

# BLAKE PUDDING

## CHAPTER 31

### PLASMANA

**Author's Note:** Ugh! I tried my utmost to complete this chapter and make it considerably longer without compromising quality. However, attempting to write while on vacation just isn't proving successful. I'll be returning home in a few days and will promptly resume my writing routine. My apologies for any inconvenience, but it seems this is the best I can do right now.

General Ezad Anlyth stood beside the helmsmen of the head ship of their small armada, his focus locked on the solitary airship suspended in the sky. He had no confirmation; he just instinctively knew that his wife, now his ex-wife, was aboard.

"My love, why did you betray us?" Ezad sighed before turning to address the helmsmen. "Proceed."

~

Vanya's eyelids fluttered, the world a hazy whirl of colors as she clawed her way back from unconsciousness. Her fingers clenched, seeking purchase on something, anything. Slowly, shapes and shadows took form. The rhythmic sway beneath her intensified her discomfort, exacerbating the aches and pains from her bruised and battered body.

Blinking away the fuzziness, she found herself cocooned in a hammock, the coarse fabric digging into her aching ribs. Her gaze lifted, and a gasp escaped her lips as her eyes fixed on the ceiling. Vines, sinuous and alive, crept and twisted along the wooden planks overhead. Nature's intrusion into the vessel's heart left her momentarily spellbound.

Frantic footsteps, a cacophony of hurried shuffling, reverberated from the deck above. Panic-laden voices, each note carrying its own tale of fear, pierced the air, reaching her elven ears with chilling clarity.

"I'm relieved to see you're awake," a soothing, feminine voice murmured from Vanya's side.

Vanya's elongated ears perked up at the familiar voice, guiding her gaze to the source. However, her first sight was not of the speaker but of the eerie scene in the neighboring hammock. Half of his face had been brutally cleaved, yet the lich's unholy regeneration was at work, knitting together bone and muscle with painstaking slowness. It was impressive, to say the least, watching the fledgling lich's regeneration in progress. Still, Vanya couldn't help but acknowledge that a more powerful lich would have recovered far more swiftly. Olin's recent possession of his new body had left his soul with limited time to adapt to it for rapid healing.

Still, Vanya's focus shifted, searching for the source of the voice. Her gaze settled on a beastkin woman, a catkin with two kittens clutching her like lifelines. The elf couldn't help but offer a dry remark, her voice strained by pain, "It's you."

The catkin woman nodded gently, her feline eyes filled with a mix of relief and concern. "We found you while evacuating the catacombs," Queen Rhyessa replied.

Vanya's brows furrowed as she mustered the strength to speak, each word a breathless struggle. "So, we won against Champion Einarr?"

"We?" the catkin smirked, her feline features quirking with a hint of amusement.

"Ugh, don't tell me it was that vile pudding," Vanya hissed, attempting to sit up but wincing as her broken ribs protested with a sharp surge of pain.

"You've proven to me you're not with the Slaethians," Queen Rhyessa began, her voice gentle yet filled with curiosity, "And yet, why did you do nothing when you came with them to raze my kingdom? Why did you do nothing when they killed my husband? Nor did you do nothing when you believed they had killed me and my children?" Her words carried a soft sincerity as she tried to make sense of the wounded Champion's actions.

"Jörmun forbid me from intervening, instead, he wanted me to watch," Vanya replied, exhaling with a hint of resignation. "Honestly, I'm glad he did. I don't think I would have fully realized how horrible Slaethia had become otherwise."

"I see," was all that Rhyessa had left to say on the matter.

The frantic shuffling of feet overhead momentarily diverted Vanya's attention upward. She closed her eyes, centering herself and tapping into the wellspring of her magic. Holy magic, a power that extended beyond smiting foes, was her domain—it was the magic of healing. A gentle, golden glow enveloped Vanya, and the sharp pain that had gripped her ebbed away as her fractured bones snapped back into place, bruises and cuts vanishing into thin air. With renewed vigor, she reopened her eyes, their once-piercing blue hue now radiating a warm, golden yellow light before gradually fading back to their original intense blue.

Climbing out of her hammock, Vanya cast a brief glance at the catkin and her two kittens, acknowledging them with a nod. "I'm going to head up and see what's going on," she said, a faint but reassuring smile gracing her lips.

She moved forward, oblivious to the small black creature nestled on the ground beneath her. With an unintentional kick, she stumbled and crashed, her face colliding with the unforgiving wooden floor. A sharp shriek escaped her lips as she rolled over, struggling to comprehend what had caused her fall. Her eyes narrowed as she recognized the familiar form of the pet Black Pudding that Blake kept around. Its name eluded her for a moment... Phantasia, wasn't it?

The creature unfurled itself, taking on the appearance of a tiny black unicorn. Vanya let out an irritated huff as she clambered back to her feet. She scolded the creature with a shake of her head. "How did you even end up there?" she chided it with a tisk.

Phantasia stared at Vanya, its unblinking gaze devoid of any indication that it comprehended her words.



"Oi, bring them scallywags to the planks! Man the cannons!" My voice roared out into the wind, carried away by the gusts, before adding, "Where's the bloody rum!" My attempt at piracy was making its debut, an incongruous spectacle against the backdrop of the impending armada on our heels.

What? You didn't expect me of all people not to daydream of being a pirate, aboard an airship? Well, I certainly did! Now, if only we could get moving instead of just sitting here as those a-holes approach with their little fleet.

"Oh, and I need to get a jar of dirt to make my first time on an airship official," I quipped, winking at a bucktoothed, beaver-looking fucker who seemed utterly bewildered, as if my sanity were the real question amidst all the chaos happening right now.

"You're an idiot," Jason grumbled beside me.

I half-heartedly considered grabbing the dark fae by the neck and strangling the life out of him until he called me "mistress idiot," but I was too excited. I bounced around all over the place, running from one side of the airship to the other, trying to take in all the various views. I couldn't care less about the impending battle. The thrill of the moment had consumed me completely, and oh, I may have occasionally twirled my jump rope as I bounced around, adding a touch of whimsy and reckless enthusiasm.

And yes, I may have let out a triumphant scream, proclaiming, "I am the queen of the moon!" while positioned at the bow of the ship, my arms stretched wide with regal flair.

Though, I'm not entirely sure why, but everyone appeared rather terrified whenever they caught sight of my edible jump rope. It's true! It makes absolutely no sense, really. Perhaps it was due to the speckles of blood that occasionally got flung off of it when I used it?

*Intestines really do make for wonderful jump ropes.*

*Ugh, an edible necklace would have been better.*

*Nah.*

Cocking my head at an unnatural angle, I observed my Champion emerging into the open air. "Von Von!" I ecstatically exclaimed while skipping over to her, still twirling my rope. "How's my favorite champ doing?" I said, perhaps a tad too chipper.

Dear Von Von didn't appear inclined to respond. Instead, she raised an eyebrow before heading over to the dragonkin woman, who seemed in a frenzied pursuit to yank out all of her hair as she struggled with the ship's steering wheel—helm, or whatever you call the round thingy to steer a ship.

I happily made my way over to the two, still overly ecstatic as I was having the time of my second life.

"Why aren't we moving?" Vanya demanded.

Nikola glanced up, her lips pulled down into a deep frown. "We're waiting for the nacelles to finish growing into place. We have hopefully less than five minutes, but we'll be in spell range before that happens," she added, her expression tinged with worry.

*Pfft, wasn't it five minutes like twenty minutes ago?*

*If she says "five or ten minutes" one more time, I'll turn her skin into a new dress.*

*Eww! Nightmare, seriously?*

*I'll include a thong and corset.*

*...Yeah, that works.*

"Does this thing have a barrier?" the elf asked.

"That's a bit more complex than the nacelles. The shields should finish sometime after the offensive capabilities are grown," Nikola sighed.

"Oh! Uh, cannons?" I asked a bit too excitedly.

"Sort of," the dragonkin replied.

"Sort of?" I grumbled to myself as I tilted my head in confusion.

I overheard Jason grumbling off to the side, "So, we're essentially dead in the water—well, air, until this damn thing's roots finish whatever they're up to."

Nikola glanced over at the fae and nodded, "Yeah, pretty much."

It was then that I noticed Phantasia, faithfully trailing behind Von Von. *Traitor!*

"Hey, there you are!" I greeted the little pudding unicorn cheerfully. I turned to my champ and asked, "Where did you find her?" I had lost her after Einarr quite literally obliterated me. She approached, nuzzling against my leg like a cat, before merging back into me. I could sense her presence once more beneath my skin.

"It was beneath my hammock when I awoke," Vanya said dryly.

"Huh, seems like two plot holes I totally forgot about were fixed with that," I remarked, choosing to ignore the odd look she gave me.

I shrugged before skipping off to take a look at these so-called nacelles. Leaning over the back—or whatever you call it, stern, I stared at them. I wasn't particularly impressed. They looked more like long boats rather than those crazy Star Fleet-style nacelles. There were four of them, each at varying degrees of completion. Well, I wasn't entirely sure what I was looking at, but the tree roots and branches seemed almost finished weaving around one of them—so, I'm guessing that one was nearly done. Honestly, I found the whole tree-growing aspect of the ship design impressive. Sure, it had a rather organic appearance, giving the ship a distinctive look, but at the same time, it was organized and had a certain flow to it.

Distracted, yet again, I nearly missed the large flash of light followed by the whizzing sound of a glowing bolt that zoomed past us, missing us entirely—sort of like a tracer round you often see in military movies, or perhaps more like a laser—plasma—bolt being shot out in a sci-fi movie? I

don't know, all I did know was that my attention snapped back to the armada still approaching. Another flash from the leading vessel sent another plasma or mana (plasmana?) bolt screaming past us once more, narrowly missing us this time.

"Huh, I think we're out of time," I chuckled, although no one else seemed to share in my enthusiasm for an epic airship battle. They weren't cheering they were lettin' out... Such crybaby fuddy-duddies. Well, I'll just have to muster enough cheer for everyone.

*Ugh, Dream, you're making our narrative sound like we're high.*

*That's because we are, Nightmare! Oh yes, that's because we are.*

*...?*

*High on life! Bwahaha!*

*...I despise you!*

A few more blasts from their cannon-like weapons screamed past us, with each one narrowly missing. However, quite a few came uncomfortably close—two of them even radiated heat as they sailed past. That wiped the sinister smile off my face, albeit briefly. Nevertheless, I didn't feel the urge to take any action. Instead, I casually leaned against the handrail, nibbling on my foot-by-foot intestines, savoring the tasty snack as I allowed everyone else to handle the situation.

I noticed a beastkin staring at me in sheer horror as I savored my food. "What? It's not as if you've never eaten dwarf before," I scoffed at him while continuing to nibble on my rope.

There was another blast originating from one of the approaching airships, and this time, even I could discern that it was on course to strike us. That being said, the ground beneath me trembled as our airship shifted, narrowly evading the plasmana (*I really should trademark that term*) cannon blast.

"We'll need at least three of the nacelles online if we hope to outrun them," Nikola called out.

"Umm, how many do we have online?" I asked.

"One," she replied.

"Oh, okay," I blinked before shrugging once again. The situation probably warranted more concern, but that emotion eluded me. Two paths stretched ahead: the prospect of an exhilarating battle or a sprint towards Aurelia's lands. Satisfaction brimmed within me, regardless of the path I'd tread. Then, as I gazed at the encroaching ships, a thought flickered to life within my mind.

*Ugh, Nightmare, you're making us sound all stuffy again.*

*Better than the airheadedness you enjoy doing, Dream.*

Returning to that flickering thought I had, Nikola skillfully maneuvered the airship, narrowly evading two more plasmana shots. Yet, they closed in on us rapidly, and their aim grew dangerously accurate. With a mischievous grin, I advanced to the stern of the ship, raising my hands into the air. I tapped into Stellar Void, permitting a hole to open within my chest, sensation emanating from the Dungeon Core's mana flowing out of me. My unsettling smile remained as I declared, "[PHANTASMAL MIST]."