

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 19 Conflicts

As Lith predicted, his fifth winter revealed to be quite interesting.

Treating Tista's condition required two sessions per week minimum, each one lasting around four hours. Two for the treatment itself and the remaining time for him to bathe and recover his strength.

Manipulating Tista's mana flow while simultaneously using fire, water and dark magic took its toll every time. The good news was that with so much practice, he was becoming accustomed to casting and maintaining several spells active at once.

Every treatment was easier than the previous one and her symptoms were quickly improving. Tista was now able to help with the house chores and the livestock.

She could even afford making long walks outside, when the weather was good.

The bad news was that Lith's relationship with his brothers was now uglier than ever before. Every time Tista got better, someone would reproach Orpal for his past words, and if no one did, then Tista would.

Orpal's fits of rage had really hurt her, his cruel words had shattered the image she always had of her perfect family, of her caring big brother.

Tista had been humiliated and betrayed, and she was not going to forget that easily.

Also, soon after hot winter baths had become available, Raaz too started to bathe often.

Orpal and Trion were the only ones left out. Orpal because he could not stand the thought of having to ask something from Lith, especially if he had to do it politely.

"I'm the eldest brother, I'm not supposed to beg runts for favours. I'm supposed to give orders and be respected for it! That Leech now has turned even the cripple against me! And I can't put Tista in her place, otherwise she

will make me look like I'm the bad guy who picks on a sick little girl. Manipulative b*tch!"

Trion was between a rock and a hard place. He deeply loved Tista, but he also loved and respected Orpal. Trion was the only one by his side, so he had not the heart to betray their bond.

With everyone else fresh and clean, their smell stuck out like a sore thumb. Even with all their family goodwill, disgusted grimaces were impossible to avoid from time to time.

The first time Tista dubbed the duo as Orpoop and T-reek, she brought down the house with laughter. Orpal and Trion blamed Lith for their humiliation, but he just ignored them like he always did.

Raaz made for Lith a pair of snowshoes, spending more and more time with him. Raaz also started imparting him lessons about how to operate a farm and teaching how to whittle. Lith was still very young, but knowing he was able to skin and gut his game, Raaz thought there was no risk for him in handling a carving knife.

Orpal and Trion lived the situation differently, though. Until then, Lith had spent most of his time with the girls, letting Raaz spend all his free time with the boys. They felt wronged twice, once because Lith was robbing them of their dad time, the second because he always refused teaching them whittling before they reached the age of eight.

Things got even more unpleasant for Lith after midwinter. Every time he would treat Tista, he could notice that something was off. Both his mother and sister had an odd look in their eyes.

Often, they would open their mouth, only to close them right away, giving him the silent treatment for hours. Lith couldn't figure out the reason of this behaviour, so his mind started spinning like crazy.

"Do they believe me a pervert? Have I looked at them in an inappropriate way? Maybe they are starting to suspect something. Maybe they know I am from a different world!"

Lith's full blown paranoia wouldn't give him a second of rest, preventing him to have a good night of sleep. He heard them sighing too often, something was definitely off.

It took Lith all his courage to muster the strength to face them and ask for the truth.

The confrontation took place in the girl's room, where they were all gathered for Tista's treatment.

"Lith, did you really not notice any changes?" Elina asked pouting.

"Yes, I did. Tista is feeling much better now, right?"

"Off course there's that. But don't you notice anything here?" She waved her hand, going from Tista's head to toes.

"That's my sister."

"And?" She prompted.

"Her health is getting better, nothing is getting worse. Tista is still Tista." For the first time in his three lives, Lith could spectate with his own eyes a synchronized facepalm outside internet meme gifs. Rena was fuming.

"Really? Don't you notice that her hair is soft and silky? That it never tangles or get split ends?" Tista had light brown hair with shades of purple all over them. Ever since the treatment began, the colour had got more vibrant and visible.

"Shades of purple, uh. This is really another world after all. I wonder why women do have them and men do not." Lith thought.

"Now that you mention it, yes I do. But normally I don't care for hair, I keep mine short for a reason." Rena shook her head.

"Don't you even notice that her skin has got smoother? With no imperfections? That she is growing taller and slender than her peers?"

Lith kept scratching his head. He knew nothing about the average girl. Also, they were simply describing the side effects of removing impurities.

"And why is that a problem? Aren't those all good things?" This time even Tista joined the facepalm.

"They are envious of those things, dummy! They just want you to do the same for them."

Lith was flabbergasted by such trivial demands. "All those grimaces, the silent treatment, all of it for such a stupid reason?"

"Lith, dear, being attractive for a girl is a pretty big deal. For your sisters could mean getting the possibility to choose between just a wealthy man, and a good, wealthy man. It can affect their entire life, their happiness."

That sounded right to Lith's ears. "How could I have not thought of that?"

"While for your poor mother, it means that she can finally make all those pompous, high and mighty neighbours of her, that keep bragging about having so much more money than her, flaunting all the pricy beauty creams they can afford, kicking themselves out of envy!"

That sounded right to Lith's ears too. He accepted with a sigh, and his life finally returned to normal. He had to spend at least three afternoons a week for all the treatments, but it was worth it.

All that practice made his mana core grow steady and fast, his control of mana and cast speed improved by leap and bounds.

Right before the end of winter, he was forced to take in a new customer.

With the weather improving, the neighbouring families started meeting often. Sometimes for a visit, more often they would simply bump into each other while trading goods at the village.

And that was driving Raaz crazy.

"Lith, you have to help me!" His plea was desperate. "Your mother looks at least ten years younger, and I am starting to look more like her father rather than her husband. People keep murmuring how she was unfortunate marrying me, that she could have got so much better. Please do your thing on me too!"

Lith had heard the rumors. They were mean and petty, and deserved to be faced head on. He would not allow anyone to speak ill of his dad.

"Fine, but only at some conditions, the same I asked from mom. One, secrecy. Nobody must ever know outside you and me. Think of all the bad people that could want to exploit me."

Raaz nodded.

"Second, you will never talk about it with Orpal or Trion, nor ask me to do it for them. I don't care if they fall on love or want to marry. They made pretty clear what they feel toward me and Tista. I will not endanger my safety for them. Take it or leave it."

Raaz wanted to object, remind Lith that they were family too. But their behaviour had only gotten worse after being forced to spend so much time together during winter. Raaz had to scold them multiple times just to make them behave properly.

"I can only hope that when they grow up, my sons will be able to mend their relationship. I can't force them to get along."

And so, he accepted.

A few weeks later, Lith was headed to Selia's house for the usual cleaning, before going hunting. The dawn's light made the world around him look like out of a fairy tale.

The thin layer of snow was immaculate, reflecting the orange light over the weeds and trees along the way. His surroundings were completely silent, the world still and at peace.

At the next clearing, Lith took out the magic stone out of his pouch, observing it in the morning light.

During the winter months the magic stone had mended most of the teeth marks. Both its life force and mana flow had tremendously improved, but it was still useless as the day Lith found it.

"Just my luck." He sighed. "I risked my life facing that Ry for nothing. Let's hope I can find something in Nana's books, otherwise my only option it's to find someone willing to buy it."

Lith was really impatient to start his apprenticeship.

It meant being finally able to study magic from books instead as a self-taught. Also, as an apprentice healer, he would get practice magic and be paid for it, gaining the village recognition and respect.

So many birds with just one stone.

After putting the magic stone back into the pouch, Lith arrived at his destination and opened the door. That day Selia was out of town to sell her merchandise, so she had left the door open for him

It didn't take him much time to clean everything and leave.

As soon as he walked out the house, he got hit in the head by a wooden stick.

Lith's eyes went blurry, he felt someone pushing him back inside, making him fall to the ground with a kick in the stomach.

"Look who's here, the little Leech!" Lith recognized that voice, he was one of Orpal's friends.

Four boys quickly surrounded Lith, kicking him while he was still down, while a fifth closed the door after checking that no one did notice them.

"You little arrogant piece of sh*t! Orpal told us all about you. How you humiliate him every day, how you even dare stealing his food!"

"Yeah!" Another one yelled. "He is your big brother, it should be him getting the best part of the game, not you, little ungrateful runt!"

"Less yelling and more kicking, Trant! Remember Orpal's words, if Leech gets the chance to use his magic, we are finished!"

Despite Lith was curling up, desperately trying to shield his head and stomach, another kick grazed his face, making one of his baby-teeth fall.

"I know what to do!" Trant moved forward gripping Lith's hands with enough strength to crush them. "Let's see how he does magic without hands!"

By coming that close, Trant had forced his friends to stop kicking, and a moment was all that Lith needed.

He released all the lightning he could muster, shocking Trant out cold.

But before he could do anything else, the wooden stick hit him in the head again, making him collapse.

"You d*ckhead! How dare you hurt your seniors! You deserve to die!"

The beating resumed, this time with no hint of mercy or holding back. Lith started coughing blood and teeth.

The four had him surrounded, Lith tried multiple times rolling out of the encirclement, but he would be sent back in the middle every single time.

Lots of feelings were ravaging his mind, while his body was burning with pain. The spite for his brother's betrayal, the rage of being assaulted by boys with double his age and size. But most of all, he felt helpless, and afraid of death.

"Damn magic! What use are you if I don't have the time to concentrate? Stupid stone, I kept you hanging from my neck for months, do something! Help me! Somebody, anybody, help me!" All his silent pleas went unfulfilled.

While his conscience was fading, Lith started cursing himself for his weakness and helplessness.

"Magic, martial arts, all that careful preparation, useless." Oddly, his last thought was not for his family or revenge, but for his last opponent.

"If only I was as strong as a Ry! He stopped my spirit magic so easily by..."

His survival instinct kicked in, his mind and body acting in unison.

"By infusing himself with mana! And I can do that too! It's the same principle behind Life and Fire vision!"

With each breath he started calling upon the elemental energy, but instead of wasting time giving it a form, Lith let it merge directly with his mana core, infusing himself with earth magic.

His whole body started hardening, the pain getting duller and duller. Lith also infused himself with light magic, accelerating his healing and preventing himself from losing consciousness.

Soon he was able to ignore the kicks, springing back up in one fluid motion.

"What is earth? It's just a mix of minerals and organic matter, the same as my body. I can be immovable like a mountain!"

With that thought, he further hardened his head, before headbutting from below the chin of the assailant in front of him.

Before the remaining three could recover from the surprise and resume the encirclement, Lith raised his guard. The left arm forward for blocking, the right arm ready to strike.

Orpal's friends were scared, after Lith knocked down their leader with the headbutt, the only thing on their mind was to prevent him to use magic, so they rushed forward, not giving him time to recover.

The closest assailant tried to punch Lith in the face, to disrupt any casting he could attempt.

"60% of the human body is made of water. I can be formless like water."

Lith's left arm, imbued with water magic, coiled around his opponent's right arm like a snake.

"The body burns calories to produce heat and energy. I can be destructive like fire!"

Fire magic burned through his muscles, granting Lith short bursts of explosive strength. By flexing his left arm, Lith broke the immobilized limb in three points, elbow, ulna and radius, while his right fist hit the opponent on the nose, pulverizing it.

The pain made the boy faint, his nose bleeding profusely.

The remaining two fell into panic, and tried to run away.

"Nerves, synapsis all the information and orders in the body are transmitted via electrical impulse. I can be fast as lightning!"

Lith imbued all his body with air magic, becoming fast enough to blink in front of them, punching both in the gonads at the same time.

All of his opponents were down, sobbing in pain or fainted.

Lith spit a mouthful of blood, while contemplating the results of his last experiment.

"Seems that this new magic puts too much strain on my body. Maybe I'm too young, maybe I took too much damage, whatever. I have all the time in the world now."

"I need to decide what to do with you motherf**kers." Lith said while using light magic to heal his internal injuries.

"It may take a while, but you'll get my undivided attention. Enjoy your stay."

Lith sat on the couch, his left hand on the chest, performing the healing.

The right one was open in front of him, releasing five streams of lightning that enveloped the five boys like tendrils, making them scream with agony.