

# BEWARE OF WRITER

1<sup>ST</sup> DRAFT

## BLACK PUDDING

### CHAPTER 30

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I eyeballed the revenant chick lying before me, trying to figure out how the hell I should handle this situation—by “this,” I mean jump-starting her soul with the damn mana she needs to wake the eff up. According to Olin, revenants were a real pain in the ass to kill—not lich-level hard, but still a challenge. Kaida’s lifeless body could chill here for fuck-knows-how-long until she unconsciously sucked up enough mana to revive herself—well, un-live herself, more like, being a freakin’ undead and all.

So, guess who’s playing the magical defibrillator? Yours truly! I can handle ambient mana like a boss, but my mastery still needs some—okay, a lot—of fine-tuning. However, I doubted Olin meant for me to use the casual mana lying around to kick this undead woman’s ass back into action. And let’s not forget, I got a Dungeon Core inside me—well, inside Stellar Void. It is still Stellar Void when I’m not using the system, right? Even though it got a makeover and became Void of Desolation after my race and class change. Anyways, where was I? Oh, yeah! I don’t feel too comfortable whipping out my balls—I mean tits—core! Ugh, damnit, that came out wrong. But you get the point!

My Dungeon Core was my golden ticket to being, well, unstoppable. Okay, maybe not entirely invincible, but with unlimited respawning at my disposal, it was pretty damn close to immortality. Hence, my precious orb of doom was my secret weapon. The name still needed some fine-tuning, but hey, orb of doom had a nice ring to it.

But pulling it out from inside me? Ugh, not the most comforting idea, I tell ya. I mean, the last thing I needed was some godly prick popping up and snatching it away from me. Paranoid? Maybe. But have you seen the crazy shit that happens in this reality? It’s a madhouse out here, and anything’s possible. Just sayin’, better safe than sorry!

*Oh, what the hell.* Might as well give ambient mana a shot, even if Olin’s gonna give me one of his classic undead side-eye glares. Who cares? I’d rather avoid the whole Dungeon Core removal procedure—it’s like a desperate last resort. And this revenant chick isn’t exactly at the top of my “Risk It All” list, you know?

With a calming sigh that would make a yoga instructor proud, I channeled my inner guru—or some shit—and reached out, sensing the ambient mana in the air. Ah, there it was, all tingling and ethereal, just waiting for my magical touch. Despite all of Circe’s poor teaching when she used to be around, I actually got the hang of this from a skill, Spirit Vessel. But hold up! Something felt off at the other end of the chamber. My pudding senses tingled—yeah, I got those now too, it’s called common sense—warning me that there’s someone or something watching us.

With a gleeful grin, I gave a sly glance that way, spotting something almost translucently green peeking out at me before it quickly scurried back under the table. “Oh, look who’s playing hide-

and-see! Come on out, or I'll unleash a tentacle to grab you!" I cooed, crossing my fingers that whoever it was wouldn't take me up on the offer. I mean, who needs food to come to them when you can go on a thrilling hunt? Plus, it's just way more satisfying to be the one doing the chasing!

"I remember now. I'm awake now. You're not supposed to be here," a haunting little girl's voice replied. "And daddy didn't die. Mommy's dead. Mommy's been dead a long time," she added with an eerie calmness. "You're changing our dreams, and I don't like it. It reminds me. It makes me cry," she whispered.

"Oh, you're that rat kid that died. Umm, what's your name again? Ah, it doesn't matter," I waved my hand nonchalantly at the little poltergeist girl and went back to messing around with the ambient mana to wake Kaida back up. *Kids these days, always trying to haunt someone's day.*

"What do you think she meant by that?" Olin asked, his undead beady rat eyes narrowing as his whiskers bristled in curiosity.

"Fuck if I know," I replied with a dismissive wave, but then I paused, a hint of uncertainty crossing my face before I shrugged it off. I did, however, take a moment to glance back at the little horror, but she was nowhere to be found. Typical ghostly behavior, I suppose. Anyway, back to the task at hand, one hundred percent focus once again. *Time to wake up Kadia!*

"*I wouldn't do that if I were you,*" chimed another, all-too-familiar little girl's voice.

I spun around to find that little pest in pink seated on the ground, playing with the golden skull I had tossed. "Look, little girl, I don't know who you are, but I kinda need Kaida's help," I explained, though I gave Olin a quick glare for confirmation. He nodded. No surprise there. I mean, I don't really want to wake the revenant up if I don't have to, but Olin seems attached to her, I guess.

"*But she's already awake, silly,*" the girl giggled.

My eyes shifted down to the revenant's corpse, and as I suspected, she was indeed—not awake, but rather quite dead still. "Umm, yeah..." I breathed out, not knowing what else to say.

"Who are you?" Olin asked.

"*Ha! Well, let's just say, I'm someone who likes to hide in clocks. Would you like to dance?*" the little pink pest grinned mischievously.

"What?!" Olin and I both blurted out in unison.

"You know what, I don't have time for you either... Although, what do you mean Kaida's already awake?" I asked, but she, too, was suddenly gone, just like the little ghost rat. "Seriously?" I groaned, getting quite tired of being haunted by children. *It's my toddler nightmare all over again!* "This is why I never had kids," I complained to Olin, but his expression looked rather concerned. *Ahem, yeah, whatever!*

Making a huff that would upset my yoga instructor—which, honestly, I'm lying about, no way in hell you could have gotten my goth ass into a yoga class! Anywho, where was I? Ah, right! I took an annoyed and rather pissy exhale, glared at the corpse below me, a glare for Olin as well, seeing

that the ghost brats weren't around, and made off for the door. I had a pretty good idea as to what was going on now, but I wanted confirmation before I voiced it aloud.

Stepping out of Kaida's lair and into the sewer, it felt like I had just bought a one-way ticket on the Centipede Express as the undead train-thing screeched to an abrupt halt on its thousands of little legs. The skull's jaw—erm, mandibles—swung open, inviting me to board the adorable, skeletal beast. And boy, was I in for a surprise! The train was packed with a jolly and boisterous crowd of various species, all having a grand ol' time. It was honestly creepier than dealing with a poltergeist, and trust me, I've earned my street cred to say that.

I stood there aboard my undead ride, trying to make sense of the cacophony of voices around me. It all sounded like Charlie Brown's teacher lecturing—total gibberish. Suddenly, my head started spinning, and my thoughts began to swirl like a vortex. I struggled to remember, and then it hit me! I had a suspicion about what was happening. But before I could process it further, my head felt like it was about to pop off my shoulders. *Ugh, great timing!*

With a sudden blink of my eyes, I found myself transported back to one of my classes, surrounded by the musty smell of ancient tomes and the unsettling aura of Professor Stormrune. His voice boomed through the air. "Some scholars date the creation of Levelers back to the war with the eldritch, back when the three Primordials' reign."

"What's the deal?" I muttered. *Had I fallen asleep in class?*

"*You're finally stirring, silly,*" a little girl's eerie voice chimed beside me.

Glancing to my side, and... Ah, there she was, that little shit in pink, smiling up at me with those cute dimples and her pitch-black eyes. As much as I wanted to murder her, I had to hold back because, honestly, I wasn't entirely sure if she was just a little girl or something else entirely. Another annoying goddess, perhaps? Either way, I figured that not murdering a powerful entity was a smart choice. "You," I spat!

"*Why are you mad at me? I didn't do anything,*" she huffed, crossing her arms and turning her head in a display of faux innocence.

Fighting back the urge to scream, I settled for a powerful shout, "Answers! Now!" Surprisingly, no one else inside the classroom reacted to my... not screaming?

With another annoyed huff, the little girl glared up at me, her arms still crossed. "*What do you want to know?*" she grumbled.

"I'm not in the past, am I?" I blurted out, hoping for confirmation of my sanity. And hey, wouldn't you know it? I think I had a similar chat with my therapist back in the day. *Ah, memories!*

"*Kind of, yeah, you are,*" she nodded, but as I waited for more information, I soon realized she was done talking.

"That doesn't make any sense," I scoffed, my frustration turning into a mix of irritation and amusement. It was hard not to laugh at the absurdity of it all, but I held back because, well, the situation was still pretty damn infuriating.

*“Everyone can visit the past. It’s always there for us, you know? It’s where we can still find the dead who refuse to move on,”* she childishly nodded as she spoke, though her words tinged with eerie wisdom. *Blah!*

“Listen here, you little shit. What. The. Fuck! Is. Going. On,” I growled, my frustration boiling over as I practically spit acid at her. Well, not literally... I hope. But seriously, I needed answers, and I needed them now.

*“You’re inside everyone’s dreams of this time. Apparently, Duskara thinks there’s something you need to see. Or maybe she’s helping you make a few friends. Who knows,”* the little girl giggled. *“Now, stop talking to me, and get out there to find what it is that silly girl of mine thinks you need to see.”*

“See what?” I blurted out, but the little girl in pink was gone. “This was turning into a way more fucked up time—wait, does that mean I’m not a college dropout? I’m only dreaming of being a magical college dropout!” I nearly giggled myself.

*Oh, great!* Now I’m off on a wild goose chase, searching for whatever the heck this Duskara chick thinks I need to see. Thanks, creepy girl in pink, for the stellar info! And guess what? Now that I’m thinking about it, there were like a gazillion hints that I was inside a dream the entire time, like, seriously, so many. Nope, didn’t miss ‘em the first time around, not even close. Nope. Nope!

“Huh, I wonder if that’s the reason I couldn’t hear the two halves of my soul?” I grumbled, stepping out of my oh-so-enlightening classroom. Professor Stormrune’s still blabbering away like I was never there in the first place.