

BEWARE OF WRITER

1ST DRAFT

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 31

Stepping out of that freakin' classroom the pink brat had voodooed me into, I shot it one last look before my eyes widened in shock. *Empty!* An eerie silence surrounded me. Professor Stormrune was just gone, like, poof! It felt as though the air thickened as the walls began closing in, and every step echoed like a sinister whisper, as though the nightmares had secrets to share. Shadows flickered at the corners of my vision, and the empty desks and vacant seats seemed like they were waiting for something to emerge from the darkness.

Goosebumps crawled beneath my silk, and a chill ran down my neck, a shiver of glee I couldn't shake off. *Oh, she's good! But I ain't letting her mess with me. Nah, I'm the future Queen of Nightmares.* Well, maybe being queen was a bit of a low bar in a realm of gods and magic. *Meh, whatever.* With a smile of determination and a glint of madness in my eyes, I got ready to face whatever horrors were lurking, fully prepared to embrace the darkness and unleash my own horror on this messed-up dream world! *Let the nightmare begin—no, wait! There's something else I gotta do first.*

"Hmm... where would I find something I'm supposed to see without knowing I'm supposed to see it?" I mumbled to myself.

Grumbling curses, I stomped down the damn corridors of the academy, the shouts roaring in my ears as wands blasted like freakin' jet engines. Pew, pew, pew—you get the picture! But that's not the juicy part. The juicy part was who was throwing down out there. I stopped over a balcony, peeking over the edge at the inner courtyard where the misfits were taking on a whole damn army of knights outside the teleporting chamber. Shit was getting real—well, it would have been if I hadn't known this was a collective dream of the past. I wondered if that's why the headmaster killed himself, he realized all of this was within a dream, so he woke himself up? *I wonder if any of them will still remember me when they wake up?*

Pfft, I'm seriously kicking myself for not realizing this was all just a freakin' dream. I mean, come on! I carry the title "Scion of the Crone," and that's supposed to make me all-powerful within the domain of dreams and nightmares. But nooo, apparently, I had to be somewhat conscious of it to tap into that power. Can you believe it? I could have been freakin' Krueger-styling out this dream the whole time! *Ugh, so frustrating!* And, of course, now I've got a gazillion questions, and I doubt I'll find any damn answers. But hey, who cares? I'm not the type to stress over not knowing stuff. I'm more about embracing the unknown—which, I like to refer to as chaos and mayhem. So, chin in hand, I lean over the balcony, watching the epic battle unfold below. Pew, pew, pew! *Those misfits are totally screwed!*

~~~~~

Thalassa's heart pounded in her chest as she pressed her back against a pillar, seeking cover from the relentless assault of spells launched by the mages. Each arcane blast struck with devastating force, shattering stone fragments in all directions. The air crackled with the raw power of magic, the very essence of it seeping into the surroundings.

Amidst the chaos, her fellow classmates fought valiantly, but their defenses were crumbling like sand in an hourglass. The sight of their torn forms filled her with a sense of impending doom. Thalassa knew that time was running out, and their fate seemed sealed.

In the midst of desperation, she focused her mind on one avenue of hope—a prayer. It was the only thread connecting her to the possibility of survival, a glimmer of faith in the face of overwhelming darkness.

The nymph's body tensed with every explosive arcane blast that tore through the once-serene courtyard. The air crackled with the raw intensity of the magical onslaught, and she could feel the bark of her wooden skin smoldering from the searing heat. The courtyard, once a place of peaceful learning and camaraderie, had now transformed into a battlefield of chaos and destruction.

The carnage before her presented a grim tableau of their struggle. The path to the gateway—to salvation was blocked, leaving them trapped amidst the chaos of battle. Wounded students were dragged to cover, their anguished cries mingling with the explosive bursts of arcane spells. The key to victory was so simple in Thalassa's eyes, they needed more healers.

In the heart of the Forest of Woe, the tribes of the nymphs' faith were as diverse as the countless trees that loomed overhead, encompassing a vast pantheon of gods and goddesses. From kind to cruel, they all had their place. This starkly contrasted with the usual practice of other races and kingdoms, where devotion to a single deity was more common.

Thalassa's emerald eyes ignited with an unwavering determination, and she drew a deep breath, seeking to anchor herself amidst the swirling turmoil. The air was tinged with the scent of burnt foliage, a sharp contrast to the once-sweet fragrance of blooming flowers that had graced the courtyard. With resolve etched on her face, she raised her voice above the tumultuous clamor, a plea directed to the divine. "Asherah, hear my prayer! Please, in this desperate moment of need, bestow your divine aid upon us," her beseeching voice echoed through the chaos, carrying with it the urgency of the situation.

Amidst the turmoil, Thalassa's sharp emerald eyes caught a gathering of darkness above her, a sinister presence lurking, always watchful, always present. The awareness of her own dreaming washed over her for the barest of moments; this had become a recurring nightmarish loop she couldn't escape as of late. But recently, something felt different, as if an interloper had been frolicking amidst the dreams. She was just about to break free from reliving the heart-wrenching moment of Thirion's fall when a new vision seized her consciousness, pulling her back into the dream. The darkness dissolved, and the courtyard was bathed in an ethereal golden light. Asherah had answered her prayer!



As I half lazily continued watching the students duking it out down below, a delightful thought crossed my mind—should I dive into the fray and spice things up? But, hell, this whole dream-not-real thing kinda killed my buzz. And that got me thinking, had I been munching on fake corpses all this damn time? *Damn, that's... That's... Well, I don't even know what the hell that is, to be honest. Bullshit, maybe? Whatever.* So, there I was, boredly spectating the chaotic battle, when my dreamworld roommate locked eyes with me, a flicker of recognition crossing her dryad—nope, sorry—nymph face, until a blinding golden light flooded the courtyard.

Squinting, I leaned further over the edge to see what the hell had happened, but to my confusion, there was nada. Seriously, I half expected some godly asshat to make a grand entrance, but nope, none of that crap went down. Instead, I noticed a few fallen students climb back to their feet and dive back into the fray with the knights. And let me tell you, all those students who were throwing down were like charging bulls on a rampage. It was insane! One of 'em even got impaled right through the damn heart but shrugged it off. The wound healed instantly as the sword was yanked out. That's when it hit me. They had some kind of freakin' healing blessing or something.

“Did a god of light just heal them?” I muttered to myself, my voice laced with doubt despite having no one to ask.

“*Goddess, and no, Asherah isn't on anyone's side, though I'm certain that stupid cult is trying to recruit her,*” a little girl's voice grumbled beside me. I shot a quick glance over, and there she was, the little pink brat. *Ugh!*

“Looks like she's picked a side down there,” I remarked.

“*Yeah, well, one of her faithful did plead for help. I mean, what was Asherah supposed to do, turn a blind eye?*” the brat chuckled sarcastically, her pink dress pulsating with dark magic as she did.

I took a deep breath to calm myself, though I was already kinda having a blast, but I didn't want to let the little shit next to me know that. “So, what should I call you? Because I've been mentally referring to you as ‘pink brat,’” I chuckled before realizing I might be talking to some powerful goddess. “Ahem, I mean, who are you?”

“*Oh, you want a name! Huh, I haven't had one in so long. Hmm, let's see... it's been eons since I've had a name... Erebus? No! What about Valdis? Nah, not after that reaper horde incident. Thanatos, maybe? Nyx! Yes, call me Nyx,*” she beamed. Though, it was rather unnerving and kinda cool gazing into the darkness within her eyes—or eye sockets, seeing as I couldn't peer into them.

I shot Nyx a look, trying to act all nonchalant, like I wasn't impressed or anything. “So, this is your grand revelation? A light side goddess helping my fellow freaks?” I casually waved my hand at the students now kicking ass against the knights.

“*What? Oh no, I didn't want to show you anything. I was happily dreaming in my favorite place when you came and woke me up in this part of the dream realm. Silly Duskara brought you here, not me. Didn't I tell you that before?*” She shook her head like she was talking to a clueless child. “*And, umm, I did help you reconnect to the system, but not all your skills will work here, sorry.*”

I raised an eyebrow, “Who’s Duskara?” I inquired, though I had a pretty good hunch about it already. “Wait! You’re the one who turned me into an Eldritch Pudding?” I blurted out.

Nyx giggled, finding my confusion amusing. “*Duskara is the Crone, silly girl, the one who dragged you into this dream realm. And yep, that Eldritch Pudding thing was totally me! Wasn’t it fun? Though, I almost destroyed your soul when I first saw you,*” she replied with a mischievous grin before suddenly skipping off.

“That little shit,” I grumbled but then froze as Nyx’s words sank in. “Wait—you almost destroyed my soul?!” I yelled in shock, only to receive another fit of laughter from the brat.

At least now I had some answers—I knew the Crone’s true name, my reincarnation mother’s name, Duskara. I glanced back down at the damn battle, the fleeing students tearing through the knights like wild beasts, hell-bent on reaching that portal room to get back to the capital. Their wounds were healing as fast as they were inflicted. Fuck, I wanted to join them, but this was just some memory, a goddess damn dream of the past—I wasn’t actually here. Yet, I saw Thalassa’s eyes on me one last time, recognition flickering in her gaze before she vanished like awakening from a slumber. I turned away from the balcony and chased after that little pink monster, Nyx.