

## Supreme M 251

Chapter 251 Back Home 2

Lith looked at her, but he couldn't see anything wrong. She was 1.54 meters (5'1") high with long gold hair tied back in a braid. She was quite cute, especially since her diminutive stature emphasized her bosom.

Lith was wondering why he had no recollection of her, when Brina took off the long glove covering her right hand. Her arm had a long burn scar up to the elbow, while the hand was unnaturally thin. It had only the thumb and the index finger.

The scar tissue was bright red and swollen. Its jagged surface made it look like a sponge had grown under her skin.

"She had an accident with the oven when she was little. They had to amputate most of her fingers and even if Nana managed to save the hand, the scar causes her a lot of pain whenever it gets cold. We prepare an ointment for her, but it's not enough.

This year she will take part in the Spring festival..."

"I won't!" Brina angrily whispered cutting her short. "I'm damaged goods. I'm tired of people staring at me with pity just like..." The "your brother" part died in her mouth.

Lith was merely looking at the arm like it was a broken chair, assessing the damages with Invigoration.

Brina hadn't noticed his touch because the arm lacked any sensitivity.

"I can fix it. For a price, of course."

"The cold issue?" Tista asked full of hope.

"No, I mean the scar, the fingers. Everything." Seeing their disbelief, Lith placed his index finger on Brina's elbow, casting a short spell that restored an inch of skin.

"Nana can't perform tier four light spells, but I can." His voice was cold and professional.

"The procedure is expensive. If you are interested, talk to whoever manages the finances in your family and then let me know. I'll be available until spring."

Tista opened her mouth to say something, but remained silent. Everything had happened so fast that Brina wasn't able to move or speak. She stared for a while at the pale new skin, before leaving in a hurry after noticing the kids staring at her, pointing their fingers at her still exposed arm.

An hour later Nana finally returned and the queue was reduced to four people.

"Excellent work, kids." Nana said after checking the income.

"I can handle the rest. You go home and have a nice meal."

Lith could have opened a Warp Steps, but judging by how Tista was looking at him, she clearly had something to say. So, he kept the surprise for another time and they walked home instead.

"How can you think about money when you can help someone in need?" She finally said once they got out of the village.

"Do you have any idea what she went through all her life? She gets out of the house only during fall and winter, she never had a boyfriend, she..."

"Had it much easier than you." Lith's voice was indifferent.

"She has been well fed and dressed all of her life. Her parents have a nice house and can afford the treatment. End of the story."

Tista was stunned.

"Yes, but I got cured and she didn't. A healer's job..." She replied after a few seconds, only to get cut short once again.

"It's a job like any other. Light magic it's not some kind of holy power, it's just a mean to an end. Does the baker give bread and pastries away for free to those in need? No. Did anyone ever help us when we were starving? No.

When you were ill, did her father care for your condition? No. Then give me one good reason why I should work for free."

Tista remained silent for a few minutes until they arrived halfway towards home.

"So, what are your limits now?" She asked.

"Brother sister confidentiality?"

Tista nodded.

"As long there is a breath of life, I can save anyone. I can now regrow organs, limbs, anything. My only limitation is that I can't repair something that was missing from the start. I can give back the sight to someone that has lost an eye, but not to someone born blind."

Tista seemed incredibly happy at his words, making Lith worried.

"Are you unwell or there is someone else you want me to heal?" He sighed.

"No, everything is fine." She giggled.

"It's just that Lutia is a small village in the middle of nowhere. After hearing your stories and seeing you at work today, I'm wondering if I should try to get into an academy too."

Lith shuddered at the thought.

'I have always avoided mentioning the nastiest details of the academy, I can't see Tista not getting scarred for life by all those jerks. Not to mention that if she manages to graduate too, our family would be recognized as a new magical bloodline.

'It would cause us a lot of troubles. If she really wants to step up her skills, then I can't shield her from the truth anymore. The princess has to become a warrior, or the world will eat her alive.'

Before going back home, Lith went to Selia's house. According to Solus, she was supposed to have left together with Ryman, but he wanted to make sure the huntress didn't need help.

The door and the windows were locked. Lith used Life Vision, discovering that there was no one inside.

'One less person to worry about.' He shrugged. Nana was at the end of her rope and the huntress was gone, probably for good. Lith felt a sting in his heart, but he preferred to focus on those he had left.

His parents were really happy to have him home earlier and during lunch, they wanted to know everything about his last days of the academy. Lith didn't tell them about the vision, but for Tista's sake, he shared with them all the aggressions and sabotage attempts he endured.

"So much violence just for a grade?" Raaz couldn't believe his ears.

Lith explained to them how fierce was the everyday life at the White Griffon.

"Nobles take success for granted and don't like being overshadowed by commoners. They consider it as a personal insult. Commoners mostly work their ass\*s off, but since the academy it's the only way out of poverty, they are ruthless too. It's easier to meet a dragon than to find an honest friend."

After many questions about the academy and as many reproaches for the things he had omitted in the past, Lith finally could tell them about the rankings. Elina and Tista cried with joy at his achievements, while Raaz simply hugged him.

"I'm so proud of you, son. I don't know what I did to deserve such a good kid."

Lith was happy too. Their joy was the first piece of good news in months.

"We should share the good news with Rena!" Elina stood up, walking toward the door.

"You stay here. I'll go get her." Lith said while opening a Warp Steps.

Elina was about to argue when the dimensional rift opened in their dining room right outside of Rena's house in the village. The mouths of the members of Lith's family fell to the ground for the surprise.

When less than a minute later the Gate reopened, they were still awestruck and so was Rena. Lith had to princess carry her through the Warp Steps. They could hear many scared murmurs coming from the village.

"Ah! Suck it, you bastards!" The voice of Zekell, Rena's father-in-law roared.

"I'm the only one with a god in the family!"

"What a classy, humble man." Lith sneered as soon as the Gate closed behind him.

After much stuttering and many questions about Warp Steps, Lith finally brought Rena up to speed. She was overjoyed by so many good news and so was the rest of the family.

Again. Lith couldn't understand why they were so excited about something they already knew.

"It's incredible! Mom, this means you can visit me whenever you want, even during winter!" Rena's words left Lith speechless.

"Indeed. Now we can go to the village regardless of the weather. Oh, gods. Freshly baked bread during winter is a dream come true!"

Suddenly the conversation degenerated into how to better exploit Lith's new ability. More than once he wanted to point out that he wasn't a cab, but there was no such word on Mogar.

After everyone had decided what they wanted to use Lith's powers for during the winter, Tista pulled Elina aside. They whispered among them for a while and even with his enhanced hearing, Lith was unable to understand what they were saying.

Rena was bombarding him with questions about the places he had access to, how many people he could move at once.

When they returned, she wasn't done yet.

"Big sis, come here please." Tista pulled Rena aside, pushing the index finger against her own lips.

"Lith, dear, please have a seat."

Elina had a serious expression, making him inwardly fear to be about to get scolded again.

'I told them so little and I am already getting my a\*s kicked. I was right working on a "need to know" basis with them.' He thought.

"Would you like to have another sibling?"

Her words made Lith's brain freeze. His hands clenched the armrests so hard that only the fear to reveal his strength too made him snap out of it when the wood started cracking ominously.

'Is this a trick question?' He thought. 'After Orpal and Trion, I don't feel safe rolling the dice again. Sadly, it's not something up for me to decide. Damn if I hate rhetorical questions.'

"Sure, mom." He actually replied while hoping that his face matched his happy tone.

"Are you pregnant already or is it something you are planning ahead?"

His words made the mood in the room turn heavy. Everyone was looking at the floor with a sad expression. Elina was squeezing her own hands, taking deep breaths to calm down.

"Have you ever wondered why we didn't have any more children?" Raaz said while hugging his wife from behind to comfort her.

"Yes. I thought that since we had so many problems with food and money already, you used some spell to prevent further..." Lith was about to say "issues", but managed to stop in time.

They were speaking about having another baby, so they didn't share his lack of love for small, smelly, noisy humans.

"...another pregnancy."

"Well, yes and no." Elina explained.

"Sure, after you were born, we couldn't afford to have more children, even though we love each other so much." She caressed Raaz hands, kissing his forearm.

"That's why we were actually happy when the Great Mother took the choice out of our hands."

"The Great Mother? Aren't you using a darkness magic spell?" During all his life on Mogar, Lith had yet to find a single church or temple. Religions were almost non existent, gods were relegated in the roles of swear words or synonyms for destiny.

"We know the spell, but it requires a magico level of power to be viable. Otherwise repeated uses can cause permanent sterility."

Raaz's words were like a punch in Lith's stomach.

"Do you mean that..."

"Yes." Elina nodded. "The labor was long and complicated. I don't know exactly what happened. Nana tried to explain it to me, but I couldn't and didn't want to understand."

"The only thing that mattered to me was that something inside of my body broke that night, making me unable to bear children anymore."

Everything made sense. Lith had wondered from time to time why even after Orpal had been disowned, after Tista had been healed, and the financial situation of the household had improved so much thanks to his jobs, his parents had stopped having children.

His mother was still young, yet nothing had happened. He had always shrugged it off, thinking they wanted to sit back and enjoy their new wealth. Yet now he couldn't help but feel guilty.

Guilt for having always ignored their distress simply because it suited him, but mostly because he was the real root of that situation. They were his parents, but Lith wasn't really their son.

'Calm down, you idiot. No need for guilt trips. I didn't choose Elina, I didn't kill the real Lith. He was already dead, so nothing that happened that night was my fault.' Lith was aware of how his birth was considered a miracle by his family.

"I pray the Great Mother every day to thank her for her gift." Elina took the word out of his mind.

"When Nana told me about my condition, I felt desperate, but as soon as I held you in my arms, it didn't matter anymore. I was already too scared after almost losing you. At that moment, you gave me a reason to live." Elina looked at him with deep affection.

Those words soothed Lith's uneasiness, but his stomach was still tied in a knot.

"Tista says that you can cure everything. Is it true?" Her eyes were full of expectancy.

"Yes."

"Do you think you can help me?"

"Absolutely." Lith lied with confidence.

The reproductive apparatus was one of his weakest spots since he never experimented with pregnant women. There was nothing in the textbooks to help him understand the difference between a functioning yet defective organ and a mint one.

He remembered how during the treatments he had found lots of impurities in Elina's womb, but even removing them and bringing her to full health for years didn't seem to have worked out.

#### Chapter 252 Siblings Part 1

'I never noticed any anomaly, the damage must be something subtle. Probably it just makes the changes of pregnancy really low. I would have never missed something that affected her health.' He thought.

Lith stood up, placing his hand on Elina's belly before activating Invigoration. He scanned her ovaries and uterus for a long time, but came up with nothing.

"Odd. Everything seems fine." Noticing his mother's distressed expression, he tried to reassure her.

"Don't worry, maybe it's just because I don't know what to look for. I just need reference material." Lith touched Rena's womb, looking for clues.

"Good gods!" Lith snapped back with a shocked expression.

"Is there something wrong?" Rena was on the verge of panic. She had never seen her brother freaking out, not even after having an arm cut off.

"Yes, I mean no. I'm not ready to be an uncle, I'm too young." The room exploded with cheers, tears, and joy. Lith remained dumbstruck. He really was not ready.

'Guess they didn't know either. For a moment I thought that Rena's pregnancy was the reason behind mom's request. Like knowing she is about to become a grandma made her aware of the passing of time.' He thought.

"Thank the gods." Rena squeezed him between her arms, before putting his hand back on her belly.

"After being married for almost a year, I was starting to be afraid Senton or I was sterile. I was going to ask for your help right after mom. How is the baby?"

"This big." Lith's index finger formed a circle about as big as a pea.

"I want to know if it's healthy!" Rena slapped him on the nape.

"I guess." He shrugged. The fetus was too little, there wasn't much he could see. Lith had no experience in the matter and didn't want to give them false hope.

'Me and my big mouth. The chances of miscarriage during the first pregnancy are high, or at least, they are on Earth. I can only keep my finger crossed and keep an eye on her'

"Please, no more surprises." He said using Tista as a template this time. At those words, she became beet red but said nothing.

"I need a clean slate." He explained.

'I have no idea if Rena's body has changed to better host the baby. Using her as blueprint could cause a false pregnancy.'

A few minutes later, he believed to have found the root of the problem. The difficult labor had caused the formation of adhesions in the tubes. Lith had no idea what they were, though. He only recognized them as an anomaly.

"I got good news and I got bad news. Which do you want to hear first?" He asked.

"The bad news." Elina hugged Raaz, who tried to act strong.

"It's worse than I thought. Between the damage that you suffered and the passing of time, I can't promise a full recovery."

"What about the good news?" Raaz asked.

"I think I can do it, but I need some time to prepare and to ask for guidance."

Raaz tried to lift Lith out of joy, only to realize a second too late that his son was already taller than himself.

They spent the lunch merrily, talking about their plans for the winter. Rena couldn't wait to share the good news with her husband, but remained with them, asking Elina for advice.

Lith didn't want to ruin that moment for them, so he avoided talking about the impending danger nor the distress Death Vision caused him. Tista couldn't take her eyes off his White Griffon pin, asking a lot of questions about the academy.

Lith didn't lie to her, describing in detail the teaching methods, the harsh competitive environment, and the need for commoners to get a Guilty Ballot as soon as they got admitted.

The more Tista learned about it, the less attractive the perspective of attending the academy became. She knew nothing about combat. Tista used mostly light and darkness magic for her job, while she practiced the other elements only for doing the daily chores.

'My situation is pretty much the same as Quylla's, but I doubt I'll find someone like lil brother to watch my back. Even if I get admitted, I'd be quite old compared to my schoolmates.

'Dammit, I want to learn more about magic. I'm tired of the daily routine, Lutia is starting to feel a cage like home previously was. At the same time, it's a safe haven for me.

'The academy sounds like the forbidden love child of a viper's nest and a warrior's arena. I want to test my limits, but it's kind of extreme as first challenge. Ballot or not, I don't know if I can stand so much pressure.'

Tista needed time to think, so she went back into her room to study the offensive spells from her grimoire. She learned them years ago at Lith's and Nana's insistence, but after never using them, Tista remembered only the simplest ones.

After taking Rena home, Lith Warped to a random location in the Trawn woods. After checking not to be followed, he Warped to an irrelevant spot at Lutia's outskirts.

'Warp Steps should make following me impossible, even to the Queen's corps. Being careful never hurts, though.'



After coming through each Gate, he would walk for a few dozen meters in a random direction before opening another. Lith hoped that the multiple spatial jumps would allow him to lose his tail, even if an artifact capable of opening again or tracing Warp Steps did exist.

Only then he opened a Gate to the mana geyser in the Trawn woods. Without Solus, he wouldn't be able to recognize the place, if not for the fact that the mana geyser was the only spot where weeds, grass, and flowers had already started to grow again in the scarred ground.

The damage caused by the Abomination he had fought alongside the other three Kings of the woods wouldn't recover until spring, if not even later. Everything reminded him of Protector, making Lith's blood boil.

'F\*ck Protector. I'm here for much more important stuff. Solus, do you mind turning into the tower?' This time he didn't say he needed her, nor he gave her an order. Lith was really asking her permission.

'Sure.' Solus had no idea of what was happening. To reduce the suffering from isolation as much as she could, she had found a way to fall into a kind of deep slumber. Solus had missed all the recent conversations and thought Lith just wanted to train or Forgemaster something.

'What do you need?' She asked.

Lith didn't reply until the tower was completely formed before answering. There were no changes from the last time. The repairs on the first floor had progressed, but weren't finished yet. The tower was comprised only by the ground floor and the basement.

"Not what, but who. I think it's time for us to talk. I didn't want to have this conversation without giving you a physical presence and a voice too."

Solus consciousness took her wisp form. The sphere of light was bigger and brighter than the last time he saw it. When she was close enough, Lith noticed another change. There was something at its center, something that looked almost solid.

## Chapter 253 Siblings Part 2

"Uhm, thanks." After all the time she spent alone, Solus was confused by his apparently kind behavior. Lith placed his right hand on the wisp, making her experience physical contact for the first time in months.

The wisp turned out to be solid enough to stop his hand. Solus could feel not only Lith's warmth, but also his touch. It was the closest thing to a caress she had ever experienced, so she couldn't help but quiver.

"Interesting. Now your wisp form is tangible and warm." Lith was amazed. He had expected his hand to go through it.

"Indeed. What were you saying?" Solus was happy with her development, but for some reason, she felt really embarrassed. Lith quickly recovered from the surprise, remembering why they were there.

"It's easier if I show you, rather than tell."

If he was talking with anyone else, Lith would have asked her if she really meant what she said the last time they talked. Yet with Solus there was no need to. Once their minds were fused, there was no way to lie or hide even the most embarrassing thought.

That was the reason why once they had started trusting each other they had stopped doing it. Lith because after considering Solus as a person, a girl at that, there were many parts of his past he wasn't willing to brag about.

Solus because the more her personality developed, the more she felt the need to have some personal space.

Lith clearly remembered how terrifying was his life from her point of view. Always scared of losing him in battle, to the point of sacrificing herself during the fight with the Talons, or almost degrading her own core to keep him alive when he failed to save Protector.

He remembered how much she had suffered hiding the truth from him, that she was aware of what coming clean could cause, yet when faced between her sake and Lith's, she had always put him first, no matter the consequences.

Lith shared with her all his memories about the last weeks. Every minute, every second was unveiled. He wasn't afraid to admit how much he cared for her, how being separated made him feel incomplete.

"Wait, this is..." Solus was shocked by the amount of information. It was the equivalent of a one sided mind fusion. Lith was showing her everything without receiving anything in return.

"Why didn't you fuse our minds again?" She asked.

"Because I don't want to force you again. Your lie hurt me deeply, but you are still my Solus. You are the only person I never had to lie to and I don't want for it to change. So, I'm doing something that I usually don't.

"I'm showing myself vulnerable.

"I understand how my behavior must be terrifying for someone forced to ride shotgun with me without ever touching the wheel. I understand how Protector's words made you feel and why you lied to me.

"I'm willing to forgive you, but you have to promise me never to do it again. I'm not perfect, so if you disagree with me, nag at me until my ears bleed, kick my ass, whatever. Just don't act behind my back again."

Solus was so happy that the walls of the tower trembled a little. She wasn't used to expressing herself with words anymore, so she triggered a mind fusion, sharing as much as he did, no matter how embarrassing it was or how pathetic she looked in those memories.

Lith felt Solus's pain like she felt his own. Their lives were like two crooked towers, but as long they could lean onto each other, they would stand forever.

Lith held the wisp tight against his chest, shocked by the amount of suffering she had gone through in so little time. The raw strength of the emotions he was experiencing made Lith completely lower his guard.

It was only the second time that he had allowed it to happen, the first being when he was ready to die at the Scorpicores hand as long he and Solus fought side by side. Neither of them noticed the wisp going through Lith's chest despite having achieved a physical form.

Once their minds and bodies were fused, the same happened to their mana cores. They pulsed in unison, beating at the same rhythm while tendrils of energy connected them. The two mana cores revolved around each other like twin stars.

The resonance between them made Lith's core turn bright cyan, on the verge of turning blue, while Solus's bright yellow core turned into a bright green one simply by absorbing the excess energy that Lith's body usually dispersed not being able to handle it.

The tower was shaken to its foundations, rumbling noises forced them to snap out of their trance. Lith noticed that everything was different, even though he had no idea why. The walls looked sturdier, the space around him larger.

Lith could perceive the mana flow passing through the magical artifact like he could hear his own heartbeat.

The debris leading to the first floor had disappeared, just like Solus.

"What the heck? Solus, where are you?"

"Right here." Lith heard Solus's voice coming out of his own mouth.

"I'm inside you!"

"That's a gross way to put it. Are you listening to yourself?" Lith made a retching sound.

"That came out wrong. Sorry." She giggled.

"Do you have any idea about what happened?"

"None." Lith replied noticing that his left hand was moving by itself, touching his own face.

"So, this is how having a body feels. It's amazing." Half of Lith's face was shocked, the other had a delighted and quite feminine expression.

"Wait, you can move my body at will?"

"It seems so." She shrugged. "Want to go check the first floor? I'm curious."

"Curious? Aren't you supposed to know what's what as soon as your body repairs?" The situation was becoming odder by the second.

"Normally yes, but nothing is normal now. I think that us merging is an anomaly of sorts, temporarily boosting my strength. I have no clue about what's upstairs like I don't know how we fused."

"I hope you are right about our condition being only momentary. It would be creepy in the long term." Lith shuddered.

"No need to be shy. I've seen you naked plenty of times." She mocked him.

"I know and I'm fine with it. Yet this gives a new whole meaning to the words 'touching oneself'."

Solus laughed heartily, before realizing the full meaning of his words and blush from the embarrassment.

"I would never do that!"

"I believe in your good will, but you don't remember how having a body feels."

To prove his point, Lith took out a cream puff out of the dimensional pocket. It was still fresh as when he took it from the academy's canteen.

"Stop after one bite."

Solus sniffed the pastry, its sweet smell was intoxicating.

She took a bite and then another, until there was nothing left.

"Sorry, but it was too good. We ate them in the past, but sharing your senses is like the trial version of the real deal." She said apologetically.

Lith sighed, climbing the stairs leading to the first floor.

## Chapter 254 First Floor part 1

While climbing the stairs, Lith didn't know what to think of his current situation. Since he and Solus had fused, most of his usual rage and resentment seemed to have taken a rain check.

Solus could perceive his happiness for being reunited with her, which made her even happier. Because of the mind fusion, their feelings reinforced one another in a loop.

Not knowing when it would end, Lith fed Solus all of his favorite foods, letting her experience them first hand. The care and the attention she received plus all those new tastes sent her on cloud nine.

"By my maker! Everything is so good! Are you sure I can eat so much? You had lunch barely an hour ago." She said worried for Lith's stomach.

"Don't worry, it's nothing we can't cure. We should enjoy this 'pink colored glasses' moment until it lasts."

The first floor was quite peculiar. The furniture was comprised of a few empty bookshelves, lots of mirrors, each one of different shapes and sizes, and a globe. It was similar to the one he had back on Earth, but this one represented Mogar and it was huge, with a radius of over half a meter (2').

Unlike his childhood nightstand lamp, it didn't show the whole world. Only the areas where Lith had been and the places he had visited were depicted.

He focused on the map of the region that was stored inside Soluspedia, recalling the names of cities and rivers, but the globe remained blank.

"So it's not a matter of knowledge." His voice was muffled by all the food Solus was stuffing herself with.

"It only matters where we have been. I wonder why. Any idea, Solus?"

"None. Hey, there's even the academy. Both of them actually. Even the Lightning Griffon academy is marked." The moment she made Lith's finger touch the academy, the globe's surface zoomed in, projecting a 3D hologram, precise down to the last detail.

The hologram was colored in shades of red, giving them a mild headache whenever they focused on a specific room they had visited during their short trip before Headmistress Linnea rejected Lith's application.

Lith then touched the White Griffon, getting the same result.

"I'm feeling a pattern here." Lith pondered. "Let's try the mining town."

The headache persisted. The holograms representing the known areas nearby the academy were all as red as detailed.

"Okay, now let's give the Trawn woods a shot." Lith had never been outside the White Griffon's forest, since thanks to the Marchioness he had access to the Mage Association's Warp Steps that brought him directly inside the academy.

He could have chosen the Lightning Griffon's outskirts, from where he departed along Count Lark, but he clearly remembered how tightly patrolled was the area. So, he picked a closer and much more harmless location.

This time the hologram was blue and the headache was gone. Lith focused on the clearing in the woods where he used to train in the past. When he zoomed to a specific location, the hologram disappeared and Lith felt his attention drawn to the biggest mirror in the room.

It had a silver circular frame and it was so big to occupy most of the west wall. The surface of the mirror rippled and the image of the room it had reflected until a moment ago was replaced by the clearing's spot Lith had been looking for.

"Could this be...?" Lith pressed his hand against the image, but nothing happened. He could feel the cold glass surface under his fingers.

"Maybe we should send mana into it." Solus snapped Lith's fingers, channeling the energy from the mana geyser through the tower and into the mirror. The mana quickly rotated along the frame's edges, making it emits an orange glow.

The glass then turned into a silvery liquid that was drained by the frame, yet the image in front of Lith's eyes didn't change. He was now able to hear the familiar noises of the woods' wildlife, to feel the chilly breeze blow on his face.

"A personal long distance Warp Steps!" Lith was amazed as much as confused.

He tried several locations he knew, even some very close to Derios, the capital of the Marquisate. They were hundreds of kilometers afar, yet they managed to open them effortlessly, without using a drop of their own mana.

"There are only two problems." Solus pointed out.

"One, we can only pick deserted places. If someone looks through the Warp Steps, they could see inside the tower and that would get us into trouble. Two, how the heck do we come back? If the tower stays here, either we split or this thing is useless."

Lith nodded, letting his arm across the dimensional Gate. An unpleasant sensation spread through his body. Both Lith and Solus felt their minds drifting apart, their connection became weaker and weaker, until he pulled his arm back into the tower.

"Guess our condition really is temporary. Probably we'll revert back to normal as soon as we get outside the tower."

They were still recovering from the surprise when the walls shook violently, cracking in multiple spots. The tremors were strong enough to make Lith almost lose his balance.

"What the heck was that?"

"Well, this room shouldn't exist in the first place." Solus ate a chocolate sprinkled biscuit.

"If for any reason our fusion gets broken, it's likely everything will collapse on our heads. See?" She pointed at the cracks that were disappearing as quickly as they had formed.

"Okay, so the globe represents all the places we can Warp to. The headache probably means that a place is unavailable, at least at our current level. I prefer not to try forcing our way through the academies' arrays.

"Not only do we risk getting detected, but we could also spend so much mana to get split. Let's check the rest of the stuff first."

"Yeah, too bad we don't get to understand how we are supposed to return here."

The second biggest mirror in the room had a gold rectangular frame. It reflected an image that left them both flabbergasted.

Lith had now a second pair of eyes, right above his eyebrows, and was shrouded in a golden aura.

"My aura has always been black and red. I suppose it's yours, then." Lith shrugged.

Solus winked at their reflection, making both left eyes close.

"Definitely mine. The question is: what the heck is this for." Lith injected the mirror with mana, the edges of which started to emit a blue glow. Instead of spinning, this time the mana seeped into the mirror until it emitted a humming sound.

"Okay, let's try visualizing stuff again." Lith thought about the White Griffon academy, getting a splitting headache in return. Then it was Derios' turn, but the result was the same.

"Lutia, then?" The mirror turned black for a second before showing him the village's square. Lith discovered that he could move his perspective at will, watching and listening like he was actually there in person.

He could move to any place he had been at least once in the past. By looking through a window, he could also enter inside the houses of the villagers. Their talks had no significance to him, so he kept experimenting with the limits of his scrying device.

"This thing sucks!" Lith stamped his foot on the ground.

"I can't even see the whole village. The range's too short."

"For now, at least." Solus tried to console him, but she didn't believe her own words either.

#### Chapter 255 First Floor Part 2

'Visiting this room is already a sneak peek. Who knows when we'll actually get it? If this is all it can do, then it's pretty terrible.' She thought.

"Agreed." Lith replied.

"Mind fusion, remember?" He added in response to her surprise.

Solus felt stupid for a second, then she had a crazy idea that made Lith's skin crawl. He focused on a small pebble in the middle of the street, using spirit magic to move it. Lith could perceive the tendrils of his mana moving through the air, wrapping around the stone.

Moving it was as hard as it was an elephant. Lith tried a series of chore magic spells too before giving up. Fire blackened only a spot the size of a pinhead, water couldn't freeze it even with the weather being already cold and earth magic didn't manage to crack it.

"It's useless. Yes, we can use magic even from this distance, but the effects are negligible. Unless..."

Lith focused on the area surrounding the tower and the image in the mirror changed accordingly. He could see and hear everything in 25 meters (82 feet) radius, like every single stone that composed Solus's body was his eyes and ears.

He could even use Life Vision and Solus's mana sense at will, allowing him to spot all the animals and magical beasts in the vicinity. When he used chore water magic on a dried up tree, it had the same effect of a tier one spell.

"I stand corrected. It doesn't suck at all. I can use it not only to scout everything within its area of effect, but I can also cast spells while being empowered by the tower and the mana geyser. This is a tremendous improvement to our defensive capabilities." Lith was overjoyed by the discovery.

"I wonder which one of these mirrors controls the arrays." Solus pondered.

"What arrays?"

"I am bound to have several arrays at my disposal, both for protection and attack. Remember what Jirni said? If every noble household has wards to protect against Warp Steps, I don't think my maker was so dumb to overlook the dangers of dimensional magic."

Lith was about to move towards a mirror with a square frame, when his vision cracked, as if he was watching through a kaleidoscope. The room seemed to be spinning around, disorienting him and making Lith lose his balance.



"What the heck is happening?" Suddenly the world wasn't so pink anymore. He didn't feel happy or relaxed, just angry.

"I guess our time has ran out." Solus calmly bit one last pastry while the tower rumbled ominously. The tremors increased while the room was shrinking in size. Countless cracks appeared on the walls.

Like living snakes they spread up to the ceiling, making dust and debris fall on their head.

Lith's mind was too messed up to use dimensional magic for escaping. He couldn't see or focus properly with Solus's mind getting in and out of his own like it was a revolving door.

He could only stumble towards the stairs, but everything happened too fast even for his enhanced body. Huge sections of the ceiling came crashing down, forcing Lith to roll forward to avoid being squashed to death.

A giant piece of stone fell on the stairs, blocking his way.

"F\*ck me sideways!" He yelled while the whole room came down.

The rubble weighted more than a ton, but instead of turning him into toothpaste, it simply pushed him down through the floor. The rock beneath his feet became immaterial for a second, letting him fall down to the ground level unharmed.

He hadn't the time to use any spell, yet he was slowly descending through the air as he weighed nothing more than a leaf.

"Why so scared, dummy?" Solus chuckled.

"The tower is my body and so is every single piece of stone and furniture. I would never allow any harm to befall my beloved host." She smiled.

"Holy sh\*t! You are smiling!" Lith pointed his finger to the figure that was floating in mid air a few centimetres from him.

It was a humanoid female, entirely made of golden light. It had no facial features, aside from her shining eyes, a smiling mouth and a cascade of golden hair enveloping her whole body that floated in the air like she was moving underwater.

"What do you mean?" Her mouth disappeared. Solus had barely the time to look down on her own hands when her body imploded on itself returning to be a wisp made of light.

"F\*ck!" Solus angrily swore.

"Can I see how did I look like through your memories?"

"I don't think it's a good idea." Lith shook his head.

"Pretty please with a cherry on top?" She begged while circling around him.

"Solus, it's for your own good. You wouldn't like what you see."

"Please, I need to know!" She rammed into Lith's head to emphasize her point.

"We just reconciled, I don't want you to get angry or sad."

"I won't, I promise."

"Remember your words, because I will." Lith let his memories flow into their mind link.

He had been true to his word, Solus didn't like it.

"What's this? C cup, maybe more. F\*ck the light? Solus is a shorty, barely 1.54 (5'1") high? Nice legs, sadly ass N/A? Her belly looks kind of flabby?" The images had more footnotes than a director's cut.

"Did you check me out in less than five seconds?" Lith couldn't share a memory without everything that came attached to it.

"Yes. I told you it would make you angry. Or sad. Or both."

"That's why you made me promise!"

"Guilty as charged." Lith nodded with a smirk.

"I'm the one stuck in a pubescent body for at least another few years and as I told you before, you have no idea how it feels. I already have to keep everything I do and say in check. I have no control over my thoughts."

Solus accepted his explanation, but was quite pissed off anyway.

'All this time wondering how I'd look like in a human body and when I finally get to see it, my precious memory is ruined by those sh\*tty remarks. Couldn't he just be stunned by my beauty?'

"So, how do you plan on curing Elina?"

"It's going to be tricky." Lith sighed, remembering the second reason he had decided to solve his conflict with Solus. He needed her help.

"This isn't just anybody, it's my mother we are talking about. I'm not going to take any risks, I can't afford using Invigoration during the procedure. I need my full focus and for you to constantly

monitor her vitals. Just like we did to remove the undead's poisoning, if I slip up, you must prevent things from escalating."

"Don't worry, we can do it. We'll get Elina pregnant in a jiffy!" She declared proudly, making Lith emit a retching sound.

"Gross!"

"Oh, come on! You know what I mean. We just need to get inside her and do our job."

"Please, stop!" Lith begged her. "This is even worse."

"Fine, I'll shut up." She mind pouted.

'I don't know if the prolonged isolation made me socially awkward or it's just that fusing myself with Lith infected me with his dirty mind.'

While pondering about her poor choice of words, Solus found herself resting on his lap. Lith was planning ahead the procedure while caressing the wisp as it was a puppy.

Before she could realize it, Solus fell asleep for the first time in over eight years.

#### Chapter 256 Preparations Part 1

Lith didn't have the heart to wake Solus. She had never slept before and he had no idea if it had been made possible by her improved wisp form or because of their temporary fusion. In the past, even when she accompanied him in his dreams, Solus was wide awake.

She was able to follow him only thanks to their mind link and would get no rest from the experience.

After an hour, Lith had finished planning the procedure to cure his mother and even devised contingency measures for everything that could go wrong he was capable of foreseeing, yet Solus was still sound asleep.

After shielding her with the Hush spell, silencing the area around the wisp, he called Professor Vastor. Over the last year, Lith had exchanged contact runes with all the Professors he had a good relationship with.

"Lith, my boy. Glad to finally hear from you." Vastor said with a jovial voice while twirling his mustaches.

"I was a little offended when you left without even saying goodbye, but now I understand why you did it."

"You do?" Lith had no idea what Vastor was talking about. He was inwardly cursing at himself for committing such blatant discourtesy. Between Solus and his foul mood, he had been too sick of the academy to stick around even a second longer.

"Yeah, thank the gods you left so quickly. When the rankings got out, everything went south. The whole top three in the Light department is something that hasn't happened in years.

"A commoner, a noble and an old noble at that. It sounds almost like the beginning of a joke. Too bad so many people can't see past the end of their noses. In less than an hour, we have been swamped in complaint calls and letters. Most of them are currently warming my old bones."

Vastor showed him a fireplace fueled by still closed envelopes.

"I expected to find you upset, maybe even outraged. I see you are pretty calm despite Linjos's trickery. He should have told us. It would have spared us a lot of troubles."

"What do you mean? What trickery?" Lith's surprise appeared genuine.

"Son, remind me never to play cards against you." Vastor laughed.

"You know, even if we aren't allowed to share the students' grades, we Professors do something called 'talk' about our most promising student. When I heard about you placing third, I asked Wanemyre why she gave you such a bad grade, right before she asked me the very same question.

"Bottom line, we know what happened and we understand why it was necessary. If a third place triggered such a mess, I can't think what would have happened if it was the second or the first." Vastor sighed.

"Wanemyre sure didn't take it well. When the Warden specialization Professor started boasting of their first place, she almost roasted him alive. That woman really has a soft spot for you. It makes one wonder if the rumors about you two are true."

Vastor said it as a joke, but Lith could sense it was actually a serious question.

"I wish." He replied honestly, it was the best way to avoid ruining both their reputations and tainting his achievements with false allegations.

"Don't be so impatient. I get older women are charming, but time only moves forward." For a moment Vastor seemed to be really tired.

"Soon you'll be old enough to court all the Wanemyre in the world. After that, you'll be so old they will pay you no attention unless marriage is at stake. If only there was a way to live forever young. Enough with my whining, to what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

"I was thinking about healing cut tendons, regenerate missing fingers. Little things, just to make a quick buck." Lith explained.

"I have no idea how much I should ask for it." He wasn't worried about asking too much, but to be underselling his services. As an intern at the academy, he always did what he was asked to, without thinking about the fares.

Vastor pondered for a bit before answering.

"Skin, tendons and maybe a tooth or two are manageable for a single mage, but I wouldn't call even a finger a little thing. Without a mage providing the treatment and another the life force at the same time it's a risky procedure.

Anyway, there is no law against being young and reckless. If you were already graduated, I'd say ten silver coins to split between two mages is a fair price. Since you are still a student, one is more than enough.

"After you kill your first patient, feel free to call me or Marth at any time if you need to talk."

Since Solus kept sleeping, Lith used that time to call Wanemyre and Marth to make up for his blunder. They were happy to hear from him and wished him a good winter break.

When he could finally go back home, it was almost dinner time, but he was forced to skip it due to all the food Solus had shoved down his throat while they were fused.

The next morning, Lith woke up in his bedroom perfectly rested. No matter how effective Invigoration was, he wanted to be at his peak condition for the procedure. Solus could act as a life support system in case something went wrong, but everything else weighed on his shoulders.

'I really don't want another sibling, but I realize how lonely my parents must feel having gone from living with five kids to just one. Once Tista and I leave, maybe I should buy them a house somewhere so they do not feel so isolated from the rest of the world.'

Lith opened the window of his room, letting the chilly morning air in. The sun had still to rise and during the night had snowed a little. He warmed up the house and the floors with fire magic before leaving for the bakery.

Even after a good night's sleep, Lith was still full. The thought of going to the village's bakery was enough to make him sick.

Yet Elina had expressed so much joy at the idea of eating fresh white bread that he couldn't deny her that small luxury.

'No matter how much she trusts me, mom is bound to be scared. Even if I'm not going to cut her open as a surgeon would, she is aware of the risks any procedure, even the simplest one, implies.' Lith thought.

'A positive mindset can help me during the operation and make her recovery faster. Also, I'm curious to see how that b\*stard will welcome me now that he needs me.'

Vexal Cornerstone, Brina's father was one of those that almost died at Lith's hand for not defending Tista from Garith's harassment. Ever since then, he lived in fear of Lith coming to finish what he had started, to the point of closing the shop whenever Vexal saw him.

Lith grinned while opening a Warp Steps from his front door to outside the bakery. He could have gone right inside, but he preferred giving the people of Lutia the illusion Warp Steps had limits.

Otherwise as soon as they lost something, they would blame him.

#### Chapter 257 Preparations Part 2

Sure, there was nothing they could do to him or his family but it would still hurt his reputation. Based on what Professor Vastor told him, many nobles were probably out for his blood.

He couldn't afford to risk for the rumors to turn into mass hysteria, giving those old farts a pretext to doubt his integrity, or even worse get him expelled. The fifth year was the last one he had to pretend to be a normal mage. After that, he could just reveal to be a "genius" magician, just like the Magi of the past.

'I'm really sorry about yesterday. I knew I shouldn't have eaten so much.' Solus said.

'Don't worry about it. A little fasting has never killed anyone. How was sleeping?'

'Incredible.' She replied. 'All of my stress and worries feel so distant now. It's like being born anew. I even dreamed a little, I think. Too bad I can't remember anything.'

Lith nodded while crossing the dimensional corridor to his destination, a few kilometers away. When the shop's door opened, the little bell above it chimed, alerting Vexal of a potential customer.

"Welcom..." The baker almost choked on his words when he recognized Lith. He was dressed like a farmer, with a simple brown shirt and pants, but looked nothing like one. His clothes were pristine, without one spot on mud and so were his shoes.

Vexal looked through the window, noticing that the snow outside was still immaculate.

"I'd like five loaves of bread and twenty pastries, thanks."

Vexal had prepared a speech, hoping to make him feel guilty for his lack of sympathy towards someone less fortunate than him. Brina was the same age as Tista after all, and they both suffered from their condition.

How could he be so insensitive despite knowing the pain she was going through?

Yet he was unable to speak. Lith exuded a cold aura that sent a shiver down Vexal's spine despite the heat coming from the oven in the backroom. There was something wrong with him. He managed to move over the squeaky old floor without making a noise.

'Why the heck does he say nothing?' Lith was surprised by Vexal's meek attitude. Usually he doesn't hide his hostility.

'Opps! Sorry, I'm out of practice.' Solus explained.

'I forgot about having to cut down the killing intent you emit naturally. Since your last two breakthroughs, you always mix a bit of darkness magic with your usual glare whenever you are angry.

Mages don't notice it because their mana flow protects them from it, but normal humans are weaker.'

Once Solus took action, Vexal discovered to have held his breath until that moment. Lith didn't look like a ferocious beast anymore, he was back being an annoying prick.

"Can I get my food? I don't have all day." Lith snorted. [freewebovel.com](http://freewebovel.com)

Vexal inwardly cursed at himself, handing over the bread and the pastries as efficiently as he could.

"It's on the house."

With a single wave of the hand, Lith made the goods on the counter disappear in the pocket dimension, replacing them with the money at the same time.

"I owe you nothing and I like things as they are." Lith sneered at him.

"You should have thought about it when I was starving, not now that I have enough money to have a bakery of my own. Keep your fake kindness for yourself, or I'll shove your bulls\*it right where it came from. Who knows, you may even like it."

"Lith? Is that you?" Brina's voice came out of the backroom, soon followed by the sound of quick steps that announced her arrival.

"Hi, Brina. Have you considered my offer?" Lith's voice was calm, but lacked any warmth. He was neither hostile nor friendly towards her.

Brina was carrying a basket of bread with her right arm, always covered by a long glove, while her face and left arm were dusted with flour. She wore a net over her hair and was smiling a lot.

"Yes, of course. How much is it?"

"One silver coin for the whole skin. Five silver coins for each finger."

The idea of losing sixteen silver coins at once made Vexal's heart skip a beat.

"That's it?" Brina sighed in relief, making her father inwardly curse at her.

'Ask for a discount, you damn woman! If you flaunt our money, he will find an excuse to raise the price even more!'

"When you can start?"

Lith had actually asked much more than Professor Vastor suggested, to leave some space for negotiations. The outcome was a pleasant surprise.

'I could ask for more, but it's better to shear a sheep rather than butchering it.' Lith thought.

"Not today, I already have another client scheduled. Is tomorrow fine with you?"

"Yes." She nodded, incapable of hiding her surprise. "How did they find you so fast?"

"Word travels fast. Plus I'm that good." Lith gave her a thumbs up.

"I need you to be perfectly rested, so take it easy today. Also, the procedure will take a toll on you. Before we start, eat as much as you can. You'll need energy. Remember I'm a healer, not a miracle worker."

Lith walked out the door, disappearing from sight before it closed behind him. Vexal and Brina looked out of the window almost at the same time. The snow on the porch was still immaculate.

"Dad, do you think the blacksmith is right? Is he really a god?"

"Zekell Proudhammer is just like my chamber pot, full of sh\*t." Vexal wanted to spit out of disgust just by hearing that name, but managed to stop in time.

He hated the blacksmith's guts. Ever since Rena had become part of his household, Tista would always treat them first and for free while Vexal had to stand in line like an idiot.

During the city assemblies, Zekell would always have his way, getting to pay fewer taxes compared to others simply by casually mention Lith or his daughter in law. To make things worse, the blacksmith always flaunted the enchanted tools he bought from Lith, saying they were all presents.

Unbeknownst to Vexal, it was a lie. Lith only gave presents to Rena while Zekell exchanged with him precious metals to get what he wanted.

Before going back home, Lith went to Rena's house. Giving her some sweets, a few potions and checking on her and the baby, just to be safe.



After going back home, Lith finished preparing breakfast for everyone and used Invigoration to recover the energy spent by using the Warp Steps.

The procedure took place in his parents' bedroom as soon as they finished eating. Lith had Solus take the form of a small disc that he placed over his mother's belly.

"What is that thing?" Elina asked.

"It's a focus. It will help me direct and control the magical energies." He lied in response. Solus's core was weak and her mana capacity small, but she was able to use Invigoration as well.

Her role was to check Elina's condition, using her own mana to fix any mistake Lith could make or at least buy enough time for him to stabilize his mother.

He also needed Tista's presence, to use her as a blueprint. First, he blocked Elina's abdomen pain receptors, then he destroyed the scar tissue causing infertility while reshaping the organ to make it resemble Tista's healthy one.

It was the first time he attempted something like that, so it took Lith several hours to complete the procedure. When he finished, he was exhausted.

'Damn, ever since I burned part of my life force, I get tired faster than usual and my stamina has yet to completely recover.

'Using Invigoration on two people at once for imaging was more difficult than I thought, then I had to cut away the scar tissue one layer at the time to not cause too much damage.

'I also had to prevent her from losing too much blood or going into shock. Unlike when I cured Tista, I couldn't immediately replace the destroyed tissue with a healthy one, since it was the excess tissue causing mom's infertility.

I can only hope that everything is fine now.'

"Is it over?" Elina asked with watery eyes. Despite Lith's precautions, she had experienced a burning sensation in her abdomen the whole time. The blood loss had made her dizzy from time to time, stopping only when Lith infused her with part of his life force.

"Yes." he used a clean towel to wipe the sweat from his face.

"Can I get up now? I really need to stretch my legs a bit."

"Not a chance."

Lith forced Elina to rest while he sat near her, checking her condition from time to time. Regrowing organs inside the human body was something he had practiced at the academy, but altering their shape by switching between darkness and light magic was another thing entirely.

He realized how big was the edge true magic gave him compared to normal healers. Unlike them, Lith was able to split a procedure into different steps instead of being forced to complete it in one go.

It had given him the time to share part of his life force with his mother when necessary and to lessen the strain on her body by taking a break from time to time. He also used those pauses to recover his strength with Invigoration.

The procedure had turned out to be much harder than predicted.

Using Invigoration on two people at the same time while exerting surgical precision magic was taxing for both the mind and the body. There were so many things to check at all times that he was sure he would have failed if not for true magic coupled with Solus's help.

She had checked Elina's physical condition at all times, allowing Lith to focus only on the procedure, and as a life force IV replacing most of the blood lost by herself. Only when she couldn't keep up due to her low mana capacity, Solus had asked for Lith's help.

Solus remained with Elina all night long, making sure that everything was all right. Only after twenty-four hours had passed without complications Lith could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Only then Lith went to Brina's house, removing the scar from the whole arm and making the two fingers she had left perfectly functional. The only downside of the treatment was that the new skin was pale as milk, but Brina didn't care one bit.

"How do you feel?" Lith checked her with Invigoration. Since the procedure was only on the external skin, he had not shared with her any life force, hoping it wouldn't be necessary.

"I feel good. Can I show it to my mother now?"

"Feeling okay doesn't mean being okay. Stand up slowly."

Brina did as asked, but she felt so dizzy she needed to sit again.

"I guess you were right. Gods, suddenly I feel so weak and hungry."

'It seems I almost pushed her physique too far. Vastor is right, a single healer can't restore fingers without endangering the life of the patient.'

He decided to split the treatment in three different days, one for each finger. It made everything easier for both of them and allowed him to better study the regeneration process without witnesses that could notice the anomaly his magic was.

While at the academy he had to use true magic like it was fake, now he could finally use it as he saw fit. After Brina, several other villagers came to him for help and every single patient provided Lith with invaluable knowledge.

After a few days, Tista entered Lith's room while he was using Accumulation to further refine his mana core.

"Say what you want, lil brother, but after seeing what you did for mom and Brina, I don't think that being a healer is just a job. It's something that brings hope and joy to other people. That's why I want your help. I'd really like enrolling in the academy."

Lith was sitting on the floor cross legged, her words merely caused him to raise an eyebrow.

"Once again, that's incredibly naïve of you. I can't wait for you to meet Professor Manohar. If he can't change your mind, then no one can." He sighed.

"Let me be honest, right now you have no chance of getting admitted. You are old for the fourth year, your mastery of the elements is sloppy, and you have no sponsor." At those words, Tista's smile disappeared.

"Use next year to practice magic until it becomes second nature to you. Then, if I manage to graduate, I can pull some strings and make everything easier for you."

Tista rushed to hug him when Lith stopped her by raising his hand. She suddenly had no control over her body anymore. Tista was pinned against the wall with her feet dangling a few centimeters from the floor.

"Tista, you are a pretty girl and the world is a harsh place. This could happen every time you walk alone in a corridor. Show me that you can take care of yourself."

At first, she thought it was just a bad joke, but when Lith refused to let her go, she discovered she couldn't even call for help. Whenever she opened her mouth, no voice came out of it.

"It's just chore magic. You can do it." Lith's words helped her to regain her cool, yet it took her a while to break the spell.

"Why did you do that?"

Lith replied by telling her about all that had happened to him from his first day at the academy. About the hazing attempts, the mean words from the students and professors and even how Phloria had almost got r\*ped.

## Chapter 259 Learning Part 2

"Despite Linjos's best intentions, the academy is still a 'survival of the fittest' environment. If you go in there with a weak mentality, you will not last even a month. Chore magic is your sword and shield against humans, since it's quick and effective. Practice it until you get as good as I am."

Lith had expected for Tista to be shocked and to need some time before making her decision. He was only half right. She immediately asked Lith's guidance, to the point of requesting homework to improve her control over the elements.

After a month passed, her magic foundations had improved by leaps and bounds. Because of the harsh weather, she could spend most of time indoor practicing. Lith's training course focused more on finesse and surgical precision rather than use magic for bashing stuff.

It allowed them to safely perform sparring sessions inside the house by fighting for the control of the color of candles, changing the temperature of a glass of water, or use earth magic to juggle with an increasing number of pebbles.

When the weather was good, Lith's family would use Warp Steps to visit their neighbors or the village. Elina was the only one with a communicator amulet, so she could always call Lith to have them Warped back home anytime they wanted.

Lith used those days to go back in the forest and conduct experiments with Forgemastering. It had taken a while, but the package from Linjos had finally arrived. After learning of his ranking, Lith had spent almost all his points immediately.

He had purchased a Skinwalker armor and several magic crystals of different purity. The Skinwalker armor was similar to his uniform, but better in every way. The elemental and physical protections were stronger. Also, by injecting mana into it, Lith could boost its self-repair speed.

The armor's best trait was its adaptability. It could shapeshift into different forms, the only requirement was for Lith to provide the enchantment a sample of the clothing he wanted it to reproduce.

Thanks to the Skinwalker armor, Lith now had a whole wardrobe of enchanted clothes. They would all offer him a great degree of protection and he wouldn't remain naked for a second like it happened when he switched between clothes via the dimensional pocket.

Lith stored inside the gemstone his farmer clothes, the hunting suit, the academy's uniform and the expensive noble clothes that Lark had bought him.

"Now this is the only suit I'll ever need!"

Lith had chosen the Skinwalker armor not only because it greatly improved his defensive abilities, but also because it made possible to easily blend in with any crowd and provided him a sample of magic crystal imbued clothes.

He had now an enchanted item he could study with Invigoration, which properties he could attempt to replicate and improve by using true magic.

Lith had spent the rest of his points to buy mana crystals. There were too many unanswered questions about them. He was eager to perform experiments with the mana blade away from prying eyes.

Realizing a mana blade like the one he used during the Magic Crystal class had been an easy feat. It was just a handle made of solid silver enchanted to have mana pathways but no pseudo core.

The only issue was the price. Lith had to pay for both the material and the craftsmanship since he was no blacksmith. Lith managed to cut his losses by exchanging his forgemastering works with Zekell's.

The blacksmith was eager to acquire dimensional rings to safely store his possession and enchanted tools to make his life easier, just like Lith was eager to get his hands on free materials.

Thanks to his experiments, Lith discovered that if instead of cutting along a magic crystal's lines he used the mana blade on the cracks that Invigoration revealed, he could recharge the low quality ones or increase their purity by one tier by providing them enough mana.

The crystals' cracks were capable of absorbing and store his mana, but only up to a degree. As soon as the crystal couldn't contain more energy, the cracks disappeared. All the attempts of further refining the gemstones ended up in failure.

'It seems that the cracks are the spots from which the crystal was still absorbing the surrounding world energy when it was mined. It means that it had yet room to develop further and that's exactly what happens when I inject mana into it.

'I wonder if the so called crystal scraps are actually what I need to refine better quality gemstones. If they work like my mana core, the mana crystals need to grow up to a certain size before shrinking to compress and boost their energy and then they need to grow again, repeating the process.

'If I'm right, it means that high quality crystals require not only an abundant mana source, but also a lot of time to properly develop. Since my core took years to turn from red to cyan and its max size is that of marble, I can't imagine how many decades it takes for a mana crystal as big as those I saw down in the mine to form.

'Unless I find a way to artificially grow them at a faster rate, buying and charging low quality crystals is the best I can do. Refining them would take too much time, my mana core takes precedence since I can't buy a better one with money.'

Soon only one month of winter was left and Lith's birthday was closing in. The prolonged rest made Lith recover most of his strength, while teaching Tista turned out to be a great way for him to further improve his foundations about magic.

Everything he taught her about chore magic also applied to true magic. Tista asked him a lot of questions about silent magic and multicasting, some so peculiar that he had never thought about such niche cases.

Unlike him that was used to think big since he was little, trying to improve the effects or the range of his spells, Tista thought small by following his teachings, focusing more on micromanaging the mana.

To answer her, Lith had to revise and deepen his understanding of the flow of mana. After many trials, experimenting together with her, Lith was able to improve the way he waved spells and to further simplify multicasting.

The only times Tista had the opportunity to put into practice her new skills was when Nana had to leave the village either for personal reasons or because of house calls. Lith would spend those days locked up in the tower, trying to incorporate magic crystals into his creations.

Lith's aim was to reproduce an Earth's house facilities, providing his family with running water, lighting, and most importantly, a real bathroom.

After getting used to the academy's lifestyle, not having a bathtub and being forced to use a chamber pot again was quite traumatic for him. His elemental stones could provide the first two, but to make them last until his return, he had to mass produce them.

Elemental stones were just a poor imitation of magic crystals that he had invented before even knowing the crystals existed. They could store a single spell, needing to be recharged after every use.

Even the weakest red magic crystal held much more mana than dozens of elemental stones. Also, it could be turned on and off like a switch, making it last much longer. For any other young mage, using red mana crystals would be too expensive.

Low quality crystals didn't recharge by themselves, and once they ran out of power they had to be changed. Lith could simply pretend to replace them with new ones, since he was able to power them up at will.

Even with the experience gained developing the elemental stones on his own and having studied the academy's tools for a whole year, the task turned out to be harder than he expected.

At first, he used only the lowest quality stones. Lith expected them to be lost or even worse, to explode. Lith had no idea how to link a pseudo core to a crystal since it was a subject of the fifth year, which he had yet to begin.

He used the Skinwalker armor as a template, searching for a way to reproduce its schematics using true magic only. After over two months Lith had yet to find a way to make the process safe.

There were only two weeks left before his birthday when he received a call from Marchioness Distar.

"Your Ladyship, to what do I owe the pleasure of this call?" Lith gave her a bow. Not only Mirim Distar was his sponsor at the White Griffon academy, but she was also his most powerful backer.

"First of all, congratulations are in order. The ranking you achieved brings great prestige to both our households and puts a muzzle on all those who wanted to prosecute me for strong arming Linjos into accepting your application."

"I'm sorry to have caused you so many troubles." Lith bowed again, aware of the meaning of her words. The Marchioness was a busy woman, she would never call him to exchange niceties.

Hers was a business call and she was reminding Lith about how much he owed her before asking him for a favor.

"Don't be." She dismissed his apologies with a wave of her hand, surprising Lith quite a bit.

"Politics work like that. If you cannot attack someone's actions, then you attack their reputation. Remember this well, once you have made some powerful enemies, they will criticize you no matter what you do.

It's something you must get used to, if you ever decide to join the political arena."

"Thanks for your concern, but it's not my intention. I plan to devote my life to magic and magical research. Wealth and status are just a mean to an end to me. I think the Marquisate is in good, capable hands already."

Lith chose his words carefully. The Marchioness' game was still unclear to him, so he decided to make it clear that he had no desire to become one of her competitors. Once he became a mage, Lith would receive a last name and a noble title.

Yet unless he also accepted the role and responsibilities that ruling his lands implied, he wouldn't become a true noble. His title would simply be nominal, giving him status and authority over the lesser nobles, but no wealth or annuities.

Many Professors of the academy had chosen that kind of life, serving their country with their magic rather than as feudal lords.

"Thanks for your kind words." The Marchioness nodded her head in approval.

"Now let's get down to business. The reason I called you is to inform you about the progress we made with the sealed box and the coded message you delivered to me. Sadly, despite countless hours of studies, my Forgemasters were unable to open it. It detonated leaving behind little clues. If only we had more than one, things could have been different." She sighed.

"The contents we managed to salvage matched your hypothesis. It contained a lot of alchemical tools that could have been used to synthesize and transport the toxin. It also carried enchanted items, but the explosion destroyed them leaving nothing we could identify."

'Damn! I know that already.' Lith thought. 'If only I had a decent excuse to provide her some of those useless trinkets I found, I could understand the bigger picture. Too bad there was no way to explain my stockpile of boxes.'

"On the bright side, we have finally managed to decipher the message." The Marchioness continued.

"It contained a series of instructions and names. The instructions explain the timing and dosage of the toxin, so at this point is irrelevant information. The names are quite interesting, though. They belong both to members of the academy staff and the students."

"We know from the royal constables' investigation that only a part of the academy staff listed was involved in the poisoning scheme. The others were simply approached and found ill-suited for recruiting because of their loyalty to the Kingdom or simply due to their cowardly nature."

"The problem is that we cannot interrogate students as we did for the staff. Accusing young heirs of noble households of treason would mean to implicate the whole bloodline. Those are more intricate than a spiderweb."

"One wrong move without hard evidence could escalate things, especially if the kids are actually innocent. Just being publicly suspected of high treason would mean for the households to lose their reputation, upsetting the balance of power in the Court."

"As I told you earlier, in the political arena it's not enough to be guiltless, you must also appear guiltless. The slightest suspicion can make you persona non grata in the right circles, not to mention your business relationship with the other nobles or the Crown."

"It can turn a family on the rise into one in decline. The Crown can't allow itself to lose even a single ally, that's why I have thought of an unorthodox method to continue the investigation..."

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Deirus Household. After the closing of the academy.

Yurial Deirus was having the hardest time of his life, to the point that he often remembered Balkor's attack with nostalgia. At least back then he had friends and enemies. A safe zone and a danger zone. Everything was perfectly black and white.

Now his whole world was in shades of grey so similar between them that the only way to distinguish sh\*t from chocolate was by the smell. His parents and his future in-laws paraded him almost daily during social events and parties, forcing Yurial to always keep his uniform and the golden pin on.



The situation caused him a huge amount of stress, since he was forced to spend a lot of time with Libea, his future wife, while pretending he enjoyed her company. The more Yurial knew her, the more he found himself contemplating Lith's suggestion about how easy it would be to arrange for her to an 'accidental fall' from a window.

Also, every time someone complimented him for his achievement, Yurial prayed to the gods to make him disappear or put him out of his misery, whatever they found more convenient.

Linjos's trickery with the rankings was like a poisoned knife in his heart. With each present and congratulation he received for his undeserved position, his condition got worse.

In two months, he had barely the time to touch a single spellbook. Yurial felt like an exotic beast, no one was interested in what he thought or had to say, only in the griffon shaped golden pin.

To avoid another relapse in his addiction to tranquilizers, Archmage Deirus, his father, had assigned him a personal assistant whose only task was to make sure Yurial would remain clean.

Yurial's father had chosen for him a stunning young woman, so to not ever leave him alone, even at night. Yet her well paid care and attention only contributed to making Yurial feel like a puppet.

'Neither my father nor Libea's family trust me. If this is how I'm going to live my life after I graduate, then I'd rather fail. I have no say in what I do, where I go, not even about who I spend my nights with. What good is to be a powerful mage if I'm only a spectator in my own life?'

The only silver lining in his current predicament was that the Ernas family attended to most of the events he was forced to took part in, allowing him to spend some time with his friends.

He and Lith called each other from time to time with the communication amulet. Every time Lith told him about his slow life in the countryside, Yurial couldn't help but wish their roles were reversed.

In his eyes, Lith's life was perfect, with a loving family, no responsibilities and a bright future ahead, while his own resembled more an elaborate form of torture with each passing day.