

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 16

As I followed the goblin child through the twisting tunnels of the dungeon, I could feel my excitement building. The thought of hunting down the other candidates, emerging victorious as the Dark Champion, and returning to Aurelia filled me with an almost intoxicating thrill. But for now, I had to make do with Wartie's idiotic company, although I did enjoy listening to his new pet slime's pleas.

"Kill me!"

As we turned down a particularly narrow passage, Wartie suddenly pointed to a small opening in the wall.

"Muddy, shortcut!" he exclaimed, grinning widely.

I glared suspiciously at the tunnel entrance, half-expecting the goblin child to spring a trap on me. But let's be real. This little dude wasn't exactly a mastermind criminal. He was only good at eating and whining about his dead pet. So, I shrugged and decided to take a chance.

"Alright, Wartie. Let's take your shortcut. But if you end up getting lost or eaten by some unknown monster, I'm blaming you," I grumbled, giving the goblin a stern look.

He just grinned back at me with his pointy teeth and led the way, bouncing along the rough tunnel floor. I couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of it all. Here I was, a monstrous abomination that could grow spider legs on my back, following a dim-witted goblin child through a dark and dangerous tunnel. It was like some twisted fairy tale where the princess was the monster, and the sidekick was a goblin.

"Aha! Look at you, Blake," Ava chortled. "You might be a twisted monster, but you're no princess!"

Oh, shut up, Ava!

"What a printless?" Wartie turned around to ask, his face contorted in confusion as he gazed at me.

Damnit, Ava!

"It's when a privileged brat is allowed to take everyone's pet slimes, only to eat them," Ava quipped before I could intervene.

"Kill me!" the tiny gelatinous cube squeaked out, his voice only Ava and I could hear echoing off the tunnel walls.

Wartie's small goblin brain took a moment to process Ava's words before his face twisted with horror and disgust.

“I hate printlesses!” he declared!

I tried to compose myself, but the image of myself as a privileged brat consuming helpless slimes was too much. My shoulders shook with silent laughter as I tried to catch my breath.

“I can’t say I disagree,” I said, barely keeping a straight face.

As we continued through the cramped passage, I found my thoughts turning to Wartie himself. The young goblin would make a tempting snack with his plump little body and juicy flesh. But I held myself back, bitterly aware that I needed the creature’s help to find the other candidates. Oh, and for some odd reason, killing a child unnerved me. *Ugh, what is this I’m feeling?*

“*Ever heard of a conscience?*” Ava teased, a sly grin spreading across my face—her doing!

Oh, shut up, Jiminy. Ava only laughed at that comment.

Wartie led me deeper into the warped tunnel, and the sense of excitement only grew with each step. The thrill of the hunt coursed through my veins as we continued through the little goblin’s shortcut. I couldn’t wait to confront my rivals and emerge victorious, but I knew I had to bide my time for now.

As we traversed within the shadows of the shortcut, the air grew colder, and my glowing orange eyes reflected off the tunnel walls. The pale green light from the shattered magical stones that lined the walls and their fragments resting on the floors grew dimmer, and the air grew even colder and damp.

We had to squeeze through collapsed sections, barely able to crawl through the narrow openings. My black pudding body occasionally shifted shape to fit through the tight spots. I brushed past a jagged outcropping of rock, tearing a rent in my dress. But as quickly as the fabric was ripped, my pudding body mended itself, sealing the tear with ease. It was a strange feeling, having my body be my clothing, but it gave me a sense of invincibility that was hard to ignore.

My mind was consumed with thoughts of devouring the young goblin, but I held myself back. I couldn’t help but chuckle at the irony of my situation. Here I was, a monster in human form, grappling with a moral dilemma about eating a goblin child. It was like a twisted joke. But alas, my twisted sense of humor couldn’t satiate my insatiable hunger for blood and destruction.

The thought of unleashing my monstrous form upon an unsuspecting victim was almost too much to bear. I could hardly contain my anticipation. My dress rippled with excitement. As we approached a narrow passage, a chill ran down my spine. Something was different about this tunnel. The air was filled with dread, and my senses heightened as I followed the child.

I could feel my blood pounding with anticipation. The darkness seemed to close around me, making the air thick. Despite the fear, my inhuman form trembled with excitement at the thought of hunting down the other candidates. The thrill of the hunt consumed me, driving me forward as we made our way further into the depths.

The desire to tear apart my rivals with my tentacles or sink my demonic spider wings into their flesh filled me with euphoria. I relished in the image of their screams echoing off the cracked stone

walls of the tunnels. But with each passing moment, I found myself growing restless and longing for a challenge, a worthy opponent to test my skills and feed my insatiable hunger. The thought of having to wait made my skin crawl. I was a monster in human form, after all. I needed something to satiate my dark hunger. I would even settle, quenching my thirst on a wondering dungeon monster. Regrettably, the only monster I found thus far down here was me.

“Blake, you seem to be getting more unstable by the day,” Ava commented.

“Hey, don’t judge me, Ava. I know you have similar tendencies,” I retorted.

“Honestly, I don’t think I’m as bad as you. Perhaps it’s a little twisted, but you’re taking it to a new level.”

I disregarded Ava’s remark with a shrug. Her tone held no semblance of concern, and it only further reinforced my beliefs. Being dark and evil was an essential advantage in this bleak and malevolent realm. I refused to fall prey to someone else’s depravity and become a victim. My twisted mind was a shield, a weapon to protect myself from the horrors that lurked in the shadows. To survive in this realm, I had to become the essence of what prowled in the darkness.

“Muddy, exit to shortcut here. We ahead of Doodle’s murderers now. They be coming to us! We wait.” Wartie proclaimed with a wicked grin, revealing his crooked and jagged goblin teeth.

“Are you sure?”

“Uh-huh.”

The wait was unbearable. I watched as Wartie rocked back and forth, humming a tuneless melody while playing with his gelatinous cube, Gooley. Time seemed to drag on, and my annoyance grew with each passing moment. The goblin’s antics drove me mad, and I wasn’t sure how much longer I could take it before I ate someone I would regret later.

Gooley, the gelatinous cube, would constantly cry out for its life to end, but only Ava and I could hear its pleas. The tiny creature’s cries echoed through the twisting tunnels. The creature’s distress amused me as I took pleasure in the slime’s misery.

As the hours passed by, my abysmal patience dwindled further. I longed for something to quench my insatiable hunger. The wait was driving me insane, and I was dying for any type of murderous stimulation. The boredom was making me lose my mind, and the thought of tolerating Wartie’s annoying humming for much longer was almost too much to bear. I was a monster, after all, and the wait was driving me to the brink of madness.

But, let’s be real, Wartie was a plump little thing, and his flesh looked juicy and delicious. The thought of sinking my tentacles into his tender flesh and feeling his life force draining away was almost too much for me to handle. The desire was irresistible, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Perhaps it was the goblin child’s innocence, but I couldn’t bring myself to make a meal out of him. Regardless, the thought lingered in my mind, tempting me with its delicious allure.

“Argh, Wartie, how much longer do you think it’ll take?” I groaned.

“Shortcut good! We two day ahead,” Wartie chirped.

Two days?! I’ll kill him! I know I will. I’m going to end him!

Hahaha! We both know you won’t, but this is just too hilarious! Ava mentally chuckled.

“Ugh!”

“Ah, for the love of the gods, I heard somethin’ back here,” a scratchy, masculine voice yelled out.

My heart raced as I heard the unfamiliar voice calling out, well, my figurative heart since I don’t have one, literally and figuratively. I looked at Wartie, and I could see that he was scared, his small frame trembling as he clutched his gelatinous cube tightly, all while the little thing in his palm cheered for its demise.

I didn’t know what was around the corner, but I was eager to find out. My mind thrummed with possibilities, and I couldn’t help but feel a sense of excitement and fear as I stepped forward. I was ready for anything that might come our way.

My senses heightened as my body liquefied. I reveled in the feeling as I shed my human form and transformed into my true self, the form of a black pudding monster. My delicate spider silk skin melted away, replaced by my tar-like skin, ready to devour anything that dared to stand in my way. I was a formidable force with an insatiable hunger that could not be satisfied. My true form reflected my growing inner darkness, and I was ready to unleash it upon these unsuspecting fools.

The hours spent without satisfying my bloodthirst on that little bastard had taken their toll on me. My hunger was too much to bear. I was desperate to devour someone. I moved forward, slithering in my natural pudding form. The rush of adrenaline was invigorating as I prepared myself to strike.

Calm down, Blake. We don’t know anything about who’s approaching. Ava’s soft whisper in my head was a calming influence, and my murderous thoughts started to slow.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm myself. Ava’s words echoed in my mind, reminding me I didn’t know anything about who was approaching. I had removed Mana Sight from my eyes and pushed it throughout my body instead. This ditched the orange glow from concentrating the spell into a single location, well, two locations, and gave me a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view. As much as I desired to have eyes, hunting in the dim corridor with glowing eyes wouldn’t be very effective. But running Mana Sight through my whole body was annoying, if effective.

Out of the depths of the pathway came three figures. One held a lantern, casting its light on the dimly lit tunnel and revealing just how dark it had been. The one with the lantern was a short woman? Actually, I wasn’t sure, she clearly had massive breasts under that tunic, but she also had a five o’clock shadow. All I could think of was a dwarf. The second figure was a classic elf with long blonde hair and green eyes, adorned in a beautiful set of white-plated armor with golden trim. He was more feminine-looking than the dwarf. The third person was the typical human wizard, with a large pointy hat, a long white beard, gray robes, and a wooden staff. I was honestly disappointed by the sight of them, but food was food.

Blake, I don’t think we should take these three on.

The glow from their lantern only served to deepen the shadows that surrounded me, making it even harder for me to be seen. Ava's warning was unexpected, her sudden apprehension irking me the wrong way. But what pissed me off the most, I was seriously considering her advice.

What?! Ugh, why the hell not?

We may not have Appraisal, but we've got Soulsense! ...Blake, it's screaming like a tornado siren right now. I don't think we can take them.

"Tsk tsk," the wizard clucked his tongue in disapproval. "You young people and your paranoia, always jumping at shadows. A simple feral goblin, I tell you."

"Ah, c'mon now, Craycroft," the dwarf grumbled with annoyance in her voice. "We've been stuck here for far too long, clearin' the path for this bloody expedition. It seems like everyone's gone soft and lazy on us. A bit of paranoia wouldn't hurt, would it?"

Wartie glanced around, desperately searching for me, but I did not move. I refused to move!

"M-Muddy?" He sniffled out.

The elf stepped forward, his voice filled with conviction. "By the grace of the gods, let my holy light guide me."

With a flick of his wrist, a chilling white beam shot out, striking Wartie's chest with a hard thud. The goblin child fell to the ground, lifeless, as the beam continued to shine, illuminating the path behind us in a divine glow. My skin felt like it was being set ablaze, sizzling under the intense light. I wanted to scream in agony, but I held it in, not wanting to reveal my presence to the three fuckers.

Ava was right, I thought to myself. If this is the kind of power they can wield against a single goblin child, I won't stand a chance against them.

But the worst part of it all was the realization that I felt a pain that I had thought was forever gone since awakening in this new world, a pain I never thought I would feel again. A nauseating feeling spread throughout my soul as I realized I was mourning the loss of the goblin. The thought of grieving for such a creature was both shocking and unsettling.

"Ah, a bit much, Anlyth?" The dwarf chuckled, amusement clear in her deep scratchy voice.

"Truly, Gimona Grimmail," the elf retorted with a haughty tone. "It was an unholy creature. I did it a kindness by granting it a swift death."

"Ah, c'mon now, Anlyth," the dwarf teased. "Don't ye know that goblin hearts are a delicacy among us dwarves? Ye went and blew its little heart away!"

"Such strange tastes you dwarves have," the wizard sighed, shaking his head. "I will never comprehend your dietary choices."

"Ah, that's rich coming from ye, Craycroft. Someone who's never had a taste of the finest dwarven meat and mead, now that's a laugh!"

Their laughter faded as they disappeared down the tunnel, leaving me with the dim light of the broken crystals that sparkled like stars. I slowly reformed my body, feeling a creeping sense of dread as I approached the crumpled form of the child. My rage spread around me, and I couldn't shake the feeling of being watched by unseen eyes. The silence was deafening, and I felt a shiver run down my spine as I reached down to examine the lifeless form. The only noise that boomed through the tunnel was the joyful cries of triumph from the small, quivering gelatinous cube.

"I'm free! I'm free!" I stomped on the gelatinous cube, putting an end to its ecstatic celebration of freedom, granting it its earlier wish.

My thoughts were dark and perverse as I approached the crumpled body of the goblin child. I couldn't comprehend why I was filled with sadness, why the thought of losing this creature I had only ever known as an annoyance caused me such distress. I was a monster, a killer, a cannibal! This sadness was beneath me. It was absurd! And yet, I couldn't shake the feeling of loss.

"Fate can be a funny brat," Ava gently whispered.

I only nodded in irritation while taking a deep sigh and pulling out one of my two empty phylacteries from within Stellar Void.

"Looks like we're getting a new pet," Ava teased.

SHIT!