

The bright golden sun rose proudly above the rolling hills of the eastern seaboard, without a single cloud to dampen its brilliance. Link and Jinn's eyes threatened to snap closed against the glare as they slowly climbed the hill towards the entrance of the little village that lay below Symin and Purah's tech lab high on the hill.

The early morning light illuminated the white stone buildings on the main street as the proud lynel slowly trotted under the sign that marked the entrance to the village. Link glanced down the street, a sense of relief sweeping over him that their journey had finally concluded. As various denizens of the town began to emerge from their homes and open their shops for the day, a high-pitched voice at the entrance to the town caught the attention of all, including Link and Jinn.

The Lynel nearly reared up in surprise as a young, bespectacled lad named Teebo, pointed up at the two of them in sheer excitement.

"They're back! Everyone! Link and Jinn are back!"

As if on cue, the collective heads of all present on the main street turned to see what the commotion was. Fortunately, the weary heroes were met with little more than warm smiles and friendly waves as they scaled the long hill in the canyon of shops and houses.

Just as they reached the dye shop, a call from up the hill to the right caught Link's attention.

"Welcome back, Link. Lady Jinn."

Link let out a warm, yet exhausted grin as Reede, the village headman, strode purposefully down the hill from his home to greet them. Link's legs let out a cry of sweet relief as he leapt off of Jinn's back and strode past her up the hill to greet the headman.

He soon realized how timely his decision had been as a low, distant rumble reverberated through the ground as young Teebo caught up to them. Link frowned in confusion for a moment before rolling his eyes at Reede as he realized what was about to happen, the bearded, lanky chief giving Link a grin and a shrug of his shoulders in return. Off to his right, Link could just make out Senna and Reede's wife Clavia letting out a collective, "here we go again" from just inside the dye shop.

Suddenly, as let loose from a dam, the children of the village popped into view from every side street and barreled up the street towards the group.

Shrill, joyous cries of "Yay, it's Jinn!" reverberated across the stone buildings and windmills that made up the village as the tall lynel was suddenly accosted by a dozen playful smiles and warm hugs.

Jinn smiled broadly as she lost herself in the children's pure, unbridled joy and raw energy. As a lynel, any sense of adulation or praise of this sort had been completely foreign to her and it had taken a great deal of time to acclimate to the attention she received as a hero of the village. More than that, it had also been a struggle to figure out how to react to creatures so small they barely reached her knees.

Over time, however, the children had won her over with their purity and innocence; they accepted her for who she was. It did not matter that she was of another species, she had saved their village once before, and to them, that was enough. Plus, Link seemed to like them, and that was enough for Jinn.

“Ha ha! Seeing all of you makes Jinn happy as well!” Jinn laughed, scooping two of the children, Karin and Nebb, off the ground and onto her strong shoulders.

Link followed Reede’s gaze back behind him, a rush of warmth overcoming him to see her bonding with the children. For the life of him, he could not fully understand why she took to the children so well despite how kind he knew her to be. He had decided not to question it, as he himself began to get caught up in the children’s energy as well. There were few things in the world that made him happier than seeing Jinn thoroughly enjoy herself like this.

“Karin, be careful!” called a voice from alongside Link.

Link glanced towards the noise and sucked in a short gasp as he glanced upon the nervous expression on Claria’s face as she called out to her child.

“Do not worry, miss Claria. Karin is safe with Jinn. Jinn will protect her as she protects Link!”

“But she-”

“It’s alright, dear. If Lady Jinn says so, our daughter will be safe, Link can vouch for that, right?”

Reede eyed Link expectantly, his own anxiety barely contained under his smile. Link followed suit with an awkward smile and nod of his own. His heart sank in disappointment as he eyed the village headman’s expression. Despite the time Jinn had spent in the village and the amount of trust she had earned from the village’s inhabitants, some were...still getting used to her.

“Of course,” Link replied warmly, making eye contact with Claria.

A frown of concern remained on the Hylian woman’s face as she backed off, still focused on the tall lynel as her children whooped in delight, perched high on her shoulders.

The awkward smile remained on Reede’s face as he gestured towards Link to walk with him down the street.

“So, I take it princess Zelda reached her destination safely?” Reede asked, eager to change the subject.

“Yes. She hopes the negotiations will not take long, but...who knows? Sometimes I feel like putting Hyrule back together will be harder than defeating Calamity Ganon.”

“Hmm, probably true. In this town, we’ve been fending off monsters all of my life and then some. It will be hard to change when all we have known is hardship. No matter. If I were you, I’d take the opportunity to rest while you can. In your position, you may not get too many of them.”

Link nodded in agreement. In some ways, their journey to Tabantha had been just as strenuous and exhausting as any he had faced when fighting Calamity Ganon. It was almost like how he had felt after he had first taken to the broken roads of Hyrule, having just been awoken from his hundred-year slumber. Back then, his journey had been full of uncertainty and peril: Where would he find shelter? Where would his next meal come from? How long would it be before he faced a monster he could neither defeat nor flee from?

Then, along had come Jinn, and everything had changed. His task no longer seemed hopeless. As strong as he was, he had grown to rely on her to protect him, even against his own insecurities. As difficult as it had been to acclimate her to his culture, there were moments where he loved her antics so much, they had made him laugh heartily, for the first time since he could remember.

Now, he wasn't even sure of her anymore. He was emotionally exhausted from worrying about what she meant to him, and what he would do if he could not return her feelings, and he wished against all hope that he could leave things the way they were between them and carry on as they had.

A few yards away, Jinn lowered herself to her knees, a playful smile on her face as she extended her arms out to her sides. One by one, the Karin and Nebb slid off her shoulders, grabbing onto her biceps and using them as trapezes. Jinn giggled in delight as she flexed each of her biceps in turn, the children giving a collective scream of joy as the massive muscles jolted them higher into the air.

However, her new position lower to the ground gave her a view of something she might not have seen standing up. Turning her attention from the children for a moment, she glanced into the window of a nearby building and spotted something she had seen only a few times before.

Karson was strapping his tool belt to his waist, presumably about to leave for another job, when Sophie suddenly appeared, smiling at him. As he turned toward her and smiled back, she suddenly reached for him, wrapping her arms around his waist, closing her eyes and pressing her lips into his. Jinn frowned in puzzlement at the gesture at first, but felt a ray of pure warmth come over her when she noticed Karson closing his eyes and leaning into the kiss.

Jinn's brain went into overdrive and her heart followed suit, excitement beginning to swell up within her. Though she could not wrap her head around the full meaning of the gesture, her intuition told her that it was some strange sign of affection, and more importantly, that Hylian men liked it.

She also knew she was fed up with Link's doldrums, so much so that it was beginning to bring her down as well. Her teasing had failed to elicit a reaction from him for more than a few minutes, and she herself had been unable to sleep well because his anxiety had worried her just as much.

She hated feeling so off-balance and uncertain as she had felt over the past few days and needed to know why Link had let himself fall into such depression. Maybe this would help him feel better and help him get his feelings out in the open. More than that, it would help her express how she truly felt about him, on his terms.

Terms that he would most definitely understand.

It didn't look nearly as intimate as her usual gesture of affection, but she would have been lying if she'd said it didn't look like fun...

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About a half-hour later, the children had finally exhausted themselves from playing so hard and their parents eagerly called them inside. Link and Jinn had back-tracked down the street, turning off to their left and down the narrow path over the wooden bridge toward the house they shared. A swell of pride pushed Link's anxiety aside as he gazed upon the newly-refurbished white facade and adjacent pond that were nestled under the towering form of the Ebon Mountain.

Link could still not recall where he had lived prior to being placed in the Shrine of Resurrection, perhaps somewhere in the castle town? But, it had made the moment when he had saved enough rupees to purchase the house from Bolson and his construction company all the more meaningful. It was solid proof that he could start fresh, build a new life for himself in this strange and uncertain world. He had worked tirelessly and almost singlehandedly to renovate the old building, to give it the ability to hold all of his necessities, plus a few luxuries on the side.

Then, as Jinn had become more accepted in the village, Link had worked even harder to make her home as well. Fortunately, by then he had the help of Bolson Construction who owed him a favor after he and Jinn had helped build Tarrey Town and had helped arrange the marriage of Bolson's senior apprentice, Hudson to the Gerudo woman, Rhondson.

Link let out a sigh of relief as he opened the front door and stepped inside into the cool, dry air of the house. Jinn trotted happily to the left side of the house, pulling a long cord that opened the massive garage door that allowed her inside to the main hall.

Link's pack strained against his back as he willed it upstairs to his loft while Jinn unstrapped her claymore and bow from her back, hanging both on the far wall that housed many of their most prized weapons, including the soup ladle that had brought them together.

Jinn glanced upstairs, a look of excitement and longing adorning her face as she watched Link toss his pack down next to his bed, before lazily removing his shirt and tossing it on the bed. Jinn's strong heart began to race and she felt a strange warmth building in her nether regions as her eyes ran up and down his relatively short frame. She had seen him like this many times before, but after what she had just seen in the village, her fervor for him had been amplified a hundred-fold. The strength in his toned muscles, the imperfections and battle scars adorning his light skin and the way he carried himself as a warrior; all of it enticed her, sending shockwaves down her spine.

The fact that he was not a lynel meant little to her. He would make a worthy mate, one that any lynel female would be lucky to have. While she had enjoyed teasing him, her instincts told her without a doubt that the time for play was over. She had to break him out of his funk and show her that she was worthy of him.

Link's mind, on the other hand, was far away from that subject as he pulled on another shirt and looked thoughtfully towards the railing to his left. Since their journey to Tabantha had begun, a

thought had occurred to him to expand the upstairs area of the house, perhaps building an addition to the house to allow for more room, and an expanded set of stairs to...allow Jinn up?

He had wrestled with that question in his mind since his talk with Zelda.

Was it worth it?

Would she be around long enough to enjoy something like that, the way things were going?

Finally, he decided that if their relationship were going to fail, it would not be over something as trivial and silly as not having enough room in the house. He turned to lean over the railing and look down into the main area at Jinn, but his face contorted into a frown of confusion as he gazed into her green eyes. If it were possible for Jinn to blush, she would have been blushing profusely, her mouth hanging open slightly, and Link noticed her lower chest rise and fall as her breathing increased.

For a moment, Link began to grow anxious as to what was going through her mind, but Link somehow managed to push those thoughts aside and return to his thoughts about what Jinn might want for herself if they expanded the upstairs of the house.

“Hey, uh, Jinn, I know we just got back, but what do you think of talking to Mr. Bols-”

“Link...” Jinn started, her eyes wandering and her face uncertain.

Before Link knew what hit him, Jinn had closed the distance between them, standing up on her hind legs as she braced her front legs under the railing. Link’s eyes shot open as wide as dinner plates as Jinn’s face stood inches away from his own, her arms grasping the railing and pulling herself closer to him.

“Can...can Jinn try something with Link? Jinn was curious to know...how...”

Before he could open his mouth to object, her eyes slowly slid closed and the warm wetness of her thin, feline-like lips met his.

It was a small kiss, to be sure, and Jinn did not try to force any intensity into it, for fear of Link’s reaction.

It was soft, deliberate, sweet.

It was the kiss of a Hylian.

The tall lynel lingered on the Hylian’s lips for a long beat, becoming lost in his familiar taste.

Link, for his part, was too shocked to object, his breath stopped dead in his throat as his conscious mind ran off in a million directions at once. This was the moment he had dreaded their entire trip back, and he had hoped for some shred of clarity about what to do when it came. But, Jinn, as she often did, had taken him by surprise and had left him utterly lost as to what to do.

Yet, something about this felt...dare he think it...right? Natural?

What? No!

His anxiety told him here was nothing natural about this.

No lynel had ever attempted anything close to this with a Hylian or any other species since time immemorial.

Yet, did he care? This felt good, right? Should he end it now? Was this wrong?

Before Link could sort his thoughts out, Jinn broke the kiss, a tentative grin on her face as her eyes frantically darted about Link's visage, gauging his reaction. Her nostrils flared as she took in his scent, looking for signs of the arousal she so loved to savor. Yet, her eyebrows contorted up in confusion as, with another whiff, she tasted his arousal mixed with an overpowering miasma of anxiety and fear. Her sensitive ears caught every hitched, uneven breath escaping from his mouth as it hung open in front of her.

Jinn's heart began to plunge downward into her hooves and her own breath began to hitch as a overwhelming sense of dread and disappointment washed over her.

For the first time in her life, she was afraid, embarrassed.

After all they had been through, after all signals she had sensed from him, did Link truly not feel the same as she?

Had she made a terrible mistake?

"Jinn..." Link managed to get out.

"Link...Link does not like...?" Jinn stammered, her eyes darting over his even faster, looking for any shred of affirmation in his eyes.

Link tried desperately to articulate what he was feeling, but all that came out were a series of staccato "ah's" as the words utterly failed him. He was absolutely lost, and growing more fearful by the second as Jinn's expression became crestfallen.

Finally, after a long beat had passed, Jinn looked away from Link, down at the ground, a black pit beginning to form in her stomach as she glanced for a moment at the cord that opened the garage door.

"Jinn is...Jinn is sorry. Jinn did not want to scare Link..." Jinn trailed off, embarrassment coating her tone.

As Link's senses began to return, Jinn lowered herself down from the balcony and turned to the cord, the large wooden door opening with a resounding creak.

"Jinn, I-"

“Jinn...Jinn remembers she had to go do something for...Purah...right now,” Jinn said as evenly as she could, yet Link could feel his heart shattering with the pall of disappointment in her tone.

“Jinn, wait!” Link yelled as the garage door slammed shut.

Link thundered downstairs and out the front door as the rumble of hoofbeats rang out further and further into the distance. Link’s instincts began to take over as he broke into a sprint, following the sound of the hoofbeats up the mountain. However, on two legs he could not hope to keep up with the speedy Lynel, and by the time he crested the steep slope, Jinn was nowhere in sight.

“Jinn!”

Frantically, his eyes searched about the landscape for her as he called her name, yet no matter where he looked, he came up short.

His emotional energy now utterly gone, Link’s body dropped like a sack of potatoes, first to his knees and then onto all fours as the hard, rocky ground pierced into his palms like a knife.

He had neither the energy nor the will to go anywhere now.

Exactly what Zelda had feared had come true.

Despite all he had done to build his relationship with his Lynel companion, he lacked the strength to truly reconcile how he felt about her.

It might have been easier if he had just let her down easy, but something in his mind, perhaps his own selfishness had prevented him from doing so. No, perhaps he had been right, perhaps it was his own curiosity about how far things could go, and what possibilities awaited him if he gave in to his feelings.

Now, he cursed himself profusely as he realized he might never get the chance to know for sure.

His own indecision had cost him his best friend, his partner, and an overpowering feeling of doom swept through him as he wondered if he would ever see her again.