

A Magical Meeting

By K. M. Shea

In the days before Stil was the renowned genius craftmage Rumpelstiltskin, he was called Pest, which was short for pestilence.

Stil—or Pest—made his home in the capital city of Baris, Fillia. He was an orphan, or at least he had no parents, and no recollection of where he came from. His earliest memory was of soft smiles and warm hugs, but by age twelve he had all but forgotten the feeling of gentle, human touches, and had been living by his wit and quick fingers for at least five or six years.

“GET BACK HERE!”

Pest dodged a mule loaded with barrels and clung tight to his prize—a small block of whitewood imported from the forests of Farset. The square was about the size of Pest’s palm, and only an inch thick, but even a scrap of famed whitewood was highly prized and outrageously expensive to the likes of Pest.

Pest clutched the block of wood to his chest and ducked under a cart laden with olives.

The woodcarver Pest had swiped the whitewood from—a heavyset man with a formidable beard and threatening eyebrows—puffed as he gave chase, running around the cart.

Pest had a good head-start on him, and he lengthened it by leaping out of the side street and propelling himself into the main market, where people were packed like grapes in a wine press.

Pest crouched low and weaved his way between legs.

“Pest!” the woodcarver bellowed.

Pest ignored the shout and launched himself onto the back of a hay wagon that was rumbling in the direction of the Baris palace.

Pest burrowed into the hay, masking himself as the wagon rumbled through the more expensive housing direct that was splayed in front of the white palace of Baris. He waited until he knew the woodcarver wasn’t following before he leapt from the wagon and retraced his steps to the market, making his way home.

As it was summer, Pest called the high rafters in the public stable his home. It was difficult to get into—he had to climb the next-door building and leap onto the stable roof, climbing in through the window meant for pigeons and birds—but the barn was airy and had a provision of fresh water Pest could use late at night when the stable-hands were sleeping.

Pest climbed a stack of hay bales—which had been long forbidden to feed to the horses as they were coated with pigeon poop—and dug out the goods he intended to sell at the market the following morning.

He had a pearl button that had fallen off a lady’s dress, a bracelet woven of horse hair Pest had picked off combs and brushes, a glossy shell, a finely hemmed handkerchief, and a delicate flower made of paper Pest had swiped from a festival celebrator a month before.

Pest went over the items again and again, nudging them and practicing the pitches he would use the following day. “The bracelet gives the strength of a horse,” Stil decided. “The shell glimmers with luck. The handkerchief...I dunno. And the flower for the best of women,” Stil decided. He practiced late into the night.

The sky was still dark when Pest stole out of the stable, carrying his goods. He couldn’t sell *in* the market—the King of Baris required a license and a stall fee for that—but Stil parked at an alleyway entrance and spread his goods out on a thin blanket—the only blanket he owned—so they could be snatched up with one smooth movement should he need to beat a hasty retreat.

By mid-morning Pest had sold the horse-hair bracelet (which gave the strength of a horse) and the pearl button (guaranteed to bring beauty to any outfit), fetching barely enough to purchase some crusty bread for his lunch and dinner.

Pest was eating some of his lunch when he noticed the west part of the market—the side closest to the palace—was in a hubbub. People buzzed and swirled like bees.

The crowds parted to reveal two figures.

The most eye-catching was the taller of the two—a man, judging by his tall stature and broad shoulders. He wore a cloak of the likes of which Pest had never seen. It was immense and colored the blackest of ebonies that was stark in the bright sunshine of the market. It was decorated with a blue design that sparkled like it was made of sapphires instead of cloth, and sewn to the edge of the cloak were hundreds of gold coins. The coins must have been a foreign currency—Pest didn't recognize them at all. The cloak swirled around the mage, almost like it had its own breeze, making the gold currency jingle. The hood was pulled up and draped over the man's face, so nothing but his mouth and nose could be seen, although judging by the reaction of the market females, his mouth and nose were thought to be very fine.

The man's clothes—made of the same beautiful ebony and sapphire cloth—could occasionally be seen when the cloak swirled just right. He had expensive black boots that, to Stil's eyes, glowed oddly. His hands were bare, except for a single gold bracelet and a sapphire ring.

His companion was less mystical looking, but just as beautiful to behold. It was a young woman who was perhaps eighteen or nineteen-years-old. To say she was stunning was a vast understatement. Pest couldn't exactly discern what her eye-color or hair-color was because they seemed to change with each step she took. When she smiled at her companion her eyes were a sparkling purple, when she looked at the civilians of Baris they turned a true blue. Her hair went from chestnut to russet red in a single step.

She was dressed just as oddly as her companion. She wore an airy white dress that had no sleeves but was adored with gold embroidery. The hem of the skirt had the same gold coins sewn to it as the man's cloak, as did her covering—which was made of gossamer white material and trailed her the same way Pest imagined wings trailed a fairy.

Pest whistled as he studied the pair. "Those two 'ave money," he said.

Almost as if he could hear Pest's words, the man looked in his direction.

Pest froze like a mouse in front of a snake as the man started walking in the direction of Pest's alleyway.

The pair stopped at the edge of Pest's blanket, allowing Pest to get a closer look at the man's strange boots, and note that the woman was wearing fancy white sandals.

"Master Evariste?" the young lady asked, looking at her companion.

Pest stiffened in suspicion and fear as the man looked down at his goods.

"How much for the flower?" the man asked.

"Two copper coins," Pest said, sinking his neck into his shoulders.

The man picked up the paper rose and tossed a silver coin to Pest.

"I don't have change for this," Pest loudly said.

"Keep it," the man said before turning to his companion. Pest rolled his eyes, divided by his good fortune. He hated charity when it was given by those who expected him to grovel, but a silver coin could feed him for the foreseeable future. He was in the process of tucking the coin into his clothes when the man said, "For the best of all women," as he handed the paper rose to the girl.

Pest stared at the man, his fear renewed. How had he known? How did the man know what pitch Pest was planning to use on the right customer to get the best price? How?

The girl hesitantly took the rose with long, slender fingers. "I will keep it for Lady Enchantress Lovelana, then?" she asked, her expression painfully genuine.

The man chuckled and patted the top of her head. "No, Angel. It is for you."

"Oh," the girl said, blushing the faintest pink.

The man turned back to Pest. "A shell for luck? That must have been tricky to—," before he could say more, Pest rolled up his blanket with a practiced snap, scrambled to his feet, and took off running down the alleyway.

He started the pattern for his most elaborate escape route and went at least two blocks before he realized the man and the girl were not chasing him.

"A lucky guess. That was all. Pretty words for the lady," Pest shivered. "I got the silver coin from him, I can lay low for a while."



Three days later Pest yawned in the sunlight, stretched next to his blanket like a cat. Business had been good in the morning. Pest only had two items left to sell—a paper fan he had folded himself and a scrap of white leather Pest had fashioned to resemble a dog collar, although he reckoned it was the wrong crowd to try and sell such a thing too—and was contemplating closing shop for the night.

A shadow fell over Pest, and he lazily opened one eye before rocketing upright.

The shadowy man and his beautiful companion were back. Today the man was decked out in a black jacket with the hood pulled up, and white pants matched with black boots. The girl was both his twin and opposite, wearing a white jacket in the same style, but with black pants and white boots. Both of their outfits were hemmed with gold, and had rubies serving as buttons.

"The fan is for cool air, yes?" the man asked.

Pest didn't bother grabbing his things this time. He just rolled away and ran to the back of the alley as fast as he could. He barely heard the female say, "I think he's just going to keep running, Master," before he fell out of hearing distance and booked it into the backstreets, leaving the two behind.



Pest waited a full week before venturing to the market again. He picked a different alleyway on the far side of the market. It was an area he usually avoided—he had swiped materials and small goods from too many of the craftsmen in this part of the market to be comfortable, but if Pest wanted to replace his blanket, he needed the money.

The thought of the unusual man had Pest so unnerved he was jumpy, and lost two sales that morning. By the time noon came, he still had most of his items for sale.

Pest was so absorbed with watching for the hooded man, that he didn't notice the woodcarver until the large, swarthy man clamped a meaty hand on Pest's thin shoulder. Pest looked up at the man and recognized him as the one he had swiped the small block of whitewood—which was secreted up in the pigeon poop covered haybales in the stable—and immediately started fighting.

He kicked at the large man and tried biting him, but the woodcarver picked him up and shook him like a miscreant cat. “You shape up, street urchin,” he said in a great, booming voice. “None of that, or you’ll make Lord Enchanter Evariste regret wasting his time.”

“Thank you, Master Dimi,” the hooded man said, sounding amused as he stepped into view.

Today the man—the *enchanter*—wore a splendid white tailcoat—with the usual white hood—the tails of which were emblazed with tongues of fire that almost seemed to move. It was cinched tight around his waist—although one of the sleeves was rolled up to his elbow.

The girl was there as well, dressed in a robe-like white dress that looked like the wide, trailing skirt and long, flowing sleeves had been set on fire they were so beautifully crafted. Gold beads and red rubies were arranged in her hair, which was elaborately piled on the top of her head with a crimson butterfly pin.

Pest thought both of the costumes looked very hot, but if they were magic folk they probably valued style over practicality anyway.

“What is your name, boy?” the enchanter asked as Pest hung from the woodcarver’s grip.

Pest said nothing.

“He asked you a question,” the woodcarver said, shaking Pest again.

“This isn’t effective. He is too frightened to talk to me. Would you hold him for a moment, Master Dimi?” the enchanter asked as Pest tried scratching at the giant woodcarver.

“Of course,” the craftsman grunted.

The enchanter and girl stepped away for a moment to exchange words. Pest was so occupied fighting the woodcarver he barely noticed when the girl shook her head and threw her arms wide in a signal of rejection. The enchanter spoke some more before the girl gave in with slumped shoulders.

Within moments the pair returned.

“Please set him down, Master Dimi,” the girl said in a low, husky voice that, in spite of his best efforts, enchanted Pest so he was still when the woodcarver dropped him.

The girl laid a hand on Pest’s arm and smiled sweetly at him. “Now, you wouldn’t fight a woman, would you?” she asked with a sweet smile.

Pest mutely shook his head.

The girl looked over her shoulder. “If you would give me a moment, Master,” she said.

“Of course. Come, Master Dimi. We can safely leave this to Angelique,” the enchanter said, beckoning to the craftsman.

“Are you certain? He’s an unruly one,” the woodcarver said, smacking Pest upside the head.

“I’m well assured that Angelique can handle it,” the master said, amused as he slipped out of the market, the flickering flames of his tailcoat snapping in the breeze.

The woodcarver gave Pest and the girl an appraising look before he too left.

Before Pest had a chance to twist out of her grip, the girl slammed him into a wall with a surprising amount of strength.

“Based on your performance over the past few weeks, you have been invited to join the ranks of the magical and attend the renown and honored Luxi-Domus, the Veneno Conclave academia of magic. Congratulations,” the girl said. Her voice was pleasant even though she held Pest to the wall with a grip of iron.

“Don’t wanna, let me go,” Pest said, wriggling.

“It’s a great honor. You’ve been indentified as possessing magic, specifically craft-related magic,” the girl said.

“Don’t care, leggo,” Pest grunted, twisting away from the wall.

He was shocked when he was slammed back against the solid surface and the girl leaned in. “Listen you snot-nosed brat,” she hissed. “Master Evariste asked me to recruit you, and I am *NOT* going to let him down. You are going to become the best craftmage there is, and you will an upright and outstanding citizen of magic! Do you understand?”

Pest understood that he was facing the equivalent of a female dragon, so he meekly nodded.

“Angel?”

The girl pasted a smile back on her face and slipped an arm around Pest’s elbow. “He’s agreed to come with, Master Evariste.”

“Excellent!” the hooded man said. “Welcome into the ranks of the magical, boy.”



The following day a somewhat bewildered Pest—dressed in fine silk clothes accented with sapphire buttons—stood with Angelique—whom he now knew to be the apprentice of the hooded man and an enchantress-in-training.

“What’s going on?” Pest asked.

“Stop fidgeting,” Angelique said, her hand clasped around Pest’s wrist.

Pest watched as two dapple gray horses were hitched up to a wooden cart.

“Sorry, Angel,” Lord Enchanter Evariste said as he approached the pair. “This is the best we could get at such notice. I would port us through, but I don’t want to risk opening a gateway here.”

“Of course, Master Evariste,” Angelique said in a sing-song voice.

“Can you drive? I have received word from Mage Serenfa. There is a spell she wants that I need to get started on.”

“Absolutely. Pest and I can manage the cart. You just work, Master Evariste,” Angelique said, which was how—fifteen minutes later—Pest found himself staring at the rounded hindquarters of the horses as they pulled the cart out of Fillia and into the rolling countryside.

“Where are we going?” Pest asked.

“Mullberg,” Angelique said, glancing over her shoulder.

Master Evariste was in the back of the cart, tracing glowing symbols and numbers and murmuring to the phoenix and tiny water dragon that perched on the cart.

“Where?” Pest said.

“Mullberg—a country to the north east, located directly above Arcainia. It’s small and somewhat isolated because it’s almost completely penned in by mountains, but it’s home to the Veneno Conclave—the magic capital of the continent,” Angelique said.

“Why are we going there?”

“To take you to the school for the magically inclined,” Angelique said.

“You mean I don’t get to travel with you two?”

Angelique flipped her curled hair over her shoulder. “Nope. You have to be taught how to use magic first.”

“Angel—,” Pest started.

“That is *Angelique* to you.”

Pest ignored the correction and continued, “What is it like?”

“The school?”

Pest nodded.

Angelique hesitated. “It’s...you’ll do well there. Master Evariste says you have craft magic. Craftmages—the good ones anyway—are really rare and quite well-liked as a result. They’ll teach you the fundamentals of magic—the balances and restraints—and the Conclave’s rules. They won’t really start shaping your magic until you are apprenticed with an experienced craftmage, who will teach you everything he knows.”

“What are the kids like?”

“Generally the students are well behaved and kind. The teachers can be...suspicious,” Angelique said, frowning. She glanced over at Pest and offered him a smile. “Though I have no doubts you’ll do better than I did. Why all the worry?”

“Will the other students come from wealthy families, like you?”

Angelique blinked. “Like me?” she laughed loudly before guiltily looking back to see if she had disturbed the enchanter. “My family isn’t wealthy. My father was in the army. Those in the magical community come from all different background. A few are the offspring of magical parents. Many—like you and me—are from civilians. We just happen to be *lucky*,” Angelique said.

They drove in silence for some time before Angelique added, “You can give yourself a new name you know, Pest.”

“What?”

“Master Evariste and I will be recorded as your seekers—the people who found you. Master Evariste chose not to record your parentage or background, so all that will be on your report will be your name, your home country, and your magic type. You can name yourself however you want—most mages take new names anyway. Names have power.”

“Were you always Angelique?” Pest asked.

“Yes, but I’m unusual. I know a weather mage who renamed herself Tempest. There’s always at least a few fire mages that go by the names of Ember or Blaze.”

“I should call myself Alone, then,” Pest said.

“Why?” Angelique asked.

“Because I’m alone. I’ve always been alone, and it’s up to me to care for myself. Nobody cares about me, so I want a name that gives strength in being alone.”

“First of all, that isn’t true. Second of all, Alone is too sad of a name. You aren’t even a teenager. You can’t be melancholy yet.”

“Then what do *you* think I should name myself?”

“If you want a name of strength, you need a name that brings to mind peace and tranquility,” Angelique said.

“What? Peace isn’t strong,” Pest scoffed.

“Is too,” Angelique snorted.

“Is not.”

“It is,” Angelique said, flicking Pest with the ends of the reins. “Darkness and unruliness throws everything into chaos. Being calm and tranquil—free from turbulence—lets a person think and be strong of heart and mind.”

“Hmm,” Pest said, not at all convinced.

“Think about it,” Angelique said. “You’ll see.”



“There it is,” Angelique said, pointing out a large building made of white and onyx colored stone. “That’s the school.”

Luxi-Domus was as beautiful and elaborate as Pest imagined it would be.

The building was mostly towers, each competing to poke the highest into the sky, although there was a massive main building that was four or five stories tall and checkered with white and black marble like a chess board.

The gates of the school were pearl white, and sparkled in the sunshine, and the landscaping was a wash of flowers and lush greenery.

“These gentlemen will take your trunks for you,” Lord Enchanter Evariste said, sliding from the front of the cart. The Lord Enchanter tapped one of two trunks—the one Angelique was sitting on—he had bought and filled with clothes and the various supplies Pest would need.

“What ‘gentlemen’—YIKES!” Pest shouted when he realized two men the size and shape of mountains had ghosted up behind the cart.

He shot past Angelique—who was being helped out of the cart by Lord Enchanter Evariste.

Today the enchantress-in-training wore a beautiful white, airy dress that was accented with rubies. Her hair was gathered in braid, although ivory combs inlaid with rubies pushed some of her hair back.

Lord Enchanter Evariste was dressed similarly in a white coat and breeches, also accented with rubies.

Pest gaped as the men lifted the trunks—which were quite heavy—with ease and carried them through the open gates.

“I wish you luck, young man,” Lord Enchanter Evariste said, placing a warming hand on top of Pest’s head in a fond pat. “You have plenty of talent. If you apply yourself you will go far.”

“Try to graduate quickly,” Angelique advised as the mountain-men disappeared with Pest’s trunks. “It’s much more fun when you get to play with your magic,” she said, grabbing Pest to reel him into a hug.

Pest leaned back to avoid her grasp. “Wait, aren’t you two coming inside with me?”

Angelique flattened her lips and looked down until Lord Enchanter Evariste rested a hand on her shoulder. “No,” he said with a sorry smile. “Sadly we must depart immediately. I have a spell to drop off, and then we will leave the Conclave fortress tonight. But the school is aware of your arrival, there is a guide waiting for you at the gates. They have already received all the necessary paperwork.”

“Oh,” Pest said in a small voice.

Angelique grabbed him, this time succeeding in embracing him. “You will do well. More than well, in fact, you will thrive. I know you will enjoy learning about magic, just as I **know** you will not to do anything to tarnish Master Evariste’s name,” Angelique said, her voice holding a warning.

“Angel,” the enchanter laughed.

“You could at least see me situated,” Pest said, his voice small.

“I can’t,” Angelique said, her voice tight. “But I will write. I promise.”

The enchantress-in-training squeezed Pest tight before releasing him and backing away.

Pest rubbed his face before he squared his shoulders and looked to the school. “Hey, Angel.”

“That’s *Angelique*, and what?”

Pest looked over his shoulder and grinned. “I think I know what I’m going to call myself,” he said, taking a few steps towards the gates.

“Oh? What?”

“Stil! No turbulence, but strength in the mind and heart!” Pest—now Stil—said. He pumped a fist over his head and ran to the school grounds, nearly colliding with the darkly clothed guide waiting for him.



“Is that—?”

“It must be! What is he doing here?”

“He’s here? Where?”

“There, talking with Master Birchen.”

Stil tuned out the words of his classmates and concentrated on the last problem. He had been at Luxi-Domus for a year, now, and was already in advanced classes with students several years older than him.

Angelique had been right, his classmates were kind, but she was wrong about the school itself. It was **dead boring**. Stil was anxious to finish all his classes and learn something *useful*.

“There,” Stil said, seeing the problem with the essay question. “Whitewood shouldn’t be used for fire enchantments. It’s too unpredictable.”

One of Stil’s classmates sighed. “That’s Stil, working away when an *enchanter* is visiting the workshop.”

“Huh?” Stil said, looking up.

“I wonder why he’s here.”

“Who?” Stil blinked.

“Lord Enchanter Evariste,” the classmate said, pointing to the hooded figure at the back of the room standing with their instructor.

Sure enough, it was Lord Enchanter Evariste, wearing an immense white and blue cloak and hood. At his side was Angelique, wearing a cloak in the same style but highlighted with purple instead of blue.

Angelique had been watching, and when Stil met her gaze she smiled. “Stil,” she said, leaving her master’s side to join Stil at his rough wooden workbench. “Master Evariste says you’re doing fantastic on your studies. Well done!” Angelique said affectionately rubbing Stil’s head and messing his hair.

“Angelique, what are you doing here?” Stil asked, swatting her hands away.

“Master Evariste had to drop off papers for the Conclave, so we thought we should check in with you,” Angelique said, her gaze sweeping over Stil’s classmates and their slack jaws. “Aren’t you going to introduce me?” she asked.

“Oh, of course,” Stil said before breaking into the list of names.

Angelique chatted with Stil and his friends for several minutes until someone cleared their throat.

Stil looked up to see Madam Quarrelous, teacher of his Magical Integrity class. Her normally pleasant face was morphed into a look of disapproval.

“Madam Quarrellous,” Angelique said, her smile stiff. “How good to see you.”

“I wish I could say the same, Mistress Angelique.”

“Angel, we’ve intruded on the class long enough,” Lord Enchanter Evariste called. “It’s time to leave.”

“Of course. It was good to meet you all. Keep an eye on Stil for me, please?” Angelique said, winking at Stil’s friends before joining her master at the door.

“After your last class report to the student-life department, Stil. There’s an evening pass waiting for you so you may join us for the evening meal. My carriage will be waiting at the gates,” Lord Enchanter Evariste said before sweeping from the workroom, Angelique on his heels.

As soon as they were gone classmates crowded around Stil.

“*You know Lord Enchanter Evariste?*”

“How?”

“When?”

“Was that his apprentice?”

“What’s her name?”

“Students,” Madame Quarrellous said. “Control yourselves.”

“Yes, Madame Quarrellous,” the students obediently chorused.

As everyone returned to their work, Stil found himself wondering about Madame Quarrellous—a normally open and pleasant woman—and her clear disdain of Angelique.



“Congratulations!” Angelique said, squeezing Stil tight in a hug on the day of his graduation. “I still can’t believe you finished school so quickly! You really are brilliant,” she said, leading Stil away from the celebrating students.

“Thank you. I would have gotten serious sooner if you would have warned me how *boring* classes were,” Stil wryly said, brushing himself off. Angelique’s dress of the day had some kind of glitter magic applied to it, and Stil wasn’t about to let the spell transfer.

“Was it boring? That must have been nice,” Angelique said.

“It wasn’t,” Stil sourly said. “What are we doing, and where is Master Evariste?”

“He couldn’t come today. He dropped me off before heading for Kozlovka,” Angelique said. “But he sent his gift ahead. This way,” Angelique said, leading the way into the stables.

“Ta da,” she said, stopping in front of a stall.

Stil blinked. “That’s a mule.”

“It’s a donkey.”

“Donkeys don’t get that big.”

“Some breeds do, like this one,” Angelique said, gesturing to the ornery donkey chewing hay in a stall that was big enough for him to roll in.

“So what about it?”

“This is Master Evariste’s gift to you for graduating school.”

Stil raised an eyebrow. “A donkey?”

Angelique rolled her eyes. “Yes. You are going to be a craftmage—you’re going to have to carry five billion pounds of goods. Most masters make their apprentices carry everything or pull a cart. Master Evariste is saving you a broken back.”

“I see,” Stil said.

“He said the master you’ve been apprenticed too—Master Redfall—is wonderful and that you can expect to learn a lot under him. Oh—but I almost forgot. My gift!”

Angelique pulled a pack out of the stall and opened the top, revealing a large amount of whitewood.

“Don’t use it right away. You’ll want to make the official rank of craftmage and learn a bit from Master Redfall before you try enchanting it,” she advised.

“Thank you, Angelique,” Stil said, his eyes wide as he reverently touched the wood. He hadn’t seen so much whitewood in one place before! “This must have cost more than the mule!”

“It’s a donkey, and it didn’t. Master Evariste is great friends with the Elf King of the Farset Whitewoods. He gave me a wonderful deal,” Angelique said as Stil dug through the bag, inspecting the different sizes and slabs of wood.

“You know, I’m really grateful to you and Master Evariste,” Stil said. “None of this would have been possible without the two of you. Before I had no one..and now,” Stil looked out at the courtyard with a slim smile.

He had made so many friends during his schooling, and met so many adults that he respected. He went from having no family, to having almost *too many* people he considered part of his family.”

“We can’t take all the credit,” Angelique said.

“Nonsense. If Evariste hadn’t sensed me that day in the market, I would still be in Baris, peddling goods,” Stil said.

“He’s a Lord Enchanter, and yes, Master Evariste sensed you, but we were only in the market looking for you because of the woodcarver,” Angelique said, leaning against a stall door.

“A woodcarver?” Stil asked, his forehead wrinkling.

“Yes. Master Dimi—the one who helped us catch you in the end.”

“Did he tell you I was stealing from him?” Stil asked.

“No. He knew we were in the area doing some work for the King of Baris and sent word to us that there was a feral child in the area who was probably gifted with magic. He had been intentionally letting you swipe raw goods from him for months so you had a way to support yourself, but he knew it would be best for you if you were properly schooled as a mage.”

“He couldn’t have possibly known. He didn’t have any magic, how could he tell I did?” Stil argued.

“Didn’t you realize it?” Angelique asked. “The pitches you used to sell your goods—they gave the items a slight enchantment to do what you promised. They were weak enchantments and wouldn’t be dangerous to anyone, but didn’t you notice when your items could deliver what you promised?”

“No,” Stil said, embarrassed.

“Oh. Well, that was how Master Dimi knew to contact us, and that is why Master Evariste knew to look for you in the first place,” Angelique said.

“I see,” Stil said, shocked to his core.

One of Stil’s classmates poked their head in the stables. “Did you already give him your gift, Lady Enchantress Angelique?”

Angelique laughed. “I’m not an enchantress yet, Razzle, but yes.”

“Great, then come on! We’re going to celebrate at the Green Dragon Pub, come with us!” the student begged.

“Stil?” Angelique asked.

Stil shook his head, dusting himself from his shock. “Of course, let’s go!”



Stil blew on his enchanted quill, activating its magic to make ink sparkle like gold before he started writing.

*It is with great joy that you are cordially invited to the wedding of
Grandmaster Craftmage Rumpelstiltskin and Gemma Kielland*

Stil held his breath as he kept writing the message, detailing the date and place of the ceremony. When he finished he looked over the invitation and nodded in satisfaction before sliding it in an envelope.

“You’re sending out a lot of invitations,” Gemma said, looking at the huge stack of invitations piled on the table.

“I have a lot of friends.”

“I’m glad I made you write them,” Gemma said with a small smile. She picked up a simple, unadorned jewelry box made of whitewood. “What is this for?”

“It’s a gift. I’m sending it with this letter. What do you think of it?” Stil eagerly asked.

Gemma opened the box, inspecting the velvet interior. “So this is what you wanted me to make the velvet pillow for? The box is beautiful. It’s enchanted?”

“Yes. Since you made the pillow I was able to enchant that will ward off tarnish. The box itself is bespelled to repel water, fire, and will resist theft.”

“I’m not sure I want to know how it will do that. Moving on, that is impressive. You must think very highly of the receiver. Who is it for?”

Stil smiled as he wrote a name on the envelope, *Master Dimi*, and slipped it inside the box. “A very old friend who stood with me even when I thought I was all alone. Sit down, I’ll tell you the story.”