

Chapter 62 Bread

Kate pulled the blankets closer and over herself, sighing when she drank from the honey infused and steaming herbal tea. She felt like a new person, warm, clean, well fed, and no longer inside of a horrifying set of underground stone corridors infested with monsters. Though she couldn't quite deny it, there was more than a little satisfaction that she felt from killing the undead.

She had often felt the same about her work as a firefighter. It was often demanding, and plenty of people she had met had both been impressed and horrified at the things she had done and seen. She could tell, many of them thought that she was a little crazy, and learning that, she had started to share a little less.

Sometimes she had thought that she was crazy too, for putting up with everything. And yet she still had. And by now, Kate believed that people always did things for a reason.

All this fighting, the killing, the strong emotions that she felt. It was easy to chalk it up to her new magic, and maybe that was a part of it but going down into those corridors, facing those nightmares, and killing them with her own hands, that was a high that she couldn't quite describe. It was a high that she could see herself getting lost in, and she was glad that there were people around that cared about her, people that she herself cared about, wanted to protect, wanted to keep safe, wanted to fight for.

Despite everything that she had lost, everything the world had lost, it felt like she could make a difference. One dead monster at a time.

"Can you spell the name of that growth creature again?" Jon asked.

Kate looked at the message again.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Celeavir]'

She spelled it out, then sipped at her tea.

Kate smiled when she heard Allison curse from above. "Work through the night and they come back with everything fucking broken..."

Equipment is there to be used, she thought, hearing Logan once again refilling magazines.

"And it's eating the corpses," Jon murmured.

"But we don't know if they're making new undead or if they're doing something else with it all," Melusine said.

"The other survivors said there are undead coming from the dungeon itself," Jon said.

"Dungeon?" Kate asked.

Jon looked at her and sighed. "Yeah. Grey told me a lot about different possibilities in how the world could've changed. He was adamant that the place we found near Keilberg was a dungeon, a place where monsters gather, are formed, spawn, or however else they're made or born. I have a lot of notes on his ideas and theories. The red glowing veins might be something similar to the blue lights you saw before that scale armored monster killed the group of orcs and goblins."

“With the veins losing some of their color when you killed that wall creature, do you think the entire dungeon is alive in a way?” Melusine asked.

“We don’t know enough,” Jon said and shook his head. “But either way, I don’t think it’s a good idea to leave that place be. Whether the corpses are used to expand it, power it, create more undead, or spread the influence that is turning corpses into those monsters, it should be destroyed. While there are other places that may or may not be similar, the undead have been the most present and dangerous.”

“We agree there,” Kate said.

“And we will continue to fight them,” Logan said. “But if these places have the power to bring or create more monsters here, like the orcs we’ve seen in those caverns, there could be monsters coming from the direction of Keilberg as well. You would be safer in those bunkers, with the other survivors.”

“Maybe,” Jon said. “Probably. But there are a lot of unknowns at play here, and there are limited resources and risks that I’ve been thinking about since we first received the radio signal from Graning. Getting us there, we could encounter unknown monsters on the way. There could be dangerous creatures in the very tunnels where the bunkers are located. With what we’ve seen, the creatures could nest anywhere. Here, we have stakes and walls, the armory, our gear. Besides, I like this place, and I like the freedom we have in managing our resources and time. With three hundred other people, that will change quickly. We have food here, and we have our magic.”

He looked at Melusine and the woman nodded, an almost melancholic smile on her face.

Jon continued. “All that aside, we chose to make our stand right here, Logan. I know you mean well but we have fought together... we have lost... together. I don’t want my loved ones to get hurt, but I know they’re fighting too. We’re here to support you and Kate, and we want to stay involved.

“The current objective is to clear out the undead, and we’ll do what we can to help you reach that goal. Bringing us all the way across that valley is not helping you get deeper into that dungeon. Having a base here to heal, having Eloise prepare more food, and Allison repair and making new gear, that is helping with that goal, and you know that, Logan.”

Logan sighed, then smiled. “I’m sorry.”

“There is no need to apologize, dear,” Melusine said. “You two slaughter those undead and if other monsters show up here, we’ll deal with that too.”

One step at a time. Kate thought, drinking more. She found that compared to the other group they had met, she wouldn’t mind having the people here join them in those corridors. She didn’t want them there of course, their level, magics, and gear wasn’t suited to fight the undead, and she knew they didn’t want to fight like that either but just emotionally, she found that she didn’t have the same visceral reaction to the thought as when Bastian had suggested joining them.

Maybe it was a trust thing.

No, she thought. At least not just that.

It was because they had a choice, a choice to find shelter in a faraway bunker, a choice to be shielded by others but all they talked about was supporting her and Logan, hunting the undead, and making their stand. Somewhere along the way, they had chosen to fight. Just as she had.

She sipped from her tea, locking eyes with Melusine. The woman had healed the remaining injuries she'd still had, all the pain replaced with itching but if it meant that she could go out there again in the morning, she welcomed it.

"How is the ammo looking?" Kate asked, glancing at Logan.

Jon was the one to reply. "Twenty five magazines left on rifle ammo, still plenty for your pistols and sniper rifle but the shotgun ammo is running out as well, twenty four shells left."

"More than I thought," Kate said.

"If I keep using as much as I did today, we'll run out soon," Logan said.

"Then we better find more at some point," Kate said.

"I'll check the maps," Jon said. "Now that you're getting so close to the city, you might find a way to grab some things, if the respective buildings haven't burned down or been otherwise ransacked or destroyed."

"Ransacked," Celeste repeated. She had been present through the entire talk, likely the decision that Jon and Melusine had made. To not hide things from the girl.

"You might even find some orange juice," Melusine supplied and the girl giggled.

"I'd rather have more bullets," Logan said. "But we'll see what we can do."

Kate smiled. She finished her tea while Jon checked his maps, faint music playing from the radio before Valery's voice once more repeated the same message they'd heard more than a few times by now. She chose to sleep early. Nightly monster attacks were still very much a possibility and they had a long day coming up.

Checking through the messages from the day, Kate was now at level twenty seven in her main Class and at twenty four in her support Class. She had invested her two new stat points into Vitality, the combined use for her defense and her blood magic alike still made it the current priority.

Kate didn't wake up to any dreams, nor was she woken by the others.

She felt faint itching still from her chest and arms, and she found that she had slept for ten hours straight, twice as much as she usually had in the past week. Looking down at her arms, she found the skin unblemished. *I would've never been able to fight again with those injuries, let alone live a normal life.* She sat up and sighed, trying not to think about the potential and implications that healing magic now had on human life, let alone all the other magic that was now out there. Those were considerations for another day, and other people.

"Morning. Did you sleep well?" Eloise asked. The girl moved her hand over a pot with boiling stew, strange orange-red runes glowing above her palm.

"Hey," Kate said and stretched. "Yeah, I feel like I just had a weekend to relax."

Eloise smiled. "That's so cool."

"What is cool?" Melusine asked as she came down the ladder.

"That I'm ready to go out there again," Kate said.

Melusine turned and glanced at her. She raised her brows and smiled. "Just don't overdo it, Kate."

Kate walked past her. "You know how things are. I should say the same to you."

“It’s still good to hear it sometimes,” Melusine said.

Kate had a cold shower before she went back to have breakfast. She was glad they had a professional cook at hand, or the canned and easily stored ingredients would’ve made things stale by now. Still, she missed fresh vegetables, herbs, milk, and eggs.

Eloise smiled when everyone was down in the storage cellar before she presented the large loaf of bread. “Fresh out of the oven. Magically,” she said and set it down before she cut into it. “And mana infused.”

Kate smiled wide, taking a slice and ripping off a piece before she ate it. She closed her eyes to savor the taste. A dark grain, or a mix, she supposed, quickly adding mana infused honey as well, finding that the non-combatants ate from the food as well. “More Wisdom?” she asked before taking another bite, this one with honey.

“A few points, yes. But I level Vitality, Dexterity, and Intelligence as well,” Eloise said. She puffed up her chest a little, averting her eyes when Kate looked at her. “I... can get my subclass too.”

“Oh, you’re at level ten already?” Logan asked.

“Faster than me, even with all that work,” Allison grumbled, then smiled a bright smile.

“Congratulations. What are the options, or did you decide already?”

Eloise glanced at the woman and smiled. “I can choose between Knife User, Flame Wielder, and Alchemist.”

“They all sound useful, though the first two seem more combat oriented,” Logan said.

“They probably are,” Eloise said. “But I think I like Alchemist the most. It supposedly lets me brew potions and the like. More... dangerous stuff too, I think. It sounds interesting, to experiment with new recipes. I have a lot of spices here and some dried herbs but not too many. Maybe, those flowers you mentioned, in the dungeon.”

“They might be dangerous,” Melusine suggested.

“Mom,” Eloise said, rolling her eyes. “I’d be careful.”

Melusine sighed. “You’re old enough. If that’s the Class you want to choose, then that is the Class you will get.”

Eloise smiled a bright smile and hugged her mother.

Jon nodded along, taking down some notes. “I’ll write down the options and all the information you’ll get from the new Class.”

Eloise smiled at him and nodded.

“Maybe all of those repairs aren’t for nothing,” Allison murmured. “Try to break your things even more this time around,” she added, glancing over at Kate.

“They’ll break as much as they break,” Kate answered.

“And get me more materials to work with. I’ll run out of Wyvern scales and direwolf pelts at this rate.”

“Most of the undead in the dungeon are humans, orcs, and goblins. Suppose we can have a look around,” Kate said.

“You mean, I will have a look around,” Logan said.

She glanced at him but didn’t reply, seeing a few of the others looking her way.

Logan pushed some air out of his nose. “We’ll try to bring more things back, and we’ll get some of the flowers too.”

“More things to categorize,” Jon said. He sounded excited.

“And orange juice,” Celeste whispered.

Kate glanced at the girl, herself the only one it seemed, who had heard her. She winked, and found the girl covering her eyes with both hands, glancing past her fingers before she giggled.

She smiled and cut more of the bread.

Allison had finished the repairs throughout the night. Kate’s armored jacket, pants, and cloak all showed a few spots with scratches and darker patches still present. Cleaned off blood, replacement scales, patches of new fabric. Kate wondered how many times Allison could repair their equipment before it fell apart fully.

Her battle axe looked clean and sharp, her hammer looked deadly, each one of her knives sharpened as well. She checked her pistol, finding Logan already preparing his collection of rifles, a few dozen replacement magazines set out on the ground floor table. His armor looked scraped and dull but it showed neither dents nor cuts.

Logan finished cleaning a piece of his rifle, setting it down before he grabbed another. He glanced at Kate when she holstered her pistol. “Sleep well?”

“Very,” Kate answered.

“Ready to go out there again?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

Kate and Logan went back into the snow covered valley, equipped with their repaired gear, ammo, and various mana infused foods. Well fed, and rested, Kate felt ready to take on the undead for another day.

They found thick flakes of snow falling from the sky, more than on the day before, and still, the sun didn’t quite manage to push through the white fog.

Kate listened for monsters but this section of the forest was quiet, more so than on any day in the past week. She hoped it had to do with their efforts, and not some sinister magical reason they would come to discover at the worst possible time.

They took a more direct path this time around, reaching the industrial sector faster than on the day prior. Leaving some of their gear in the office they had come to use as some kind of forward base, Logan wanted to have a look from the top floor of the building, the two of them taking their time to watch the outskirts of Falstadt through their binoculars and Logan's sniper scope. Visibility wasn't great but they could occasionally make out groups of undead and flying spots in the distant sky.

The dungeon entrance was close and they decided to focus on the target they knew instead of fighting the monster groups out in the open. As strong as they'd gotten, neither Kate nor Logan wanted to test themselves against an undead Wyvern. Not out in the open where it could grab onto them and fly up.

Kate breathed in deep when she saw the faint glow of red light far into the corridor. The light looked a little farther away, a little less intimidating. She glanced over at Logan and activated her magics when he gave her a slight nod. The sound around her and the corridor itself focused. She felt the weight of her battle axe and walked, down into the dark.

Kate cut away the last bits of the dead Celeavir from the walls. The fifth one of the strange flesh growths they had found and killed, cut apart until they stopped moving. She reached up to her neck, finding a barbed piece of bone stuck in there. Looking at her ally, she saw him glance back before he pointed down the next corridor. He unholstered his pistol and fired once.

She grinned, soon hearing the rushing steps and groans of more undead. The magic and healing of her ally was potent, powerful, but it was limited. A precious resource they would not waste on minor injuries or weak foes. She saw the creatures and raised her axe.

One of the creatures was a bulging mass, covered in red and glowing veins. A human, running with heavy steps.

Her ally stepped next to her, aimed, and fired a single bullet into the cascade of dead. He missed.

She glanced at him.

He fired again.

This time, the bulging undead was struck with the radiant flash, bulged and exploded into the horde, the dull sound lost in the groans.

"I think you're good to go," her ally said.

Kate agreed. She heard no Emisary among this group, and she saw no more of the vein covered monsters, nor anything else she deemed unknown. Just the undead.

Walking towards them, she waited until the last moment, then ripped out the bone piece stuck in her neck, ripping open the nasty wound before she rushed forward, and into the fray.

They returned into the office building when their food buffs were close to running out. Logan checked his notes and the sketches he had taken, drawing a more accurate map of the dungeon corridors onto a fresh sheet of paper. They tested their radios before Kate took some time to scour

the break rooms and the cafeteria to collect some basic things like rags, cleaning supplies, even a few blankets and pillows. She brought everything back and found Logan already meditating. She went for a second round, this time going for any food and medical supplies she could find. There wasn't much left as someone seemed to have searched through the place already. Orcs and goblins, based on the damage and strewn about items.

Still, she managed to collect a reasonable assortment of supplies and set them up in the office room they had chosen. It still looked gloomy, her headlamp the only illumination with Logan sitting in the dark.

Kate lit a few of the candles she'd found in one of the storage rooms and grabbed some of the cleaning supplies, starting with her weapons. *Already looks like some kind of forward base.*

She cleaned most of her gear and then went back out to one of the storage rooms, grabbing entire boxes full of the bottles labeled with skulls and flames. She remembered quite a few of the names she read on the labels. Chemical accidents around here weren't particularly common but she'd had to be present in a few occasions. Luckily nothing serious. The proximity of the chemical industry still had her refreshing her basic knowledge on the more dangerous chemicals more than a few times. She hadn't planned to look for any of this, let alone move it but with Eloise mentioning an Alchemist Class, she thought there may very well be a use for all this stuff.

She stacked the boxes in another office, neither too close nor too far away from their chosen resting area. Back with Logan, she started heating up some food, enjoying the calm moments and the simple, quiet, and monotonous work before they would return to fighting the undead.

Maybe I should pick up knitting, she thought, tasting the boiling stew. Enough to burn her tongue in the past but now, she found the heat did wonders to warm her up in the cold weather. "Food is ready," she said, hearing her armored companion stir.

She glanced at the large sheet of paper, the dungen corridors carefully mapped out, with plenty of space left to fill. She wondered how large it would get, and she wondered what else was lurking down below Falstadt.

Kate Lindgren

Unspent stat points: 0

Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 27

- ***Active: Mindless Ferocity – 2nd lvl 18***
- ***Active: Blood Frenzy – 2nd lvl 16***
- ***Active: Vengeful Charge – 2nd lvl 8***
- ***Active: Reaper Jump – lvl 14***
- ***Active: Blood Rupture – lvl 19***
- ***Passive: Blood for the Living – 2nd lvl 15***
- ***Passive: Fury of the Unarmored – 2nd lvl 10***
- ***Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – 2nd lvl 15***
- ***Passive: Unrelenting Carnage – 2nd lvl 4***
- ***Passive: Terrifying Presence – lvl 8***

Support class: Roaring Pursuer – lvl 24

- **Active: Thunderous Shout** – lvl 18
- **Active: Reverberating Charge** – lvl 20
- **Active: Aura of Silence** – lvl 16
- **Passive: Sound Perception** – 2nd lvl 6
- **Passive: Echo Awareness** – lvl 12
- **Passive: Tremor Sense** – lvl 14

Support class: Locked

Status:

Vitality: 34

Vigor: 12

Endurance: 24

Perseverance: 15

Strength: 25

Brutality: 9

Dexterity: 8

Intelligence: 7

Wisdom: 12

Serenity: 15

Equipment:

Torso: Direwolf Cloak [Common]

- Low grade Cold Resistance

Legs: Splintered Bone Armor [Common]

- Low grade Fire Resistance

Trinket: -

Food: Savory Beef Stew [Duration 3 hours]

- Stamina regeneration +10