

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 12

As I trailed behind the goblin child through the winding tunnels of the dungeon, a surge of excitement coursed through me. The prospect of hunting down the other candidates, emerging as the Dark Champion, and ultimately reuniting with Aurelia was an exhilarating thought. But for the time being, I had to tolerate Wartie's insufferable presence, though I found some amusement in the pitiful pleas of his newly acquired pet slime. "Kill me!"

As we made our way down a particularly cramped passage, Wartie's eyes lit up with excitement. He eagerly pointed to a small opening in the wall. "Muddy, shortcut!" he exclaimed, a wide grin spreading across his face.

I shot a suspicious glare at the tunnel entrance, half-expecting the goblin child to spring a trap on me. But deep down, I knew Wartie wasn't exactly a mastermind criminal. He excelled at eating and whining about his deceased pet, but that was about it. So, with a shrug, I decided to take a chance. "Fine, Wartie. Let's go with your shortcut. But if you end up getting lost or becoming a monster's snack, I'm not responsible," I grumbled, giving the goblin a stern look.

He flashed a toothy grin at me, his pointy teeth on full display, and eagerly took the lead, bouncing along the uneven floor of the tunnel. I couldn't help but let out a chuckle at the sheer absurdity of the situation. Here I was, a monstrous abomination capable of sprouting spider-like legs and tentacles from my body, following a dim-witted goblin child through the treacherous darkness of a deceased dungeon. It felt like a twisted fairy tale, where the princess was the monster, and the sidekick was a dimwitted goblin.

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

And then there's Circe. I didn't particularly want to resummon her again, but after spending a couple of hours with an idiotic goblin, I was desperate for someone, anyone else to talk to. Honestly, I had no clue why the goddess granted me the ability to summon and dismiss her like a light switch, but I had a feeling it wasn't something I would appreciate. But damn, it was taking every ounce of self-control not to murder this child. So, having Circe around was a welcome distraction for my warped and cruel mind.

"Why don't you go ahead and crown me the title Monster Princess?" I shot back at her. "And while you're at it, stay the hell out of my mind! I can't stand it when you start poking around in there."

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

Damnit, Circe! "It's a spoiled brat who gets to snatch up everyone's pet slimes, only to gobble them up," I quipped, the words slipping out before I realized the impact it might have on the goblin child.

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

Wartie’s small goblin brain took a moment to process my words before his face twisted with horror and disgust. “I hate printlesses!” he declared!

I struggled to compose myself, but the mental image of me, the privileged brat devouring helpless slimes, was too absurd. I couldn’t contain my laughter, my shoulders shaking as I gasped for breath. “I can’t say I disagree,” I managed to say, fighting to maintain a straight face.

As we continued through the cramped passage, my thoughts turned to Wartie himself. The young goblin, with his plump little body and juicy flesh, would make a tempting snack. However, I resisted the urge, bitterly aware that I needed his help to locate the other candidates. Strangely enough, the idea of killing a child unsettled me, adding an unexpected layer of discomfort to my monstrous desires. Yeah, believe it or not, there’s still a tiny sliver of a moral compass within me—somehow. Still, I couldn’t deny the persistent thoughts of devouring him that plagued my mind. It was an internal struggle, an ironic twist that I couldn’t help but find darkly amusing. But even as I chuckled at the absurdity of my situation, the hunger within me remained unquenched, and the thirst for destruction lingered. *Ugh, what is this I’m feeling?*

“Ever heard of a conscience?” Circe teased, a smug grin appearing on her lips.

“Oh, shut up, Jiminy,” I snapped back, but by Circe’s pause, it was clear she didn’t get the reference.

Wartie led me deeper into the twisted tunnels, and my excitement surged with each step. The anticipation of the hunt pulsed through my veins as we continued along the goblin’s shortcut. I could hardly wait to confront my rivals and emerge triumphant, but I knew I had to exercise patience for now.

As we ventured further within the darkness, the temperature dropped, and my glowing orange eyes cast eerie reflections on the tunnel walls. The pale orange light reflecting from crystal shards that lined the walls along with their scattered fragments on the floor grew fainter while the air turned colder and more damp.

Our path was narrow and cramped, forcing us to crawl and contort our bodies to make progress in certain parts. I wriggled and squeezed through the tight openings of collapsed sections, determined to forge ahead. My Black Pudding form proved to be highly adaptable, reshaping itself to fit through each obstacle with ease. As I navigated through the dim path, I brushed against a jagged outcropping of rock, causing a tear in my dress. However, my resilient pudding body quickly repaired the damage, seamlessly mending the fabric. It was a peculiar sensation, with my body acting as its own clothing, but it bestowed upon me a sense of invincibility that was difficult to describe.

As we continued on, my mind wandered with daydreams, consumed by thoughts of unleashing my monstrous form upon unsuspecting victims. The anticipation built up inside me, threatening to

burst forth at any moment. My dress seemed to ripple with excitement, mirroring the turbulent emotions coursing through my gooey body.

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

“Are you absolutely certain?” I double-checked, wanting to confirm Wartie’s statement.

“What ‘a abso-smurfly?”

“Are you positive?” I reiterated.

“Posi-giggity?”

I could feel my frustration mounting as I took a deep breath and tried once more. “Are. You. Sure?” I asked, each word dripping with impatience. And, okay, I won’t deny it. There might have been some handclapping as I spat out each word.

“Uh-huh.”

That conversation had driven me freaking nuts. Here I was, stuck watching Wartie as he rocked back and forth, humming some off-key tune and playing with his slimy blob of a pet, Gooley. Time was dragging on like a snail on a sugar rush, and I was getting more annoyed by the second. Seriously, how much longer could I handle this before I went all “hangry” and chomped down on him, knowing I’d regret it later? *Ugh, the struggle is real.*

At least there was Gooley. That slimy blob, aka the gelatinous cube, would whine and beg for its miserable existence to end. The funny thing was, only Circe and I could hear its pathetic pleas. The little block of sorrow’s cries echoed through the twisted tunnels, and I gotta admit, it gave me a sick kind of joy to revel in its misery.

Exiting the narrow passage, the corridor unfurled like an expansive underground highway, with colossal pillars stretching out into the abyss, disappearing into the darkness beyond the reach of my luminescent gaze. The sight beckoned us, luring us deeper into the enigmatic depths, as if daring us to uncover the secrets hidden within. A chill ran down my back, a foreboding sense of something different about this section of the dungeon. The air grew heavy with an unsettling dread, heightening my senses as I followed the goblin. My core pulsed with eager anticipation, fueled by the darkness that enveloped us. Fear mingled with excitement, creating a strange and intoxicating mixture within me. With each step, the thrill of the hunt intensified, propelling me forward deeper into the depths of the unknown.

The exhilarating desire to rip my rivals apart with my cruel tentacles flooded me with euphoria. I savored the vivid imagery of their piercing screams reverberating through the cracked stone walls of the winding tunnels. However, with each passing moment, an unsettling restlessness crept over me, a yearning for a true challenge, a formidable opponent to satisfy my insatiable hunger. The mere thought of waiting made my skin crawl. After all, I was a monster in human guise, and my dark cravings needed to be appeased. I would even settle for a chance encounter with a wandering

dungeon creature to quench my thirst. Alas, thus far, the only monster I had encountered down here was none other than myself.

“Fascinating! It seems that your instability is escalating with each passing day. Now, I wonder if it will correct or at least stabilize?” I overheard Circe murmuring to herself, her tone devoid of any subtlety.

“Hey, don’t judge me, bitch. It’s not like you’re a shining beacon of stability yourself,” I retorted.

Much to my irritation, Circe ignored my remark with an eye roll. Yeah, I couldn’t care less about what she thought either. So, what if I’m a little unstable? I prefer to see myself as a dark and twisted badass with a touch of craziness for good measure. It’s all part of the package in this messed-up world of magic I’ve been thrown into. I’m not about to let anyone else’s messed-up ideas drag me down and turn me into a victim. Nope, I’ll embrace my insanity with open arms. My twisted mind is my shield, my sword against the creepy things that lurk around every corner. I’m here to survive, and I’ll become the very embodiment of a nightmare to do it. This reality will never forget me, for I’ll be their worst nightmare!

As the hours crawled by in the vast corridor, my patience sank to new depths of despair. My insatiable hunger for bloodshed grew stronger by the minute. The endless wait was pushing me to the edge of sanity, and I craved any form of murderous excitement to satisfy my twisted desires. The boredom was slowly driving me mad, and the constant, irritating hum of Wartie’s tuneless melody was like nails on a chalkboard. I was a monster, and this agonizing wait was pushing me closer and closer to the brink of madness.

And once again, my mind drifted back into that delightful daydream. But let’s be honest, Wartie really was a plump little succulent snack. The mere thought of sinking my tentacles into his tender body, feeling his life force slowly fade away, was almost too tempting to resist. It was a desire that tugged at me relentlessly, whispering its seductive promises. However, despite the irresistible pull, I couldn’t bring myself to act upon it. Perhaps it was the innocence shining in the goblin child’s eyes, or maybe that flicker of lingering morality within me. Regardless, the thought continued to linger in the depths of my mind, teasing me with its delicious allure.

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

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

“Two days?! I swear, I’m going to kill him! I just know it. I’m going to end him!” My mind was already spinning with dark and twisted delights, concocting various ways to bring about his demise.

“Hahaha! We both know you won’t, but I must admit, it’s quite intriguing to watch,” Circe chuckled.

“Ugh!” I seethed.

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

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 death.

I had no idea what awaited us around the corner, but I was filled with thrilling anticipation to find out. My mind buzzed with endless possibilities, and a mixture of excitement and fear coursed through my core as I took a step forward. I was prepared for whatever challenges or surprises lay ahead, ready to face them head-on.

My senses went into overdrive as I melted my body into a gooey mess. It was a wild experience, shedding my elegant human form and transforming into the badass Black Pudding monster that I truly was. Goodbye, delicate spider silk skin, helloooo tar-like skin that could devour anything in its path. I was a force to be reckoned with, and my hunger knew no bounds. My true form oozed with darkness, a reflection of the twisted monster I had become. And now, it was time to unleash my inner beast upon these clueless fools. They had no idea what was about to hit them. *Game on!*

The hours of restraining myself from feasting on that little brat had pushed me to the edge. My hunger gnawed at my insides, demanding satisfaction. I couldn't bear it any longer. With determination, I advanced, oozing forward in my true Black Pudding form. The surge of adrenaline pumped through my core, electrifying me as I readied myself to pounce and sate my voracious appetite.

"Please, do compose yourself, child. You are entirely ignorant of the identity of the oncoming individuals," Circe condescended with an air of snobbish superiority, much to my fucking annoyance. Surprisingly, though, my murderous thoughts started to slow down. Not that I'll give her credit for it, nope! Well, maybe... just a tiny bit.

I took a deep breath, or at least I tried to. Do I even need to breathe? Who knows? Anyway, Circe's words repeated in my head, reminding me that I had no freaking clue who was coming our way. So, I decided to ditch the Mana Sight in my eyes and spread it throughout my whole body instead. No more glowing eyes, thank goodness. Now I had a 360-degree view. However, everything went pitch black. I contemplated activating Thermalsense, but I held off.

I half expected my entire body to start glowing, but surprisingly it didn't. Guess concentrating the spell in a small spot does that trick. Sure, I already wanted to go back to using those two small spots for eyes but hunting in a dark corridor with glowing eyes wouldn't be the brightest idea. So, I sucked it up and dealt with the annoyance of running Mana Sight through my entire freaking body. It worked, though, so I can't complain too much.

Out of the darkest depths, three figures emerged. One of them held a feeble lantern, its weak light struggling to cut through the gloom and reveal the true nature of the corridor. The one with the lantern was... well, let's just say it was a bit perplexing. They had these massive breasts but also a five o'clock shadow. I couldn't help but think of a dwarf attempting a failed drag act. *Ah, memories of those wild shows... Good times!*

The second figure was your classic elf, complete with long flowing blonde hair and piercing green eyes. They were dressed in fancy white-plated armor with gold accents, looking more like a pretty boy than a battle-hardened warrior. Although I wasn't entirely sure if they were male or female, so

I'll go with the former for now. And then there was the third person, the typical human wizard with a pointy hat, a long white beard, and those oh-so-stereotypical gray robes. Of course, they had to top it off with a wooden staff because what's a wizard without their trusty stick?

Honestly, I couldn't help but feel a bit let down by the sight of them. I was hoping for some real excitement, but hey, when it comes to satisfying my appetite, beggars can't be choosers. Food is food, right?

"Child, I strongly advise against engaging in any form of combat or interaction with those three," Circe warned, her voice filled with an unusual touch of concern.

The dim light from their lantern seemed to intensify the surrounding shadows, enveloping me further in darkness and making it even more difficult for me to be noticed. Circe's warning caught me off guard though, her sudden display of concern irritating me to no end. But what really got under my skin was the fact that I was actually contemplating heeding her advice. *Damn it.*

What?! Ugh, why the hell not? I mentally shouted in frustration, unable to contain my exasperation from bleeding into my thoughts.

"You may not have Appraisal, but you've got Astral Insight! ...And let me tell you, child, it's screaming like a banshee right now. Fighting them will be your undoing," Circe stated, her voice filled with connotation as if scolding a child.

"But I haven't invested in unlocking Astral Insight yet," I hissed to myself.

"Tsk tsk," the wizard clucked his tongue in disapproval. "You young folks and your paranoia, always jumping at shadows. It's just a harmless feral goblin, I assure you."

Hold on, what?

"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 looked around frantically, trying to spot me, but I stayed put. Nope, not gonna budge!

"M-Muddy?" Wartie sniffled.

The elf boldly stepped forward, his voice brimming with conviction. "May the gods bless me with their divine light," he declared.

With a quick flick of his hand, a scorching white beam shot out, colliding with Wartie's chest with a thunderous crack. The goblin child crumpled to the ground, lifeless, while the beam continued to emit a radiant glow, casting an otherworldly light on the path behind us. The searing brilliance seeped into my skin, making me feel as if I were being slowly roasted alive. The pain was unbearable, but I held myself tightly, resolved not to reveal my presence to those three fools.

System Override Detected

Buff Activated
[Holy] Resisted

Circe floated above me like a ghost, her ethereal form only visible to my sight. Her arms were crossed, and a stern expression adorned her face as she glared at me with eyes that could shoot daggers. “*Child, don’t count on me to intervene like that again. Next time, I might just let them finish you off;*” she warned. I was left speechless, unable to come up with a response. For once, I found myself at a loss for words, not even bothering to argue with her about being called a child.

The worst part of it all was realizing that I actually felt something, a pain that I thought was long gone since waking up in this messed-up world. It hit me like a punch to the gut, a sickening sensation that spread through my very being. I couldn’t believe it, but I was mourning the damn goblin. I mean, seriously? Grieving over a pathetic creature like that was beyond messed up, and it made me feel all sorts of twisted and unsettled.

“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 a feckin’ good one, Craycroft!” the dwarf boomed with laughter. “Ye, who’s never savored the delight of dwarven meat and the nectar of our finest mead! Now, that’s a bleedin’ joke! And as for yer tower, I’ve heard whispers about the perverse things ye be doin’ in there.”

Their laughter gradually faded away, swallowed by the depths of the tunnel, until all that remained was the faint afterglow from the broken crystals. The dim light sparkled like distant stars, its brilliance gradually diminishing. As the glow faded, I took my time reforming my body, feeling a growing sense of dread as I approached the crumpled form of the kid. Rage seethed within me, and I couldn’t shake the feeling of unseen eyes watching my every move. The silence was fucking deafening, and a shiver of rage ran through me as I stood there gazing at the lifeless body. The only damn noise that echoed through the tunnel was the jubilant cries of triumph from a small quivering gelatinous cube.

“I’m free! I’m free!” it cried in ecstatic celebration, but I quickly ended its joyful outburst with a swift stomp, fulfilling its earlier wish for freedom with a swift death.

My mind was consumed by twisted thoughts as I neared the lifeless form of the goblin child. I struggled to make sense of the strange mix of emotions bubbling within me. How could I, a monstrous being, feel sadness for the loss of this insignificant creature that had only served as an

irritant? It was absurd, beneath me. I was a killer, a cannibal devoid of such sentimentalities. And yet, the lingering feeling of loss gnawed at me, refusing to be ignored.

“Fate can be a mischievous entity,” Circe gently whispered.

“You believe in fate?” I asked, my tone devoid of emotion or interest. I didn’t even bother to glance in her direction.

“Why not?” Circe’s response carried a hint of contemplation. *“Even gods often find themselves questioning if there is something beyond their current state of existence.”*

I nodded irritably, letting out a deep sigh as I reached into Stellar Void and retrieved one of my two phylacteries.

“Looks like you’re getting a new pet,” Circe teased.

I stared at the kid’s lifeless body, feeling a chaotic mix of emotions—pain, guilt, sorrow, and pure freaking rage. The anger inside me was boiling, and I wanted revenge so damn bad! Thankfully, I had two phylacteries, but wasting one on that annoying brat I barely resisted eating myself felt like a total waste. But for someone else to come along and snuff out the kid’s life? That’s some major bullshit. Death alone wouldn’t be enough to satisfy my thirst for payback. Oh no, I was gonna make those three responsible, pay, and I mean really pay, with a lifetime of misery. But there was one big-ass obstacle in my way...

“Circe, I’m freaking lost on how to use this damn thing,” I grumbled, my frustration evident in my voice.

“Oh, for the love of me, just rely on the system commands,” Circe huffed.

“I thought you told me not to rely on the system commands,” I shot back. However, Circe refused to give me any more information, which was super annoying. So, not knowing what else to do, I just lifted up the phylactery and mentally clicked, [**Spirit Vessel**]. And bam! My arms started flailing around on their own like I was some water bender from that awesome cartoon I used to watch as a kid. Gotta admit it looked pretty cool with the orb floating there. And way cooler than having to chant some spell like an idiot.

“...Do I seriously have to wave my arms around like some kind of total idiot to cast this spell?” I grumbled, my self-consciousness growing as I caught Circe watching me. Yeah, it might have looked cool at first, but now I couldn’t help but feel a bit ridiculous. But hey, who cares if I’m immediately contradicting myself? I’m certifiably crazy, so it’s all part of the package. Besides, I’m entitled to like something while not liking it.

“Maybe if you actually learn to cast the spell without relying on a system command,” Circe explained.

“Well, that’s good to know,” I sighed in relief. “Wait, hold on a second. You’re the one who told me to cast it with the system command,” I blurted out. But, as expected, Circe went right back to ignoring my existence, pretending as if I hadn’t said anything at all.

As my skill did its thing, I tapped into the sensation, feeling the mana flowing around me. There was something lurking beneath me like a tiny spark just waiting to be snuffed out. It was a weird feeling, and I could tell my mana had the power to mess with that spark if I wanted to. It had this warm and comforting vibe, but also kind of annoying to be around. So, with a gentle tug, Spirit Vessel grabbed hold of it and holy crap, Wartie's tiny soul was a thing of beauty. It flickered dangerously as if on the verge of fading away completely.

I watched in awe as Spirit Vessel carefully placed the kid's soul into the phylactery. It was like watching a badass seamstress flawlessly thread a needle on the first try. I mean, I can barely sew a button back on without messing it up. It made me wonder if I'd ever be able to do something so delicate and precise without relying on the system's aid.

As Spirit Vessel's work neared completion, a soft glow emanated from the phylactery, signifying the end of the process. Kneeling beside the child, the skill delicately wove a strand of mana from the orb to his body, establishing a connection between the two. Within moments, the phylactery took over, seamlessly carrying on the task that my skill had initiated. It flawlessly integrated the soul within the phylactery and his body. And just like that, Wartie drew in a gasp of air. He was now a goblin lich.

"I feel something... off," I muttered to myself. "There's a strange sensation running through me, but I can't quite pinpoint what it is."

"That's called pride, child. Congratulations, you're now a proud mother," Circe stated with a dry tone.

The Primordial Goddess of Magic has gifted you with a title.
You have earned the title: Unholy Mother <i>Best of Luck!</i>

"Oh, hell no, and fuck you! TAKE THAT BACK!" I screamed.