

## SUPREME MAGUS

### Chapter 14 Learning a Trade, again 2

"How did you do it?" Selia asked, still recovering from the surprise.

"Magic. I am blessed by the light. Didn't you hear the news?" Selia started rummaging her brain, until the answer made sense.

"Ohh! I get it now. You are the magic kid that's on everybody's mouth in Lutia. That's explains a lot, including your shitty attitude."

"Excuse me? You found a scrawny kid on your door, asking for help. And what you did was send him away with a rip-off deal, even laughing at his efforts, and I am the one with a shitty attitude?" Lith was now so angry that even the idea of sharing his prey did not seem so bad anymore.

Selia laughed out loud. "Kid, you really are funny in the head. First, when you come at the door of a stranger asking for help, the best you can hope for is to be sent away with a polite kick in the butt. If I had to comply with every madman's request, I would be broke in a jiffy. Second, you had the guts to slam the door at me and then come back like nothing happened. That's a shitty attitude."

Listening to her point of view, Lith could only agree. For four years he had been a recluse, his only interactions with the family members. He had got too used getting a yes as an answer, forgetting the basic social interaction rules and even common sense.

His hunger didn't help either, making him single minded and prone to anger. Lith realized that Selia was right, and what he did that morning was just a temper tantrum.

"I'm really sorry." He said earnestly, looking her in the eyes. "I have no excuses from my behaviour. I would understand if you wanted to call off our deal."

Selia started laughing even harder.

"Hold your horses, kid. I said that you are crazy and rude, and I like that. As you so kindly pointed out, I'm a bit of jerk myself. And dog does not eat dog, our deal is still valid."

She handed him a small knife with a wooden handle.

"Rule number one, bleed out the game as soon as possible. If the blood starts clotting, the meat is ruined. Make a deep incision in the neck and then hang them upside down, to make the blood drain out." She pointed him to a clothesline.

"When you don't need the fur, I always cut off the head directly, makes things faster."

Lith put down the knife and conjured water, making it coat his whole hand. Then he froze it, turning it into a razor-sharp blade, cutting off the birds' head, using the knife only for the squirrels.

Selia whistled with approval.

"Nice trick. You don't shy away from blood, don't you?"

"As I have told you before, I am hungry. Too hungry to care about big round eyes or a warm fur, I only see them as food."

Selia gave him thumbs up. "That's the right attitude for a hunter!"

Then she took the animals and hanged them, thinking the clothesline was too high for Lith to reach. Lith did not feel the need to correct her.

"Since we are building a master-apprentice relationship and all that cr\*p, mind you telling why come to me instead of your father or mother? I don't know your family, but this is something that any farmer knows how to do. It would be too expensive having someone else butcher your livestock."

"Indeed." Lith concurred pondering how to answer. He looked her straight in the eyes before asking. "Juts between us, master-apprentice secret and all that cr\*p?"

Selia nodded, surprised receiving an actual answer instead of a cranky remark.

"As far as I can remember, me and my brothers never had a good relationship. Things are pretty bad, especially with my older brother."

Lith decided that he needed to take that load off his chest. Talking to a stranger was the best way to relieve his stress and ruin Orpal reputation. Truth was indeed the best policy.

"I do not know if it's because of my magic, but I always ate a lot. That would not be a big deal if I hadn't four siblings, one of which has a congenital condition. Her treatments cost quite a lot, and that is barely necessary to keep her house ridden."

"Thank the Gods I'm an only child. But what does that have to do with your older brother?" Lith pretended to not have heard her.

"This means that despite my parents' hard work, we don't have much food on the table." Lith pointed at his thin arm, to make her feel guilt. "And my brother is a growing boy too, so he would like to have much more chow than he actually has."

From time to time, especially during winter, he had fits of rage, where he would accuse me of everything that goes wrong in his life. He often said things like:

Why the heck did you have so many children if you cannot properly feed them? Why does he have to get almost as much as food as me? He does nothing, while I work my ass in the fields all year around! This is not my brother, this is a Leech that is sucking my life away! I wish you died that cursed day!" Lith did his best Orpal impression.

"Are you making this up to make me feel guilty, kid? Because that's sick." Selia was knitting her eyebrows, doubting someone could say such things to his little brother.

Lith shook his head, sighing.

"I wish."

"Did your father give him a good beating? Maybe that could help him come to his senses."

Lith shook his head again. "No. This started when I was still very little, and even when my father resorted to spanking, it only made thing worse. To the point that I now sleep in the girl's room."

Selia bit her lips, to avoid making a sex joke. "Too soon."

"Too soon for what?"

"Nothing. Please continue."

"That was until a year ago. Then I started practicing magic, and soon I was skilled enough to do almost all house chores by myself. Sometimes I help with the livestock too. I even managed to keep my sister's condition under control." Lith took a deep breath before finding the strength to add "Most of the times."

"Then everything should be good now, right?"

"Wrong. The house needs repairs, and so does the barn and most of the working tools. If you also take in consideration all the random sh\*t that happens and takes priority, I don't see our situation getting any better soon, and neither does my brother.

Now he can't put the blame on me anymore, so the last time he took it out on my ill sister, saying things that I refuse to repeat out loud." Lith spat on the ground to get rid of the dirty taste the memory gave him.

"To the point of saying that it would be better for her to..." Lith pointed at the hanged game.

"To put her down like an animal? Kid, we may be jerks, but your brother is a lunatic."

Lith gritted his teeth, remembering Orpal's exact words.

"It would be much better for her, for all of us! She can't run, she can't work. Tista will never be able to make friends, fall in love or have children of her own. She is bound to be a burden for the family. And what will happen when you guys are no more? Who will take care of her? Eliza? Or maybe the little Leech wonder?"

Lith could still vividly recall his mother crying from those cruel words. Eliza and Tista running into her arms. Raaz beating Orpal so hard he could not walk for days.

"Indeed." He replied to Selia with a growl. "And that's is why I despise him and don't want him to touch a single bite of MY game."

"I get it. I don't even know him and already hate that guy's guts too."

"No, I don't hate him." Lith corrected her "Hate, just like love, is an irrational feeling, while my contempt for him has sound foundations."

"Wow! Such profound notion for someone so young. Worthy of a hunter!

Now enough chit chat, it's time to get to work."

Selia took down the squirrels, passing one to Lith.

"We will start with the little critters. They are smaller and better for practice, since even if you mess up is no big deal, there is not much meat in here."

She placed a squirrel on a cutting board, and prepared another for Lith.

"What I am going to teach you stands for most rodents, but just in case, if you ever find a rabbit that still has a snow-white fur, bring it to me. It is valuable only until it starts turning brown for the spring. Even a tiny mistake can ruin the fur, lowering its value."

Selia handed him the short knife again. "If you want me to teach you properly, let's do things my way. Use the knife, do as I do and follow my instructions."

Lith nodded in approval.

"On the squirrel's back pinch its hide and cut it near the base of the neck so to expose at least half of it. Now use your index finger and middle finger on both hands to create an opening after you have made the cut. Use your fingers to hook up under the skin and pull one hand towards the rear and the other hand towards its head..."

During the process, Lith noticed that beside being disgusting, skinning a squirrel was like taking off a sticky wet glove.

After that Selia showed him how to remove the head, the legs and the tail.

"I know is a bummer, but that bushy tail is no fur, is all goddamn body hair. You can still use it to stuff things, is very warm and soft. Now comes the tricky part.

When we proceed to gut anything, be careful while making incisions. If you cut open the bladder or the intestines, the meat is ruined by bile or feces. There is no saving it. This stands for all the animals, so pay attention, kid."

Gutting the squirrel was bloody and gruesome, but Lith could already smell the meat at the end of the tunnel, so he barely felt any discomfort.

When they finished, Selia put both squirrels on a skewer, to roast them in her fireplace.

"While we wait for our morning snack, I'll show you how to scald a bird for the plucking. As the name implies, water must not be too hot or cold, just enough for you to immerse a finger without getting a burn, but unable to hold the finger in for more than a second without burning yourself. That's proper scalding temperature."

Selia took a big cauldron, positioning it over a campfire she had always ready on the back of her house.

"It can be a messy job, so it's better to do it outside whenever is possible."

The smell of the meat cooking inside was making Lith's mouth watery, he could not afford the risk of them burning.

"Jorun!" At his command the cauldron became immediately filled with water.

Lith then stuck his hand in the water casting "Infiro!" making it emit steam.

Selia whistled again with approval.

"Fast and efficient. I'm starting to regret this master-apprentice stuff less and less.

I now understand why that old hag of Nerea called dibs on you. We should be ready to go, but first..."

Selia went inside briefly, returning with two little plates of roasted squirrel.

Before she could even pass him his plate, Lith had already snatched the food, wolfing it down like there was no tomorrow. He sucked and gnawed until only bones were left.

After licking every single of his fingers, he returned to his previous calm and composed demeanour.

"Good gods, such a gentleman." Selia's voice was oozing sarcasm. "Would you like another serving? Because that seriously creeped me out and I know a thing or two about..."

Her mockery fell on deaf ears. Lith's eyes could only see the second squirrel closing in. As soon as Selia pretended to offer him her share, his hands were already moving.

After devouring the last squirrel, Lith noticed that Selia was frozen in place.

Her mouth was open but no words were coming out of it, the plate still near his face.

He gently put the bones back into the plate.

"There was no need to hold the plate for me, but thanks. That was very kind of you."