

# BLAKE PUDDING

## CHAPTER 4

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### LOST HOLINESS

#### BLAKE

I felt like a schoolgirl with a massive crush. Seriously, Aurelia was gorgeous! Have I mentioned that already? If I had, it still hasn't been enough. That's probably why I can't wipe this lust-filled smile off my face.

*Dream, you've got us drooling.*

*Oh, shit!*

With a nonchalant twist, I glanced away from Aurelia, who was looking around as if searching for someone who had just been there, though I hadn't seen anyone else. No, wait, that's right, there had been that smug feline bitch. Seriously, my brain is a whirlwind of butterflies, hearts, and skulls at the moment. Anyway, I seized that moment to wipe away the yellowish drool from the corners of my lips. *That was embarrassing.*

*We're not too acidic for her, are we?*

*Nah, it wasn't a problem last time.*

*I think we've undergone a bit of an upgrade since our last, ahem, bow chicka wow wow.*

*...Nah, our kiss just now was fine, so no worries. And, bow a what? You're such a prude, Nightmare. Just say we fucked!*

*If we weren't both Blake, I'd devour your intestines after wearing them as a necklace. Apart from what happened in the Realm of Dreams, we barely experienced any tentacle action with her when she wore us as a dress. And... I hope you're right.*

*Ah, good times... and yeah, me too. Also, an intestine jump rope is way better than an edible necklace.*

Aurelia seemed to have given up her search for the elusive feline and instead reached out to grab my hand, pulling me closer to her side as we awaited the arrival of the rest of my group from the airship. I caught Sophia shooting us a shit-eating grin, as if she found my recent mist stunt thoroughly amusing. Jeremy, on the other hand, did not seem amused in the slightest as he stomped over to us.

"So, would you care to elucidate how you've come to possess your own champion, my love? I was under the impression that only the gods were privy to such companions," Aurelia cooed beside me, her voice a blend of curiosity and velvet. "And, she is quite stunning," she added, her tone laced with a distinct sharpness this time. *Yikes!*

I chuckled nervously before diving into my explanation. "Umm, it wasn't my idea. This dickhead, Joe, Joe Mamma, or Jörmun," I began, pausing to tap my chin as if trying to dredge up his name from memory. "That god loves messing around and tossed me his former champion. I'm not totally sure what he's up to, but she's damn useful, even if she's a bit of a sourpuss—I mean, I don't know if her puss is sour or not. Ha-ha! Umm... Yep, but, I kinda killed her husband. You remember him, don't you? The big black dude stacked with muscles upon muscles who looked like he was really into He-Man cosplaying—well, that, or he had a leather strap fetish. He was a general, if I remember right. Yeah, well, he's back from the dead and out for her head. She's labeled a traitor now. This is all guesswork, really; we didn't stick around to exchange pleasantries. Though, I did get into a scuffle with another champion looking to off me. Kicked his ass, I did. Would've offed him too, but that needle face bastard stole my kill," I said, pointing at Jason, who was slowly approaching, with my middle finger as I continued. "Anyway, as an adopted daughter or reborn child of a goddess, it's all a bit messy. The system probably pegs me as a demi-goddess, maybe even a full goddess, or perhaps an ascended goddess, something along those ridiculous lines. Speaking of pegging, I missed you. What was I saying again? Oh, right! Maybe Granny Death pulled some strings when she got me back into the system? So, that's probably why I've got my own champion. Who the hell knows," I rambled on and on.

Much to my surprise, and to the weird flutter in my black heart (not that I actually had a heart), Aurelia was all ears, completely captivated by my story. As the last of the refugees disembarked the airship, we engaged in a lively back-and-forth for a few minutes. She had, of course, tons of questions, and I answered them as best I could. In other words, I had no clue and merely spat out a ton of nonsense that somehow made sense in my head. I wasn't lying or making shit up; my life was insanity. So, when it comes to explaining insanity, it's best to offer an insanely honest explanation.

"Yo," Jason interrupted, calling out to me—or perhaps to Aurelia? It was hard to tell. Regardless, I offered him a glare that could kill. He didn't get the message as he approached.

"Ah, Jason. Where's Vorigan?" Aurelia inquired.

To my surprise, Jason staggered slightly, as if hit by a wave of grief, but he quickly concealed it. "He was defeated by that shorty of a champion I beheaded. That bearded midget turned the frog freak into a red paste with his hammer."

"You beheaded? Don't you mean the kill you stole from me?" I grumbled under my breath.

"Do not fret over Vorigan," Aurelia advised Jason, dismissing his concern with a graceful wave of her hand. "I have witnessed that masochist reduced to a mist of blood by Lord Demidicus on numerous occasions, and upon each return, he has been filled with pure ecstasy. Despite being utterly useless in a fight, he is consistently underestimated. Rest assured, he's enjoying his little hiatus, most likely captured and being tortured somewhere. He'll return once his captors have had their fill, much to his disappointment, no doubt."

Jason simply nodded as he walked off, though I noticed his shoulders and head droop slightly. It was funny to think that such a self-centered prick could care about anyone else. Turning my attention back to Aurelia, I caught her staring intently at something. Following her gaze, I saw Vanya approaching, and I couldn't help but stiffen. I don't know why, but this felt rather awkward. It shouldn't, should it?

My bitchy champion came to a stop before the two of us, and still holding Aurelia's hand, I leaned in close, resting my head on her shoulder. The last time I saw her, she had been taller than me. Now, we were the same height—well, emphasis on *were*. I may have just shrunk a little to get the right angle I wanted for my head against hers. *Tee-hee!*

"My love," I said with great delight, "this is my champion, Von Von. Von Von, this is my everything, Aurelia," I introduced them.

"It's Vanya Anlyth. Pleasure," Vonya said dryly. If it were anyone else, I would have already been wearing their intestines, but honestly, that elf kind of scares me. Me no likey fire and holy—don't tell her that.

"A pet name? I see," Aurelia responded, matching Vonya's dryness.

"Ha-ha... Umm... is it just me, or is it hot out here?" I laughed, the effort feeling half-hearted.

"My love, we're nearing winter. In fact, it had just snowed on the mountain top this morning," Aurelia cooed softly.

"I see. I see," I chuckled nervously before adding, "Did I hear something about a meal? Your soon-to-be-late husband is on the menu, right?"

I felt Aurelia tense at my words. It wasn't the thought of me killing and eating that guy that got to her, but my crack about her being married. Ha! Score one for me; I couldn't wait to gloat about this win in bed later. Besides, I didn't really pick up any real jealousy vibes from her about Von Von. Aurelia seemed to enjoy the same kind of mischievous teasing I did—though, it got me thinking if she also got a kick out of tormenting her food. Being a bit of a sadist myself, the fantasy of her teasing me while she eagerly devoured me was damn hot.

Weird how I felt so connected to someone as if we'd known each other forever, yet I was just scratching the surface of who she really is. Looks like mom was onto something—she really is my soulmate.

"It's good to see you again," came a surprisingly high-pitched voice from behind me.

Reluctantly pulling my head from Aurelia's shoulder, I directed a death glare toward the source of our interruption. Astonishingly, I found myself facing a laid-back-looking old warg. Far from the gaunt figure I remembered, he now seemed as though he had devoured an entire farm's worth of livestock. His shimmering gray beard, voluminously long, could have served as a cape, albeit one hanging from his chin and trailing on the ground. His attire was a slight improvement (and I stress 'slight') from the complete fashion disaster I remembered: he was clad in a black robe left casually open, resembling a bathrobe, and paired with a long black skirt. Seriously, a skirt? Thankfully, it was long enough to conceal his feet, rather than stopping at his thighs. He maintained the relaxed demeanor of a wizard, or perhaps a writer—the very type I'd imagine might pen my saga. The crowning feature was the impressive walking cane he brandished, emitting an unsettling energy that seemed to distort the surrounding mana.

"Henry, you old werewolf, how have you been?" I greeted him with a beaming smile.

His previously happy demeanor vanished, his shoulders slumping. "It's Hensley, and I'm a warg, not a werewolf," he corrected, a touch of annoyance in his grumble.

"That's what I said, Henry," I responded, acknowledging his correction with a nod. "But really, what's the difference between a warg and a werewolf? They seem pretty similar to me," I inquired.

"Well, I never," he muttered under his breath. "Setting aside your racism, werewolves transform into mindless beasts with some features similar to wargs. Wargs, however, do not transform, and we certainly aren't mindless beasts that attack on sight."

"That's a bit racist, don't you think? To assume all werewolves are mindless beasts. I'm sure there are plenty of decent man-eating werewolves out there," I countered with a shrug. "I expected more from you," I sighed. Just then, my attention shifted to the ever-growing crowd. "Oh, speaking of man-eating, I'm feeling quite peckish myself," I grinned, prompting the warg to take a step back.

My smile might have been unnaturally wide, complemented by what appeared to be freshly sprouted sharp teeth. What? It was all subconscious, really—I would never intentionally intimidate others just for the thrill of it. Nope. Nope. Okay, yes, I absolutely would, and just did.

"Come on, my love, let's head home," Aurelia cooed beside me, tugging at my hand. "You can introduce me to those you've brought at the castle."

With a gleeful nod, we began our journey through the cobblestone streets of what initially seemed like a village. However, 'village' probably wasn't the right term—this place was massive. It would be more accurate to call it a city, albeit not as large as those from home,

but certainly a city by fantasy world standards. The architecture was a diverse mix, with some buildings appearing as if they had grown naturally, others carved from a single block of granite, and still others exuding an old German fantasy aura. It was an architectural cluster fuck—I found it rather charming. Even more striking was the variety of races, all peering out from their dwellings or lining the streets to observe Aurelia and me as we led a procession of new refugees trailing behind us.

For the first time in a long time, I was utterly happy, even without a single homicidal thought—well, except maybe a few. The mere thought of murdering Jason always managed to bring a smile to my face. However, my moment of bliss was abruptly shattered by the very source of those dark musings.

Jason clutched his head, doubling over as if stifling a silent scream, before he burst out, “Fucking hell, you Crone!” he grumbled. Turning to me, his voice took on an urgent tone as he blurted out, “We need to hurry, now!”

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"We need to hurry," Lady Hikari insisted.

Duke Lysander, moving with the inhuman speed of a vampire, swiftly gathered everything he could into his dimensional storage gem, which was attached to a gold bracelet. He had known his time here was limited, but the end had arrived sooner than expected. After securing the last of the gold and enchanted items, he turned to the vampiric catkin. "Ready!" he declared.

In a blur of hurried movement, they dashed down the narrow corridors, making their way to the castle's lower depths—his castle, the heart of the coven, usurped from him upon his ill-fated marriage. Questions about why his god, the Serpent had orchestrated this betrayal nagged at him, yet no answers materialized.

Suddenly, the catkin leading the charge halted abruptly, causing the duke to almost crash into her. “Lady Hikari, what is...” His voice faded into silence, cut short by the scene unfolding before them. His eyes lit up with a sinister gleam of recognition at the sight of a figure standing before one of the castle's rare windows.

Hikari swiftly turned to lock eyes with him, her voice reduced to a whisper that only his enhanced vampiric hearing could discern. “We need a dampener collar, or the goddess will inform her champion of our actions,” she hissed.

He flashed a fanged grin, sidestepping her to approach the dark elf woman who seemed absorbed in her thoughts, gazing out the window. The double convergence and Völuspá's nightly glow enveloped the woman in a serene pink and blue hue, casting an ethereal light around her.

“Ah, if it isn’t the Priestess. It’s an honor, Lady Heather,” Duke Lysander said, his tone and approach deliberately non-threatening as he closed the distance.

"Duke Lysander," she acknowledged with a slight bow of her head, "I’m far from any lady. Please, call me Heather. How may I assist you?" Her smile was tentative, a mere shadow of warmth. Yet, her pink eyes, coupled with the streaks of tears on her face, betrayed a reluctance to offer any assistance.

"I’ve got something I’d like to show you," Lysander murmured, just loud enough for Heather to instinctively tilt her head slightly to hear him better.

With evident delight, he lifted his wrist to show her the gold bracelet, then tapped the red gem on it with his index finger. Instantly, a circular metal object materialized in his hand, catching the dark elf off guard. Before she could fully grasp what he held, he extended his hands with such incredible speed that Heather struggled to keep up.

"W-What?" Heather stammered, her hands instinctively rising to feel the circular object now clasped around her neck, bewildered by the sudden turn of events. "What is this?" she demanded, her voice tinged with a rising anger.

"It's a dampener collar. It will sever your connection to your mana," Lysander explained, his smile unyielding. "Similar to the time I had you held in the dungeon. We cannot allow you the freedom to access your mana or those troublesome system skills," he continued, his smile darkening, underlining the seriousness of his measures. "And, of course, we wouldn't want your goddess to catch wind of our actions, would we?"

"We don’t have time for this," Lady Hikari hissed, striding past the duke to confront the seething dark elf. Before Heather could even think to escape or retaliate, the catkin struck her with a forceful slap, causing her head to collide with the window, shattering the glass and rendering her unconscious. "I'll carry her," Hikari declared, hoisting the Priestess over her shoulder. She quickly realized that, given her smaller frame, perhaps the duke would have been better suited for the task. However, she kept this thought to herself.

Together, they pressed on, delving deeper into the castle's labyrinthine depths, moving past the despairing confines of the dungeon and navigating through a maze of concealed passageways. Their path led them to a circular stone chamber, dominated by a solitary wooden door at its center—an anomaly against the backdrop of stone and subdued lighting.

Duke Lysander, stepping forward, approached the door with assured strides. He executed a series of knocks, each tap forming a cryptic rhythm that seemed to murmur ancient secrets. With the final knock resonating through the chamber, the door swung open silently, revealing a blaze of light that dispelled the gloom and filled the space with a radiant luminescence. A cool, ghostly mist flowed over the threshold, its tendrils gently brushing against their skin.

Exchanging glances of unyielding determination, they offered each other a firm nod—a silent agreement forged in the moment. They advanced through the doorway, the unconscious Priestess slung over the catkin’s shoulder, marking their entry into the unknown. Behind them, the door closed with a quiet, resolute click, its echo marking their passage as it sealed shut.



Vorigan pouted as he sat ensnared in chains, his dried blood painting the chamber. Three days had trickled by since the last torturous visit or execution attempt. Boredom had set in, a stark contrast to his usual predicament, and he found himself missing Jason. That dark fae's sadistic glee never waned, providing a distraction Vorigan now found himself yearning for. With a heavy sigh, he tugged at his chains, only to realize the Slaethians had become cunning, ensnaring his entire body in tight, flesh-biting restraints. This bitingly delightful pain of the chains had been the sole reason he had postponed his escape; not that freedom was ever beyond his grasp, but because he relished the agony they inflicted. Now, his desires veered towards a more exquisite form of cruelty.

Throughout his extensive lifespan and the numerous instances he had willingly fallen into the clutches of his countless enemies, not one had ever conceived the idea of chaining his tongue. Frequently, they resorted to severing it, an act that sent shivers of ecstasy through him. Yet, it would regenerate at the slightest indication of his desire, thanks to the unique synergy between his rascal heritage and vampiric healing abilities. This regenerative prowess was further enhanced by various spells, stacking with one another, affording him utter immortality, even after complete obliteration.

Opening his maw, filled with short, razor-like fish teeth, his tongue lashed out, not at the chains—for that escape would be too unsatisfying—but at his own neck, severing his head from his shoulders. With that, Vorigan's head hit the ground with a hard thud, rolled a few paces, and then his magic took over. From the severed neck beneath his head, a body formed, conjured from a combination of blood and mana.

With a bit of a hop in his step, Vorigan rose to his feet, scratched his newly formed nuts, and headed for the exit without any concern for stealth. Being caught would simply mean another round of torture and execution attempts, and he always found those to be entertaining.

“Hey! Hey!” came a hushed voice from one of the cells Vorigan was walking past.

Glancing to his side, he spotted an old-looking wizard. Across from his cell, he noticed a bearded dwarf woman, both looking worse for wear.

Vorigan shrugged, seemingly uncaring, “Sure,” he croaked out.



"Why shouldn't I kill you where you stand?" demanded a goblin, exuding the regal demeanor and unwavering confidence of a king.

Perched upon a throne carved directly into the side of a massive boulder, the goblin held court not in a castle or grand hall, but amidst the sprawling expanse of the northern mountains. His dominion was not defined by walls, but by the sheer scale of nature itself. Surrounding him was an army of undead monsters, each one seething with barely contained anticipation, awaiting his command.

"I presume you're Lord War-Mist, the Goblin Lich King?" inquired a shadowy figure, his form obscured beneath the cloak of his hood.

"I am. And who might you be?" War-Mist replied, his voice a low growl that carried an unmistakable authority. At his words, the vast assembly of undead creatures, from the smallest prey animals to the mightiest predators of the north, stirred, each one trembling with eager anticipation.

"I am Lord Demidicus, and my purpose here is solely to deliver a message," the man shrouded in shadows—no, not merely a man, but a monster—responded, his voice laced with an unsettling glee.

War-Mist reclined into his throne, a defiant glare through the slits of his helmet, fixed upon the old monster before him. Confidence surged within the goblin; his power and intellect had soared over the last two years, solidifying his belief that no adversary could now challenge his dominion. Beside him stood a starkly nude zombie, a testament to his conquests—a former human warrior reduced to a mere servant, intended to end his reign but instead reinforcing it. The warrior's once proud plated armor now adorned War-Mist, its dark purple surface catching the night's myriad lights, enhancing his magic with its potent enchantments.

"Ah, I remember you," War-Mist growled, his voice casting an even deeper chill over the already tense atmosphere. At his command, the undead stirred restlessly, a select few beginning to encircle Lord Demidicus with deliberate, menacing steps. "After the deeds you've done, why should I grant you the mercy of life?"

The shrouded figure seemed to be taken aback for once, unsure what to say as he thought. "I have done many dark deeds, but I do not recall you in any of them," he finally stated, seeming uncaring about the undead encircling him.

A tense silence stretched between them, lasting a long moment before War-Mist finally broke it. "I'm more interested in what you want, rather than dwelling on the past."



"Ah, wise of you," Lord Demidicus acknowledged, a hint of approval in his voice. "I am forming an alliance to reclaim this moon from the Kingdom of Slaethia and purge all Imperials supporting that kingdom from our lands. After that, I aim to strike at the heart of the Empire while they are preoccupied with the double convergence. What say you?"

War-Mist sighed, his head resting against the throne's back, enveloped in contemplation. He felt a profound animosity toward the figure before him, recognizing the vampire as the architect of his suffering two years ago. It was this very vampire lord from whom he had narrowly escaped, following his dramatic emergence through the portal gate alongside his former dungeon denizens—the Dungeon Folk. His escape had coincided with a tragic sacrifice: his adopted mother's self-destruction to shield him from the Slaethians, an act of love and defiance that had freed his people. This enemy before him now, though loathsome, perhaps did not stir as much hatred in him as the Slaethians, against whom his mother had laid down her life. Those were dark days, shadowed by his transformation into a lich and the painful loss of his mother, during which he bore his formerly demeaning name, Wartie.

"I will contribute to the downfall of Slaethia and ensure their eradication from Nyxoria. After that, we shall see," War-Mist declared firmly to the ancient vampire.

"Then, for now, that shall suffice," the vampire said, his smile broadening to reveal his fangs within the shadow of his hood. "The forces gather to the southwest, rallying under the banner of my daughter, Aurelia. I've also received word that her wife has been returned to her—this Blake, Scion of Dreams and Nightmares," he concluded, disappearing suddenly, leaving no trace behind.

At the mention of that name, War-Mist straightened abruptly, his eyes widening behind the slits of his dark purple helmet. A faint whisper, an echo of when he suffered from low intellect escaped him, "Mummy."