

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 14

To my utter disbelief, the bearded elf's shout alone snuffed out my Necrotic Flames as if he was blowing out birthday candles. I couldn't help but feel a mixture of awe and frustration at his ability to counter my spell. It's not every day you come across someone with such power, minus Circe, but she doesn't count since she does nothing but floats around and bitch at me.

Oh, and to make matters worse, as I surveyed the aftermath, it seemed like everyone I had engulfed in flames miraculously survived. It was a real bummer. I had expected my flames' wrath to reduce them to a pile of crispy corpses, but apparently, luck was not on my side. The only casualty in this supposed student tryout appeared to be the unfortunate soul who took the full force of the lightning blast. I couldn't help but feel a pang of envy for the wielder of that spell. *Damn it, why couldn't I have lightning magic?*

"The display of magical prowess among the aspiring students has reached its conclusion," the bearded bastard announced, prompting a mixed response of cheers and boos from the crowd.

Well, maybe not exactly a mixed response. There were a bunch of dumbasses in the crowd who thought it was a great idea to hurl what looked like blue tomatoes right at me. Like, seriously?! Blue tomatoes? Though I must admit, there was a strangely enticing aroma wafting from those bizarre projectiles.

"That was quite an impressive spell you used," a voice from behind me remarked.

Turning around, I found myself face-to-face with the lucky son of a bitch who stole my first kill. And wouldn't you know it, he was some kind of elf prick. His eyes flickered with yellow and green sparks like he had a damn lightning storm going on in there. His hair was a wild mess of green and yellow as if he had tried and failed miserably at growing dreadlocks. And let's not even get started on his fashion sense. He was rocking some autumn-themed pants and a matching shirt, topped off with a robe made of stitched-together leaves. And I'm not talking dainty little leaves either. We're talking giant freaking leaves. Seriously, couldn't he come up with something more original? I swear, he had the wood elf look down to a damn cliché.

"I'm not interested," I stated dismissively, turning my back on him without another word.

"I didn't offer anything," he grumbled. But his complaint was cut short when I noticed a blue tomato hurtling toward my face. With a quick dodge, it sailed right past me and splattered directly onto the wood elf's face. I couldn't help but burst into laughter, thoroughly enjoying the sight. "Ah, I hate skunk fruit," the wood elf grumbled a tinge of disgust in his voice. "The stench alone will linger for weeks. Urgh."

I noticed another blue tomato lying on the ground, courtesy of the relentless crowd. They seemed to derive some sick pleasure from throwing them, much to the dismay of the healers who were now scrambling to tend to the victims. Unable to resist the tantalizing aroma, I couldn't help but pick up the fruit and take a bite. Luckily, my silk-capped teeth proved up to the task of biting into the soft flesh. As I savored the flavor, I remembered the stark contrast of my pitch-black tongue and gums against the backdrop of my artificial white teeth. In a world where fantasy creatures roamed, my appearance was the least of anyone's concerns. *Let them wonder if they dare.*

Meanwhile, the wood elf made an audible gagging sound, clearly unimpressed by my culinary choice. Its flavor brought back memories of the time I indulged in devouring Olin's eyes as he screamed in agony. *Ah, those were the good times.*

"Excuse me, miss," a voice interrupted my thoughts, drawing my attention downward. To my surprise, I was faced with a peculiar creature. It had fuzzy fur and oversized ears that gave it an uncanny resemblance to those lovable gremlins from those cheesy 80s movies.

"Yes," I replied, fighting the urge to scoop up the adorable little creature and gobble him up – quite literally! The blue tomato in my hand would have to suffice for now.

"Professor Stormrune would like a moment of your time. If you could follow me," the gremlin stated, then promptly turned around and scurried off.

Much to my bemusement, the gremlin didn't even bother waiting for my response. I glanced at the wood elf, who appeared to be battling a wave of nausea as he desperately wiped his face. With a mischievous grin, I shrugged nonchalantly at the elf and decided to go along with the little bugger, who was scurrying away like he had urgent business to attend to.



Eldrathil Stormrune had just returned to his cluttered office within the academy, his face etched with a mix of frustration and bewilderment. He rummaged through the chaotic array of tomes, books, parchments, and grimoires that adorned his shelves, desperately searching for answers amidst the jumble of ancient magic. His finger grazed the spine of a particular book, and a glimmer of fascination and hope flickered in his eyes.

This semester's proceedings hadn't gone according to plan. The death of a few candidates was not only acceptable but even desired, with a little mind magic to pacify the crowd as they left to quell any anger. However, the snow elf's spell was beyond typical candidates' potential. That spell had the potential to eliminate every single competitor and expose Headmaster Thalador's mistreatment to the Queen. Alas, Thalador intervened before such an outcome could manifest. Nevertheless, the delicate balance had been disrupted, and Eldrathil couldn't help but feel a thrilling sense of anticipation at the possibilities this could bring.

Grabbing the book, "*Transcription Retelling of Skills, Magic, and Might of Levelers*," Eldrathil swiftly brought it to his cluttered desk, his eager curiosity reaching its peak. With no space amidst the array of student assignments covering the desk, he resorted to a brute-force approach. Swiping his arm across the mess, he sent papers and objects crashing to the even more chaotic floor.

Clearing a small space, he placed the book down. He began flipping through the pages with an almost savage intensity, desperately searching for a particular spell name. And there it was, “Oracle” – *Gain the capability to call forth divine wisdom through inherent sorcery. In truth, it is a unique skill, with no recorded wielders to date, allowing one to commune with the three pillars of existence.* Eldrathil lifted his trembling finger from the skill’s description, taking a few unsteady steps back before collapsing into his chair.

A forceful knock on the door abruptly interrupted Eldrathil’s train of thought. A surge of excitement washed over him as he called out, “Come in.” The door creaked open, and one of his two teaching assistants walked in, with the snow elf following closely behind.

“Professor Stormrune, as requested, I’ve brought the aspiring candidate,” Nibbles announced, offering a respectful nod before promptly turning and departing from the room.

“Hello, I’m Professor Stormrune. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“Hey.”

“...And may I inquire as to your name?”

“Blake,” she responded, much to Eldrathil’s surprise when she didn’t provide a surname.

“Just Blake?” he inquired, unable to hide his curiosity. This was a most unusual encounter. Most aspiring candidates would be foaming at the mouth for the chance to speak to a professor. It was both odd and refreshing to meet someone who seemed unfazed by his presence.

“Umm, Blake Pudding,” she added, seemingly coming up with a name on the spot.

Eldrathil couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow at the peculiar choice, but strangely enough, he detected no deceit. He surmised that either her name truly was Blake Pudding, or she believed it was an acceptable name for herself. “Well, Miss Pudding,” he said with a hint of eagerness, “I would be delighted to assist you with your enrollment into this esteemed academy.”

Without any warning, the door to Professor Stormrune’s office swung open with an enraged Headmaster storming in. He slammed the door shut behind him and bellowed, “What is the meaning of this, Eldrathil?”

“I am in the midst of interviewing a prospective student, Headmaster,” Eldrathil calmly replied, a faint smile playing on his lips.

“A prospective student? You can’t be serious,” Headmaster Thalador laughed, “she looks like a street urchin you found on the side of the road?”

“Hey!” The snow elf gasped in protest, clearly taken aback by the insult.

The Headmaster heaved a weary sigh and turned his attention to the girl. With a wave of his hand, he cast a spell, his mana resonating in the air, “Sleep, urchin. I will deal with you in due time.”

“I’m not particularly tired right now,” she stated as she folded her arms across her chest as she glared at the Headmaster.

Eldrathil was taken aback by the girl's fearlessness and her apparent resistance to sleep magic. He knew he had to act swiftly to regain control of the situation before the Headmaster did something drastic, jeopardizing his chance to train a leveler with a connection to the pillars of existence.

"Headmaster, I am quite serious."

"I forbid it! I refuse to allow such trash into my academy," Headmaster Thalador retorted, his disdain evident as he looked down his nose at the girl. "Besides, she would need a royal sponsor to even be considered for admission to this esteemed institution."

At the most opportune moment, another teaching assistant, Dibbles, barged into Professor Stormrune's office without bothering to knock. While such a breach of etiquette would have normally sent the Headmaster into a hypocritical fury, it was hard to deny the significance of Dibbles' unexpected companion. Trailing behind her was a gnome, whom Eldrathil had noticed fervently cheering for Miss Blake Pudding during the competition. It had been clear to the Professor that the two knew one another. And if there was one unwritten law strictly enforced by the Queen on the moon of Yaddith, it was that gnomes were considered equal to nobility, for this was their ancestral home.

As the gnome entered, he greeted Blake with a warm smile, but Eldrathil couldn't help but sense a hint of nervousness in his demeanor. Something was clearly on the gnome's mind. Moreover, the Professor's keen observation skills caught the gnome's subtle glance toward one of the shelves, a gesture that also piqued the girl's curiosity. It seemed as though the gnome and Miss Pudding were exchanging silent messages.

"Umm, are those mana crystals?" Miss Pudding asked, her curiosity piqued as she pointed toward three crystals unceremoniously tucked back on one of the shelves.

The Headmaster's face contorted with anger at the girl's audacity for daring to speak in his presence. Eldrathil couldn't help but suspect that it wasn't just her defiance that fueled his fury but more her inexplicable resistance to his sleep spell. The level of resistance she had displayed bordered on complete immunity, a feat believed to be impossible.

"Yes, they are. In fact, you'll learn how to create them in your first semester," Eldrathil responded, a wide smile spreading across his face, disregarding the furious glare of the Headmaster.

All the Professor had to do now was convince the gnome to agree to sponsor the girl and then figure out the details of her tuition fees. With that accomplished, he would have the chance to train a genuine leveler and possibly gain indirect access to one of the three pillars of existence.