

# BLAKE PUDDING

## CHAPTER 23

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As for Sophia and the others, they were now donned in fresh attire and armor courtesy of the dungeon dwellers, stood shoulder to shoulder, exuding the air of fierce warriors and mages—except for Jason, who seemed like he had just raided a crypt. Sophia sported sleek black robes paired with a silver chest plate, feeling a sense of pride in her new ensemble. And let's not overlook Blake, who was being cradled by the vampire like a precious possession.

As they surveyed the enemy army regrouping for another round of combat, Sophia, Rob, Heather, and Yua shared expressions tinged with uncertainty. In stark contrast, Jason reveled in the swirling turmoil. As for Jeremy, his thoughts remained enigmatic. The opposing force comprised battle-seasoned knights, leaving the group second-guessing their decision to enlist the aid of the dungeon inhabitants. In hindsight, fleeing seemed like a far more appealing choice.

The Chief raised his hand, a gesture that commanded a momentary hush across the battlefield, spanning both opposing sides, before unleashing a deafening roar. With unmistakable authority, he bellowed a solitary order, "RELEASE!"

The night sky ignited with a spectacular display of colors, reminiscent of a vibrant fireworks show, as the dungeon dwellers harnessed their magic collectively for the first time since reclaiming it. Heather and her comrades stood in awe of the multitude of spells being cast in perfect harmony. The opposing forces and the few remaining citizens of Elsternwick hastily shielded themselves and invoked protective incantations. Simultaneously, others struggled to flee the impending magical onslaught, as the conjured energies soared skyward, ultimately descending like an unrelenting torrent of missiles.

Explosions reverberated through the enemy encampment, hurling unprotected soldiers through the air by the sheer force of the unleashed magic. The breathtaking spectacle of vibrant colors persisted, punctuating the sky with each detonation as spell after spell descended upon the opposing forces. The billowing dust and an array of colorful smoke veiled the complete scope of the devastation, yet it remained evident that the dungeon dwellers had sown chaos and havoc with their onslaught.

However, donning his imposing wizardly visage, the warg seemed to be in over his head and wasn't about to leave anything to chance. With another deafening roar, he bellowed, "KEEP FIRING!"



Vanya couldn't come to terms with the unfolding nightmare. Her husband had been brutally slain, his soul ensnared within a reanimated corpse—assuming it was even his soul in there. To compound her agony, the very fiend who had orchestrated his death and triggered the kingdom's ruin a century ago was none other than the necromantic vampire, Aurelia. Driven by a desperate

urge to thwart Aurelia's malevolent designs of amassing an army of the deceased, Vanya had resorted to obliterating the tent that sheltered the fallen bodies. But let's be clear—it wasn't just any tent. It concealed a spatial pocket, and its destruction triggered a cataclysmic explosion, rending the encampment and Elsternwick itself asunder. Yet, despite the devastation, Vanya couldn't risk allowing Aurelia to commandeer their departed brethren. A cruel necessity, perhaps. And now, the enigmatic dungeon creatures, whose power she had brazenly confiscated, were assaulting them with incomprehensible magic—confounding her understanding of the situation entirely.

“What the hell?! They should be magicless without the core!” Vanya snarled as she hid beneath a magical barrier as a barrage of spells rained down like an unrelenting hailstorm.

“Oi, I'm wonderin' how long these feckers can keep up this little magic show,” Gimona bellowed.

"No idea. They shouldn't even have the capacity to cast spells, but look at them go, showering magic like it's a trend. The worst part is they might have some ambient mana users among them. That means they could keep up this onslaught for hours if the mana saturation in this area persists. We're trapped in a defensive stance, evading spells until either reinforcements arrive or the vampire contingent in their ranks has to retreat at dawn," Vanya's voice wavered between exasperation and disbelief.

“Well, I'll be fucked! We're going to be arse pounded into oblivion at this rate. We need to do somethin', anythin' but standin' here and takin' a magical beatin' from those vicious monsters!”

“I'm open to any ideas.”

“Ah, sure 'n' why not use that auld coot's Way Stone?” Gimona cackled, her eyes alight with mischievous glee.

“Craycroft's Way Stone?”

“Aye! Sure it's got to be hidin' around here somewhere! Ah, ye think that tent exploding was a wild ride, just ye hold that cooch tight, love, there's more madness to come!”

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I stared, wide-eyed and jaw dropped, at the epic fireworks display of magical mayhem the dungeon folk had unleashed on the invading knights. These so-called monsters were putting on an absolute pyrotechnics show of rage aimed at the knights who dared swipe their precious Dungeon Core. I mean, let's face it, the lunacy of it all wasn't lost on me. I'd have swiped that core quicker than a pickpocket in a crowded market, not giving a rat's ass about the fallout. But now, where the hell had that blasted thing vanished off to? Sure, I considered that it might be chilling in the cozy confines of the spatial ring Aurelia had given me, which I promptly pitched into my own private dimension storage, no big deal. But honestly, with the dungeon gang nearby, there was no way I was gonna whip it out to check. At least not if I intended to keep it all for myself—unless, you know, Lady Sexy Vampire decided otherwise, which of course I would begrudgingly give it back. A swirling mix of excitement, dread, and that unmistakable battlefield unease twisted in my gut, and I had no clue what the hell was causing it.

“Ah, Lady Aurelia,” purred a feline figure as she materialized out of thin air. “It’s so delightful to see you’ve made it through the chaos unscathed.”

Back when I was busy springing the prisoners from their constraints, my focus had been solely locked onto Aurelia. But now, as I gave the petite figure before me a closer once-over, an odd duality in her appearance hit me like a brick. She had this aura, you know? Kinda like she'd seen it all, lived through more than her fair share – mature like a seasoned librarian, a naughty one at that. Yet, right alongside that, there was this innocent vibe, almost like a teenager just starting out, still finding her way. Figuring out her age was like trying to solve a riddle with a missing piece.

*“Hmm, she’s a hard one to read.”*

“*Seriously,*” I answered my own thoughts.

“Thank you, Lady Hikari,” replied Aurelia. “May I inquire as to the origin of this mob?”

“It seems our new priestess has rallied a small army in the name of the birth of our deity’s daughter,” revealed the cat girl.

“Daughters, plural,” I interjected, my tiny voice trembling as I found that my voice now matched my pitiful stature.

“My sincerest apologies,” corrected the catkin, “daughters.” Hikari glanced back to Aurelia, “Did you manage to secure the core?”

“I have. My darling Blake is keeping it safe and sound within her adorable little belly,” Aurelia replied with a smirk.

*“Well, if she considers Stellar Void my belly—.”*

“*Then she’s spot on,*” I chimed in, completing my own thought.

Hikari nodded eagerly, “Fantastic news! I’ll inform their Chief. It seems he brought some spell crystals to use as a decoy. This will be the ideal moment to retreat to the dungeon and set up a teleportation gate with the core.”

Drowning out the cat girl's chatter, my eyes locked onto the explosive symphony unfolding before me. Each blast outdid the last in pure chaos. The night sky turned into a canvas of magic, fiery and alive, as if the dark clouds were part of some twisted masterpiece. You'd think it was a mix between awe and terror, but honestly, it was more like awe and oh-my-god-I'm-gonna-puke. That level of raw power was like reality on steroids, giving a big middle finger to the laws of physics. I couldn't even spot who was caught up in that maelstrom anymore.

My attention shifted to the spectacle of orcs, goblins, and even a few dungeon-dwelling humans. They were hustling around like mad, setting up a row of crystals perched on tripods. It was like something out of a war movie, but with a fantasy twist and a sprinkle of bling as those crystals caught the flickering light of the ongoing magical chaos.

The sight was a curious one—humans mingling among creatures that the rest of the world deemed as monsters. Or were we on some distant moon? Regardless, it seemed that humans were a race

that could be found anywhere there was conflict and strife, without any sense of loyalty or allegiance to anyone but themselves. At least, that was the impression I've always had of them. But then again, I had never held a high opinion of humanity before being reincarnated as a Black Pudding.

My disappointment surged as Aurelia chose to divert her attention from the chaotic carnage. Oh, how satisfying it had been to witness those knights being utterly obliterated. But alas, I remained rather minuscule after shedding a substantial chunk of my mass, snugly ensconced in Aurelia's arms like a newborn. Not that I could complain. Truth be told, I found solace in her embrace, enjoying the warmth and security it offered. Though, the idea of feasting on the soldiers pummeled by the relentless magic was certainly alluring.

Peering from behind Aurelia's arm, my gaze fell upon the activated crystals erected by the dungeon denizens. With a surge of energy, each crystal unleashed a ceaseless onslaught of magic, enveloping the enemy forces in a tempest of detonating spells. The attackers, their energy seemingly drained, halted their casting, visibly gasping for air. A few hurried to aid their fallen comrades. It hit me like a bolt of lightning—this impressive barrage was but a fleeting illusion, a grand show of power intended to deceive, for they had stretched their capabilities to their limits. It was nothing short of a clever ruse!

*“Oh shit, we need to get the hell out of here!”*

We dashed back toward the desolate ruins of the dungeon, a destination I had little fondness for. In the distance, the barrage of spells continued unabated, its duration uncertain. Abruptly, a colossal explosion erupted, unleashing a shockwave that nearly toppled Aurelia. Yet, she stood firm, a paragon of resilience. Sadly, the same couldn't be said for all members of our motley crew; some were flung through the air like ragdolls by the impact. Scanning the scene, I witnessed a neon rainbow pillar shoot skyward—a vibrant beacon of chaos resembling a volcanic eruption. Strangely, it wasn't alone; in the distance, another towering column of light pierced the heavens.

“Wow, those crystals are amazing!” I exclaimed, in awe of their destructive power.

“That wasn't from the mana crystals,” Aurelia replied.

“Do you think they're all dead?” I asked, my morbid curiosity and hunger getting the better of me.

“I highly doubt it, my love.”

“Seriously?” I exclaimed, struggling to believe that anyone could have survived such an explosion.

“You mean they're not all turned into crispy critters?”

“No, my beloved,” Aurelia replied with a hint of a smirk. “Magical barriers are highly effective when combined together with a spell linkage. It most likely kept their casualties to a minimum. I would estimate no more than a hundred fell from that little display.”

*“...Daaamn!”*

After a painfully slow and grueling journey, we finally managed to stumble our way back into the dungeon. Apart from Aurelia and a handful of vampires, every single one of the dungeon dwellers

looked like they'd been through a meat grinder. My companions from the trials—the six pesky bastards—fared no better. As the gnawing ache in my gut intensified to the point of near agony, I found myself utterly famished. Even worse, I couldn't retrieve any corpses I'd stashed within Stellar Void, since I had devoured them all during that chaotic battle. But that wouldn't pose a problem now, not when there were mouth-watering, putrid bodies scattered around the ruins. The time for a feast had come!

I must have looked like a ravenous infant, my hands reaching out desperately toward a nearby corpse, grunting incoherently as my hunger overpowered my ability to form words. My legs kicked and flailed, a futile attempt to propel myself toward a pile of bodies scattered across the corridor. Amidst the darkness, Aurelia's soft, melodic laugh broke through like a ray of light, a fleeting innocence in the midst of the chaos. She gently lowered me to the ground, and driven by a hunger that felt as ancient as time itself, I lunged towards the mound of flesh, my desire to feast overpowering any other thought.

My small size was oddly disproportionate, with my head slightly too big for my body. I swayed and wobbled as I toddled forward, looking like a newborn taking its first shaky steps. It was humiliating! "Darted" might have been a bit of an exaggeration.

"Aww, check out the little tyke!" The voice might have been Sophia's, though I couldn't be sure. My focus was solely on not toppling over as I headed for my feast. But my attempts were futile, and I ended up face-planting onto the unyielding stone floor, half of my head splattering into a gooey mess. Yet, nothing could deter me. I reshaped my face and crawled the last few steps on my hands and knees. The teasing "oohs" and "awws" that surrounded me only intensified my insatiable hunger.

*"We're going to kill them!"*

*"Yes, we are!"*

My stomachache roared like a beast from the depths, but my unrelenting hunger wouldn't be silenced. At last, I reached my coveted feast, a decapitated head that stared blankly back at me. Unfortunately, my size prevented me from sprawling across the pile, so I resorted to a more devious approach. Transforming into my true form—a liquid-like tar—I slithered into the inviting eye socket, eager to feast on the tantalizing morsels within.

The jeers that initially greeted me as I stumbled my way to the feast swiftly turned to dry retches as most of my onlookers, save for one, abandoned the grisly scene. While I couldn't see Aurelia as I voraciously consumed my meal from within, an inexplicable sensation told me she remained, delighting in the twisted spectacle of my gruesome dining experience as I dined on a man in a way that defied all norms.

In a twisted culinary adventure, I unearthed that decaying brains bore a suspiciously delightful similarity to mashed potatoes drowned in gravy. Unable to resist the siren call of these flavors, I plunged deeper, journeying along the spinal cord, gobbling up everything in my path. Bones crumbled under my corrosive touch, a peculiar concoction of jam and raspberry gelatin swirling on my metaphorical taste buds. But the real pièce de résistance awaited in the stomach – bile! Its

tangy punch was akin to the wicked satisfaction of the sourest candies. Ah, a wickedly divine treat that left me craving for more!

Just to be crystal clear, let's not beat around the bush here: if the opportunity presented itself, I wouldn't exactly shy away from indulging in a living person's misery as they let out heart-wrenching screams. But you know, I'm a bit of a gourmet in my own right – think of me as the connoisseur of the wicked. Much like those folks who go nuts over dry-aged meat, I've got this refined palate that hankers for a more elevated flavor profile. Believe it or not, there were cultures in my previous life that genuinely savored the distinct tang of rotting bile in their various dishes. So don't go thinking it's some monstrous eccentricity – it's just my way of showing off my sophisticated taste buds. Call it a testament to my impeccable taste! And let's be honest, the allure of decomposing flesh is a class apart from the pedestrian flavor of the fresh stuff, don't you think?

With a twinge of disappointment gnawing at me, I begrudgingly registered the absence of my humble feast. Simultaneously, that unsettling feeling in my gut persisted, taunting me with its mysterious source. I glanced around, and there stood Aurelia, the last one standing by my side, reducing our gathering to a mere duo – or trio, if you're counting me and me. The clock was ticking; those knights were closing in fast, leaving us precious little time to explore our more wicked inclinations.

Unfazed, I initiated the process of reforming, emerging from the obsidian ooze that composed my being. The tacky tar gradually molded into muscles and ligaments, followed by delicate, silken threads draping over my dark, gooey form, forming a soft, natural casing that was my flesh. There I stood, utterly bare and open before her. Alas, time—the ultimate buzzkill—interrupted our shared desire. With a resigned exhale, the tar beneath my fresh layer of skin erupted, morphing into an intricate gothic gown. Sinuous tendrils wove themselves into an exquisite tapestry of the damned.

My vibrant orange eyes locked onto Aurelia's, mirroring a kindred hunger simmering within her deep crimson gaze. But, as fate would have it, time was not our ally in this moment. On the brighter side, I had managed to regain some of my lost stature – not quite the towering figure I used to be, but a reasonable hundred and sixty centimeters, or a humble five-foot-three. Who was I trying to fool? I was still vertically challenged!

Vorigan, the toad-faced freak, entered the chamber and respectfully bowed to my gorgeous vampire. “Lady Aurelia, preparations for the core are finished.”

“Ah, yes. My love may I have that bracelet I gave you.”

*“We both know that was no bracelet.”*

“Of course!” I smiled.

I decided against tearing my new flesh to access the gold ring in my Stellar Void. Instead, I opted for a more unconventional method. I plunged my arm in my mouth, up to the elbow, delving into the dark recesses where the Void dwelled. I felt around, my fingers brushing against a round orb – not my target. Persisting, I probed deeper into my abyss until I finally found the elusive gold ring. With a swift motion, I yanked my arm out, dragging along Aurelia's so-called bracelet. In haste, I

couldn't avoid tearing my silken skin, my cheeks splitting into a demonic grin. Though I'd have preferred to leave the grisly smile intact, I couldn't leave it there with Aurelia watching. Reluctantly, I mended the damage, mourning the brief existence of my wicked jester smile.

Surprisingly, my stomach felt better! I handed over the gold trinket to my sexy vampire. Watching Aurelia glide her finger along the ring's rim, I felt a pang of envy, wishing that was my...anyways! Suddenly, a glowing orb the size of a volleyball appeared out of thin air, just hovering there. My understanding of magic was still severely lacking. Yet, the aura of energy pulsating from it felt like I was standing before a miniature sun. I wanted to eat it!

"Vorigan, I entrust this to you. I shall check on the reformed monsters managing the defense preparations." Aurelia gestured nonchalantly, and the Dungeon Core drifted toward the amphibian.

"Understood," Vorigan croaked. "However, I doubt they can establish a robust enough barrier with the core before the Slaethian knights regroup and lay siege to our position."

"Indeed," Aurelia conceded, nodding at Vorigan, "but it ought to endure long enough for the portal to be opened." Aurelia glanced at me with a beaming smile, making my nonexistent heart flutter. "My love, please hold on to this for me."

I smirked as I gratefully reclaimed the cock ring – I mean, the bracelet back from Aurelia. My mouth gaped open, revealing a writhing, tentacle-like tongue that ensnared the ring and dragged it into the abyss of my maw, where it was swallowed by the Stellar Void. I could've sworn I detected a flicker of eager excitement in those mesmerizing vampiric eyes.

"Let's go inspect the preparations, my love," Aurelia purred, her voice laced with dark delight. She sauntered out of the chamber, her hips swaying hypnotically, bathed in an eerie orange glow.

Unfortunately, the gnawing stomachache returned as I followed Aurelia through the ruins.



Craycroft, a wizard of notorious power, lounged in his grand tower, entwined in experimentation upon his lesser servants – a brother and sister, if memory served him right. He reveled in the memories of past conquests, a sinister pleasure derived from capturing and then reshaping the so-called "inferior" races. To him, it was an act of mercy, a way to elevate them, a means to be of use. While many of his kind advocated for the eradication of non-enlightened races, Craycroft considered himself beyond such base desires. No, he was far too cunning to resort to mere destruction. Why squander potential slaves when you could twist them to your will, manipulate their minds, learn from experimentation, and shape them into tools of use? The thought painted a sly smile on his lips as he injected the two gremlins with viper's bane, an experiment to test the creatures' supposed immunity to poison. The waves of hatred emanating from the two gremlins formed a noxious cloud, a testament to the twisted delight Craycroft derived from their resistance. These siblings had a long journey ahead of them before his reshaping efforts took full effect.

Nonetheless, the current phase centered on experimentation. Every endeavor began with resistance, and the process of dismantling that resistance exhilarated him. Shaping their wills, leading them to acknowledge the perceived imperfections within their own race—this was his

motivation. The ability to manipulate and sculpt their minds according to his desires set him apart from his peers. As the two siblings writhed in their hatred and the poison took its hold, he couldn't help but bask in his sense of superiority, a sensation that surged with every new poison he introduced into their veins.

The night wore on as he immersed himself in his twisted experiments, driven by his perverse desires as he delighted in their cries. Eventually, he found satiation in the cacophony of their screams, and sleep gradually overcame him. The two broken servants he'd subjected to his torments slinked back into the shadows of the tower, left to their own pain and misery.

In his slumber, Craycroft experienced no guilt or remorse, his mind free of such emotions. To him, his actions were a form of mercy bestowed upon the unenlightened. In his view, these pitiful creatures would have met a swift and violent end under someone else's hand. Yet, his approach involved reshaping their minds, molding them into something he considered superior—an act of kindness in his twisted perspective. Moreover, the knowledge he gleaned from their natural resistance to poison proved valuable, even more useful was that it did very little to alleviate their suffering.

The room burst into brilliance as Craycroft jolted upright in his bed, his eyes scanning for the source of the disturbance. What he beheld defied logic and reason. The air was charged with magic, a swirling, crackling maelstrom of mana that engulfed not just his chamber but the entire tower. This unprecedented concentration of magic in a singular spot conveyed a clear message—one he understood all too well.

"Mana detonation!" he exclaimed, his horror mounting as he realized there was nothing he could do to avert the inevitable.

The pinnacle of the wizard tower, housing Craycroft's bedchamber, was convulsed by a cataclysmic eruption of untamed magic. The skies themselves ignited with a resplendent spectacle, visible to kingdoms situated as far as three horizons away. A radiant column of energy surged skyward, akin to a geyser of unadulterated magic, showering stone and mana in a mesmerizing cascade. Fleeting, it appeared as if the very heavens were set ablaze. Miraculously, the scores of servants whom Craycroft harbored within the tower emerged unharmed from the chaos, seizing the chance to flee into the obscurity of the night, never to return.

As for Craycroft, he found himself still within the confines of his bed, encircled by the fragmented remnants of the army he had departed from earlier that day. The only conceivable explanation was that the Way Stone had detonated, flinging him back to the encampment of the army. However, what greeted him was an eerie scene devoid of the camp's presence, with naught but traces of a recent skirmish and the soldiers and knights that now lay strewn about him. His grip on the thin sheet tightened as he surveyed the landscape. Crystal fragments were scattered along the tree line, a silent testament to mortar fire. Yet, there was an unsettling absence of the army or any vestiges of military might. It seemed as though a meticulously crafted distraction had been executed, allowing the perpetrators to vanish into the shroud of night. Craycroft seethed with indignant anger, knowing that whoever orchestrated this perfidious scheme would pay a grievous price.





Despite no longer being a mere ghoul, Olin lay sprawled on the battlefield, his neck snapped and chest ripped open. In the rush to scavenge arms and armor from the blood-soaked chaos, the knights had scarcely spared a thought for the fallen. Olin gazed up at the sky, motionless, unperturbed by his injuries. After all, as a lich, his injuries were nothing to worry about as long as his phylactery remained safe and sound. Even with time, Olin knew he would grow in power and eventually be able to heal such wounds. Though, he did worry about how far he could be from his phylactery, which was still in the clutches of that vile Black Pudding.

As Olin rose from his prone position, he cast a discerning eye across the surroundings, unraveling a bitter truth. Utter solitude enveloped him. The creeping weight of realization sank in, a gradual and excruciating comprehension that his mistress had, indeed, abandoned him to this desolate fate.