

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 12 Learning a Trade

Lith had been so engrossed reading to forget where he was, throwing caution to the wind. When Nana caught him red handed, he was startled enough to yelp.

"I thought I knew every single rascal, but I fail to recognize this one. What's your name, kid?"

"Lith. What's yours?" He replied while making puppy eyes. Nana was now more curious than angry.

"Lith? Do you mean Elina's little imp? No wonder your face is new to me, you were just a new born the last time I saw you."

Nana's presence had made the chatter stop. Some women wanted to ask her how long until their turn, others were just curious, Elina jumped out from her chair apologizing on Lith's behalf.

"There's no need to apologize, Elina." Nana said. "No harm, no foul. The little imp has not damaged the book while playing with it."

"Yes mom, there is no need to apologize." Lith hated when someone spoke of him like he wasn't there. "And I was not playing with it, I was just reading."

"Reading? Young man, how old are you? Three years and something? If this is a joke, it's not funny. I never expected one of Elina's children to be such a liar."

"He is not lying. During the last storm, Lith was bored, so he asked his father to teach him how to read, write and count. Here is proof." Elina handed Nana the wooden ruler.

Elina's rebuttal had caught her by surprise, she realized to have struck a nerve. After studying the ruler, Nana had to admit it was a clever learning tool.

"Tell your husband that this thing is really a good idea. He could sell it to teacher Hawell. It never hurts to have extra money."

Elina wouldn't let her change the subject, not until she apologized for calling her son a liar.

"Raaz didn't invent it. Lith did, so he could study alone without bothering anyone."

Nana was shaken by all those sudden revelations. Her pride wanted to avoid apologizing, but insinuating that Elina too was lying in front of all those people would have hurt her whole family's reputation.

"So, young man, how much is seven times six?"

"Forty-two."

Nana took the book from Lith's hands, and after opening a random page, she gave it back.

"What is written there? Start from the top of the page."

Lith suppressed a smirk. "The first thing to understand while studying magic is that it's just a tool. Anyone can use it, but only few can actually use it properly. In fact..."

"Okay, that's enough. I owe you an apology Lith." Yet she said it while looking at Elina. "Seems your son is indeed blessed by the light, dear."

The room was once again resounding with chatter, but this time they were all discussing the same topic.

"What does Nana mean with blessed by the light? Isn't that just a fairy tale?"

"I wish my son was that smart. Every morning just sending him to school is a war of attrition. Not to mention getting some actual results!"

Those were the most common comments.

Lith kept hitting the iron while it was still hot.

"Can I..." Suddenly he realized that he ignored the word borrow. "take it with me for some time? I will return it as it is. I promise."

"And what would you do with it? Can you already use magic?" Nana's reply would have normally been quite different, but she had had enough surprises for the day and could not afford anymore sarcasm or scepticism.

"Yes, I can." Lith replied before realizing his mistake.

"I'm an idiot! I just blew my cover! Years of careful planning, ruined by this big mouth of mine. The only thing I can do is damage control."

"Really? And what can you do?"

"Yes, Lith. What can you do?" Elina rebuked. Her right foot was furiously tapping the floor in annoyance, Lith knew he was in trouble.

"I can do wind and water chore magic." He said with a low apologetic tone, while staring at his own shoes.

"I'm sorry, mom, I know you prohibited me to use any magic. But everyone else in the house always uses it, and I was so bored."

The chattering increased in volume. Elina was really angry, but she could not scold him in public. Not when they were staring at them with admiration.

"Nana seems really impressed. Maybe this is a turning point in Lith's life. If she takes him as her apprentice, we could have a healer in our family. I can't ruin this opportunity."

So, she kept silent, wondering about his son's future.

"Would you please show me?" Nana asked, smiling for the first time.

"In for a penny, in for a pound. Here goes everything." Lith thought.

"Brezza!"

Lith twirled his middle and index finger two times, creating as many tiny whirlwinds that he used to quickly sweep the room. He pretended to lose control from time to time. His goal was to impress, not to brag or scare people out of their wits.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" Nana laughed in admiration. she could see more and more of her in the little imp. Nana too had been a precocious brat. When she was his age her talent was better, but Lith was still a sight to behold.

Usually men were less talented for magic, since women with their prerogative to give birth, were naturally more in tune with the life force of the planet. Some called that world energy, others simply called it mana.

Also, country boys were usually blockheads, more inclined to hard works in the fields or in the military rather than spend years on books.

"Now I want you to do a thing for me. You said you can conjure water, right?"

Lith nodded in response.

"Now call upon water, it does not matter how little. But then, you have to not let it fall. You must make it float, like this." A perfect sphere of water the size of a fist appeared half a meter from Nana's open hand.

Lith could not comprehend the why of such a specific request, but he complied.

"Jorun!" He conjured less than a glass worth of water, keeping its form irregular and instable. Lith could not afford any more mistakes, his focus peaked trying to make his lack of control convincing.

The water floated for three seconds before falling off. But instead of hitting the floor it started floating again, becoming another perfect sphere orbiting around Nana's spell like the Moon does around the Earth.

Lith was flabbergasted. Not by Nana's control on the mana flow, he was already able of doing the same, if not better.

He could not avert the eyes from the spectacle in front of him. Both spheres of water were constantly spinning on themselves, reflecting everything around them. They would capture the light from the sun, turning it into sparkles of rainbow.

Lith had always seen magic like a force to be reckoned with, a great tool to build his future with. But he never thought of it as beautiful.

For the first time in over three years he was not pretending anymore. He was simply amazed, staring at the dancing lights while the memories of his old life flooded his mind.

He suddenly remembered all the hours that he spent as kid, hiding in the planetarium together with his little brother Carl. They would dream of becoming astronauts, to run away to the stars where no one would ever hurt them again.

And just like that his grief returned, stronger than ever, fighting the joy out. The pain for the loss overwhelmed him, tears started streaming from his eyes.

"Lith, are you all right?" Elina voice woke him up from his stupor.

Realizing how weak he had allowed himself to be, Lith felt deeply disgusted.

"Water is just water, no need to get soft over a measly light show. Soldier up and follow the plan." Lith steeled himself sealing away all the feelings that he deemed useless. "I'm done getting hurt." He thought.

"Yes, mommy, I am alright. I was just moved from the old lady's magic."

"My name is Nerea, Lith. But everyone calls me Nana."

"Why Nana?" Nana was usually a term of endearment used for the family's grandmother.

"You see, when I was still was a young maiden, everyone called me by my name. But then time passed, and I helped so many children come into this world that they started to call me Mama. After even more time passed, those children had children of their own, and they started to call me Nana." She ruffled Lith's hair.

"I have a proposal for you. Now you are too little, but when you become six years old, instead of going to school together with those blockheads, you could come here instead. So, you could read those books as much as you want. And maybe you could learn a trade. Mine."

Lith tilted his head, playing dumb.

"I don't know, you don't seem nice. I would like the books, though." He replied while hiding behind his mother, only half his face visible behind her legs.

Elina didn't know if to laugh or cry. Her dream had come true but Lith didn't understand what he was turning down.

"Please, excuse him, Nana. He is just three years old, he has no idea what he is saying. He doesn't even know the importance of apprenticeship."

"Three years old." Nana repeated. "It's almost too good to be true. But you are right, if he had to choose between gold and toys, he would probably pick the latter.

"We'll have this conversation again three years from now." She knelt down, looking Lith straight in the eyes.

"If you don't become dumb as all the other boys in this village, I'll take you as my apprentice. If you are still interested in magic and books, of course."

Lith nodded, grabbing his mother gown, looking for protection.

His weak and scared appearance hid his inner rage.

"Three years? I could have as well starved by then! And all because of you, greedy hag." He was so sick of being hungry, he wanted to bite her out of frustration.

"Calm down, Derek, and remember all of your lessons. Suck it up and grow stronger, because only strength will make you free. Only power will keep your family safe."