

## Supreme M 481

### Chapter 481 Overwhelming Power Part 4

No one wanted to believe their own eyes, but reality was a cruel mistress and couldn't care less for their wishes. Thrud had used her tier five Crystal Griffon spell to encase herself in a thick layer of ice which she had constantly regenerated to protect herself from the Raging Sun spell.

Dark Star and Death Zone had messed up her plan, but her artifacts had managed to keep her alive so that her White Griffon spell was now bringing her body back to its peak condition.

'She has depleted about half of her life force and mana flow.' Solus hoped that, by giving Lith a steady flow of information, he could find a way out of that nightmare. It was the only thought that kept the fear that was gripping her heart at bay.

Lith was honored by her trust, but no matter how many scenarios his brain managed to play, they all ended up in defeat.

'It's not the first time I face a superior opponent, but I always managed to exploit my advantages to come out victorious. Against Nalear I had allies. Against Treius and his cursed object, I used their parasitic nature against them.

'Thrud is perfect. No visible weakness aside her ego and she hasn't activated her vortex even once. How long does it take to bring that damn barrier down?' Lith cursed while running more and more simulations with Solus's help.

Both Solus's mana sense and Kilian's Third Eye revealed how close the array surrounding The Mad Queen's hideout was to crumble. Alas, "close" only works if someone is playing bowls or throwing a grenade.

As long as the barrier prevented them from escaping, they were still in deadly danger.

"You have exceeded all of my expectations, Manohar. It was worth taking my time to put your abilities to test."

'Was this just a game to her?' Everyone but Manohar thought in unison.

"Soon I'm going to take back my throne and once it happens, a Queen needs a King. Who better than the god of healing to stand beside a goddess? Now your title is just empty air, but my machine can make you stronger, younger, even make you handsome. It can turn you into a true god like my father was."

At those words, Manohar's eyes went wide with rage.

"Join me, and together we will rule the Griffon Kingdom forever. Refuse, and I'll kill you where you stand along with your useless companions. What's your answer?" The barrier protecting the outpost was one of her creations.

She knew she had not much time left and her brave façade hid the harshness of reality. Thrud Griffon hadn't expected to be found out. Her hideout contained everything she held precious, all the treasures she had accumulated over time as well as the precious mementos from her long lost family.

There were no Carpenters with her because they were storing everything inside dimensional items. The Mad Queen believed she could easily escape, but she couldn't afford to lose centuries of hard work and research.

She had actually gone all out from the beginning of the fight and her inability to take out even a single enemy annoyed her greatly. Now that her puppies were almost done collecting her things, she wanted to give Manohar a last chance.

Despite his horrible character and not being easy on the eyes, he was the most outstanding man she had ever met. He was barely over thirty, yet he had achieved a knowledge that surpassed her own, and a magic power that had allowed him to survive in a fight against her.

There was so much they could teach each other. Their offspring would be peerless and their rule eternal.

'Killing him alongside the magicless wench, the arrogant farm boy, the old pig, and whats-his-face would be a waste.' She thought.

"Rejected!" Manohar replied with a wave of his hand. "This world is already boring as it is, the idea of living forever is my worst nightmare. Immortality is for losers that can't achieve anything without luck, just like you.

"Centuries of life and for what? A shallow understanding of magic? A slightly better version of daddy's Madness? Don't get me started about that stuff." He pointed at Arthan's Sword and Armor.

"Once again you just copied someone else's work, there's no shred of originality in everything you do or say. If you are a goddess, then you're the goddess of mediocrity and I'd rather die than put up with your stupidity for even one day!"

Manohar's words hurt Lith, Vastor, and Kilian as much as they did Thrud. None of them was a genius, their achievements were all based on hard work and relentless practice. In their eyes, Thrud's creations were dreadful but great at the same time.

Even Balkor, a genius on par with the Mad Professor had accomplished much less. Whenever Balkor needed an array or a magical item, he had to study and realize it by himself, whereas Manohar had unlimited funds and plenty of experts who took care of "minor details" of his research,

"So be it." Thrud still couldn't believe Manohar being a fake mage like her, so she Blinked close enough to hit with one of her spells while keeping a distance that would allow her to react against incoming attacks.

She had battled Awakened in the past and learned the hard way that they could predict a Warp's exit point. Her plan was brilliant, but it failed to bait the real Awakened due to her defenses being too good.

Lith couldn't harm her with his blade, so Blinking behind her was pointless, nor he could take her out with a single spell. He Warped away like the others, simply choosing a random spot to buy some more time.

"Are you really just a man?" Thrud yelled in outrage. Her pride refused to accept that life could be that unfair. Manohar's mockery made all of her sacrifices and suffering appear meaningless.

'Killing him is not enough. I'm going to break him first!' She thought as she Blinked again. The Mad Queen appeared behind the man she hated the most after Manohar. She would keep him for last.

Kilian was the one who had removed the seal on dimensional magic, depriving her of victory when it was within her grasp. If it wasn't for him, they would be already dead.

If it wasn't for him, she could have activated any of the deadly arrays surrounding the throne room and killed them all in a snap. Yet while he was hiding, Kilian had isolated the room with an array of his own.

He had ruined everything for her, and Thrud returned the favor. Her sword went straight through his right shoulder blade, piercing his lung in the process. The Captain fell onto the ground, drowning in his own blood.

The blinding agony he experienced made him wish for death, but Thrud's had planned otherwise. Next, she went for Vastor. The old Professor's body was battered after using so many high level spells and being ravaged by the Black Griffon.

His years of experience could nothing against age. His mind was ready to Blink, but his tired hands failed him. Arthan's Blade opened a deep wound that went from his left shoulder to his right hip, revealing both the white of the bones and the pink of the intestines coming out of his large belly.

"You can save yourself or you can save them, but you can't do both. Today you're going to lose, Manohar. First I'll take your pride and then your life as well."

#### Chapter 482 Nights End Part 1

Thrud's move cornered the god of healing. He didn't need to use a diagnostic spell to know that no potion could save his teammates. Their injuries were too deep, without providing them life force, any healing attempt would be as deadly as the wound itself.

Krishna Manohar knew it was over. He had failed to rescue his rescuers and now, weakened and alone, he was no match for his enemy. They were all already dead, the only variable was the order in which they would die.

The Mad Professor finally experienced defeat and it tasted like horseshit. The monumental self esteem that had been the beacon of his whole existence crumbled like a house of cards. He stood with a blank stare, incapable to react.

'I can't win. There's no reason to play if I can't win.' He thought.

The Mad Queen didn't even bother with him, moving to her next target. Her plan was cruel and implemented with such precision that it would inspire terror in any sane person.

Unfortunately, her last opponents didn't fit the bill. Neither of them was ready to die nor surrender. Manohar fought only to win, whereas they were content with not losing.

"You already managed to hit her, yet she's still alive. What's gone wrong?" Jirni asked while Thrud yelled her promise.

"The problem it's not the sword, I can manage that." Lith said leaving her impressed.

"The armor blocks all of my attacks and in a contest of pure magic, I'm no match for her. While she is free to focus only on countering my spells, I've no chances of winning."

"Maybe I have a solution for that." Where others would see The Mad Queen promise as a death sentence, Jirni saw an opportunity.

"I need you to buy me some time, can you do it?"

Lith nodded in reply. Thrud appeared between them, slashing at him while unleashing a hail of icicles at Jirni.

Lith blocked Arthan's Blade with ease as Jirni rolled behind a nearby column and escaped being turned into a kebab.

Thanks to Solus drawing power from the mana geyser, Lith was still as strong as when the fight had started. Thrud's body, instead, was severely weakened after being hit with the full force of three tier five spells.

It made the physical gap between them even wider. Lith tried to push the opponent's blade aside to headbutt her, but Thrud read his move. She didn't resist, so that he used too much force and found himself out of balance.

The Mad Queen used that split second to step in and execute a shoulder bash against Lith's sternum. It pushed him back and squeezed the air out of his lungs, leaving him defenseless.

'Even though my strength is diminished, the skill gap between us is more than enough to get rid of him.' She thought.

When she tried to lunge at his chest, Lith deflected her blade while holding the Gatekeeper in a left handed grip and returned the favor in kind. He used the momentum of Thrud's attack to double the strength of his own shoulder bash.

She was too close to avoid the hit and the one which followed. The armor could prevent part of the damage, but Lith was much heavier and stronger than her, leaving Thrud in mid air long enough for a right uppercut to land.

Once again Arthan's Armor deflected the hit, but Lith's gauntlet's claws still accomplished their mission. Solus had enveloped herself in a gravity sheath strong enough to open a deep cut right above the Mad Queen's left eye.

It bled profusely, blinding her.

'It's a trap! The Constable was waiting for this moment to strike.' Jirni's reputation was enough to make even Thrud afraid of her resourcefulness. The Mad Queen kept her only eye on Lith while she stabbed with surgical precision at her own blind spot, where Jirni was supposed to be.

Except she wasn't. After her roll, Jirni had dashed toward Manohar to snap him out of his childish tantrum.

"What the heck are you doing? Why aren't you helping?" She said while splashing potions and tonics on the two fallen Spellbreakers. They couldn't save their lives but could prolong them for a bit.

"A single Healer can't save both of them." He replied.

"Even if it was possible, it would be pointless. We did our best and f...." The word refused to roll off his tongue. "I don't have enough mana left to defeat her. Not with those goddamned artifacts supporting her. You are useless and he is too young. It's over."

"No, it's not, you dimwit! Have you forgotten about the Clean Slate spell? It can disable her armor." Jirni whispered.

"You think I didn't try?" He said while pointing at the numerous cuts on his Professor vest. "I need to touch her to activate the spell and she is too fast. My constructs can't transmit spells and the last time my real hands neared her, I almost lost them!"

"Listen carefully, man child!" Jirni snarled. "You prepare that damn spell and we'll do the rest. You'll know when to act."

Meanwhile, Thrud's confusion was getting the better of her. The cut was too deep for first magic to heal it quickly and she had already used the healing spell she had at ready.

Arthan's Armor held another such spell, but once she used it, it would weaken the artifact's defensive abilities to the point the enemy's blade could seriously injure her. Not to mention that wasting such a powerful ability for a small cut sounded absurd.

Lith exploited her blind side to pile up more damage and weaken her with each hit she failed to block. The Armor prevented wounds from opening, but the blunt impact wore down her already dwindling stamina.

When Jirni returned, Thrud's enhanced senses informed her of the enemy's arrival.

The Mad Queen had no idea if it was Jirni, Manohar, or both. She Blinked to safety, putting her back against a wall. Lith saw her exit point and made sure to appear on her left side.

Thrud couldn't see and Jirni was too far to notice Lith's throat turning of a scaly black as he hurled a stream of blue flames.

## Chapter 483 Nights End Part 2

The Mad Queen tried to activate her Sword's Ruler's Will ability to cancel the blue flames, but to no effect. They didn't consist of normal mana which she could assume control of, but of pure world energy ignited by a spark of Lith's life force.

The Armor still protected her even from that kind of threat, yet she noticed that the flames' intensity wasn't dwindling over time. They ate at the Armor's gravity sheath like it was their fuel, wearing down its pseudo core as it was forced to spend mana to keep its master safe.

Thrud activated the Frozen Heart spell stored within the cyan gemstones engraved on the blade. The tier five spell snuffed out the flames and attacked Lith at the same time.

He dodged it while keeping himself in her blind spot. His left hand conjured a cold gale as his right hand took control of the remaining energy of Frozen Heart, adding it to his own spell.

After beating Lith's fire breath, the Sword's spell was reduced to the intensity of a tier two chant. Lith and Solus worked together to weave their tier three water spell like it was tier five.

Its power would still be that of a tier tree, but by merging it with Frozen Heart's remains, they took it up a notch and now their will flooded within the spell's every fragment.

They didn't just link their mana to the world energy to conjure the ice hail, they also continued to control it even after the mana was outside of their bodies, like they did with Necromancy spells.

Thrud countered it with Ruler's Will as she prepared her new spell, but once again Arthan's Sword failed her. The willpower Lith had infused the ice with repelled the Mad Queen's, so that the razor sharp icicles struck her and interrupted her chant.

'Dammit, that sword is troublesome.' Lith inwardly cursed. 'Controlling every single piece of ice required a lot of mental energy. It's no wonder that tier five spells only create a small number of focus points. Splitting your will like that is exhausting.'

To add insult to injury, all of their efforts had barely resulted in a few more bruises. Tired of Arthan's Armor's interference, Lith unleashed a barrage of first magic spells.

None of them was strong enough to kill Thrud, but they were naturally infused with their caster's will, making them impervious to Ruler's Will. The Mad Queen cursed loudly as her spells were interrupted one after the other and her mana went to waste.

After Thrud's timely Blink had messed up her plan, Jirni finally reached the two as she signaled Manohar to be ready to step in. Her plan, or rather, her gamble, would be difficult to pull and they only had one shot at it.

Her body enhancing potion was about to wear off, and once it did, taking another so soon would have reduced effects. Jirni was past her prime, but even if she was still young, her body would never be able to keep up with Thrud on its own.

'I don't want my death to be just another statistic in this madness.' She inwardly griped as she executed a leg sweep from the Mad Queen's blind side. Thrud was thrown off balance, yet she didn't care.

The hit had allowed her to pinpoint the enemy's position. She swung her blade against the new threat and unleashed streams of lightning against them.

Exactly as Jirni had predicted. She held half of her needles in her right hand and the other half in her left as she used them as a pincer to grab hold of Arthan's Sword and rip it from Thrud's grip.

That was the easiest and yet the most dangerous part of her gamble. Usually, the needles Orion had Forgemastered for her were perfect lightning rods, able to protect her from that kind of attack.

Unfortunately, the electricity produced by the Sword had already proved to be able of ignoring her artifact. Jirni could only hope that with them being in direct contact with the enchanted blade, they could absorb most of the lightning before it had the opportunity to strike her.

Even with her iron will and rigorous training, Jirni was still human. There was only so much damage she could bear until it made her lose focus and her hold on her enemy's weapon all at once.

Once again, Orion's masterpiece didn't let her down. Jirni was the spell's target, so the electricity followed the path of least resistance towards her hands and most of it was trapped by the enchanted needles.

Jirni withstood the spell as she pulled with all of her might, yet her plan was doomed to fail. Even from such an awkward position, Thrud's grip was still too strong for Jirni. The potion wasn't enough to overcome the difference in height, weight, and physical prowess.

At least not until Lith understood what was happening and used all the spirit magic he could muster to hinder Thrud's movements and add his own pull to Jirni's. Arthan's Sword flew across the room for only a few meters before doing a U-turn in mid air.

The enchanted weapon wasn't sentient, but among its many spells, there was one which allowed its master to recall it to their side with a thought.

"Now!" Jirni yelled at Manohar.

The Mad Professor Blinked right in front of Thrud, hitting her with two open palms. She sneered at his weak attack and struck at his elbows with her fists, shattering his arms.

Blinding pain almost made Manohar faint. Only sheer willpower coupled with gritting his teeth like his life depended on it allowed him to retain his consciousness.

'Dammit, I hate pain. I knew that taking one for the team was a bad idea, but dying sounds like an even worse one.' He thought while the healing spell he had prepared in advance restored his blood vessels and ligaments the moment they were torn apart.

Thrud's fists were slightly bigger than his own, yet they hit like a sledgehammer. Her smug grin disappeared as she felt her full armor returning to its normal weight.

'The enchantments on her protections have stopped working!' Solus announced with joy.

Jirni ignored her pain and Lith ignored his fatigue while they circled around their enemy making it impossible for her to guard herself against both. The skill gap between Thrud and her opponents was massive, but not even she could block attacks from behind.

Soon the damage she sustained was too much, even for her perfect physique.

"Enough!" She yelled as her eyes turned orange with the activation of the corresponding gemstone on Arthan's Sword.

As Thrud crouched down to prevent being beheaded by Lith's horizontal slash, her weapon generated a small flaming sphere that affected everything in the surroundings except her body.

Lith and Jirni were blasted away by a roaring explosion that left the floor charred black. The Mad Queen used that moment of rest to Blink near Arthan's Madness and store it inside her dimensional amulet.

"It's over you fools!" A burst of maniacal laughter erupted from her full lips as the doors of the room opened, letting her army of Carpenters return to aid their master. They had finished collecting her resources and were ready to join the fray.

"Fine! For once you are right." Manohar fell on the ground with a thud, using the last of his energy to stabilize his companions' conditions.

Then, the external barrier shattered. Dozens of Spellbreakers barged from every direction, turning the Carpenters who were unlucky or stupid enough to stand in their path into mincemeat

"It is over." He said with a mad grin.

Chapter 484 Nights Aftermath Part 1

Dozens of mages and as many tier five spells flew across the room. As chaos ensued, Lith and the others were Warped outside Thrud's hideout.

"Don't worry, we'll take it from here." Said an old mage with snow white long hair and beard. Lith could see several Wardens taking down the arrays protecting the outpost one by one.

The fighters didn't attempt to pile up on Thrud. Even in her weakened state, now that the Carpenters and their expendable vortexes were by her side, she didn't hesitate to make them self destruct.

The Mad Queen was aware of the mana geyser's presence and used it to overload her minions with world energy causing explosions that rivaled tier five spells. She hadn't used it to fuel her arrays because she needed it to draw energy for Arthan's Madness.

The Carpenters' ability to absorb the surrounding world energy was just a pale imitation of her pseudo Accumulation skill. For centuries she had been close to perfecting her father's creation, to the point that her core had actually evolved.

She was on the brink of turning it to purple, but she was unable to correctly expel impurities, leading her core to turn rainbow colored due to their presence. Thrud had used the mana geyser to refine her body and develop her clones before Mogar could reclaim its stolen energy.

Now she was forced to destroy her own sanctum, yet the outcome of that night's events pleased her.

'Manohar alone wasn't a match for me. Even this Country's greatest genius was a mere child compared to my strength. I just have to take my time and kill him as soon as the opportunity presents itself, before he can become a real threat.

'The others were irrelevant at best. My only worry is the Ranger, but first things first. To challenge Tyrus I need more power, more artifacts. Let's see how granny dearest takes this blow to her precious Kingdom!'

Thrud made several Carpenters detonate at once, using them as cover while she retrieved the dimensional amulets from her thralls.

"Thank you for your help, idiots. This is my parting gift!" Her eyes turned purple, activating the corresponding gemstone on her sword. Space itself was torn apart by her artifact, creating a fissure which led her hundreds of miles away.

Banishing wasn't an escape spell, though. The fissure instantly closed, leaving behind a crack that spread to all the recently opened Warps' entry and exit points. Arthan's Sword had made space unstable, turning dimensional magic spells into suicide.

"Fly away!" Yelled many mages at once. Yet a few of their companions didn't manage to disengage from their opponents before it was too late. The fissure Thrud had left behind caused a domino effect.

Each crack made the fissure grow more and more volatile, until it exploded. The resulting flash was visible for miles, allowing both the people at Othre's Mage Association's branch and the members of the Courts to witness it.

When the dust settled down, where once the old outpost stood, now there was only a crater. The Mad Queen had made sure to leave behind no traces of her passage and no clues about her future plans.



Luckily, Lith's group had been Warped back to Othre right after their rescue. Vastor and Kilian were in dire need of medical attention, while the others had left since they weren't able, or in Lith's case willing, to take part in the fight anymore.

"A simple rescue mission, eh?" He said while a couple of Healers treated his and Jirni's wounds.

"Okay, I stand corrected." She shrugged. "I may have actually jinxed it, but we are alive and that's all that matters."

Before they were allowed to rest, the Crown asked each member of the unit for their personal report about the events.

'I could sleep for a week and maybe I will. Yet there's no way I skip the opportunity to get properly compensated. This mission was a disaster from start to finish, way above my measly paygrade.' He inwardly grumbled.

"Professor, could you explain to me how to turn holograms into constructs?" He asked Manohar while they were waiting for their own turn. Lith opened his palm, creating a small replica of the Professor himself.

Yet it was unable to interact with physical objects, passing through them like it was a ghost.

"I can see you have spent a lot of time practicing first magic." Manohar had a smug grin while watching his self proclaimed handsome features.

"I'll tell you what I told the Crown every time they asked me to take an apprentice: I'd rather die than share my secrets. You have already made it this far, young Lith. If you are as talented as I have always suspected, you'll find the answer on your own.

"If you don't, it just means that you are not destined to wield such power. Do not worry, you are in great company. I'm the only known human that can do it." He gloated.

When Lith's turn came, he told them everything that had happened after they sent him to meet the Dawn Court, from their absurd rules and verbal traps to his grasp of Thrud's plans.

There were just a few hours left before sunrise, yet both the King and the Queen attended the reports, pondering every bit of information they heard carefully.

"We are grateful for your sacrifices, Great Mage Verhen. Tell us how can we repay you." Sylpha avoided offering him a noble title or a marriage. He had already turned down those offers multiple times and there was no reason for him to change his answer.

"This experience has proven to me that I'm lacking in several aspects. I need quite a few enchanted items to use as study subjects. Also, I would like to receive ingredients and equipment for my personal lab." Lith provided them a long list of rare materials.

"Do you already have a personal lab?" Was the only question the Royals had about his request. Lith was asking for the equivalent of a Baron's annual budget, but after all he had done, they believed it was a fair price.

Especially after everyone, including Manohar, had stressed his contribution in the fight and reported Lith's ability with holograms.

"Anything else?" Asked King Meron.

"Yes, Your Majesty. In the past, I have requested to check out several tomes, yet they were denied to me. I would like for my request to be reconsidered. Some of them may help me to better understand the threat Thrud Griffon represents."

After witnessing Arthan's Madness effects, Lith wondered if it could teach him how to speed up his own refining process. It was also a perfect excuse to hide the real purpose of his research.

Not only did he request books about souls and reincarnation, but also several others which were meant as misdirection. His obsession with afterlife could be misinterpreted as madness, but put together those tomes made his research seem nothing more than eccentric.

The second list worried them much more than the first one. Most of the titles belonged to forbidden books. Tyris had forbidden the access to some of them in the hope of smoking out the Master or at least their accomplices.

"Last, but not least, I really need a vacation."

## Chapter 485 Nights Aftermath Part 2

Meanwhile Lith spoke with the Royals about the many things he would like to receive as compensation for his troubles, Jirni reassured the other members of Othre's group about the mission's positive outcome.

In her book, every mission she could walk away from was a good one.

"We still have to deal with the paperwork, but that can be done anywhere. I can't wait to leave this awful place. No offense, Dorian." She said after sharing everything she was allowed to with them.

Both Thrud's existence and Arthan's Madness' were strictly on a need to know basis.

"None taken." He replied quietly. The team had accomplished feats beyond all expectations, which meant the Association would award him handsomely. Yet his future personal gains were overshadowed by his guilty conscience.

Not only did Dorian put everyone in mortal danger, but also none of the missing persons had survived the hideout's explosion. With Thrud's escape and countless casualties, he couldn't consider it a victory.

Kamila and Tista sighed in relief. No amount of paperwork was worth the weight that had just been lifted from their chest. They had spent most of the night talking. It didn't make them friends but they felt much closer to each other than before.

"Constable Ernas, I have a few questions for you." Kamila asked.

Jirni turned toward her and noticed she was still holding the camellia like it was some kind of charm. Kamila had retrieved the mystical flower while Lith was dealing with the Dawn Court and she had him imprint the flower before they left for Thrud's hideout.

As long as he was alive, the spell which shaped the hologram would hold it in place.

"Sure. What can I do for you?"

"I have always followed your career, dreaming one day to become a Royal Constable myself. However, this mission made me doubt my abilities. I'm not your match and I don't think I ever will be. Are all Constables required to fight like you do?"

Kamila had proven herself useful more than once. Before asking Commander Berion to put her up for the Constable training course as reward, she wanted to make sure she wasn't just wasting her time with pipe dreams.

"Gods, no." Jirni laughed at the thought. "Otherwise the Knight's Guard would be useless. A Constable is required to be smart, cunning, and above all, loyal to the Crown. Most of them don't see a fight in their entire lives. That's what mages are made for."

"Does a Constable need to be able to use magic?" Kamila was aware that her battle prowess amounted to almost zero. Her brain was all that she had.

"Not at all. Most Constables aren't mages and for a good reason. Take my husband, for example. His heart is that of a soldier, but his soul belongs to Forgemastering. People usually love doing what they are good at, and mages are good at magic.

"When he isn't busy protecting someone, his mind longs for his forges. In my experience, a mage who doesn't enjoy researching the mystical arts is usually a parlor dog. Is that...?" Jirni asked pointing at the camellia.

"Yes. Lith made it for me." Kamila replied while blushing a little. She was too embarrassed to mention it was also named after her. It would sound like marking her territory.

"It's beautiful." Jirni sighed in envy.

'My blockhead of a husband has never made anything like that for me. Plus, Lith has yet to ask me about Phloria. Either he is really taken by this woman or maybe my daughter's ship has sailed. Only when I see them together at my birthday will I know for sure.'

"Do you think someone like me could become a good Constable?" Kamila snapped Jirni out of her reverie. Jirni was her idol, her words meant the world to Kamila.

"I don't know you well enough to be sure, but you performed much better than I expected from a political puppet." Jirni wasn't the type to mince words, making Kamila turn pale.

"You found useful information and even risked your life to save your companions. That's a plus in my book. I could recommend you for the role of field assistant. It's basically the Constable trainee course.

"It teaches you the ropes and gives you the opportunity to understand if you are fit for the job." She said while sipping her tea.

"Would you really do that for me?" Kamila's head was spinning at the sudden turn of events.

"It's not a big deal. I'm just giving you an opportunity. Failing or passing is entirely up to you. Just a few words of advice. The things you see while doing this job will often make you feel dirty inside. It's not for the faint of heart.

"Also, I recommend you fetching yourself a Forgemaster for a husband. Enchanted items are like true friends, you never have enough." Jirni winked, making Kamila become beet red.

'I can always play the long game. As long as the Verhen and Ernas families get along, there's always the next generation.' She thought.

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In the end, every member of Othre's group received a reward proportionate to their contribution and one week paid vacation. Dorian Felhorn was promoted to Great Mage, while Manohar was pardoned for his last escape.

The Mad Professor exploited his vacation and disappeared for a few months, but that's a story for another time.

Jirni already possessed everything she wanted plus several royal pardons, so her reward consisted of giving both her husband and daughter a week leave to spend some time together with the rest of the family.

Much to Lith's surprise, Kamila asked him to spend a few days together. Commander Berion's ploy of using her to keep an eye on Lith had messed up their newborn relationship.

During the last week in Othre, they had gone through thick and thin. All the more reason why he assumed she would have distanced herself from him to evaluate the effects that his presence had brought into her life.

They both agreed to leave Othre and never return. Lith was sick and tired of not being able to Warp or fly at will while Kamila had never visited the Griffon Kingdom's southern regions, so he brought her to Derios, the Distar Marquisate's capitol.

He had been there many times both as a Professor and for other dates but he had never visited the city. They stayed in the same hotel but in different rooms. It was something Lith didn't know whether to be happy or worried about.

'I enjoy my privacy, but she was the one who proposed this vacation and she even brought the camellia along. Then why the different accommodations? I'm getting mixed signals here.' He inwardly griped.

One of the reasons why he had picked Derios, was that it was not only an open-air museum where historical monuments and luscious gardens coexisted, but Lith was also pretty well known. Most establishments would offer him discounted prices.

"I need your opinion about one thing." Lith asked during lunch, after they toured the ancient quarter of the city.

"Shoot." Kamila was amazed by Lith only picking good restaurants that offered local delicacies and always offering to pay the bill.

"This mission made me rack up a lot of merits. I also had the opportunity to remind the Crown that I don't like people messing with my personal life."

#### Chapter 486 Vacation Part 1

"I got permission to get rid of Berion, but since it's you who he tried to manipulate, I wanted to let you decide."

"Are they really willing to replace our commanding officer?" Kamila said in amazement.

"Yes." Lith said.

'If by "replace" you mean shoving him six feet under.' He actually thought.

"First of all, thanks for your consideration." She replied with one of her dazzling smiles.

"I think it's better if we keep him, though. Berion is better than most of his peers and whoever they replace him with, would surely do the same if not worse. The Crown holds you in high regard, whereas I'm just a low level bureaucrat.

"Let's be honest, I'm an easy target to get to you. I wanted us to spend some time together because even if we haven't known each other for long, the mission in Othre allowed me to catch a glimpse of your life in the field.

"I learned more about you during those weeks than I would after dozens of dates. I needed to see if my feelings were born only out of gratitude or the shock of seeing you almost die and now, I have my answer.

"I like you, Lith Verhen, and that's why I have to ask you to be equally honest with me. Do you think our relationship is worth its troubles? I have a messed up life and family. As long as I don't have a position of my own, I'll be a liability."

Kamila had a hard time speaking those words, yet he deserved to know the truth.

During the last few days, Lith had shared with her so much of his world. He had made her dream of soaring through the skies come true and shown her wonders like the circular rainbow visible when looking at the ground from above the clouds.

Just like Constable Ernas had said, those who were like them were killers but also humans. All those moments spent together had made her reflect about their future, if they ever got one together.

'It's like there are two Liths. I'm not afraid of the one who fights like a demon and I really like the one in front of me right now. Yet we are very different and I want him to realize how little I have to offer him.

'I have no family or assets worth mentioning, but that doesn't mean I'm willing to be dependent on others. My career comes before marriage and relationships.' She thought.

Lith was taken aback by her words. His life had made him single minded enough that when he wanted something or someone, he just strived for it. Being rejected was much less painful than being tormented by regrets or loneliness.

He was sick and tired of feeling empty inside. When he was still a kid on Mogar, he had often dreamed of being special. Now Lith only wanted to feel normal for once in his three lives.

"If we talk about messed up lives, I'm sorry but I take the cake. Any relationship means solving problems together that you wouldn't have alone." His joke made both of them laugh.

"So, yes. I like you too and I never considered you a liability. I don't know if our story will be worth all of its troubles, but I'm willing to find out." Lith took her hand into his own.

It was the first romantic moment they shared since their second date and Kamila found herself deeply enjoying it. She threaded her fingers through his and she kept them that way until they got back to their hotel.

Later, that evening, Lith went to pick her up for dinner and found Kamila still wearing her dressing gown.

"If you don't get ready quickly, we'll lose our reservation." He said with a smile. Even though he hated being late, Lith couldn't get angry at her. It was clear how much effort she had put into their date.

Her black hair was perfectly straightened out and so silky that her room's lights reflected on it creating wonderful shades of gold. Her light make up made her skin look flawless and emphasized her oval features.

A sweet scent emanated from Kamila's body that made Lith wish the night was already over, so that he would understand if she was ready to pick their relationship up from where they left it or if she wanted a do over from scratch.

"Sorry it took so long, I want to make this evening special." She replied from the bathroom's closed door.

Lith sighed and looked at his watch. Their reservation was as good as gone.

"Well, be honest. What do you think?" Kamila entered the room wearing nothing but a flower in her hair and a smile on her face.

Lith suddenly couldn't care less about the restaurant's reservation, nor that he had no food until morning came.

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After his week of vacation with Kamila, Lith took another with Solus. He hadn't forgotten about the promise he had made to her and the lost city of Kogaluga was the perfect cover for his off the record holiday.

Unlike Kaduria, the mystery of Kogaluga was of no interest to him. The lost city was plagued by a rift in the air from which darkness magic seeped endlessly. Any living being who died within the city would immediately turn into an undead.

Those reanimated by the rift would all start as lesser undead, like skeletons and ghouls, but they would get stronger over time. The sons of Kogaluga would evolve into greater undead if not destroyed and forced to rebuild themselves from scratch.

It was the result of a failed experiment to grant immortality and eternal life, but it resulted in utter failure. History had shown there was no ceiling to their metamorphosis.

Back before Kogaluga was turned into ruins, its ruler had turned into a Lich and led the horde of greater undead who had been amassed inside the city to storm the surrounding regions before the Kingdom was born.

Yet all of them were just puppets of the rift. It had a will of its own, making any new undead just a means to its own ends. Just like Kaduria, Kogaluga was surrounded by a barrier and the Ranger's duty was to make sure its inhabitants remained at their weakest.

The rift was able to recreate their bodies out of thin air over time, so even reducing the undead to dust was just a matter of further stalling. Normally, it would take several days for a Ranger to scout the whole city and make sure that no clever undead remained hidden.

Thanks to Life Vision, it took Lith less than half a day to find and pulverize them all with darkness magic. He spent the rest of the week with Solus. Ever since she had achieved her green mana core, the first floor of her tower form had been completely rebuilt.

One of her new abilities was to Warp the whole tower to any mana geyser where she had ever been in the past. It allowed them to travel great distances without anyone inside or outside the Kingdom being able to follow their movements.

Luckily, the nearest mana geyser to the lost city was too far away to be useful to fuel the barrier surrounding it but perfect for Lith's purposes.

He simply had to get back to Kogaluga when he had to perform his daily reports, while he spent the rest of the time indulging in Solus's wishes.

## Chapter 487 Vacation Part 2

The first thing Lith and Solus did was go back to Lutia. Solus's physical form was limited to the tower's premises, but she loved the most rolling over the dew laden grass and feeling the warmth of the rising sun over her wisp form.

After being trapped for months inside her ring, even the most trivial of experiences, like hearing her own voice instead of just her thoughts, gave Solus endless bliss. They would walk around the tower, putting her new limits to the test, and change location the moment she started to feel like a hamster on its wheel.

"Are you sure you don't want to bring Tista along?" Lith asked.

"Maybe later. Spending time with her made me understand how odd our relationship is in the eyes of a normal person. I'm sure she would ask me what I think about Kamila, but right now I really don't want to talk about it." Solus sighed.

"The only thing I want to do is sleep." Another change which had occurred after she achieved a green mana core, was that now Solus was able to sleep while in her tower form independent of Lith.

In her normal condition, Solus was unable to rest. Her constantly being awake wore down her nerves over time, especially when Lith was asleep or she was forced to isolate herself from the outside world to give him some privacy.

Sleeping alleviated her stress and relieved her depression. While Solus rested, Lith used that time to study some of the tier five spells the Crown had awarded him with and to further experiment with light magic.

After seeing Manohar in action, Lith had realized he was just scratching the surface of light magic. His efforts and relentless practice improved his holograms even further, making them more realistic.

Unfortunately, they remained ethereal. Lith tried to at least add some color to them but without success. He forged many more camellias, roses, orchids, and each one of them had the colors and nuances he remembered from his life on Earth.

'Why can I achieve with Forgemastering what I'm unable to do without a magical focus?' He pondered to no end nor improvement.

While his forged creations could be easily infused with other elements, mixing light with other kind of magic that wasn't darkness made the images crumble. Lith would have liked to forge

an enchanted item capable of creating hard light constructs, but he had no idea how its pseudo core should be shaped.

Without something to use as a reference, it was just a waste of time. There were too many variables to hope for a stroke of luck.

Lith tried using more mana while shaping the light element, but it only made his holograms brighter, while adding focus made them more detailed but nothing else.

While Solus slept, he moved the tower back to Kogaluga and searched its ruins far and wide for any magical treasure that Life Vision could reveal now that no undead remained.

"Dammit. Either opening the rift consumed everything precious inside the city, or someone beat me to it centuries ago. This place is useless. The undead here have no soul or life force of their own, they are just extensions of the rift."

Life Vision showed him that regardless of the source of the will driving the dark energies, it kept replicating itself. All the undead, no matter their starting form or the evolution process they would undergo, were all the same being.

Lith gave his report before going back to the tower and practicing more magic. Once Solus awoke, she felt reborn.

"Do we have plans for tonight?" She asked after noticing the Sun was already down.

"No. I'm open to suggestions." He replied while patting her wisp form. After they had learned tier five light magic, Lith and Solus had discovered the reason why she was now able to experience physical sensations.

The wisp was only made of light, but the thing that had been growing over time inside of it was life force. Solus's life force to be precise, and it was something completely different from that of the tower.

They had failed to notice it in the past because both Lith's Life Vision and Solus's senses could only distinguish one person's energy signature from another's, but failed to notice when the same person had more than one.

Only the tier five Scanner spell was able to do it. Just like Lith had a human and a hybrid life force, Solus had one as a tower and another in her wisp form. Lith was almost certain that, rather than a sphere of light, it was an embryo of the body she had shown right after they had fused for the second time.

They were both eager to test such a theory, but all of their past attempts to master the art of becoming one at will had failed. Solus had also tried to alter the shape and size of the light part of her wisp form, but she had to stop after discovering it was directly connected to her life force.

"Do you mind watching the stars together? I can't remember the last time we shared a significant moment outside a life or death situation."

Lith's replied by Warping them above the tower's roof, or to be more precise, above the ruins of the second floor. That night the sky was clear, allowing them to enjoy the many bright stars which lit the sky and Mogar's silvery waning moon.



The chilly breeze made Solus shiver, but compared to the nothingness she usually experienced, even a slightly unpleasant feeling had the allure of novelty.

"Do you think we could ask the undead Courts for help?" She asked while snuggling in his arms. Cold had already lost most of its charm.

"It's unlikely, at least on our terms. The Undead seem to be a tight-knit community that only play by their own rules. Kalla was accepted so easily only because she is already half undead." Lith replied.

"We were naïve thinking that they wouldn't try to exploit my nature of Awakened for their own ends. If not for Inxialot's presence, they would have surely tried to take me prisoner.

"I don't want to even think about what they would have done if you came with me. Our best shot is to approach the Council of the Awakened, but only after we understand how rare a magic tower is.

"Worst case scenario, we'll need to be a lot stronger than we are now. They may not care about me, but I doubt someone like a Lich or a powerful mage would hesitate for a single second to kill me to get their hands on you."

"There's another way." Solus pointed out. "We know that Marchioness Distar has an enchanted item that allows her to hide her core. If we can get our hands on a similar tool, we could develop our own version to shield both of us from detection.

"I'm tired of all those people that would only dissect us like guinea pigs. It's time to stop reacting and take the initiative."

"Excellent idea!" Lith nodded. He had almost forgotten about the Marchioness' enchanted hairpin because it was the only one of its kind they had ever met.

"Our only problem is that I never even heard about something like that. If it's as precious as I expect it to be, it could be a royal treasure. Stealing it is out of question and so is revealing we know about its powers.

"The former could make us an enemy of the state while the latter would arouse questions we have spent our whole lives avoiding."

## Chapter 488 Meet the Parents Part 1

Months passed and Lith completed his first round of the Kellar region. Luckily, after Othre's incident, nothing relevant happened. Some of the lost cities were sealed because of phenomenons that were of no use for Solus or Lith.

Others were interesting cases for their studies, but unlike Kaduria there was no one they could talk to in order to gain intel about what caused the disaster. Almost every sealed ruin was populated by monsters who were incapable or unwilling to communicate.

Lith and Solus did their best to unveil their mysteries, but they had little time at each city. The army kept them on a tight schedule because once winter started, small villages and cities without a Warp Gate would be isolated.

Lith could Warp only to locations he had previously visited, which made finishing his rounds of paramount importance so that he could share his contact rune with every mayor who could require his help once the cold season started.

When Lith's birthday arrived, he was way ahead of schedule, which gave him several free days.

Thanks to Invigoration he could work non stop for weeks, while Solus's new ability to Warp between mana geysers allowed them to save a lot of time whenever an emergency forced them to backtrack.

Lith was scared of his birthday because it put him between a rock and a hard place. Things had been going well with Kamila, so after a while, it was only natural that she asked him when he would introduce her to his parents.

His family had also started badgering him once they realized that Lith didn't consider their relationship as a fling. Hence his birthday had become a source of stress. It was the perfect occasion for them to meet.

So perfect that not even Lith could find an excuse decent enough to prevent it from happening.

'Dammit, I never introduced anyone to my family for a good reason. In this stupid world, I'm supposed to already be married. My family and friends are like vultures circling closer with each passing year.'

'Everyone expects me to settle down before I turn twenty, but I can't unless I solve my problem or at least Solus's. So far, distance and conflicting schedules have helped me to keep the two worlds apart, but now I'm against a wall.

'If I don't let them meet, both sides will think I'm ashamed of them. My parents because of their poor upbringing and Kamila because of the age gap. Solus, you are a genius chess player with an incredible win rate. How do I get out of this pinch?' He asked in desperation.

'Genius is a big word since most of my victories are against you, and you suck at chess.' She sneered. Truth to be told, Solus had won a few tournaments using Lith as a proxy, but chess was too recent and had few real players.

She just considered herself like a big fish in a small pond.

'There's no way out. Unless you manage to cause a crisis that you would be called to solve, of course.' Her words were the last nail in the coffin of Lith's hopes. He had no choice but to set everything up.

The idea of meeting her boyfriend's family left Kamila overjoyed for at least five full minutes. After that, panic ensued.

"What do I wear? What can I bring as a gift for them or for you? What if my present isn't good enough and your family starts thinking I'm a gold digger?" Lith enjoyed having company in his misery, at least until she almost cried.

"Why are you sitting there with that stupid grin on your face and not saying anything?" Kamila said after noticing that no matter how many times she asked, Lith would only shrug in reply.

"If you want to break up you just have to say it. Setting me up for failure is just cruel!"

"What the heck are you talking about?" Lith inwardly cursed for having activated the communicator's hologram function.

He had done it out of habit. When Lith traveled for weeks in the middle of nowhere or was surrounded by hostile people who disliked foreigners, Kamila's face was the only beautiful thing he could see all day.

"I'm not setting you up. You insisted on meeting them, how can any of this be my fault?"

"Yes, I've insisted for over a month!" She rebuked. "Why does it have to happen during your birthday? A normal family lunch would be so much easier to handle."

"Easier how?" Lith scoffed. "I bet a month's pay that even in that scenario you would have asked me the very same questions. Even worse, you would worry about having no cooking skills to flaunt."

"Oh gods! You are right. If I don't bring any food your mother will think I'm incapable of taking care of her son. I'm so screwed." Kamila said between tears, reminding Lith that when sense and sensibility clash, usually sense loses big time.

Between her upbringing and having a full time job since she was sixteen years old, Kamila's culinary repertoire was limited to her favorite dishes. Her romantic partners would bring her to restaurants and the army canteen did the rest.

She wasn't a bad cook, she just never had a good reason to practice.

Seeing her anguish made Lith feel like an insensitive jerk.

He had never cared about someone enough to worry about what their family thought. Phloria's family didn't count, because Orion would have disliked him even if he was Prince Charming, whereas everyone else loved him.

"Look, Kami, it's not a big deal." He said with his sweetest voice, in a perfect example of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

"Dress like you would when meeting a friend, show them your lovely smile and you'll charm them just as you charmed me. Besides, no one would ever think of you as a gold digger. Not after putting up with my stinginess for so long."

The last phrase managed to cheer Kamila up, to the point of getting a laugh. Whenever they went to a new place, the best part for her was always the menu. The faces Lith made while checking the prices were hilarious.

After reassuring her, Lith informed his family too. That day joy seemed to be pretty scarce throughout the whole Griffon Kingdom, since even Elina's enthusiasm lasted less than the length of a pop song.

"What should I prepare? What should we wear? What kind of present can I possibly give you? If it's not good enough, after seeing how we live, she'll think we are leeching off your hard work."

"Yeah, and she may be tempted to do the same." Raaz brooded. "She could be a gold digger looking for a mark."

Hearing Solus telepathically laughing at his misery made Lith realize how rude his earlier grin had been. The silver lining was that, after making his girlfriend cry, he knew how to spare his mother from the same fate.

"Please, Mom, don't overthink things. This is just a family lunch, not a contest about who loves who more." He tried to reassure her.

"Oh, gods! He said the L word." Lith's enhanced hearing caught Rena's whisper. "Lith usually avoids it like the plague. This is bad."

## Chapter 489 Meet the Parents Part 2

"It's bad indeed if I can't even use a metaphor without it being dissected!" Lith snapped.

"You guys are unbelievable! You consider me old enough to get married, live on my own, and even have children. Yet at the same time, I'm apparently too stupid to choose who I should date.

"I don't remember a single objection at Rena marrying Senton just because he could be after my money. Why are you blowing everything out of proportion? If my birthday is such a bother, I can always cancel the party.

"I'll spend the morning with you and the evening with her. Everybody wins!" Lith said.

'Or at least I do.' He actually thought.

"Lith dear, we don't think that you are stupid." Elina said while shushing the peanut gallery.

"It's just that Senton had his family business and even if he was a gold digger, well, we were confident that the moment he broke Rena's heart you would've ripped his out." Elina replied while biting her lower lip.

"You what?" Raaz quieted Rena's outburst by placing his hand over her mouth. She didn't know whether to be more infuriated by her parents' lack of trust in her judgment or by the shadow of death that had lingered over her marriage.

"We are just worried about you. Kamila sounds like a good woman, but you are a Great Mage who could get a fief and a noble title with a snap of your fingers. If only you relinquished your mania of traveling like a migratory bird, of course."

Elina had tried countless times to make her son take up a more sedentary career. Every time Jirni called to tell her about Lith's latest achievement, she would feel something crushing her heart.

Elina knew from experience that the bigger the reward he got, the deadlier his mission must have been.

"I'd never force you to choose between her and your family, I'm just nervous because this is the first time you've brought someone home. It means the world to me. Yet since you have always refused to introduce her to us, I can't help but be worried by your sudden change of heart."

"Relax, Mom, Kamila is not a gold digger. I've met plenty of them. Heck, now I can admit I even dated a few, but I never fell for their trickery. They always make up some sob story and then start asking for money, favors, or magical items.

"Ever since I've known Kamila, she has never asked me for anything but to be careful doing my missions. She told me about her family when I told her about mine and that's it. No relative that needs a Healer, no forgemastering asked or given.

"For the record, she wanted to meet you for a month now. It was me who delayed because I was afraid you would scare her." Lith sighed.

Elina had heard a lot about Kamila from Tista after she had returned from Othre. Lith's words made her hope she could be the one who finally grounded her boy, maybe even give her a grandchild or two.

"What do you mean scare her?" She gasped.

"Mom, Kamila is a career woman, she's older than me, and she's not a mage. I would really appreciate no mentions about how much she earns, how many kids she has planned and stuff like that."

"Don't worry, she won't hear a word about it from us, right?" The peanut gallery nodded, even the still gagged Rena.

"What about the rest? Is there something she doesn't like to eat? Anything we should know?" Elina asked.

"Just one thing. She is as terrified as you are of making a bad first impression, so cut her some slack." Lith replied before working out the final details.

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'Based on Earth's calendar and how close the new year is, I'd say I was reborn around mid December. It's odd how people on Mogar have split the year into seasons and weeks but not months.' Lith mused as he opened one Warp Steps after another, crossing the space between Derios and Lutia in less than a minute.

'Hey, Copernicus, less thinking and more acting. You're scaring your date by showing off this much.' Solus warned him.

Kamila was used to Warp Gates and considered them a marvel of magic. Them being fueled by a whole city made it much easier for her to not think about the amount of power they required.

She had studied the maps, so she knew the Marquisate's capitol and the village were hundreds of kilometers apart. Seeing the scenery around her change with every Gate Lith opened with but a flick of his wrist was beyond impressive.

"I'm a bit tired, do you mind if we stop a few minutes so I can catch my breath?" Lith lied through his teeth. They were in the middle of a small clearing, on top of a hill he had picked to avoid dirtying their shoes and pants with mud or snow.

"Sure." She smiled reassured at the idea he was still human. "You shouldn't exert yourself so much. We could have taken a coach."

"And waste a lot of time and money for something I can do for a roasted chicken's worth of energy? No way." He replied with an indignant tone, making her laugh heartily.

"By the way, I know it's your family, your rules, but isn't our attire a little too casual?" Kamila asked pointing at her legs. For the first time in his life, Lith had actually picked someone else's attire.

She was wearing a warm long coat over a salmon pink woolen sweater, black pants, and flat shoes. Lith had insisted on clothes she wasn't fond of and comfortable shoes whereas she would have preferred something more sophisticated.

"No. You are forgetting that my house is in the middle of the farmlands. Heels would get stuck in the soft ground and the kids will make a mess of your clothes. One of your usual pencil skirts would make you look great for about five minutes.

"Then you would trip over their toys and their adorable, little, and ever dirty hands would make you curse every second of your stay." Now it was his turn to laugh.

If not for the self cleaning properties of the Skinwalker armor, Lith would never wear anything but sweatpants near his little brother or his niece.

"Do you think they will like me or will they try to burn me at the stake?" Kamila had been second guessing herself for almost a week. She was older than Lith's biggest sister and was scared at the idea his parents were even one bit as bad as her own.

"You already know Tista, which is a plus. As for my mother, when I told her you would come to our home for my birthday, she freaked out as much as you did. Heck, she even used almost the exact same words." Lith shrugged.

"You didn't tell her I freaked out, right?" Kamila was still embarrassed about the poor performance of her nerves. After facing a Carpenter, she found it unbelievably stupid being so scared of a loving mother.

Maybe.

"Of course I didn't." Lith lied again, as Solus emitted retching sounds in his head.

'I hate how easily he spouts bullshit, but seeing how both Elina and Kamila relaxed after knowing how nervous the other one was, I must admit it's the right thing to do.' She thought while Lith opened the last Gates that brought them in front of the Verhen household.

#### Chapter 490 Meet the Parents Part 3

Just like its master, the Verhen house had never stopped growing ever since Lith had started working as a Healer for his village first and for the highest bidder later.

It was now a beautiful two story cottage, which didn't look like a farmer's home, more like the cozy countryside love nest of a noble. The walls were entirely made of stone and the sloping-roof was covered with high quality tiles.

The inside looked even better. The floor was made of hardwood and covered with soft carpets which helped to keep the house warm and gave it a welcoming feel. Kamila had rehearsed what to say to each member of Lith's family many times in her head.

She wanted to make a good first impression, yet she had no idea the mission was already accomplished. Tista had nothing but good things to say about her. Also, she was the first girlfriend Lith had ever brought home, his family had mistaken his obsession with control in preparing the event for tender affection.

They loved Lith so much that she had a special place in their hearts even before they could meet her and their only worry was to not embarrass him. Thanks to the White Griffon academy, Lith and Tista had developed sophisticated manners and speech, which made them able to easily mingle with both commoners and nobles.

The rest of the family had never left the area surrounding Lutia except during short vacations or for visiting the Ernas household. Count Lark was still as frequent as welcome guest in their home and had provided them with several lessons about etiquette over the years.

The Count found the thought that Lith's parents couldn't accompany him at galas unbearable, so he had tried to help them overcome their fears and inhibitions. Elina and Raaz had greatly appreciated his gesture, but when surrounded by nobles, they kept feeling like a freak show.

Facing Kamila alone, in the comfort of their own home and without being forced to wear fancy clothes still proved to be a harder challenge than a gala for them. Lith couldn't care less about what nobles thought, whereas he seemed to think the world of Kamila.

As soon as the couple stepped in, an awkward silence ensued. Tista had yet to arrive, only Rena was already there.

Everyone was as stiff as a mannequin and the way introduced themselves reminded Lith of one of those tv shows featuring job interviews where the CEO was known to be disguised among the applicants.

The tension in the room was so thick it was hard to determine who was more frightened.

Luckily, kids had no sense of shame nor care for any form of etiquette.

"Big bro!" Aran had turned two years old just a few months before.

He emerged from the bathroom with his arms up demanding a hug, but his pants were still down. When Lith saw his little brother running toward his brand new coat, his battle hardened reflexes kicked in.

"You shall not pass!" Lith yelled as small wisps of light surrounded Aran while spirit magic lifted him off the ground. The light was just for show, so he wouldn't scare people with an invisible force.

"What were you doing in there, young man?" Lith tapped his foot while his parents recovered Aran's pants which laid on the floor like a fallen soldier.

"Poo!" Aran was proud of his ability to use the bathroom and not need diapers anymore.

"Did you clean yourself up before barging in here? Did you at least wash your hands?"

"Maybe?" Aran wasn't sure. He clearly remembered of being almost done when he had heard his brother's voice. The rest was kind of fuzzy. Elina took her son between her arms and brought him back to the bathroom.

"I'm so sorry." Lith said with a remorseful tone as fake as a three dollar bill, beating the embarrassed Raaz to the punch.

"That's why I hate kids." He added with a purposely audible whisper into Kamila's ear to break the ice. "They are noisy, smelly, and messy."

"That's not true! Boys are smelly, girls are clean." Leria protested while tugging Lith's pants.

"My hands still smell like soap." To emphasize her point, she put them under Lith's nose as soon as he lifted her in his arms.

"Duly noted. Leria, this is my girlfriend, Kamila. Kamila, this is my soap scented niece Leria. She dreams of one day becoming a princess."

"Nice to meet you Leria." Kamila shook Leria's small hand that quickly escaped her grasp and went for her hair.

"Are you a princess? Because your hair really looks like a princess'." The little girl had never seen such a shiny black hair.

"Thanks, but I'm not a princess." Kamila replied with a laugh.

"Too bad." Leria combed Kamila's hair with her fingers for a while before losing interest.

"Uncle Lith, can you please cook? Uncle's food always tastes better than mom's." Leria calmly explained to Kamila with a solemn tone.

"That's because your uncle cheats with magic." Rena replied while saving Kamila's hairdo.

"Be careful. He cheats at everything with magic."

"I know, but you can never argue with his results. Every time he stays at my place, he leaves everything cleaner than when he arrives." Kamila replied without thinking.

'Oh gods! Now they'll think my house is a dump.'

"I know, I trained him well." Rena stood on her tiptoes and ruffled Lith's hair.

"Don't listen to him. He's great with kids too. When Leria was teething..." While Rena talked, Tista arrived and the awkward mood faded away completely.

Lith left Kamila with his family and put on his kitchen apron which resembled a mage robe. Fire Vision allowed him to check the temperature of all the dishes both on the stove and in the oven.

Then he used fire magic to make them cook evenly while he stirred everything with water magic and at the same time cut fruits and vegetables in animal shapes with air magic to make them more alluring for the kids.

Kamila had never seen so many ladles and lids float in the air while Lith moved from one dish to another. Between the kids and Lith's skills with domestic chores, they had a lot to talk about.

Kamila also learned about their past hardships and Tista's illness. Kamila was moved by how tight knit the Verhen family was, being able to talk about such a sad past with a smile on their face.

Instead of being emotionally scarred, like it had happened to her, leaving her afraid of any form of commitment, they had overcome it together and their lives were better for it.

"Can I do something to help you?" Kamila joined Lith in the kitchen to resist the temptation to share her troubled past with her family.

'My problems are my own. They don't deserve me ruining this day by talking about sad things' She thought

"Of course." Lith replied as the words "Kiss me. I'm a wizard in the kitchen and I'm good at cooking too." appeared on his apron thanks to a light magic spell. While Kamila was still laughing at his stupid joke, Lith took her in his arms and gave her a long but soft kiss.

"Why did you do that?" She blushed while looking at the rest of the family who was quick to turn their heads around. Kids excluded, of course.

"Because you looked like you needed it." Lith shrugged.

"Stop worrying now. This is not a mission nor a job interview. This is just a lunch for the Verhen family and today you are part of it."

Elina and Raaz shared a glance and clenched their fists in silent triumph while Kamila found herself hoping it wouldn't just be for today.