zora have jumped in the river and one of them swam quickly to the group carrying the fish, turning and backflipping out of the water upstream to cheers and laughter from the Gerudo girls. One of the other young zora does the same to more applause and fawning from the girls. Nabooru and Impa turn back from watching and Impa does smile. The two turn to Makaru.

"Alright, you've shown off, they're clearly impressed. Get back home now." Makaru says to the younger Zora boys, who without protest swim back up the river, the older Zora following. Makaru turns to the Zora standing, who, without a word, but with a wave to Impa and Nabooru, also climb into the river and swim up it, Makaru watches them go.

After a bit, Nabooru asks, "Are you the prince?" Impa cringes, although Makaru turns around, looking down. "No. Our prince..." he pauses. Impa noticeably tightens. Nabooru tries to backpedal, "Oh, I just meant..." she pauses just enough for Makaru to talk: "Ruto will become Queen soon, I'm just her counsel. She didn't send me though, her father did." Nabooru looks at Impa, who stands rather stiffly. After a while, Impa says "Makaru." The Zora looks to her and she bows. Makaru says quietly, "I don't want any conflicts. I don't think Ruto does either, but she is very protective."

Impa stands and nods. "I understand." Impa and Makaru look at each other for a while, then down. Nabooru shifts, looking up the river and tapping her foot. Impa and Makaru look at each other again. Makaru says "I assume the royal family..." He trails off and looks away. Impa just tilts her head a bit, also now looking up the river. "It is done. There is a girl named Malon, she has taken in the Hylians at her ranch in the center of Hyrule. She will probably come to see the King soon, although I'm not sure when, or what she will say."

After a while, Makaru says "We probably will not have a King by then. She will have to speak to Ruto. If you talk to her, it might be better if she communicates through me. You are welcome to come to the domain." Makaru pauses, "Sorry, what were your

names?"

"I am Impa." Impa says. Makaru turns to Nabooru, who still looks away. She finally turns "I am Nabooru. I lead these Gerudo." She extends a hand. Makaru shakes it. Nabooru explains, "We left the desert as there was... a split." she pauses. "We thought we'd only be here for a while, but some things came up and we will likely be here for..." Nabooru pauses again, then looks at Impa, who is looking at her. Nabooru turns to Makaru, "We will be staying in the lowlands here indefinitely. If anything comes up, we can move our camp."

Makaru looks to both of them, then, addressing Nabooru, says "I can't guarantee anything, but I also don't foresee any issues. Zora are not warriors, nor interested in empire." Nabooru nods. "You are honorable people, we Gerudo have long admired you in fact." Makaru does smile at this. "That is mutual, from every Zora I have ever met." Nabooru bows, as does Makaru.

"That is all, I wanted to reach out before anything changes. I'm glad to meet you two." Makaru looks to each of them again. Nabooru offers a hand, which he shakes, Impa's as well. "Good night then." He says, bowing to Impa and turning. He dives into the river and quickly disappears upstream.

Nabooru looks to Impa, whose arms are folded. "What do you think?" Nabooru asks.

Impa doesn't say anything for a while.
She sighs, "Everything is moving so fast."

After a few moments, Nabooru puts her hand on Impa's waist gently. Impa unfolds her arms, grabbing Nabooru's hand. Nabooru looks at her, "Are we moving too fast?" Impa turns, tightening her grip a little, but just looks into the river.

Nabooru squeezes her hand lightly, looking at her. "Impa?" Impa looks at her, at first just past her, but eventually she looks into Nabooru's eyes. They stand and look at each other for a while. "I'm sorry, Nabooru. I don't know." Impa finally says. Nabooru looks down at their hands. "It's okay. I don't either." They stand a while longer. Eventually, Nabooru looks up at Impa, but Impa seems to look past her.

Nabooru carefully and gently grabs Impa's other hand. Nabooru softly says, "I need you Impa." Impa's focus finally comes back to her. "Why?" Impa asks, almost reflexively - her tone isn't defensive, but more a tone of confusion. Nabooru doesn't say

anything. She wraps her arms around Impa.

Impa freezes up for a second, but wraps her arms around Nabooru as well. "I just need you." She says. Impa puts one hand on Nabooru's head, squeezing her tightly. "I'm here. I'll stay as long as you want me to." Nabooru squeezes her tighter. The two breathe deeply, standing in the sunlight beside the flowing river.

Impa and Nabooru Discuss Various Issues

Walking slowly side by side, Impa and Nabooru turn the bend of the river, the stable and south gate of the camp ahead. "Oh." Impa says. Nabooru looks at her as they walk.

"I forgot, Zarah and I were going to get started making soaps today. I haven't seen her all day." Nabooru shrugs a bit, although Impa seems to be scanning the camp for Zarah.

"I'm sure we'll run into her. Do you mind if I join you?" Nabooru asks. Impa looks at her - "Of course, you don't have to ask."

Nabooru doesn't look at her, "That'd be nice. I do have to ask of you though, Impa," Impa slows down further, "Please don't go out anywhere without me again." Nabooru looks at her. Impa begins to say something but decides to stop. "Okay." Impa says. They approach the stables. Nabooru explains, "It isn't that I don't trust you, I'm sure you and Zarah, together or alone, can both handle Wolfos or Tektites or anything like that. I think we need to be very careful though."

They walk around the corner of the stable. Impa nods. "I know it wasn't my place to bring her out to the lake, although Dreza did encourage it." They walk along the fence toward the south gate, although they both stop for a while at the small, deep pond that holds the Loach the Zora offered them. The two look into the pond, watching the Loach resting.

"If things were different, Zarah would probably be going on her Rite of Travel. Right now, though, we are probably going to have to suspend it for all the girls." They stand there a while longer.

Impa says after a while "I guess, I haven't thought about how different things must be for everyone here. I'm sorry." She pauses, but adds hopefully, "Everyone does seem to be handling it well, though." Looking at Nabooru. Nabooru is quiet for a long while. Eventually, she just says "Yeah." and starts walking to the gate.

Impa is a bit concerned, she wants to ask more, talk longer, but follows without a word. As they walk through the camp, a group of younger Gerudo are standing in the aisle of the camp. As Impa and Nabooru pass, the four of them quiet down and bow. Nabooru starts walking more quickly, and Impa catches up. Approaching the cafeteria pavilion, Nabooru slows down approaching her tent. "What is it?" Impa asks. Nabooru turns to

her. She looks at Impa expressionlessly. "I need to be alone for a while." she says.

Impa is confused, but accepts, asking "Do you still want to make the soap with Zarah and I?" Nabooru looks away and shrugs. "Not today. I just need to read and write for a while." Impa resists the urge to pry. "Alright." Impa says softly. Nabooru continues - "There's just so much to think about. I need to meditate as well - and do prayer." Nabooru's eyes wander. "Oh, I need to bathe as well-" Nabooru starts, but Impa puts a hand up. "You don't have to explain. If you need anything, let me know, okay?"

Nabooru looks at Impa and smiles. "Well," Nabooru starts, turning and quickly unfastening the door on her tent and opening it. She walks in but turns her head back and asks "Come in just for a second?" Impa smiles and does. Nabooru closes the door lightly and leans up and kisses her briefly. They look at each other and smile. Nabooru leans in again, this time they kiss quite a lot longer and Impa does put her hands on Nabooru's waist. Nabooru holds Impa's head with her hands.

The two breath deeply, hearts beating quickly - then Nabooru pulls away, opening the door again quickly. She smiles at Impa and says "Ring for me at dinner later. Maybe spend the night again?". Impa smiles back and bows slightly while stepping out. "If you want me to, I will." Impa says. Nabooru smiles. Impa backs out of the tent. Nabooru quickly grabs an orange sash from by the inside of the door and hangs it on the hook above her door, closing it rather quickly. Impa turns around, her heart still racing a bit, a smile lingering.

Makaru Consults Ruto

Makaru knocks lightly on the door of the wall now separating the lake above Zora's domain from the once wide opening in the cliff face that used to lead into the Great Fairy's fountain. The space in front has been turned into a garden since the day before, with grass and planters with flowers. The garden and entrance are hidden from the lake by tall fences, although a gate to the west has no door. Makaru can't place why, but he can't help thinking that the garden looks like a graveyard.

A zora opens the door and, seeing him, gestures for him to come in. He walks into the chamber, the zora closing the door behind him and joins two more zora standing in front of him. sunlight shines through a grate along the top of the wall he came through, and, although the grate has a graceful wavy pattern, the shadows fall from it like the shadows of jail bars. the various shadowy corners of the room are meticulously lit by candles. Across from the entrance on a raised stone stage, below a massive Zora emblem, King Zora rests.

"He is sleeping." One of the zora says quietly. Makaru approaches a moat in front of the King with one of each fish from the river. Makaru bows deeply, hearing the King breathing, occasionally wheezing. As Makaru stands, a zora touches his shoulder gently and extends an arm, pointing to the North wall, where a torch-lit sort of lobby has been carved from the stone. Makaru walks to it, another zora bows and gestures to Makaru's left. A stairway extends upwards.

Makaru walks to the stairway, looking up and seeing candles in slats in the wall lighting the way up, unable to see the top. He turns to look at the zora in the lobby, but he has joined the other three, who he hears quietly leave through the door Makaru came in.

Makaru turns up to the stairs again. He breathes deeply and begins to climb. Each opening in the stone to his right has a candle. above each candle, inlaid a bit further, a portrait of an animal or plant of the river. Fish, eels, birds, insects, turtles, frogs, mussels, trees, flowers - each beautifully rendered in traditional Zora watercolor. As Makaru begins to see another room at the top of the stairs, he notices each watercolor signed: Ruto.

Makaru reaches the top and enters a similar lobby room. To the left, a wall like the one at the bottom floor entrance: tall and fence-like, having a wavy-patterned metal grate that stretches above the wood panels, across the top of the jagged stone

opening - this one having a few wide windows at eye level which presumably overlook the lake. More candles adorn the dark corners of the large, otherwise empty room. Makaru considers looking out over the lake, but instead just watches the candles for a while.

No sounds of playing zora echo over the grate. Everyone has been told to stay in their quarters, except for Makaru and the zora who accompanied him earlier. Even they were only allowed a short time out, although Makaru was to come to see Ruto. Hearing his own footsteps echo through the room, he turns away from the sunlight, which falls short of the wall behind him. No candles adorn the wall. Nothing does. A single wooden door stares at Makaru from across the room.

Makaru walks to the door and puts his hand up to knock, but hesitates. After a few moments, he knocks. His gentle knock rings out through the room as loud as a hammer on an empty wooden crate, and he winces. Just as soon as his hand moves away from the door, it creaks open a bit. Not pushed by any hand, but seemingly by a light wind from behind it. Makaru stands nervously waiting.

After a while, he hears nothing. The door stands still. He steps towards it, slowly pulling it open further. As he does, he sees more steps going up further. He opens the door fully and looks in. Another long staircase leading up.

Makaru sighs and begins walking up. This staircase winds in a slow circle. The indents in the walls of it are just wide enough for a candle, although they are much less numerous as well, some parts of the stairway being dark. Makaru tries to imagine the shape of the staircase, but his sense of direction fails him.

Eventually, he reaches the top. Another wooden door confronts him, this one looms above him, guarding the top step, such that to enter the door one would have to take a step up. It is dark, but he can see through miniscule cracks in the door itself that the room beyond is lit by daylight. The edges of the door are firmly closed against the stone. Makaru knocks twice, the sound being oddly muffled in the staircase compared to in the room below.

After a while, hearing no movement, and seeing no shadows pass across the other side of the door which must be directly in the sunlight on the other side, as a few floating particles of dust draw his eyes to rays leaking through, he knocks three times again, although more quietly. A few more specks of dust pass

through the rays that pierce the door which, while being newly placed, is very old. Still, no movement on the other side, and the cracks in the door are too small to see anything but the faintest cracks of light. Makaru reaches for the handle of the door, but hesitates. He heard something on the other side. The tiniest of sounds.

Suddenly, Ruto's muffled voice: "Leave me alone."

Makaru just stands there for a moment like a fine carved Zora statue, one foot two steps above the other, his arm outstretched as if he were a saint offering a blessing, looking up at the door as if he had just claimed victory in battle. Hearing nothing more, he turns from a regal statue to a mere mortal fool. He turns silently and begins to make his way back down, ashamed, although not sure why.

Malon Seeks Out Ruto

"Makaru," a Zora calls out from the domain's entrance. Makaru is sitting on the old dead tree reading a book. He looks over, and seeing a younger Zora waving, sets the book down and dives off the tree, swimming over to the entrance. Climbing up onto the stone ground, the younger Zora says, "Someone is here, a Hylian I think. She's asking to meet Ruto."

Makaru stands and looks back past the tree to the fenced entrance to the grotto. He looks back to the young Zora. "Did this person say what it is about?" he asks. The Zora shakes their head. Makaru glances back to the grotto entrance, wondering why a Hylian would come asking to talk to Ruto instead of the King.

"Alright, where are they?" He asks. "Just at the entrance still, I did let her in." the Zora answers. Makaru starts to walk down the tunnel into the King's old chamber, now restructured into a much larger hall with several of the newer Zora families living in newly-carved rooms connected to it. The young Zora follows, but they run off into one of the rooms.

Makaru walks down the hall to the waterfall, looking down and seeing a woman in purple bloomers with long, deep reddish-orange hair standing near the entrance. Makaru dives off the waterfall, landing and, in one fluid motion, arcing underwater all the way across the domain's interior lake and surfacing at the ladder near the entrance.

He climbs, looking up to see the woman, probably just a bit younger, looking down. "That was an incredible dive! I've never seen anything like it!" The young woman smiles widely down at him. Makaru, mostly unphased, reaches the top of the ladder. "Can everyone here dive like that?!" she asks. Makaru, somewhat awkwardly, responds, "Well, no. Its always come easy to me, I guess. Just a blessing."

The woman smiles, stepping closer and putting a hand on his arm, "Sure is!" she says, then, seeing Makaru flinch a bit, "Oh, I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to be rude. I've never met a Zora before!" Makaru looks at her a bit skeptically. She must have, unless she is much younger than she seems. He shrugs it off, thinking, why would she lie? "My name is Malon, by the way." She says. "Nice to meet you-", Malon looks expectantly.

"Makaru." he says, thrown off. Malon puts a hand on her hip, saying, "Well, Makaru, its nice to meet you. I'm here on business, but I'd love to come visit you some other time." She leans forward a bit more, looking him up and down rather brazenly. He steps back a bit and looks away, although he fails to mask amenability as he says "I suppose."

Makaru looks back at her, seeing her looking at him. He stammers a bit, "Were you here to see Ruto?" Malon seems to roll her eyes but disguises it as looking up to the top of the waterfall. "Oh, yeah, I guess if she's around I did want to meet her, I've

heard so much about her.”

Makaru’s heartbeat slows a bit, his face feeling a bit less warm. “Sorry to say, but she isn’t seeing visitors.” Malon lightly glares at him, and he quickly says, “She is mourning. She has been through a lot and to be honest, even I, as her counsel haven’t talked to her directly in a few days.” He avoids Malon’s intense green eyes.

Malon adjusts her top, saying “Ah, yeah. Well, a lot has been going on for everyone. Sitting around doesn’t do much good for anyone though.” She looks up, seeing Makaru’s brow furrowing and adding, “I mean for anyone, its not good to spend so much time alone, even if they are mourning, everyone needs some company.”

Malon again slightly steps further toward Makaru. “Well, I can tell her you stopped by, what was your business?” he asks. Malon flips her hair behind her shoulder on one side, “Oh, nothing,” she says, “Just wanted to meet her. I haven’t seen any other Zora women around here.” Malon looks at him then looks around the domain.

“They spend most of their time taking care of the young ones.” Makaru says. He pauses as Malon again looks around rather dramatically. She looks at him again, this time pinning him with her intense eyes. “Have you got young ones yourself?”

Makaru sighs, looking away and growing a bit exhausted. “I don’t.” he says.

Malon senses his resignation. “I’m sorry, dear. I don’t mean to pry too much, I’m just curious.” Makaru looks back at her as she steps back – she does seem genuinely apologetic, turning a bit and looking out the entrance, saying, “I think I’ll leave you alone. Maybe I’ll come back another time, if that’s okay.”

Makaru pauses but, his own eyes now wandering up and down Malon. He steps forward and waves a hand, “It’s alright. I’ve been under a lot of stress is all. I’d show you around some other time, though.”

Malon turns, saying, “That’d be lovely, Makaru. Maybe you can show me your personal quarters, if you have any?” She smiles at him, Makaru’s eyes wide. Not really thinking, he just responds “I do,” his heart racing again.

“Well, Makaru. I’ll come visit you tomorrow, if that’s alright with you?” she asks. Makaru looks away, scratching his forehead awkwardly. He simply says, “Sure.”

Malon leans toward him, again putting a hand gently on his arm, “Alright then, I look forward to it.” she says, looking up at him. He just nods. Malon laughs, tapping his arm a few times then turning to leave. “Have a good day, Makaru. It was lovely to meet you.”

As she walks out, Makaru watches. “Me too,” he says rather quietly and automatically, entranced by Malon, who turns back to

wave before stepping across the gap between the domain's entrance and the outcrop in front of the waterfall, disappearing left and down the river.

Act 3

A Confrontation

"Hey!"

Zarah calls out from down the river. Nabooru rolls her eyes, Impa smiles. "Hey, come here, you have to see this!" Zarah yells again. They start walking, Nabooru yells back "We're coming!"

They turn the bend in the river, seeing Zarah standing by the stables. They walk rather slowly down the river, Zarah yells and gestures to them, "Seriously, hurry!" The two look at each other and do start jogging back, eventually meeting Zarah who points into the stable up at the ceiling. "Look! Its so pretty and gold!"

Nabooru and Impa look up at the ceiling where Zarah points - a gold skulltula is clinging to the ceiling. Nabooru laughs, "I didn't know they had those out here in the lowlands too. They're so pesky." She looks at Zarah, "Zarah go get your bow."

"What!? I don't want to kill it! Maybe I can train it!" Zarah says. Nabooru remembers that the younger Gerudo probably haven't seen gold skulltula before. "They're a lot more useful dead. We can use the metals and gemstones." she says.

Impa is staring, concerned, and Nabooru turns to her - surprised to see her worried expression. "What, scared of skulltula, Impa?" Nabooru teases. Impa immediately starts to walk past the fence to the gate, around and toward the stable, Zarah letting out a "Huh?"

Impa doesn't even wait to take her horse out of the stable, getting on and starting to ride out and through the gate. "I have to go see Anju. Those shouldn't be here." She looks back at Nabooru and Zarah, who are both confused. "I'll be back in a bit." Impa says, turning, but Nabooru asks, "They exiled you, though, you think they'll let you in to see her? What's the big deal anyway?"

Impa looks back, "They probably will turn me away, but maybe I can sneak in to see her, she said she lives along the west fence, I can look over and see if she's there."

"Why are you so worked up about it?" Nabooru asks again, but Impa simply turns and starts over the bridge, saying "They shouldn't be here." before getting to the other side and quickly riding off toward the south end of Lon Lon.

Nabooru and Zarah look at each other. "Well, leave it for now I guess." Nabooru says. Zarah asks, "Is she really that afraid of a

skulltula?" Nabooru shakes her head. "I don't know. I guess I'll find out when she gets back." She scratches her head.

"Lunch soon, huh?" Nabooru asks.

"Oh! I'm on cooking duty, I forgot!!!" Zarah says, immediately running into the camp.

Nabooru sighs, looking briefly back across the field to Impa who is already almost disappeared over the hill. She heads into camp, calling out to Zarah, "I'll be in the cafe, alright?"

Zarah probably doesn't hear. Nabooru walks through the main aisle of the camp toward the cafeteria pavilion.

Golden-Hearted

Zarah finishes her own meal in the kitchen after bringing everyone their meals, gathering and washing the dishes. She washes her own dishes, excited to return to the gold skulltula.

Returning to the stable, she looks up at it. "Hey, you!" She calls out. It stops spinning aimlessly and seems to look at her. "What're you doing up there?"

She patiently awaits an answer. Eventually, the skulltula moves along the ceiling and starts to descend the pole in the back of an open stall. Zarah walks into the stall, watching it descend to the floor. "What do you like to eat?" She asks.

The skulltula inches a bit toward her away from the wall and stops in front of her. "Maybe you don't need to eat anything?"

It doesn't respond, just sitting in the middle of the stall in front of Zarah. "Follow me, okay? Try it." She backs up, out of the stall and outside of the stable. After a bit, the skulltula follows her out, as it reaches the sunlight it pauses and backs up into the shadow cast by the roof of the stable.

"Ooooh." Zarah says. "You can't go in the sun, huh?"

Zarah thinks for a while. "I'll be right back okay?" She turns and runs to her tent, returning with a spherical basket with a small flat base, setting it down near the skulltula, holding the lid in her hand, she says "Go in there, it'll stay dark."

Almost as if it is questioning whether to trust her, it pauses but starts to climb the basket. It is the size of a large rat. The weight of it tips the basket toward it and Zarah almost reaches to pick it up but she realizes it can get in. The skulltula pulls the opening of the basket down enough to climb in, as it does it tumbles and the basket rolls back upright.

"You're good at that!" Zarah says, looking into the basket. "I still don't know what you like to eat though, or if you do." She looks into the basket at it for a while longer, then puts the lid on and picks it up, turning and taking it to her tent.

A Childrens' Rhyme

As Impa rounds the south of Lon Lon, pulling up to the west fence, she pulls her horse up to it, carefully stepping onto the stirrup and looking over the fence. She could hear, and now sees a group of kids singing, some skipping around, others playing to the side and laughing. Impa, almost horrified, sees Nemek - standing and waving like a conductor in front of the three girls singing. Somehow worse, the three girls sing to the tune of Zelda's Lullaby:

Poor old girl
Cold hard world
She grew cold
'Til She was no more

Born to lead
Made to wait
Wait she did
'Til it was too late

She made a boy
Made him a blade
But down he sank
Into the lake

Now we're all
Ruled by the cows
The frogs and fish,
And the guay

For when man rules
He rules with pride
With not a care
For wrong or right

The girls laugh, a few kids looking on clap and laugh as well. Impa stares for a moment, her foot on shaking on the stirrup. "Impa!" Anju calls out, looking around a shanty to the left. Impa looks at her and Anju calls out again, "I'll meet you at the north entrance!" Impa nods, and Anju quickly turns and walks through the surrounding small shanty buildings.

Impa looks back to the children, who are dispersed now, a couple girls chase a boy off past one of the buildings. Nemek is nowhere to be seen.

Deku Scrubs Re-establish Trade

Nabooru and Dreza sit in the cafeteria, talking about possibly cutting down some trees near the stable to construct a more permanent barn. Dreza though, stops Nabooru, pointing out and up a bit to the field, "The scrubs found us."

Nabooru looks, seeing three Deku Scrubs flying slowly toward them. "Either us, or they might be going to Death Mountain." She says. Dreza and her watch and wait. After a while, the scrubs pass over the pavilion roof, so they both get up and walk to the north gate, looking up and seeing the scrubs descending. "Hello, how are you?" Dreza says to them.

"Excellent, excellent! It is a bit strange to see you Gerudo in the lowlands, are you lost? Regardless, don't I have a deal for you today!" One of them squeeks as he lands in front of the two, who look at each other. Nabooru puts her hands on her hips.

Another scrub speaks up as well, now landing with the other. "I've also got a HUGE discount today for you two!" Dreza laughs. The third scrub says, "I'm sure you have everything you need already, ladies, but I've got something you've likely never seen before!" Nabooru does raise an eyebrow at this.

"Well, what have you got?" Dreza asks the first scrub. "Sir, I have an exclusive deal just for you only!" It squeeks to her, although it looks at Nabooru as well and adds, "and your beautiful wife as well! I am selling the finest Deku Sheild you ever saw - with it you can defend her from any Mad Scrub or even Wolfos!" Dreza laughs again - she loves Deku Scrubs. "How much then, do you only have one?"

The scrub jumps excitedly, saying "A wise man to ask for a bulk discount! I can offer you five for the incredible price of two hundred rupees!" Dreza and Nabooru stare at each other in shock for a moment, "I'll be right back, we absolutely could use them, and the spares!" Dreza says, walking quickly back into the camp.

"What about you two?" Nabooru asks the other scrubs. The second one says to the other, "After you, sir!", to which the other says "No, no, I insist!" Nabooru rolls her eyes and points at the second scrub, "What have you got?"

"Ma'am, I offer you the best deal you can find today! Red potions, today only ten rupees each!" Nabooru raises her eyebrows. "And you?" She asks the third, who says, "Ma'am, you are clearly an experienced warrior, I am sure you have traveled far and wide, but I believe you have maybe never seen something

like this before – I offer it for a mere ninety-nine rupees!” The scrub says, digging in a bag it has set down.

The scrub struggles with something heavy in the bag, eventually lifting up and then promptly dropping a huge hammer with a shriek. “Ahem!” The scrub bends over and stands the hammer up, saying “What do you think? As a matter of fact, I will offer you a special deal just because you are so beautiful – only seventy rupees for you! This hammer can easily smash any Iron Knuckle armor, make short work of an Armos, and even turn boulders to dust with one fell strike!”

Nabooru looks at the hammer, stroking her chin. “Alright, sure, I’ll take it.” She says, producing her wallet and handing the rupees over. “Wonderful, wonderful, miss! You’re sure to love it! Goodbye now!” The scrub shrieks, grabbing its bag and quickly ascending, muttering “Finally rid of that stupid thing.” as it begins flying much more quickly toward Kokiri forest.

“Do you still have interest in Red Potions?” The second scrub asks Nabooru. “I never said I wanted any.” She says, glaring at it. The scrub shrieks with fear, but she smiles and says “I’ll take six though.” The scrub claps and jumps ridiculously, reaching in and pulling out a massive flask, and adding, “I have bottles for sale as well, only sixty each!” Nabooru waves her hand, seeing Dreza returning. “I’ll be right back.” she says, passing Dreza toward her tent. Dreza transacts, receiving the sheilds and carries them to a table in the pavilion as Nabooru returns with six empty bottles to the first scrub that landed, now alone.

She hands the scrub rupees and holds the bottles for the scrub to fill them. As soon as the last is full, the scrub quickly puts away the flask and begins ascending as well, saying “You’ve bought us all out, we didn’t even make it to Death Mountain! Well, enjoy your day, ma’am!” as it turns and quickly flies to Kokiri Forest, the three of them now forming a sparse line across the sky, chirping and squeeking at eachother across the sky.

Nabooru places each of the bottles back in the caddy she brought them in, bringing it over to the table with Dreza. “What’s that?” Dreza asks, looking at the hammer still standing outside the gate. “Oh! I figured you’d have a use for it.” Nabooru says, quickly walking out and picking it up, inspecting it and finding no markings of any kind, the handle wrapped with fraying fabric, she carries it mallet-up back to the table, showing Dreza.

“Its enormous.” Dreza says, staring.

"Yeah, I hear that a lot." Nabooru says. The two laugh, Dreza covering her face. "You think you have any use for it." Dreza shakes her head, "Not anymore." she says. Nabooru laughs. "Suit yourself then." Nabooru says. She looks at the caddy of bottles. "Do we have any potion makers in training? I have been a bit worried the ones we have might go bad."

"Oh, yeah. Asheti seems to be very good with it." Dreza says. Nabooru nods. "Well, something for her to do during her retreat then, I'll give her one and see if she can reproduce it." Dreza nods as well.

"I'm going to put these in the armory tent. Are you hunting or training today?" Dreza asks, picking up the stack of sheilds.

Nabooru looks toward Lon Lon, a bit mindlessly, but sees Impa's horse pulling around toward the gate. She grabs her spyglass from her belt and looks closer, seeing a door to the side of the large gate open and Anju speaking to Impa, eventually inviting her in - Impa petting her horse before going in with her, the door closing. Nabooru retracts and puts away the spyglass, sitting down.

"I don't have any tasks today at all. I'll probably wait out here for Impa to come back. We might go visit the lake, but if not I'll probably just read and maybe fish some later."

Dreza, shifting the sheilds she is holding, asks "How are things, by the way? Seems to be good."

Nabooru breathes deeply. "I think it is. I am still nervous."

Dreza turns, although she does look back at Nabooru, "Taking things slow?" Nabooru sighs. "I'm trying."

Nabooru doesn't see Dreza smile a bit. "Well, I always tell you, take your time. You should stick with this one."

Nabooru sits looking at the potions in the caddy for a while. "I will." She says, although turning to look, Dreza has already left.

Malon Resumes Talks With the Zora

After a while, Nabooru, occasionally taking her spyglass to look across the field at the gate to the ranch, sees, instead of the door on the side opening, sees the large gate draw open. As it does, a woman on a horse slowly makes her way out, seeming to call back to someone further back – Nabooru sees a Hylian man waving to her.

The woman has a large cowboy hat, wearing purple bloomers and a cropped vanilla shirt with a gold neckerchief. Nabooru watches the gate close behind her as she makes her way down the hill towards the camp. Closing the eyeglass, she stands up, but decides to just sit back down.

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Zarah approaching. Nabooru turns to Zarah, who says as she approaches, “Hey, I gave that skulltula a home! It listened to me and crawled right into a basket I set out for it!”

Nabooru looks at her, ignoring what she said and asking, “Zarah, have you met a lady with long red hair?” Zarah says, “Yeah, she’s right there.” and points at Nabooru. Nabooru rolls her eyes. “No, I mean a Hylian. From that ranch, maybe you can see her, she’s coming this way.” Nabooru points out to the ranch.

“Oh! That’s Malon. She’s umm...” Zarah pauses, looking across the field toward Malon. “She’s okay I guess. I haven’t ever really talked to her though.” Nabooru looks at Zarah skeptically.

“You’re sure? Malon is her name?” Nabooru asks. Turning back to Nabooru, Zarah nods.

“Where’d you get that?” Zarah asks, point at the caddy of potions. “Oh, you just missed it. Some Deku Scrubs stopped by. They were practically giving things away. Look at this.” She says, turning and hauling the hammer onto the table. Zarah’s eyes widen. “Woah. Its so huge. Did a Deku Scrub sell you that!?”

Nabooru nods. “Pretty weird, huh?” She says, Zarah immediately picks it up effortlessly. “I don’t have any use for it really, I thought it was interesting though, and it was cheap.” Zarah pretends to fight with it, striking poses. “I was thinking Dreza might want it but she said she has no use for it either.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Nabooru sees Malon approaching the bridge.

“I wish I had one. I bet this thing could crush a boulder like its nothing-” Zarah starts, investigating it, but Nabooru quickly says, “Well why don’t you have it then. Go try and find some rocks to smash, alright?” Zarah looks at her with her mouth hanging a bit and Nabooru laughs. “Maybe you can pay me back the rupees I spent on it if you smash enough boulders.”

Zarah is speechless for a bit, then turns and quickly walks off, probably heading to the river. “Thanks!!!” She yells back at Nabooru, who laughs.

She hears a voice call out from the gate to the pavilion. “Well

hey there! Sad to see her run off, I've barely met the girl."

Nabooru turns, seeing Malon waving and smiling. Nabooru finds herself waving back then pauses before asking, "You must be Malon?" Malon gives an exaggerated bow - "Yes ma'am. I take it you are Nabooru?" she asks, looking over as Nabooru nods.

"Come on into the shade then," Nabooru says. "Do you need any Red Potion? I got them very cheap earlier." Malon walks over, reaching for her purse and asking "Oh, well I wouldn't mind a spare, how much are you charging?"

Nabooru looks to Malon's horse, saying "Oh, you can just have one. By the way, we do have a stable-" Malon looks at her with a faint smile still and interrupts "Oh, I probably won't be too long, I do have to visit Death Mountain as well. Just doing my rounds, I suppose." She says with a giggle.

"I see." Nabooru says, bristling a bit at Malon's laugh.

"Mind if I sit with you for a while?" Malon asks, grabbing a Red Potion and stowing it in her purse.

"Sure." Nabooru simply says as Malon makes her way around the table to sit almost directly across from her.

"Oh," Malon starts, "I was wondering if you all would take money for those, um..." she pauses. "Well, that girl who left gave me some delicious pastries the other day, I'd love to buy some."

"It isn't really our way to take money for food." Nabooru says.

"Ah, I see. Well, I would love to have them again some time." Malon says, digging in her bag and producing a canteen which she unscrews.

"We do have some, I can get you a couple." Nabooru says.

Standing, she pauses for while, then asks, "Were you wanting to buy a tray full? How much would you pay?"

Malon drinks from her canteen and then looks at Nabooru, eyeing her up and down. "Well, I'd buy plenty for the whole town up there - I was thinking one hundred rupees per tray?" She says, taking another sip of water.

Nabooru looks at her rather stunned. Malon quickly says, "Well, maybe a hundred fifty?" Nabooru waves her hands, "No, no, a hundred is plenty. We'd be glad to sell you some, how many trays did you think? We only have one tray at the moment."

Malon looks excited, "Oh, that's fine, I'd love to buy them fresh any way! I was thinking seven or eight, do they keep well?"

Nabooru says "Oh yes, very well." Malon screws the lid back on her canteen, rifling through her purse a bit, although producing nothing and staring at the table. "Do you happen to have any coffee on?" She asks.

"I'll be right back," Nabooru says, "I'll grab you a cup of coffee and a couple baklava." Malon closes her eyes, breathing deeply and gently saying "That'd be lovely."

Nabooru heads to the kitchen tent and Malon rests her head

on a hand, looking into the woods across the pavilion. After some time, she yawns and looks around, eventually looking down the aisle of the camp, where she sees Zarah walking quickly toward the pavilion with a basket. Zarah enters, and waving at Malon while looking around, quietly approaches and sits at the table with Malon, opening the basket and tilting it to show Malon.

"Look, I found this in the river just now." Zarah says, almost whispering. Malon looks into the basket and sees several chunks of Red Ice, saying "What is that? Some kind of gemstone?" Zarah shakes her head, saying, "No, no, Its ice!"

Looking at the girl skeptically, she asks "It was in the river?" Zarah nods. "It doesn't melt, it just stays cold! There wasn't much of it, but if we had more we could use it to keep food for a lot longer I bet."

Malon rubs her chin for a while. "What was your name again, dear?" she asks. "Zarah." the girl says, looking into the basket and shaking it a bit - the ice making a horrible screeching sound that makes Malon cringe. "Please don't do that, what a terrible sound!" Malon says, Zarah makes an exaggerated frown at her briefly then stands up with the basket.

Malon extends a hand, though, saying "Hold on, girl-" Zarah interrupts, "I just told you my name." Malon rolls her eyes and scratches her forehead, continuing, "If you find any more of that ice, I'll pay you well for it."

Zarah looks at her and flatly says, "I don't need money." then turns, walking back along the woods, just missing Nabooru returning through the central aisle of the camp holding a tray with two cups and a plate, sitting beside Malon and grabbing a cup of coffee and drinking.

Malon rifles through her bag again mindlessly, eventually producing a smaller flask. "I'm sorry, dear. I just remembered that I also have to visit the Zora today as well." She pours the cup of coffee Nabooru brought into the flask. "I appreciate the coffee and company, of course."

Malon looks at her, her lips puckered and raising a finger to them in thought, she looks off into the woods past Nabooru, who asks, "Have you been speaking with their King?" Malon scratches her neck, saying, "Oh no. I haven't been able to meet him, nor the princess. I have made a bit of a friend among them, though."

Malon stands up, but seems uneasy. "It was quite nice to meet you, Impa..." she says, Nabooru casts a confused look.

Malon seems to freeze up, and suddenly collapses. Nabooru looks around then quickly attends to her, finding her to be unconscious. Checking her breathing, which is fine, Nabooru grabs Malon's arm and hoists her up, calling out toward the camp, "Dreza!"

Malon's Continued Talks

After some time, Dreza having set up a hammock in the pavilion and resting Malon on it, sitting her somewhat upright, Nabooru glances over, noticing Malon rubbing her eyes.

Dreza and Nabooru stand from the table and approach her. After yawning and stretching a bit, Malon looks a bit confused at them, then at the hammock she is in. As if nothing were wrong, she says "Oh, I appreciate your hospitality, ladies."

Dreza and Nabooru look at each other. Malon shifts a bit, asking "Do you remember where I happened to put my bag?" Dreza turns to get it from the table, while Nabooru looks the girl up and down. "Are you alright?"

Malon, looking a bit confused still, says "Well, I suppose I'm still a bit tired, but I do have a lot to do today." receiving her bag from Dreza and attempting to stand but reclining back into the hammock a bit. "I do thank you so much for the accommodations. By the way, do you often see fireflies during the day around here?"

Again, Dreza and Nabooru look at each other, then back to Malon, who says, oddly thoughtfully, "That forest is filled with them, its quite an asset. You could save a fortune on oil if you learned to harvest them."

Malon again rifles through her bag aimlessly.

"You sure you are feeling alright?" Dreza asks. Malon nods, producing the both the bottle of red potion and flask of coffee Nabooru had given her earlier, unscrewing the flask and yawning. "Oh yes, much better. I was so tired." she says, drawing from her flask, then uncorking and drinking some of the red potion. The Gerudo watch her as if she were a guay that learned to speak.

"You collapsed on the floor earlier, I had to pick you up and Dreza prepared the hammock. We were very worried." Nabooru says.

Malon waves her hand, finishing another pull from her flask of coffee. "I'm so sorry about that. Again, I appreciate it so much. I needed just a breif rest."

Malon stands, having put the bottle of potion back in her bag and slung it over her shoulder, sipping more coffee. "I do have so much to do today. Do you think you could feed my horse while I go to the Zora's domain? I'd gladly pay you to watch her."

Nabooru shrugs at Dreza, who also shrugs, saying "It's alright, you don't have to pay. I'll bring her to the stable." as she walks through the pavilion to tend to Malon's horse.

"You're sure you are alright?" Nabooru asks again, watching Malon adjusting her bloomers. Malon looks up, now making eye contact and seemingly back to her usual self. "Oh, I'm feeling just great, really. That red potion was remarkably fresh, it must have just been made hours ago. Are you sure you don't need any money for it?"

Nabooru waves her hand, "I'm glad you are feeling well. You needed it, so it is fine." she says, Malon already beginning to walk toward the main aisle of the camp to head to the river trail. "I can show you around the camp if you want-" Nabooru starts, but Malon simply continues walking, sipping coffee. Nabooru shakes her head and follows.

The two walk through the camp and Nabooru asks, "Did you meet the princess' counsel, Makaru?"

Malon yawns again, although she gives Nabooru a rather wide eyed look from the side of her eyes and smiles very widely. "I did, yes! How ungoddesly my mind turns around him!" she exclaims, looking up and biting her lip. Nabooru rolls her eyes, and Malon laughs, elbowing her - Nabooru bristles.

"Oh come on now, we're both ladies. He's nearly irresistible, I'd say, wouldn't you?" Malon says, still smiling and looking ahead as they approach the stable and south gate. Nabooru simply says, "Sure."

Approaching the gate, the two stop. Malon pauses, then turns around, leaning toward Nabooru, who flinches a bit. "You must have someone you fancy already, don't you?" Malon says, smiling and leaning further toward Nabooru, who folds her arms. Malon looks Nabooru up and down, saying "Perhaps one of the fairer kind?" smiling again.

Nabooru, arms folded, stares at Malon angrily, "I'd just begun to find you tolerable." Nabooru says flatly. Malon's smile fades and she actually looks a bit hurt. "I am sorry, I don't mean anything bad by it. My father likes the same as well." Malon looks down. "I love him dearly. He hides from everyone with his dear."

Standing quietly, Nabooru softens, her mouth hangs open a bit as she fails to think of anything to say. Malon looks up to Nabooru, her dire and reflective tone throwing Nabooru off even further, "We are all trying our best to find something to keep going on for. It is the best we can do." Malon says, tearing up and rifling through her bag, finding a handkerchief and folding it in her hands.

Nabooru rubs her forehead, staring at the ground away from the girl as Malon quietly wipes her tears. "I am sorry to be so gloomy," pausing, Malon asks, "What was your name again?"

"Nabooru. It is alright. I appreciate your openness, Malon." Nabooru says, the two still don't look at each other but Malon does bow a bit, putting away her handkerchief and folding her hands. "I may just have to return home for the day." Malon says softly.

Nabooru waits for her to say more, but she doesn't. "From what I know, we have plenty of time. You seem to need a break from things for a while." Malon nods. She looks briefly up at Nabooru but doesn't make eye contact, instead looking over to the stable at her horse and beginning to walk over.

“I’ll watch to make sure that you make it back safely.” Nabooru says, presenting her spyglass as Malon nods again, now quiet. Approaching her horse, in the stable, she wordlessly gets on and begins making her way along the woods, Nabooru following silently as well.

They reach the north gate of the camp and Malon turns to Nabooru, looking down to her and making eye contact again. “I thank you, truly, Nabooru.” she simply says.

Nabooru scratches the back of her neck, looking down, “You owe me nothing.” She looks back up to Malon, who has turned and is already heading quietly and slowly back to the ranch.

Nabooru was skeptical when Impa had told her that Malon didn’t seem malicious. She had seemed almost friendly with Ganondorf when they saw her talking to him, on that day which now felt like years ago. Then again, she seems to try to be friendly to everyone.

Nabooru sits back down at the table in the pavilion, watching Malon return.

Ganondorf could be manipulating her.

Or, maybe the odd girl thinks she can outsmart him.

Nabooru just can’t get a read on it.

Zarah Follows The Skulltula

The evening light had turned everything gold. After finding the red ice, returning and finding no more, Zarah had wandered up the river a bit further, finding some boulders to test the hammer on. Being satisfied with it, and collecting a few blue rupees, she had returned to her tent, setting the hammer down near her desk and now sat to think of some other ways she could make use of it.

Sitting for a while, thinking, she, a bit absently, looks down at the baskets under the desk – one having the gold skulltula, the other having red ice, both lids closed.

She lifts the lid of the skulltula basket, and lets out a “Huh?” finding it empty. She looks around her tent for it, but to no luck. Leaving her tent and rounding the corner, seeing a Gerudo cooking for the camp in the kitchen tent, she asks, “Have you seen a skulltula crawling around?”

The Gerudo just continues cooking, saying “Nope.”

Returning to the pavilion, she hears a scuttling coming from inside Impa’s tent. She heads to the door and quickly opens it. Inside, she finds the skulltula’s sound is coming from a bag near the door. Zarah recognizes it as filled with fronds of lavender, sage and juniper that Impa and her had still not started to do anything with. Zarah opens the bag and realizes the skulltula must be at the bottom.

She reaches in, getting sap on her arm, eventually pulling the skulltula out carefully. Holding it up, she sees it has wrapped itself around some pieces of paper. “You eat paper, then?” Zarah asks it, taking it in both hands and standing up, looking down. It doesn’t seem to be eating the paper, just clinging around it.

Zarah looks at it as she walks out of Impa’s tent, returning to her own without sealing Impa’s. Sitting at her desk and setting the skulltula down, it unfurls from the paper and crawls over the side of the table – Zarah pulls back and watches it crawl back into its basket.

She stares for a while as it spins and eventually stills, and she returns the lid. Looking up, she inspects the papers. Seeing a header on the pages which say “Lake Hylia Laboratory of the Royal Family”, with handwriting on printed lines of the pages.

She looks around, then down at the silent baskets, she stands and seals her tent’s door. Lighting a lamp, she begins to read the few pages, which have a torn hole at the tops indicating they must have been posted somewhere together.

Pages From the Lakeside Laboratory

I have been faced with two options. I will choose the least painful.

Some years ago, I found a trapdoor on the ceiling which in all these years I never noticed. Perhaps I did, but assumed the planks to be a evidence of a mere patched hole. I had become quite paranoid after the first assault of rocks thrown at the building from the lake, and, knowing I could not venture out due to my binding, I turned my eyes over every inch of this building. It began as manic cleaning – every inch scrubbed with the smallest brush. Even in my strange trance over those days, I knew that something had broken in my mind as I found myself scrubbing the ceiling.

Still, with little else to distract me from my ever-racing thoughts, I scrubbed away. Upon the first pressure on the old wooden planks, I found them giving way. At first thrilled at the prospect of a new distraction – repairing the hole in the ceiling – I realized the planks moved together, and pushing upon them with my hand, they gave way together and I realized they formed a hinged panel. Adjusting the position of my ladder - which had, since my first assignment (or confinement), always been present in the case of the terrible occurrence that a “scientist” may fall into the deep pool while it is empty (a fate which now seems pleasant) – I climbed to the topmost step, heaving upward, so enthralled with curiosity. Into the crawlspace, I hoisted myself and a lantern.

Finding it disappointingly empty at first, I lamented the lack of some arcane discovery. Only months later would I wish that I had not been so determined to inspect every arch, every plank, every brick. The latter proved to be my undoing, as nestled into a circular indentation in an innocuous brick of the wall which made up the base of the lookout tower, was a keyhole. Enthralled, and so tragically ignorant, I realized my keyring, decades ago passed on to me as the building would become my home, there was always a remarkably old and large bronze key which seemed to fit no lock. With glee I descended and fetched it, returning to that cursed brick.

Surely sweating with anticipation, I inserted it, and to this day I remember the lock turning on its own of course. Latching itself open, the brick wall I faced began to retreat into itself by some supernatural force, forming an opening into the inside of the lookout tower. Upon its latching against the opposite wall, looking up the inside of the tower, a metal ladder plummeted down before me, the ringing of the iron striking the brick singing like a siren to me as I greedily climbed, not caring that there was nowhere it could logically lead – and indeed, it lead nowhere, but to a brick ceiling.

Yet behind me, on the wall across from the ladder, a small

shelve was formed in the brick, holding exactly the sort of treasure that a man like myself could not but shriek with boyish excitement to find: a row of books.

No ordinary books, as well – these were thin and tall, like none I had seen in all my years scouring libraries and antiquaries - comprising at most of two dozen pages each, the parchment within the oily, filthy, leather covers thick and warped.

Without hesitation I excavated them one small armful at a time. Finally with the collection completed on my desk, I poured through them immediately, but upon the first page I was met with disappointment at first, realizing the first I opened was merely a ledger of materials for the laboratories construction. Perhaps then, I could have thrown them all out, assuming them to be worthless transaction records kept for propriety's sake.

Yet I read each memo anyway - orders of planks and bricks and rope and the like, I absorbed them as if they were the finest literature in the land. Perhaps now, with the clarity to psychoanalyze my past self, the rhythm of the ledgers and the reliable mathematics of the tallies comforted my mind which was so torn through with chaos.

Finishing the first volume, I moved on to the next. Within it, I found more ledgers, although no longer were they for simple materials to build the outpost I inhabited. The ledgers called for increasingly strange things. First, massive stone slabs, with precise dimensions. Then, many iron gates and bars. Then, chains and spikes and barricades, Fascinated, but assuming I had run across ledgers for construction elsewhere in the land, I glanced and saw the requests were indeed to be shipped to Lake Hylia. Pouring through the ledgers, between pages asking for more and more and still more carved stone, I saw requests for “crystal switches” and “blade traps”, for “hookshot targets” and dozens of torches.

It quickly dawned upon me that perhaps the gate at the floor of the lake lead not merely to, as I was told, an old ceremonial plaque, but the entrance to some vast underground construction.

Thinking of this, I was quickly answered by a new volume which no longer held ledgers, but a journal of construction and blueprints. I looked over them, my suspicion all but confirmed. I was lead to the obvious question, what purpose could it serve? The volumes I had read had begun to outnumber those I had not, and I feared my question would not be answered.

If only it had remained unanswered, I may not be forced to do what I soon must. Dismissing the blueprints and journals describing the mundane details of the construction and receipts of payment for labor, I finally reached the final volume.

Unlike the others, the cover of it held a title:
On The Containment of the Deity of the Zora People.

In this text, the author detailed what he described as: the Zora

People's disgraceful "cowardice" in failing to either destroy or imprison a beast called Morpha; as well as their "stupidity" and "primitive nature" for appeasing it with prayer, sacrifice and worship. The author describes the "sacred duty" of the royal family to contain this monstrosity, and reform the "primitive" Zora people, informing them of the creation of this land by Hylia and the goddesses.

Much worse, I realized that that the prison was build not by Hylia, but by Zora, at the command of the royal family.

Before finishing the volume, I recall setting it aside for some time, my already fragile mind nearly in pain. This must be the reason for the assaults on the laboratory. I wondered - had this beast escaped, or was it an attack by the Zora on me, the unwilling guard of their imprisoned God?

Naively, I was later comforted by the fact that the assaults ceased shortly thereafter. The remaining part of the last volume described, in short form, the legend of the Hero of Time that all Hylia, yet few truly believed in.

Within this volume, however, the Hero of Time is not referred to as such. Instead, it refers to the Executioner, who is to be trained from birth to have the Intellect, Strength and Courage to finally slay the imprisoned Deities. The Hero of Time was the Executioner: the ultimate weapon which would ensure that the Zora, the Goron and the Gerudo, would, with his arrival and proper training, be forced to enter into eternal contract to the royal family under threat of their sacred Deities being not just imprisoned but slain if they refuse this Blood Oath.

Here, dear reader, I shall not bore you with the years after my discovery of these texts. I returned them immediately to where I had found them, and swore to never speak of it to a soul. In the years that followed, no assaults on the lab and nothing strange occurred. I carried on with life.

Yet here I sit, writing to whoever may find these pages. What lead me to this point?

I am not sure if it right to say that the royal family's plan is soon to fail - neither am I sure whether it is better for it to succeed or to fail. What I know is that I met the Executioner, the Hero, and I can not bear the burden of knowing his fate and his purpose. Seeing the naive boy brought back all the memories of those cursed books which I spent years pretending I never read.

For years, I did not see him. Then, he returned one day, asking a simple errand of procuring eyedrops. I obliged, but held my tongue. After this, for some weeks, I did not see him again, although my anxiety grew again - surely I would soon be scrubbing the walls and ceilings with fervor.

However, one night, several hours after seeing a strange man conduct some ritual on the island, then leave on horseback, I

glanced out my window to see something floating in the lake.

My reader, I will not write what I found floating in the lake.

All I will tell you is that I have decided to make myself one with the lake as well.

Perhaps no one will find this testament. Perhaps it is better that nobody does. I will leave it up to fate. To my reader, I offer no interpretation, no verdict. I am no jury, no judge. I simply write to make a record of the facts.

Having done so, whether these pages are found or not, I feel a great weight lifted from me. With this weight I carried deep in my soul now gone, perhaps when the deed is done, my spirit will be able to float up to meet Hylia, if she is real after all. I am only sorry to you, reader, that the fact of that matter is one I will not be able to record for you.

Hylia, if you do await me, or Morpha, if it is you who may someday meet my wretched remains, be kind to my miserable soul.

- Mizuumi

Zarah Speaks With Ruto

For a while, Zarah simply sits in silence. Her fingers rubbing gently up and down the last page she holds as she looks at the flickering lamp light glittering on the gold inlaid titles of the stack of books on her desk.

After a while, she stands, gathering a small shoulder bag, and carefully putting the pages within. She also grabs the basket of red ice, opens her tent, sealing it behind her quietly. The Gerudo from the kitchen turns the corner with a tray, saying "Oh, I was just about to bring your food, Zarah." Zarah looks down at the tray, then up at the Gerudo. "You can put it on my desk, I'll be back in a bit." she says, bowing and walking toward the south gate.

Approaching it, she glances to the stable, looking for a while at her horse. The horse that belonged to the Hero. She breathes deeply and sets out up the river, the sun not yet setting but the evening shadows growing long. Walking up the river further than she has yet, past the shanties and climbing up a fallen tree. Continuing further as the river's edges narrow and become overgrown, the noise of the river grows louder as she reaches a small bend and an old wooden bridge. Briefly assessing it and finding it likely passable, she walks across, rounding the bend to the right and then pausing, standing and looking with awe.

She had never seen a waterfall before. The sound of it is overwhelming, yet strangely calming as well. She stands for a while simply listening to the blanket of white noise that drowns out any frogs or guay. Eventually, seeing that the waterfall is split, a crevice dug into the stone, she ascends the moss-covered stone, taking care with each step not to slip.

Reaching the center of a stone outcrop which long ago must have been carved as a bridge from one side of the waterfall to the other, she stands looking into the crevice and seeing inside, at the end of a long tunnel, a open massive cavern, lit up inside with a faintly bluish glow. Looking down, she sees that she stands upon a massive stone plaque which has had its face chiseled away.

Looking back into the crevice, she jumps across to it and slowly walks down the hall.

Impa's Proposal to Nabooru

"How far do we have to move?" Dreza asks.

"Malon said we can set up along the Northwest of the old ranch, where they are already beginning to erect fortified stone walls." Impa says.

Nabooru is silent, picking at an unvarnished spot on the table. Impa looks to her, but she just stares at the table.

"All of this is just because of a skulltula? We have access to the water and fish from the river, wood and game from the forest. We can fortify the camp as it is here, if any of this is even true."

Impa sighs. "Nabooru, it won't be just skulltulas."

Nabooru looks to Dreza, who doesn't offer her any support.

Nabooru now sighs, looking to Impa. "I do believe you. But If we have to move, we could go to the south plains. There is nothing out there but Pea Hat and Deku Scrubs. Why should we move to the ranch, right at Ganondorf's doorstep?"

After looking at Impa for a while, who just looks down, Nabooru gets up and leaves. Impa and Dreza watch her go quietly.

Dreza looks concerned and turns to Impa, but the two both just look down for a while more. Eventually, Dreza looks up at the roof of the pavilion, about to say something, but doesn't.

"Should I go talk to her alone?" Impa asks.

Dreza just shakes her head.

Impa rests her head in her hand.

Zarah Meets Ruto

Makaru and Zarah stand in the humid dark of the stairwell. After a pause, Zarah's voice echos almost piercingly through the silence, "Princess Ruto, I have a piece of Zora history to give you."

There is a long silence, and Makaru begins to shake his head, but just as he does, the door begins to open, scraping against the stone. "Come in." Ruto's soft voice says. Zarah and Makaru look at each other, and Zarah leads the way up the last step into the bright room. Before Makaru can turn around the door to see Ruto, the door begins to close. He raises a hand, but instead backs down quietly. The door closes and he turns, making his way back down the stairs to the foyer.

The walls arch in Ruto's room, covered with by a vast mural of the flora and fauna of the river. Sunlight pours in from the south, where a massive window spanning the width of the room is carved from the rock. Along each wall, lit by skylights, are two vast aquariums filled with fish, clams, eels, seaweed, corals and too much more to list.

A waterfall springs from the north wall, the water almost silently flowing down a stepped ramp to an opening in the wall, at the base a long pool extends halfway out into the room. Zarah looks in awe at all of it, as Ruto turns to sit on a small mezzanine which looks out the massive window. Zarah follows slowly behind, taking it all in and stepping up to the beautiful iron table and chairs, inlaid with fine embroidered cushions.

"You must be a Gerudo, then." Ruto says softly, watching the girl set down a covered basket and sit, looking at the bracelets covering Zarah's arms almost to the elbows, and the girl's bright green eyes, as well as the gold ornament around her spiky ponytail, adorned with finely carved and wrapped rubies.

Zarah just nods, still looking around the room in wonder, and Ruto smiles, watching Zarah's gaze look over everything. Eventually, Zarah turns and digs for the papers in her bag, taking them out carefully.

She looks at them, then at Ruto, who smiles kindly.

"What did you have for me, dear?" Ruto asks.

Zarah looks down again at the pages. After a while, she puts them back in her bag and leans down to pick up the basket, presenting it to Ruto.

"I found these, I think they might be some kind of Zora artifact." she says, opening the lid to present the red ice to Ruto.

Malon Interlude

"Talon, I'm headin' out now," Malon calls out, opening the front door. Talon eventually comes to his door, looking a bit confused. "Alright then, take care then Mal." He says. Malon casts him a look he can't really place and heads out, closing the door behind her as he returns to his room, closing his door.

Malon walks her horse through the ranch to the west wall. The head Carpenter does look over at her but turns back to bark at some of his workers. The west fence has almost completely been replaced with tall stone and iron walls. An arch sits open facing the Gerudo camp down the hill across the field, the entrance to Kokiri forest visible as well.

Malon stops under the archway and stretches for a while. Seeing the man who ran one of the shops in Kakariko, she calls out to him. "Have you put in that order for coffee and lemons?" He waves to her, just yelling back "Yeeep." while cracking open a crate next to a few Deku Scrubs, in front of a newly finished building that will be his home and store.

Malon yawns and stretches again. She takes out a flask and sips some exceptionally strong green tea, turning to head out. She whips the reigns and bears a bit south, heading for Zora's river.

Malon Comforts Makaru

Stepping off her horse, Malon climbs up the fallen tree that leads up to the incline before the bridge around the bend. She sips her green tea, walking across the bridge and approaching the waterfall. Walking up, she hops across the gap into the entrance as if she has made the trip many times.

Adjusting her clothes and taking off her hat, she walks across and makes her way down the stairs cheerfully, almost skipping. Turning right, ignoring the Zora shopkeep talking to a young Zora to the left, she approaches a door with a massive skeleton of some aquatic creature hanging on it. She can hear music coming from inside, it must be Makaru's band practicing. Malon knocks hard and waits, swinging back and forth and now drinking some water from her canteen.

The music stops and Makaru answers the door. Seeing Malon, he immediately calls off the practice, to some groans from two male and a female Zora inside. Inviting Malon in, she sits down at a booth just to the left inside as the three Zora leave, one of the males slapping Makaru's butt and laughing. Makaru feigns a punch toward him, laughing and closing the door. Turning around, he bows to Malon before sitting next to her. "So, how have things been?" She asks, leaning toward him as he taps his foot a bit.

"Oh, pretty good really. We've gotten a lot of new-" He shivers as Malon leans against him and puts a hand on his thigh. "Go on, dear." She says, looking at him with a smile. "Well, we have almost finished six new songs. I think they really pull together everything we've been trying to do." Makaru says, his voice raising a bit as Malon strokes his thigh.

"That's very cute, sweetie." She says, now turning to him, kneeling upright and looking down at him. "I'm here to discuss business, though as you should expect." Makaru smiles and shivers, looking up at her. "Of course, ma'am." he lets out, crossing his legs. Malon looks down at his thighs then back at him, smiling. He leans in closer but she presses against his chest, pushing him back. "Now now, you mustn't let your feelings get the best of you."

Makaru gulps and nods, whispering, "Yes ma'am."

Malon again returns a hand to his thighs and he bristles, breathing deeply. "Sweet Zora boy, you know that I just want us to be open with each other." she says, spreading his thighs with both hands. "It will be easier for both of us if we don't hide anything from each other."

Makaru inhales deeply, bracing himself with his hands on the seat of the booth. "Yes, ma'am. Of course." Malon strokes up and down his thighs before kneeling upright again, reaching into her bag. "For today's negotiations," she says, about to pull something from the bag, but, seeing Makaru look, she says "Look at me,

darling. Don't be rude." Makaru nods and looks up at her, smiling briefly then biting his lip.

Malon leans forward, her face in front of his, they feel each others breath and warmth just inches away. "That's right, sweet boy. Just look into my eyes. You trust me, don't you?" Makaru nods, his mouth now hanging open a bit, staring directly into Malon's eyes. They hold for a while, Malon taking something from her bag and leaning in even further, the two can just barely feel the sides of their noses almost touching.

"I thought that for today's discussions, restraint would be of the utmost importance," Malon says, as Makaru feels something soft brush against the top of his head before Malon reaches behind him, wrapping a satin scarf around the wrist furthest from her. "Don't you agree?" She asks, smiling, the two still staring into each others' eyes. Makaru nods as she pulls the furthest wrist behind his back to meet the other, where she ties them together, then pushes on his chest. Makaru slides down in the seat a ways as Malon pulls back, looking him up and down, then kissing him.

Another Foggy Night

Another foggy night at the camp – the day had been a bit muggy but overcast. Zarah, Dreza and Impa sit at a table in the pavilion in front of one of the desk lamps Zarah had begun making – a base of carved wood reaching up and suspending a horizontal jar full of fireflies.

Dreza sits drawing blueprints for buildings they can construct after moving, taking in mind the materials Malon offered to procure for them from the Goron and Deku Scrubs. Zarah works on macrame as usual.

Impa sits, drinking tea and reading a book Zarah had given her – a Gerudo classic: travel diary, with some romance and foreign government intrigue.

Initially the older Gerudo of the camp were wary of the fog, although the younger ones seemed to be fascinated and found it pretty. Everyone was used to it now, though. Zarah had asked Impa a few times for reassurance that it was normal in the summers, and Impa did insist it was, especially in these parts of the lowlands.

Diagonal from them in the pavilion, three young Gerudo girls quietly play a card game. Impa had tried to learn the game, but found far too complicated. One game can sometimes take days to finish – she had even heard that it can drag on for a month, with Gerudo having small books where they keep notes about it. Some Gerudo even have notes for two or three games, occasionally jotting down ideas between chores.

Dreza had told her the game used to be simpler, but that the younger Gerudo had consolidated multiple card games into this one, and now it is the only one most of them play.

The older Gerudo in the past week had eased up on curfew for the teenage girls, so Impa saw them around the camp more – their regiments and routines seem to have become more lax. The camp was abundant – as Nabooru had pointed out, they had easy access here to plenty of water, game and fish, to the point that harvesting rupees became not a necessary chore but an occasional sport.

Deku Scrubs now brought arrows and shields less often, instead offering novelties, oddities and antiques, relics from distant lands, as well as new styles of clothing made by Kokiri which the younger Gerudo loved. Still, the prices remained very low, and many Gerudo had started bartering and trading with each other, as some hunters would run across Deku Scrubs in the south lowlands, and oftentimes the Scrubs would visit during training or classes, or occasionally some Gerudo would venture out to Lake Hylia to fish and return with wares from the Scrubs who had lately turned the lake into a second home outside the Kokiri forest.

A bit over a week has passed since Impa made her proposal.

Impa thought Nabooru was being evasive again, and she was, but it was different. They had talked briefly. Surprisingly to Impa, she recommending that Dreza and Impa coordinate it. Nabooru said she needed more space until the move was done, and Impa did not push.

If anything, Impa appreciated the space too, as well as Nabooru's directness this time. The last time Nabooru avoided her, after that strange night, the thing that hurt most was not the distance, but not knowing what Nabooru wanted.

Impa had wondered if Nabooru would turn out to be just another short-lived fling like others throughout the years. Maybe it was a bit too much, too soon? Maybe it was just too much.

Still, whenever she had run into Nabooru and made small talk over the past week, she knew it wasn't the case. Nabooru was restraining herself, not repressing. Impa and Dreza both saw it as a good sign, as Dreza said Nabooru tended to be much less careful in the past. The opposite of careful, really.

Impa, Zarah and Dreza had grown very familiar, spending most of their time together. Dreza had introduced Impa to several more Gerudo of the camp and she was glad to now be able to put names to faces she had seen around. Grateful to make small talk, to have been invited to take up cooking duties for a day, and to even be invited on an upcoming hunt.

"Did Zelda like the Zora?" - Impa is jarred by Zarah's spontaneous question. She should be used to the girl's meandering questions and thinking aloud, but she asked this question in an almost hushed tone. Impa looks at Zarah, who continues working away under the lamp, and thinks for a while. "Well, the Zora were always very loyal to the Hylian royal family. I couldn't say if she... liked or disliked them. I almost never saw her talk to any of them, or anyone outside of the castle or the capital." Impa finally says.

Zarah continues working, after a while she asks, "Why were they so loyal?" Impa sets down her book, puzzled. She hears a scuttling in the basket next to Zarah - the girl now often carried the gold skulltula around with her. No others had appeared quite yet. Anju had said it would likely still be weeks or months, maybe years before things get worse - but in the mean time, with construction already underway to the north side of the old ranch, it would be best for the camp to get ahead of it and move.

Looking off into the fog, Impa thinks. "For some generations, everyone was loyal. The royal family brought stability. Especially after the wars, they helped broker peace and encouraged trade and cooperation. That's how I always saw it, anyway. It seemed good for everyone."

Zarah hadn't ever really asked much before about the royal family, and Impa was now curious, having not really thought about the Gerudo's perception of the Hylian Kingdom. Impa begins to ask Zarah a question, but Zarah looks up at her and Impa is thrown off a bit by Zarah's look. "Do you think we need a new royal family?" Zarah asks.

Impa looks to Dreza, who looks back but doesn't say anything and continues writing and sketching. Impa pauses a bit and says, "Well, I haven't really thought about that. I don't think there will be a new one. Either way, it isn't up to me. I just want safety and peace."

Zarah looks down to her work again. The skulltula scuttles around again. Impa does think to herself that what she said sounded very naive. She adds, shrugging, "I don't know. It isn't up to me. We'll have to just see what happens."

Sitting for a while more quietly together, the skulltula scuttles again, and Zarah says, almost to herself, "Malon is kinda the new Zelda."

Impa does protest to this, saying "I don't think so." She pauses. "If anything, Malon is more generous-" she stops, almost shocked at what she said, although neither Gerudo seems to respond. After a bit, Zarah does ask, "Do you think Malon is good?"

Impa sighs.

"I don't know, Zarah. I haven't talked to her very much. I did think at first she seemed power hungry, but an old friend of mine

who moved to the ranch and has started to get to know her says she isn't. Her father just doesn't want to be in charge." Impa drinks some tea. It is chamomile.

Zarah does stop and think. "Huh." she says.

"You met her didn't you?" Impa asks.

"Yeah, a couple times. She always wants to buy things from me, its weird." Zarah says. Impa laughs a little. "Well, that comes from her background. On top of growing up around so much money moving around through the ranch, Hylians do love money. Not in a greedy way always, they just... I don't know. They just like buying and selling things."

"I don't get it. Its weird." Dreza finally chimes in, Impa being releived because she had started to feel strange about the conversation.

"Aren't you a Hylian, though?" Zarah asks, the question hitting Impa back off guard quite a lot. Impa breathes deeply and takes another sip of tea. "I guess so." she says.

Nabooru Wanders

Nabooru stands looking down into the purple water, tracing the whorls of oily sheen with her eyes.

In an odd way, it did look beautiful. Not like a striking sunset, or a picturesque landscape of the southern plain, or the painted canyons she knew so well, but in some way, the swirling dark rainbows floating past the slower purple underneath, the motionless gray cracked stone beneath that - the gaps between the large bricks almost uttering - was beautiful.

She takes long, deep breaths, standing and watching for a while more - then, jumping across the rotten, collapsed wooden drawbridge, lands elegantly and walks into the ruined capital.

As if she had heard it many times, the echoes of her footsteps ring through the streets as if she walks through a cathedral. She does notice, though, that the stone and dirt doesn't crunch beneath her weight the same - instead, her footsteps clatter clearly, crisply, like hooves on cobblestone.

Approaching the market square, she finds it empty. The howling of wind calls through the buildings, although nothing seems to blow - she feels no breeze. Looking up at the dark tower, it seems more distant than it did before. Approaching the destroyed fountain in the middle of the plaza, she realizes it is definitely further than it used to be.

She looks around, even admiring the remnants of the city.

Frames of buildings that might have before resemble the partially exposed skeletons of slain carcasses instead felt more to her like shoots of black and gray grass reaching out from soil. The ash on the streets and charred black spots that before she recoiled at as if they were bruises or blemishes, instead now strike her as saccharine and delicate makeup on a sorrowful, still face.

Approaching the north gate of the market, she sees not yet that incline toward the castle, but another identical plaza. Entering it, she continues walking north, although her mind does halt - were there two plazas? Approaching the north gate of this, she finds the same plaza, and now stops, with the beginnings of dread, looking back - two plazas behind her, the gate still visible. Looking to the tower, it does seem she is nearer now.

She breathes deeply.

Looking around this third plaza, walking a bit more slowly, but, finding it identical, she looks forward and resumes walking. Two more plazas ahead, beyond the last is visible the scorched soil incline to the castle.

Walking through the next two plazas, the howling wind subsides until, as she approaches the threshold of the castle's yard it is barely audible.

Her first step from the stone to the black soil gives way a bit,

the soil feeling somewhat spongy. In that split second, her instincts tell her quicksand, but putting more weight on her foot finds firm ground. Very firm, in fact. She looks down and puts both feet on the strange soil.

By some compulsion, she scrapes with the side of her foot, revealing black iron under the spongy black material that couldn't be dirt. A trapdoor, she thinks, immediately jumping back to the stone behind. Yet nothing moves. The air is dead silent, and now as her feet returned to the stone she realizes that her steps do not echo.

Looking back to see if she can still spot the drawbridge gate, a dense black fog obscures the distance now. She counts: one, two, three, four, five plazas, before the darkness is impenetrable. She puts a hand on the hilt of her sword - not in preparation, but almost as if to signal alertness - yet to no witness but the yawning shadow ahead.

The fog does not encroach further. Everything is silent. All she can hear is her own breathing. The silence almost seems to pressure against her eardrums - almost quiet enough for her to hear her own heartbeat. Certainly quiet enough to hear her own thoughts, if she had any.

Standing for a while, staring, she eventually turns back to the castle yard. Looking down again, stepping again onto the brown, spongy material which gives way, unevenly, with each step, to the iron floor below. She swears she can almost feel the cold of the metal through her covered sandals. Looking ahead, she progresses up the yard toward the moat, staring into that massive, cursed open door across the hill.

At the top of the hill, the first thing she notices is that there is no lava. Instead, the tower hovers over a lake of the same purple water - if it even is water. Wanting to gaze into it again, but tearing her eyes away, she sees the bridge is still there. Walking over to it and placing a step upon it, a wind picks up. A silent, cold wind - yet the air is just as muggy and warm as it was when crossed the lowland field minutes ago. At least, she thinks it has only been minutes.

Looking down at her feet, she is struck with the memories of the last time she had been here. Catching herself almost overwhelmed by what she might face, she steels herself. Thinking instead, with grim irony, that the last time her feet left this bridge she had wondered if she would ever cross it again. Even if she had thought about it back then, for a few seconds longer, a few minutes longer, maybe days, she never would have conceived that the second time her feet would touch this bridge, she would be crossing it in the same direction: into the castle again, not out.

Some terrible part of her mind asks if she ever did leave the castle, but she refuses the thought. Those kinds of thoughts serve

no purpose. Still, it entered her mind as if it came from someone other than herself.

Thinking of the card game that had developed in the camp, she reminds herself that even the latter is pointless. The best players know that the best long term strategy against a good opponent is cultivating hesitation and doubt. She looks ahead to the void beyond the door and walks across the bridge.

The breeze picking up into a gust, out of the corner of her eye she sees the bridge turning to dust beneath her feet, blown away from each lifted step by the wind. She passes the dark threshold, staring firmly straight ahead. As she walks past the door's stone frame into the darkness, the outside eventually slips from her peripheral vision. Walking on, the walls on each side and floor fade into black until she can see nothing.

Malon's Notes on Governance

Openness

a leader should never be aloof, they should be open to conversation with anyone, at any time, on any subject. This is foundational, as even in the absence of effective communication, familiarity and presence is the basis for understanding. indeed, most things can be understood merely through observation, and many problems can be solved by simply witnessing them up close and investigating their causes. Openness goes both ways: one must be open with their thoughts and motives, and also have open eyes and ears and be receptive.

Candor

not in the sense that a leader should be excessively conservative and overly cautious, but that they should understand constraints not as barriers to be ploughed over, but living parts of the landscape. constraints such as material resources, geography, even culture and individual personalities, are not barriers but scaffolding which gives texture and shape to the world. they add complexity, but it is a sign of good leadership and good spirit to see complexity not as messy and inconvenient, but as a challenge to one's mind and as rich terrain to become familiar with, even as it evolves around them.

Restraint

not in the sense that a leader should be excessively conservative and overly cautious, but that they should understand constraints not as barriers to be ploughed over, but living parts of the landscape. constraints such as material resources, geography, and even culture and individual personalities, are not barriers at all, but scaffolding which gives texture and fullness to the world. they add complexity, but it is a sign of good leadership and good spirit to see complexity not as messy and inconvenient, but as a challenge to one's mind and as rich terrain they can become familiar with, even as it may evolve around them.

Humility

For any of the above to be valued, one must have humility. perhaps, then, humility is the core of all other principle virtues. without humility, one can not be open, as pride begets secretiveness and aloofness. without humility, one can not be candid, as one is too concerned with appearances and status. without humility, one certainly does not show restraint, and instead forces what they think is right upon the world.

Nabooru Questions Ganondorf

After some time of walking, alone and thoughtless, simply listening to her footsteps echo down the long hall, Nabooru eventually sees dim light at the end. She picks up the pace a bit, the echoes of her footsteps growing from a slight reflection against the stone to a blurred reverberation as if she were walking through a massive, empty arena – then, after some time more, the footsteps repeating back rhythmically as sounds would in the canyon outside of her peoples' old fortress home. She swears she can even hear the same roaring of the massive waterfall and river in that canyon, and the unmistakeable call of a hawk.

Having approached the end, beyond the frame she sees that plenary hall again, lit dimly with a single torch at the opposite end of the room the blue hue of night in the chamber punctured by strips of moonlight intruding from the windows. Passing the threshold, expecting the violent slam of the massive metal door to drop down behind her, it does not.

Nabooru flinches a bit walking further into the room, seeing that familiar dark figure sitting quietly at the end of the long table. She makes her way around the right of the table, sitting a few seats down from him.

"I have tea coming." Ganondorf says flatly yet softly.

Nabooru nods, looking out the window across from her.

They sit in the dark at the table. Ganondorf rests his chin on his thumb, mouth covered, looking down, away from Nabooru, occasionally tapping the table. Nabooru folds her hands, after a while clearing her throat, but they say nothing.

After some time, the purple shrouded figure floats into the chamber silently, holding a tray with cups, a kettle of hot water, and a bowl with tea bags. Her dangling pendants and chains are silent as she floats to Ganondorf's side. Setting down the tray, the red glowing orb under her hood disappears for a moment as she bows, turning and floating out of the room. Nabooru looks over to Ganondorf as he pours hot water over a teabag. She gets up, taking the seat perpendicular to him and procuring a cup and tea bag.

Ganondorf finishes pouring his, then sets the kettle by Nabooru. "What kind?" She asks. "Oolong." Ganondorf says.

Nabooru smiles a bit. "What kind?" she asks, pouring hot water into her cup.

"Qi Lan." He responds, watching the steam.

For a while, they are quiet, letting the tea steep. Eventually, Nabooru asks, "So how many of them are there?" Gesturing toward the door that the shrouded figure had disappeared into.

"Just one." Ganondorf says. "One, but many."

Nabooru looks at him, a short grayish beard forming, his hair no longer a vibrant red but a dull orange – although it might just

be the lighting. The whites of his eyes glow dimly yellow, irises dark.

"I assume you still have no dealings or communication with Koume and Kotake." Nabooru says, resting her head in her hand as well now.

"I do not."

"Do you think they will seek you out? Or me?"

Ganondorf leans back, folding his arms. "Maybe me. If they are merciful enough to put me out of my misery."

Nabooru raises an eyebrow. "I thought you said you couldn't be killed, nor Impa or I."

Ganondorf looks at her, his dimly glowing eyes reflecting the strips of moonlight in the chamber.

"They can kill us. Ruto could as well, if she is fully awakened. I do not know if she is. That is what Nemek has said, anyway."

"Nemek?"

Ganondorf gestures behind him, Nabooru, realizing what he was referring to, adjusts her teabag.

"What can kill us other than Ruto, Koume and Kotake?"

He shrugs. "Most things."

Nabooru glares at him.

He explains, "It seems some logic of the prophecy that only that boy could kill me - and that I can not kill any of the sages. That logic seems to apply still. With the boy dead, though, the prophecy is thrown off, leading to effects that I do not think can be predicted, even by Sheikah or Rauru himself - were he still in existence."

Eventually, she unfolds her hands, reaching over to stir and then lift and squeeze the teabag. "I see." She says, setting the teabag on the table and lifting the cup to drink - Ganondorf picks up the teabag and places it on the tray, stirring and squeezing his own, discarding it on the ornate metal tray, which he slides away to his right.

Nabooru looks off, thinking.

"Whatever you think of me, whatever anyone thinks of me, I don't care. Every person has had their own opinion about me. I gave up trying to change their opinions long ago - deciding to show through action, rather than wasting my breath. Now, however, I can barely act." Ganondorf says, sipping again from his cup. "It won't be long before you will likely not be able to speak with me again. There may be days left. This castle will slowly recede further from the world, and Nemek will be my only connection to it."

Ganondorf turns to Nabooru, looking at her as she stares into her cup. "If you can find some way, Nabooru, I ask that you lead Koume and Kotake here. If they do not kill me before this prison fades into eternity, I will be trapped in a purgatory of nothingness."

Nabooru looks out the window, blowing on her cup of tea.

After a while, Ganondorf says, "I can offer you, Nabooru. This would not merely be an act of mercy. I can ensure that they are annihilated along with me."

Nabooru thinks for a while.
The two are quiet.

The night air growing cold, Ganondorf says, "If you have any further questions, as I said, you soon won't have the chance to ask more."

Nabooru thinks, and asks "What is Malon's intent?"

"She is a student of Nemek."

Nabooru pauses at this. "What is Nemek's intent?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nemek has no intent. He... or it, is a gossip - useful sometimes, but no plans aside from its own amusement. I tried discerning any motives myself, thinking it could act on my behalf, but... I've seen no motive that I understand."

Nabooru thinks.

"What about the monsters?"

Ganondorf scratches his nose. "They are a side effect of the prophecy. I was brash and careless, so Kakariko was improperly sealed. The village leaks energy from the Shadow Realm. It might be a portal, a curse, or some remaining power from sigils, relics or altars not properly destroyed. I am not really sure." Ganondorf says.

He adds, "Either way, Shadow energy also radiates from from the place the Temple of Time once stood, and likey some other areas. Nemek has not offered much. He said the energy will get stronger, then disipate eventually. Probably over the course of centuries, even if any relics or altars causing it are destroyed - without caretakers their energy will fade."

Nabooru now scratches her head.

Ganondorf stands. "It is late."

Nabooru stands as well.

Ganondorf continues, "The Goron know more. Seek them out. I would also tell you, the Sheikah, Anju likely knows more, although I'm not sure how much, or how willing she is to share. She may still think the prophecy is salvageable in some way, or that she can find a way to control the energy. I doubt that."

Ganondorf turns, "I apologize. I need to retire for the night."

Nemek floats back in, quickly leaving with the tray from the table. Ganondorf steps up to the door, waving behind him.

"Will Nemek talk to me?" Nabooru asks.

"To anyone at all, yes - of his own accord, though. Not everything he says is true, though. Goodnight, Nabooru."

Ganondorf passes the threshold and the door slams shut, the same way the other had slammed shut behind Impa and Nabooru the last time. Nabooru stands for a while. The torch goes out with a flicker, and she stands a while longer in the moonlit room.

Eventually, she turns, walking out the door. The hallway is shorter, and as she walks through it, at some point, she blinks, finding herself approaching the exit to the capitol city - the ruined drawbridge just in front of her.

She pauses and looks down at the water. She stares into it for a while, rubbing her neck. Looking left, she looks along the water,

jumping across the bridge and following it to a grate under the wall. Having never really inspected it, she walks further along the walls toward the camp.

After several minutes walking, she reaches the other grate under the wall, looking down the river a ways to the bridge. Through the fog, she can just make out the camp in the distance. She heads to the camp, exhausted, but feeling strangely light. She appreciates the quiet walk, putting off thinking about any of the conversation that just happened. Maybe none of it mattered.

Act 4

Malon Meets Ruto (nsfw)

Makaru sits reading in the sun on the fallen tree at the lake above Zora's domain. He leans back, having added some planks to form a kind of bench atop the tree - above and the pages of his book, past the large boulder that separates the lagoon he sits above from the wider lake, various Zora kids and adults talk, dive, swim, play games.

He does briefly look up to see a Zora walk from the entrance to the Domain, past the lagoon in front of him, entering the fence that leads to King Zora's shrine and the long, dark ascent to Ruto. The Zora does wave at him, just a simple wave of recognition. He waves back to the Zora who disappears into the shrine. For a moment, he does think about the contrast between the quiet solemnity of the shrine and long, dark, echoing stairwells that lead to Ruto's room far above.

His thinking is interrupted by Malon calling out to him. "Good afternoon, Zora boy!" he looks to the entrance of the domain and smiles, standing up on the bench and waving. He begins to move forward to dive into the water and meet Malon, but, walking toward the fallen tree, she says, "I'll come to you." He does ask, "Are you sure?" as she rather easily and quickly climbs the trunk, barely needing to grab hold of anything to keep herself up.

Reaching him, she looks over the bench he had constructed. "It's nothing fancy. I spend a lot of time up here though so I figured I'd make something a bit more comfortable." Makaru says, watching Malon sit and reclines a bit. "On your knees, Zora boy." She says, smiling up at him. Makaru's eyebrows raise at this, although he does kneel facing her. "No, no," Malon says, "Turn around, dear." Makaru obediently turns around, and feels Malon sit up to put a hand on his waist. "Good boy." she says, and he nods, smiling as she slaps his ass and holds it. Sitting up next to him, her other hand guides his lips to hers. She sucks on his lower lip, making him quiver on her other hand. "Not coming on too strong, am I?" She asks, pulling back briefly.

Makaru shakes his head, smiling. "Not at all, miss." She smiles back, leaning up and pulling his head down a bit more, sucking his lower lip again, then biting a bit, softly at first, then, after licking his lips as he gasps, she bites his bottom lip harder, tugging as he lets out a moan.

Pulling back and caressing his ass, he smiles as much as he can through a bit of stupor, quietly saying, "You're in quite a mood today." as Malon's other hand rests on his thigh, squeezing a bit. "Should we go to my room?" He asks. Malon looks up at him, raising an eyebrow, "If I wanted to, I wouldn't have come up here, stupid boy." she says, squeezing his ass and digging her fingernails into his thigh. Makaru moans and nods, breathing

deeply.

"Yes, ma'am. Of course." He looks into her bright green eyes as her fingernails press harder, stabbing his upper thigh and just barely moving down slowly. For a moment, he does somewhat nervously glance across the lagoon and over the boulder at the crowd of Zora.

Seeing this, Malon releases from his thigh and gently rubs it, "Just remember your magic words, okay? I'll stop if you want." Looking back into her eyes, he does smile and gently begin to nod.

As his head goes down to nod a second time, Malon's right hand quickly moves from under his tail fin, pressing hard against his inner thigh from behind, spreading his ass. His eyes widen in shock a bit, watching Malon lick and then bite her lips, her fingernails stabbing his thigh again a bit further up.

She admires his body, eventually looking up to him - the Zora has a bit of a dazed expression now. She kneels up to quickly pass her tongue over his lips, pulling away briefly, sucking and then biting his lower lip again, this time hard enough that he lets out a rather loud, high-pitched sound.

"Don't worry, dear. Nobody would suspect you'd be wrapped around my fingers," she says, inserting a finger as Makaru lets out a gasp, looking at her wide-eyed and, as she glances up at him he flashes the faintest smile through his dazed expression. Malon inserts two more fingers and Makaru lets out an even more high pitched moan.

Malon bites her lip and looks up at him, her right hand leaving his thigh, she turns a bit to recline back. "Don't you agree, Zora boy - nobody would look over here and think you are kneeling for me like a dog, my fingers in your ass." Makaru nods as Malon pulls his ass, he begins to move back but she quietly and commandingly says, "Sit up, Zora boy." - he immediately straightens his back, resting his hands on his thighs.

After some time, pulsing and tugging his asshole, her pinky finger goes in as well, Makaru doesn't moan now, just breathes deeply and slowly. "Your slutty ass is making lube, Makaru." Malon says. He nods. She pulls his asshole more, now rocking her fingers and knuckles in and out - the Zora does begin to drip from his ass a thick transparent sticky lube.

Pulling on his asshole with her knuckles fully inside, she asks with venom "It's like boys like you are made to have their assholes played with, isn't it?" Makaru, leaning forward, a bit limp from pleasure and gulping, nods, "Yes ma'am, of course, ma'am."

Malon pulses and squeezes his asshole with her knuckles inside for a while more, before her thumb begins to trace the rim.

"Anything you want, ma'am." Makaru whimpers.

"Take your cock out, slutty boy. Toward me, between your legs." Malon commands, this time quite loudly, making Makaru jump a

bit and look around the lagoon, although no one is near or headed over, he can still hear all the Zora visible over the boulder chatting, laughing and playing. "I said take it out, you fucking boyslut." Malon interrupts, tugging his asshole again. Makaru nods, "Yes ma'am, sorry ma'am."

Makaru's hands make their way up his thigh to his groin, where, as his huge, bright pink dick unsheathes, he pushes it back between his legs toward Malon, his balls descending and grazing Malon's wrist. Malon watches the Zora cock unsheath and grow, reaching toward her, slimy with natural lube, and, after reaching its length almost below her elbow, pulsing and letting out a bit of precum from the tip as Makaru closes his legs in front of him, knees together, hands returning to his thighs.

He looks back at Malon, who stares at his cock, pulsing with her knuckles in his ass. "Goddess, boy. I just can't tell if I want to jack you off or just play with your ass all day." She says, sighing and running her free hand through her hair. Makaru wiggles his hips a bit and moves himself further into Malon's palm, gasping, and saying, "I do like this a lot, ma'am."

Malon gives him a surprised look. "You do, don't you, slutty boy? Look at you, your asshole is begging for me now." Makaru, eyes dimming a bit and barely open now, the Zora noticeably blushing, nods. Malon says, "I do have a plan for the day. In fact, the climax should be coming soon." Makaru eagerly wiggles and moves his hips up and down a bit. "I don't know if you are ready for it, though." Malon says, a bit more lucid.

"I am, Malon. Whatever you want." Makaru says, also snapping out of it a bit, although his cock throbs as his dirty thoughts race. Malon looks to the side, not at anything in particular, but pausing. "Lean forward a bit more, ass a little closer?" She says, still looking away, almost as if listening for something. Makaru smiles back at her and obliges, nuzzling Malon's palm with the lip of his sticky wet, greedy hole.

Malon holds for a moment, squeezing and releasing slowly. "You are sure you are ready?" She asks, looking away still. "Yes, Malon. I've taken more before." Makaru says, Malon looking to him out of the corner of her eye briefly, he adds, "I wasn't sure if you were even into this, I'm glad you are." Malon pauses for a while more. "The humiliation, though, is it too much?" Makaru shakes his head and laughs a bit. "I challenge you to take it too far. We have magic words. But I really like being slutty." The two look at each other for a while, Malon looking a bit thoughtfully past him. Eventually, she smiles, tightening her grip on his asshole. Just as she does, Makaru hears the door to the shrine open.

Makaru turns to look, but looks down as Malon uses her free hand to push his thigh, whispering quickly, "You better turn a little bit so she can't see." Makaru does, and as Malon's thumb slips in and

her fist penetrates him, he looks to the fence and sees just over it, the top of Ruto's head approaching the gate.

He freezes, and in a split second, as Malon's wrist passes into him and she sits up, pressing his back down a bit further and digging her forearm almost half way into him, resting her head on her other hand on her knee and, turning to look face the gate more, feels Makaru tighten up around her fist and forearm, looking back to see cum shooting out across the bench, dripping down it into the lagoon below. Turning to look at the gate, it opens slowly and Makaru covers his face with one hand, breathing deeply and quivering as more cum drips from his backward cock. "Good fucking slut." Malon quickly whispers into his ears, digging her arm in deeper while turning and waving at Ruto.

"Hello! Isn't it a lovely day? You must be the queen." Makaru opens an eye and stares into the lagoon through his fingers, Malon pushing just a bit deeper as he gasps and more cum drips out of him. Malon feels his balls pulsing near her elbow now. Makaru just stares into the lagoon, seeing Ruto take just a few steps forward from the gate as Malon leans back and pulls her arm out just to the wrist.

"Who are you? A Hylian?" Ruto asks, ignoring Makaru who breathes deeply, face in his hand, his cock still throbbing and, with each throb, dripping just a little more cum behind him. "Why yes, I am. I've been here a few times, its a lovely place, I hope you don't mind me visiting!" Malon says to Ruto cheerfully as her hand slips out of Makaru and she leans most of her weight onto his dick, preventing it from retreating back into him and causing him to whimper lightly. Ruto stands, looking suspiciously at Malon, still ignoring Makaru. "That is fine. Non-Hyilians are not welcome though." Ruto says firmly. "You do pay respects while you are here?" Ruto asks.

Malon responds, leaning off of Makaru's dick but grabbing it near the base and pulling hard, causing him to gasp, "Well that was why I asked to meet the Queen, what was your name?" Malon says cheerfully, squeezing and releasing her hand around Makaru's penis, pulling it out as it tries to retract back into the sheath. Ruto stares at her for a bit from across the lagoon, eventually saying, "It is Ruto. It isn't me you pay respects to, though, it is the river. You must be young?"

Malon replies, "Ah, I see. I'm twenty five, I haven't been up here before. But I'm sure Makaru can show me how to pay my respects." Makaru is silent, his hand does slide down to his chin and he continues staring into the lagoon. With a shudder, he hears cum drip into the lagoon under them as Malon turns to him, tugging again and asking "Right Makaru?" He breathes deeply and nods.

"Speaking of him," Ruto says, finally acknowledging him, "Makaru, tear down that bench. I don't want you sitting out here

anymore." Malon releases her grip and his dick and balls retract as he sits a bit more upright and nods to Ruto. "Yes ma'am." he says rather loudly, his voice cracking as Malon leans forward and puts her weight down on his thigh with her hand.

Ruto stands for a bit more, she repeats to Malon, "Don't let any non-Hylians think they can come here." Malon and Makaru, in unison say, "Of course.", although Makaru adds, "ma'am." They briefly look at each other and Malon laughs.

Turning to Ruto, they see she has already turned around and opened the gate. Makaru watches her close it, while Malon leans back. After a few moments Makaru watches the door to the shrine open, and, as it closes, Malon puts a hand to his mouth. A hand covered in his cum.

"Time to clean up, Zora boy." She says, licking his neck toward his ear. Makaru breathes deeply, now turning to face Malon, who asks "How was that?" Makaru rubs his forehead, looking at her, "Really good." He says, breathing deeply and smiling.

He looks down at the cum on the bench, feeling the breeze. Malon puts a hand on his shoulder gently, leaning toward him. She takes a deep breath near his ear. "Lick up every drop, slut. I don't care if your tongue gets splinters." she says, kneeling upright and pushing down on his shoulders.

"Yes ma'am." He says, leaning forward, chest against his knees, and begins to lick as Malon rubs his back. "Good boy." she says. Makaru nods, sticking his tongue into a crack between the planks. "I have to go soon, but its a good thing your tongue is getting some exercise," Malon says softly to him, "I'll be needing to use it eventually."

Makaru smiles widely his eyes turn toward Malon's thighs, noticing his cum on them as Malon presses his face against the wood. "Don't look too eager." she says, bending to look at him and smiling. He licks up more cum, simply saying, "I can't help it, miss."

Malon's Notes

While every home may have a variety of "petty" fiction, "indulgent" poetry, "lurid" novellas and other "bawdy" literature - no two bookshelves containing the same combination, representing the unique tastes of their owner - each of those bookshelves almost without exception contained at least a few of the same old "inimitable" treatises on ethics and metaphysics, treated as sacred writ yet rarely actually read - seemingly not even by their authors. Kings, queens, state-craftspeople and their pet academics have spilled endless ink on "ethics," morality, philosophy. It is a shame. Printed text should serve us: wonder, passion and joy; as well as informing us about facts through journalism and educational materials. Only the hubris of royals and academics could waste so many pages on things the average person understands without hesitation. The basis of the "study" of ethics and metaphysics is not to find truth, but to convince citizens that they are not qualified to decide their own conditions. Those decisions are to be left up to the people who worship these books with the most zealotry - those who spent decades "studying", or those born into a caste which, through barbaric means, "convinces" the people that that the philosopher kings are infallible. The "ethical Kingdom" thrives not on its leaders being honorable and responsible, but atrocious, disgusting - less than animals. The most uncivilized people occupy palaces and mansions, far from the dirt-covered workers in fields, "seedy" traders in bazaars, butchers and bakers who come home sweaty and sore, quiet craftspeople whos hands and spines are shaped by proud work. The humble people know this, yet without a change in the organization of life, they are satisfied with occasional putsches, rather than a proper revolution. In Allon, the new capitol of the lowlands, let the people choose their fate. Let leadership be the anonymous servants rather than commanders, and let any failed leader be swiftly removed. Let heads of state weigh each breath that gives them their pitiful lives, against the well-being of the citizens, and properly fear the justified wrath of the masses. Let appointments and demotions be made frequently, and let every leader spend time in the fields and the shanties. If there is one thing all people know, being living creatures: impermanence is the only truth. Denying this, while our bodies may fade, they feed the cycle of life graciously - the wise cycle which so many Kings have tried to pause by sacrificing the innocent.

Nabooru Returns

Now sitting alone in the pavilion, Impa reads. Hearing faint footsteps from the north, she stands, drawing her knife and turning. Crouching, she moves up to the fence - the silhouette making its way through the fog looks familiar, though.

Impa returns her blade to the sheath and stands. She waves, calling out, "Where did you go?" Nabooru waves, not saying anything but approaching as Impa walks to the gate. "How are you?" Nabooru asks, looking at Impa with a gentle smile.

"Alright. What were you doing up at Death Mountain?" Impa asks. Nabooru grabs Impa's hand, surprising her and they walk together to the table. Impa smiles as they sit side by side, turning to her. Nabooru leans in, looking up to Impa, resting her other hand on Impa's thigh. "Hey." Impa says.

Nabooru leans closer, nestling her head into Impa's neck, unlocking her hand and wrapping her arm around Impa, who lifts a hand to hold Nabooru's head, stroking her hair. For a while, they sit like that in the humid night air, breathing slowly.

Nabooru eventually leans back and kisses Impa lightly. Impa smiles, petting Nabooru's head, saying "You're in a rare mood."

Nabooru holds Impa's head and kisses her again, a bit more passionately, biting Impa's lower lip gently. They kiss for a while before Nabooru asks, "Spend the night?" Impa breathes deeply, the world spinning just a little. "Is this real?" She asks.

Nabooru smiles, holding Impa's head and kissing her again, pulling back and lightly tracing Impa's lips with her thumb. "Of course it is." She says, smiling. "Come to my tent?" Nabooru asks, running a hand through Impa's short white hair and down the back of her neck, her other hand up Impa's side. Impa, a bit stiffly, but smiling, just says, "Sure."

The two kiss again and stand, Nabooru hugs Impa tightly, resting her head on Impa's chest for a while before pulling away, grabbing Impa's hand and leading her down the central aisle of the camp.

Approaching Nabooru's tent, Impa does ask again, "Where were you?" as Nabooru opens the door, pulling Impa in by her hand. Inside, Nabooru lets go, making her way to her vanity and lighting a lamp. Reaching for incense and lighting it, she looks back to Impa who is standing a bit awkwardly.

"I went back to the castle." She says, placing the incense in the ceramic bowl hanging from the vanity. Turning back to see Impa looking speechless and concerned, she walks behind Impa to close the tent door.

"It wasn't very eventful. I had some questions for him, he answered them." She says, folding back her comforter and sheet and sitting, grabbing Impa's hand and tugging a bit. "Come on,

we can talk about it tomorrow." Nabooru says. Impa sits next to her, looking skeptically. Nabooru traces up Impa's back with her hand gently. Sensing Impa still thinking, Nabooru tugs at Impa's gown. "Hey." she says gently.

Impa looks at her, asking "Everything's okay?"

Nabooru gives her a look not as playful or flirtatious, and nods. "Yes." Impa still looks away, worried. Nabooru gently puts a hand on her thigh, Impa looks down. After a few moments, Impa breathes deeply and puts a hand on Nabooru's, looking at her a bit more calmly. They look at each other for a while, Impa eventually starts to rub Nabooru's thumb.

"It's okay." Nabooru says. Impa closes her eyes and breathes deeply a few times. She feels Nabooru raise a hand to caress her face, turning it gently toward her. Impa breathes deeply again, eyes still closed, Nabooru slowly petting in front of her ear. After a few more deep breaths, she feels Nabooru shift her weight and lean closer.

After another deep breath, Nabooru asks, "May I?" Impa smiles, laughing quietly and nodding. Nabooru smiles too and kisses her, the two breathing deeply between kisses. Nabooru shifts to kneeling on the bed, lifting Impa's chin up to her. Nabooru leans down, and Impa prepares to kiss her, but Nabooru pauses, letting them feel their breath on each others' lips.

Lifting Impa's chin further and tracing her lips with her index finger as Impa closes her eyes, Nabooru finds the opportunity to wrap a leg around her, exhaling a laugh and returning her face to Impa's.

Holding Impa's head with both hands, her thumb guiding Impa's mouth open, Nabooru traces her upper lip with her tongue and as she finishes the Sheikah shivers and opens her eyes to smile.

"Do you want to lay down?" Nabooru whispers. Impa looks away toward the lamp, staring for a while. "Not yet." Impa says, and Nabooru sits down in her lap. Nabooru was about to ask something more, but Impa leans forward, wrapping her hands around Nabooru's waist, squeezing and moving her hands forward slowly over the top of her thighs, her face in Nabooru's neck.

Interlude

Impa, Nabooru and Malon sit at a table under the pavilion of the camp, drinking tea, having finished eating. "Whoever cooked, that was magnificent." Malon says, drinking water from her canteen. "I think it was Yorai. Glad you enjoyed it." Nabooru says. Malon looks out across the field, Nabooru and Impa look at each other briefly and Impa returns to finishing her food.

"I'll find Dreza." Nabooru says, standing and turning to wander off

into the camp.

After she is gone for a while, Malon says, "She is wise and capable, I don't understand why she doesn't want to."

Impa, finishing her food, says, "She prefers to lead from behind." She sips tea and digs in a bag under the table. Malon tilts her head, still looking off across the field. "Huh."

After a while, Impa adds, opening a book, "It makes it easier to watch things, not drawing attention. It also helps to be more impartial."

Malon nods slowly. "I see." She says, turning as she sees Nabooru and Dreza approaching.

Dreza waves a bit awkwardly as her and Nabooru sit.

"Well, you don't look too excited," Malon says.

Dreza looks up and shrugs. They sit for a while, Malon looks at Impa, who has started reading, leaning forward onto the table with her head resting on one hand, facing away, her head down.

"Well," Malon says, looking back to Nabooru and Dreza, tapping her canteen, "we will be meeting weekly, every friday evening around seven, since the sun sets late. After the stonework perimeter is done we will start construction on the plenary hall, until then we will just be meeting in my home. We will probably meet less often over time, but I do think it is a good idea for everyone to be communicating frequently while we see the shape of things."

Nabooru nods. Dreza tilts her head. Impa turns a page in her book. Malon is quiet for a while, then sips some more water from her canteen, looking out to the ranch.

Nabooru Discusses the Moblin

Outside the new trail to Death Mountain, behind the Moblin shanty, Impa sits on a log, leaning forward. Nabooru stands, staring skeptically at a few young Goron barelling down the trail.

Outside of the long evening shadow of the shanty building, an older Goron sits in front of Impa and Nabooru. Two younger adult Goron sit in the shade, playing some kind of game with rocks on the other side of the fire pit.

"We haven't had any problems. It has been almost a month." The Goron says. "Sometimes I even think we should have invited them to live on the mountain sooner."

Nabooru stares off to the mountain. There are no Moblin in sight, but the Goron, probably knowing they are viewed with suspicion, had likely told them to stay behind.

The Goron goes on, "You really should visit the city, we can treat you well. The other elders still don't leave Death Mountain, but they would host you and honestly, they are more interested in these topics than me."

Nabooru stares at him and he seems rattled by her look and turns to Impa, who scratches her head. "You really don't know anything about Kakariko? It has been right outside your city for generations." The Goron shrugs, "I'm sorry. I am an elder, but, to be honest, they don't take me very seriously. To be blunt with you, I'm just in it for quartz," he says, smiling and lifting a bag of rocks, rattling it toward the two.

Nabooru rolls her eyes.

"I'll go." Impa says. Nabooru looks at her, rubbing her forehead. "Impa-" she begins, but Impa interrupts, "They clearly have a peaceful situation, Nabooru. If anything, I ought to be the one most hesitant to walk into a hole filled with Moblin." The Goron chimes in, raising his hands in an indignant shrug, "Our city is not just a hole."

"Sorry." Impa says.

The three are quiet for a while. Eventually, the Goron speaks to Nabooru, "If you are that worried, I could let you in through the Lost Woods tunnel. The Elders live just near it, and if you have any issues you can leave quickly. Most Goron don't even know

about the tunnel, and no Moblin do."

"That isn't necessary, Nabooru I can just go-" Nabooru stops her, "Fine. I would much prefer to enter the city directly, we should go through the Lost Woods entrance then - do we have time today?"

The Goron looks south into the sun, holding up a hand and eyeballing the time. "I suppose not, really." he says, turning to Nabooru, who is tapping her foot. "Well, any time in the day is fine, I can just tell them to be expecting you. Tell them that Darduk invited you. You'll see the Elder's hall if you come in from the forest, you can't miss it. I'm sure they'd like to talk."

The Goron gets up, stretching a bit. "They talk a lot, for ages, about boring things. So I'm sure they will love to have some guests asking questions, so they can drone on more."

Nabooru walks over to Impa, who stands. The two turn to the Goron. Impa places a hand on Nabooru's lower back, who flinches a bit and casts her an annoyed look at first but smiles. "Well," Impa says, "We will make it out there within the next few days." Nabooru nods, the Goron is already turning to leave - the two younger Goron still playing their game across the fire pit.

"Ya." The Elder Goron simply says, waving back briefly and rolling, barelling up to the trail.

Nabooru turns to Impa. "You know your way through the woods?" Impa shrugs. "Not really." Nabooru looks indignant, "I knew I should have asked him for directions." Impa says. "I'm sure the Kokiri can tell us where it is, if not we can come back and ask."

After a bit, Nabooru begins to walk back to the Gerudo camp. Impa catches up, having paused a bit in thought, and the two walk back to the camp toward the setting sun.

Malon's Address to the People

Friday afternoon, in the plaza outside Malon's home between the kakariko shanties and homes of the ex-hylians, most of which construction has began on, some of which are finished.

A crowd is gathered around the foundation of what will be the new plenary hall. Malon addresses the crowd - Baron standing beside her, Talon, Anju and Dreza sitting off to one side of the foundation which acts as a makeshift stage.

"I hope you are all well this afternoon." she yells out, having stepped onto a small crate, everyone quiets.

"Construction has gone very well, hasn't it?" she asks, to "aye"s from some in the crowd. "We all have worked hard, and that is finally paying off. We have re-established trade with the deku, many of you now have decent contracts with outland merchants. We have a fair contract with the Zora for fish and ice. And haven't the Goron have been especially helpful to us all?" she gestures to several Goron in front of the gate to her house, with many in the crowd applauding them as the Goron stand a bit awkwardly.

"I do want to say. I know some of you look at me with misgivings, and I understand. I am sorry for all that you have gone through, and I know that many are struggling to adjust-", from the back, the head carpenter lets out a "Bawh!" and some ex-hylians hiss back at him and his men.

"I also know," Malon says, speaking louder, "that there is distrust brewing amongst us. These are some of the reasons why, as many of you likely know already, Talon and I intend to step back from leadership."

At this, more hiss - Malon and Baron exchange a look, some guards of Malon's make their around the back of the crowd. Malon loudly speaks out, over some continued hisses, "With our withdrawal, we will hand authority-" the head carpenter, from the back, yells out, "To a faggot!" as his men jeer and hiss, some other Hylians hissing back at him, and some of his men beginning to push a few of the Hylians, who simply move closer to the stage as Malon's guards grab the head carpenter and a few of his men who attempt to fight them off.

"Be lost, all ye then! Be lost, like dogs!" the head carpenter calls out, being dragged out with some others by the guards down toward the lookout tower at the southwest corner of the ranch,

past the Kakariko shanties. "Like dogs! Like mutts!" He yells, the men being dragged with him repeating after him.

Everyone watches as they are taken away, except for some Kakariko villagers, who just look toward the stage or at the ground. Only half the town or so is in attendance, and the crowd draws a bit nearer the stage.

Malon continues, "We will be handing authority to a council. It is crucial that, even in small decisions that we might think only effect us, we consider the perspectives of the other groups of this land. Not just to ensure against unforeseen consequences, and not merely to have an outside opinion, but to respect them as equals, as all of us have a stake in each others' survival and prosperity. Is such, the council will consist of: Deku, on behalf of themselves and the Kokiri; Goron, on behalf of Goron City; Zora, on behalf of themselves; Gerudo, on behalf of their eastern camp;"

"What of us?" a man in the Kakariko crowd calls out, interrupting her.

Malon pauses. "I had hoped that I could address the issue more delicately, but," Malon says, her voice fading a bit. She begins to feel a bit faint, and, after a pause, she steps off the crate and gestures to Baron, who steps forward as she backs off the stage, passing the Goron into the gate and returning into her home, with Talon following.

Baron now addresses the crowd, his voice rather quiet, "Well, I am Baron. Many of you know me. As Malon was saying-" he begins, but is interrupted by a Hylian woman calling out, "Speak up!"

Baron glares at her and raises his voice. "As Malon was about to say, the men just carried out, we know to be Sheikah." The entire ranch falls silent, except for some muffled yelling heard from inside the southwest tower.

"Clearly, they are hostile to this entire situation, but they are not the only ones doubtful and suspicious. We don't expect everyone's respect and trust. Trust is a scarce commodity for us all right now. However, we absolutely can not afford witch hunts and strife. That will put us all in jeopardy." The crowd is quiet, although a few of both Hylians and Kakariko villagers speak up with "aye"s.

"It has been taboo, but letting it fester threatens us all. I do not

fear or have any issue with Sheikah, in spite of everything. The occurrences in the village before we left were terrible, but I have no reason to hang it around the neck of all Sheikah." The crowd is silent again, the lookout tower is silent as well.

"As many of you have seen, we are constructing a partition to the North, where the residents of Kakariko shall live, Sheikah or not, alongside the Gerudo. This is, we all feel, the best option to maintain peace while diffusing tensions as we all focus on rebuilding. A representative has been elected, which many of you know," Baron gestures to Anju, "Anju will represent the Northern partition, alongside the Gerudo representative."

"Also, I will finally add, if anyone has an issue with me, personally, we can elect one or two more to the council, but otherwise I will represent the Hy-" he pauses, "The people of the former capital city. If there is no protest, I believe Anju has some words as well."

The crowd remains quiet. One Hylian does call out "aye, Baron" and another echoes "aye".

"I thank you all. I look forward to representing the interests of this new capital."

Many Hylians in the crowd snap and some applaud.

"Again, I thank you, and Anju will speak some before I close the address for the night." Baron says, to some more snapping and quiet applause which dies out as he retreats, Talon returning to the platform as Anju gets up. Anju does walk over to Talon on her way to the front, saying some things to him quietly, to which he nods and approaches the fore with her.

"G'd-evening everyone. Thank you for comin'." Talon says, "The guards over there, uh, will have notes that you are all welcome to, and after today they will be posted on the board there for anyone who wasn't here." Talon says, gesturing to the guards outside the farmhouse gate standing by the Goron.

"I do have to say, I truly love what's happened in spite of all the pain we've gone through. To offer up our ranch like this, I was worried for sure. Still, Malon's a smart girl - er, she is a smart woman, isn't she?" Many in the crowd "aye" and snap their fingers.

"Well, you all know me and I don't have too much to say, but I figured I'd let you all know, we will be havin' a big meal tomorrow evening right here. I know it's a little awkward with what just

happened over there," he says, gesturing to the tower, "but you all probably heard we invited the folk over at that Gerudo camp, as well as the Goron. It will probably be some of the Kakariko folks' last night on this side, and I hope that, despite all that going on we can all have a good time, let the kids play and all that, yeah?"

Almost all of the crowd snaps, claps or says out "yeah"s or "aye"s, as Anju steps up. "I suppose I also don't have a whole lot to say. I just wanted to introduce myself if anyone doesn't know me." She pauses. "I know I'm putting my neck out, but I will say that I am from Kakariko, and I have been a Sheikah my whole life." Some in the crowd shift and stare, although everyone is silent.

"I've practiced my beliefs quietly for decades, and while I don't like the idea of segregating, with tensions so high right now it seems the best option. Many of you know me. I am no warrior, spy, sorceress or anything like that. While I don't have any definite answers to make publicly about what happened in Kakariko, if any of you need counseling about it, my door is always open."

Anju stands for a while, looking down, as many in the crowd also look down. "I'll let Talon close out, thank you for coming, everyone." Anju says, to quiet snaps and a few "aye"s.

Anju turns to Talon, who shrugs, and she walks over and sits by Dreza, looking at the Gerudo who gives her a short glance but continues looking up to the sky somewhat blankly.

"Well, I suppose I don't have much more to say. I do thank you all again. I suppose a few folks got some things off their chest." Talon says, gesturing a bit disappointedly to the tower, "We'll see you all around tomorrow evening for supper, yeah?" The crowd doesn't clap but begins to disperse, half or so of them giving out an "aye" or a "yeah", some leaving others remaining and talking amongst themselves, a few of the kids, now let go chase each other around the front of the platform and Talon waves after them.

Baron, Dreza, Talon and Anju gather toward the back of the foundation of the new hall. "Could have gone worse, I suppose." Talon says. Anju and Dreza nod, Baron sneers a bit and turns to go into the farmhouse, calling back to Talon, "I'll be in the bedroom." Talon waves after Baron as he disappears around the corner of the farmhouse. Dreza asks Talon, "Will folks be coming through the west gate or up North? We can greet them."

“Oh, yeah. Up the North gate. If you don’t mind welcoming folks, I’ll go wait inside, yeah?” Dreza nods, “Sure.” The three of them step down off the side of the platform, through the frame of the hall under construction and then turning to walk through the gate. Talon goes inside, while Anju and Dreza walk to the North gate, Anju saying “I’ll come with you.”

Malon's Notes From the First Plenum

All express careful optimism and pleasantries.

Discuss Koume and Kotake, potential threat from Western Gerudo

Deku volunteer to check on them tomorrow, say fortress doesn't have forces and many are tired from work constructing paddies

goron propose to offer construction help, seeking trade for desert rock, although would have to wait til fortifications of lon lon done

discussion tabled until more is known

explain head carpenter, men's rebellion, jailing

anju will speak to them

Dreza will speak with gerudo carpenters,

offering training and some assistance amidst North partition construction

to be discussed between parties, pay: hyliaans>gerudo, malon>both

Baron and deku propose designated market area, south of town.

vendors bring their own protection and shop setups,

building trust through trade, inviting traders from all

zora like the idea

all vote aye to allowing daily, seasonal or tentatively permanent shops

all vote aye limiting lon lon liability

goron mention gold skulltula appearing around DM,

moblin deal with them fine so no issue

Moblin and goron working fine

goron do mention moblin metalworking as a potential asset

zora have not much to add. No skulltula or other issues

makaru expresses concern over ruto's isolation

assured by goron and zora, they have not much to add.

Deku scrubs confirm kokiri are disinterested,

kokiri do accept visitors for trade/diplomacy

but happy to send scrub representatives, exports via scrubs,

zora, goron, east-gerudo will be alert for any issues from gerudo valley

committed to defend lon lon

closing, reaffirming commitment to mutual benefit

pleasantries and food

Zarah Wanders

Wagons are being packed, a few tents have been taken over to Lon Lon already. A few of the Gerudo, surprisingly, weren't very worried about Koume and Kotake or the Fortress Gerudo. Dreza had pointed out to Nabooru, who protested anyone moving until it was over, that if the plan falls through they're not in any better position being just a bit further away.

Nabooru took a while to concede, but Dreza and a Yorai reminded her that Koume and Kotake had barely ever left their chamber in the Spirit Temple during the time Nabooru was imprisoned, and their guards even said the two were senile. Still incredibly powerful, and respected by the Fortress clan, but they wouldn't risk all out war with the entire lowlands.

Impa sits on a stool in the kitchen tent, drinking water. She has all of her things packed, and has been helping some other Gerudo. Dreza and Nabooru are at Lon Lon with some other Gerudo reassembling the tents. The pavilion roof is down, two Gerudo are rolling the round tables across the field toward Lon Lon.

Looking toward Lon Lon, she does notice a horse passing by the south and over the hill. A bit worried, she gets up and walks to the stable to see if all the horses are there. Zarah's is gone.

She looks around, finding a young Gerudo girl packing things outside of a tent. "Have you seen Zarah?" Impa asks. The girl shakes her head. "Which tent is hers?" The girl points a past the tent, "Two down." she says. "Thanks." Impa walks down the aisle between the tents.

Approaching Zarah's and seeing the door open, she looks inside. Most everything is packed up. Some books and papers are still on the desk. Impa looks around and hears a scuttling under the desk. The basket with Zarah's gold skulltula sits there. Impa dismisses it and leaves.

Impa walks to the main aisle outside the kitchen tent and looks across the field to Lon Lon. She looks down at the girl she had talked to, "When you see Nabooru or Dreza, tell them I've gone to Lake-" she pauses. "To the lake?" Impa asks. The girl just says "Yeepppp."

Heading to the stable and getting on her horse, Impa sets out to Lake Hylia - having a feeling the girl must have gone there, although not sure.

Arriving through the gate of Lake Hylia, Impa looks down into the lake. The entire surface is almost entirely covered by algae, and turning to the right she sees the river feeding it is now barely a small stream. "Zarah?" Impa calls out, her voice echoing through the valley. It is almost the same time of day as when she last brought the girl here – seemingly a lifetime ago. She feels bad that they still haven't gotten around to making soap or oils, although the Juniper will take quite a while to dry out and be ready.

Heading down a ways, she descends the slope between the fence and the old laboratory building but, seeing fresh hoof prints in the damp soil that head to the laboratory building, she makes her way up and over to it.

The soil turns to long grass and the hoof prints fade, Impa can't really tell if they continue going around the building but stops and gets off her horse to check. "Zarah?" She calls out again, seeing no prints in the patch of mud behind the building, she approaches a window and looks in.

"Zarah?" She asks, although she just realizes that the girl must be gone – her horse isn't here, although Impa doesn't know how she could have missed the girl coming back. Unless she went to Gerudo Valley? But why would she? Maybe she took a low path along the south plain and Impa didn't notice. Either way, Impa does enter the lab building, the door creaking open harshly.

Her eye immediately is drawn to a ladder that she is sure wasn't there before, leading to a trapdoor on the ceiling that hangs open. Looking down, she does see mud footprints leading to it, small, probably Zarah's. She walks over, seeing mud scraped off of the bottom of a shoe on the first step of the ladder and, realizing how slippery the tile floor is, she wipes the mud from her own shoes off the ladder, causing what was there to fall onto the tile below with a rather gross plop – she almost thinks she hears it sizzle oddly, although paying closer attention she hears nothing but a Guay calling outside.

She begins to climb up, but sees it is dark. Sighing, she walks out to her horse and grabs a tin of matches and a very small lantern from the bag that she always keeps on her horse. Lighting it, she walks back inside, setting the tin of matches on a desk and once again scraping the mud from her shoes onto the first rung of the ladder, then begins to climb.

Approaching the top, she sets the lamp down, grabbing the frame to hoist herself up, as the ladder faces a wall. As soon as she touches the frame, she is reminded of the door in Ganondorf's keep and winces a bit, expecting pain on her hands, but there is none. She hoists herself up into the dark crawlspace, raising the wick of the lantern and picking it up.

Looking around, it is wide open and empty. She stares into the

empty crawlspace for a while in silence. Despite it being empty, she traces the wood frame and boards around the crawlspace. Eventually, she hears a skulltula somewhere. She draws her blade, thumb on the hilt, turning around but not seeing it anywhere. She does notice a part of the brick wall that juts out near the trapdoor - probably the lookout tower's base. Listening closely, the skulltula seems to echo a bit strangely. She crawls over to the base of the tower and to the right, seeing an opening and, upon looking in, a ladder.

Impa looks up the ladder, hearing the skulltula somewhere at the top. She sighs. Finding she can stand in the narrow interior of the tower, she rests the long handle of the lantern in her left elbow and begins climbing with her knife drawn.

She climbs, shoulders almost scraping against the walls, and having to slowly raise her arms to avoid bumping them. After some time, she slows, listening to the skulltula. Almost stopping, she continues climbing up, the air terribly humid and stale, almost suffocating. She thinks about turning back, but it isn't much further to the top - although she looks up, not able to see another trapdoor, ceiling or anything, just shadows above, and now below. She continues climbing and after a while starts to worry. She's climbed way too far by now, the tower isn't this tall. Stopping and staring at the bricks in front of her, her breath straining in the humid, hot tower. She swallows with some difficulty and coughs. Taking a few more deep breaths, looking at the bricks behind the ladder, she notices that they glisten.

Holding the lantern up, she sees the Sheikah eye inset into each brick. Not large, just a small symbol in the middle of each brick, easily missed as they have a rough texture.

She breathes deeply, noticing that the sound of the skulltula has stopped - for some reason, it makes her afraid. She looks up, still seeing nothing but shadow - down, nothing but shadow. Feeling suddenly faint, having forgotten how high she was, how high she had climbed, she leans her back against the wall and wipes sweat from her brow. Breathing slowly, she closes her eyes.

After a while, she opens them, looking down. In the shadows below, she sees a red orb glowing. "Just a bit further." she hears some strange inhuman voice whisper. She looks up, seeing a red orb glowing in the shadows above as well. Taking a deep breath, she begins climbing again, a bit more quickly, looking straight up. Eventually, the red orb above fades and she looks down, seeing the one fading as well. Looking up again, climbing a bit faster now still, the orb above fades into the shadowy black. She looks down, a bit panicked, seeing the one below has faded as well. As she turns to look up again, she flinches as she almost pulls her head up right into a brick ceiling. She exhales, rubbing the sweat from her forehead and her hand through her hair. She does feel a breeze up here, although can't tell where it is coming from.

Looking down the ladder, she breathes deeply and slowly.

The sound immediately behind her head of the skulltula jolts her, and she immediately turns around, seeing it on a recessed part of the wall behind her and stabbing it. It was a gold skulltula, which lets out a horrible sound and slowly shrivels. No token falls from it.

Impa breathes deeply again, the air a bit less stuffy. She looks at the recessed wall behind her, a plank is shimmed into it forming a sort of shelf. There's nothing else, though. Maybe something to keep the tower stable? Impa shrugs, a bit frustrated. Looking around and pressing on the brick, nothing happening - pressing on the brick above her to no result, she begins descending.

The descent feels much shorter, but Impa shrugs it off. Reaching the bottom, she extinguishes the lantern and makes her way through the crawlspace just by the light coming from the trapdoor. Descending the ladder, she graciously breathes the fresh air - although a faintly sulfurous smell sometimes wafts with the breeze, probably something to do with the algae.

Looking around for any more signs inside the building, but seeing nothing, she exits and climbs on her horse. Turning to look at the sunset, she pulls the reigns and her horse begins making its way to the lake's gate. Maybe the girl went around the west side of Lon Lon to get to where all the construction is happening, she thinks. She turns left outside of the lake, scanning the horizon but not seeing anything before she rounds the tall stone walls of the ranch's lookout tower, heading north along the west wall.

Impa Helps Anju Move

As Impa heads up the West wall of Lon Lon, which is being slowly replaced with stone, she scans the valley leading to Gerudo Canyon. Seeing nothing, she keeps watching until her horse carries her over the hill, rounding the corner along the shorter northwest wall.

She sighs a bit of relief hearing the hammering and talking echo from the taller interior wall, but turning the corner immediately heads for the large gate and dismounts. About to open the door, for some reason instinctively wanting to find Malon, she glances to where the tents are being set up and sees Nabooru.

Walking over, she calls out, "Have you seen Zarah?" Just as she does, she sees Zarah's horse out of the corner of her eye, behind a lean-to along the North wall. Nabooru calls back, "She's talking with Malon." Impa, now much more relieved, and breathing deeply as if she had held her breath the whole ride from Lake Hylia, turns back to enter the gate. "What's wrong?" Nabooru calls back, but Impa waves back at her, "Nothing."

Impa opens the door and heads up, realizing she doesn't actually know where Malon lives or if she is even allowed to be here.

Regardless, she continues up the path and sees Anju sitting outside, on a bench across from the door to the large farmhouse.

"That's Malon's house right?" Impa asks. "It is. I guess she's meeting with someone right now." Anju replies. Impa walks over and sits, looking at Anju, although her eyes wander toward the gate leading to the middle area of the ranch, where construction can be heard.

"I'm not going to get chased out of here if someone sees me, am I?" Anju shakes her head and frowns slightly. "No, I guess the people who were most suspicious of you were the Head Carpenter and his men. They probably won't be around much longer." Impa quickly looks to Anju, "They aren't going to-" but Anju waves a hand, "No, no. We have all had enough violence. The Head Carpenter seems to be dilerious, but his men do seem set on leaving to go build some sort of monastary."

Impa looks at Anju as if she told a terrible joke. "Monastary?"

"I guess they are in a fervor. They say all this happened because some sect of the Sheikah betrayed the royal family - of course, they think you and I are part of it." Anju says as a cool breeze cuts through the humid air.

After a silence, Impa asks, "We aren't, are we?"

Anju looks at her out of the corner of her eyes, then turns to her.

"I know I'm not."

Impa simply stares at the wall of the farmhouse. She is quiet for a while, then hears footsteps inside - the two of them look to the door expectantly, and it opens, Zarah walking out. Malon is

behind her.

"Zarah, I was so worried, I didn't know where you were." Impa says a bit breathlessly, standing up and walking over, although Zarah just raises her eyebrows at Impa, looking at her for a while and then walking away rather quickly, carrying her basket which Impa thinks she heard a gold skulltula in.

Impa looks to Malon, who watches the girl wander down the path and, a few moments after she has passed the corner, turns to Impa, bowing a bit. "I was a bit surprised she came to me as well." Impa scratches her forehead, "What was that all about?"

Malon looks at Anju, then Impa, shrugging a little. "She seems very restless, I guess I just offered her some advice. You know how it is, being that age. So much energy and attention to spare and get wound up with."

"You don't seem lacking in the same." Anju says, although Malon ignores it.

"It wasn't anything about you, the camp moving," Malon says to Impa, "She just seems to not know what to do with herself."

"Huh." Impa says, still staring off down the path for a while longer and breathing deeply again, sighing then turning to Malon. "Well, I'm glad she is safe."

Malon nods and bows slightly again. "By the way, Impa, I'm not sure if Dreza told you yet, but we do have pledges from the Zora and Goron to help if anything happens."

Impa looks at her, somewhat confused but then says, "Oh. That's good. I had not heard anything. I guess my nerves have been a bit high, but everyone seems confident."

Malon again nods. "We still have obstacles, but-" Malon pauses.

She looks at Anju, "Did you need to speak with me, Anju?"

Anju stands, "Yes - well, I suppose from what you said, my questions are answered though." Malon smiles at her, "Well, you are welcome to come in for tea if you'd like."

Anju looks at Impa, who is looking at the ground. "Well, I should finish moving my things. Impa, would you mind helping me?"

Impa looks at Anju, then to Malon who says to them both, "Well goodnight then, I am pretty tired after all." and quickly bows and returns inside.

"You think it is alright?" Impa asks, looking past the farmhouse gate. Anju assures her, "It should be fine. Maybe an odd look, but like I said, it was the Carpenter and his men that were leading the charge against you, and they're currently jailed in the lookout tower."

Impa nods, and the two make their way to the gate. "Oh." Anju says, "It will close behind us, but I'm sure Malon won't mind if we prop it open while we move things, it won't take more than a couple trips." Anju, having opened the gate, pulls a latch that prevents it from swinging.

Impa follows her to the right, past a few spots of dirt in the grass

where some shanties have already moved to the North partition.
“Wait.” Impa says, stopping. Anju stops as well and turns to her.
“Your husband.” Impa says.

Anju sighs, she simply says “Yes.”

“He is leaving with them? To the monastery?”

Anju looks down at the ground between them.

“I’d rather not talk about it right now.” she says after a while.

Impa walks towards her, intending to comfort her, but Anju just turns and starts walking. Impa pauses but follows quietly.

Reaching her shanty, a cart outside, a large torch burning in the corner of the small streets of shacks and another two doors down, Anju opens the door, saying back to Impa, who stands back a ways, “I’ve just got to move my bed and desk, they are a bit awkward.”

Impa can hear Anju moving some things around inside, but she feels a lump in her throat and just stares, looking at the long shadow cast by the lookout tower creeping toward Anju’s shanty. The torch light flickering against the almost decayed-looking wood of the shacks. The breeze has grown chilly, and Impa looks up at a Guay that squawks, flying over a completed stone portion of the West wall. “Impa?” Anju calls.

Impa watches the Guay fly over the wall. As passes over, flying east, she watches as an arrow hits it, causing it to nearly fall, although it flaps faster, keeping itself upright. Another arrow hits it, this one causing it to fall backward and down into the wall, falling behind a shanty two doors down. For some reason, watching the Guay fall reminds her of a flash of fear she had in the shaft of the laboratory tower, irrationally worried she might fall down it.

“Impa, are you alright?” Anju asks.

Impa covers her mouth and is quiet for a few moments. “Yeah,” she says, “Some kid just killed a Guay.” She turns, looking to the east end of the camp past some of the shacks. “Ah. Malon pays well for anyone who does.” Anju says, approaching Impa. “She hates them, deeply. A bit more than I understand. I do have some ideas to keep them out, though. We’ll have to talk about that soon.”

Impa turns to Anju. “I suppose if your idea works, you’ll be paid even better.” Anju waves her hand, “I don’t want pay, they are a bother.” Impa shrugs and walks to the door of Anju’s shack.

“Well, lets get moving, it is getting dark.” she says. Anju passes her and pushes her desk, although it splinters the plank floor and makes a loud crack, Impa quickly comes in, asking, “Is it empty? We should tilt it on its side onto the cart.

“Oh.” Anju says. “It is empty, yes.”

“Well, wheel the cart over and I’ll tip it over.” Impa says.

Anju does, and Impa carefully lifts the table up on one side. As Anju pushes the cart in the door, the two hear some muffled

yelling from the lookout tower. Anju looks off towards it, but looks back. Impa turns the table over onto the cart and pushes the end with drawers a bit further onto the cart. Anju begins to pull it out the door, but as she does they hear the yelling get louder, the door of the lookout tower must have opened and people are yelling outside.

Pulling the cart out the door, Anju does look to Impa, who tries to see past one of the shanties. They hear someone yelling about Malon, and Anju begins to walk past the shanties, Impa following.

Rounding the last structure, Anju and Impa see four guards standing outside the lookout tower in front of Malon and another, the Head Carpenter having wrested a spear and swinging it at the guards. "She will doom you all!" he screams, the guards backing away. He suddenly leans forward, vomiting – the guards take the opportunity to surround him, two to the side and two in front, spears drawn.

He screams again, regaining his posture and swinging the spear in an arc, disarming all four guards. "She'll kill you all! She is a witch!" He yells, lifting his arm and stabbing the guard to his left in the face, drawing back and doing the same to the guard approaching behind him, "She will kill you! She'll kill you! Look at what she has done!" he screams, piercing the guard's skull quickly and drawing the spear back as if stabbing fish in a barrel.

The two in front of him, terrified, run away as he turns to Malon and the remaining guard. "Look at the bloodshed she has caused!" The carpenter yells. The remaining guard approaching, spear drawn above his shoulder, but the carpenter smacks him across the face with his spear before his arm can fall, rounding a kick and sending him toppling backward, dazed.

Impa looks at Anju, who looks terrified, grabs her blade and steps, slightly crouched, sideways, rounding behind the carpenter, although Malon steps forward, unphased, ignoring Impa. "You witch! Look what you have done to these poor men!" The carpenter screams at her, raising his spear. "You won't get away with this! I will fulfil the prophecy myself!"

As his arm raises higher and begins to come down, Impa tackles him from behind and to his right, although he remains standing, as if she had jumped into a solid wall – in a split second she reaches up toward his arm to stop him, but he plunges his spear down into Malon's chest.

Malon doesn't respond. "Ghoul! Poe! What are you, foul thing!"

the carpenter yells as Impa stretches her arm and pulls it around, stabbing him in the stomach, nearly piercing her own arm wrapped around him. He lets out a short croak and Impa, feeling blood beginning to drip down her arm, withdraws as he collapses to his knees, hunched forward, coughing.

Impa looks to Malon, who glares at her, stepping back. The spear through her chest, lodged in the ground behind her, passes through her the same way Nabooru's blade passed through Ganondorf. Impa stares as Malon simply turns walking back toward the farmhouse, saying behind her, "Thank you, Impa." Impa stands staring at Malon as she walks away. The carpenter falls forward ridiculously, his head hitting the ground in front of him and then his body collapsing to one side as the two guards who had fled return, joining the one who had fallen to Malon's side and now stands, they all look down at the carpenter.

From a distance, a few civilians had looked on but they all quickly disappear out of sight. "Thank the land he missed her." One guard says. After a while, all of them breathing heavily, another looks up to Impa, "Thank you, who are you?" Impa just looks down at the carpenter.

After a while, she says, "Impa." although she turns and returns to Anju. The guards look at each other and begin carrying the carpenter's body to the lookout tower wordlessly. Returning to Anju, although not looking at her, she asks, "You saw that, right?"

Anju is quiet. Impa looks at her. "The spear passed through her as if she weren't even there. You saw it, didn't you? Did you know about this?" Anju shakes her head, watching the guards carry the carpenter away.

After a while, Anju speaks, "I don't know. I saw it, I just-" she trails off. The two stand there for a while. "It effects the sages and Ganondorf. I don't know why it would effect Malon." Anju says.

"Could Nemek have granted her some kind of power?" Impa asks. Anju shakes her head. "Nemek doesn't grant powers, or even really have any power other than-" She pauses. "Knowledge. Definitely some forms of trickery, but they are minor abilities." They stand for a while. "You know that?" Impa asks - Anju nods. "Nemek's power is mostly just knowledge and foresight, although he is also a portal to the shadow realm."

Impa stands for a while, then begins walking back to Anju's shack, Anju follows. "From the look she gave I don't think she'll be answering questions about it." Anju says. Impa shivers, feeling

cold, although the night is not yet fully dark. Approaching the cart outside Anju's door, Impa simply grabs the handle, gesturing for Anju to hold the table upright while they move.

Malon Meets with Koume & Kotake

It is late outside of Malon and Talon's home. Malon sits on one of the dining room chairs outside the door. Nemek floats above the barn next to a lantern that is suspended from the barn, looking out across the night sky to two figures approaching, flying across the sky from Gerudo Valley. Malon looks up as she hears a rattling sound, but Nemek is gone.

Seeing the two figures approaching, Malon stands and watches them near. They approach quickly, stopping just short of the moon which hangs directly above, and descend. "Good evening, Koume, Kotake." Malon says quietly as the witches descend in front of her.

They look at each other, then back to Malon. "Is Malon here, girl?" Koume asks. Malon sighs, "I am Malon." The two witches look at each other again.

"We did not come to be made fools of, girl!" Kotake says. "If the leader, Malon is not here, or if your people think you can play tricks on us, we will wipe this entire town from the face of the earth!" Kotake lifts an arm, blue fire blazing from her hand.

"I am Malon," Malon says, "I sent for you to speak about Nabooru and Ganondorf."

Kotake eyes her skeptically, the blue flames crackling. After a moment, Koume slaps Kotake's arm, yelling, "Kotake, let's see what the girl has to say."

Kotake, floating back having been destabilized by the blow, faces Koume, "Koume, I'll destroy you along with this entire village if you slap me like that again!" she yells, blue fire now emanating from her entire body as she rears upward on her broomstick, pointing at Koume. Blue fire falls like drops of water onto the ground beneath Kotake, burning the grass then extinguishing.

"Kotake, you miserable crone, you know you can't kill me! Calm down!" Koume yells. Kotake, still angry, although the fire around her flickering and fading, retorts, "I can and I will, you old whore!" Kotake flies at Koume, who dodges her tackle, the blue witch smashing into the wall of the barn, shaking it and cracking the planks, nearly flying through the wall.

Malon cringes, putting her hand in her face. "Ladies, come in, please. I have some chamomile tea at the table, and Baklava."

The two witches look at Malon, Kotake awkwardly almost falling from her broomstick as she pulls next to Koume. "Baklava!?" Kotake jeers, "Are you sure you haven't just made some soggy scones, Hylian? Show me them!" Koume adds, elbowing Kotake, "You'll be needing the tea, though."

Kotake starts to retort, although she pauses, looking into the farmhouse window, saying thoughtfully, "I do love chamomile. Reminds me of being a young girl." Malon, picking up her chair and turning to open the door, hears Koume say wryly, "Your nose is the only part of you that remembers anything. I'm sure you picture yourself having been a dainty piece, but you've always been just as ugly as you are now." Malon turns as Kotake flies up, having now tossed Koume to the ground. Kotake again glows with blue fire, "Koume!" Malon runs over, standing over Koume and trying not to yell, says "Kotake, come have some baklava."

Kotake again seems to blank and descend. "We will see! If whatever rock you've baked even deserves to be called baklava! Koume, come on!" Kotake yells, diving to the door and bumping into it a bit hard with her broomstick – Malon cringing again as Kotake opens the door and goes inside, hearing the blue witch yell "What a dreadful hovel you live in, girl!"

Koume gets up, floating over and heading in as well, saying "It reminds me of your chamber, reeking of cuckoo ass!" Malon puts her hand to her face, although she does smile a bit, setting down the chair and walking in as Kotake yells, "What? Speak up, hag!"

Malon sits at the dining table as the two witches circle around the living room. She loudly taps a spoon to the kettle, and the two pause, coming over. "Well, girl. You claim to be Malon, then? What do you know about Nabooru?" Kotake asks as Malon pours hot water over the teabag in the cup in front of her. Turning to pour some for Koume as well, Malon says, "She is still alive, and from what I have heard she is planning to take on Ganondorf – in fact, this very upcoming morning."

Kotake sips the nearly boiling hot tea with no response. Koume fiddles with her teabag, saying, "This evening, you say?" Malon pauses, watching Kotake finish the entire cup of barely-steeped, boiling hot water and burping, she corrects Koume, "This upcoming morning, I said."

Kotake now speaks, "Well, it is in line with that foolish girl to try it on her own." turning to Koume, "We can kill the both of them, they'll be distracted with eachother and possibly one having killed the other, likely wounded already." Malon and Koume nod. Koume fidgets with her tea, but asks, "What do you want from us, then? There is always a catch with you Hylians." Malon glances to the side, "I'm not a Hylan. Being rid of the two of them is my own goal as well, but I can't do it."

"Certainly, you can't." Kotake says, pouring more hot water into her cup. Koume asks, "You are not a Hylan?" Malon pauses, watching Koume squeeze her teabag.

"My family immigrated here during the great war," Malon says, although Kotake loudly says, "A fine time to immigrate! This tea is poor!"

Koume retorts, "You haven't even steeped it, senile wench." Kotake doesn't respond. For a while the three are quiet.

"By the way," Malon says, "Do you know anything about the lake down the river from the canyon? It has turned to a swamp practically overnight." Malon backs away as Koume coughs and hacks rather loudly before waving and saying, "The girls are trying to irrigate and see if they can grow rice in the canyon. It isn't going well, the whole thing has been a waste of time."

Kotake defends the move, though, saying "It has barely been a month! The paddies have not even been built. I ought to cut you out of the profits for all the complaining you've made about it!"

Malon cringes, but neither witch escalates the topic. Koume simply turns to her, "Well, lets see how your baklava are, then."

Malon nods, fearing a retort from Kotake although the blue witch is quietly sipping from her cup. Bringing a tray over to the table, Kotake starts at it, "Have you stolen these from the fortress, girl!? Surely you didn't make them!"

Koume also starts a bit and looks at Kotake. The two raise their eyebrows a bit at eachother, Koume grabbing one and inspecting it. "You're no Hylan, to be sure. They make a mockery of baking!"

Koume says, taking a bite.

Kotake grabs one as well and inspects it briefly before tossing the entire thing in her mouth and chewing loudly. "Quite good, actually." Koume says. Kotake, swallowing loudly and smacking her lips, says, "Too much sugar, just as you always do, Koume."

Koume glares at her, but finishes eating hers as Kotake turns to Malon. "Well then, tomorrow morning you say?" Malon nods.

Kotake turns from the table, heading to the door. Koume yells at her, "I'm still eating!"

With a loud thump, Kotake collapses, Koume not paying any mind. The door opens and Koume yells out again, "Fly back on your own then!" she says, grabbing another. Nabooru walks in, looking down at Kotake then at Malon, who stays still but glances to her. "I'll take some with me, you bake them almost as well as me." Koume says, about to take another bite but pausing.

The witch turns around, as Nabooru stabs Kotake who is splayed on the floor. No blue fire, no burst of magic. Koume looks on without much reaction. "Stupid old crone," she says quietly as blood begins to pool under Kotake. "Sorry for the mess." Nabooru says to Malon, approaching Koume, who simply looks at Nabooru and eats the baklava whole.

"I thought it would be much worse." Malon says. Koume swallows, then falls forward onto the floor. "I thought it would be too." Nabooru says, stabbing Koume through the back as well. Malon, already having turned away, places the tray carefully into a canvas bag, saying, "For two of the worlds' most powerful witches, they really were idiots."

Nabooru begins to drag Koume's corpse over to Kotake's, blood trailing along the floor. Malon joins her, holding the canvas bag and watching Nabooru tie a rope around the dead witches' wrists. Finding the two dead bodies light, Nabooru begins to drag behind her outside like a pair of shot geese. Malon follows, glancing back at the blood on the floor, then closing the door behind her.

The two walk down the path to the gate, now surrounded on either side by not wood and iron walls, but stone ones, built from massive slabs, towering a few stories up and wrapping around the entire ranch.

A guard, at Malon's gesture, opens the large doors. The two turn left, Nabooru easily dragging the dead witches while Malon

carries the tray in the bag. Around the corner, construction has come along on a stone wall, although it seems it will stretch further east, encircling the old entrance to Lon Lon. The wall is much shorter, although still a story and half tall.

Nabooru and Malon approach a large pit dug against one of the north walls, the moonlight shining directly down brightly, the only shadows being below the scaffolding and the lean-tos, as well as under the two women as Nabooru kicks the two witches' corpses into the pit. Malon tosses the bag in as well.

Producing a tin box of matches and striking one, Nabooru looks at the flame for a while, then into the pit. She spits into the pit, then throws the match in. Malon and Nabooru watch as a massive fire roars to life, lighting the area and casting their long shadows against the wall of the ranch where they stretch nearly to the top.

As blue and red flames begin to rise from the pyre, Nabooru grabs large branches from the side of the pit, tossing them in and watching them burst into flames quickly, the half-dead branches crackling and popping loudly and filling the air with smoke. Nabooru adds a few more branches, watching the blue and red flames struggle against the bright orange and yellow.

After some time, the two watching the pyre, the blue and red flames subside, becoming short as the corpses of the witches burn. Nabooru crouches on one knee, unscrewing an urn and beginning to toss some sort of ash or sand onto the corpses. As it reaches the red and blue flames, it turns the flames purple for a moment. Nabooru continues tossing the material in, each time, a bit more of the red and blue turns purple for a few seconds, then to yellow-orange.

After some time doing this, the fire is all yellow-orange, and Nabooru stands. Malon has left. Nabooru steps back, adding another large branch which crackles violently and emits a smoke, the smell of cedar filling the air. Nabooru turns and takes a seat in a chair under one of the lean-tos nearby, watching the fire.

Malon Cleans

Entering the farmhouse, Malon slowly closes the door behind her and heads up to her room, returning with two small vials.

Kneeling in front of the puddle by the door, she uses the pipette to draw some of the blood and squeezes it into the vial. Doing this until the vial is nearly half full, she repeats the process with the other puddle and other vial, then placing the two vials on the dining table, then goes to open a closet under the stairs, bringing out a bucket and mop, towels and a scrub brush.

She covers the blood with a few hand towels, applying some pressure with a scrubbing broom so that they absorb more, though not letting them become too saturated. She then pushes them into a small pile and rolls them onto a thicker, larger, dry towel which she rolls up with the broom and pushes away, avoiding pressing too hard and ensuring no streaks follow as she pushes it toward the dining table.

Wetting the floor with the mop, consolidating the two puddles and avoiding getting her boots wet, she produces a pouch and from it, pours a purpleish ash that rests on top of the water for a while. Rounding the puddle she pours more, then pushes it around with the mop, the water sizzling as it mixes with the witches' blood.

Eventually, after a few passes, the sizzling dies down and she begins instead using the push broom to scrub at the floor, occasionally switching to mop and draw the water, then returning to scrubbing. After some time, she lightly drops more of the purple ash onto the drying floor, scrubbing it in again with the brush. Satisfied, she walks over and looks into the bucket.

From the kitchen counter she gathers an empty canvas bag. Returning to the rolled towel, she lifts it and slides the bag around it, lifting the bag carefully and, checking if any blood leaked through the larger towel, but none did. She folds and knots the excess of the bag.

About to leave, she stops, setting the bag near the door and returning to the dining table, she grabs the vials, holding them up and looking for a while. She turns and heads up to her room.

Outside, Nabooru rubs her eyes and stretches, looking out to the Gerudo camp in the distance where a few lamps have come on, the camp having been instructed to stay quiet and dark until Nabooru started the pyre. Nabooru unscrews her flask.

"The poor Gerudo man's soul will never rest, now." Nemek says from behind her.

"Good." she says, drinking water and staring into the fire.

Nemek rattles. "How easily mortal love turns around." it says, its voice echoing and transforming into a laugh.

"Fuck off." Nabooru says, turning, but Nemek is gone.

She hears the door by the gate swing open, then close, and Malon rounds the corner, approaching the pyre and looking around, eventually seeing Nabooru. Malon tosses the bag onto the fire as well as a few more branches and heads over to Nabooru.

About to sit and join, Nabooru says, "Hey," nudging Malon and holding out the pouch. "Ah." Malon says, taking it. Nabooru watches Malon return to the fire, maybe three yards away, and toss more of the ashy material onto the burning bag. Nabooru gets up, walking over silently and they stand a ways apart, looking into the fire for a long time.

Nabooru, after several minutes, turns and looks behind Malon out across the field to the camp. Seeing most of the lamps have gone back out, she turns, and the last one remaining is also extinguished.

Malon turns to face her.

"Do you wanna see my tits?" Malon asks.

Nabooru stares at her and laughs kind of quietly. Malon looks at her, tilting her head and staring – her expression isn't flirtatious or even curious, she more looks at Nabooru as if she had just asked the Gerudo to pass her a pitcher of water.

Malon just stares, and after a while Nabooru scratches her cheek. "Sure." she says.

Her expression not really changing at all, although maybe a slight smile barely crossing her face, Malon leans forward a bit – the two of them still a yard or so apart – and lifts her shirt. For a while Nabooru just stares, her elbow resting in one hand against her hip and her fist in front of her mouth, as if looking at a painting. Malon leans forward a bit more, swaying as Nabooru watches, then lifting her shirt off, dropping it on the ground next to her. She presses her breasts together with her arms and leans forward, slowly swaying again and looking down at them.

After a while she looks up at Nabooru and cups her breasts in her hands, squeezing and pulling them slowly. "What do you think?" She says, as if asking for Nabooru's opinion on a book. Looking to Nabooru, she massages her breasts, squeezing her nipples and saying, her voice wavering a bit, "You can feel them if you want."

Nabooru breaths deeply, glancing out across the empty field briefly before approaching the girl. Grabbing Malon's hips, she tilts her head to the side and back slightly and bites her lip. Malon looks down at her breasts, still squeezing and pulling them as Nabooru's hands slowly move up her waist and side. Malon lifts her arms, letting Nabooru's hands work their way around her breasts. "Do you like them?" Malon asks, her arms behind her head, looking down and watching Nabooru's hands grope her.

Nabooru doesn't say anything for a while, just fondling Malon. Malon takes a step back and Nabooru lets go. Leaning forward a lot more so her breasts hang, she looks up at Nabooru. "Could you slap them, please?" Malon asks, looking into her eyes with a still almost bored expression. Nabooru raises her eyebrows, inhaling deeply again and stretching her back and shoulders. She almost says something, but instead looks down at Malon's breasts, pulls her arm back a bit and slaps Malon's left breast rather hard – Malon immediately saying "Harder."

Nabooru raises her eyebrows again a bit, this time pulling her arm back further and higher, and, Malon looking down to watch, she slaps Malon's left breast as hard as she dared. Malon looks down at herself for a while, quiet, then says, "Please, harder, Nabooru. Please." she looks up to Nabooru, still not expressing much of anything, although her eyes are a bit glassy.

Nabooru takes a deep breath and pulls back again. As she pulls back, Malon says, "As hard as you possibly can. Please." Nabooru follows through, and Malon moans as soon as her palm hits her breast. "Thank you." Malon says, looking down still. "The other?"

Nabooru laughs and says, "I'm not as strong with my left arm."

Malon looks up at her, smiling. "Why's that? Jacking off too much?" Nabooru exhales, lifting her left arm back and hitting Malon's right breast as hard as she can – Malon's smile fading and immediately after, she says "Thank you. Again, please." Nabooru obliges, and after another blow Malon looks up at her, tears running down her cheeks and a faint smile across her mouth.

She steps closer to Nabooru, looking up at her, pressing her breasts under Nabooru's. "I'm a virgin, you know." She says. Nabooru looks down at her and pushes her hips forward, pressing her dick against Malon's thigh. "I don't believe that one bit."

Malon frowns, her eyebrows arching and lips pursing as she uses her hands to press her breasts up against Nabooru's, looking down, "It's true, I swear. My tight little pussy has been waiting so long for a woman like you, Nabooru." she says, and Nabooru sighs, although Malon looks up with what seems like genuine sadness, she is crying. Nabooru is taken aback, although her dick throbs against Malon's leg harder, precum dripping down her leg.

Nabooru backs away a step, but Malon follows, pressing her breasts against Nabooru. Malon sobs, "Won't you lick up my pretty virgin tears? Please?" Nabooru's heart is racing, she feels dizzy, but a breeze picks up and she finds her hand moving up to hold Malon's face, the other squeezing the girl's hips. Cooled by the breeze, yet suspended in the humid night air, Nabooru's lips taste the tears on Malon's cheek, the girl sobbing lightly, saying "Thank you, thank you."

Nabooru watches her own tongue lick Malon's cheeks, at first just picking up a teardrop, but then she begins to press her tongue against Malon's cheek, slowly licking above her cheek and along her bottom eyelid. She does the same for the other side, the salty tears almost burning her tongue.

"Do you like the way it tastes?" Malon asks, as Nabooru holds Malon's chin and grabs her ass with her other hand, squeezing. She doesn't respond, instead pulsing her dick against Malon's thigh. "Nabooru, do you like it?" Malon repeats, her tone a bit more flat, Nabooru looks into her eyes and breathes deeply.

"I do." Nabooru says. Malon smiles, more tears forming in the corners of her eyes. "I'm glad you do." Malon says, her voice cracking. "If you hurt me more, I'll cry more for you, Nabooru."

Nabooru stares at Malon, looking down to their breasts, Malon still pressing hers up against Nabooru's and pushing them up a bit more a few times. Nabooru's hands make their way up Malon's waist again toward her tits and Malon's hands drop. "I want to show you all of me, okay?" Malon says, pulling back and taking a step back, Nabooru watching her unbutton her bloomers. Malon pauses, looking up at Nabooru, "Is that okay?" she asks.

Nabooru glances across the field and a bit around. The fire has died down in height, but still burns brightly, illuminating the two

as they face each other, casting long shadows against the wall.

"Sure." Nabooru says, looking back at Malon, who smiles to her and pulls down her pants and underwear at once, stepping out of them with her boots still on. "What about the boots?" Nabooru asks. Malon looks up at her, squatting to remove her shorts over the boots. "I would like to leave them on, if that is okay." she says, pausing. Nabooru raises her eyebrows and shrugs. "Fine with me." she says. Malon finishes taking her bloomers and underwear off and stands, also taking out the tie in her long orange hair, stretching her neck around and letting it fall over her shoulders.

Malon stands still, the two looking at each others' bodies up and down. Nabooru looks up and down Malon's naked body - in the moonlight and the light of the fire, skin white as bone, standing there like some holy relic. "Do you like me?" She asks, looking at Nabooru across the few feet between them as if it were a canyon.

"I do." Nabooru says, biting her lip. "What would you like to do with me?" Malon asks, stepping closer, looking down at her own body, pulling a lock of her hair on her neck behind her shoulder, then looking up to Nabooru.

"May I touch your hair?" Nabooru asks.

Malon looks at her, almost expressionless, and nods.

Nabooru steps forward, lifting an arm to Malon's cheek, holding it softly for a while. Malon leans her head into Nabooru's hand, closing her eyes. Nabooru runs her hand through Malon's hair, her hand wrapping around Malon's skull, her other hand finding its way to Malon's waist again.

Malon, eyes still closed, tilts her head back up to Nabooru. "Push me to the ground." she whispers. Nabooru hesitates, looking down at her. Malon opens her eyes just the smallest amount. "Push me to the ground."

Malon says, still whispering. "Cover me in dirt, and hay, and bruises. Bite me until I bleed. Pull my hair, and slap me." Malon's whisper turns into a cracked voice. "Until no more tears come. Until my voice is gone. Until I forget my own name."

Nabooru can see through Malon's mostly closed eyelids that she isn't looking at her - just staring into space. Nabooru looks down and then up at Malon, who continues looking dimly at nothing.

Nabooru pulls back slightly.

"You aren't really a virgin, are you?"

After a few moments, Malon's eyelids flicker and she takes a few deep breaths. She looks away with a restrained smile, saying "No." in a rather flat voice. Nabooru laughs lightly as well and Malon looks at her, actually looking embarrassed and trying not to smile. She breathes in and out deeply and quickly, with a sigh, saying, "Fine. I didn't think you actually believed me though."

The two laugh a bit and Malon lets herself smile. They stand there for a while, not looking into each others eyes but each watching the smallest movements of the others' face.

"What do we do now? Go to bed?" Malon asks. Nabooru steps back, clearing her throat. She walks over and throws another branch on the pyre. It crackles, and she throws another on then turns and walks back to Malon, who stands now with her arms crossed. Stopping in front of her, Nabooru gently moves Malon's arms out of the way, grabbing her breasts - Malon lets out a moan as Nabooru pulls her closer by her tits. "You lost control." Nabooru says, grabbing the back of Malon's neck.

Malon looks away, now facing the field. "Sorry."

Nabooru pulls Malon's hair gently, causing Malon to moan again, looking up to Nabooru and smiling briefly before arching her eyebrows and frowning, saying, "I'm so sorry, it won't happen again. I promise."

Nabooru digs her nails into the back of Malon's head and she lets out a high, cracked moan. "Spit on my face." She whispers. Nabooru does, then pulls her hand from behind Malon's head and slaps her cheek hard enough to make Malon's head turn, the girl leaning away but quickly turning back, smiling - although she returns to her faux-sad expression quickly, saying, "Thank you."

Nabooru looks the nude girl up and down, feeling her cock getting hard again. "Does the last request still stand?" She asks. Malon looks up with pleading eyes and nods. As Malon comes closer, Nabooru pushes her to the ground hard, Malon slides a few feet back along the dirt and grass.

Nabooru approaches her and spits on Malon's face. Malon looks up, putting a hand to her face and, with a finger, scraping the spit from her face into her mouth, then sucking on her finger, saying "ank oo" through her finger. Nabooru bends down, grabbing Malon's chin and pulling it up, slapping her across the cheek, hard. With one hand, she pulls Malon up to her knees by her hair,

her other hand shoving a thumb into Malon's mouth. Malon smiles, tears dripping down her cheeks. "Shank you," Malon says, looking up at the Gerudo. Nabooru tugs Malon's cheek a bit to one side, pulling her hair which she still holds in the other hand. Malon lets out a short squeek and says "Pank you."

"You talk too much." Nabooru says, her thumb digging deeper into Malon's mouth, her other hand grabbing Malon's hair closer to the roots and tugging. Malon nods quickly as Nabooru squats down, feeling Malon's tongue with her thumb. Nabooru looks at her, her thumb pushing further back and down harder on Malon's tongue but she doesn't gag - instead just looks back, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Mhm! Mhm!" Malon lets out, nodding quickly again. Nabooru grabs her by the chin, guiding her to lean forward as Nabooru licks her tears up again, this time licking all over Malon's face, along her jaw, her eyebrows and upper eyelid, occasionally spitting and slapping Malon's breast.

Through this, Malon continues nodding, occasionally letting out a quiet, "mhm!" until Nabooru again grabs her hair by the roots. Feeling the dirt and grass in her hair, she tilts the girl's head back, spitting into her mouth, causing Malon to let out a long, deep moan. Nabooru pulls Malon's head forward, about to kiss her when Malon pulls away, shaking her head quickly and saying "Nope." in a light, high voice.

Nabooru lightens her grip on Malon's hair, whispering, "Sorry." to which Malon whispers, "It's okay, keep going."

Nabooru stands up, leaning over Malon who begs, "Don't stop! Don't leave me!" Nabooru pushes the girl down with her foot. As she falls to the ground, laying on her back, Nabooru pushes one of her breast up with her foot, to which Malon hides her face and sobs. Nabooru pushes harder, releasing and pushing again a few times until she puts her foot down on the ground. Pausing for a moment to look at Malon, Nabooru kicks her side, then rolls her over with her foot. Malon limply lies there, feeling her breasts and cheeks against the cold, dewy dirt and grass.

Nabooru kneels over her, unfastening her belt, her knees closing in around Malon's waist. "Fill me with your cum, Gerudo." Malon says rather loudly. Nabooru pauses. After a few breaths, she leans over Malon, grabbing her hair again and pulling her head back, belt still in her hand. "You'd like that, wouldn't you." She says, truly venomously. As much as she can with her hair being pulled, Malon nods, "Please, please!" she almost yells, gripping the grass and dirt, lifting her hips up and down, flexing her thighs and masturbating a little.

Nabooru lets her knees apart and watches the girl hump the air. "Please, Nabooru. Cum in my tight virgin pussy. It is yours!" Malon begs, even louder, thrusting her hips up and down. Nabooru watches for a while more, her pant leg drenched with precum. Nabooru leans in to Malon's ear, "What about the rest of you?" She says, grabbing Malon's ass and digging her nails in. "Its all yours, all of me is yours!" Malon says a bit more quietly and swallowing loudly, still humping the air although a bit more slowly as Nabooru squeezes and releases, then scratches her ass cheek, reaching behind her to scratch even harder down the back of Malon's thigh. Malon lets out something between a moan and a yell, "Oh god, fuck, fuck." She quickly says, breathing fast in and out and tensing.

After a while, Nabooru resting her weight on Malon and holding Malon's ass tightly, her thumb leads the rest of her hand deeper around Malon's thigh. "Its all yours, all for you," Malon whispers, "all for you." Nabooru presses with her thumb flat against Malon's asshole, "Even this?" she asks.

Malon nods, pushing her hips up into Nabooru's thumb, "Yes mommy, all of my body is yours." Nabooru raises her eyebrows and clears her throat.

"You sure you want to call me that?" She asks a bit flatly. Malon stops thrusting her hips upward and looks back, confused, "What?" Nabooru looks up and away. "I mean," Malon says flatly, "I don't have to, if you don't like it."

Nabooru shakes her head, laughing quietly. "No, I do. Its just weird that you..." she glances at Malon briefly, who is smiling back at her, but looks away. Malon thrusts her hips up and down again in a teasing dance, "That I know mommy wants to fill her cute virgin girl's pussy with cum?" Nabooru covers her eyes with her arm and laughs. "What the fuck, Malon." Nabooru says after a bit.

Malon says, lifting her ass again, "Fuck Malon, that's what I want you to do! Won't you, please, mommy?" Nabooru glares at her, "You better shut up."

Malon goes limp a bit and groans. "Do you really hate it?" Nabooru takes a deep breath and sighs, "I don't, but it is kind of pissing me off that you know I like it. Did that Poe thing tell you or what?"

Malon shrugs. "Woman's intuition. It's also something I like, so I

was hoping you would too. Can we stop with the boring stuff now?"

Nabooru rolls her eyes, but picks up her belt and dangles it in front of Malon's face. In a light, quivering voice, Malon asks, "What are you gonna do with that?"

Sealing

In the early morning, the fog beginning to dissipate across the lowlands and the sky striped with pink, orange and purple, Nabooru looks down at the dirt that fills the pit where Koume and Kotake were burned, as if expecting them to reach out of the ground or for it to burst into flames. It doesn't, of course, and she turns to see four horses drawing two connected carts with a couple Goron pushing it from behind as it comes up the slow hill. On the cart, a large, black, granite obelisk.

Some Goron and Gerudo are at work building somewhat more permanent housing on the west end - three structures having been built so far, the rest being Gerudo tents. Nabooru turns to look, seeing Anju emerging from the building in the corner.

Anju walks north past the construction to a tent which is a temporary kitchen. Nabooru thinks of walking over, Anju is likely making coffee, but she just turns back to the carts, walking toward them as they approach the top of the hill.

"I'm sorry to rush you. I appreciate it." Nabooru says to the newer Goron elder who walks alongside watching. He joins her walking back to the pit. Looking and rubbing his chin, the goron says, "It could be deeper. We can build up the earth around it though."

Nabooru looks at him then nods. "We will probably lay stone slabs around the base later. Maybe we can raise a few yards wide of earth up, build a platform." The Goron nods, "That'd do."

He turns, directing the cart past the pit, releasing the horses and helping the two goron push the cart toward the wall, positioning the larger end shy of the hole. The two go to grab rope from the cart and tie it around the obelisk.

"The granite under the pit will guide it into place." Nabooru says as the two goron return, handing an end of rope to the elder goron. In a remarkably fast motion, the elder having positioned the cart just perfectly, the three goron pull the ropes and the obelisk slides half way off the carts, the larger end dipping into the hole. Nabooru winces as the cart on the end flips upward as the Obelisk slides in - the Goron quickly switch to pulling a different set of ropes that pull the top of the obelisk toward them, allowing the base to neatly slide into the pit, hitting the bottom with a muffled but sharp thud as it connects with the granite below.

The two goron grab shovels and begin packing the earth around the obelisk, which now stands a little over a story and a half tall, barely exceeding the top of the fortified north wall.

"Thank you again, Darduk." Nabooru says. The elder Goron waves briefly without looking back. Nabooru turns to leave, but adds, "Impa and I will be visiting around mid day, by the way. Through the forest." Darduk the Goron does turn his head enough to quip,

"Sounds good, don't get lost." which Nabooru feigns a laugh at. She walks to where some barricades mark where the East wall will be, looking out to the camp. Taking out her spyglass, she looks on, seeing about a third of the camp has moved, half of the tents remaining are being taken down by Gerudo or having some hauling chests and belongings to the wagons waiting outside the old Kakariko gate. She does spot Impa, who is sitting outside her tent reading – she had volunteered to be among the last to leave. Nabooru sighs. Looking back at the three walls that stretch wide enough for some of the humid, foggy air to make the ones opposite a bit faint. The district, once more is built, will be large with plenty of open space. It does feel claustrophobic though sometimes. Especially after having lived near the woods, river and open field, it does remind her living in the Fortress past Gerudo Canyon, which isn't much of a comfort to her. Still, the North, West and East gates, which are massive, will likely be open in the day and help. Malon also has planned a large park outside the East gate. It is hard to imagine how different things will look in a few months time. Nabooru looks North out of the corner of her eye. Breathing deeply, she points her spyglass to the old capital city and Ganondorf's keep. The tower is indeed receding along the horizon. The walls seem to be crumbling slowly – decaying like a carcass. For a long time she just stares at the gate.

Impa and Nabooru Go to Goron City

Impa and Nabooru emerge from the massive hollowed log forming the gate to Kokiri forest. On the bridge, Impa stops and looks through the ravine.

Nabooru's footsteps on the bridge ahead stop, "Something wrong?" she asks. Impa watches fireflies float below the bridge, they look like glints of sun on a swirling lake.

Nabooru takes a few steps closer, looking down as well, but Impa turns and continues across the bridge, walking through the gate. Nabooru watches the fireflies for a few moments before turning back and quickly following.

Passing through the tunnel in the massive log and reaching the clearing, Nabooru watches Impa run left as a giant blue claw hurdles toward her. Nabooru instantly draws her blade, and crouches, moving forward and to the left, seeing the claw at the end of a massive green stalk – some kind of bizarre plant creature. "What is that!?" She yells, the claw retracting and lifting, inside it a massive, toothless wet mouth, its tongue licking what Nabooru realizes is not a claw but almost a beak.

As the beaked head pulls back, Impa yells, "Shield your eyes! Now!" The beak barrels toward Nabooru, who covers her eyes with her arm and closes them, a Deku nut flashing and hot saliva spraying her – she looks up and the creature is stunned, beak facing the sky and stalk straight. Impa runs from the left with her machete, felling her entire weight into a blow near the base of the stalk – Nabooru instinctively runs up, yelling, "Down!" and strikes it a bit further up, her sharper blade cutting the stalk through fully as she somersaults over Impa and stands after rolling, turning back alert.

The beak falls, sizzling and groaning as Impa stands and the two watch the beak burn with a bluish flame that works its way up the stalk which still hangs erect in the air. All within maybe a second, the flame consumes the entirety of the creature and then glints out, the stalk dropping to the ground the deep brown, familiar odd hollow sound of a Deku stick.

Impa grabs the stick, looking to Nabooru – "Never seen where Deku sticks come from, huh?" as she finishes speaking, the stick shrinks to the size of a small twig, as Deku sticks do, and she turns and walks away, putting it in a bag on her waist. "Come on, it'll grow back quickly." Nabooru quickly follows.

"The Kokiri live here with those things all around?" Nabooru asks.

Impa pulls herself up a small ridge to the left of a house made from a massive tree trunk and turns, looking around the clearing at the houses and seeing no one. "They know how to handle them. Still, they shouldn't be here." Impa says as Nabooru climbs up to join her, the two of them looking around the clearing. No Kokiri, no fairies, barely even any fireflies.

For a while they stand quietly. Nabooru tenses up as, near the entrance, the blue head of a Deku Baba grows back, two massive leaves shooting out from the side of the base. The head doesn't move, though.

They stand again for a while, then Impa begins to walk around the back of the house, scanning for any more Deku Baba and jumping down into tall grass, wading through it and rounding the corner of the house, Nabooru jumping down and following. "Impa, you don't think-" She trails off.

Following Impa around the corner where Impa walks inside, Nabooru glances around the empty clearing at the silent houses built from massive tree trunks. As Nabooru is about to enter, Impa has turned back. She lightly touches Nabooru's shoulder and walks out. Nabooru looks briefly inside then out to Impa. The forest clearing is silent.

Nabooru approaches Impa, who puts a hand out and they both stop and listen. They do hear, Impa turning and looking, music coming from a log gate overlooking a rocky outcrop above the clearing. Impa turns and they look at each other, Impa looking to the silent homes. "Is anyone here?" She says, her voice peircing the quiet almost deafeningly. "Hello?"

After a few moments, Nabooru says "We should have asked the Deku scrubs about things before coming here, maybe the Kokiri think we are hostile and have hidden away."

Impa just stands as if waiting for a response that clearly isn't coming. She looks at Nabooru. "I guess so. Well, the music from up there, it must be the Lost Woods. There should be a trail through, lets go."

Nabooru nods as Impa turns and walks over, beginning to climb. Looking up at the outcrop, Nabooru does see a blonde Kokiri girl peeking over, who quickly runs away. "Hey! We don't mean any harm! Wait!" Nabooru calls out, Impa looking around then back.

Impa quickly climbs the rest of the way up the vine-covered wall. Seeing nothing at the top, she hoists herself up and looks down to Nabooru who is climbing up. "Was it a Kokiri?" Impa asks. Nabooru, climbing up and standing, says "I think so, a blonde girl in green clothes." Impa asks, "Did you see a fairy?" Nabooru nods. "They must just be hiding."

The two walk to the log gate, the music a bit louder. Looking to each other, then in, a dense fog obscures what is on the other side, although fireflies and fairies shine through it and float around. They walk through the gate, and, seeing a clearing with three more log gates, Impa says, "Darduk said follow the music and we will reach the gate fine."

Approaching the center of the clearing, Impa turning right toward the music, Nabooru stops. "I don't know. This fog seems wrong. Something seems wrong. You know other people who have taken this route?" Nabooru asks.

Impa turns, "Well, no, but why would Darduk lie? Anyway, the Kokiri are not violent people, or the type to ambush us. Come on."

Nabooru looks back through the gate they came through, but begins walking with Impa through the next, adding "There are many worse things to walk into than an ambush."

Entering the next identical clearing, Impa walks around clockwise, listening to each gate and setting off into the one across from where they came, Nabooru following. Impa repeats this process a few times until they eventually walk into a clearing with a pond and only one exit. Impa heads to the exit while Nabooru looks at the pond - "Hey, there's some kind of door at the bottom."

Nabooru looks back, but Impa has moved to the next clearing. Nabooru sighs, walking over and passing through it, although Impa is not in the clearing. Four more gates. "Impa?" Nabooru calls out. A bit panicked, she listens to each of the gates, but can't tell a difference. Going back to the gate she thinks is the one she came from, the music seems to be the same volume. "Impa!" Nabooru yells, tears forming in her eyes.

She walks through, swearing it was the one she came through. It leads to an identical clearing with four more gates. Empty. Nabooru stares down at the ground. For a long time, she just silently stares at the ground, the melody droning on.

Eventually, she hears footsteps coming through a log gate behind her. "Come on, its just ahead." Impa says. She turns, breathing deeply and walking over, they walk through side by side. "Don't leave like that." Nabooru says, Impa, not really looking at her, offers bit half-hearted "Sorry."

They pass through a few more clearings, Impa remembering which way to go and leading ahead a bit. Eventually they reach a clearing with a large stone doorway, leading down into a tunnel. The two stop in front of it. "This must be it?" Nabooru asks.

The music has stopped, it is completely silent. Impa tilts her head, looking into the tunnel. They stand side by side looking into it. After a while, Impa says, "I wanted to ask you. About Malon."

Nabooru looks at her, Impa just looks down into the dark tunnel. Nabooru sighs. "Do we have to do this right now?"

After a moment, Impa looks back at her, confused and a bit irritated, "We made it this far, its right there, I'm not going back." Nabooru looks at her, then past her.

After a while, Impa goes on. "When that carpenter attacked Malon and the guards, I wasn't sure if it was real, but Anju saw it too. The carpenter stabbed her with a spear. Everyone else thought he had just missed, but I saw her just back up and it passed through her, the same as your blade passed through Ganondorf."

Nabooru just stares past her, her brow furrowed.

After a while, Nabooru asks, "What do you think it means? Is she a sage?" Impa shakes her head and turns back to the tunnel. "I don't think so. Anju didn't seem to have any ideas about it either."

Nabooru is quiet for some time. "Have you seen that Poe, Nemek?" Impa shakes her head. "I don't think so."

"What do you mean you don't think so?" Nabooru asks.

Impa looks up. "I guess I haven't. I saw something I thought was him, a few days ago, but it was maybe just my mind playing tricks on me in the shadows."

Nabooru turns to Impa. "Don't Anju and Malon talk a bit?"

"I suppose, although I don't know how much. Anju doesn't like her, but she doesn't think Malon has bad intentions." Impa says.

"Has anything happened with-" Nabooru pauses. "With that purple energy I told you about a while back?"

"Not that I know of." Impa says.

"I'm sorry I haven't talked to you much, so much has been going on." Nabooru says.

Impa shrugs, "Its alright, I like that we can take space from eachother. We probably should be talking more about things though. For instance, a few days ago Zarah wandered off and I went looking for her. She seemed to go wander around Lake Hylia in some abandoned building then I found her leaving Malon's house. Stuff like that, I guess, we should be talking about."

"Yeah," Nabooru says, "I guess I'm not that worried about Zarah, but it is weird that she went to Malon, on her own?" Impa nods. Nabooru shrugs. "I told you, she is a bit power hungry. She probably looks up to Malon."

"I still don't get why you say that. You barely know the girl." Impa says. Nabooru looks up and scratches the side of her nose with her thumb, sighing. "I suppose your right, I don't know. Something about the way she talks, it does remind me a lot of Malon, though. You don't see it?"

Impa just gives her a confused look. "I don't see it." Pausing, she says "I guess they are both a bit odd. They change subjects a lot, and you can never tell when they are going to be talkative or almost mute."

"They also talk out of line a lot, or they'll ask weird questions." Nabooru says. "Like they're testing you or something."

"Yeah. I guess I see what you mean." Impa says, but shrugs. "I guess I do kind of see it."

"You trust Malon?" Nabooru asks.

Impa laughs. "Well, as someone said to me once - trust isn't really something we can afford right now." Impa looks at Nabooru, softly smiling.

"True." Nabooru says a bit flatly, looking into the tunnel.

Impa nudges her with a hand lightly, "Lets go. I want to go back home and read some before bed." Nabooru looks at her and smiles a bit. The two walk into the tunnel, down which they can

see torches, Goron flags lining the walls. They continue down the tunnel for some way.

"Well." Impa says, stopping. "If we can still be killed, just not by Ganondorf, or by age or illness, why did Malon not die by the carpenter's spear?"

Nabooru looks at her, although she just says "I don't know any more than you do, Impa."

For a while they stand, but Nabooru eventually turns and starts walking again. "Lets go."

Impa pauses but shakes her head and follows.

Malon's Gift to Anju

In the harsh light of the day, Malon stands in front of the lookout tower with a guard. "We will provide them nine cuckoos and two cows." The guard looks at her with an uncomfortable expression. "The others fear they will kill us as we take them."

Malon sighs. "Blindfold them, tie their hands. Leave them a knife in a closed crate some ways away. You'll have enough time to leave on horseback." She says.

"We leave the wagon?" The guard asks.

Malon nods. "Then leave as quickly as you like. It will be fine. I'll have some others bring everything here, and you can set out with them."

The guard shifts, "All right, miss." He says, walking to the door of the lookout tower as Malon turns and leaves. He looks back at her, for a while, watching her walk back to the farmhouse. He sighs, opening the door and walking in.

Opening the unlocked gate, Malon turns into the stable.

Inside, in a back stall, she begins wheeling out a cart with two massive chests. Pulling it outside, she sets off to the path to the North partition. Approaching the declination, she holds the handle of the cart, pulling up so that it descends with her. The gate is open and, reaching the bottom, she pulls the cart back around behind her, wheeling it past the construction along the south wall and to the southwest corner. She doesn't look around, but, approaching Anju's building, the first one completed - a simple two story building, with three others connected and mostly finished - Anju emerges from the door, having seen Malon approaching through the window.

"Do you need any help?" Anju asks.

"Help me take it off the cart." Malon says flatly.

Anju does, Malon having drawn the cart up to the side of Anju's door. Setting it down, they look at the chest. "I have two more for you." Malon says. Anju looks at her, but Malon just turns and takes the cart back, heading back to the barn. Anju follows.

Wordlessly, they head to the barn, lifting onto the cart another chest, pull it back and unload it, repeating the process with the

last chest. Dropping it in front of the others, the sun beating straight down on them, Malon catches her breath for a while.

"I'll get some water-" Anju says, although Malon lifts and gestures with her canteen, unscrewing it and drinking.

"The building next to you is also yours." Malon says.

Anju watches Malon, whose hair, let down, shifts in the faint breeze. Malon takes a tie from her belt and ties it up into a high ponytail, a bit like Nabooru's, Anju thinks.

"I have no need for it, Malon. Someone else can have it." Anju says, but Malon turns to her, looking at her then down at the chests, gesturing at them. "Open one."

Anju leans down and does, Malon drinking more from her canteen and wiping sweat from her brow. Inside are piles of ancient books, still coated with thick dust – cobwebs stuck to some of them, many warped seemingly by humidity. The smell is overpowering, and Anju almost gags, backing away. It isn't a rotten smell, the books just smell strongly of dirt and smoke.

"These are from Kakariko." Malon says, waving at them. "I will be bringing more eventually, although construction is the biggest priority right now." Malon pulls the cart away from the chests.

Anju just stares at the open chest, Malon looking at them too.

"Why?" Anju asks after some time.

Malon looks at her, although Anju just looks at the books – none with titles, although each cover, all different colors, are adorned with a Sheikah eye. "I figured you'd like to read through them, maybe repair or transcribe them. I'm pretty busy lately, so I won't have the time." Malon says.

Eventually Anju looks at her, although Malon just looks at the cart, holding the handle. They stand for a while, Malon speaks again, "I thought the building next to you here," she gestures, "You could make some kind of library. Maybe a workshop as well. I'm sure there are various potions, spells, mechanical or technical things in the books."

Anju looks at Malon, who still doesn't look back. Quiet for a while, Anju says, feeling tears come. "Thank you, Malon."

Malon shrugs. Anju wipes her eyes, and does say, "I did have

some ideas to stop the guay from coming through.”

Malon finally looks at her, “Ah. That’s exactly the kind of thing I was hoping you’d be able to help with, with the aid of these.”

Anju looks back at Malon, looking into her bright green eyes before she turns away and starts pulling the cart. Anju, still speechless, just stands for a while watching Malon head back.

It is nearly sunset and Impa and Nabooru ride North from the Kokiri forest toward the Gerudo camp, the sun at their backs. They ride rather quickly, although looking to not be in a hurry. Arriving at the bridge and south gate of the camp, the fence removed but gate still standing, they pull up to the stable and dismount quietly.

As soon as their horses have returned to the makeshift stalls, they both turn hearing Zarah calling out, "My skulltula is gone!"

The girl walks quickly over to them, not quite running, but looking angry. "Impa." She says a bit angrily - Impa casting a glance at Nabooru, who frowns and raises her eyebrows. "I didn't do anything with it Zarah, maybe it wandered off?" Impa says awkwardly, intimidated by the girl, who now stands with her hands on her hips glaring at her. "You promise?" Zarah demands.

"I promise, Zarah. I'm sorry. If I see anymore I can catch one for you-" she starts, but Zarah rolls her eyes. "Its fine. I just-" Zarah pauses. "Blegh." she simply says, turning and walking away. Impa and Nabooru look at eachother and walk together toward the north side of the camp, where Impa's tent still stands along with four others and the kitchen tent. Zarah has disappeared into her tent, but they do see someone on horseback heading away from the trail to Death Mountain. Immediately identifying it as Malon, the two look at eachother then watch Malon, who doesn't seem to notice them yet.

"We just missed her?" Nabooru asks, although Impa shrugs.

"Did she see you see it happen?" Nabooru asks, looking at Impa, who just watches Malon approach the stone bridge, ignoring them or not seeing them. Impa nods.

Nabooru's mouth scrunches to one side and her eyes follow Malon. "I thought you'd be a lot more skeptical of her after what I said. You always seemed skeptical of her." Impa says.

Nabooru looks up to the sky. "Well." she says lightly but says no more. For a while she just looks up, staring off. Impa eventually sighs and heads to her tent, saying, "Well, I suppose we have to work with her no matter what. I did think you were a bit harsh about her."

Nabooru turns to Impa, who is opening her tent door. "Are you going to bed?" She asks. Impa shakes her head. "No, I'm going to make some food and read I guess. I will still probably have some time to help move after I take some time."

Nabooru watches her open her tent door. "Well, I am going to go talk to Malon. What do you think? Or should I wait?" Impa, standing, shrugs. "Do what you want. I'm not very interested really."

Nabooru looks at her skeptically. "You seemed like you were."

Impa turns to her, shrugging again. "I just figured you should know. I guess I've kind of just been trying to appreciate that Ganondorf and those witches are gone. If Malon has some sort of ill intent, there isn't much I can likely do. She doesn't seem to though, and I think things will be okay."

Nabooru raises her eyebrows a bit. "Well." she says, although nothing more. Impa just heads into her tent.

Nabooru stands for a while, watching Malon ride back to the ranch.

Well, it isn't just a ranch anymore.
She watches Malon ride back to the town.

Nearly sunset in the north partition, Nabooru and a few other Gerudo sit on scaffolds finishing the frame for a new home. Most of the time, they have been working alongside former Kakariko Village residents and Goron. The village folk return to their shanties in the main ranch in the late evening, although Anju and a dozen others shared finished homes.

The Gerudo had opted to pitch and live in tents along the unfinished east wall, tentative to build permanent structures until things take more shape. The Gerudo working alongside Villagers has been remarkably good, with a dozen of each finishing in the span of two days their work on the humble two-story row houses that Malon designed. Each having four small bedrooms, the houses being built with regular timber as well as Deku wood and a first floor of stone, the homes were very sturdy and efficient.

Of her own accord, surprisingly to Nabooru, Dreza had taken up training villagers in carpentry and construction. The head carpenter's death and his men having been exiled was a loss, but a decent number of well trained villagers were left, but with Dreza's oversight and training, each day a new worker was added. Goron would quickly and efficiently lay the first floor in stone, then the villagers and Gerudo would start construction while the Goron laid the start of another.

Nabooru, having taken a moment to look at the foundations laid by the goron, the few finished homes, the Gerudo tents, notices Malon walking to Anju's home. They had not spoken except a passing acknowledgement since the other night. Nabooru looks back across the scaffolding to Dreza, who is focusing on work.

Nabooru lays down her tools and climbs down the scaffold. She thinks for a while, not able to see Anju's home in the corner behind some stone floors constructed earlier in the day - forming an alley in front of the homes against the wall. She decides to just go, and walks around the structures, approaching Anju's home.

Seeing nobody outside, she walks up to the door and knocks. For a while she stands there, but no response. She stands a while longer, looking up to the second floor windows, although nobody is there. She turns around to see Malon and Anju leaving the house next door, just behind her. Anju locks the door and the two of them, seeing her, turn. "Hey." Nabooru says, a bit awkwardly, realizing she doesn't really have anything to say.

"How are things?" Anju asks. She hasn't been out at all really, and Nabooru still barely knows her. She barely knows Malon either, to be fair. "Good. I guess I just wanted to ask, well." she

trails off.

Anju and Malon look at each other, Anju asks, "What's wrong?"

Nabooru hesitates, but Malon interrupts, "Do you want to talk to me alone?" which jars Nabooru, who looks at Malon. Her bright green eyes staring intensely, although her expression is light. "I guess, yeah." Nabooru says. Malon turns and bows slightly to Anju. "I'll talk to you tomorrow, thank you." to which Anju nods and passed Nabooru without a look, returning to her home - Nabooru just now noticing a stack of books under Anju's arm, although Malon begins walking toward her and hooks Nabooru on her elbow, hooking her as well with her eyes - before Nabooru can think they are rounding the corner of the alley and walking to farmhouse's north gate.

"Took you a while." Malon says, the two strolling as if they were old childhood friends. "I'm glad things are progressing so well." Nabooru walks, awkwardly shifting her elbow in Malon's. "You aren't scared of being seen with me, are you?" Malon asks. Nabooru breathes deeply as they get to the door beside the large gate. Watching Malon open it, letting go of her arm, Malon stepping in, Nabooru's mouth hangs open, not really knowing what to say.

"Well, come on. You've never seen my room, but I think you'd like it." Malon says, smiling. Nabooru hesitantly smiles and lets out a small laugh. "Alright." She says, joining Malon and closing the door behind them. They walk up to the farmhouse and Malon opens the door, walking in. Nabooru follows.

Inside, Nabooru looks around - having chosen not to represent the Gerudo, she had never seen the inside. Malon closes the door behind her and walks to the stairs. "My room is up here." Malon says, starting to walk up. Nabooru briefly glances at the two large dining tables pushed together, various notes, maps, blueprints and the like laying out, although she follows Malon up the stairs.

Reaching the top, Malon produces a keyring and unlocks her door, opening it and stepping in. Nabooru follows around the corner into the room, stepping aside and looking around as Malon closes the door and hangs her keys. "It's a bit messy right now, sorry about that." Malon says. Nabooru looks at the shelves and shelves of books and ornaments and artifacts, the massive table with maps, more books and notes.

"How old are you?" Nabooru asks, realizing she doesn't know. Malon, turning and putting a hand on Nabooru's arm, winks and

says "Old enough." Before going to sit on one of the four large chairs – the one nearest facing Nabooru. Nabooru gives her an annoyed look, coming over to sit across from her. "Really, though." Malon is untying and taking off her boots. "Any age you want." She says, looking up – seeing Nabooru annoyed, she says, "You're no fun tonight. I'm twenty five. Want to know my shoe size as well?"

Nabooru raises her eyebrows, unamused, and crosses her legs, leaning back in the chair. Malon continues taking off her boots and socks, setting them aside. She stretches her own legs out, crossing them and setting her feet on the table in front of Nabooru.

"If only I had someone to give me a massage." Malon says, throwing her head back, dramatically putting her arms behind her head and leaning deeper into the chair, pushing her feet over the edge of the table. Nabooru is silent, and Malon sits back up a bit, looking at her and resting her head in one hand, elbow on the armrest of the chair. "Well, you seem to have something you want to talk about." Malon says.

Nabooru breathes deeply, sighing somewhat. "A lot, really."

Malon looks at Nabooru and they hold eachothers' eyes for a while. Eventually Malon says, "Well, if we have a lot to talk about, I'd like to get a bit more comfortable." Nabooru sighs again. "What do you mean?"

Malon sits up. "Well, maybe we could lay down and talk." she says, gesturing to her bed. Seeing Nabooru not intending to respond, she adds, "I do mean that, I'm really sore. We can just talk."

Nabooru stares at the bed for a bit, eventually saying "Fine."

Malon, getting up and walking to the bed, pouts "What happened, Nabooru? Don't you love me anymore?" and flops onto the bed, rubbing her eyes and stretching. Nabooru gets up and walks over to the bed. Malon looks up at her, putting her arms behind her head again. They look at eachother for quite a while before Nabooru eventually sits at the end of the bed, one leg lifted and crossed over the other, her shoulder facing Malon, who scoots back further onto the massive bed. "Come on, lay with me. I do just want to talk." she says. Nabooru looks at her, and, feeling sore as well, slides her shoes off and joins Malon, the two of them laying on their backs.

Nabooru just breathes for a while – the bed is magnificently comfortable. She props herself up with a pillow, trying to stay awake. “Listen, Malon.” she says, Malon rolling onto her side and looking up at Nabooru with those piercing green eyes. Nabooru sighs and rubs her forehead. “Yes?” Malon asks.

“Do you,” Nabooru pauses. “I know you have talked a lot with the Deku scrubs, and they have told me the Kokiri are in hiding, but safe. Have you talked to any Kokiri?”

Malon shakes her head. Nabooru thinks. “Ganondorf told me to ask the Goron about the Sheikah and the Shadow Energy. Why do you think that is? Impa and I went to the Goron, but they claimed they knew nothing about it. We went through the Kokiri entrance.”

“Welllll.” Malon kind of tilts her head back and forth, looking up and thinking. “I asked them the same, but they didn’t have anything to say to me either.”

Nabooru looks at Malon, who stills and looks down the bed at the drafting table across the room. “Under Kakariko, there is a lot of old Sheikah things. Anju told me about it, and I found a way under the rubble. I recovered a lot of books for her.”

Nabooru sits up. “You brought them here? They are probably cursed and dangerous, Malon.” She says angrily.

“They aren’t, they aren’t,” Malon says, waving a hand. “There is something else deeper underneath that is causing the Shadow Energy.”

“Wait.” Nabooru says, she is quiet for a long time. “That’s why Impa was radiating energy, maybe?” She looks at Malon. Malon shrugs. “I don’t know what you are talking about but, sure, sounds plausible.” Malon says.

“It only ever came out of her, well. As the village was being evacuated, and at Ganondorf’s tower.” Nabooru says, mostly to herself. “Sure. Makes sense.” Malon says, although Nabooru ignores her. “She is like a magnet for the energy.” Nabooru ponders aloud.

After a while, Malon turns onto her back again, saying “Could be.” After a bit, Nabooru looks down at Malon, who just looks up at the ceiling. Nabooru stares at her for a while, then looks away as Malon starts to look up to her. Malon stares at Nabooru for a while, both silent.

"Do you think the Gerudo at the fortress will ever reconcile with your group?" Malon asks.

"I don't know. Dreza told me that during the five years I was in that armor, a lot of them started to resented Koume and Kotake, although they still don't like me, and were too afraid to leave."

Malon is quiet for a while but lifts herself up and turns to Nabooru. "You were stuck in that armor for five years!?" Nabooru shrugs. "I guess so." Malon stares at her. "I wish I'd gotten to stab them myself. That is horrible." Malon says, Nabooru a bit surprised at her anger, looking at Malon who now stares at the wall behind Nabooru for a while before laying back down on her side. "I'm sorry Nabooru."

Nabooru's brow furrows somewhat, looking down to Malon, "You are so strange." she says. Malon looks up, "What?" Nabooru shakes her head. "You seem so cold and indifferent most of the time, but other times-" Nabooru pauses, "other times, not, I guess."

Malon looks ahead, although that means staring at Nabooru's bellybutton. Partly staring off, partly following the light hair under Nabooru's bellybutton down, Malon eventually says, "Well, you learn to change when you have to. Raising horses and cows for all of Hyrule, we always had a lot of money, but that also meant people were always plotting against us. And with all the meetings and business, all the boys proposing, and people like Ingo trying to take control while pretending to help, it just comes natural to change a lot, and keep people guessing."

Nabooru looks down at Malon, but is quiet.

"There's a lot of things I'm not going to ever tell you, Nabooru. That I won't ever tell anyone. I can tell it frustrates you, it frustrates a lot of people." Malon says. "But that's the way it is."

Nabooru yawns, then clears her throat. "I suppose one of those things is why that Carpenter couldn't kill you, huh?"

Nabooru looks down and Malon briefly glances up to catch her eye then looks away, shaking her head twice. They lay together for a while in silence, the cool air of the night now blowing through the windows. After a while, Malon slides a hand under Nabooru, wrapping another around her and sliding up a bit, resting her forehead on Nabooru's chest just under her neck.

Nabooru wraps an arm around her, reaching up to stroke her hair. For a while, they lay like that, Malon rubbing Nabooru's back with her thumb, Nabooru stroking Malon's hair gently.

