

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 11

Back in control of my body, I first tossed the sword and shield to the ground. They were useless in my hands anyway. The first wave of fighting within the coliseum ruins had been a mob battle with undead gladiators. Ava, my supposed split personality, had thoroughly dominated the arena using the sword and shield in combination with an area attack spell, Necrotic Flames. The spell could be focused on a single target, but the way Ava used it to create a circular zone of complete mayhem wherever she moved was extraordinary. That didn't even cover Ava's precision and swordsmanship, which was astonishing and terrifying. Because Ava possessed capabilities that far surpassed my own, she frightened me.

Everything Ava did exceed my own imagination and abilities! Even the intricate detailing she put into the creation of my spider silk face to my black dress was beyond anything I could have done in this life or the last. The dress was a masterpiece as writhing embroidery made of my black goo tendrils squirmed about like a nightmarish hellscape. I looked like some demonic vampire princess going to a royal ball, and I loved it! And that was the problem... If I couldn't fight like a one-woman army or create stunning dresses, how could my split personality?

I had never been more certain of anything in either life, Ava was an imposter, and I did not trust her. What was worse, how could I hide this revelation and distrust from a fraud who could read my thoughts? *For fuck's sake, she can control me like a puppet!*

Relax, Blake. I'm not going to go all bodysnatcher on you.

"Oh... Uh. Ha. Haha. That thought never crossed my mind."

...

Fear coursed through me at the possibility that this charlatan was lying and could, in fact, be a bodysnatcher. *Oh god... Damnit!* Clearing my mind before I could give any more thoughts to my suspicions, I released a pent-up sigh and refocused on what was in front of me.

I shifted my shoes into feet, moving sand between my toes as I wiggled them. It was cool and gritty and helped distract my mind. Partial morphing of my body had become so simple to use, I didn't even need to cast Polymorph. It had become second nature. Whether or not that was the imposter or me, I couldn't say.

The change in focus helped calm my growing anxiety. Before I knew it, I was grinning as I lifted the front of my dress to glance down at my feet... I had been expecting gooey black limbs or Ursula's tentacles, but what I saw were two silky white legs. I even had cute little toes that were wiggling in the sand. At that moment, I knew it was Ava's doing. Not only did I not use my Silk Webbing ability to make the silky skin on my legs, but I did not possess the control or skill needed to weave spider silk.

What's wrong, you don't like it?

My anxiety was back!

“I do... It's just... I feel like you're doing everything for me. To the point that I don't know where I start, and you end... Does that make sense?”

Fuck, Blake! My attempts at avoiding letting Ava know that I knew she was deceiving me hadn't been going as planned. Before I could play it off with a fake chuckle, a grinding noise squealed throughout the stadium as if two pieces of rusted metal were forcibly rubbed against one another. Scanning the arena, I found a section of sand sifting down like an hourglass as if something beneath had opened.

“Well, shit, looks like round two is starting.”

RUN!

Not questioning Ava's warning, I took off, not knowing which one of us was controlling my body. The sifting sand briefly imploded in on itself before suddenly detonating outward with the force of a kiloton bomb. I was sent hurdling through the air in a mixture of sand and my screaming until I found myself getting splattered across the stadium wall with a sickening slap.

BLAKE!

I hadn't had a chance to peek at what exploded from the hole in the ground before Ava started screaming at me. The impact had left me both dazed and disoriented, but as I peeled off the wall and sunk down to the sand, I found a mound of a few corpses from the first round lying below me. Apparently, the blast had also sent them slamming out to the outer edges of the coliseum.

Damnit, I'm getting sick of being turned into goop.

Hurry up and absorb one of the corpses, NOW!

Huh, you sound like you almost care. Why don't you go ahead and do it, you fucking deceitful body-snatching bitch!

What's gotten into you?!

Apparently, you!

Ugh, fine! I guess it's up to me to save both of us again!

I didn't know how much health I had lost from that explosion and impact against the wall, but I could safely say it was pretty low with how lightheaded I was. That is probably where I discovered this newfound determination to confront the bitch. I was punched drunk! That said, I was beyond enraged when I felt my body move on its own accord toward the corpses as Ava took the reins. I still hadn't fully collected my wits after being hit, but that didn't mean I had lost my resolve.

No. No! NO!

“It’s okay, Blake. I’ve got this. Just rest. I won’t let you die here,” she insisted as she reformed my body into its human form.

Of course, a lying parasite wouldn’t want to let its host die!

I hadn’t realized it during the undead battle when she was in control, but Ava had spoken with my voice, out of my lips, and she just did it again! I wouldn’t let her get away with it! This Ava bitch was a body-snatching lair, and if I couldn’t control my own body, neither could she.

“What,” the bitch asked with my voice, almost sounding confused?

With every ounce of inner strength I could find, I fought for control. My body locked up mid-stride, causing us to fall face-first into the sand. And yet, the harder I grappled for dominance, the more ground I lost. I felt my arms tuck underneath me, and before I knew what was happening, Ava pushed off the ground into a backflip, narrowly dodging a portion of a stone pillar that was hurled at us.

“Blake, calm down. You’re going to get yourself killed if you keep struggling.”

*I refused to play second fiddle in my own body. **Get out!***

“Sure, but only once I know you’re safe!”

NO!** The Unique skill Dissociative is a lie! **WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?!** You’re not some kind of fucked up split personality. **I know that for a fact!** I would rather die free than live as your victim! **Either give me control, or I’ll do all I can to end us!

“Damnit, Blake, this isn’t the time!”

At that moment, I finally noticed the monstrosity that had burst out of the sand. If I had anything to call it, I guess it would be an undead chimera. And it was huge! The creature had a decomposing lion’s head and body, but its lion’s mane seemed to be untouched by the decay. Although it was missing the typical goat head, I had come to expect a chimera to possess, even an undead one. However, it did have a cobra-like snakehead for its tail. The lion’s mouth was leaking yellow drool, and the snake’s head did the same, but only green. And did I mention it was huge? The undead chimera was as large as Bigfoot, not sasquatch, but the monster truck!

Oh, shit!

“Yeah! Now please stop fighting me, so I can save you!”

God damn you! I will never be your slave! If you don’t release me, I’m prepared to die here and now!

“Okay, damn myself, Blake! You’re not a slave, and I’m not a bodysnatcher. I promise I’ll explain everything, but I refuse to let you die here!”

The lion’s head released an earthshaking roar as its tail wrapped around a second chunk of a broken pillar, and with a swipe of its tail and lunge of its hips, the hefty slab of stone was hurled right at me. I knew Ava had more power than me, and I wouldn’t be able to win back full control. That

said, I didn't need to be in command of my body to forever free myself. As the fragment of a stone pillar approached at high speed, I felt Ava preparing to leap out of the way in a summersault, but instead, I picked that moment to lock up every gooey fiber that made up my Black Pudding body. Of course, I couldn't maintain this struggle against Ava, but I only needed a fraction of a second.

With another sickening splat within mere moments, my upper body wasn't so much hit as to say a large chunk of rock passed right through me, taking everything above my waist with it. I couldn't tell if the screams ringing in my mind were my own or that of the imposter. Either way, it didn't matter anymore. The last time I got torn in half, it nearly killed me. I would have died there on that toad's tongue if not for the level-ups for defeating the bastard. Only this time, no level-ups were coming.

I knew I should have been out of health with all that's happened. And yet, Ava wasn't done. All that remained of me was below my waist. I was nothing more than a pair of legs within a black skirt dashing for a heap of corpses. *I look ridiculous. God, please just let me die!*

You are the wickedest, most stubborn bitch of a Hopeless Crusader I've ever had. You know that! *Ugh, for the sake of the godlings, why did I pick you?! Argh, you're the worst, and now I'm stuck saving your dumbass.*

Hopeless Crusader...? Wait, you're that goddess I threatened to kill, Circe!

Silence! *Don't ever think or say that name! Not even I know who's spying on you. From now on, the name is Ava! Do you understand me?*

Fuck you, bitch! I still would rather die free than live as your victim!

I was a bit dumbstruck by the revelation. I could already feel my body reforming as the asshat goddess collected my other half from beneath the stone slab. She dodged two more incoming slabs without interference from me. Then with the skill of a gymnast, she did a cartwheel over a pile of three corpses, absorbed each of them simultaneously, twisted while ducking to avoid another slab, and backflipped over the one hidden behind it. Absorb shouldn't have worked like that if the description was anything to go off of, but she was the Primordial Goddess of Magic, so I guess she could break whatever rule she wanted. *Fucking hypocrite!*

"You ungrateful brat. If you want to fight that beast, go right ahead. Just know, if you die here, I swear to you, I'll come down here and collect your soul and shove it into one of those shit-eating slimes some random orc village uses in their outhouse latrine. So, please, go right ahead, be my guest, and slay that undead beast that outclasses you by forty levels."

"I already told you! **I would rather die than be your victim,**" I screamed!

Oh damn, I was back in control of my body! And it appeared that bitch had gone out of her way to restore me to full mass and health before surrendering control. Glancing up, I noticed the chimera forty meters away. Before I could think or do anything, the monster-truck-sized fucker started charging right at me. Even with the thunderous pounding of its massive paws against the sand-covered arena, I could hear sizzling each time a drop of that yellow drool landed on the ground. However, the most disturbing thing was the three marble statues were now watching me.

“SHIIT!”