

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 17

Olin's soul still clung around his body, even after his skull had been shattered beyond repair by a massive battle axe—or so Heather claimed. *Man, I really wish Mana Sight would let me see souls. That would be so cool!* And yet, thankfully, Heather, our new Dark Priestess—sorry, Priestess of Dreams, or whatever—had the power to mend the ghoul's head with relative ease, even though he still looked like shit. Now healing magic shouldn't have worked on the undead but being on the dark side seemed to have its benefits. But it was clear that just fixing the skull wouldn't be enough to bring him back to life, or un-life, which was where the phylactery came into play.

So, there I was, standing over the little ghoul bastard's body, holding one of my two phylactery nuts like a boss. With a cocky smirk, I went ahead and activated the system command. [**Spirit Vessel**] flared to life, and let me tell you, it was a trip! The flow of mana all around me had me feeling like Evil-Lyn. Now, I couldn't see the magic at work, but I could feel it licking my skin. Surprisingly, the skill seemed rather simple, like I could repeat it without the system's aid, though I wasn't entirely confident in my ability to pull it off just yet. But hey, practice makes perfect, right? And how hard could it be to shove a soul back into a body? I mean, what's the worst that could happen if I screwed up Olin's soul? Not like he's gonna die... again... right?

As much as I wanted answers from Olin, a part of me couldn't help but feel like I was wasting his soul on my last empty phylactery—*what a freaking waste*—but hey, desperate times call for desperate measures, right? I needed to find Aurelia, and if this was the way to do it, then so be it. Still, amidst the skill's spellcasting, a nagging feeling gnawed at the back of my mind, like I'd forgotten something important. *Meh, whatever!* I brushed it off with a mental shrug. No time for second-guessing now.

Before I knew it, the skill deactivated, and the phylactery took over, weaving Olin's soul back into his body. The whole process felt strangely familiar, like déjà vu or something. Like, hey, has something similar happened to my own soul before? It was freaky, but I pushed the thought away. Right now, all I cared about was getting answers out of the little rat bastard.

“He's a lich now,” Ava declared.

Hoisting the ghoul over my shoulder, I pressed on with my search through the ruins, heedless of the gnawing feeling in the back of my mind. There was no time for distractions or second-guessing. Aurelia was out there somewhere, and I was determined to find her, no matter what it took.

“Oh, and that nagging in our head, it's Wartie,” Ava chuckled as soon as the realization hit us. “He's still trapped inside the Stellar Void.”

“What? I can't hear you,” I replied, pretending to be clueless, even though she knew everything since she was me—or wait, was it the other way around? Ugh, this is so confusing. Maybe I should

give the other half of my soul a name or something? I mean, we're both Blake, but it's getting hard to keep track of who's who in this freaky soul-split thing. Maybe I should just deactivate Oracle. That way, I'm not aware of it. But then again, it's kinda handy having someone to talk with that I don't want to eat. Oh well, I'll figure it out later.

"You... You seriously didn't forget, did you?" Ava playfully accused. "Come on, you're just trying to dodge dealing with him!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," I protested, my tone oozing with sarcasm. With a wry twist of my lips, I sought to deflect the accusations I was having with myself—I mean with Ava.

"Let the poor kid out!"

"Ugh! Do I have to?" I whined.

Sophia leaned over my shoulder, a look of bemusement on her face. "You know, it's sort of creepy listening to you argue with yourself like that," she said with a smirk.

"Umm, Sophia, please don't tease the man-eating monster that's already killed three of us," Yua interjected, her tone wary.

"Five," I replied, a glint of amusement in my eyes. "I'm counting the cave-in as my victory." I grinned, reveling in the memory of beheading Rob and Heather and ramming my tentacle down Jason's throat.

"I'm pretty sure the cave-in counts as Jeremy's win," Rob added. His words struck me with bitter annoyance. The grin faded from my face, replaced by a scowl as I glared at him.

"Do you want me to remove your head again?"

"No, ma'am!" Rob blurted out.

As I navigated the twisting labyrinth of corridors, a sense of unease grew within me. Olin's lifeless body in my arms, I was followed by a group of simple-minded followers. Soon enough, I came across a familiar path that led to the massive chamber where Aurelia had tossed me at that delicious succubus. The memory of Aurelia shoving me into Niamh and devouring her sent delightful shivers through me. The desire to murder and consume that succubus while Aurelia watched consumed my thoughts.

"Pervert!"

"Oh, shut up, like you're any better."

"..."

Despite my attempts at teasing myself, my heart was heavy with dread at the thought of discovering Aurelia's lifeless body within the labyrinthine corridors. Cautiously, I stepped into the chamber. The delicious stench of death and decay bathed my senses. The space stretched out like a massive cathedral, with towering vaulted ceilings and endless pillars vanishing into the shadows. The faint

green light from a few remaining cauldrons cast an eerie glow, revealing the crushed remains of countless skeletons scattered across the floor.

Amidst this haunting scene of death, I spotted the bodies of necromancers and other dark creatures, all fallen in their final last stand. The mere thought of Aurelia being among them sent shivers of sorrow through my body, and I couldn't help but feel utterly lost in this realm of despair. I wandered aimlessly, hoping against hope that I wouldn't find Aurelia's lifeless form among the fallen.

"Ava," I asked, my voice barely above a whisper, "if she's here, do you think we can turn her into a lich?"

I shook my head, her voice equally hushed. My other half's words struck me like a knife to the heart, leaving me feeling hollow. "I don't know. If her soul still remains near her body, it's possible."

"What happened here?" Rob's voice boomed out through the solemn cathedral of death.

My flock of lost sheep began murmuring amongst themselves as I searched through the grisly aftermath of the battle. To my immense relief, I could not find any trace of Aurelia's body amongst the pile of crushed skeletons and fallen dark creatures. But then, I felt Olin shifting about on my shoulder, and my heart raced. Olin was stirring, awakening much faster than Wartie had. I speculated that it was due to his previous existence as an undead. The time had come to extract some answers, and with a cold and callous heart, I tossed the little shit to the ground and loomed over him.

Olin's eyes opened wide in shock and confusion as they met mine. Before he could speak, I transformed an arm into a massive tentacle and slammed it beside his head, causing the former ghoul to tremble. Olin attempted to speak, his lips forming a word. "Bow—," but my voice blasted through the chamber like a clap of thunder, silencing him.

"WHERE IS AURELIA?!" I screamed, my eyes blazing with a harsh, orange light that cast a sinister glow upon the quivering figure before me. However, whether the voice had been mine or Ava's was unclear—well, technically, it was both. Man, I really need to figure this shit out—as the air around me seemed to thrum with dark and ominous energy. I could have been mistaken, but I thought I had seen a few orange sparks.

"The last time I beheld my lady," Olin spoke, barely above a whisper, "that bastard, Demidicus, was dragging her towards the portal chamber, with the surviving elders in tow, in a bid to escape." The fear and trembling in his voice faded, replaced by a look of determination in his eyes as he stared up at me.

"Where would they have gone?"

"There is another coven located far to the west of these lands, along the coast," Olin replied. "If they went anywhere, it would likely be there. However, I highly doubt they would stay for long. The Grand Elder is not known for sharing power and holds little sway on that side of the continent."

“And after that?” I growled.

“I cannot say for sure,” Olin admitted. “This place was our final resort in Demidicus’s eyes.”

“Ugh! How do I find Aurelia?!” I demanded.

“My guess is she will find you,” Olin answered.

“That’s not much help,” I snarled. “If you’re not going to be useful to me, I might as well eat you.”

Olin’s gaze darted towards the others, a look of surprise crossing his face before returning his attention to me. “I thought the other candidates had perished during the trial?”

“We all did,” I answered. “But the Crone chose to keep us.”

“Did she choose anyone to be her priestess?” Olin asked, a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

“Heather, get your ass over here!”

“C-Coming!” Heather shrieked back as she stumbled over, with Yua protectively by her side and the other two following closely behind.

“Meet Heather, our Priestess of Dreams or some shit,” I announced with a hint of sarcasm, gesturing toward her.

Heather stood stiffly, fear evident on her face, as she nervously waved in Olin’s direction. “H-Hi,” she stammered.

“Excellent! No, remarkable! You are her voice in this world,” Olin said to Heather, his eyes alight with excitement. “If you seek answers, you must pray to our goddess.”

Heather looked around, bewildered, until Yua offered her a gentle nudge of encouragement. My interest, however, was piqued by the other roles in this twisted little group of ours. Something to worry about later!

“W-What exactly should I p-pray for?” Heather stammered.

“Pray for where we may find Lady Aurelia,” Olin instructed, his eyes shining in eagerness. “It may take several hours to respond, but do not stop praying until she answers.”

“Remember that sexy vampire woman we caught a glimpse of before the trial began,” Yua whispered into Heather’s ear, her voice carrying clearly through the silent, cavernous chamber. I felt a longing desire that I couldn’t explain as Ava nodded in agreement.

“Do you think Aurelia has a thing for twins?”

“Shut up, me! ...Maybe?”

“Which one of you is the champion?” Olin asked, his gaze fixed on me as if waiting for me to claim the title for myself.

I gave a nonchalant shrug, “We left the fool in that room filled with altars.”

“You’re not the champion?” Olin muttered to himself.

“Nope.”

“Interesting,” Olin said, his brow furrowed in thought. “My mistress was so sure you would come out on top.”

“Well, these things happen,” I said, a smirk playing on my lips.

“Wait... You said the room with the altars?” Olin’s expression darkened.

“That’s right,” Sophia confirmed.

“So, all of you really did meet your end down there?”

“I’m not entirely sure I did,” I chimed in, my arms folded behind my back as I swayed innocently, “but I can vouch for the death of the others.”

“Some of the old scriptures I’ve found stated that if a leveler fell in a dungeon. Their spirit would be returned to the fold, to a place known as a Respawn Point. So, they may fight again,” Olin mused, his eyes distant and his demeanor contemplative.

“But wouldn’t the dungeon’s core be necessary for that to work?” I asked with a hint of skepticism.

“Indeed,” Olin replied, nodding his head in agreement.

“Funny thing,” I added with a wry smirk, “the core was taken a month or two ago.”

“What? That’s not possible! ...Unless the Crone intervened on your behalf,” Olin gasped.

“Well, that might explain why Rob’s body vanished,” I interjected. “But it doesn’t explain why Sophia’s body was left lying there when Blake started the trial.”

“...When Blake started it?” Olin repeated in confusion at my odd phrasing.

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied with a dismissive wave of my hand. *Yeah, I’m a bit confused by it myself.*

“Perhaps the goddess wasn’t involved at first and left Sophia’s body there until we, or rather, until Blake started impressing her,” I theorized, my mind racing with possibilities.

“Are you talking about yourself in the third person?” Olin asked, sounding a bit puzzled.

“She does that,” Sophia teased. “You’ll get used to it.”

I turned my gaze to Olin, a curious expression on my face. “So, these respawn points only work for Levelers, and are they limited to dungeons?” I asked.

“As far as legends go, they only talk about them working inside of dungeons for Levelers,” Olin replied, a contemplative look on his face. “There’s no written evidence of them working outside of dungeons.”

Not surprising,” I grumbled, my brow furrowed in thought. “Our knowledge is limited to isekai anime, of course, but it makes sense, nonetheless,” I mumbled to myself.

“I’m concerned,” Olin muttered, his features etched with worry as he fixed his gaze upon me. Probably referring to the way I was speaking to myself, or rather, of myself. *Whatever!*

“And you should be,” I said with a nod. “But for now, shush!”

Heather let out a startled breath as she eyed me with fear, “S-She... Umm, the Crone, the goddess? Your mother, as she put it... S-She says the King-Kingdom of S-Slaethia cap-captured her.”

“Oh, no!” Olin uttered.

I fixed Olin with a steely, intense gaze, my voice tinged with the fury that boiled within me. “Which way is the Kingdom of Slaethia?”

“To the southeast,” Olin answered, his expression a tempest of conflicting emotions. “D-Did the priestess refer to the Crone as your mother?”

“Scion of the Crone,” I replied, but there was no humor or taunting behind my words. My thoughts were solely focused on retrieving Aurelia, and the burning fury within me was overwhelming. I did not heed the others as they proudly announced their titles to Olin.

“S-Scion?!” Olin stammered out, his disbelief and shock oozing from that single word.

I felt a strong urge to plunge a tentacle into Olin’s eye socket, but despite my rage, the sight of his small, childlike form held me back. *Stupid kid face!* However, a wicked idea struck me as I glanced around the room at all the dead bodies.

“Hmm,” I breathed out in a menacing tone, “is it too late to transplant his soul into another host, or is he stuck in that body until his soul adapts?”

In a low, sinister coo, I replied back to myself, “Since he was already undead, the answer should be... no? Let’s try it and find out.”

My four idiots went silent as Olin’s eyes bulged in terror, realizing his fate. But before he could utter a single plea or protest, I ruthlessly severed his phylactery from his current vessel, leaving him silenced. I needed warriors, not children. And tormenting him without feeling that dreadful sensation called guilt—*blah*—is just a bonus!

“Did you just kill a child?” Rob asked, his face filled with concern.

“He was already dead,” I replied, my tone flat and unemotional. Ignoring the look of disbelief on their faces, I reached into the Stellar Void and retrieved a tiny, irksome goblin clutching an orb no larger than a softball as if it were the most special thing in all of existence.

“Where? What? Who?” Wartie stammered, his eyes darting around in disbelief as he came face to face with four of his sworn enemies. I gently patted the goblin’s head, calming him down before he could act recklessly. He gazed up at me, his mouth opening and closing as he tried to speak, but no words came out. Then the little pest attached himself to my leg like a frightened child... *Ugh!*

“Heather,” I stated with determination, “ask our mother if she will restore the powers of the dungeon dwellers in exchange for their undying devotion to her.”

Heather muttered, “Our?” before falling silent and resuming her prayers, inclining her head in reverence.

I furrowed my brow in confusion and whispered to myself, “Mother?” It was strange how quickly I had accepted that the Crone was indeed my mother, but it felt surprisingly natural for both halves of my soul to come around to this realization. Still, it was odd how I was referring to myself as

“This is where the fuck you guys went!” Jason yelled, swaggering into the room like he owned the place. He had thrown on some scavenged armor he’d looted off a random corpse, blood stains still evident. With each step, his armor clanked loudly, making his entrance even more obnoxious.

Wartie let out a low growl, but a gentle hand on his head calmed the irksome goblin. Surprisingly, I noticed Jeremy trailing behind Jason, also donning pilfered armor. I had half-expected that jagged-toothed fucker to have killed him. Guess that devastating lightning spell of Jeremy’s had kept Jason in line. *Meh, whatever!*

Heather let out a sharp gasp as she suddenly started levitating off the ground. I turned toward her, noticing her eyes had become as dark as a moonless night.

“Listen well, my dears,” the Crone’s ethereal voice echoed, “for I doth proclaim, that I shall take the dungeon dwellers into my fold, if they swear their undying devotion to me and mine, unyielding and bold. And with thy faithful followers, my dear daughters,” she continued, a sly grin spreading across Heather’s face, “ye shall have the makings of an army, a force to be reckoned with, so begin. But beware, my dears, for if they should stray, they shall feel the wrath of my daughters, nightmares and dreams rolled into one.

“And now, my dears,” declared the Crone with a nod, “my priestess hath received my command, with my beloved grandchild in tow, he and ye three, my paladin, sentinel, and assassin, shall go with my priestess to the dungeon folk, to offer my kindness. With my offer, they shall join our cause, and my daughters’ army shall grow, for ye must be ready, for what is yet to come, so go and make ready, my dears, I bid thee go.

“Now for ye, my daughter, I know what it is ye seek, and know this well, if ye act with haste, ye shall rescue that which ye desire, within Elsternwick to the east, before night doth waste. Take my champion with thee, and when ye return with your love, lead my flock to the covens of the west, for the holy knights shall chase close at thy crest.”

Heather’s dark elf irises returned to their normal purple and pink hue before she collapsed into Yua’s embrace. I turned my gaze to Jason and saw a look of anger and disdain on his face. *Oh, joy—wait, did she say grandchild?*

We all sprang into action when the Crone finished her decree, splitting into two groups. Wartie—My. My... The Crone’s new grandbaby—Seriously! *What the fuck?! You know what, I don’t fucking care! Anyhow.* The kid led the five dipshits back into the dungeon to present the Crone’s offer to restore the dungeon folk’s lost magic and powers. They just had to swear their devotion to

the dark goddess. After the dungeon core was stolen, the dwellers lost everything. It was apparent that they were desperate for a way to regain their magic.

The second group consisted of me, myself, and I. Oh! And Jason, the new sucker—champion! He wouldn't have come on his own accord without my new foster mama commanding it. *I love being the Scion of the Crone!*

It didn't take long before I was nestled deep in the heart of a forest far from the dungeon ruins, keeping a wary watch on the holy knights' encampment just outside the charming town of Elsternwick. That's if a few crumbling houses huddled behind a dilapidated wall was considered charming. Then yeah, it's charming! The Crone's proclamation still resounded in the back of my mind as I scouted the knights' movements. Oh, and I was alongside my mother's worthless champion. Mother? Ha! It's strange how fast I've accepted I'm her so-called Scion or daughter! The cold shoulder Jason gave me was almost amusing. Too bad that occasional glare he threw at me was a bit aggravating. If he continued doing it, my new foster mother might have to search for a new sucker—I mean, champion. *Not it!*

Locating Elsternwick was a cinch, with the army's trail laid out clear as day, leading right through the forest. Jason and I arrived outside the encampment in no time. My heart dropped at seeing vampires bared naked and impaled upon wooden spikes, Vlad the Impaler-like, still living as they slowly roasted beneath the blazing sun. The once-fearsome creatures of the night were reduced to squirming in agonizing pain! Their skin bubbled, blackened, and blistered, their piercing screams of torture echoing through the air, met with jeers and laughter from the holy knights. If the roasting vampires weren't supposed to be my allies, I would probably take a bite or two. I was grateful that Aurelia wasn't among them. Still, the thought of Aurelia suffering set my tar-black blood blazing with rage as I gazed into the camp, desperate to find her.

“What's the fucking plan?” Jason growled out. “Because I'm not risking my ass against those fuckers!”

I smirked at Jason's arrogant face and replied, “Remain here until I need you. Then let loose and create mayhem at my signal, or you hear a commotion from within the camp – either or! You've got that shadow walker thingy. Oh, and just so you know. I'm still pissed about not stealing that spell from you!”

Jason's face was a mask of frustration and anger as he crossed his arms to glare at me. “I'm not your fucking pawn. I need a real, solid plan, not a suicidal one, you crazy bitch!”

I shrugged at Jason before giving him a twisted dark smile as my body liquefied, shifted, and deformed like a Wicked Witch hit with water. I assumed all my extra mass had disappeared into Stellar Void, but I wasn't quite sure if that was the case; it had gone somewhere, regardless. Following that bitch, Circe's poor teaching, I found that magic was all about feeling and sensation as much as imagination and desire, much like a waltz or salsa. I had to let go of my inhibitions and let my body flow to the beat. *Don't think about the steps. Just move!* I could only pray that I wouldn't stumble at a crucial moment of the beat—like during a fight! Once, my body had shrunk

to the size of a Trounce Spider, my first nemesis. I took off scurrying in a mad dash toward the military encampment, leaving a pissed-off sucker—champion behind!

“What the fuck!” I heard him hiss.

As dusk descended, the sky was awash with orange and pink hues, casting the knight’s encampment into a maze of haunting shadows. The camp was much larger, nearly four times the size of Elsternwick, and being near so many knights gathered in one spot was a bit nerve-wracking. *How the fuck am I going to pull this off?* As a mere tarantula in girth, I continued on in my demonic scurrying amidst the encampment, taking full advantage of the darkness as if it were a shield—because it was!

I was overcome by shock as I observed the eclectic mix of knights in the encampment. Half of them seemed to be adorned in elegant white and gold plate mail, befitting stereotypical holy knights. But the other half... Oh boy! They appeared more like barbarians or soldiers, wearing outfits that made He-Man, Conan, and lingerie models seem conservative, leaving very little to the imagination. What was even more surprising was that these revealing uniforms were equally spread among the genders. It was a sight that left me both amused and bewildered.

“Seriously, what the hell?! What is this, some sort of raunchy cosplay convention or an S&M hookup? Unbelievable! What’s going on?”

I couldn’t help but mentally catcall back to myself, *“Honestly, I’m not sure... but damn, look at her ass!”*

The approaching night was overcome with boisterous laughter of knights bellowing, “Hey there, Gimona! Glad to see you lot made it out in one piece!”

I froze, my tiny legs halting as that name repeated like a cruel mantra in my ears, like a funeral hymn. Wartie’s horrified face flashed in my thoughts, digging that name deeper into my already enraged psyche!

“Ah, ye know it to be true! And I hear tell that yer fight against them blood-suckin’ vamps and necros went as smoothly as a lady’s bosom. Did they suspect that the core was gone missin’?”

“HA! Those vile fuckers never saw it coming! Their magical barrier collapsed like a wizard’s tower made of sand without their siphon into the dungeon core. It only took but a gentle push!” The knight let out a hearty laugh.

“Mercy of Gods! Tis about time! And what of those black-hearted elders? Death too good for ‘em, I say!”

“Their leader or grand shit stain slipped away with a few of his followers, but we got that vile fuck’s daughter. Many of us, I included, offered to spike the bitch, but the General refused. The General is treating her like some fucking VIP, last I heard, intent on handing her over to Slaethia for interrogating. A bunch of bullshit if you ask me! We should strap the bitch down and let the boys spike her! And just be done with it!”

Gimona let out a wholehearted laugh filling the camp. “Ha! If that little vamp is goin’ to Slaethia, she’ll be wishin’ the General ye lads be done with it! Did they drain the lass, at least? Vamps can be a real beast if they’re not. Ye know!”

“Ha! Last I heard, she’s bone dry!”

“*Blake, how many of them do you think we can kill before anyone notices?*” I asked myself.

“*Aurelia first, murdering after!*” I responded.

I peered around the corner of a tent. Easily spotting the dwarf as she lost herself in laughter and ale amongst a gaggle of knights, her five o’clock shadowed jawline on full display. My eyes continued to roam the crowd, searching for the rest of the dwarf’s companions. No sight of the wizard... Still, my true prize was the one approaching a tent. Anlyth, the elf fuck that killed Wartie, arm in arm with a burly, bald behemoth of a caramel-skinned man, built like a seasoned blacksmith or a rampaging linebacker.

“*There’s Anlyth, but who’s the man he’s clinging to?*”

“*Aurelia first, Blake, murdering after! She might be held in a tent at the center of the encampment. There’s also a chance she’s in a secure location inside Elsternwick. But I doubt that shithole has a secure enough location to hold her.*”

Ugh, I was right, and I knew it. “*Then to the center, we shall go!*”

I went unseen as I crept through the camp, using the ever-growing shadows of the descending sun beneath the horizon. The last rays of light barely illuminated the tops of the trees, casting the rest of the camp in black and gray shades of darkness. Meanwhile, the knights reveled in their victory, drowning themselves in drink and jubilation. Some even pranced about in the flickering light of their campfires. Laughter rang out like a chorus as the haunting cries of impaled vampires withered with the dying of the light. The scene was both eerie and surreal, a twisted dance of celebration amidst the suffering.

As I slipped my way into the central portion of the encampment, I found rows of steel cages strung about, like those of a dog kennel. And yet, they were all crammed with crying and sobbing people of various races I could not identify. Worse, not a single person within those cages appeared to be from the necromancers’ fortress—base—ruins...lair? Something or other! I didn’t see anyone who would have dwelled among the vampires and necromancers. These prisoners had a different demeanor than my creepy kind of folks. These were families! It wasn’t that heartbreaking to witness their suffering, hopes, and lives shattered by the cruel fate that had befallen them. Though I did feel a tiny bit of pity for the children among them—I blamed the broken half of my soul.

“*Hey, do you think these are random families the knights rounded up along their way here?*”

“*...I think so.*”

Since reincarnating into this twisted reality, I now call home, I’ve never cared much for others. In my eyes, everyone was food to me. By preference being that of decomposing flesh, but people were still food. Well, besides a particular vampire who’s somehow caught my deep fascination and

longing, it was almost like love at first sight, if such a thing were real. No, I knew what it was. I was in lust, like some naïve lovestruck girl. But all that aside, what I bore witness to now was wrong – children caged like fucking animals! I mean... I may occasionally want to devour a certain goblin child now and then, but I never did it.

“Do you see that tent over there?” I thought to myself.

Amidst the pitiful wails and cries of those caged, a massive tent reminiscent of a Renaissance Fair dominated the scene, guarded by six knights and six savages—nudists, well, barbarians, to be exact. *Honestly, why are they dressed like that?* I desperately needed an opening, a way past them, to reach Aurelia. But to my dismay, there was none. These individuals were devoted and unwavering in their duty, unlike their fellow soldiers, who drowned themselves in booze while reveling in their conquest.

Sweeping my sights over the cages, I spotted a young child who couldn't have been older than six. She had fluffy white bunny ears, and her precious pink eyes were wide and watery, peering at me with a quivering lip. To her, I must have looked like some dangerous spider that had wandered into the encampment. She wasn't entirely wrong; I was dangerous! If I had a heart, it would have shattered into a million pieces at the sight of her. But a funny thing about me in this twisted reality—I had become a heartless bitch. And yet, I couldn't bring myself to abandon the poor thing. It wasn't due to any self-righteous reasons or anything like that. No, I just wanted to inflict as much pain upon those who had taken my Aurelia as I could. One of those ways was by robbing the holy bastards of their captives.

“Hey, got any bright ideas?”

“Not any good ones,” I replied to myself. *“We could try corroding the locks on the cages, but I'm sure we'll get caught. Or we could pull the cages into Stellar Void, but we would have to do it one at a time, and besides getting caught, I don't think we can pull living people into it.”*

“Well – Shit!” I quite literally muttered to myself, feeling a wave of frustration wash over me. If I couldn't find a solution, I was about to have a mid-mind crisis.

“Ugh! We need a distraction that won't alert the entire drunken camp.”

“Do you think they have a munition or weapon tent like earth militaries? Oh, can you imagine what a magic depot explosion would look like?”

“Didn't I just say we don't want to alert the entire camp?!”

“Yeah, but hear yourself out. They're all beyond shitfaced right now. It just might work! We'll make it look like an accident!” I pondered, my thoughts running wild with the potential plan.

“...Okay, but when has anything I planned ever gone according to plan?”

“...”