

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 28

My gaze rose to the tree line, and I was filled with a flicker of hope. An army stood there, led by a gnarled old warg that looked like a werewolf straight out of a horror movie. With his furrowed brow, long beard, and piercing eyes, this wizard-werewolf cast an ominous gaze across the battlefield. His staff was alive with crackling lightning energy, a spectrum of colors that would have made a rainbow jealous. And I...I couldn't help but feel a twinge of intimidation. But as I looked around at the soldiers I had been fighting just moments ago, now enraptured by the arrival of the new forces, my hope was rekindled. Now, I just needed to find a way to get Aurelia's fine ass over to their side.

As the warriors gawked at the horde of dungeon dwellers, Aurelia had other plans in mind. With a quick and deadly move, she sunk her razor-sharp fangs into the neck of a vulnerable human barbarian, draining the warrior of every last drop of blood. In a matter of seconds, the stunning vampire had fully healed, her wounds disappearing before everyone's very eyes, leaving behind only smooth, unblemished skin as if she had just taken a relaxing bath. The only blemish on her pristine appearance was me – a tattered, ragtag pile of black goo barely clinging to her body in the shape of a scandalously risqué little dress, which was more like lingerie at this point.

I was a hot mess, both literally and figuratively. Beaten, battered, torn, and burned, I was left reeling as I clung to Aurelia's flesh. The battle had taken a toll on me, reducing me to a mere shadow of my former self. My survival depended on feeding and regaining my mass, but I was surrounded by enemies eager to take down the stunning vampire I was attached to. Fighting was not an option without replenishing my strength. Still, unlike the beautiful bloodsucker, I doubted I could consume enough bodies in time to survive the army of soldiers that surrounded us. And with the feast Aurelia had just indulged in, the enemy was no longer in a state of stunned disbelief.

The elf dude, wait, I mean the elf woman, Anlyth, was now barking orders and directing her troops. Despite her thin cloak flapping in the wind, constantly revealing her curved butt and unkempt lawn, I still couldn't seem to get her gender straight. Maybe it was those massive biceps that were throwing me off. Regardless, in a matter of seconds, her forces were regrouping to push back Chieftain Hensley and his horde of dungeon folk. The silent and cunning warg kept an eagle eye on the scene as Anlyth took charge, rallying her troops into formation and creating a shield wall to surround Aurelia as if she were a dangerous animal needing to be contained rather than confronted.

It was then that Jason materialized beside us, sending a jolt of worry through me. I was too weak to attack, but his sudden appearance was enough to make me want to try. Thankfully, the cool and collected Aurelia recognized him. With a sly smirk on his face, complete with jagged razor-like teeth, Jason extended his hand to my woman.

Umm, that's our woman!

Ugh, fine, our woman.

Jason's arrival sent shockwaves through the soldiers surrounding us, and they charged forward with renewed vigor. I was confident that Aurelia was ready for another round, but as for me, I was far from it. Jason declared with a cheesy shit-eating grin, "Come with me if you want to live!"

Do you think our new mom will let us kill him...again?

We can only hope.

Aurelia grabbed Jason's hand just as the knights lunged at us with weapons drawn. Suddenly, the world around us transformed into a swirling vortex of darkness. Although we were still in the same location, everything appeared made of black fog as the world was cast in various shades of gray. Jason held tightly onto Aurelia's hand, leading the way through the darkness.

"Hold on tight, babe, or you'll find yourself back in the middle of that shitshow," Jason smirked, his tone as cocky as ever. "We must run to the tree line before my magic wears off. Time's a-ticking, so keep up, or you'll be left behind."

Oh, he did not just call her babe.

I don't care what mom says. He's so dead!

As I clung to Aurelia, I watched in awe as she and Jason sprinted past the ghostly figures of soldiers and knights, who seemed to be made of nothing more than black smoke. The thick, murky fog surrounding us lent the scene a dreamlike quality, as if we were running through a surreal, alternate world. The strange stillness of the shadow realm only added to its eerie atmosphere, making our escape feel like a treacherous journey, despite everything being nothing more than mist. The crowning jewel of this strange land was the massive black hole that loomed above us, casting its event horizon as the only light source in this bizarre world.

The next time we kill him, absorb better steal this ability, or I'll be pissed.

No kidding!

In mere moments we found ourselves standing beside a grizzled silhouette of an old werewolf made of smoke. Just like that, light and color flooded back into the world. I was surprised to see that the Chieftain seemed unfazed by our sudden appearance beside him. He stood there, staring at the enemy forces with a steely gaze, not batting an eye.

One of us, either Ava or I, conjured up Aurelia's black and red trimmed robe to drape over her. Knowing Ava, it was probably her doing because the robe appeared perfectly over our vampire. I doubted I had that kind of finesse. That said, it was only her robe that was returned. I was keeping the other articles of clothing as my trophy... I reluctantly slithered down Aurelia's leg and attempted to reform into my human form. Still, I was far from my former self with the lack of mass.

"Ha! You look like a fucking toddler!" Jason laughed.

I looked down and let out a groan of frustration. Jason was wrong. I was no toddler. I was more like an infant, barely reaching 60 centimeters in height.

This is humiliating!

We still have those corpses stashed away inside the void.

Only Niamh's body is left. We devoured the other bodies during the fight to replenish our mass.

Before I could chow down on the lifeless corpse I had originally saved for Absorb, the stunning vampire scooped me up like a baby and held me close. It was a mixed feeling of embarrassment and comfort as I snuggled into her cozy chest. Despite the chaos of the battle, she seemed to have had her fill of fighting and was now more interested in watching the old warg and his ragtag horde of former monsters. As if entertaining a kid, she handed me the golden cock ring she wore as a bracelet, as if it were a teething toy. Okay, maybe not a teething toy, but I did tuck it away into my void, much to her surprise and my amusement. However, a nagging sensation in the back of my mind told me I had forgotten something important...



Despite no longer being a mere ghoul, Olin lay sprawled on the battlefield, his neck snapped and chest ripped open. He gazed up at the sky, motionless, unperturbed by his injuries. After all, as a lich, his injuries were nothing to worry about as long as his phylactery remained safe and sound. The real problem was that he was surrounded by foes who thought he was truly dead. But, hey, he was dead...or rather, undead. So, he lay there waiting for his next move, hoping his mistress hadn't forgotten about him. Though, he did worry about how far he could be from his phylactery, which was still in the clutches of that vile Black Pudding.

Sophia and the others, now dressed in fresh clothes and armor courtesy of the dungeon folk, stood side by side, looking like fierce warriors and mages. Except for Jason, who still looked like he raided a grave. Sophia wore a sleek set of black robes paired with a silver chest plate, feeling quite proud of her new outfit. And let's not forget about Blake, who was being cradled by the vampire like a tiny little baby.

As they gazed upon the enemy army reforming for battle, Sophia, Rob, Heather, and Yua, all wore expressions of doubt. Only Jason seemed to be relishing the chaos. Jeremy, on the other hand, was a mystery. The enemy army was made up of rows of battle-hardened knights, making the gang question why they ever thought it was a good idea to recruit the dungeon denizens in the first place. They were starting to think that running away was the better option.

The Chief raised his hand, silencing the battlefield on both sides before releasing a thunderous roar. He barked out a single command, "loose!"

The night sky lit up with a dazzling array of colors, like a neon light show, as the dungeon dwellers unleashed their magic for the first time since regaining it. Heather and the others were taken aback by the sheer number of spells cast simultaneously. The enemy forces and the remaining citizens of Elsternwick prepared themselves with shields and protective spells. At the same time, some

desperately attempted to escape as the magic soared skyward, only to rain down upon them like a barrage of missiles.

Explosions rocked the enemy camp as those without protection were sent flying by the force of magic. The dazzling display of colors continued to burst forth with each explosion as spell after spell rained down on the enemy army. The dust and various colors of smoke from the continuous explosions obscured the full extent of the destruction. Still, it was clear that the dungeon dwellers had wreaked havoc.

However, with his wizardly appearance, the warg wasn't taking any chances, and with another deafening roar, he commanded, "Keep firing!"



Vanya couldn't accept what was happening. Her husband had been slain, and his soul trapped in a reanimated corpse, if that was even his soul in there. To make matters worse, the monster responsible for his death and the downfall of her kingdom a century ago was the necromancing vampire, Aurelia. In a desperate attempt to stop her from raising an army of the fallen, Vanya had destroyed the tent that housed the corpses of their fallen. That said, it wasn't just any tent. It was a spatial pocket and destroying it resulted in a massive dimensional explosion that tore the encampment and Elsternwick apart. Despite the destruction, she couldn't risk Aurelia using their dead against them, so it was a necessary evil. But now, the dungeon monsters from which she had robbed the core were attacking them with magic, making no sense whatsoever.

"What the hell?! They should be magicless without the core!" Vanya snarled as she hid beneath a magical barrier as a barrage of spells rained down like an unrelenting hailstorm.

"Oi, I'm wonderin' how long these feckers can keep up this little magic show," Gimona bellowed.

"No idea. They shouldn't even be able to cast spells, but here they are, raining down magic like it's going out of style. The worst part is that they might have a handful of ambient mana users in their group, which means they could keep this up for a few hours if this area stays saturated with mana. We're stuck in a defensive position, dodging spells until either reinforcement shows up or the vampires in their group have to retreat at dawn." Vanya spoke with a mix of frustration and disbelief.

"Well, I'll be fucked! We're going to be arse pounded into oblivion at this rate. We need to do somethin', anythin' but standin' here and takin' a magical beatin' from those vicious monsters!"

"I'm open to any ideas."

"Ah, sure 'n' why not use that auld coot's Way Stone?" Gimona cackled, her eyes alight with mischievous glee.

"Craycroft's Way Stone?"

"Aye! Sure it's got to be hidin' around here somewhere! Ah, ye think that tent exploding was a wild ride, just ye hold that cooch tight, love, there's more madness to come!"



Craycroft, a wizard of notorious power, lay in his grand tower, basking in bed with two of his lesser servants, a brother, and sister, as he remembered. He derived a sinister pleasure from capturing – reforming – the inferior races, a task he considered a mercy. While many of his ilk saw fit to eradicate the non-enlightened races, Craycroft considered himself above such base desires. No, he was much too cunning to simply destroy. Why waste such potential slaves when you can bend them to your will, manipulate their minds, and mold them into something useful? The thought brought a sly smile to his lips as he grabbed the young man’s ass as his sister watched.

The hatred radiated off the two gremlins was like a noxious cloud, but that was all part of the fun to Craycroft. Every project began with resistance, and breaking it down was half the thrill of the reforming process. To bend their will, to make them see the error of their race, that was what he lived for. The power to manipulate and shape their minds to his liking set him apart from the others. And as the two siblings writhed in their hatred, he could not help but revel in his superiority as he enlightened them with every thrust of his hips.

The night wore on as he indulged in his twisted pleasures until, at last, he was sated and slumbered, leaving behind two broken servants, who slunk back into the shadows of the tower. He could sleep soundly, without a hint of guilt or remorse, for he knew his mercy was a blessing to the unenlightened. Those pitiful creatures would have met a swift and violent end if he were anyone else. But to him, reshaping their minds and molding them into something more was a true act of kindness.

The room was suddenly alight with energy as Craycroft bolted upright in his bed, his eyes darting about in search of the source of the disturbance. What he saw defied all logic and reason. The air was thick with magic, a seething, sparking, and arcing mass of mana that filled not only his chamber but the entire tower. This was an unprecedented amount of magic concentrated in a single location, and he knew exactly what it meant.

“Mana detonation!” he exclaimed, realizing with horror that there was nothing he could do to prevent the inevitable.

The crown of the wizard tower, where Craycroft’s bed-chamber was situated, was rocked by a devastating eruption of raw magic. The skies were illuminated with a brilliant display that could be seen as far as three kingdoms away. A dazzling pillar of energy shot upwards, like a geyser of pure magic, sending stone and mana raining down in a brilliant shower. For a fleeting moment, it seemed like the heavens were ablaze. By some stroke of fortune, the dozens of servants that Craycroft kept within the confines of his tower emerged unscathed. They seized the opportunity to escape into the night, never to return.

As for Craycroft, he found himself still in his bed, surrounded by the remnants of the army he had departed from earlier that day. The only explanation was that the Way Stone had detonated, transporting him back to the army’s encampment. But there was no sign of the camp, the only evidence of a recent battle and the soldiers and knights surrounding him. Craycroft clutched the thin sheet tighter around his chest, concealing his nudity. He noticed the scattered crystal shards

along the tree line, a telltale sign of mortar fire. Still, there was no sign of the army or any other military might. It appeared like someone had staged an elaborate distraction and fled into the night. Craycroft seethed with anger, for he knew that someone would pay dearly for this foul deed.