

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 3 Prologue 3

It was a Friday evening, and Derek was getting prepared for work.

He was still stuck doing Q&A because the pay was too good and no matter how many times Carl said he wanted a small ceremony, Derek was sure that whatever they planned to spend, it would at least double in the end.

It was a goddamn wedding; hence things were supposed to blow off proportions at some point. That's just how they work.

Derek was adjusting his shirt when the smartphone rang on the notes of "Night on Bald Mountain", the pre-set ringtone for unknown numbers.

"Derek Esposito, who is it?"

"Mister Esposito, this is the Saint Joseph hospital." The female voice sounded worried. This together with the word "hospital" sent him a shiver down his spine.

"Is Carl Esposito your brother?" Derek could almost hear her biting her nails.

"Yes, what happened?"

"He was involved in a car accident and is in serious conditions. You should come here as soon as possible. The doctors need you since you are his healthcare proxy and the patient in unconscious."

"A car accident?!?" Derek yelled while rushing out of the door and looking for a cab.

"We don't have any fuc**ng car! What the hell happened?"

"I'm sorry, I am not at liberty to say. The doctors will explain it..." Derek hung up on her. He had no time for useless babbling, only for a goddamn cab.

Every second in the traffic was torture, and when he finally arrived it was too late.

The surgeon and a police officer explained to him that Carl had been run over by a drunk driver. The culprit had run off and the police was still looking for him.

A bystander had immediately called 911, but because of the traffic jam caused by the accident it took hours for the ambulance to arrive.

So, when Carl arrived at the hospital he was already in critical conditions. He had multiple fractures, ruptured spleen and internal bleeding, requiring immediate surgery.

Derek had been called while Carl was just entering the OR.

They had done their best to save him, but Carl had lost too much blood, so there was nothing they could do. They offered Derek their condolences, but all he could hear was white noise.

"Let me see my brother." He begged.

The body was covered by a sheet, only the head visible. Derek could still see traces of blood on the face of his little brother.

Derek left his number to the police officer to be kept updated about the investigations, and then returned home.

The culprit was quickly apprehended thanks to the traffic cameras. It turned out to be a kid, barely seventeen years old, that had stolen his old man's car and then got drunk and high with his friends.

Derek lived the months before the trial in anguish. The damned DA had decided to prosecute him as a minor, and the even more damned judge had granted him house arrests. All while his little brother, his Carl, was dead because of him.

"How could they do such a thing?" Derek would yell and argue with anyone willing to listen to him. "Why all this talking about the rights and the future of that little sh*t? What about my brother's rights? What about his future? Carl has none because of him! What kind of justice is that?"

Derek visited multiple times the DA office, expressing his outrage and demanding them to ask for the maximum sentence. They were always kind and accommodating, and promised him that they would not forget about Carl.

When the day of the trial finally come, Derek's world died one more time.

The DA and the defence attorney had come to a settlement.

Since Chris Wainright, this was the name of the murderer, was still a minor and that was also his first offense, he had accepted to go in rehab and do six hundred hours of community service. If Chris would complete his rehab program and did not commit crimes in the next three years, then he would be a free citizen with no criminal record.

Derek was too dumbfounded to even be angry. When the session was over, he just walked to the DA and asked a single question with muffled voice.

"Why?"

And then with their most kind and accommodating tone, the DA assistants explained to Derek that Chris was just a kid from a good family that had made a dumb mistake.

He had a brilliant future ahead, Chris had already been admitted at the Cal Tech and this was his first offense. Also, his parents had hired a great lawyer and the judge would likely be unwilling to destroy Chris' life.

Despite their expectations, Derek did not make a scene. Derek's fire was extinguished, he had no more tears to shed.

In the following days, Derek lived by going through the motions. He kept following his routine like nothing had happened, his brain still refusing everything that happened in the last half year.

The only thing that made him feel alive, was that constant headache that had started shortly after Carl's death. According to his doctor it was a stress related symptom so with all that had happened, Derek had just been swallowing aspirins and paracetamol like they were candies.

But the pain never did go away, instead it was getting worse. Derek finally found the strength to get a serious check-up, and once again bad news were waiting for him.

According to the full body scan and the follow-up biopsy, he had stage two pulmonary cancer.

"But I never smoked in my whole life!" Derek exclaimed more amused than scared.

"Indeed, it's odd." Doctor Monroe, his oncologist, was quite puzzled.

She was a good-looking Hispanic woman, maybe five years older than Derek. In another moment he would have probably asked her out.

"You told me you work for a chemical company, right?" Derek nodded.

"Such an aggressive cancer is too uncommon to be a coincidence. My personal opinion is that their ventilation system failed. You and God knows how many more people have been breathing poison from quite some time."

"But we wear masks the whole time we work with the chemicals, and speaking for myself, I follow the safety protocols to the letter. My colleagues always mock me for it!" Derek was still in disbelief.

"Then maybe the masks are cheap pieces of junk. Or maybe the lab or the storage, if not both have leaks. These corporate scumbags only seek profits.

It would not surprise me in the least if they cut from the safety budget to put more dividends in their pockets."

Doctor Monroe was too outraged, even in his catatonic state Derek could tell there was more to it.

"Doctor, what are you hiding from me?" He asked, looking her straight in the eyes for the first time.

She nibbled on her lower lip for a while before answering.

"Between you and me, you are not the first case from your company. I have already reported it to the Department of Health and to the federals. If I were in your shoes, I would get a good lawyer and sue the soul out of them. You'll need a lot of money for the treatments."

"I agree on the lawyer, but I refuse any treatment. I'll just take palliative care."

Doctor Monroe jumped from her chair.

"Do you realize that without the proper treatments you have six months, a year at best to live? Also, as I have already said, your cancer is really aggressive. We need to start as soon as possible if we want to a chance to beat it."

The situation was dramatic, but Derek found all those "we" words hilarious, so he could not refrain from chuckling.

"We barely know each other, doctor. So, we have nothing to do if not going separate ways." Derek said to her with an icy tone.

"What do I have to live for? I have no family, no loved ones. My little brother's ashes are all that is left to keep me company. I could die tomorrow and I would not give a s**t!"

They parted on bad terms, but she still gave him her number, in case he changed his mind or simply needed to talk. Derek called his old shark lawyer and explained everything.

Years had passed but they would still send each other Christmas cards.

Derek had kept tabs on him, just in case. He had now more grey hair than before but was still a first-class shark.

Derek stopped going to work and started spending his money without much care. He would go to all the fancy restaurants he had always wanted to try, bought the suits he always dreamed about and only ate his favourite foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Derek would spend most of his days playing games on his brand-new gaming PC and revisiting all the spots that held a significance for him and Carl.

Then, twenty-four days after the diagnosis he had an epiphany.