

The Art of Control

The apprentice was a polite man. He hated to disturb the master when he was working in his garden, but the question was urgent. After some consideration, he disrupted the master's planting and said, "I need to learn how to transform living things."

"My boy!" The master cried, setting down his pot, "That is magic beyond your years! Though you are skilled, I fear that this is too advanced for you. Besides, what ever would you need to learn this for?"

The apprentice dodged the question. "Master," he said. "When have you ever known something to be too advanced for me?" He flashed a charming smile and knew the master would melt.

He was right; the master was putty in his hands. Everyone was.

It took only a few weeks of training for the apprentice to master the art of living transformations. When he was finished, he thanked his master profusely.

His master had completely forgotten about the question left hanging in the air.

That night, the apprentice went to town to seek out a maiden he had chosen for the project. She was beautiful and smart and lonely. She was perfect for his use.

He spoke to her swiftly, like the river flowing outside of the tavern. His words swept her up as the current did. She was moving without knowing.

Looking into his eyes was knowing magic itself.

The maiden went willingly with the apprentice to his lair where he practiced magic. She even smiled as he cast the first spell.

He had turned her into a small dog.

Though the master complimented the apprentice on how well-trained his dog was, he soon grew weary of the maiden's new form, for she followed him where he went and craved his attention.

He went to his master for advice.

"What about a bird?" His master asked.

Yes, the apprentice agreed that a bird was a grand idea and transformed the maiden once more.

And yet, he was unhappy. For to keep her from flying away, he was forced to cage her. Seeing her in this state pained him – he cared too much for her to see her locked away.

Yet she could not have freedom.

Again, he went to his master for guidance.

“Would a tree do?”

The apprentice thought it over. A tree was stoic, solid. It would not go where he did not want it and it would not leave. But growing a tree took more time and effort and the apprentice was an impatient man.

“Perhaps a leaf?”

“A leaf?!” The apprentice yelled in shock. “And have it blown away with the wind?”

“What about a flower?”

“*A flower,*” the apprentice whispered, his eyes blazing. “Perfect.”

He left for his room and transformed the maiden into a flower. Her soft petals were beautiful, and he could admire her for as long as he wished.

But one day the apprentice did not water the flower. Purposefully or by accident, the flower did not know.

And she wilted.

The apprentice rushed back to his master for a final time to ask for his advice.

“Perhaps you should turn the flower into another kind. One that does not require water,” the master recommended. “A cactus should do.”

The apprentice looked to the broken flower and cast the spell. She bristled and thorns began to grow from her back. She turned her face away from the apprentice in agony as she transformed for the final time. After setting her in the sun, the apprentice was pleased. He could come and go as he chose. He gave her attention when the sun was hitting her just right, but he belonged to someone else in the evenings. He knew he had won.

And the reason that she did not require watering was because her own tears would do the trick.

And the reason that she sat in the sun was because she felt no other warmth.

And the reason that the nights were so long was because she was lonely and not alone.

And the reason that she loved her pot was because she was homesick for a place that no longer existed. She was not sure if it had ever existed at all.

And the reason that my skin was prickled was because no one else could touch me, but you would not either.