

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 24

I loomed over Olin's new corpse like a harbinger of death as Ava meticulously bound the phylactery to it with surgical care. Though she said nothing, I couldn't help but sense a hint of admiration from her, as if she were in awe of the situation. Perhaps even a private joke!

Ever since our fateful encounter with the Crone, the world had taken on a twisted and surreal quality, like a familiar and foreign nightmare. Reality had been skewed and distorted, leaving me feeling disoriented and lost. It was as if I had once again stepped into an alternate realm where the world's laws were both recognizable and yet, entirely new. Yet, despite the nightmare that surrounded me, I found myself more at peace than ever before.

I tore my gaze away from the lifeless body and gazed upon a vision of pure beauty. I gazed and gazed, transfixed, as Aurelia glided towards the frog man, her movements as graceful as a cat's. With a flick of her nail, she severed the leather straps that bound him, though he seemed almost displeased with his newfound freedom. But I paid him no mind. My attention was solely upon her!

"Vorigan," she commanded, her voice like music to my ears, "release the others from their cells."

"Others?" I asked.

If I still possessed a heart, it would have skipped a beat as she turned to me, her eyes alight with a mischievous gleam and a grin playing upon her lips. It was a smile that promised both delight and danger. And I couldn't help but be drawn to her as if under her spell.

"BLOODY BITCH!" Olin bellowed as his soul reanimated the General's corpse.

Aurelia's graceful stride came to a halt as she peered down at the undead lich, a flicker of recognition in her eyes. Her once mischievous grin now took on a sinister quality, as if a dark joke was playing out in her mind. Yet she remained silent, holding up a single finger with a wicked glint in her eye, forcing Olin to bite back his next curse-filled outburst.

"My apologies, my mistress," Olin stammered, his voice quivering with fear. "I was momentarily disoriented. It won't happen again. It's a relief to see you again, my lady."

Instead of responding, Aurelia elegantly strolled past him. Her eyes turned back to me, containing a mesmerizing gleam like a blood moon, a wicked invitation to hidden dangers. She had bewitched and captivated my very being. I reveled in her darkness, like a delicate rose flourishing amidst a garden of thorns, ready for her to pluck. It funny how it seemed to me I had once considered myself to be the monster to be feared. Oh, how wrong I was!

As Aurelia resumed her stride toward me with her feline grace with every step she took. She was the embodiment of beauty and seduction. Her black and red trimmed robe swayed with her movements, teasingly revealing what delights hid beneath. I couldn't help but feel like I was

witnessing a supermodel striding down a runway straight at me. Though my true form was that of a slippery, sticky, gooey tar monster, a Black Pudding, I found my mouth going dry with a mixture of unease and desire.

She approached me with sensual charm, her hand outstretched like the tendril of a dark vine. She leaned in close, her eyes locking onto mine with a hypnotic gaze. With a gentle push, she guided me backward until I was pinned against the wall, her hand resting between my breasts. I felt like a young girl ensnared by a dangerous and alluring lover, powerless to resist her spell.

Oh, Gods, I want her to take me right here!

Us!

“Oh, my beloved,” Aurelia purred, her voice as delicate as a feather. “What have they done to you?” She was close enough that I could feel her breath upon my lips as she gazed deeply into my eyes. “Attempting to replicate your very essence with but a skill and failing miserably, it seems. It even looks like they tried to manipulate it as well. Thankfully, I can see the tether has been severed. But nevertheless, they fractured your soul into two fragments. Damn the divine!”

Her eyes darted back and forth as if she were peering into the depths of my very soul – or was it, souls? I shook off my haze of desire and finally comprehended the true horror of her words. So much was going through my head, beloved being among them. But more pressing was the notion of my soul being fractured into two. My mind reeled with confusion as I felt Ava stirring about within it.

“Fractured?” Ava stammered, our voice a nervous squeak. “What do you mean?”

“Ava, we know what she means,” I replied, my tone eerily serene as I embraced the reality of the situation.

“Ah, Blake and now Ava,” Aurelia cooed, her voice a seductive whisper. “It seems my journey to find you, my beloved has led me to two of you, both within my grasp.” She closed the thin gap between us and pressed her body against mine, one hand at the small of my back, pulling me closer and forcing our pelvises to meet. “What a delightful surprise.”

Her other hand swept across my breast, trailing across the writhing tendrils of my dress, until it came to rest under my chin, tilting my head up. To my surprise, she was slightly taller than me. Her touch was electric, her thumb tracing the curves of my lips with a seductive hunger that seemed to ignite a fire within me. Her intense and passionate gaze held me captive as she peered into my eyes with a ferocity I had never before experienced in either of my lives.

Is this love?

It must be!

The magical moment was shattered by the frog fucking nuisance. “Lady Aurelia,” he croaked. “I have released all of the captives down here. What is our next move?”

“Please let me kill him,” I moaned with a sigh of desperation.

Her laughter was like a symphony of temptation, an angelic tone that promised untold pleasure and excitement to come. Her gaze was intense, filled with a dangerous allure that left me breathless and yearning for more.

Aurelia fixed her mesmerizing red eyes on me as she issued her orders. “Vorigan, lead those lacking in stealth back to the ruins. We’ll scavenge for any usable remains and corpses. From there, we’ll make our way to the western covens. With the dungeon core gone, we’ll have to brave the journey on foot. We don’t have enough magic to reopen the portal for everyone without it. The rest of you, eliminate their command structure of this army, if possible. And retreat to the ruins before the break of dawn. From there, we must flee beneath the unforgiving rays of the sun.

“As you command, my lady,” the frog said, bowing respectfully. Oddly enough, he seemed to start grinning at the mention of the unforgiving sun.

“Why don’t we steal the core back?” I murmured, trying not to ruin the moment with my voice. Aurelia was still tracing my lips with her delicate touch. I didn’t want to disturb her any further, especially with the disruption already caused by the frog and the others being present.

“Would you happen to know where they’re keeping it, my beloved,” Aurelia asked with a deep purr that sent a thrill through my core.

“Within the center of encampment just outside the village is a large tent under heavy guard. If I had to guess, I would say within there.” I replied, my eyes darting back and forth between her lips and her eyes, silently pleading for her to close the gap and make my wish a reality.

“Olin, how’s that new flesh suit of yours?”

“Mistress,” Olin reported, “it appears to be a physical wielder. I highly doubt I’ll be able to wield magic through it. Still, it’ll be useful in close combat against elemental benders.” Olin struggled to stand, both hands clutching his head to prevent it from hanging from his shoulders. “Ah, my lady, it seems my neck is broken.”

“They had more prisoners locked in cages around that t-tent.” I panted out as Aurelia’s thigh slid between my legs, sending me to my toes. “I-I wasn’t certain if they were from your group or this village.”

Oh, gods, Ava, when did you reshape our body to be anatomically correct beneath this dress?!

Shut up and grind that thigh!

“Lady Aurelia,” a small woman with gray cat ears stepped forward. “Those must be refugees from The Order. If we have the chance, we should take them with us.”

“Ha! Who cares about those good-for-nothing refugees? And who the hell appointed Aurelia as the leader?” The grating voice of a familiar figure echoed through the room, striking a nerve with every word. “And, who is that woman you’re eye fucking, Aurelia?”

Did she just talk shit to our woman?!

Oh, she’s dead!

My longing gaze was torn from my Aurelia as I set my eyes upon an all too familiar face. One that filled me with a sense of eager delight. At the thought of murdering her, once again! The succubus approached with an overaerated sway of her hips that did the demon no favors.

“Niamh,” Aurelia said with a hint of disappointment and annoyance as she pulled away from me to face the succubus. “I’m surprised our captures didn’t return you to the nether.”

“Well, it may have been better if they had sent me back,” Niamh sneered. “I can already sense your father’s beckoning summon ritual. But alas, I cannot go to his side while I am stuck here with his pathetic daughter—**Gaaak!**”

With a flick of my shoulder, my arm transformed into a writhing monstrosity of black tendrils of terror. They shot forth like a bullet from a gun. Before anyone knew what happened, Niamh included. My tentacles had smothered her head, forcing their way down her throat, ears, and nostrils.

I was just beginning to realize this world was filled with powerful beings, most I knew I couldn’t fight, but I was quickly finding out they were nothing when caught off guard. And what better way to catch someone off guard than with a slithering, tar-like appendage being rammed down their fucking throats and forced out their asses! It was a staple of my arsenal, a tool of destruction that left my enemies writhing in agony as I devoured them from the inside out. Sure, I could scorch them with Necrotic Flames, cover them in Blight, or spit Poison, amongst other things. Still, there was something truly satisfying about this method. The taste of their terror as they struggled to escape my grasp, as I feasted upon their entrails from within, was a delicacy I could not give up.

I cast a glance upward, observing a group of onlookers who gaped at me with dread-filled eyes. I couldn’t be sure, but I doubted that all of them were of the undead persuasion, namely vampires. Though their numbers were few, I roughly counted fifteen pairs of eyes fixed upon me. Niamh flailed and thrashed in my grasp, a pitiful sight of fear and delight. Suddenly, Aurelia glided up behind me, her arms encircling me just below my chest, her breath cool against my cheek. Her piercing gaze swept over the room, daring anyone. I couldn’t say whether it was to protect me from harm or assert her claim over me. But one thing was clear, nobody said a word as Niamh stopped her useless flailing.

Hey Ava, I wouldn’t mind seeing the notification from this kill.

Blake, we’ve been experiencing some minor technical difficulties. We haven’t received any notifications since our...respawn?

...

Aurelia breathed a hushed whisper into my ear, dripping with lust. “Oh, you truly are a sight to behold, my love. And to think, you managed to withstand her Charm’s temptations, it only fuels my desire for you. If she had succeeded in ensnaring you, it would have been a cruel blow to my heart, and I would have taken great pleasure in ending her life myself. Though, I have no doubt that she’ll be resummoned before Lord Demidicus within the hour. Heavens forbid he go without his pet.”

She used Charm on us?

Probably, but we're immune. And with the system acting up, we weren't alerted to it happening.

Huh... Should we try using Absorb on her?

No, Blake! Under no circumstances should we use the system right now. We'll play with it or figure out a solution later. You can attempt to Absorb her without relying on the system, but for now, let's store her body in the void with the others.

All eyes lingered on Niamh's corpse as I dragged her body toward me. I didn't want to give the impression of devouring another woman in front of Aurelia, who held me close. Her breasts were pushed snugly against my back, so I had several tendrils pull the succubus beneath my dress, where she vanished from sight. Much more dignified and presentable, I thought to myself.

"Vorigan, take the defenseless to the ruins," Aurelia ordered again. "Hikari, pick out the necessary individuals and take out the army's commanders." The small cat-eared woman gave a nod of acknowledgment. "And you, Olin, shall join me and my beloved as we deal with a tent and some cages."