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The Sweetest Pleasure

by Mia Sundby

The wizard eyed him with curiosity, gesturing to the carafe of wine on the low metal table between them.

"You don't drink?" He asked, his pristinely-shaped curling moustache twitching as he spoke. The wizard's own goblet of wine filled the air with a crisp, cold scent --a relief in the heat of summer which crept inside even with the charms and velvet curtains Ashar had placed around his workroom.

Ashar smiled politely, his fangs bulging just ever so slightly beneath his smooth skin as he replied, "Long practice has taught me that one pleasure leads to another."

The wizard --gods, what was the man's name? Magnor? Margor? Martin?-- stared, his gaze flicking to the subtle bulge of Ashar's fangs.

"Ah," he said.

Ashar took some small victory in seeing the man squirm before he began. Leaning back against the rough upholstery of his favourite chaise-longue, he ran his tongue along the inside of his cheek, where the aftertaste of his own bloody meal still lingered. Surprisingly tangy, the last batch, though not unpleasant. After all, Ashar paid for the best blood money could buy and in a city this big, the best was willingly offered.

"You wanted to speak with me?" he asked.

Margorth...? The wizard leant forward, gold jewellery ringing against the metal goblet as he did so.

"Yes, I was hoping that I might have your assistance. You see--"

There was a knock at the door.

Irritation puckered the wizard's brow, his oil eyebrows tugging sharply together. Ashar, who had been about to dismiss whoever was at the door, decided to indulge in a little spite.

"Come in," he called.

Affront flashed across the wizard's face. Delight filled Ashar at the sight.

Elri, one of Ashar's employees, opened the door, apology written across his features.

"Sorry to disturb you and Mr Magnaizus, sir."

Magnaizus, that was the man's name. Gods, he almost wished to forget it again. Who named themselves Magnaizus? It was standard practice for wizards to choose their own names once they had accumulated some skill and fame, but really that was just silly.

"Not at all, Elri," Ashar responded easily, pretending not to hear the splutter of outrage from the man opposite him. "What is it?" he continued, only looking at the boy.

"Um, well--"

Magnaizus tutted loudly, gesturing sharply enough that he threw the scent of all his hair oils, patchouli perfumes and a few flecks of spit across the room. "Hurry up, boy, can't you see we're busy!"

Elri glanced at Ashar enquiringly, who offered his employee a conspiratory eye-roll. "Go on, Elri."

"Well, it's Rhinde, sir, she's bleeding out on the front step."

"Oh, not again." With a sigh, Ashar stood and turned to Magnaizus. "Terribly sorry, Magnasaur--"

"Magnaizus."

Ashar delicately lifted a brow. "Sorry?"

"Maganizus Artalamol, The Unbowing."

"Yes, of course, darling. I'm afraid this is something I must attend to. You may wait here, or," he said, turning back from across the tiled floor. "It might really be best to write to me. Good day, Magnet."

Spite, in Ashar's opinion, had always been the sweetest pleasure.