

BLACK 2 PUDDING

CHAPTER 18

The next day dawned, bringing with it the highly anticipated Spell Theory and Creation class with Professor Gigglesprout. Let me tell you, I was practically bouncing with fucking excitement. I was itching for some goddamn action, and by action, I mean a good old-fashioned murder spree. Not because I was in a pissy mood or anything, no way. I was feeling freaking fantastic, and that's exactly why I craved the rush of the hunt. But for now, I had to keep those cravings in check. Standing outside the classroom, I was eager to see if I could learn a new spell without relying on the damn system.

Yeah, I'm here to learn about mana stone creation and, you know, maybe snatch a few for myself if the opportunity presents itself. But let's face it, my status sheet is all screwed up without a proper class, or at least that's what I believe. So, I figured, why not dive into magic the good ol' dirty way. And if that doesn't pan out, well, I'll just grab those shiny crystals or stones or whatever and make a break for it, hauling ass back to Aurelia as fast as possible on an airship or starship or whatever.

But shit, I was still blown away by the class option that popped up yesterday. The Crystal Artificer class I snagged confirmed my theory perfectly – losing my Dungeon Monster class must be the reason my status sheet looks so damn empty. Now I just had to cross my fingers and hope that grabbing a new class would bring back my levels and, hell yeah, those sweet missing skills. Seriously, I was itching for Absorb to be back in my freaking arsenal. Now, the big question was whether I should click on Crystal Artificer right away or wait to see if there were any other classes I could snag while I was here, and more importantly, what the requirements were to unlock new classes.

As for my roommate, Thalassa, she remained convinced that I was nothing more than a snow elf meat sack housing a hivemind spider nest inside. To be honest, I hadn't bothered to correct her mistaken belief. I had introduced myself as Blake Pudding, not the most creative choice, but hey, I suck at coming up with names. Surprisingly, nobody had a single damn clue that I could be a walking, talking Black Pudding. They were all blissfully ignorant of my true nature, despite my half-assed attempts at keeping it under wraps. Oh, and there was absolutely no way in hell I was going to introduce myself as the Daughter of Nightmares.

Stepping into my Spell Theory class, I couldn't help but notice the perplexed expressions on everyone's faces. The room was filled with a mix of confusion and bickering among the students.

“Where's the professor?” I overheard one student griping.

“The assignment is on the board, but I don't understand,” another student said.

I glanced down at the front of the classroom, my eyes landing on the professor casually reclining in his chair at the desk, absorbed in a book. He didn't bother to hide himself, at least not that I noticed, but rather seemed disinterested in the presence of his students. Behind him, the chalkboard displayed a single word written in bold letters: *Arcane Sight*. Below that, a message I had almost missed caught my attention: *If you can decipher this message, remain silent and depart. You have the remainder of the day to pursue personal studies. For your next assignment, delve into the topic of wards. Professor Gigglesprout.* Well, it seemed my Mana Sight worked just like this Arcane Sight thing, allowing me to see the professor and read that hidden message like a boss.

Though, to add a touch of amusement to my day, I couldn't help but notice my nymph roommate seated in the classroom, her expression mirroring the perplexed looks of everyone else, including Prince Asshat. With a frown and an irritated huff, I swiftly spun on my heel and stormed out of the class. Sure, I might have felt a bit smug about seeing through the professor's illusion, but I had wanted to learn a new damn spell, not to prove that my own spell met his goddamn standards. *Ugh, what a waste of time!*

I decided to spend the rest of the day in the library, immersing myself in books about ward spells and incantations. However, I must admit, I wasn't particularly thrilled about delving into incantation magic. It brought back memories of the days when I had to compete against the other six summoned Dark Champion candidates, who would recite incantations before activating their system commands. There was no damn way I was going to follow in their footsteps.

No, what fucking intrigued me more was the possibility of using an incantation spell to unlock a new skill within my list of system commands. I was determined to acquire a new system skill that would let me cast the spell without relying on the damn system, tapping into the ambient mana swirling around me. Unfortunately, much to my dismay, my attempts yielded no bloody results. However, amidst my research, I stumbled upon a particular ward incantation that set my black goo pulsating: *Astral Shield*.

I focused on repeating the incantation in my mind, determined to etch it into my memory. "*Veiled in the unseen, guard me from all harm, Astral Shield.*" If the only way to acquire new spells was through incantations, I made up my mind to figure out a way to mentally recite them, saving myself the embarrassment of announcing my attacks like an oblivious fool. I wasn't about to reveal my attacks before launching them.

Before I knew it, the third day of my academy arch had arrived, and my next class was Combat Training with Major Emberblade. However, this class was not held on the same campus. To attend, I had to make my way through the portal located in the main hall of the academy. As I groggily opened my eyes in bed, I noticed my roommate staring at me, her gaze fixed intently upon me.

"You know, it's both unsettling and fascinating to observe your meat suit deflate as you sleep," Thalassa remarked, her eyes filled with a morbid curiosity. "By the way, I can't help but wonder, who was she... I mean, whose host body do you inhabit?"

"It's not a host body. It's a silk shell," I groaned, still half asleep, before my eyes snapped wide open.

“A silk shell? Huh, I didn’t know Corpseweaver Hives could do that,” she muttered to herself.

Damn, she had managed to pry some information out of me. I quickly realized I needed to be more cautious around her. But then again, considering the other residents in the Hall of Oddities dorm, it didn’t seem like it would make much of a difference. I mean, seriously, there were vampires and all sorts of nightmarish creatures living alongside me. And let’s not forget about my Den Mother, who seemed to have a never-ending fascination with trying to cast charm spells on me. It was a twisted and bizarre living situation, to say the least. But you know what? It felt just right if I’m being honest.

Departing from class, I decided to skip the dining hall and avoid drawing too much attention to myself. Instead, I satisfied my hunger with a secret stash of rotting limbs that I had pilfered from Kaida and concealed in the depths of Stellar Void. Perched on a stone throne, I discreetly delighted in devouring my meal in the sanctity of a restroom stall. I was fully aware that my supply would soon dry up, forcing me to face the dreaded mingling of others. But for now, I embraced the solitude and savored every dissolving bite of decaying flesh.

After satisfying my hunger, I proceeded toward the portal, the same one that had been shown to me during the lackluster campus tour. Unlike my previous classes, Thalassa wasn’t enrolled in the same course. Instead, she had her own schedule with Ethereal Floral and Potions. Honestly, I felt relieved about that. It wasn’t that I had any particular animosity toward my roommate, but I simply lacked the enthusiasm for any murderous inclinations toward the nymph. Hence, being in her presence didn’t hold much significance for me.

As I stepped through the portal, I found myself in a grand marble chamber that exuded a sense of elegance and refinement, far superior to the one I had just left. It became apparent that I had crossed the threshold into the main campus located within the capital of Yaddith, the Fortress City of Thule. Casting a glance toward one of the massive windows, I was met with the sight of a relentless blizzard raging outside, the snow mercilessly pelting against the glass. However, as I drew closer to the window, my eyes were captivated by an intriguing peculiarity. It appeared as though I had entered the vast expanse of a colossal cavern system, with a rocky ceiling and twisted, towering roots suspended in the sky above. The surreal landscape held me spellbound, evoking a profound sense of awe.

“Miss Pudding, I presume?” a woman’s voice said from behind me.

I turned to find another nymph-like figure, but there was something distinct about her. While she shared certain features with a nymph, she exuded a regal and refined aura, as if she possessed immense power. As I continued to explore the realm of ambient mana casting, still struggling to master it with only a few spells at my disposal, I had developed a growing sensitivity to the flow of mana. And let me tell you, it was practically radiating off this tree lady in waves. Her skin resembled birch bark, and her soft, bioluminescent green hair shimmered with purple and yellow flowers. Her eyes emitted a gentle bioluminescent glow, captivating and enchanting.

“Are you a nymph?” I asked.

“I am a dryad,” she replied with a soft smile. “Unlike nymphs, I am bound to a tree. In this case, I am bound to the Elden Tree. But I must admit, I am curious. Where do you come from, little Eldritch?”

“Eldritch?” I asked, my curiosity piqued. The term was not unfamiliar to me, as I had heard stories from the Crone, my new mother, about the war between the Titans and the Eldritch. However, I hadn’t had anyone actually refer to me as one before.

“Quite fascinating,” she murmured, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. “Well, in any event, please disregard my ramblings. However, I would be delighted to accompany you to your class.”

“Are you Major Emberblade, my instructor for the Combat Training class?” I feigned obliviousness to her evasiveness regarding the “little Eldritch” comment. My focus remained on the present, not wanting to delve into discussions about my origins. Besides, if I wanted to explore the topic of Eldritch further, I could always seek out a book in the library.

“No, you may call me Penelo,” she continued to smile as her gaze seemed to penetrate deep into the depths of my soul.

I trailed behind Penelo, the enchanting dryad, as she guided me through the corridors of the main campus. Every step revealed a world of pristine beauty, but my gaze couldn’t help but wander back to her enticing figure. Like nymphs, it appeared that dryads didn’t give a damn about clothes, and with her birch wood skin, I couldn’t help but notice the intricate details. However, my heart remained steadfast in my pursuit of Aurelia, the one I truly desired, and I had no intention of entertaining any other romantic interests. Nonetheless, I couldn’t deny the visual appeal that Penelo presented, and I found myself appreciating her swaying aesthetic backside as she walked.

Wanting to divert my attention from her enticing figure, I decided to bring up a topic that had piqued my curiosity. “Penelo, I’ve been wondering, how deep beneath the surface is the main campus?” I asked, hoping to learn more about the mysterious cavern system I had glimpsed through the window.

“The majority of Thule is situated beneath the extensive root system of the Elden Tree,” said Penelo. “It consists of a network of thirty-two large caverns, each with its own distinct climate and weather patterns. The variations between the caverns can be quite dramatic. As for the academy, it is specifically located within the Forever Winter Cavern, a region known for its unyielding cold and everlasting snowfall. Ah, here we are,” she announced as we came to a stop before a pair of weathered iron doors bearing the marks of time and neglect. They stood in stark contrast to the elegance that characterized the rest of the main campus.

“Thanks,” I replied with a stupid grin. Like my roommate, I had no fucking desire to murder this wooden woman. But let’s be real, I was positive she could kick my ass without breaking a sweat if I dared to try.

As I approached the doors, I heard her bid me farewell from behind, her voice lingering in the air. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Daughter of Nightmares,” she said with a hint of intrigue.

I spun around in disbelief, but to my goddamn shock, Penelo had vanished. There was no fucking way she had just disappeared down that long-ass corridor. She simply freaking vanished into thin air, leaving me with a mix of excitement and curiosity. And what the hell, she even knew me by my name, or what felt more like a badass title to me, the Daughter of Nightmares. This shit just got a whole lot more intriguing. However, I decided to set aside those questions for another time. Right now, I had Combat Training waiting for me beyond those doors.



Penelo reappeared in the throne room, where Queen Anna Evergodling, the third of her name, and Grand Magus Aldin awaited her. The chamber was filled with only a select few loyal royal guards, emphasizing the significance of the forthcoming discussion. Queen Anna, a gnome of small stature, held herself with regal poise before her court. However, as Penelo, the queen's lady-in-waiting, knew well, the queen possessed a mischievous and innocent nature akin to that of a gremlin. Speaking of which, Penelo's gaze shifted. She noticed the grand magus, a gremlin with reptilian skin, an oddity among the court. Despite his peculiar position of power within the court, the queen placed her trust in him, which prompted Penelo to grant him the benefit of the doubt.

Both the queen and the grand magus showed a keen interest in the information Penelo had gathered about the newest addition to the academy. The question lingered on whether their adversaries had taken notice, but it was undeniable to the dryad that this girl masquerading as a snow elf carried the marks of five powerful and distinctly conflicting entities. The queen was resolute in her determination to determine whether Blake was a valuable ally or a potential threat, particularly in the face of the rising cults of light within her domain.

While Penelo possessed the power to confront any potential threat posed by little Eldritch within the boundaries of Thule, she understood her constraints. Bound to the Elden Tree, she couldn't stray too far from its protective sanctuary. As the eldest of dryads, she commanded tremendous power and had attained mastery that surpassed the newly emerged gods of the realm. However, Penelo had consciously chosen not to pursue godhood, opting instead to remain devoted to the Elden Tree, also known as the Tree of Life among the dryads. She patiently awaited the day when her goddess would be reborn, fulfilling her purpose and bringing forth a new era. Although she had no personal desire for power, being an ancient leveler, Penelo knew that she possessed the levels to ascend to godhood whenever she deemed it necessary, should she ever choose to embrace her divine potential.

"My grace, I believe it would be prudent to exercise caution and gather more information about this young lady before making any hasty decisions," Penelo respectfully voiced her opinion. "While she does possess conflicting sources of influence, there is something intriguing about her inner spark. I personally wish to observe her more closely, especially regarding her origins."

Queen Anna Evergodling couldn't help but smile in the presence of Penelo, the strongest entity in all of Yaddith. She often marveled at her good fortune in having Penelo as her trusted lady-in-waiting. "As for this, Blake, I entrust the decision to you," the queen decreed, acknowledging Penelo's wisdom and judgment in the matter.