

BLAKE PUDDING

CHAPTER 10

DREAMING AS ONE

“Fuck, I’m dead,” I uttered, the words emerging in two distinct voices.

Was this place the Dream Realm or Realm of Dreams? Or perhaps Purgatory? I haven’t settled on an official name yet. Honestly, all three seem fitting, and I’ll probably keep switching between them, much like a politician flip-flops on promises or how Aurelia constantly enjoys switching positions—be it on her back, all fours, or atop a pile of corpses—what I getting at is, I’ll choose whichever name fits my whims, needs, mood, or fucks with readers’ heads the most. But oh, here I go, rambling again.

During my last visit, I wrestled with... shall we say, a slight identity crisis. One part of my soul was in deep slumber, while the other wandered, lost without its counterpart. Was Dream the kind and sweet half or the cruel yet sweetly malicious one? Well, I did learn one thing: Dream really needs her nightmares. It makes me ponder how Nightmare would act alone, without her dreams... possibly becoming even more sociopathic? Yeah, both halves of me definitely need all of... well, *me*.

Huh... This is spiraling into a self-made paradox. I’m curious about how you, the readers, are digesting this—not that it really matters; this story is all about me. And if there’s anything I’ve figured out, it’s that I’m a shamelessly self-centered bitch who does and says whatever I want, and that’s a fact for both halves of me. Don’t get me wrong—I’m not trying to be some feminist icon, girl-power hero, anti-hero, or villain; I simply do whatever the fuck I want. Even if it blows up in my face, I’m at peace with any outcome as long as I’m the architect of my own disaster, not a pawn in someone else’s schemes—be it hell or high water, murder, cannibalism, drugs, sex, or syphilis.

Well, maybe not syphilis—that shit ain’t fun, believe me, but it brings back oh-so-sweet memories. Aww, Stifler’s mom—crap! There I go, rambling in my narration again.

Where was I? Oh, right! I found myself in a meadow within the Realm of Purgatories (*Tee-hee!*), featuring a quaint little cabin perched upon a hill, almost like a castle atop a mountaintop. Saying *I* was standing is a bit of a conundrum, though, because there *we* were, both of me.

On my right, I shimmered in silken beauty, a vision of a dream enshelled within flawless ghostly white silk skin, a dress, and flowing hair. To my left, the same flawless silk skin was nothing but a masquerade mask, a facade barely concealing the underlying truth. I made no effort to hide my pudding-like essence; the darkness flowed outward, transforming into a swirling dress of horrors, while my long black hair, alive with sinister tendrils, quivered ominously. Hand in hand with

myself, I smiled with both bodies, Dream and Nightmare, in unison as we merrily skipped up the hill.

It's quite amusing, really. Back in the waking world, and even during my previous visits here, my two souls seemed to act separate from one another, as if each half was its own entity, exact opposites of one another. Maybe I'm finally getting to grips with my duality? Hard to say, honestly—it's all still too surreal. But despite the back-and-forth of consciousness between my two halves, there was now this sense of being one, a synchronized harmony in thought and action. After all... We. Are. Blake.

My brighter me halted our gleeful skipping, turning to face my darker side. "Seriously, Nightmare?" she—or I—groaned. "I think we've milked that line enough."

"And there goes our sync," I lamented, both halves exclaiming the sentiment at once.

There was a long pause before both of me giggled as one, returning to our merry way up to the cottage. With a rhythmic dual knock, rum-rum dum-dum dum-dum, the door swung open before us with a welcoming creak. The smell of fresh-baked goods wafted out like a warm hug.

Without hesitation, all of me entered the cottage, stepping into what felt unmistakably like home. It was strange; memories of my past life and former parents persisted, yet here, my mother, the Crone, Duskara, the Goddess of Dreams—and Nightmares—had reformed my dual souls with her very essence, entwining a part of her soul and divinity into me. She was more of a mother than any I had ever known, essentially rebirthing us—me—back into existence after Circe—Magic—had shattered my soul into dust. And now, despite my insanity, darkness, cruelty, and mischief, I adored my mother beyond words.

The interior of the house appeared much larger than its exterior suggested, resembling a nightmare where hallways stretch endlessly—I reveled in it. Maintaining my childlike glee, I skipped along the lengthy corridor, peeking into various rooms brimming with an array of wonders and horrors, one even hosting a winter wonderland, before finally arriving at the kitchen. Its design was quaintly homely, yet the floor plan had transformed completely since my last visit—not that it mattered to me. My dual smiles broadened as I observed an old, haggard woman bustling around, meticulously setting the dining table for three.

"Mom!" I joyously exclaimed, extending four arms.

The candlelight flickered, and the haggard old woman vanished, replaced by a youthful figure who could easily pass as a sister. She greeted me with a warm, affectionate smile, then opened her arms wide. I rushed forward with both bodies, eagerly merging into her comforting embrace.

"How's my baby girl?" Mother asked, gently kissing each of my foreheads. "What led to your demise this time?"

I fought to stifle a laugh at the *this time* remark. "You don't know?" I asked with Nightmare.

“My dearest one,” she soothed, tenderly caressing both of my cheeks, “I am not omnipotent. No being in existence is, not even my own mothers,” she clarified, her voice laced with a subtle undertone of sorrow. “So, what happened?”

“I was training,” I started with Dream’s softer tone, then interjected with Nightmare’s sharper edge, “—with my eyes closed like an absolute fool.” Taking a deep breath, I continued in Dream’s voice, “—and then, this intense, searing pain suddenly engulfed me, and by the time I opened my eyes, I found myself here.”

“An assassination, perhaps?” Mother mused, tapping her lip thoughtfully before shrugging. “Well, nothing can be done about it now. Please, sit down for a meal with me before you head back,” she insisted, guiding both of my forms to our seats at the dining table.

The table was laden with an array of baked goods, yet the candle flickered sporadically, casting intermittent shadows. During those fleeting moments of darkness, an inverse spread appeared, showcasing a grotesque array of rotten meats, severed limbs, and writhing maggots—it looked absolutely delicious. Mother’s visage would appear as a skeletal figure in those fleeting flickers of light, her face obscured in shadow.

It seemed I faced a tantalizing choice for my dinner: a delightful spread suited for a dream or a nightmarish array fit for the macabre tastes of horrors.

Unable to resist, I extended Nightmare’s fingers and extinguished the candle with a pinch, allowing the moonlight streaming through a nearby window to illuminate the dining table, fully revealing a nightmarish display. Curiously, the sun had been shining when I entered Mother’s cottage just moments before. But I didn’t dwell on it, not with the array of mouth-watering horrors in front of me, stirring an insatiable hunger.

I dined with gusto, crunching on a finger with Dream while gnawing on a rancid liver with Nightmare. Mother sat with the pose of nobility, her bony hand revealed only by the moonlight as darkness bathed the rest of her, her silver fork piercing into a clouded eyeball.

“Tell me, daughter, how was your visit with your grandmother?” Mother inquired.

I paused, my two selves sharing a glance. Dream was in the middle of savoring a man’s half-gnawed sausage, so responding with that mouth was out of the question. I swallowed hard with Nightmare’s body, which had just been enjoying a chunk of fat adorned with what suspiciously resembled half a nipple.

“She was... um, intriguing,” I responded sheepishly with Nightmare. “I mean, given she’s Death, the choice of a little girl’s form is... odd?” Dream’s head nodded in agreement, though I really should remove that wiggling sausage from my mouth.

“Ah, youth is often associated with life, and if there’s anything she misses most, it’s Life,” Mother remarked, a touch of sorrow in her voice returning. “And what about your love? Did you find your soulmate?”

“I did,” I declared excitedly with both bodies. However, the sausage in Dream’s mouth muffled my words. Annoyed, I used Nightmare’s hand to yank the dick out of her—or my—mouth.

The evening unfolded intimately, dining with a goddess—my mother—and sharing every detail of my adventures, mishaps, and deepening love for Aurelia. She listened intently, asking questions with genuine curiosity, and I eagerly shared every moment. Her responses were devoid of judgment or condemnation, only radiating total acceptance and love. It didn’t matter that my tales included murder and devouring foes; her unconditional love was steadfast. Yet, as with all dreams and nightmares, the waking world beckoned. And so, Mother led both of me upstairs to a room that appeared to be my bedroom, where she gently laid both aspects of me on a bed so inviting it could soothe the dead, tenderly stroking our hair as she coaxed us into slumber.

Half-asleep, I whispered a question that had long haunted me, laden with simmering rage. “Mom, whatever happened to Circe?” I murmured through Dream, while turning Nightmare’s head to give Mother my full attention.

“You don’t ever have to worry about her,” Mother assured, gripping my hands.

“Shame, I’d really like to kick her in the cooch,” I mumbled through Nightmare.

“She’s preoccupied with a double convergence. Even without that, she wouldn’t bother you again. She’s not a vindictive entity; manipulative, perhaps, but not spiteful. And even if she were, she wouldn’t dare harm you now that your grandmother has recognized you. Especially knowing I’d give up my eternity, my divinity, to protect you. Now, sleep well, my darling, and wake knowing I love you.” I smiled at Mother’s comforting words as sleep—or rather, wakefulness—pulled me from the Realm of Dreams. The swirling energy within surged as the Dungeon Core’s power took hold.

Phasing from this realm, I felt Mother’s whisper tickle my consciousnesses. “Rescue *your* Priestess, save *your* two wayward followers from themselves, and reunite the six I have given you, or destroy them all. The choice will always be yours, my darling. And do say hello to my daughter-in-law for me.”