

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 11

“You cannot be serious,” Kaida exclaimed, her voice laced with horror. “This is a terrible idea,” she continued, casting a pleading glance at Olin, silently urging him to convince me that I was making a grave mistake.

“Don’t worry about it,” I waved my hand dismissively. “I’ll just enroll as a student in the academy, grab a few mana stones, and be back in no time. No biggie.”

“Granted, the main academy in the capital might be slightly more inclined towards inclusiveness,” Kaida replied, her voice tinged with exasperation. “But we’re not in the capital. Enrolling in the academy here is far from a simple task. They may claim that anyone can enroll, but the reality is quite different. You either need wealth or some extraordinary talent to be deemed worthy of attendance. In other words, you have to prove your usefulness to the aristocrats.” Kaida sighed, her fingers pressing against her skull in frustration.

“I may not be well-versed in the intricacies of this so-called academy,” Olin interjected, his tone measured, “but wouldn’t it be simpler to make another attempt on the duke’s estate? Alternatively, we could try acquiring enough mana stones from the black market. There must be other options available to us.”

I shot a piercing glare at the insolent rodent, who appeared completely oblivious to my annoyance. To make matters worse, Kaida’s disagreement with my plan caught me off guard. But I stood my ground. No, I was determined to attend the academy. It wasn’t just about acquiring mana stones; it was about learning new skills, honing my abilities, and perhaps even enjoying a bit of mischief along the way.

Surprisingly, the gnome remained silent throughout the discussion, wearing a timid expression that caught my attention. I couldn’t help but wonder what was going through his mind. Perhaps he had reservations about my plan or was simply lost in his own thoughts. Whatever the reason, I wanted to assure him that I had no intention of making a meal out of him. After all, he was my ticket off this moon. *Silly nerd, worrying about the wrong things!*

I was taken aback when the gnome finally spoke. “Blake, I don’t know how you managed to survive that blast from the rune you stepped on. I was certain you were incinerated. Stealing from the academy will be far more challenging than attempting to break into the duke’s place. I believe it’s a risk you shouldn’t take.”

Awe, he cares! The little gnome’s concern was touching, but he failed to realize one crucial fact—I was immortal! With a Dungeon Core safely tucked away in my dimensional storage, death held no power over me. *Unlimited respawns, baby!* While another heist at the duke’s estate might be easier, my burning desire to attend the academy trumped all other considerations. Sure, it meant

delaying my reunion with Aurelia, a thought that tugged at my metaphorical heartstrings, but I knew deep down that becoming more powerful was essential for both her and myself. The academy offered a unique opportunity for growth, learning, and wreaking delightful chaos. Besides, who said I couldn't go back to the duke's estate and try again? Next time, I'd just have to be more audacious and use the front door.

"Nah, I'm going," I declared, a mischievous smile spreading across my silk face.

"Huff, I guess we have no choice but to aid you on this foolish quest," Kaida grumbled, her frustration evident as she started rummaging through the shelves filled to the brim with various items.

As I observed Kaida, it dawned on me that her motivations for assisting Olin and me were still shrouded in mystery. While I appreciate any help I could get, I couldn't help but wonder why she had chosen to involve herself in this endeavor. The gnome's commitment was understandable, fueled by his desire for mana stones for his starship and perhaps a touch of delusional loyalty for being a fellow Earther. Olin's loyalty to Aurelia was apparent, and his assistance was driven by his devotion to our shared goal of reuniting with her. But Kaida, the revenant in the purple dress, remained a puzzle to me. What drove her to lend her aid? What hidden agenda or personal reasons lay behind her actions? It was a mystery I could unravel if I cared enough, but honestly, I didn't. Nope, what mattered to me was fulfilling my own desires. Going to college had always been a dream of mine, and in a strange way, attending a magical academy felt like it counted. So, to all the haters out there, I have one message: ***Suck it! I'm going to embrace this trope and have fun doing it.***

"Here it is!" Kaida exclaimed, holding a black crystal in her skeletal hands. "If you're going to attend that school, we need to conceal your true nature from them. With those religious zealots gaining influence, the academy has likely succumbed to their political pressure. So, we'll need to deceive their analysis spells. Can you shapeshift enough to resemble an elf?" Though her skeletal visage lacked lips, I could sense a mischievous twinkle in Kaida's voice.

With a casual shrug as my response, my ear tips began to elongate, gracefully taking on a distinctively Vulcan-like appearance. I couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction and amusement at my new look. I turned to one of the old silver mirrors scattered around Kaida's lab, catching a glimpse of my reflection. My ears looked rather alluring if I had to say so myself.

"You look like some sort of human elf half-breed," Nikola bluntly remarked.

"I concur. That appearance simply won't do, especially with that silk shell enveloping your pudding-like body," Olin criticized.

"I was specifically referring to the visual manifestation of a snow elf's appearance," Kaida interjected, her tone tinged with an air of scholarly authority. "I propose that you elongate the tips of your ears in a linear manner, extending them outward to a precise measurement of approximately twelve centimeters. Additionally, I recommend utilizing a material akin to the silk-like substance that comprises your shell to meticulously recreate the texture and appearance of

your hair. It is worth noting that the inherent black hue of your current hair is a blatant indication of your non-snow elf lineage. While it might conceivably pass as an attribute of a dark elf, your shell's fair complexion casts doubt upon such an assumption." Kaida continued, her voice trailing off into murmurs. "However, I must acknowledge the high percentages of albinism found within the dark elf population."

"Don't worry about making yourself look any more like a child than you already are," Olin chimed in. "It's quite standard for students at any magical academy to be around your age in appearance. In fact, most of them should even appear slightly older than your current appearance."

I ignored Olin's jab about my supposed child-like appearance, which was utter bullshit! I maintained an appearance of a young woman in her early twenties. *Whatever!* I focused on the task at hand. With a deliberate effort, I allowed my ears to elongate and sharpen, resembling daggers as they extended from the sides of my head. Simultaneously, I gathered the mass of my Black Pudding hair, molding it into individual tendrils of silk thread that cascaded down my back. However, as I gazed at my reflection, I couldn't ignore the glaring issue: my eyes. The eerie orange glow emanating from them was a clear indication that something was amiss. "Um, any ideas on what to do about my eyes?" I inquired, fully aware that their current appearance was far from natural.

"Hmm, oh, don't worry about those. In fact, if anything, they may actually work in your favor during the admission process," Kaida responded as her skeletal hand waved about dismissively.

"Glowing eyes and even glowing hair are regarded as highly desirable attributes, particularly among magical circles," Olin added. "They are widely recognized as indicators of profound magical attunement."

"Yes, indeed. However, you must conceal your pudding-like form from prying eyes," Kaida interjected. "Now, hurry up and reabsorb that absurd little dress that's barely coating your shell."

"My dress isn't absurd. It's cute!" I protested, slightly offended by Kaida's remark. My strapless summer dress was stylish and stopped around my thighs, which I considered a perfectly appropriate length. In fact, it was quite moderate compared to the revealing outfits I had seen on the city streets. However, understanding the need to conceal my true form, I swiftly pulled the pudding that had been serving as my dress behind my silk shell, ensuring it remained hidden from view.

"Yikes! Um... Blake... Um," the little gnome stammered, his face turning bright red. He quickly averted his gaze and turned around, clearly uncomfortable with the situation.

I couldn't quite understand what the fuss was about. Sure, I appeared to be naked, but I hadn't given my body any explicit features like nipples or other anatomical parts, well, except for a navel, but that seemed to have been created subconsciously. There was nothing embarrassing about my appearance. In fact, I was rather proud of the body I had meticulously sculpted.

Kaida approached me. Her movements were devoid of unnecessary showmanship, and she gently placed the black crystal between my breasts. “Make sure not to dissolve or fully absorb this crystal into your body,” she instructed. “Leave a portion of it exposed.”

“What is it?” I inquired, my curiosity piqued as I felt half of the pill bottle-sized crystal merge into my chest, halting its progress and exposing the remaining portion between my breasts.

“That is a soul crystal,” the revenant explained, her voice tinged with a mix of satisfaction and a hint of resentment. “It contains the soul of one of my former students, an obnoxious snow elf. After a confrontation one evening where she managed to curse me into this form you see before you, I sought my revenge and trapped her soul within this crystal.”

Uncertain about how to respond to Kaida’s revelation, not out of pity but simply because I found the conversation rather dull, I simply watched as she rummaged through a large trunk and retrieved a worn, dirty white dress. It appeared to be just as revealing as the dress she had dismissed as absurd earlier. With an eye roll at her hypocrisy, I begrudgingly donned the tattered garment, all the while aware of Nikola’s burning red face as he continued to awkwardly avert his gaze.

“I look like a street urchin,” I sighed, eyeing my reflection in the mirror. The tattered, dirty white dress did little to showcase my unique and awe-inspiring presence. Instead, it diminished my grandeur, making me appear rather unremarkable and dirty.

“That’s the intention,” Kaida affirmed with a nod. “Now, go out into the sewer and immerse yourself in the wastewater, ensuring you get a thorough coating. Afterward, take a quick rinse under a drain grate.”

With eager anticipation, I dashed out of Kaida’s lab, excited to immerse myself in the murky waters of the sewer. After that, it didn’t take long to find a drain grate that served as a conduit for water flowing into the underground system. I positioned myself beneath it, allowing the water to cascade over me, simulating a refreshing ice-cold shower. However, the quick rinse proved ineffective in washing away the grime and filth of the sewers. Normally, as a Black Pudding, I could effortlessly dissolve any dirt or grime that clung to my silk shell, which served as my skin. But following the revenant’s recommendation, I kept that part of me concealed beneath the surface.

Returning to Kaida’s lab, I couldn’t help but voice my dissatisfaction with my current appearance. “I look like absolute shit,” I declared, surveying my disheveled, dirt-covered form. The dirty white dress clung to my grimy skin, and my newly created pristine silk white hair now resembled a tangled mess.

“Yes, but now you embody the appearance of someone who is determined and willing to go to great lengths to compete for a scholarship into the academy,” Kaida stated matter-of-factly. “Combined with your glowing eyes, I have no doubt that we will find at least one or two naive noble families who will be captivated by your apparent desperation and be foolish enough to sponsor you.”

“What do you mean, compete?” I asked with a tinge of concern.

“In the academy’s arena, of course!” Kaida replied with an air of excitement.

A groan escaped from Olin, which I couldn't help but echo. The realization hit me—I had to conceal my true nature, but how was I supposed to fight in an arena without revealing my Black Pudding abilities? *Ugh, I should have thought this through.*