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Velma had never been the most prolific of witches.

Not for a lack of trying, obviously. She was just as dedicated to becoming a Maester as the next practitioner of prestidigitation; perhaps even more. But coming from such a pitiful pedigree of potterers didn’t exactly spell out potential in her stars.

But as a graduate of the College of Three Crowns, Velma had proven herself truly capable of understanding magic in a way that put her leaps and bounds over the lower branches on her family tree—at least, on a studious level.

But on an applicatory level?

Well, let’s just say that there was a reason why she was seeking out a mentor even after her hooding. Velma’s magical energies were so low that anything beyond base-level offensive and defensive spells were beyond her reach—but while her warding spells were fragile and her healing abilities null, Velma’s most powerful trait had always been her perseverance and an inability to give up on her dreams.

And thus, a long trip to the Moorlands was but the latest in a long line of attempts at increasing her magical capabilities.

The Summer sun had been blaring down on top of Velma for some weeks now. Out of the city it certainly *smelled* better, but as the trees and buildings began to transition to uncultivated hills and valleys, Velma couldn’t help but think that the sun was somehow hotter out here in untouched creation. The switch to her summer dressings was a downright necessity—as was twisting her long auburn hair into an ornate braid that wrapped down her shoulder.

It wasn’t as though she didn’t have the time to ensure that it looked alright. The trip had been long and terribly unstimulating; so much so that she was already dreading the return journey come next year.

The carriage hadn’t come to a halt when Velma took her first steps down, placing her bags down on the mossy cobble beneath her as she ran to meet the woman who had come to meet her at the door. Her arms spread wide and her voluptuous shape drawing her verdant gown tight, the Witch of Eldermoor was perhaps Velma’s greatest chance at actually learning how to overcome her naturally weak magical energies.

After all, if one woman in her family could accomplish it, then whose to say that she couldn’t as well?

“Aunt Wanda!”

With her wide-brimmed hat, short peasant gown, and a dusting of freckles across the bridge of her nose, Velma looked far more the countryside hick than she did an accomplished and hooded witch from Three Crowns. Not at all like the more dignified-looking woman who smiled warmly as her niece leapt from the back of her cart and embraced her after so many years apart.

“It’s good to see you too, Velma.” The moor witch chuckled as her niece wrapped her arms around her, “After so long away, I was worried you’d hardly recognize me!”

“How could I ever forget the face of my favorite aunt?” Velma squished herself tight against the plump physique of the older woman, “I ask mother about you all the time!”

“Oh you’re such a brown-noser.” Wanda chuckled, petting the smaller witch on the back, “Come come, let’s get you inside.”

With a snap of her fingers, Wanda summoned broomsticks from the inner tower—enchanted beings brought to life by magics that Velma understood, but had no hopes of wielding herself. With their wooden hands, two of the domestic golems grasped the handles on Velma’s trunks while another pair marched to the rear trunk and acquired the rest of her belongings. Aunt Wanda stepped away from her niece and ward to pay the carriage driver his fare, plus tip, and sent him on his way.

“Come Velma—you look starved.” The heavyset woman said in a gentle and motherly tone, “I’ll show you to your room, and then we can get started on lunch as we discuss your curriculum.”

As the older woman placed a hand on Velma’s exposed back, ushering her into the old and mossy tower, the future suddenly felt much brighter for poor Middling Velma. She could practically feel her magical energies growing as soon as she set foot in the powerful, mystical, druidical dwelling, and the heavy oaken door shut behind her…

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“Isn’t it difficult to get food, all the way out here?”

By the lunch that had greeted her, it certainly didn’t appear so. While Velma had been taught that there were no stupid questions, just uninspired ones, this certainly felt like an inquiry that answered itself.

It was clear by Aunt Wanda’s plush physique and the succulent spread of lamb and breads that she wasn’t starving out here in the moors. She had grown quite plump in her retirement; far more curvaceous and heavier than when Velma had seen her last, even. Where she had once been quite the wanderer and very much a sought-out companion for adventuring parties, it was clear sitting across from her at the dinner table that the more slow and sedentary life of a retired adventurer suited her quite well.

“Oh, sometimes. In the winter months, it gets a little scarce.” Aunt Wanda shrugged as she dipped her chunk of bread in the small dish of olive oil, “But I *do* send The Brooms into town once a month to procure groceries for me.”

“The closest town is a day’s walk from here, Aunt Wanda—you can control your constructs from that far away?”

“Of course I can!” Wanda’s round face creased a bit along the laugh lines as she smiled in acknowledgement of her niece’s wonderment, “They’re really simple creatures. And one doesn’t take that much magical energy to create. With a little work, I’m sure that someone of your knowledge will be able to make something like my brooms in no time.”

She took her bite of oil-soaked bread and then took a sip from her water cup.

“Mm—but not before lunch is over. Come now, Velma, you’ve barely touched your food.”

Velma had never considered her Aunt Wanda that much of a prolific chef; but then, her experiences with the elder witch had always been limited to situations when she would have been the guest, rather than the hostess. She had found herself more than a little surprised at just how *delicious* the food that her Aunt had prepared for her was… could magic have been involved here as well? Surely a witch as accomplished as her Aunt Wanda could have done something as simple as amplify the taste of her culinary feats…

“I can already see the gears turning in your head, dear niece—there’s not an ounce of magic in that food.” Wanda smiled gently, “Just hard work and pride in my craft. Much the same as in my magical abilities; something that I’m sure you’ll come to realize soon enough.”

Velma looked away from her aunt bashfully. Was she really that easy to read?

“We’ll have plenty of time to discuss as much after you get settled in.” the older woman said, her belly rolling slightly onto the table as she reached overhead for a bit of meat, “I suggest that you take a little time to rest up after your long ride over! You’re going to need the energy with what I have in store for you…”

It had sounded like a threat at the time—as though the quietly regal woman across the table was somehow warning her about the intensity and difficulty of what lay in store for her…

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“Isn’t there anything more stimulating to do in this tower than lay around and eat?”

Velma had often said that to herself inwardly, or at the very least under her breath. Weeks had passed with very little changing throughout her day-to-day routine. She would sit in her room in the tower, slowly acquiescing to the muggy nights of the Eldermoor while spending her days studying with her Aunt Wanda.

“Besides reading dusty old tomes? Probably not very much, no.” Aunt Wanda said in that pleasant, sometimes irritatingly gentle tone that she so often used, “I don’t know about you, but the satisfaction of a job well done in the kitchen is very fulfilling, don’t you think?”

Perhaps if Velma had been any *good* at any particular kitchen work, she would have agreed. But she had spent most of her tutelage under her Aunt Wanda sitting in the kitchen while she prattled on about this magical property and that—the lack of academic terms could be confusing to someone as studiously mindful as Velma, and Aunt Wanda’s lack of formal education could definitely put the two of them at odds.

Honestly, if she had thought that her aunt had become a dottering old cookie baker in her retirement, she might have spared herself the tightness in her dress—did this woman go one day without baking something in the oven?

“It’s very important for you to keep your spirits up when practicing your magics, Velma.” Wanda said in that sagely way as she sat down next to her niece, the soft “whump” of the air being forced out of her flowy dress noticeably heavy, “I’m afraid that you’ve *convinced* yourself that you are unable to do magic, when that’s simply not true.”

Velma shifted uncomfortably in her seat. The last thing that she felt that she needed right now was for Aunt Wanda to yet again point out the fatalistic attitude that years of being unable to cast more than the most simple of spells despite her knowledge base had left her with. For someone who claimed to be so positive, Aunt Wanda was so capable of pointing out the negatives in her outlook…

“And you know what brings my spirits up?” the older woman’s shoulder pressed against her niece’s in a tender, loving way as she leaned in, “A full belly and the satisfaction of a job well done.”

“Well… I certainly have *one* of those…”

Velma cradled her stomach as it distended softly into her hand. There was no denying that her Aunt had become quite the chef since she had retired—to the point where poor Velma’s dresses were beginning to grow tight. If it weren’t for the magical alteration ability that her Aunt possessed, she would have had to offer to go into town in place of one of her brooms if she wanted to make sure that her clothes continued to fit her well…

“How about you come and give me some assistance, honey?” Aunt Wanda pushed off of the seat and rose to her feet, “You’ll feel much better about your *magical* abilities when you master the more mundane ones; that much I promise you.”

After some hesitation, at least slightly brought on by the near-fire that Velma had caused the last time that she had tried to help her Aunt in the kitchen, she took the older woman’s hand and stood up, taking her brave steps in front of the oven, and putting herself fully under the guidance of her more accomplished Aunt…

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And so, Velma’s apprenticeship began in earnest.

“Would you like some more, honey?”

Over the course of the weeks that turned to months that turned to seasons and then a year, Velma would spend her time locked away in the mossy old tower of the Eldermoor, following the teachings of her reclusive Aunt to a T.

“There we are—doesn’t it feel so much better to practice when your energies are replenished?”

During her studies, Velma would come to find that her energies were far often than not more “replenished” than they quite needed to be. With her Aunt Wanda’s penchant for pushing comfort food onto her and with nowhere else to go, there was little else to do in that tower but study and “replenish her energies”.

“If you say so, Aunt Wanda… urp…”

Day in and day out, Wanda made sure that her niece had as much mana to work with as possible, her positive affirmations only matched by her generosity in the kitchen…

And in time, results began to show.