I

Melva 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, Melva 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. Melva’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, Melva’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 Melva 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, Melva 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 Melva 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 Melva’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, Melva 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, Melva.” 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?” Melva 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 Melva understood, but had no hopes of wielding herself. With their wooden hands, two of the domestic golems grasped the handles on Melva’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 Melva—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 Melva’s exposed back, ushering her into the old and mossy tower, the future suddenly felt much brighter for poor Middling Melva. 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 Melva 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 Melva 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, Melva, you’ve barely touched your food.”

Melva 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.”

Melva 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?”

Melva 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 Melva 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 Melva, 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, Melva.” 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.”

Melva 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…”

Melva 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 Melva’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 Melva 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, Melva’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, Melva 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, Melva 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.

II

A year later, Melva would return to Three Crowns as a more accomplished spell-slinger… among other things.

The time that she had spent out of the city had been doubtlessly beneficial. Without the hustle and bustle of the noise that came with living in such a populated area, Melva had really been able to focus on harnessing her magical abilities—and to great success! Now she was able to conjure up fireballs and her wards were inches thick rather than the pitiful fingernail’s width she’d been able to conjure before. Thanks to her Aunt Wanda’s tutelage and the constant practice that she had undergone, Melva had—

“You’ve gone and gotten fat on me, Melva!”

“*Well you don’t have to rub it in!*”

Crossing her arms over her blossomed chest and accentuating the soft double chin that had crept up over the past year or so, Melva huffed impetuously at Jeannie’s accusation.

Well… it wasn’t so much an accusation as it was a simple statement of fact. Melva *had* put on some serious weight while she had been locked away in that tower with her aunt, but anyone who had been there wouldn’t have judged her harshly!

Melva had left Three Crowns as a svelte and slender, spritely and spirited sort of girl. Someone who was full of energy and discipline—the exact same sort of discipline needed to be able to become a witch recognized by the College of Three Crowns despite not being able to conjure up a simple ward spell.

The woman who had greeted Jeannie, the pot on two legs who had heaved herself out of that carriage, had been so far removed from the woman that had left that her colleague and roommate had been forced to do a double take! To Jeannie, there was no way in the Void that Melva could have gone and gotten so plump while she was away—but lo and behold, there she was! All chubby-cheeked and squishy, ripe for the poking!

“It’s my Aunt Wanda’s fault!” Melva puffed out her cheeks as she tugged at her dress, “She’s so good at cooking, and I couldn’t exactly tell my mentor *no* could I?”

“Could you have? Yes.” Jeannie chuckled, “*Should* you have? Definitely.”

“You’re absolutely useless!”

Melva’s round cheeks grew pink as her former roommate and current colleague continued to laugh at her expense. Her soft belly swayed slightly even seconds after she had turned impetuously to the side, bulging enough in front of her that she could see it from underneath her crossed arms. Her dress, magically tailored to fit her swollen figure, clung tightly to the fat that had attached itself so inconsiderately to her physique over the course of her tutelage under her Aunt Wanda; undoubtedly the product of plenty of taste-testing from the kitchen and a lot of that “make sure your energies are full” nonsense.

“You’re so chubby!” Jeannie squealed, “I never thought that *you* of all people would have let yourself go to seed; and so *quickly!* It’s only been a year Vemmy—exactly what was that aunt of yours *feeding* yo—”

“Alright, that’s enough.” Melva huffed, “If you’re not going to help me with my bags, I’ll kindly thank you to wait until you’ve gotten all of this out of your system to come and see me again. I’ve got plenty of work to do, and—”

“Oh you’re such a spoilsport, Melva.” The other witch wrapped an arm around her colleague’s shoulder, hanging off of her chest with her tippy-toes touching the cobbled street outside of her homestead, “Come inside and tell me whether or not I did a good job keeping up your garden—honestly, you can be so *sensitive* sometimes…”

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The fact of the matter was that Melva’s display of her newfound magical prowess was not that impressive.

For a witch of her learning, the things that she was showing off to Jeannie were downright amateur in accomplishment.

But given that she could hardly so much as maintain a simple fireball spell before her trip to the Eldermoor, that made it that much more impressive. Watching her point at various items across the living quarters in which Jeannie had been squatting in for a year and making them wiggle, sometimes spark, may as well have been watching a toddler take its first steps.

“Wow, I’m impressed, Vemmy!” the shorter woman clapped her hands together, “Your sabbatical really paid off!”

“Well… my Aunt Wanda *is* a famous adventurer…” Melva sniffed proudly, eyes closed as she chuckled haughtily to herself, “I’d imagine that if anyone could have trained me to do it, it would have been her.”

“That’s clearly not *all* she trained you to do.” Jeannie squeaked as she nibbled on the cookies that had cooled on the windowsill, “These are absolutely *divine*.”

“Oh! *I* didn’t actually make that.” Melva’s pride swelled in her chest that much more, puffing her poundcake breasts out further as she slapped her hands akimbo on her wide sitting hips, “I had one of my *golems* do that while I was showing off!”

At that, a sad little broomstick shuffled into the room. Its arthritic movements were the telltale signs of an inexperienced mage—but again, given the notorious *lack* of talent that Melva had shown until that point, that made it all the more impressive. After all, she had gone from barely having any magical presence to at least being competent enough to cast the most beginner-level spells. Jeannie might have been far more skilled in most areas of Magic, but seeing Melva have come so far in such a short amount of time was nothing more than inspiring!

“Wooooow you’re really coming along, Vemmy~!” Jeannie kicked her feet back and forth as they dangled off of the couch, “And all it took was for you to spend a year with your Aunt?”

“Well… a year *and* hard study.” Melva cleared her throat, “It wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows, you know.”

Despite the vast physical changes that Melva had undergone over the course of the last year, there was simply no denying that she was a far more skilled witch than she had been when she had left for the Eldermoor. She and Jeannie had been hooded at the same ceremony, when the difference between them was so vast that Melva could hardly spark a fireball. But now that she was conjuring golems, she was at least as technically skilled as any entry-level witch!

“Mm… it actually did a really good job with these…” Melva munched contentedly on one of the sweets that her broomstick construct had made for the two of them, “The last time I left one of my brooms to do the cooking it wound up burnt…”

But then, those physical changes *were* pretty remarkable. Jeannie could hardly believe that the same slender, energetic woman who used to devour the ancient tomes that housed their curriculum was the same chubby, chomping woman who was instead devouring cookies from the plate that had been left out on the kitchen table. Melva’s soft, squishy tummy rolled and hung noticeably underneath her dress, to the point where the outline of her belly was clearly visible beneath the fabric of her loosest summer dress. Her plump thighs touched somewhere beneath all of that fabric—a fact that Jeannie was well aware of given the audible swishing that sounded from the two of them fighting for space that was once plenty.

“I take it that your Aunt Wanda had you do a *lot* of cooking while you’re up there?” Jeannie said in an obnoxious sort of way, feet still kicking back and forth.

“I-I mean… I had to have *something* do to between all of the magic lessons.” Melva’s face turned red at the accusation, “You know, to keep my mind fresh.”

“Uh-huh, sure.” Jeannie pushed off of the bench seating and landed on her feet, “Well, whatever you’re doing, it certainly worked—you went from someone who could barely cast a spell to someone who can animate *at least* two broomsticks. That’s a pretty big step forward, Vemmy.”

“Ugh, I just wish I could have them exercise for me too.” Melva groused as she folded her arms over one another, her little double chin folding noticeably as she assumed a more defensive stance, “Then maybe I wouldn’t have had to learn so much tailoring magic too…”

“Wow, you’re already up to tailoring magic?” Jeannie looked genuinely impressed, “That’s supposed to take a lot of time and skill to master.”

“Aunt Wanda says that it’s not about how much magical energy that you have, but how you use it. And since I spent literally all of our time at Three Crowns studying how to use magical dexterity to make the most out of my abilities, I guess that just sort of translates to a better control over the spells I *do* know.”

“Leave it to your Aunt to turn the most hopeless witch in our graduating class into a pro.” Jeannie clapped a hand across her friend’s back, “If I didn’t know any better, I would have bet that all those cookies were just chock-full of stuff that made you a better spellslinger!”

“If that were a thing, I would have started having my study sessions in the bakery, rather than the library.” Melva chuckled softly, though not without a twinge of regret, “If becoming a Witch of her caliber were as easy as getting fat, I’d have done it ages ago…”

“Well luckily for you, you managed to pull it off at the same time!”

Jeannie slapped her friend’s back in another boisterous outburst, but found herself worried when Melva didn’t at least respond in her usual sort of anger. Fearing that she may have crossed a line, she was quick to apologize to her friend.

“Oh, hey, I didn’t mean it like that Melva.” She leaned her head on her friend’s shoulder, “We’ll help you drop this weight in no time, I prom—”

“No, it’s not… not that at all.” Melva said in a tone that Jeannie, her longtime friend and frequent study partner, couldn’t quite identify, “What… What if my weight and my magical prowess are linked somehow?”

“…I’m sorry?”

“No! You’ve heard the stories; the link between the physical and the spiritual is different for every person! I’ve been skinny my whole life, but the minute I put on a few pounds—”

“More than a few pounds.”

“—*More* than a few pounds, I’m suddenly enchanting broomsticks and casting unbreakable wards?” Melva happily added onto her friend’s statement with a manic gleam in her eye, “Jeannie, what if I just haven’t been approaching my training the right way? My Aunt Wanda *is* always saying that you need to nourish your body if you want your magic to be as powerful as it can be!”

“…Vemmy, did you get heat stroke on the ride back from the moor?” Jeannie’s face turned, “It *kind* of sounds like you got heat stroke.”

“*No*, I’m of perfectly sound mind, thank you very much.” Melva harrumphed at her friend’s refusal to entertain this idea of hers, “Just, like… what if there’s something *to* this, you know? I don’t think it’d be *that* weird, do you?”

Jeannie couldn’t help but think that, yes, this *would* have been *that* weird. Even if Melva was right and there *was* some link between her weight and her magical abilities, it’d *still* be weird. But… seeing how *happy* she was with her progress as a spell slinger and with the undeniable results that she’d already undergone, well… maybe…

“Maybe there… *might* be… *possibly*… something between the two of them?”

“I think that it’s at *least* worth some experimentation!” Melva said in an all-too-eager voice as she picked up another cookie, “If anything, it’s a nice excuse to enjoy myself a little more at dinner…”

“Are you *sure* that this isn’t just an excuse for you to not lose your Vacation Weight?”

“Oh I’m very, *very* sure Emma-Jean.” Melva first-named her friend as she bit sumptuously into her latest treat, “Mark my words, big, *big* things are in store for me if I’m right about this…”

Jeannie coughed, clearing her throat pointedly.

“Erm… pardon the pun.”