

BLAKE 3 PUDDING

CHAPTER 3

REUNITED

AURELIA

Flexing my fingers, I felt each one pop as I gazed down at my long nails, my claws, their blood red polish fading to black—a constant since the day my soul awoke in this body, in this farce of a reality. I was torn from my home, from my love, by a gruesome death at the hands of foreign invaders, the Romans. Time, it seems, has marched on in my home realm; two thousand years have passed there, while I’ve only experienced two hundred here, a testament to the intricacies of time dilation between realms.

I’ve grown and learned much since that time, becoming the entity that invaders now fear. Yet, my ambitions do not lie with dominion or conquest. Despite acquiring a taste for blood, it’s not what drives me. My only desire is for my husband, from that time long ago—though his reincarnated soul no longer resides in a man. My Bowen has returned in the form of a woman, a formidable one, a monstrous one, my Blake. She is my sole desire, my everything. For her, I would burn moons, worlds, even realities. Only for her.

“Lady Aurelia,” purred Lady Hikari, her gray cat ears twitching from side to side as she executed an overly embellished bow.

Like all my fellow vampires, I trusted none of them. Each of us thrives on the opportunity to backstab one another in the quest for more power, wielding cunning and deceit as naturally as we breathe. Thankfully, I seem to be the most powerful among them, though I must admit, I have yet to test my strength against the oldest of our kind, Lord Demidicus—my, or rather, this body’s, biological father. He is a truly detestable and manipulative vampire.

“What is it, Hikari?” I replied.

Her tail twitched slightly, betraying her irritation with me, though she managed to mask it well in both her facial expression and tone. “An airship is landing on the outskirts of the city, within the nearby valley.”

“I’ll send Jeremy and Sophia to intercept them,” I declared confidently.

“Are they prepared for such a task?” Hikari inquired, her tone laced with doubt.

A grin spread across my face, my fangs peeking out as I looked at the vampiric catkin. I harbored no doubts about those two; they had dedicated themselves to relentless training

over the past two years, achieving a level of power comparable to my goddess's champion. My only reservations, if any, were about Heather. Despite being a dark elf, she was innately kind-hearted, to the point where I feared she might struggle to defend herself against even the mildest threats. However, her true value lay in her healing abilities. She might not be the strongest fighter, but her skills made her an indispensable asset to us.

"They'll manage," I assured Hikari. "Do let them know for me," I added, halfheartedly waving her off.

Hikari executed another exaggerated bow, which was unmistakably meant as an insult, before exiting the grand hall where I sat enthroned. Calling it a throne was generous; truthfully, I loathed this symbol of authority. Yet, I couldn't deny the twisted satisfaction derived from watching the pathetic man Lord Demidicus had forced me to marry seethe with fury as I occupied his erstwhile throne. This, however, brewed a storm of worry within me. How would my Blake react upon discovering I was now wed to Duke Lysander?

The Serpent, a deity known for its cunning manipulations, had revealed that my union with Lysander was technically my second marriage. In a twisted technicality, since my soul had been bound to Bowen—now Blake—in a past life, this allowed for the new marriage to be deemed a part of a harem, my harem, which I vehemently opposed. Yet, the thought of my beloved returning to me, executing Lysander in the most barbaric way as we consummate our reunion in his blood, stirred a dark fascination of glee within me.

I closed my eyes, recalling the vow I made to my love as I lay dying in that frozen forest, "I shall find you in the life beyond, my dearest love," I had whispered. With those words, I relinquished my hold on that world and set my sights on the next, on this one. And I had succeeded; I had found my dearest. Now, the two of us will stand united, invincible to any force that dares to part us, threaten us, or separate us ever again.

As I sat, lost in my reverie, my thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the entrance of three vampires whose names I hadn't taken the trouble to learn. They stormed into the grand hall, a picture of urgency, and promptly dropped into deep bows before addressing me.

"Our lady," began the lone male vampire in the center, breaking the silence. "The airship appears to be of Slaethian specialty design; it has no sails—" he informed, just before the vampire to his right interjected.

"Idiot, that's not the important part—"

Before either of them could finish, the third vampire cut them both off, urgency lacing her voice, "They have a champion aboard, Paladin Champion Vanya Anlyth! We've lost sight of the two you had sent to intercept within a shroud of mist, y-your grace," her voice carrying a tremor as she delivered the news.

“Jeremy and Sophia,” I muttered, unable to fully conceal my worry as I stood up from the throne. The realization that these three could potentially spread rumors of a perceived weakness across the coven weighed heavily on me. It served as a stark reminder of the necessity to better guard my emotions. “I’ll take care of this champion myself,” I declared, before making my departure.

Being potentially the most formidable vampire in existence—save for one possible exception—I also ranked among the swiftest. The moment I propelled myself off the ground, the wind surged around me, sending the three vampires tumbling to the stone floor as I surged past them, exiting the castle. I raced down the narrow mountain path, my passage stirring up a blizzard of snow that trailed behind me as I descended into the city I had founded for the alliance of refugees under my rule. The cobblestone streets of this ever-expanding city vibrated and shook beneath my feet, right until I halted at the city’s edge, overlooking the nearby valley. There, beside Hikari—who I hadn’t expected to find—I stared out at the mist separating us from the airship. Through the haze, I discerned the silhouette of our adversary, Paladin Champion Vanya Anlyth. The two I had dispatched to confront the intruders were nowhere to be seen within the mist’s veil.

Turning to glance at the elf woman, I noted her crossed arms and her look of bewilderment. What truly took me by surprise, though, was the figure beside her: not a ratkin as I initially thought, but an undead. My surprise turned to shock as I recognized the Crone’s champion.

“Jason?” I uttered.

Then, I sensed it—a surge of magic emanating from within the mist, accompanied by a blur moving at a velocity surpassing even my own, charging straight for me. The approach triggered a wave of anticipation within, igniting a deep, aching yearning. I closed my eyes, surrendering to the moment as the figure halted right in front of me, their lips meeting and parting against mine.

BLAKE

Just a few moments earlier... I was a bundle of nerves, pacing back and forth aboard the airship, barely acknowledging the curious glances thrown my way, their confusion evident. My mind was desperate for a diversion, craving something—anything—to focus on. What I truly wanted was an outlet for my restlessness, be it through killing something or someone, or simply indulging in a bit of torment.

I halted abruptly as I felt the airship begin its descent. Drawn to the railing, I peered eagerly below. To my astonishment, a sprawling city unfolded beneath us, nestled atop a large mesa and shadowed by an imposing mountain, atop which sat a dark, gothic castle. Its haunting beauty struck a chord with me, a goth chick at heart, and I couldn’t help but admire the view.

As we descended, it became clear we were landing in the valley below the mesa, where the city proudly stood. The valley, lush with trees, caught my attention, especially the large fruits hanging from them that bore an uncanny resemblance to beating hearts. I dismissed this peculiar sight with a shrug—after all, it was far from the weirdest thing I’ve encountered.

Upon landing, I spotted two figures rapidly making their way toward us, a familiar magic emanating not from them, but swirling around them, reminiscent of the aura surrounding me and Jason. This observation coaxed a sly grin onto my face. It appeared my sensitivity to the mana in my surroundings had been intensifying lately, allowing me to detect a myriad of nuances.

A distraction from my mounting anxiety was exactly what I needed, and what better diversion than a bit of playful torment? I had no intention of causing harm, but a subtle reminder of the dynamics between predator and prey in this realm might prove entertaining.

“What are you doing?” I heard Von Von hiss as I lifted my arms into the air, mimicking an orchestra conductor poised to unleash the fifth symphony.

I offered no reply to her inquiry; instead, I bestowed upon her a mischievously childish grin, akin to being caught with one’s hand in the cookie jar. Seizing the moment, I invoked a system skill, [**PHANTASMAL MIST**]. From my hands, a swirling mist emerged, enveloping everything before me in a dense fog. The two figures approaching us were soon shrouded in it, oblivious to their envelopment. Casting a glance at Von Von, I couldn’t contain my glee and let out a chuckle before I leaped from the airship, diving into the concealment of my spell.

The last thing I heard before immersing myself completely was Von Von’s exasperated remark, “Why do I even bother?”

Upon landing on the ground, my manic laughter subsided—well, not entirely. With a slight sway, I navigated through the trees, shrouded and concealed from any prying eyes. My targets were none other than Jeremy and Sophia. I observed them as they halted, their alertness evident as they scanned their surroundings, heads turning from side to side. It had been a while since I last toyed with Jeremy—since I had ended him on the dark road beneath the former dungeon. And yes, I was the one who killed him; his act of collapsing the tunnels on all of us hardly qualifies as his victory.

I’m pretty sure it counts as his kill.

Nuh-uh!

Regarding Sophia, I had never engaged her in combat or subjected her to my usual torment. Truthfully, she’s probably the only one from that little band of six who didn’t outright irritate me. Unfortunately for her, I was in dire need of a diverting pastime as I collected my thoughts. Harnessing the power of [**PHANTASMAL SURGE**], I propelled myself forward with a burst of

speed that blurred my movement, positioning myself directly behind Sophia without her detection.

Unable to restrain myself, I let out another burst of manic laughter. Sophia spun around, but by then, I had already darted away in a swift blur. The amusing aspect of my mist spell is its capacity for mental fuckery. Whether it conjures ghosts, nightmares, or dredges up the victim's own memories is still something I haven't quite figured out.

Hey, Nightmare? Do you reckon those airships we enveloped in mist during our getaway witnessed any bizarre shit?

I doubt it. Those airships likely had some form of shielding, like what we had.

Huh.

Anyway! From a safe distance, I observed as Sophia came to a standstill, her gaze fixed on what seemed to be ghosts emerging from the mist before her. Yet, to my surprise, there was no scream, no tears, no visible panic on her face—quite the letdown, honestly. Instead, a dark smile slowly spread across her features. With a curious tilt of her head, she casually raised her hands near her head and gave a subtle double clap, as if calling for a butler or maid to attend to her needs.

What transpired next were purple-hued spirits materializing out of thin air, charging towards my orange ones. Her spirits brandished their ethereal weapons, which passed harmlessly through my specters. The outcome was slightly disappointing; I had anticipated an epic confrontation. However, it appeared my spirits were designed solely for psychological warfare. Despite this, I found some satisfaction in witnessing the effectiveness of my illusion against her own summoning skill. With a shrug, I shifted my attention to Jeremy, the dog-faced bastard I was oh so eager to kick around—a bit like how my stepdad used to treat my dog growing up. Ah, good times...

Dream, do you constantly have to bring up the stepdad remarks? Makes us seem like we're riddled with daddy issues.

What? I think it adds character. Plus, let's face it, we kind of do have daddy issues, right?

No, we don't. What we have are issues with assholes and people in general.

But Nightmare, aren't we often the asshole in most of those scenarios?

...Huh, you might actually have a point there.

I momentarily froze when a black bolt of lightning whizzed by me. Raising an eyebrow, I peered through the mist at Jeremy, who seemed unaware of my presence. Instead, he was launching spells at my mind fuckery—I mean, illusions. Well, they're not exactly illusions; I'm still trying to pin down what Phantasmal Mist actually makes people see. But,

considering I can tweak my magic based on my understanding, working with Sophia might be a good idea. After seeing her spirits at work, together, we could perhaps make these spectral figures that toy with everyone's minds more tangible. Imagine the possibilities if I could wield an actual, physical army within the mist. Now, that would be truly badass.

Redirecting my attention from the tantalizing prospect of an actualized spectral army, I focused again on the puppy-faced nuisance unleashing havoc with what seemed to be influenced by my dream spell. Really, what or whom would I need to devour to acquire a lightning spell for myself? Well, logically, that would imply Jeremy is on the menu. The thought lingered: could I actually bring myself to eliminate and consume an ally? The answer bubbled up effortlessly—yes, absolutely!

I took a step forward, driven by a hunger for power, my mouth watering at the thought of acquiring the spell of my dreams. The notion of casting lightning spells, becoming the sorceress I'd always aspired to be, enthralled me. However, I halted mid-stride when a voice, external to the mist, caressed my senses. It rippled through my awareness, carrying a whisper of desire, reminiscent of Elizabeth Hurley murmuring seductive promises. The distance from which the voice emanated—be it miles or kilometers—was unclear, but to me, it felt as though it whispered directly into my ear, borne on the currents of my phantasmal magic.

As Jeremy persisted in unleashing black lightning within the veil of my magic, I cast him a final glance, acknowledging his eventual role in satiating my hunger. Yet, I turned away, drawn instead towards a deeper, more profound yearning. Beyond the allure of power, magic, or the acquisition of new skills, my heart yearned for a vampire. The mass of apprehension, nervousness, and doubts that had clouded my mind dissipated, leaving me wondering why I ever entertained them. In the presence of the one I desired and craved above all, I felt a sense of completeness, as if my soul(s) had reconciled with their long-lost counterpart. A smile graced my face, a prelude to the unleashing of **[PHANTASMAL SURGE]**.

Time appeared to stand still as my consciousness expanded around me, my skill propelling me forward akin to a scarlet speedster—though, in my case, more of a gothic tangerine blur. The mist puffed out around me as I made my exit from the Phantasmal Mist. An ethereal orange streak marked my passage as I surged ahead, my ability to steer somewhat limited, yet stopping precisely when needed was within my grasp. And stop I did, exactly where I intended, directly in front of the woman of my dreams. I halted toe to toe with her, our lips meeting, mine parting before hers, yearning for the connection.

I believed that time had nearly frozen under the influence of Phantasmal Surge—I couldn't have been more mistaken in either of my lives! Astonishingly, in that fleeting instant, Aurelia recognized me, her lips parting in sync with mine, her hands reaching out to grasp me as eagerly as mine sought her. Time, space, deities, and the universe filled with magic fell away;

in this suspended moment, there existed only us, intertwined, her tender tongue entwined with the black tentacle that served as mine.

Aurelia was the first to pull away, and I could feel her reluctance as she did so. Upon opening my luminescent eyes, I was greeted by their orange haze that bathed her exquisite pale skin in a warm glow, my gaze drawn irresistibly to the depth of her stunning crimson eyes. I have to confess, I've never truly found my ideal form, often altering my hair, my outfits, and at times even my facial features and height. Sometimes, I even revert to the original 'creepy cute' aesthetic I favored when first mastering the Polymorph skill. Now, the reason for my indecision became clear; perfection personified was already before me, embodied by Aurelia herself.

"I love you," she breathed out, her voice carrying that ever-tempting tone, her exquisite accent igniting a fire of need and desire within me.

"Ahem," came from the side, effectively grating on my nerves while capturing my attention.

Just as I was about to confront the audacious interrupter who dared spoil the moment, Aurelia intervened. "Hikari, as you can see, everything is under control."

"What about the mist and the enemy champion on the airship?" came the query from a feline woman, a 'fleabag' my mind uncharitably labeled her. I squinted in her direction, a flicker of recognition passing through my mind before I dismissed it; she was clearly of no consequence.

I raised my hand, tapping my lower lip thoughtfully with my finger, as I commented, "Does she mean, my champion?"

"What?!" the gray-haired cat woman exclaimed, her surprise evident.

I waved her off nonchalantly and turned my smile towards Aurelia. "I've got my own champion," I reiterated confidently. "Though, she can be a bit of a bitch," I admitted, allowing a slight frown to crease my forehead.

Naturally, I kept to myself the fact that I was far more of a bitch than Von Von could ever aspire to be—some truths are self-evident. She did kill my kid (I use that term very loosely), but hey, I returned the favor by taking out her husband. Well, perhaps that was indeed a favor, considering he now seems hell-bent on killing her. At least, that's how it appeared to me after coming back from the dead. Whatever! What was I doing again? Ah, right, I was yearning for more smooching and butt play.

Dream!

What?

Really! Butt play? Must you always steer our thoughts in that direction?

Hmm, yes! Why are you upset with me? You're the one who had us contemplated devouring Jeremy. I'd argue my idea of 'eating' is far better.

...

“My beloved,” Aurelia cooed, drawing my attention back to her and away from that perfect backside. “Is that mist also your doing?”

I nodded like a lovestruck puppy, lifting my hand to snap my fingers, dispelling the shroud of mist—well, technically, I mentally selected the skill from my list to deactivate its effects. I wanted to appear powerful and competent in front of Aurelia. How am I doing?

“What the hell is going on?” roared a voice from the now-clearing mist—Jeremy, by the sound of it.

I momentarily entertained the idea of ending him to possibly acquire that coveted lightning skill. However, with my vampire now standing before me, her hands clasping mine, the urge for a murderous rampage faded away.

“That explains a lot,” came another mutter, followed by the sound of footsteps approaching from behind. Reacting, I conjured a third glowing eyeball at the back of my head, surprising Sophia with its abrupt gaze. The sensation of having an extra eye was jarring, to say the least, and quite unsettling for me as well. Her shock was clear, but once the eye had achieved its intended effect, I quickly dissolved it back into me, its unsettling presence no longer necessary.

“So, what do you say we ditch this place for a comfy bed?” I asked, grinning like a kid in a candy store.

“Maybe check on her husband’s whereabouts first,” murmured the cat woman, almost too quietly.

Husband? Did I somehow skip a memo about her getting hitched? Guess it’s time to rummage through the old memory archives—but honestly, my recall’s pretty selective. If it’s not related to the finer things in life: sex, drugs, rock ‘n roll, or a good old-fashioned blood fest, it’s like trying to catch water with a net. For the moment, I’m treating whatever the furball’s saying as pure gibberish. Really, opening her mouth like that in front of me? Bold move, kitty.

“W-What’s she on about?” I whispered to Aurelia, eyeing the cat woman like she was my next DIY project—her bones as a new set of cutlery, her skin for a chic outfit. And yeah, I’d even keep that fluffy gray tail as a quirky accessory.

Aurelia appeared sheepish and somewhat uneasy, like she was dreading breaking some news to me. It stung and kindled a fire within me—not because she hesitated to share, but because it was evident she wasn’t pleased with a decision thrust upon her. The very thought

of someone coercing her into anything boiled my blood. I'd tear down the realm itself to protect her from such tyranny!

"I got pulled into a political marriage," she confessed, her voice so faint it nearly got lost in the breeze. And there she was, worried she'd upset me—me, of all people, as if. I'm perfectly cool with Poly, particularly the sharing aspect.

I gently held her face, beaming to show her all was well. "Mind if I kill him?" I asked, voice softer than a feather.

The way Aurelia nibbled her lip, eyes alight with a mix of nerves and anticipation, sent a shiver down my spine. She nodded, almost relieved, as if my offer was the lifeline she'd been waiting for.

I turned to shoot the smug feline a menacing smile, one that hinted at impending doom, only to discover she had vanished. Baffled, my focus snapped back to the present as the airship's crew began to disembark, with my champion leading the way, albeit with a noticeable hint of reluctance.

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Lady Hikari advanced with determined urgency, her movements betraying a clear sense of panic. Utilizing her vampiric speed, she dashed forward—not with the swiftness of a true-born vampire, and certainly not on par with Lady Aurelia, but her velocity still surpassed that of most turned vampires. With the unexpected return of Aurelia's first spouse, turmoil was inevitable. Hikari knew she had to alert Duke Lysander and ensure his safety if their carefully laid plans were to have any chance of succeeding.