

BLACK PUDDING

CHAPTER 1

As twilight nears and breath turns thin,
My eyes glimpse visions ere life's end.
In that brief moment, I dreamt, aghast,
Of a realm of wonder unsurpassed.

In this world of pure delight,
Magic weaves dreams in the fading light.
Where reality blurs and dreams entwine,
Impossibilities bow, their limits resign.

In this realm divine, I wander and roam,
Amidst the mystic marvels, magic calls home.
Yet, even here, where enchantment blooms,
Nightmares lurk and terrors loom.

These dread specters hold wicked sway,
Their dark dominion in eerie display.
In this beguiling world, I find myself entwined,
Where nightmares dance with the divine.

“Did’s its works, m-mistress?”

“Another failure, I’m afraid.”

As my beautiful dream dissipated, I became aware of two individuals conversing nearby. One voice was grating, reminiscent of a nasal-infected elderly man. In contrast, the other was intoxicatingly seductive, as if Elisabeth Hurley herself were whispering sweet nothings into my ear. *I’ve always had a thing for accents.* Oddly, their voices were all I could focus on as I realized I couldn’t see. *Oh God, am I blind?*

Confusion clouded my mind as I struggled to understand what was happening to me. *Am I alive or dead?* My body felt like it was suspended in thick, murky water, each nerve and limb tingling with numbness. Panic threatened to overwhelm me, but I forced myself to focus. Something was definitely off. *My mind has to be playing tricks on me!* The thirst that burned my throat was almost unbearable, and I longed for a nurse to bring me water. But when I tried to speak, no sound escaped my lips. Fear crept in as I tried to grasp the true extent of my situation.

“What’re wents wrongs, m-mistress?”

“The body was inadequate to hold the summoned soul. Olin, bring the girl’s remains back to the farmlands from whence they came. We cannot afford to have elves or humans wandering too far into the forest in search of her, potentially discovering the hidden dungeon ruins. If Lord Demidicus fails to do so, the Order will certainly entomb me for a century or two as a consequence of jeopardizing this location. Take the boy’s remains as well, and stage it to look like a griffin attack. Also, Olin, procure two more bodies for me. Ideally, not children this time. Their vessels are too fragile for my purposes.”

“What’re abouts ones of those’s g-goblins, m-mistress?”

“Regrettably, Olin, we will encounter the same problem. The necromancy ritual I’m employing seems to shatter the vessel from the inside as if the gods themselves are forbidding it. I need a more resilient body, preferably that of a skilled adventurer or the like. Oh, the delight of sinking my teeth into a sorcerer or healer and using their remains! I might even be able to transform my—the summoned soul into a powerful lich if only we had a phylactery, but those are too difficult to come by. Mmm, the wicked deeds we could do together.

“Even better! Olin, take Vorigan and Niamh with the skeleton army and raid Elsternwick to the east. Bring me their remains and any living prisoners you can capture; I feel a little famished. And Olin, ensure it appears as if it were a border skirmish from the south.”

“As’s commands. And’s m-mistress, wheres the’s s-summons soul is?”

“**WHAT?!**”

What the hell were they talking about? This must be some cruel joke! Where am I? What’s going on? The cacophony of chaos intensified, with metal and wood colliding against stone and glass. God, I wish I could see what’s happening! Before I could process my thoughts, a sensation gripped me, unlike the numbing cold I had been feeling. It was as if something guided me upward, like a rollercoaster’s ascent, followed by a sudden jerk as though I was being thrown. Everything came to an abrupt halt with a sickening splat.

As I crawled through the murky fog of my new reality, a solid surface scraped against my back. I tried and failed to stand, but at least I could move, even if it meant awkwardly wriggling on my belly. Every inch forward felt like a battle, with the numbness and darkness conspiring to create a sensory deprivation chamber around me. The sensation was distant yet strangely familiar, evoking memories of wiggling beneath my childhood bed during games of hide-and-seek.

Bewilderment clouded my thoughts as I grappled with the surrounding chaos. Harsh words filled the air, accompanied by the discord of metal clashing with wood and the shattering of glass and stone. Completely disoriented, my senses faltered, unable to help me decipher the unfolding pandemonium. An unrelenting yearning to witness the events tormented me, yet I remained confined to a realm of darkness.

[Poison] Resisted.

What the—?! Pain engulfed me, and my thoughts spiraled, leaving me feeling as though I'd been run over by a freight train. And to top it all off, I couldn't tell if I was seeing a system notification or hallucinating. This is what I get for reading too much manga! Gratefully, the pain began to ebb as the numbness rolled back in.

Panic surged through me as I grappled with my bewildering predicament. *Poison? How did I end up so powerless and exposed?* Desperation clawed at my psyche, urging me to flee from this nightmarish situation.

A flicker of relief ignited within me as I felt something large enough to climb on. *If death is stalking me, I refuse to meet it lying down!* I clutched at it, mustering every ounce of strength to hoist myself up. Yet, as I began my ascent, the object under me disintegrated as if made out of cotton candy, dissolving at my touch. At first, the sensation was akin to sinking into a plush beanbag chair or a fluffy cloud. However, the texture rapidly transformed, becoming granular and sweet, coating my senses with an unsettling sugary taste.

What is happening? I couldn't make sense of the bizarre circumstances, but I knew I needed to keep moving, to fight for my survival. A primal urge to escape coursed through my veins. With determination fueling my every motion, I refused to let the sugar-coated snare drag me under.

You have defeated a [Trounce Spider].
<u>LEVEL UP!</u> You are now level 1. Racial Skill Unlocked [Absorb]
Do you wish to [Absorb] [Trounce Spider]? Yes / No

An odd sensation enveloped me, and for a fleeting moment, I reveled in the warm, comforting embrace. However, the respite was ephemeral, as a tide of dread and disbelief washed over me.

Rendered speechless and blind, my body felt peculiar, as if bereft of limbs. Regardless, I still managed to crawl. The spider beneath me had dissolved, and the mere thought sent shivers down my spine. The situation was a conundrum, a puzzle demanding resolution. *What am I?* Desperation clawed at me, praying I wasn't a mimic chest or some other grotesque monstrosity spawned from hell's abyss.

This can't be happening. I have to be dead and stuck in some twisted version of hell. Although, the scenario was too surreal, too ludicrous. I had longed for a new life, a fresh start in another world. And yet, here I found myself, a minuscule entity that had inexplicably consumed a spider. I drew upon my life experiences, scrutinizing my circumstances in search of a clue, a glimmer of hope. I needed to understand my new form and my capabilities. And then, a revelation struck me—every RPG had a character sheet. With a surge of hope, I wagered that perhaps I had one too. With

unyielding resolve, I harnessed every ounce of strength and channeled my focus on a singular goal. I mentally shouted out, **[Status]**!

Name: Blake Race: Black Pudding Class: Dungeon Monster Level: 1 <u>Titles</u> None		
<u>Racial Skills</u> [Absorb] [Corrosive] <u>Spells</u> <u>Abilities</u> [Veil Polyglot]	<u>Vulnerabilities</u> [Fire] [Holy] <u>Immunities</u> [Acid] [Darkness] [Disease] [Poison]	<u>Unique</u> [Restricted] [Restricted] [Restricted] <u>Selectable</u> [Stellar Void]

A crushing wave of despair washed over me as the full weight of my predicament became apparent. My humanity had been stripped away, leaving me metamorphosed into a creature of slime—a Black Pudding, to be exact. This repugnant entity, a manifestation of dread and darkness, was the loathsome variety of slime if my gaming memories served me right.

Regret seeped into every thought as I mulled over my former life, wishing I had taken more chances, and lived more boldly. Perhaps then, I could have escaped this nightmarish destiny. It felt like the universe was punishing my reclusive disposition, ensnaring me in this revolting form.

“**Ugh!** Olin, check the soul crystals on the shelves over there! The summoned soul couldn’t have gone far.”

“Y-yeses, m-mistress.”

As the footsteps drew closer, my heart raced with fear and anticipation, and I strained to hear any other sounds that might give me a clue about my surroundings. But all was silent except for the steady beat of my own heart. In desperation, I turned my thoughts to the Absorb notification that still floated before me, willing myself to click on it despite my deep-seated aversion to spiders. With a mental push, I clicked “Yes,” and the sensation of absorption washed over me, leaving me feeling slimy and disgusted. But even as I recoiled from the feeling, I felt a glimmer of hope that maybe, just maybe, this would give me a way to escape the darkness that had become my constant companion. As the cotton candy taste in my mouth intensified, I wondered if I had a mouth to taste it with, or even a heart, for that matter.

[Absorb] [Trounce Spider] Successful.

Selectable
[Mana Sight]

I clung to this newfound sense of purpose, determined to make the best of my situation, even if it meant facing impossible challenges and obstacles. I felt like a mad scientist, experimenting with a new ability and pushing the limits of what was possible. But deep down, a part of me knew there was a darkness within me, a side that craved power and destruction. I was playing a dangerous game, and I couldn't help but wonder if I would lose myself in the process. But for now, I reveled in the rush of this newborn life, slightly scared and delighted.

“M-mistress, these's crystals are's empties.”

“Ugh, get Niamh. It loathes me to admit I need that soul sucker and her Astral Insight. Losing my—our Dark Champion is not an option if we are to survive this era.”

“Ates once's, m-mistress.”

My heart sank as I heard the words “Dark Champion” and “soul sucker” thrown around. I scanned my status sheet again, looking for any skills or abilities to help me in this strange new world. Despite my confusion, I knew I had to keep my wits about me to stay focused on the task.

I scoured my status sheet for skills or abilities to aid me in this strange, twisted world. Mana Sight caught my eye, offering a glimmer of hope in the darkness surrounding me. With every passing moment, I longed to regain sight and understand the world again.

[Mana Sight]

Acquire the capability to apprehend the environment through inherent sorcery.

Type
Spell

Activation
Passive

Unlock?
Yes / No

My heart raced excitedly as I mentally clicked on the Mana Sight option, desperate to regain sight and understand my surroundings. A quick notification popped up as I selected it, but I disregarded it without bothering to read it. The thought of being trapped in perpetual darkness was unbearable, and I longed to see the world again!

As the ability took hold, the world erupted, revealing every detail in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree panorama. The rush of sensory input was overwhelming, like a barrage of fireworks going off at once. Colors and shapes blurred together in a dizzying whirlwind, like a mad carnival ride that never slowed down.

But soon, the excitement gave way to nausea and dizziness. It was like being on a spinning carnival ride, my senses overwhelmed by the constant motion and movement. The sickening feeling of being trapped on a rollercoaster that would never end filled my stomach, and I fought to keep whatever was in there down. *Ugh, do I even have a stomach?*

I had sworn off carnival rides and theme parks after a particularly harrowing experience, choosing to avoid any activity that involved spinning or sudden movements. And yet here I was, trapped in a body that felt like it would collapse at any moment. The weight of my new reality bore down on me, the frustration and anger building with each passing moment. I loathed my new life and hated the endless sensory input that threatened to overwhelm me at every turn. But despite my despair, I knew I had to keep moving forward, to push through the discomfort and uncertainty and find a way to survive in this strange, new world.

[Poison] Resisted.

The profanities flowed through my mind like a raging river as I attempted to concentrate on the venomous spiders that had just attacked me. Despite my best efforts, the pain continued to overwhelm me. I surveyed the area, watching the arachnids approach with their many legs scurrying like a horde of sharp blades. But my vision was hazy, the world around me like a poorly lit circus tent, whirling and spinning out of control. I struggled to fixate on the spiders, to determine their number, but my sight kept shifting, refusing to remain still. And then, I became aware of the black sludge that seeped from my body, akin to tar from a damaged road. Every twitch of my muscles sent blobs of the vile, sticky liquid flailing like writhing tentacles, leaving me feeling repulsed and sickened with myself.

I had never been the typical pretty girl, always the short and curvy girl with a permanent resting-bitch-face, sunless skin, green-dyed hair, black lipstick, and a plethora of tattoos. But now, I felt like a monster. A wave of nostalgia washed over me as I thought back to my previous life, to the person I used to be. I longed to go back in time and be Blake Lyanna Jefferson again. But deep down, I knew there was no return to the past, that I was trapped in this new reality, a Black Pudding in a world of magic and monsters.

[Poison] Resisted.
[Poison] Resisted.
[Poison] Resisted.

In a panic, I tried to scramble away, crawl, run, or do anything to escape, but it was too late. Three massive spiders had already launched themselves at me, their legs propelling them forward with terrifying speed. As they landed on top of me, I felt a surge of panic and revulsion, my mind

screaming to fight or flee. But then, like before, I felt a strange delight, a sweetness flooding my pores with the taste of cotton candy at the county fair.

Despite their size, the spiders were no match for me, dissolving into nothingness as they touched my tar-like body. But their remaining comrades were undeterred, leaping forward to take their place. One after the other, they came at me, each disintegrating into my body like cotton candy in water. The sensation was overwhelming, like a drug that I couldn't resist. But with each spider, I consumed, a part of me felt like I was losing my humanity. *What's happening to me?*

My mind was a chaotic mess of emotions, ranging from euphoria to disgust, and I struggled to come to terms with what I had done. Not only had I become a monster, but I was also becoming one, as in mentally embracing it, a cannibalistic entity that fed on the creatures around me. The realization sent shivers throughout my core, and I couldn't help but wonder what other horrors this new existence would bring.

I couldn't cry, not with my current lack of eyes and tear ducts, but the urge to weep was overwhelming. The thought of what I might become next was almost too much to bear. I was eating spiders and enjoying it, trapped in this monstrous body with no hope of escape. It was a nightmare beyond imagining, and I was living it every moment.

You have defeated 9 [Trounce Spiders].
<u>LEVEL UP!</u> <u>LEVEL UP!</u> <u>LEVEL UP!</u> You are now level 4.
Do you wish to [Absorb] [Trounce Spiders]? Yes / No

I mentally clicked, "Yes!"

[Absorb] [Trounce Spiders] Successful.
<u>Selectable</u> [Silk Webbing] [Spider Walk] [Venomous]

As I stared at the notification, frustration and anger boiled within me, and I suddenly realized something odd. *I'm glaring at the notification!* My sight fixed on it with an intensity that belied my lack of physical eyes. It was strange to focus so intently on something despite my vision being a nauseating, all-encompassing blur. But the more I concentrated, the clearer the notification became, until it was almost as if I could touch it with my gooey body.

A sense of relief washed over me like a cool breeze on a hot summer day, dissipating the waves of nausea that had threatened to overwhelm me. Although my three-hundred-and-sixty-degree field of view remained unchanged, I found that I could now hone in on what I wanted to see. It was as though I had a selective tunnel vision, zooming in on specific details while the rest faded into obscurity. Or perhaps it was more like a phone camera, with the edges of the frame blurred out and only the central focus in sharp relief.

Whatever the explanation, it was a welcomed relief from the overwhelming chaos of my surroundings. I felt a sense of calm wash over me, knowing I could now navigate this strange new world more easily and precisely.

“M-mistress, eyes are’s r-r-r-turned’s wishes Niamh’s.

“Slow down, Olin. Don’t rush yourself when speaking. I would hate to replace you so soon.”

“Y-yeses, M-mistress.”

“Niamh, if you would.”

“Aurelia, if I would, what?”

I didn’t need to be a genius to realize that they were on the hunt for me. The sound of their conversation sent chills along my gooey skin, but as I tried to inch my way to safety, I realized that I had nowhere to go. *Perhaps there’s a mouse hole nearby, like in those old cartoons?* Strangely, however, I didn’t need to move to survey my surroundings and determine that there was no hole in sight. At least now I knew I was under a set of shelves, not a bed. It was a small victory, but a victory nonetheless.

Peering out from the edge of the shelf, I spied on the trio below. The first creature appeared to be a zombie or a ghoul, with various stages of decomposition on display. The stench was almost overwhelming, and I couldn’t help but feel a strange sensation. It was disorienting and yet fascinating. *Am I salivating? What the hell is wrong with me?* Shaking off the strange feeling, I averted my attention to the other two figures. Despite standing on opposite sides of the room, I found myself staring at both of them at the same time, as if I couldn’t decide where to look first.

The woman in black and red robes was breathtaking. Her long black hair, pale skin, and red eyes made her look like a ghostly apparition. Her robes shimmered like silk in the candlelight, and I couldn’t help but be drawn to her. *This must be Aurelia.*

The other was like a sexual nightmare coming to life. She was stunningly beautiful, but something in her gaze made my pudding crawl. Her attire was like something out of a fetish club; she had wings, horns, and a tail, like a creature from mythology. And those breasts, holy hell, they were practically bursting out of her leather bra. But despite her allure, my eyes drifted back to Aurelia as if under a spell.

“Niamh, would you be so kind as to use your oversized snout to sniff out a wandering soul?”

I couldn't help but feel the palpable tension between them as they glared at each other with seething anger. It was as if they wanted nothing more than to rip each other's throats out. I could sense their desire to keep their distance, each remaining on opposite ends of the room. Suddenly, my sight was drawn to the subtle movements of the zombie-like creature, inching his way back toward Aurelia as if he were her loyal dog. Seeing him intensified the salivating sensation, and I had to remind myself that I wasn't some mindless beast. I needed to focus on remaining hidden and staying alert.

I could hear the teeth grinding a brief moment before the demoness spoke. "And why tell is this soul so important, Aurelia? It's not like you to give a damn about a lowly soul."

"Niamh, that is unimportant."

"Oh, but it is, seeing as it's currently observing us. I do have to admit, that's an interesting vessel you've chosen for it. So, Aurelia, what's stopping me from devouring your little pet?"

"YOU WOULDN'T DARE!"

"Oh, but I would if I'm not given a reason not to."

The air around me became heavy and thick as ominous darkness seemed to creep into the room, causing the flickering candles to dim. A palpable aura of magical energy descended upon me, causing a sharp, stabbing pain that felt like a thousand needles piercing my skin at once. It was as if the very fabric of reality was being distorted, and Aurelia was at the epicenter of it all.

[**Darkness**] Resisted.

"Your reason is your life. Harm that soul, and I'll be feasting on demon blood this night!"

"Ha-hahaha! You're so cute when angry, Aurie. Don't worry about that pretty necromancer head of yours. Your pet is below that shelf there. But do be careful. Its vessel is so very tiny. Ta-ta."

As Niamh sauntered out of the room, her hips swaying seductively with her laughter echoing behind her, I found myself again transfixed by Aurelia. And then, suddenly, her gaze locked onto me with an intensity that made me feel like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. *Oh, shit!*

"Well, what have we here?"

Aurelia's voice was like honey, sweet and alluring. I could feel the weight of her gaze upon me, sending jitters of fear and lust coursing through me. Her eyes held a mischievous glint, and her lips curled into a smirk as she spoke. I couldn't help but feel drawn to her, like a moth to a flame. But I knew better than to let my guard down.

Despite my inner turmoil, I couldn't deny that Aurelia was stunning. She was dressed in a tight-fitting robe that hugged her curves in all the right places, and I couldn't help but notice the way it shimmered against her porcelain skin. Her black hair cascaded down her back like a river of silk, and her red eyes sparkled in the flickering candlelight.

I was captivated by Aurelia's gaze as if she had me under a hypnotic spell. Despite the urge to escape, my body refused to budge. It was as if a part of me wanted to stay with her. I fought against the feeling, trying to shake my thoughts free, but it was a losing battle. Panic clawed at my mind as I realized I had no escape. I was trapped beneath the shelving, yet a perverse joy overtook me. It was like I had found my rightful place.

"Ah, don't worry. I've gone through a lot of trouble to bring your soul from beyond the veil. The last thing I want to do is hurt you. However, I must admit, I didn't expect your soul to cling to a dungeon slime and pudding of all things, especially after I collected so many promising corpses for you. It must've been fate or a god being mischievous, but we'll work with what we've got. Let's see what we're dealing with, shall we? [Appraisal]."

A spark of light emanated from Aurelia's ring, and a tremor ran through me, causing any thought of hiding to vanish. Instead, I felt exposed and defenseless, as if all my barriers had been stripped away. Well, in a way, I was stripped bare since I had no clothes on this new form.

"I can't tell you how long I've waited for this moment. Oh, Olin, be a dear and retrieve, my be—our champion, would you." She ordered the decomposing ghoul to retrieve me with a single wrist flick.

This won't end well! My instincts screamed for me to flee. Aurelia's lips twisted into a sinister grin, and a chill ran through my body like ice water, as if my very soul was freezing.

"Y-yeses, m-mistress."

The ghoul commenced with his rigor mortis shuffle as he hobbled toward me as I lay beneath the shelf. The funny thing, I was overcome with a desire I had never experienced. It was as if I were a lioness preparing to pounce upon a carcass. *Eww! Don't do it, Blake!*

A deep and primal hunger seized hold of me as a hazed-over cataract eyeball came into view. I felt my body contort and writhe, my form shifting and undulating with a grotesque fluidity. Disgusted with myself, I tried to hide, to fight against the urge, but it was like trying to hold back a tidal wave. The ghoul had gotten on his hands and knees to peek beneath the shelf at me. Before I knew it, I was lunging toward the ghoul, my body moving on its own accord. I couldn't stop myself from pouncing! *NO! No! No – oh... god, this is amazing.*

Olin let out a shriek of pain as he began to roll on the ground, scratching at his face as he futilely attempted to peel me off. However, I refused to let go as I slid past his clawing fingers into that hazy eyeball and into the depths of pure warmth and deliciousness. The ghoul writhed and clawed at me, but I refused to let go, lost in the euphoria of this new sensation. It was unlike anything I had ever felt before, an intoxicating pleasure that left me drunk with ecstasy. *Oh yes, this feels better than sex!*

“Olin, I command you to stop resisting!”

The undead ghoul let out a deafening screech of defiance, his body writhing in what appeared to be an act of rebellion against Aurelia’s orders. But before I could make sense of the situation, he slammed his head against the cold, unforgiving stone floor with a sickening splat, leaving a pool of gory mess in his wake. The sound of the impact echoed through the chamber.

You have defeated [Undead Minion].
Do you wish to [Absorb] [Undead Minion]? Yes / No

The overwhelming pain that came crashing into me felt like a violent tornado, but just as quickly as it came, it was replaced by a tidal wave of pure ecstasy. It didn’t take long to realize what was causing these blissful moments – devouring the ghoul’s decomposing flesh. As revolting as it was, I couldn’t deny the pleasure of consuming him, especially when crawling into his empty eye socket had provided such a euphoric sensation. The thought alone made me recoil in disgust, wondering what had happened to me to make me crave such grotesque things.

Aurelia’s lips curled into a wide grin as she spoke, “This is the third time I’ve lost him this year.”

Oops!

As I devoured the undead ghoul, I couldn’t help but feel alarmed by how effortless it was. Aurelia approached me with a stool, her grin making me uneasy. Despite feeling disgusted with myself, I couldn’t bring myself to stop. The taste of cinnamon and apples filled my senses, and I felt myself slipping deeper into a state of bliss. My body seemed to move independently as I slid into the ghoul’s chest cavity, savoring every moment of my meal.

Before completely surrendering to this delightful banquet, I mentally clicked “Yes” on Absorb. Instantly, I was torn away from my blissful consumption, spreading out over what little remained of Olin’s corpse like a cozy blanket. And just as suddenly, his remains vanished, leaving me to shrink back to my previous form. However, I was no longer the small tarantula-sized monster I once was. I had grown significantly in size, now closer to that of a Yorkie.

[Absorb] [Undead Minion] Successful.
<u>Selectable</u> [Blight] [Fear] [Life Drain]

The universe has to either be punishing or mocking me! I mentally groaned out, [**Status**].

Name: Blake

Race: Black Pudding Class: Dungeon Monster Level: 4 <u>Titles</u> None		
<u>Racial Skills</u> [Absorb] [Corrosive] [Thermalsense] <u>Spells</u> [Mana Sight] <u>Abilities</u> [Veil Polyglot]	<u>Vulnerabilities</u> [Fire] [Holy] <u>Immunities</u> [Acid] [Darkness] [Disease] [Poison]	<u>Unique</u> [Restricted] [Restricted] [Restricted] <u>Selectable</u> [Blight] [Fear] [Life Drain] [Silk Webbing] [Spider Walk] [Stellar Void] [Venomous]

Aurelia’s grin was so ferocious that it made even the most notorious sociopaths and psychopaths from horror movies look pale in comparison. She waved her hand while leaning over me while sitting on her stool, and a tiny orb of light floated out from within me. As the orb drifted away, a shiver ran through my body, leaving me wondering what had just happened.

“Don’t worry, my be—little pool of death. It’s only Olin’s soul.”

As Aurelia leaned closer, her breath caressed my gooey skin like a cool breeze. Surprisingly, I felt no urge to devour her. At least, not one that was homicidal. I was starting to question my own sanity.

“Hmm, it appears I’ll be replacing his body after all. But do be careful the next time you decide to eat Olin. It’s quite difficult to find durable bodies of his soul.”

Aurelia made a sharp movement with her wrist, sending the small glowing orb flying over her shoulder toward a nearby table. Despite my small size, I strained to see what was up there. However, my curiosity was quickly satisfied by a sickening sound that followed; a sound that seemed like a devilish gasp yet was somehow unmistakably human.

“Olin, be a dear and clean up this mess. I’ll be leaving with our dear Blake to meet the others.”

Wow, how does she know my name? Ugh, what I would give to be able to speak! I have so many questions to ask her.

“Yes, mistress,” a young boy replied.

As I strained to get a better look at the child on the table, Aurelia's gorgeous form blocked my view. Still, my own form seemed to stretch and elongate like a malleable substance drawn by an unseen force. The child appeared to be around ten years old. Although I couldn't discern his nationality, he looked like any other average kid his age. But as his gaze met mine, I could sense an intense hatred emanating from his hazy green eyes, and I knew I had found my first nemesis in this strange new world.

Bracing myself for round two against the child ghoul, Aurelia suddenly lifted me into the air like a small doll. As she carried me away from the undead child, I couldn't help but wonder what she had planned for me next. Instead of feeling threatened, I felt a strange sense of security being held against her chest like a teddy bear. It was a stark contrast to the terror I had felt moments before. *I can't say I don't mind, but how am I not melting her away?*

"We've got a lot of work, the two of us, but first, you should meet the others. They'll just love you! And if they don't, you can eat their remains once I'm done," Aurelia finished that last sentence with a soft chuckle.

The stone walls of the narrow hallway seemed to close in on me as Aurelia carried me through it. Although my improved ability to see my surroundings with Mana Sight, the constant swaying and bouncing of her movements made me feel queasy. The world around me became a blurred and distorted mess of colors and shapes, leaving me disoriented and dizzy. Aurelia's strength was surprising as she effortlessly held me close like a precious object. I couldn't help but wonder what else she could do and how she had acquired such strength. Despite my discomfort and growing sense of unease, I fought back the urge to vomit and remained still in her arms.

[Sickness] Afflicted.

Every step Aurelia took echoed through the dark and winding corridor, bouncing off the damp stone walls like a ghostly symphony. The flickering torchlight illuminated each room we passed, revealing a macabre display of alchemy bottles and bubbling potions that seemed to glow with an eerie aura. Skeletal remains littered the floor of some rooms, while others contained mysterious objects that I couldn't identify.

Despite the unsettling surroundings and persistent nausea brought on by the sickness affliction, Aurelia began humming that resonated off her chest like a gentle lullaby. Her beautiful sound calmed my frayed nerves and offered a rare moment of serenity in this new and terrifying existence. Nonetheless, the bitter realization that this was my new reality continued to gnaw at me.

[Sickness] Removed.

"All better?"

Wait, she knew I had that debuff?

As we stepped into the enormous chamber, I was awed by its vastness, with dozens of green-flamed firepits lining the walls and pillars stretching several stories high. But what really gave me

the chills were the skeletons adorned in ancient-looking armor, standing motionless with spears and shields at the ready. As I tried to absorb the scene, my vision went crosseyed, unable to take in the eerie sight before me.

But as we ascended a series of steps leading to a large elevated platform, I saw several individuals lounging on shabby couches or locked in heated arguments with Niamh. Some were even getting physical. Behind them, I noticed a floor section had collapsed into a sinkhole. It was a real shithole, to say the least.

Aurelia cleared her throat before speaking over the ruckus, “Everyone, I present to you our Dark Champion!”

I couldn’t help but think that hiding under the shelf was a far better option. Suddenly, everyone stopped their activities, even Niamh, who had a small woman with gray cat ears in a chokehold. It dawned on me that Aurelia had referred to me as their “Dark Champion,” which probably meant that I was supposed to embrace my inner darkness and start performing evil acts? *How exciting... I think?*

“Is that a slime,” a frog-faced man in a hooded black robe asked?

“No, Vorigan, it’s a Black Pudding! **Hahaha!** She’s outdone herself this time! Aurelia, why didn’t you tell me that pet was your candidate? Oh, by the Crone, this is too funny!”

“Shut it, Niamh,” Aurelia hissed as her fingernails dug into me.

As I writhed in discomfort, Aurelia withdrew her talons from my skin. I focused on the figure in black, slowly drifting towards us. He moved with eerie grace, like a reaper of death silently stalking its prey. His face was shrouded in darkness by the depths of his hood. But the parts that peeked out appeared sickly and pallid, as if his skin was decaying. The real showstopper was his eyes, which burned with an intense, fiery red light, almost like they were possessed by a demonic force.

“Lady Aurelia, we already have six candidates undergoing the trial. You’re too late to submit your creature. Besides, what makes your abomination any different?”

“Lord Demidicus,” Aurelia replied. “He’s special.”

He?!

“**Hahahaha!** Special? Hahaha! It’s a slime, you dimwit vamp,” Niamh gasped out between fits of laughter.

“Silence, demon! Daughter, special or not, your candidate is too late to undergo the trial. Besides, we had an agreement.”

Daughter?

Aurelia’s voice was calm and collected as she addressed the ancient-looking vampire, her eyes staring him down confidently. “He only just awoke, Lord Demidicus,” she said, her voice dripping with subtle hatred that only I seemed to notice. “But per our agreement and the Crone, he can

compete. I only ask, can I have some time to work with him before throwing him to the wolves in the trial?"

I'm not a man! I am not... no. Just no!

"Fine! Perhaps for the best. Daughter, your creature can compete, but you may not receive additional time. Toss it into the depths," Lord Demidicus said with a dismissive wave.

Toss me into the depths?

My attention was drawn to the demoness, who sauntered over to the gaping sinkhole on the floor. Niamh appeared to barely contain another round of laughter as she peered over the edge, her body shaking with amusement.

Wait, can we talk about this first?

"Aww, don't worry, that pretty little head, Aurie. I'll do it for you. Pfft!"

Aurelia drew me closer to her face and whispered, "Make it out, my champion, and back to me." Her eyes gleamed with a sinister grin as she turned her attention to the demon.

I don't like where this is going!

"Alright, Niamh, fine," Aurelia agreed, and then she launched me directly toward the demonic woman!

A revolting splat resonated as my viscous form collided with the demon's unsuspecting face. An abhorrent sensation smothered us both. Time seemed to dissipate, and I discovered myself grasping her head with tendrils of ebony ooze propelled by pure desperation. United, we spiraled into the voracious chasm of the sinkhole. As we plunged deeper, Niamh's distressing shrieks and Aurelia's mocking laughter, interwoven with her words of resummoning and demons, diminished into tiny whispers as we fell.

I really do hate my new life!