

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 13 Learning a Trade, again

Nana's work ethic didn't allow for favouritism of any kind. Lith may have been his future apprentice, but Tista had to wait for her turn like everyone else.

Lith hadn't been so happy of being stuck in the queue since his student's days in college, when he would use every single second to review his weakest subjects.

"So much to read and so little time. Better to cram light and dark magic since they are the only elements outside the physics as I know it. In the best-case scenario, it will take years to get my hands on a book again, and there is only so much I can learn as self-taught."

When it came their turn, he studied carefully how the healer performed the light magic *Vinire Rad Tu*.

It was the same life force detecting spell she had used on him three years ago, and this time he had a better understanding of magic and a way better standpoint.

Being next to her, Lith could appreciate every gesture and hand movement Nana used to amplify the spell effectiveness. The light enveloped Tista's body, quickly turning grey around her chest, clearly outlining the shape of her lungs.

"I have good news, and I have bad news. The good news is that Tista's condition is the same as always, there is no sign of degeneration this time. The bad news is that it doesn't seem to be improving either. I'm afraid that she will remain like this forever. The more she grows, the lesser the chances that her body will be able to somehow fix itself."

The air in the room turned heavy, a lifetime of illness was barely better than no life at all.

Lith was so shocked to completely forget about the books. The whole world meant nothing to him if he could not share it with the only three people he loved and trusted.

They came out of Nana's house in low spirits, returning home without speaking a word.

Once arrived, Elina shared the bad news, searching for Raaz arms before starting to cry. One by one, the whole family burst into tears, hugging each other in search of comfort.

Lith allowed himself to cry, cursing the cruel fate that had befallen his sister.

"What good is magic if I keep being helpless? Why do I keep reincarnating, simply to replace one living hell with another? Is this just bad luck or is it my fault? Could it be that in some previous life I committed such an atrocious act that now all those I love are cursed? Could this be my punishment?"

During the following days Lith kept second guessing every life choice he made, before accepting the fact that bad things happens. Tista was already ill when he resurrected for the second time, it couldn't be his fault.

Having been accepted as Nana's apprentice, he could now practice magic openly. Soon he proved capable of cleaning the whole house by himself, relieving his mother and sisters from all the chores.

Thanks to darkness magic, cleaning dishes and cauldrons became a matter of minutes. Nothing organic, be it food residue or grease could escape being turned into dust by a single spark of dark energy.

He also made countless experiments with light magic, in search for a cure. Yet all he managed to do was keeping the symptoms at bay. Tista now needed much less treatments from Nana, but was still prisoner in her own body.

This caused Orpal to hate him more and more.

"Show off! How I am supposed to enjoy my life with him constantly breathing on my neck? Not only Leech shares the housework with mom, but also spends so much time with Tista. Mom and dad always praised him for his so-called talent and intelligence. And now they never shut up about Leech saving the family a lot of money, by tending Tista's condition on his own. No one gives a damn about me wasting my time and sweat doing all the farm work! Gods, why did you let him live? Why you didn't give me any talent?"

Oblivious of his brother's feelings, Lith was not coping much better. His magic power and comprehension of mana kept growing, but it could not erase the perpetual taste of failure that accompanied him.

In the following year he could not feel any joy regarding magic, every discovery was useless, all his power meaningless.

And so, he was finally four years old. The period between four and six years in Lutia was called "the golden age" since the child was big enough to have some freedom and too little to be of any help in the daily activities.

They would be allowed to play all day without a care in the world. It was the perfect time to make friends and grow closer to one's own neighbours and deepen the ties between the families.

The day of his fourth birthday, after he finished the chores, Eliza introduced him to all their neighbours before returning home.

He was supposed to socialize and play, but Lith had other plans. There was no amount of failures or grief that could make him forget for long the hunger that consumed him since he was barely five months old.

Raaz's farm was on the western edge of Lutia's farmlands, a little less than a kilometre (0.62 miles) apart from the great woods known as Trawn.

Despite the pretentious name it wasn't particularly dangerous. The people who lived in nearby villages depended on the forest as their primary source of timber for their everyday life.

Trawn was also abundant in wildlife, so those bold and lucky enough would go hunting all year around, searching for precious meat, warm fur or both.

It was impossible to meet monsters in the forest, unless one went several kilometres deep. Since there was no need for exploring Trawn in detail, the inner areas were still uncharted territory.

There was a reason if Lith had never practiced martial arts in the new world, not even the footwork. The constant practice of magic required a lot of energy, and his household lacked the necessary resources for his training.

Lith was already skinnier than all of his siblings, any more exertion and he would turn in a pile of bones. He needed food.

But being a city boy, he knew nothing about butchering, he needed a teacher. And that was why he was headed for the house of Selia Fastarrow, the only hunter among their neighbours.

"The problem is that I have no idea how to get her to help. I'm still too little for apprenticeship, and even if I wasn't, it's unlikely she had not heard about Nana's offer. She has nothing to gain helping me. I can only hope she is a kind and benevolent woman."

Selia's house was a single-story wooden house, much smaller than Lith's, about sixty square meters large. There was no henhouse or barn. Except for the space in near proximity of the house, the fields were uncultivated, full of weeds, tall grass and whatever the wind had planted over time.

"She clearly has no interest in farming and stockbreeding, and that's good news. Means her business is good enough. I wonder what's in the shed near the house. It's almost as big as the house itself."

Lith knocked, his innards tied in a knot from the nervousness. The door opened almost immediately.

"You again? Are you lost or something?" Selia was a woman in her early thirties, 1.7 meters tall, the skin tanned from the years long exposure to the sun. Her black hair was kept short with a haircut identical to Earth's military standards.

She could have been considered very cute, but the small bosom coupled with her sharp eyes and rough attitude made her manlier than most farmers.

She wore a leather hunting jacket over a green shirt, green cargo pants and brown hunting boots with a soft outer sole to limit the noise made while moving.

"Hi miss Fastarrow, I need a favour. Could you please teach me how to skin and gut animals?"

Selia raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

"Because I am hungry." Not having any lever on her, Lith had decided that truth was the best policy. "I have been hungry long enough to forget how being full feels. I know I can hunt, but I also know that without proper handling meat goes bad and is inedible."

"No, you got me wrong. I mean why should I help you? What's in for me?" Now she was knitting her eyebrows.

"What do you want?" Lith asked while bottling up the urge to kill her slow and painfully. He was hungry enough to see her as quarry.

"Honestly, I don't believe a runt that barely reaches my belt can hunt anything, not even a rat. And since teaching is a waste of time, it demands compensation."

She scratched her chin searching for a deal bad enough to drive the pest away. She never wanted a child of her own, let alone dealing with someone else's.

"So, if you want to learn from me, first you must bring here some game. If you mess up while playing butcher, you'll ruin my merchandise, wasting my goods and time. So here is my deal, whatever you bring me, I'll teach you how to skin and gut it. But half of it is mine for the trouble. Take it or leave it."

"So much for the kind and benevolent woman, this is plain extortion." Lith thought.

"I'll take it. How long will you stay home?" He replied.

"I'll be here all day, I have a lot of work to do. Why?"

"Because when I get back with my prey, I'll need your help. Don't forget our deal."

Lith turned around, moving toward the woods. Seeing the little runt act all tough, without a bow, traps or even just a bag for the game, Selia could not help but laugh out loud. That until the door suddenly slammed on her face, sending her butt first on the floor. After getting up, she went to the nearest window.

Lith was still in the same spot, but his face was turned towards her door, his eyes glowing bright in the dim light of the dawn.

After getting at the edge of the woods he activated the light spell Life Vision. It was one of his creations from the last year of practice. By infusing his eyes with light magic, Lith was able to see living beings as coloured, while the rest of the world was turned into shades of grey. The stronger the lifeforce, the bigger and brighter was the light emitted. This way he could easily spot animals, even if they were hiding underground, in bushes or inside a tree.

Lith did not need to hunt something big, as long as it was meat it was the perfect prey.

Most of the animals would run away as soon he came too close, but not all of them. Birds and squirrels perched on tree branches felt safe. But Lith's spirit magic had reached a range of over twenty meters (21.9 yards), they were all within his reach.

He only needed to extend his open hand towards the quarry, then squeeze and turn it for a neck to be broken. In less than twenty minutes he had killed 2 odd feathered birds and two squirrels.

"I could catch more, but I want to pay that harpy as little as possible."

While returning to the huntress' house, his greed was debating fiercely with his rage.

"Dammit! I wish I could just ask my father. Our farm has a henhouse, we eat chicken, so he must know how to butcher it. But if I do, then I will be forced to share MY quarry in equal parts. And if there is something that I hate more than being robbed by that harpy is the idea of Orpal and Trion having the same amount of meat as me. Or worse, even more, being older. I hunted this game! This meat is mine, MINE! They will only be allowed to eat my scraps when and if I want so!"

When Lith got to the door he had calmed down, the rage hidden by his business face. He took deep breaths before knocking again.

When Selia saw him, was on the verge of mocking him, calling him a quitter for giving up in less than an hour. But then Lith showed her his game, making her whole "Never underestimate how hard a hunter's job is" speech die in her throat.