

## **The Witch's Maid**

*1343 IC*

Zoralie shivered as she entered the opulent dining hall, its stone walls covered in tapestries depicting the various magical and political achievements of her masters. Zoralie was a small, spritely woman of twenty-four, with flaming red hair tied back in twin braids and a rounded, plump physique. The maid had been sent to the Castle to serve the Witches who lived there, so that her village would not need to pay a tribute of grains or materials. Over the past three years, she had seen many of her fellow servants suffer the whims of the lord and lady of the castle, but she had become something of a favorite of Mistress Pleasance, and - for now - was shielded from their fates.

But she was not shielded from Thorton, and whenever she was forced to serve him - usually because some other servant was suffering a punishment - she worried about how she would fare. Today, as she carefully balanced a serving tray with a glass of wine and a bowl of chicken stew, she saw that Thorton was alone at the table, a ledger spread out in front of him and an empty glass set next to him. The Witch of Nungal was a blocky man, his hair cropped short and square, his beard slightly unkempt, and his tanned skin covered in a fine layer of dark hair. He was staring intently at his formulas, and barely responded to her approach.

"Your lunch, master," Zoralie said softly. She set down the tray, and moved to place the wine glass on the table next to him. As she did, Thorton's hand reached out to take the glass directly from her, and they collided.

For a single frozen moment, the maid stared in horror, scrambling to catch the glass that had suddenly been knocked spinning. Instead, she simply knocked it at an angle, sending wine spilling across Thorton's ledger.

Thorton and Zoralie stared at the spreading red stain. Then the Witch looked up at her, eyes furrowing in anger.

"I'm sorry, master!" Zoralie wailed, falling to her knees and pressing her head against the floor. "It was an accident, I swear."

“Oh, I believe you,” Thorton said, a dangerous undertone to his calm words. “No maid of ours would be foolish enough to do *this* on purpose.” He stood, gritting his teeth. “The ledger is ruined. I’ll have to copy it all over again. I don’t know why my wife puts up with you.”

“I’m sorry, master,” Zoralie said again, swallowing. When Thorton started discussing his wife in that tone, it never ended well.

“Don’t be sorry,” Thorton said. “Be better. In fact... I think I may need to offer you some training in how not to spill wine.”

“Master?” Zoralie started to look up at him, eyes wide.

“Come with me. We’ll need to select a proper vintage first.”

What Zoralie *wanted* to do was run, but she stood, shakily following her master through the servant’s doors and down the long, dark stairwell into the wine cellar. As they passed the guards, he snapped his fingers, and two of them fell into step behind Zoralie, hemming her in. She clutched at her dress, breath quickening as she imagined a myriad of possible punishments that awaited her.

Soon, they arrived at the wine cellar. Rows of barrels lined the walls, containing all of Thorton and Pleasance’s favorite vintages. Thorton gestured to the maid. “On the ground,” he said. “Face down.”

“Yes, master,” Zoralie whimpered. She went down on her hands and knees, pressing her face against the floor.

Thorton gestured, and the hairs on his arms stood on end as his magic began to fill the room. The soldiers behind him looked on in a combination of nervousness and interest as a faint light began to shine from Zoralie. “Master...” she started.

“Silence. You are not here to speak. You are here to hold my wine, and not to spill it.” Thorton clutched his fist, and Zoralie’s mouth opened in a cry of pain as his spell took hold. Her clothing exploded as her body stretched and changed; for a moment, she was naked in front of him, breasts pressed into the floor and mouth stretched in a feral scream, before her chest began to expand, arms and legs pulling inwards even as her body pressed outwards. Her eyes went wide, and then froze there as the spell overtook them, flesh transforming to wood.

Moments later, the woman on the ground was gone. In her place was a large oak barrel, properly bound in iron. On one side was the impression of Zoralie's face, frozen in its final moments of shock and fear, and on the other was the protruding features of her shapely ass.

"Tilt it down," Thorton said. The soldiers hurried to obey him, tilting the barrel forwards; the rim was just wide enough that Zoralie's face was pressed into the stone without destabilizing the barrel, leaving her ass pointing upwards. Thorton gestured to a funnel and tube on one wall. "Fill the barrel with the '72, if you would."

"Um..." The soldier stared for a moment, then saluted as Thorton's eyes began to narrow. "Yes, sir!" He grabbed the funnel, shoving its pointed end into the space between what had been Zoralie's asscheeks.

Inside the barrel, Zoralie was frozen, struggling helplessly against the spell. She felt as though blood was rushing to her head, leaving her dizzy and unsure, and she felt the funnel wedging her open, as though someone was forcing a massive tube into her ass. Moments later, the wine began to flow, and as it filled the barrel she started to feel more and more uncomfortably full. *Master, please...* She tried to shape the words, but her lips wouldn't move. Nothing would move. She was stuck, staring helplessly at the dark floor, listening to the muffled sounds of Thorton giving orders to the men.

Finally, the work was done. Thorton gestured for the barrel to be returned to an empty place in the cellar, and looked at the barrel with amusement. "One last thing..." he said, reaching for a metal spigot.

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"Zoralie! Zoralie!! Where the devil is that girl?!" Pleasance stormed into the dining hall, throwing her bangled wrists up in frustration. Thorton watched his wife's ire with amusement. The Witch of Birtum was even more beautiful than the day they'd met, curvy and voluptuous, hair falling in brown bangs around her sharp, dark eyes scanning the room looking for someone to punish. "My hair is a mess," she growled, "and my dress has not been properly pressed."

"Easy, my dear. Have some wine. You can send up some of those little birds of yours to find her, I'm sure. Perhaps she fell in the moat."

Pleasance narrowed her eyes. "You're in a good mood."

"Simply enjoying the ambience," Thorton said easily, handing his wife a glass.

She took it suspiciously, sniffing it for poison, and then risked a sip. "This is quite nice," she acknowledged. "A new tribute?"

"Yes, from the lords of Redhaven. I've had it placed in a proper barrel, to make sure that we don't lose a drop." Thorton sat back, smiling at his little joke.

Pleasance's frown grew, and then she groaned. "You did not," she growled, stalking off.

Thorton smiled, swirling his wine.

Pleasance returned a few minutes later, accompanied by a pair of cat-faced guards bearing the large barrel that had once been her maid between them. Zoralie's terrified expression stared back at her mistress, lips parted around the spigot Thorton had inserted as though sucking lewdly on it and eyes rimmed with wood-carved tears. "You fucking bastard, that was my best handmaiden," Pleasance spat.

"I can't possibly imagine that's the case. She was quite clumsy," Thorton replied. "But don't worry, she isn't dead. She can see, hear, and feel everything."

"Change her back."

"I'm still figuring out how that would work," Thorton said, taking a sip of wine. "If you don't want her to be a barrel you can hack her to pieces, but otherwise she will be staying right there and keeping our wine in a fit state to drink. I'm sure I'll develop a counter-curse in a few months."

Trapped within the barrel, Zoralie tried to scream out in protest. She couldn't possibly last a few days like this, let alone a few months. But the wooden frame that held her was immovable, and she couldn't so much as glance away from the fight unfolding in front of her, let alone beg for mercy.

"Oh, really. Well, then, I suppose we'll just have to see how your stablemaster looks as an amulet around my neck!" Pleasance spat, turning and storming out of the room.

“My stable... not Karlos. Pleasance, he didn’t do anything. Pleasance, come back here!” Thorton rushed after his wife, wine forgotten. In his wake, their former maid was forgotten, left sitting on the table.

*Please. Please help me.* Her nethers were full to bursting, she couldn’t breathe, she could feel the alcohol slowly soaking into her, making her dizzy. But she couldn’t move a muscle.

The cats looked at each other, shrugged, and lifted the barrel, to bring her back down into the dark until she was ready to be tapped again.