

1 Eclipse

1.1 Draft A

1.2 Draft B

The sun glinted off the myriad glazes on the ceramics Irene had set out before her, and again she stole an envious look into the Witch's hut where Gram, by dint of seniority, conducted her consultations indoors. Squinting away the glare, she reached for a blue solution – not yet a full potion, but give it two monster tails and time on the fire and it could be – and an empty jar, into which she decanted half.

“Give ‘im two sips of this an evening for the fever ‘til symptoms improve and–” she was blanking again, how did Gram keep them all straight “what’d you say the other thing was?”

“My daughter needs–”

“– a potion of invulnerabilty! –” “– an antiseptic. What? *Ele!*”¹

It took Irene a moment to parse out the two different voices, and a moment more to understand ‘invulnerability’ though the child’s mispronunciation, before turning towards Ele.

“What do you need invulnerability for?”

“I’m going to ride a lynel,” she answered with an indifferent confidence that suggested the lynel-riding was merely instrumental in some grander scheme she did not deign to share.

“Not if you have a festering wound you aren’t. Where are you injured?”

The girl rolled her sleeve up to reveal an elbow covered in abraisions, with splinters at her wrist. “A lynel shot me and I died,” she explained. Irene was very proud of not laughing aloud and over Ele’s head her mother mouthed ‘she fell.’ Irene wondered whether she ought stop to get the true story out of the girl, to build good patient habits, but another look at the line wending its way around the hut decided against it – too many other people to make wait. “But you can treat arrowwounds!” the girl chirped with an enthusiasm rare in the recently deceased. “They

¹Reminder: Ele is short for Eleuthera.

say the Hero got shot full of them and you pulled them out and healed him.”

Irene froze as the image of Link, bloodied and skin-pierced from head to toe, formed unbidden in her mind. Her blood stopped dead in her veins a moment before she managed “You must be thinking of someone else because I don’t know a thing about that if it happened, and I certainly wasn’t the one to tend ‘im, but I do know you shouldn’t yank arrows out of a person.”

It was a brusquer answer than a child deserved, but if she didn’t stop the rumor now she feared half her consultations would be nothing but questions about Link’s heroics. Still, she made sure to offer an apologetic smile to both girl and mother as she fetched another small jar. She handed the jar to the mother and made sure to address Ele – in a voice loud enough the mother was sure to hear, too – while explaining.

“Ointment. Pummelled verderoot in bosun’s oil. Apply it once now, and then when you wake up and go to bed for three days. Might sting a little, but it’s an ant bite next to a lynel’s bow.”

Ele looked at the jar solemnly while her mother offered a thanks and a blue rupee. Irene had been hoping for a red, but accepted the payment and wished them both safe travels back to town.

“Next!” she shouted, as a man with an arm in a sling ambled up.

He’d broken his favored arm judging by the side of his belt he kept his satchel on, and the fumbling with the stool as he tried to take a seat, but through it all he offered high spirits and a bucktoothed smile. It was a familiar smile, though Irene couldn’t say from where.

1.3 Draft C

2 Fortune

IRENE LOOKED UP^α from her work, bit her lip, and glowered at the myriad suns and distant galaxies scattered across the black. If there were portents in the stars – and she was most certainly not conceding that there were – Irene wanted nothing to do with them. The very premise had something insulting in it. Reading palms or tea leaves, their subjects as rough and varied as the lives they predicted, required work and more than a little art. The charting of stars required a few pages of records and maybe an hour of computation. Irene could change lead into gold, or a bead into a bandicoot, but not a life into arithmetic, and whatever sense of professionalism might keep a better witch from crowing at an astrologer’s failures, Irene lacked it – and it was far too late to worry about professionalism, anyway.

“Net pull is weak, two or three–” the astrologer mumbled. Irene hadn’t a clue what two or three was measured in, but he seemed to be talking for his own sake at the moment “– and it’s...five degrees, no ten toward... um...”

A turtle glid serenely through the cosmos, before coming to an amenably smooth rock at the end of the visible universe and climbing half-way out. Behind it trailed a rippling wake that washed the million points of light from visibility; Irene beamed.

“Interference!” Link whined, “this go doesn’t count.”

“Does so.”

“Oh come on. I can’t finish the stars now until the pond settles, and you’re still reading my palm” She wasn’t; she was too giddy.

“If you don’t like it you’re always free to use the actual thing,” Irene said, motioning upwards to the night sky above them, boxed in by the courtyard’s walls and occluded by clouds, none of which appeared in the water below them. “I’m already giving you a leg up, you know.”

“But–”

Irene scooped water from the enchanted pool with her free hand and flicked.

“Okay! Okay! Fine,” he said in a voice clearly indicating he was anything but, and indeed might die at any moment, but whatever his pains he recovered quickly “there really *is* a reading to take from the clouds. They filter the stars’ influence, so depending which are covered

^αQuick note to self: I think you have three problems with this draft. i) I don’t think this gives enough room to Irene’s growing problem with fate vs her own reputation. ii) I don’t think this does enough to make clear this is a few years after LBW, how Link picked up astrology in Labrynnna etc.) iii) I think this does a really *bad* job of spelling out the inform-but-don’t-interfere rule of witchcraft that Irene sets herself up to break in this chapter.

right now...” and back he went to mathematical muttering. Which stars were covered seemed like an open and closed case to Irene’s eyes, clouds evenly smothered the whole of the sky, and after the incident with the turtle, all that was left to light the yard were a set of torches sconced in the castle walls and the glow of an acorn that Irene had enchanted earlier for a reading aide. The latter of these suffused Link’s face, and she could see the focus in his eyes as he peered intently out into space, his lip twitching in consternation at meanings she did not credit were there, not really, but he gawked with such conviction that some part of her wondered if there might be something to the starry mumbo-jumbo he had dragged back from Labrynnna after all.^β That wondering was idle, the other parts snapped. This was a competition and if star-reading had any foundation it could win fair and square against her preferred style of divination,

“Stop squirming.”

“I’m not!” And he sent forth a tiny spray of water in revenge, but stilled all the same. Even with his palm steady, the low light proved a burden, and Irene had to scoot and shift her seat around him until she was nearly over his shoulder so that, when she leaned in, she did not cover the hand in shadow.

Once on her broom she had looked down over Zora’s River and realized the hills of eastern Hyrule were ancient riverbanks whose river had wandered off.^γ Rolling hills curlicued around the ghost of an oxbow, while three miles west the River ran straight. A bluff overlooked a valley that once must have been part of the Eastern Palace’s moat, and now the River wended lazily around Hyrule Castle. Where now it bent west, in some age or other past it bowed east, and so on in a thousand variations on the same watery journey, always emptying into Lake Hylia. Link’s palm was like that. What she initially thought was a severely bifurcated Life line, crossed and pockmarked by occlusions was, in fact scores upon scores of Life lines all run together. Once realized, it shocked her how easily she picked out her Link from the tangle, and could trace the line as it turned toward the Mount of Apollo, like all the hundred others. His Heart line ran deep and clear, which was no surprise to her,^δ and like all the others it doubled back up to the Mount of Jupiter before running a short distance and vanishing somewhere on the pads below his ring finger.

A thousand meandering variations, all ending in the

^βBefore publishing decide for sure if you want this to be Labrynnna or the drablands instead

^γ*Cf. Ancient courses within the Mississippi River meander belt* (illustration) in HAROLD N. FISK, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENG’RS., GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE ALLUVIAL VALLEY OF THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER (1944)(real example of same phenomenon). This hydrology doesn’t match LBW or LTTP, but I like this metaphor enough I think I’ll take artistic license.

^δIs this Too Much Hinting?

same place. The flow of time was cruel, indeed.

“–the brightness of p-thulan... or the Peninsular Star? I didn’t know it bothered you.” There was a note of genuine apology in his voice.

“What?” It was only after asking that Irene realized she had flinched, and that Link thought it was something he’d said. She was going to have to explain, now, when she had only the vaguest premonition of what was even wrong – and even if she did understand, what could say? “Oh, not that. Don’t get me wrong the Labrynnan names are dry as a *bone*, but– Link, there’s something terrible in your future.”

“Future in the next few days? Weeks?” he said, handling doom with a calm that, on reflection, should not have surprised her.

“Further out than that.” She was sure of that much, at least, but what was she allowed to tell? “...Months?”

Link gave a simple resolute nod, and it perturbed her how much even in this he seemed to be accepting an assignment. “Then I have both time and excellent counsel.” It was true, but hearing it somehow made everything worse.^ε

“However I can, I’ll help.”

The conversation hung silent for a moment before Link mumbled an “anyway” and turned his head back toward the pool, and hung on for a moment longer while Irene processed his reaction.

“You’re *still* on that?” she exclaimed once she realized to where his attention had turned “Now, of all times?”

“Well I promised a fortune reading for one,” he said in that same bewilderingly calm tone “and this late at night it’s not like there’s an octoball game to join.”

It had to be at least partially an act, she thought, and pushed away a pang of hurt that he felt he had to keep the performance going for her. But then again, how often had she flown in only to find him dodging cuddles when the world was at stake? Maybe it really was normal – well, normal for him – stress management.

Maybe, but she’d known the peril to all the world then, too, and this felt different to her.

He’d could simply have been stewing in heroism too long, she supposed. Gram had always warned her about the difference between feeling urgency and panic, and never to lose one when you tamped down the other. But it wasn’t like anyone taught Link heroics, people told him about old curses in older temples and then he dove head-

^εShe’s reacting – subconsciously – to what I can only describe as the performative streak in this response. Having a response so polished ready to go disconcerts her because half of her worry is how much time he’s doing work on behalf of the Royal family and seeing him develop courtly skills...

long inside them and everyone breathed easier. Save a country or a village or a world often enough and maybe mortal peril just stopped registering. That explanation felt incomplete, though. It wasn't like there was any shortage of times he'd rung her to side-step monster encounters. For that matter, there was no shortage of times he'd rung her after a long battle to get to a fairy fountain, or just to bum red poition. He'd seemed to understand urgency perfectly well then. She searched his face as he worked for a clue to his thoughts, but found only a look of concentration give way to one of confusion.

"What is it?"

"I can't get an answer." He said in a tone take took all joy out of victory. "It's – once you've got a readings of the stars, you try to project...there's a part where you find the tip of a cone, only with this reading there's no cone at all, and it all just circles and circles without an answer."

Her mouth opened briefly, then closed again when she realized she had no clue what to say. Telling him none of his starry mechanics was real wasn't any consolation to him, and pretending she believed it meant believing the intolerable, even if Link hand't realized it yet. There was an easy explanation for why Link could not read her future: she didn't have one. Not that she feared death, she'd read her own Head line and knew she had ages. A long life without any further events of note, however, felt discomfitingly plausible. But that was a problem she only had if she believed nonsense, and even assuming it were true she – by definition – had a long and healthy life to address it. Link was the one with the crisis.

From the north wall echoed the clank of armor on stone; the guards were changing shifts.

"I know there's a way to get an answer out, but I don't think I'm likely to find it tonight."

"Rain check?" She asked as she got to her feet, extending a hand up. He took it and nodded. "And a lift home?"

"I'm staying at the barracks tonight."

"Do – alright." She said and then did not say, because it wasn't like you could argue Link out of Royal Duty. "Meet me later in the day then. To discuss your problem." *Euphemisms* she sputtered in private disbelief. She was using euphemisms.

"Why not the day after, instead? I'd rather deal with this on full day's rest."

"Deal!" she said with far more vehemence than she

meant to, and kicked off the ground. In the glowing acorn light below, she saw Link waving goodnight, and saw the turtle slip back in the water.

ABOVE THE CLOUDS the wind blew too sharp and froze to keep her eyes open. Irene pulled the brim of her hat far down and retreated into her cloak, relying on memory to navigate home half-blind. It worked, and in half an hour her boots touched soggy ground and she stood outside her hut, immiserated and shivering.

An oil lamp burned in the window, which meant Gram was already asleep – and also that Gram had come around on upgrading from monster tallow, which Irene had not been expecting for months yet given how vehemently she’d insisted the smell was an essential part of a witch hut’s ambience when Irene last raised the subject. Light – warm, amber, and stenchless – filtered out across the cottage stoop, and in its glow something glass shone. The lamp might have been brighter than candles, but not bright enough to reveal any more as she approached than what she already had guessed: bottles, six of them, sat neatly arrayed on the first step of the entrance.

When did he find time to leave them?

Carrying the bottles underarm, she ascended the stairs two at a time before skidding to a stop at the door. She elbowed the latch up, the door swung inward, and in a trice she had the bottles spread out over the work table. Lamplight did plenty up close, and now she could see chuu jelly climbing the glass, meniscus bowed deep, in one, but not a color she’d seen before. She swirled it in the glass – less viscuous than she was used to, as well. The next bottle was double-sealed with an inscription in what was *probably* Old Labrynnan to keep the poe in. Gram would want to have the first look at that. Then there were peahat leaves, second flush by the smell of them, who knows where he’d found that but she could cure every sore throat in Hyrule for years coming with a batch this plentiful. The bottle after held hairs off a lynel’s tail, and she hrrmed quietly because truly she wished he hadn’t risked the trouble of getting them. Then there was a clutch of terrorpin eggs, not remotely magical but she’d always wanted to try them in stew. And then–

There was something in the last bottle, but scarcely enough something to see. She could turn the glass under candle light and in the movement catch a rainbow-colored shimmer off of whatever was inside, but holding it still

revealed nothing more. Rotating it back and forth the same flash of light ran up and down the center of the bottle no wider than a hair's breadth, which gave her at least a hunch to go on.

The bestiary was on the other table, but its pages were folio-sized and it weighed like a boulder, and if she ever dropped it Gram would let her have it, so it was easier to carry the lamp and bottle over to it than move the book. She waited a patiently for her hands and sleeves to dry before touching the pages, then waited impatiently, and after five minutes muttered a piece of *drý-cræft*⁷ under her breath. Gram turned in her sleep, but did not wake. As quietly as she could, Irene leafed page by page until she came to the illustration and accompanying text she was looking for:

A phantome that represents a hunger lingering vpon the earth. The Pol's uoice stands two feete of height, but with its eares held tall may stretch to four. Being ghostlie, it may eat any food and leave the likeness of the meal still on the earth, but any who eat the same meal after gaine no nourishment. Its whiskers are extreamlie fine of texture, and shine in colours sympathetick to whosoeuer holds them ahand. When they are added to a preparation of Metheglyn, after it has beene set on the fire but before it has come to froth, the drink can cure any maladie; but the whiskers haue power onely if severed from a living animal (if any Pol's uoice may be soe called), which by the creature's great fortitude is alwaies a wearisome and dangerous uenture. The Venerable Beedle (liber. iv, ch. xi) says that oft the Pol's uoice and the Poe spring from one soule, which vpon death becomes diuided into severall partes, the Pol's voice being the parte of a desirous will, the Poe being the parte of an inueterate malice, and further prooves the point by obseruing that 'Pol' and 'Poe' are descended from the Sheikah *Poi*, and that in many lands the two names doe signifie the same monster.

Irene carefully removed the stopper, plucked out a strand between two fingers, and, holding it in front of the lamp, saw the whisker darken until it matched the black of her

⁷Old Eng. for 'sorcery', I'm representing extinct languages of this Hyrule with real old languages rather than inventing words. Sheikah = Old English; Gerudo = Old Norse or Old High German; Ancient Hylian = Polytonic Greek.

cloak. She knew, distantly, this meant she could do worlds of good but the only thought she could actually form and put to words was that this was just like the lynel tails. Worse, even, because you could at least kill a Lynel before collecting the tail. Link was in danger and whatever instinct made people jump to save themselves, he'd lost it. Which meant that if anyone was saving him, it had to be her.

She sat and stared at the whisker in her hand for a small eternity.

What would Gram do? Not be caught in this situation in the first place, because she wouldn't tell fortunes for a lark. Well, what would Gram advise another witch to do? Drop dead, because she had no truck with fortune telling at all. Damn. Then, what would an alternate version of her Gram who didn't hate palmistry say? Irene strained her imagination to no avail, but maybe she didn't need to imagine. She had never travelled that far from home before, but if she set out early enough she might even be back by morning, to say nothing of the other advantages of her rapidly-forming plan.

Self-respecting witches did not meddle, her Gram had drilled this into Irene at the earliest age possible. Self-respecting witches did not bless infants with good character or with the ability to talk to animals. Self-respecting witches did not guarantee good harvests, nor did they guarantee anything. Self-respecting witches especially did not try to shape people's futures; and if a self-respecting witch's daily reading of chuu jelly *did* happen to mention some idiot thane destined to become king, she kept it to herself.^ζ Irene intended to break none of these rules, now or ever, but also knew better than to hope that Gram, if she ever learned of it, would see the nuances of the present situation.

She likewise was under no illusions that, when Royal duty next found him and Link next vanished for weeks into the monster-infested wilds and returned, as he always did, stuffed impossibly and insufferably full of gossip, word of her visit would somehow not be among the scores of rumors he gathered like rupees. Nor did she have any question about the sense in which the rumors would run; a young woman asking after the fortune of a man her age was even more certainly doomed to romantic misinterpretation than a princess paying honor to her most favored knight. It had ever been thus, but now, only a year or two away from her apprenticeship's end and setting out as a

^ζI really like this joke, but it might be too out-of-world.

witch in her own right, it was harder to endure.

In light of the stubborn facts, Irene had taken no time at all to decide that there would be no rumors, nor a stern talk from her Gram about pride in her craft, and if it required traveling a world and a half away, well this was hardly any distance at all to a good broomstick.

It remained a great deal of distance to a young witch.

3 Lorule

3.1 Draft A

3.1.1 Draft A.2

...The same knowing smile she had seen on the faces of a thousand people who knew *nothing*.

3.2 Draft B

In fortunetelling, the ability to divine what information was relevant to the customer was as vital as the actual ability to divine the future was superfluous. The telling was what sold, not the fortunes. The Great Periander, only-and-possibly- foremost fortuneteller in all of Lorule had gone far on this maxim, but was at present finding it deeply challenged, and if the present case was a trying one, it was all the more reason to cling to first principles.

3.3 Draft C

The quicker a fortune was told, the better. The typical customer came, not for a numinous encounter with forces beyond their ken, but to have the information they wanted and be on their way. The actual telling was, at best, an inconvenience, and at worst the source of terrible anxiety and acute embarrassment. What were, to him, the essential tools of his craft – his robes and hat, the yellow tablecloth and faintly pink crystal ball, were to customers malcolored and garish eyesores. At this advanced stage of his career he knew customers did not want an explanation of how, absent the aid of these accoutrements, the grueling difficulty of coaxing answers from the great beyond would simply render his trade impossible. What they wanted, dearly, was close their eyes and pretend that they did not see them.

3.4 Draft D

In years past this reluctance had taken an even darker turn, with efforts to predict the future running afoul of the [Masked monster worshipping folks] taboo of acknowledging that the future existed at all.

3.5 Draft E

This made the look of careful appraisal that the young woman gave to all of his instruments entirely unexpected. She had run her finger across the top of one of his bookshelves and frowned disapprovingly when it came up without dust when,

3.6 Draft F

“It’s not about that. I—” the peel of a bell cuts her off and her attention is gone from the conversation. She instinctively refuses to give the old fraud the satisfaction of seeing her fret, even as the familiar, if only momentary, panic sets in. It doesn’t seem to matter, and the old bat glows anyway. She keeps eye contact and does everything she can to ignore the smug, knowing grin of the smug, know-nothing parody of her Gram as she excuses herself.

She is on her broom and soaring as soon as she is out of the tent.

4 Consult

4.1 Draft A

The book – if the singular *book* was even appropriate – was unlike any she had seen in years of hard study. One page fell out into yards of inserts and appendices, and then those appendices unfolded into scrolls of errata and emendations running parallel to the book’s spine for meters before they came to another insert with its own set of errata and the process continued on and on, in tinier and more cramped hands with each succession.

Irene looked on in wonderment while a small committee of royal librarians, dressed in an assemblage of green robes that suggested a witch’s cloak that had gone up in society and then lost its way, worked to unravel the last of the pages. Once, as part of her apprenticeship, she had been told to speak with an oak. This was, in fact, a misnomer, because oaken communication was largely a

series of mental images that rolling across her brain, and when the oak had said ‘I’ she had seen something of the same tangle of roots descending from trunks to thin white rhizoids as she did in the scripts’ endless branching into subcases and strata more and more obscure.

After the rustling of pages had finally settled, the leader of the committee cleared her throat and with visible relief the sub-librarians and the poor devils of sub-sub-librarians assisting her filed out of the room. When they were gone the chief librarian produced a quill from her robes and, after fumbling with the tails of the book, eventually settled upon an empty strand of paper.

Princess Zelda spoke evenly, in a voice Irene could almost mistake for indifference if she didn’t recognize it from Gram trying to keep an even temper, “why do you believe you have irreparably shifted Hyrule off of its natural historical course?”

4.2 Draft B

“I think, as far as attitudes toward the recording of history goes, it would be fair to call us ‘pro-copious.’” the Chief Librarian offered.

5 Princess

5.1 Draft A

Irene woke in darkness and waited for her eyes to adjust. It was unseasonably warm for early spring, especially when the sun had not yet risen, and she wondered at what weather might have rolled in along with the unexpected heat. Wind? Rainstorms? But there was no faint wail of air through the cottage shutters, nor the gravelly hiss of droplets on the roof. Birdsong filtered through the closed windows, which settled the matter – if there had been storms they were gone now. It also meant that there should at least be the beginnings of a dawn outside, so why could she not see yet?

She pulled herself up straight and the quilt, a scratchy thing as old as the Great Witch Syrup, slid with uncharacteristic fluidity onto her knees still in covers. Extending her arm to her left – slowly, so as not to hit Gram if she was sitting awake – Irene outstretched her fingers and tried to move a bit of flame from the hearth’s embers into the wick of the candle they kept by the bedside. Warmth neither came in to her nor flowed out. Irene fumbled around in the substratum of all things for the objects she was trying to connect and found nothing. No candle, no hearth. With nothing to do she let her arm flop back down, and when her palm hit the mattress she noticed the third absence. No Gram.

Irene leapt, or tried to. The side of her jaw flashed in pain and the bone of her wrist hit hard against something cold and smooth. She kicked and kicked uselessly against the air and her foot, still tangled in blankets, moved half an inch at most. Her other hand, the one that wasn’t stinging, had also somehow smothered itself in blankets and it flopped like a fish as she tried to reach for something, anything in the dark to help her get her bearings back. It brushed something alternately soft and solid in a corded texture. She grabbed it by reflex. What on earth was *that*, why did this quilt go on *forever* and where was Gram and *why couldn’t she see?*

The curtains around her bed opened with a terrible rattle and Irene traded blinding dark for blinding sun. A palatial room and a distant figure, entering from the far side of it, burned against her eyes before she slammed them shut and pulled the quilt back over her face.

“Highness?” A voice – the figure’s – asked with poorly masked confusion.^α

^αCome back to the section and try to distinguish the voices by sound more than repeated ‘first’ and ‘second’

^βI'm also considering: Vitrsta *Wite?* and *Witestre?* (female cognates of Old English *Wita*, wise man, advisor) and *Wicce?* (Old English for witch).

^γTOO BLUNT

“Wise one?”^β Another voice, stationed somewhere off to Irene’s left, asked with no mask at all.

I’m not a– but plainly she somehow was, so Irene swallowed her panic and gathered up her most coolly regal voice. “We are awake,” she announced, raising her voice to be heard over the quilt’s muffling. The voice out of sight burst into peals of laughter. Irene felt her lips tighten into a scowl. She had enough problems without being the object of someone’s fun.^γ

“And uninjured?” The first voice again.

“And uninjured” she snapped. Irene pulled the quilt down yet again, slow enough to allow her to prepare for the sun this time, and glared where she expected to see them. “Glad it’s a laughing matter to you both, though.”

She immediately regretted it. The face of a girl maybe four years her junior

5.2 Draft B

On her third day, Irene came to the conclusion that Being Witch-Crown Princess was an endless exercise in costuming. She was still unsure whether she held one title or two, but she was beginning to believe it must be two because her attendants only ever helped her dress for the princess half, and then left her to find an appropriate cloak and hat by herself. But then what witch owned so many different styles of cloaks and hats, and how ever was she supposed to fit her crown over the point of her hat without assistance? Lorain visited in the mornings and offered breakfast – always stews or porridges, always from the cauldron that

6 Hygge

6.1 Draft A

Suspicious had been growing in the back of his mind since lunch when the jam in his Chu roll – made fresh before Irene started divination sessions that morning, and from berries he had picked and preserved no more than two days ago – tasted weak of flavor. Later in the afternoon, just as the sun reached its zenith and the day grew its hottest, he absentmindedly traced the tips of his teeth with his tongue after a glass of water and thought them unusually sharp. He looked back to the hut and heard the murmurings of a fortune in progress before noting the

line stretching out the door. On the principle of better safe than sorry, he had quickly extinguished the fire and dumped back his pile of unused coals into the covered bin, before setting himself to completing the shaping of one last half of an oxshoes. After that he spent an hour cleaning, and another clearing monsters in the surrounding wood before stopping to rest, and only when the sun was half-down and casting pallid rays of blurry indistinct smudge on the horizon was he certain.

The cottage door was shut tight when Link arrived, which meant Irene was still giving counsel. An elderly Zora rested against the shady side of the house, while a young girl paced out the edges of its umbra.

"Either of you here for an emergency?" he asked, knowing full well that they were not, but getting them to say that they'd been triaged to the back of the line always made cutting in front easier.

The Zora blinked alert, "Just a refill on eye-dr--"

"Myfriendisdying"

"Where are they?" Link asked immediately, without quite catching the reassuring evenness of tone Irene would have.

"Here!" she screeched, motioning to the ground next to her. Behind her, the Zora switched the lenses on their eyes and muttered in confusion.

Link wished again that he still held the hint glasses, but by now a sniff of the air was nearly as good and confirmed what his eyes already told him.

"I see, and when did they start feeling sick?" he said, already reaching for an empty bottle regardless of the answer.

"In the morning. He said his tummy hurt. And then we waited and then it got worse."

"An acute case of Rapid-Onset Tummyhurtosis" Link offered in his best diagnostician's voice. "A rare but serious condition for invisible friends. But easily treated with a colorless green poti--"

The empty bottle was snatched out of his hands before he could finish speaking.

"This only works for *invisible* friends" he warned when the draught had been administered and the expression on the girl's face had shifted away from abject terror "friends other people can see, though, you need to bring to get help."

There was a grunt of what Link hoped was acknowledgement as she continued tending to the ailing figment.

Behind him, loud enough for his ear to twitch, the door at least creaked open.

6.2 Draft B

“Every single one of those sounds *exhausting*.” Link fought back a laugh of incredulity, but not successfully.

“At least let me – here” her hand glowed bright and blue with the kind of magic he was trying to get her not to use. “*Uncer dýrling*,”^α she said, tapping his chest before he could object. The spell of protection came over him in a warm breeze, and he marvelled again at how easily she switched between her normal and her ‘casting’ accent.

^αUnsure about *uncer* as a character choice – it’s a first person possessive dual pronoun, which matches her status as witch-crown princess, but maybe not her internal sense of how she’d cast? Alternative *mīn dýrling* is too legible though)