

## A SPINNER'S TALE

by Lisa Stringfellow

### Chapter 1 - Thread Break

Leandra would never forget the look of agony on Darian's face on Proving Day. The candidates had taken their turn one by one before the Council. The Elders watched each boy come to the center of the room, some with stoic faces, others nodding encouragement. Each boy spoke the spell of Making they had learned and hoped to produce something, a shadow, a thread, some sign that they had the gift. Nothing had happened until Darian's turn.

When her brother took his place before the fire pit with a look of utter concentration on his face, the Elders and witnesses became silent. The task was simple. If he had the gift of the Spinners, he would be able to speak to the spirit of Fire and coax it into being.

"Spirit of the flame, hear my words." Darian spoke with a strong, but cautious voice. "Come forth and share your light." He moved his hands in the careful patterns he had learned attempting to drawing the invisible threads of Fire from the air and weaving them into being.

Seconds passed, and then something began to happen. A wisp of smoke slowly rose from the kindling in the fire pit. A spark appeared and then flames began to hungrily lick upward in the fire pile. A smile of triumph spread across Darian's face as the crowd burst forth with cheers and the men of the Council nodded in approval. In the next moment, everything went horribly wrong.

A moment's inattention was all the fire needed to break free from the control Darian had been wielding. With wild abandon, it shot up, breaking the threads of essence Darian had been weaving and engulfed him in flames.

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Three years had passed since that day. Sometimes when Leandra looked at Darian's scars, the sinuous patterns of burns winding up his arms and across the right side of his face, a deep sadness washed over her. He had lost much in the accident. His place as an Apprentice was foremost, but with that door closed, so many other paths were cut off. Darian had hoped to be a great Spinner and sit on the Council someday. Now to take over their small family farm when he was of age was the height of his aspirations.

Leandra sighed. Darian teased her and called her a cloud-bringer when she had these moments and he was right. She did have a tendency to look at the bad rather than the good. Her family did have much for which to be grateful. Although badly injured, Darian had survived. Their mother Nalia had been there that day and was the first by his side, cradling his charred figure in her arms as she cried in anguish. Later, she sat by his bedside, caring for his ghastly wounds, endlessly changing his dressings, and applying the special herbs that Spinner Argol had brought to lessen Darian's pain and speed healing.

It had taken weeks before he could begin to move and months before he could leave the house and begin to help around the farm. He walked with a limp now because the fire had scarred his legs so badly. His face though was the same kind, caring Darian she knew. Almost. The right side, the side that was facing the fire pit, had a waxen look, like a candle that had been held too close to the flame. His dark hair, which had grown back as thick and wavy as before and fell over his forehead, softened the appearance. Still, his mouth tilted down on the edge and his right eye was molded into a permanent squint. He joked that people would always think he had the sun in his eyes when they saw him from that side. Leandra smiled as she thought of his words.

She looked up. The sun was moving higher in the sky and she still had not finished her task. Darian would be done harnessing the donkey by now. How had she let the time get away? She quickly bent over the bushes again and tried to pick the berries as fast as she could. Her long brown hair was

pulled back from her face in a single braid, which hung over her shoulder. Her brow was furrowed as she directed her full attention to her work.

The basket was almost full, but she needed it to be completely full if she was to fetch a good price in the market. Leandra's nimble fingers swiftly flew from branch to branch, plucking the ripest berries and tossing them into her basket. Just as she was finishing, she heard her mother's voice call across the field.

"Leandra! What keeps you? We must leave now for the village." called Nalia.

"Here, Mother! I'm coming." Leandra called back. She hoisted the now heavy basket into the crook of her arm, pulled her skirt up with her free hand and made a run towards the house and her mother's impatient form, which was waiting by the cart. Market was important every week, since selling the farm's goods were how they survived, but today's market was more important than any had been in a long time.

Darian waited by the cart with his mother. He was sixteen now and looked much like his father did before he had died. Tall and muscled, Darian, took Leandra's basket as she came up to them and lifted in into the back of the cart along with the other barrels and boxes of goods they were taking to market.

Nalia turned a disapproving eye to her daughter. "Leandra, what took you so long? I told you I wanted to be on our way just after sunrise. Now the crowds will be thick and we will have to choose a stall at the edge of the market."

"Sorry, Mother," Leandra mumbled, "I didn't realize how much time had past." She thought guiltily of the moments she had spent watching a doe graze at the edge of the meadow and examining the bird's nest she had found in the walnut tree.

Nalia sighed as she fingered the hair framing her daughter's oval face. "It is always something with you, Leandra. You need to focus and mind your responsibilities. We will talk more later, but now we must hurry for the market."

Leandra, nodded and made her way around the back of the cart as her mother turned to prepare to go. Darian was loading a few last parcels and caught Leandra's eye with a grin.

"So what was it this time?" He whispered. "Didn't you stop to wade in the pond the last week?"

"Stop it, Darian." Leandra whispered back sulkily. "I know I'm a scatterbrain. I don't mean to be, but things just attract my attention. I almost can't help myself. I just wish it didn't get me in trouble so much."

"Don't worry," Darian smiled, "Someday you'll find a way to be yourself *and* make it to market on time. But right now... you need to hop in!" and he lifted her into the back of the cart where she sat on a box of apples.

Darian's face took on a serious look. "Be sure to help Mother. Proving Day is coming and with luck the crowds will be good. We can't afford not to make our price today. You know how much we need today's sale."

"I know," said Leandra as the cart lurched forward and headed for the village road. "It means everything."