

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 10

I found myself scurrying down the cobblestone path, my little glowing orange eyeball and its accompanying spider legs navigating with ease. The guards stationed outside the gate were as dimwitted as they came, completely oblivious to the peculiar sight passing through the portcullis. It was late into the night, and the city slumbered, unaware of the tiny intruder making its way through the streets.

The nighttime scenery was nothing short of breathtaking. The celestial canvas was adorned with a myriad of stars scattered across the vast expanse of the sky. Yet, despite the darkness, there was a gentle glow emanating from Völuspá. The gas giant suspended high above was a spectacle to behold, its swirling clouds painted in mesmerizing hues of blue and... pink. I found myself gazing at the magnificent planet, its vibrant hues captivating my senses.

Beside me, Circe trailed along with an air of nonchalance, her appearance mirroring the very essence of the planet's ethereal clouds. Or perhaps, it was the other way around. A peculiar thought crossed my mind, and I couldn't help but ponder the connection between Circe and the captivating world above. Was she a reflection of Völuspá's beauty, or did the planet itself mirror her enchanting appearance? Alas, as captivating as her ethereal allure was, I couldn't help but wish for her stuck-up personality to match the beguiling exterior.

In the distance, I noticed a section of the city that remained abuzz with activity, but my current stature limited my exploration. However, the thought of revisiting that area at a later time sparked a mischievous thrill within me. But for now, my path was clear, leading me back into the familiar embrace of the sewers. Fortunately, several grates along the city roads provided convenient entry points into the dark underbelly below.

With a graceful dive, I descended through the open grate, the cool water welcoming me as I submerged into its depths. It was strangely comforting here in the sewers, a respite from the chaos that I had become. Yet, lingering was not an option. Thoughts of Aurelia flooded my mind, tugging at my heartstrings with an undeniable longing. Soulmates, a concept I had dismissed as mere fantasy, now held a tangible truth in my life. Mother's revelation about our connection resonated deep within me. Aurelia was meant to be mine, and I, hers.

The passage of time seemed distorted, for it had been a mere day since I left Aurelia's side; I knew that the years had ticked by for her. I yearned to be reunited, to feel the cool touch of her vampiric embrace. And so, I had resolved to aid Lenny, or should I say, Nikola... Well, with a name like Lenny, it was only fitting to make a change. Anyway! I was determined to assist the little gnome in his quest to steal a few mana stones. If it meant a chance to return to Aurelia, I would do anything and everything it took.

As I pondered what the supposed starship looked like, a chuckle escaped my lips. The image that materialized in my mind was far from impressive—a measly sailboat rather than a grand airship. Oh well, I supposed I shouldn't let my expectations get too high. In matters of the heart, one had to be willing to embrace any means necessary, even if it meant setting sail on a humble vessel. Perhaps I was foolish to pin my hopes on the nerdy gnome's engineering without at least seeing his vessel first, but love had a peculiar way of defying logic. And yes, for the first time in my existence, I found myself believing in love.

Emerging from the murky depths of the sewer water, I found myself on a narrow stone path that meandered alongside the flowing currents. The darkness of the underground was not absolute, thanks to the occasional rays of light filtering through the grate openings. But it was the mesmerizing sight above that truly captivated me. The stone ceiling was adorned with a peculiar moss that emitted a soft aqua-blue glow, creating an otherworldly, bioluminescent ambiance. It was stunning if I do say so myself.

“Hey, this is my territory! Go, find your own spot!” a squeaky, tiny voice screeched.

I glanced around for a good minute, my eyes scanning the area until they settled on a rather unremarkable sight. A cube-shaped slime. Oh, joy. It was none other than a gelatinous cube, the epitome of slimy and uninteresting. I couldn't help but let out a groan of disappointment. Weren't gelatinous cubes supposed to be large and menacing, not tiny and... cute? I rolled my eye at it; it wasn't even worth my time, let alone my appetite.

“Hey, don't you dare ignore me! I clearly stated that this is my territory!” the pipsqueak squealed in a feeble attempt to assert dominance.

He? Or was it a she? Maybe it was both! It was hard to tell with slimes. Well, at least not with me. I'm one hundred percent woman... or slime, I suppose. Regardless, the other slime, tiny as it was, held no interest for me. Perhaps if it had been larger, it would have been worth my time and effort. But like the fishermen who tossed back their undersized catches, I saw no point in wasting my energy on something so small. Maybe one day, the slime would grow into a more substantial morsel, but for now, I simply continued my journey down the sewer path, paying it no mind.

Though I tried to ignore the incessant yells of the tiny slime, I couldn't help but feel a slight twitch in my eye. How amusing that such a puny creature had the audacity to challenge me. “And stay out!” it screeched as if it could intimidate me.

In the nick of time, I reached one of the stops for the sewer express. The undead centipede train was just coming to a halt as I arrived. I observed a peculiar assortment of creatures disembarking from the train, each with their own unique features. Without wasting a moment, I scurried aboard, joining the motley crowd. To my surprise, a few individuals cast strange glances in my direction, but for the most part, no one seemed to bat an eye at the presence of a glowing eyeball with spider legs. Apparently, my appearance was just another ordinary occurrence in these sewers.

After a few stops, I finally recognized my destination outside Kaida's place. Unfortunately, being my current diminutive size, I lacked the strength to give the door a substantial knock that anyone could hear. But that wouldn't deter me. Oh no, I was corrosive, and with a mischievous grin, I

relished the thought of leaving my mark. Using my acidic abilities, I burned a tiny, mouse-sized hole into the bottom corner of the door.

It took longer than expected, which led me to wonder if my size somehow affected the potency of my passives. Curiosity tugged at me, tempting me to ask Circe for answers. However, considering her bored expression, I opted to deactivate my [Oracle] skill instead. *Oops!* It seemed I had forgotten to give her a fair warning, as her eyes snapped at me with an exasperated glare before she vanished. *Tee-hee!*

I stealthily ventured into Kaida's laboratory, taking in the sight of its chaotic arrangement. Shelves and tables were cluttered with a vast assortment of flasks, beakers, and jars, each containing their own peculiar concoctions. Bubbles danced, liquids twitched, and eerie glows emitted from the various containers. Frankenstein would have been jealous. As my eye roamed the room, it locked onto one particular jar, its contents fixated on me with an unsettling gaze. The grotesque entity within piqued my curiosity, igniting thoughts of what it might taste like. However, my focus quickly shifted to a cabinet nearby, which housed a sizable collection of corpses.

Thankfully, I had refrained from indulging in the tempting buffet of corpses when the gnome rudely interrupted my feast. Oh, the sheer delight I had in teasing him about my cannibalistic tendencies, which were undeniably true. But at that moment, I exercised a rare sense of self-restraint and spared eating the rotting delicacies in front of him. Little did I know then that those rotting bodies would hold such significance for me now.

I was on the verge of climbing into the cabinet, ready to savor the forbidden feast of tantalizing morsels, when suddenly, everything plunged into darkness once again.



“What the fuck was that!” Nikola yelled. He stared at the book he had slammed on top of the grotesque spider, only to witness its legs twitching briefly before they liquified into nothingness.

Before Kaida could even process what had transpired, her gaze shifted from Nikola to Olin, the lich who had just returned to her lab. She had been preparing to reattach his detached head to his shoulders and tend to his numerous wounds. But before she could utter a word or inquire about the state of his soul and what happened, he collapsed in a heap on the floor once again. His head rolled a short distance away, adding another layer of absurdity to the already surreal situation. The shock of his reappearance was quickly replaced by the shock of his sudden collapse. It left Kaida and Nikola dumbfounded, their minds struggling to make sense of the inexplicable series of events unfolding before them.

“Nikola, would you lend me a hand in moving Olin to the nearby table?” Kaida requested as she observed the gnome's startled gaze, his attention shifting from the book he had slammed down.

“Y-Yes,” he stammered, “of course.”

As expected, the gnome proved to be of little assistance. Even Olin's severed head was nearly as large as him, though, to be fair, the lich's rodent head was rather sizable. After some struggling, Kaida managed to hoist the lifeless body onto the table while Nikola, with a mixture of reluctance

and determination, dragged the rat-like head by its whiskers to join its body. However, the gnome let out a startled yelp when Olin's eyes suddenly flickered open.

“Fascinating,” Kaida mused, her curiosity piqued as she observed Olin's peculiar condition. “For some reason, your soul keeps disconnecting and reconnecting to your vessel. The first time it happened, I theorized that Blake had been carrying your phylactery when she was destroyed, inadvertently destroying your soul as well. However, this repeated disconnection and reattachment leaves me utterly dumbfounded.” A glimmer of excitement danced in her eye sockets, eager to unravel this new mystery.

However, much to Kaida's disappointment, Olin remained tight-lipped about the truth behind the series of events that had been transpiring. Despite his disdain for the pudding, he held a steadfast loyalty to his mistress, Aurelia, and thus refused to divulge any secrets related to his mistress's lover—or, more accurately, Aurelia's obsession.

Though Olin wasn't initially certain, it had now become obvious to him that the pudding harbored the Dungeon Core within her. Olin's lips were firmly sealed, and his unwavering loyalty ensured his silence. However, deep within his mind, questions swirled, and curiosity burned. Would the Dungeon Core lie dormant within the pudding, biding its time? Or would it yearn to bind itself to her soul, merging their powers into one? It was a mystery that fascinated Olin, even as he chose to keep it concealed.

After a few hours of meticulous work, Kaida had successfully repaired Olin's vessel, leaving him feeling as good as new. He was particularly grateful for the attention to detail she had put into restoring his groin area. While it would have been a simple matter for them to use restoration magic to fix his body, neither of them possessed expertise in that particular branch of magic. Furthermore, since this was not Olin's original body, his soul did not have a strong connection to it, making the restoration process more challenging. Perhaps with time, as his soul fully adjusted to the new vessel, the restoration of damage would become easier. But for now, they had done what they could, and Olin accepted it for what it was.

As the crackling light of dawn filtered through the city above, both Kaida and Olin remained wide awake, their undead nature rendering sleep unnecessary. Meanwhile, the gnome, exhausted from the day's events, had long since succumbed to slumber, snoring softly on a nearby stool. Olin gazed into the empty eye sockets of the revenant, captivated by the enigmatic thoughts that flickered inside them. Slowly, with a graceful movement, he leaned closer, his long-dead heart almost yearning for a beat at that moment. However, their moment was abruptly interrupted by a loud bang that reverberated through the large chamber, causing even the slumbering gnome to jolt awake with a startled yelp.

All eyes turned towards a single cabinet that had been forcefully kicked open from the inside out. Amidst the chaos, there stood Blake, emerging from a now empty cabinet that Kaida had used to store discarded cadavers for future research. The gnome and the revenant stood frozen, their expressions a mix of shock and disbelief. After all, they had witnessed what they believed to be Blake's demise, engulfed in flames and torn to pieces in a violent explosion. And yet, here she stood, unscathed and very much alive, a smug and irritated expression adorning her face.

“Ugh, let’s not do that again!” Blake exclaimed, releasing a breath of annoyance. Though, a mischievous smirk danced across her face as she continued, “In fact, I’ve made up my mind. I’ve decided to go back to school.”

While Nikola and Kaida exchanged disbelieving glances, Olin remained unfazed by Blake’s sudden reappearance and her announcement. His rodent face betrayed no hint of surprise or shock, for he had already grown accustomed to the unexpected and bizarre occurrences that seemed to follow the pudding wherever she went.