

## Chapter 46 Blood

Kate heard more creatures now. Growls and moans coming from beyond the doorway leading out into the snowed in yard of their castle. Had they made a mistake clearing the paths to the truck and other buildings? Had they made a mistake in using the wood stove? Or was it just coincidence?

*They're not here yet*, she thought and focused on the now. She looked around on the ground floor of the armory, then moved. First, she grabbed one end of the sofa and moved it in front of the entrance as quietly as she could. Then, she grabbed a jacket and put it on, moving over to the latch as the first of her team started coming down from above.

"What's happening?" Jon asked.

"Monsters outside, not sure if they know we're in here," Kate said and glanced at the group of fighters, Ethan and Logan just waking up.

Something landed in front of the door with a thud.

Kate raised a hand and listened, hearing something sniffing around before a scraping sound came from the wooden door. She waited, everyone silent before a strained and slightly muffled howl resounded from beyond the door, followed by more steps and moans.

"I think they found us," Ethan said.

"I'll keep the door shut, get me my knives, get your gear, and get everyone else into the cellar," Kate said and walked over to the entrance, reaching over the sofa she had put there before she raised her arms against the door and braced herself.

A moment later, she felt the first impact. She heard the others rush down the stairs. Celeste was crying.

"What's happening?" Allison asked, her voice shaking slightly.

"We're under attack," Jon said. "Every non combatant, down into the cellar. You don't come out for anything."

"What about you?" Eloise asked.

"I'll be down when it's safe," he said.

Kate felt another impact, this one heavier. "I don't know how long the door will hold," she said. "I hear more of them out there. Undead based on the sounds and variety." Growls and moans mostly but it sounded almost the same as when they had hunkered down in the police station of Grenndorf.

The others worked fast, moving gear out of the cellar whilst those not taking part in the fight moved down.

"You want to stay up here?" Logan asked.

"I do," Melusine said but wavered when Celeste called for her from the cellar.

Kate saw her exchange a glance with Jon. She heard Allison trying to talk to the two girls.

The entrance shook again.

Grey walked over with a set of knives and started strapping them to her belt and jacket, adding her Glock as well. Ethan stood near the stairwell, Logan walked over with several rifles and a bag full of magazines. He already wore most of his armor and got on the rest with calm movements.

“There are a lot of them,” Grey said.

“We have the advantage in here,” Logan said as Jon walked to his side with two crossbows and a load of bolts. They now stood to the right of the door and where they could shoot into a gap if it opened. Ethan joined them when he saw what they were doing.

Grey waited to the left, standing in front of Melusine with his blade ready.

Bert stood next to the healer.

“You should go down into the cellar, old man,” Kate said.

He grumbled something that got lost in the loud sounds, glaring at her as he gripped his double barrel shotgun.

Melusine crouched down in front of the hatch. “I will join you as soon as it’s safe. Stay hidden for now,” she said and hesitated for a moment before she closed the hatch and turned around, her eyes cold. “Grey, get me a pistol.”

The young man didn’t move before Logan held out one of the guns.

“Let me use the crossbows first before we alert every monster in the vicinity,” Jon said.

“They’re already howling,” Kate said, hearing more creatures arrive in the snow outside.

“Can you still hold?” Logan asked when another impact shook the door. The hinges rattled.

“I can. Don’t think the door will,” Kate said.

“Let me shoot with my magic, you reload,” Jon said to Logan as he raised one of the crossbows.

Logan glanced at him and shouldered his rifle, preparing the bolts Jon had brought.

Kate pushed against the door when the next impact sent her back a few centimeters, one of the hinges splintered and flew to the side, the sofa pushed back ever so slightly. She held on as the snarling and moaning sounds from outside were no longer muffled, pushing against the door as cold air entered the ground floor of their armory.

“Let it open a tiny bit more,” Jon said.

Kate glanced over to see the man aiming his crossbow, the metal tip of the bolt shrouded in a pale turquoise light. She obliged, letting the door open ever so slightly before the twang of a crossbow firing sounded out, a blueish hue following the bolt as it found flesh.

The creature it hit didn’t moan or stop its assault, a furred paw reaching past the door as Logan handed Jon a reloaded crossbow.

He fired another bolt in the next moment.

Kate held on, pushing against the growing number of undead gathering outside to come in and kill them. She grit her teeth as bolt after bolt was fired into the closest creature to the door, the first few soon stopping to move but more pushing past to replace them. She was sweating by the time Jon ran out of magic. And she felt tired when he ran out of bolts.

“They’re still coming,” he said in a whisper.

“And they won’t stop until they’re dead,” Logan said as he touched the man’s shoulder. “My turn,” he said and raised one of the police rifles.

Kate glanced his way and saw his sword leaned against the wall next to him, the shotgun and a set of rifles resting at the same place. Jon stepped back, then grabbed a pistol and a few rifle magazines. She saw him nod to Logan.

“Monsters at our doors,” Logan said as he loaded the first bullet into the chamber. He had his helmet visor open, his eyes focused and cold. “Do not falter. Stand and fight. With me!” Faint white light glowed in his eyes and from runic symbols on his face.

Kate felt herself calm and focus, the strain in her arms and legs lessened as she grit her teeth and smiled.

“How many levels do you think we’ll get from this?” Ethan asked with a joyous voice.

“Cover your ears. I’m sorry Kate,” Logan said.

Kate turned off her heightened hearing right before Logan pulled the trigger.

The shot echoed through the armory, a loud and cracking sound.

She winced, a ringing sound coming to her right ear with the second shot, then to her left on the fifth. Single bullets fired with deliberation, impacting the moving flesh snarling beyond.

The firing stopped as Logan reloaded, the empty magazine falling to the ground.

Kate didn’t feel any push for mere seconds, the unmoving limbs reaching into the room ripped back away by the undead trying to get to them. A moment later, everything was deafened once again by the thunderous sound of Logan firing.

She soon lost count of how many times he reloaded, herself receiving a notification about a level up. She put the points into Endurance and Strength, feeling the slight rush, the sensation quickly drowned out by the continuous firing.

Logan stopped and she felt no more pressure from any advancing undead.

Her ears were still ringing.

She glanced over and saw Logan aim through the scope of the rifle.

“Is that it?” Jon asked, the question muffled to Kate’s ears.

She looked forward when she heard a loud growl and something wet. Her arms shook when something impacted the walls, bits of stone and debris falling from the ceiling.

Logan fired two times when something struck the door.

Kate flew backwards, impacting the metal stove with her back, the sofa sliding to a stop next to her. All the air was punched out of her lungs. She could taste blood in her mouth, her ears ringing and vision slightly blurred as she coughed. Thunderous sounds and shouts echoed out around her as a cold wind entered the room.

She looked for her hammer and found it a few meters away. Stumbling up, she nearly fell. She saw an explosion of fire near the door, felt the heat of the flames. Kate activated Mindless Ferocity, reaching her hammer as the world narrowed around her. She turned to see a massive hand reach

past the door, burnt and shot apart by Ethan and Logan. The hand moved out and was replaced by a flood of undead rushing over a mass of corpses. She could see a dozen as her vision cleared.

Her eyes opened wide and she activated Blood Frenzy, her ears popping as the ringing moved to the back. She could see them, hear them, and she would kill them.

Kate raised her hammer and activated Vengeful Charge, rushing forward and past the sofa, right into the throng of undead trying to come in and kill her allies. Chaos erupted around her, blades and bolts cutting into flesh. An explosion of fire took the head of an undead human right when Kate slammed her hammer into and through the chest of a blue eyed goblin. She could feel her ears pop again, her hearing clearing as she blocked the blade of an undead orc, slapping it aside when the tip of a greatsword slammed into its neck. She let it be, blocking three more undead from entering as the creatures tried to step over each other to get inside.

She held on with one hand and unsheathed a hunting knife with the other, stabbing down and into their flesh with heavy impacts and dull thuds. Her weapon cut deep before the handle snapped, forcing her to use another. She fell when the undead pushed in, both moving and unmoving corpses falling on top of her as she kept stabbing, aiming for the former.

All she saw was flesh and armor. All she focused on were the strikes she delivered. She felt the blood in her veins sing with the sounds of battle. And she laughed, pushing aside the dead creatures as she tried to get up. One of them bit into her leg where her pants were torn, blood flashing out and burning the creature's face as it held on.

She roared and moved her hammer in a horizontal strike, the creature ripped to the side with a bit of her flesh between its teeth. She crawled to the side and delivered another blow, this one cracking the orc's head, the wound on her leg already healing with her magic. Another creature grabbed onto her arm when a shotgun flared from one of her allies, ripping off the head of the goblin.

Kate stood up and walked over to her ally, seeing another flare of light as he fired the second shell of his shotgun, the impact unable to kill the goblins before him.

She grabbed onto the undead ripping into the man and pulled them away, throwing them towards the entrance where more of the creatures still came in. Fire erupted before her and she swung her hammer into the monsters, some of them already burnt. She finished those injured and watched with glee as an explosion of flame stripped flesh from bone. She ran forward and towards another one of her allies, his sword cutting through arms and legs, the man pushed back step by step by several monsters when she spread her arms and used Vengeful Charge.

Kate crashed into the group of undead, landing in a sprawl of limbs and flesh. She grinned and tasted blood, staggering up before she swung her hammer around in wild strikes, sacrificing health to maximize every impact of her weapon. Bones were shattered, limbs were broken. She did not stop to think or consider. Something heavy impacted her and she was thrown against a wall, a snarling beast biting into her face before she pushed it back. Steel bit into her stomach and leg. She raised her hammer to stop one of the orcs, punching with her right fist. Three times until she could grip something in its face. She squeezed and pulled, throwing the creature to the side and once more able to hold her hammer.

The floor was littered with the dead, more creatures still stumbling in as she delivered a heavy and blood magic enhanced swing of her hammer to the closest goblin, shattering its spine and small body. She moved with the momentum of her strike, stepping past the corpses before she met the injured orc. Kate opened her mouth and watched the orc rush towards her. She swung left and felt her arms tremble with the heavy strike, felt her blood rush as she used its power to enhance her

blow, life and energy flowing back into herself as she killed her enemies.

She turned and met another goblin with her boot, feeling the weight in her leg as she stopped and pushed it down onto the ground. She raised her hammer and was jumped by a wolf. Kate didn't fall, her legs sliding on the ground before she found purchase. She felt the monster's teeth bite into her stomach. Turning her hammer, she brought it down with its spike, cracking the monster's spine before she grabbed onto its fur, pulling away as it snarled. She didn't finish it, raising her right arm to catch a club like weapon wielded by an undead human. She saw a blade slice past its arm, glancing right to see one of her allies stumble back. Fire erupted a few meters away. She could hear screams and shouts over the screeches of the undead.

She screamed back and swung her hammer in a horizontal strike, shattering the undead human's head before she turned and finished the injured wolf. Kate stumbled when three more goblins jumped her. She fell in a twirl, something sharp biting into her chest, a dagger scraping into her face, her left eye blinded. Her right hand found one of her knives, the handle slippery for a moment before she could grip it tight. More blades cut into her arms and torso as she screamed and slammed her blade into the closest goblin. Three strikes as the others continued to stab her. She didn't stop, moving on to the next one before she grabbed the last with her left hand, holding its flailing arm as she screamed and stabbed its body with her knife.

Her vision blurred as she stood up. She coughed and tasted blood but was still focused. Someone shouted. She could see one of her allies crouched above another, her hands glowing. Kate felt the walls shake and heard a roar from outside.

She walked over to another ally, the large armored man holding off four injured and half burnt undead. Behind him stood another man aiming his crossbow and firing a bolt straight through the chest of a monster.

Kate walked up to them with unsteady steps, the floor now covered with the dead. She grit her teeth and stayed quiet until she struck the first of the snarling creatures with her hammer. The strike came out sloppy, her balance off. And still, she managed to down the orc and finished it with another strike. She raised her head to see a crude blade coming for her face. Moving her head, she felt the weapon slam into her shoulder, bringing her to one knee as she grabbed on to the arm holding the sword and pushed back. She grit her teeth and let go of her hammer, looking for another hunting knife but finding all of them gone. She instead found the gun strapped to her belt. Removing the strap, she still held on to the undead's arm and raised the gun to its head.

She stopped herself when she saw her allies behind the monster, fighting the remaining two creatures as she got closer and put the gun to the monster's jaw. She could feel its left hand trying to grab at her face and pulled the trigger, bone and blood exploding as her ears started ringing. She pushed the orc back and to the side, firing three more rounds into its chest now that no allies remained behind it.

It still moved, so she let go of the gun and ripped the sword out of its hand. Kate grabbed the weapon with both hands and sliced down into the injured monster with wild strikes, the ringing in her ears fading as the undead fell to join the others.

She looked for her hammer but could not see it, turning with her sword in hand to join her allies fighting the last undead human left standing in the room. She had to look down to walk on the bodies, unable now to find a spot of floor between the dead.

She saw the large armored man try and hold his sword, one of his arms limp as she walked up to the undead, the monster trying to get to him with outstretched arms and a small blade scraping against

dented plate armor.

Kate brought her orc sword down, cutting halfway into the undead human's arm. Her second strike severed it, bringing its attention towards her. She saw her ally raise his greatsword before he fell forward, striking with the weight of his fall, the blade stabbing into and through the undead's chest and bringing it down with him.

She breathed in and wiped at her face. Her eyes were whole. She tasted blood and felt her muscles. Sore and spent. Her breathing was ragged but she knew that one of her enemies was left. A large creature, growling as it once again struck the building itself, the walls shaking.

She heard more shouts and crying now but ignored it, looking down at the armored man as he touched his shoulder with a glowing hand, the pauldron removed. Kate glanced at her sword and found it wanting. She reached her hand towards the man and locked her gaze with his. They would fight together, to bring down the monster knocking at their doors.

They would fight together, until none of them were left.

He reached up and grabbed her hand.

Kate grinned and raised him up.

He did not speak a word but walked over the bodies and to the wall, pointing at a set of corpses.

Kate helped him move them.

He glanced at her before he grabbed something from below the bodies. Her ally looked towards the door and reloaded his shotgun. He glanced to the ground and pointed at his greatsword. "That will work better."

No more monsters were coming into the room. Kate knew the coming fight was inevitable. And she knew he was right. She grabbed the large sword and moved towards the door. She would get its attention and they would kill it.

Her ally moved close and next to her, shotgun raised as a large burnt and cut hand reached through the entrance.

Kate screamed and stepped aside, bringing up the large blade before she cut down and into the monster's wrist. She got halfway through when it grabbed her and pulled her outside. She could see the snow all around, dozens of corpses littering the white ground, thrown aside by the other undead after they had killed them. She saw the large ogre, its face burnt and twisted, only one eye remaining as it raised her up.

She raised her own arms and brought the greatsword down again, aimed at the same spot. The strike nearly made her lose her grip, flesh cut and bone broken as she severed most of the bits still connecting the monster's hand to its arm. It ripped off when it tried to raise her up higher and Kate fell with the mangled fingers still around her.

She hit the soft snow and pushed out of the hand, hearing a roar as she tried to stand up in the high reaching snow. She saw the large ogre step towards her, its remaining hand extended when a shot resounded, bits of flesh stripped from the creature's right knee, a second shot making it stumble. Kate found a body in the snow and stepped on top of it. She activated Reaper Jump and felt her blood surge before she jumped up, screaming as she slammed the sword down with all the power her magic and arms could muster, stabbing the blade through the ogre's face and out the back of its skull. She couldn't hang on and fell, struck on her way down by one of the creature's heavy arms.

Kate spun and landed in the snow, unable to move her right leg as she tried to push herself up with her arms. More shotgun blasts resounded, followed by the echoing sounds of a rifle. Her vision blurred as she shook her head, focusing before she turned and saw the ogre fall into the snow a few meters away from her.

Her ears rang and she could no longer hear or see another enemy nearby. Dozens of corpses but none of them moving. She started laughing, feeling her left leg once more before she tried to get up in the snow. They had won and she could feel her blood pulsing through her veins. She was alive. More alive than she had ever been. If only there were more monsters to fight and kill.

If only there was more.

She could feel her magic fading, her muscles feeling frayed, her limbs heavy, and her breathing ragged. Kate tasted blood, the ringing in her ears slowly fading as she shuddered and felt the cold of the snow mingling with the heat of her blood. She could feel the pain now. Several injuries not yet healed. Tears came to her eyes as she fell to her knees and screamed.

She breathed in a sharp breath and blinked her eyes. Kate grit her teeth and pushed herself, tears rolling down her cheeks as she tried to move. She saw Logan step past the dead ogre and towards her. He was limping.

“Kate!” he shouted, his voice strained. “Kate don’t move!”

She didn’t listen, pushing herself.

She had to know.

Kate reached the path leading to the armory. “H... help me down,” she stammered, her throat sore and painful.

Logan reached her and helped her down, the two nearly falling on top of each other.

Jon joined as well and helped Kate rest against the wall of snow.

“Where are you injured?” Logan asked. His voice was frantic.

Kate breathed. “Right arm. Left side of my hip. Right calf.”

She turned her head and tried to see the entrance to the armory. *Why isn’t Melusine here?*

“You’re not bleeding out,” Logan said after he had checked her injuries. “At least not externally. Melusine needs to check you.”

Jon looked at her with a strange expression.

“Help me up,” she said and saw neither of the men move. “Help me up!” she screamed.

Logan twitched slightly before he grabbed her arm.

Kate grit her teeth against the pain and took an unsteady step, walking in silence and back to the armory.

She held her breath when they reached the door. Little light reached into the ground floor. The place she had come to call a home after just a week. The furniture was wrecked, the stove dented in. It smelled of burnt flesh and hair, of blood and death, the entire floor covered in corpses, stacked two or three bodies high in some places.

Her mouth opened when she saw Ethan among the bodies, his red hair covered in blood and his

lifeless eyes staring back at her. Her lips quivered when she glanced at Melusine, the woman's arms covered in blood up to her elbows. Her hands glowed with magic as she knelt above Grey's lying form, his torso and stomach ripped open. He was pale. His eyes were closed. Next to him lay Bert, covered in wounds.

Kate saw the strained expression on Melusine's face. She had seen the look before.

She lost the strength in her body, falling to her knees as she watched the healer try and save the young man.

And just like Melusine, Kate knew he was dead.

She felt something change in her body, a cold going through her. She still felt the pain and exhaustion but it no longer mattered. They were dead.

Jon walked up to Melusine and touched her shoulder. "Kate and Jon are injured."

Melusine didn't look up for a few seconds before she bit her lower lip. She breathed in deeply before she looked at Grey's face and stood up.

Kate kept her eyes on the young man when she felt the healing magic flow into her body. It neither felt warm nor cold. She felt the itching but that too didn't matter.

She only felt the pit in her stomach.