

## Chapter 47

Kate hardly felt her breath. Melusine had moved on to Logan. Jon had stepped outside to puke. She could hear her own heartbeat echoing in her ears. It was slow.

Her sight was blurred but she could make out the forms of Grey, Ethan, and Bert among the dark and bloodied silhouettes.

She wanted to activate her skills but they didn't work. She felt spent.

*Why did...*

Her lips quivered.

She heard crying from below, breathed in, and stood up. She looked away from the bodies, her head pounding now as she stumbled to the door, nearly falling over the undead corpses.

"You need to rest."

She heard Melusine's voice but ignored it.

The air outside was cold compared to the bloodied and stuffy room inside. She looked up at the gray sky and felt nothing.

Kate looked at Jon, the man still retching.

"I need to... breathe," she said. "I won't be far," she added the second half with a whisper, the effort nearly too much for her but she knew they would worry otherwise. She knew it but didn't care. She just knew it was the right thing to inform them.

It all felt numb.

She breathed in and reached the truck, half snowed in but she still found the battle axe resting in the truck bed. She thought of Ethan as he threw down fire right after she had thrown the axe at an orc.

*When was that?* she wondered, feeling her cold hands grip the shaft of the large weapon. A thin layer of snow had covered it. She brushed it away and started climbing up the snow. Kate slipped and fell on her knee, gritting her teeth as tears welled up in her eyes. She pushed on and soon reached the wall. Past all the bodies. Past all the death.

She used her skill to jump over the snow covered battlements, and landed on the other side. Kate stayed in the snow. She could barely hold on to her axe, sunken in up to her waist.

*We will need wood.*

*To burn them.*

*Or they will turn as well.*

*Or attract predators.*

It sounded logical but a part of her just wanted to sit there in the snow.

She could hardly feel herself breathe.

Kate felt the handle of the battle axe. She looked at it, the polished wood. Why was she here? Why were they fighting? What happened to the world?

And why did she feel nothing.

She knew why.

A part of her knew why. This wasn't the first time. A defense mechanism, she had learned. A way to deal with what she couldn't deal with. She knew what to do to get out of it too. The cold would help already.

But she didn't want to get out.

She wanted to stay right there.

She didn't want to move.

*You have to.*

*Why?*

*There are people who depend on you.*

*They are dead.*

*Not everyone.*

*They will die too.*

*You're being dramatic.*

*There are more of them out there.*

*I don't want to.*

*I know that.*

She breathed, her shoulders slack. For a long moment she stayed there and looked into nothing.

*You know what this is. Move.*

Kate grit her teeth and moved. She waded through the snow until she reached the line of trees, the snow less high below the branches and leaves, just reaching her knees.

She moved closer to one of the trees. A thick birch. She reached up her hand and touched the white and black bark. It felt rough.

*How will the trees react to the sudden snowfall? The animals? Grasses and flowers?*

Analytical questions she found. She didn't care. Not right now.

*Move.*

She heard herself think.

*Up.*

Kate raised her arms, the battle axe heavy in her strained arms. And still, it felt light compared to what she knew the tool should weigh. She struck the tree, the strike chipping away a small bit of wood.

She raised the axe again. And struck again.

*Why did they stay here?*

She struck again.

*Why didn't we run away. Somewhere safe?*

The axe hit the trunk.

*Why didn't we hide in the cellar?*

She felt a pulse move through her blood. Her grip tightened and she struck again. The tree shook.

*Why didn't we flee up and regroup?*

She ripped the axe blade out of the tree and raised it behind herself. Her muscles tensed and she brought the weapon down into the tree.

*Why couldn't I hold them back?*

Kate could feel something warm run down her cheeks as she ripped the blade out once more. She raised it high and screamed.

Her axe broke through the rest of tree, thudding against the next.

*Why did they die?*

She breathed hard now and touched the bark again.

Kate heard the rustling leaves, snow falling as the tree went down. A loud and thunderous crash. No birds flew out of the forest and a few breaths later, the sound was gone. She heard herself sob, shuddering as the sensation flowed through her. Her eyes burned. Her body ached. She looked into the forest and screamed.

Her arms felt numb now. She was cold. The injuries weren't fully healed and she could feel the strong itching sensation from where Melusine had healed her.

The wood no longer seemed important.

She heard someone land in the snow and walk towards her. Logan by how his breaths sounded.

"Mel and Jon are in the cellar with the kids," he said.

She nodded.

"There will be more," he said.

"Why didn't we plan this better? Why didn't we hide?" She heard herself say. "Why didn't we-"

"They are dead," Logan said.

Kate felt her breath stuck in her lungs. She heard him step closer, a heavy hand touching her shoulder.

"Those questions. They don't lead to a good place," Logan said and paused for a long moment. "There will be more."

She grit her teeth, realizing the meaning of his words.

"You told me that you would fight. This is the cost," he said. "So what will you do?"

Kate looked at him. She felt a pulse going through her blood. She grit her teeth and breathed. Calm. She felt the heavy axe in her hands. "I will..." she bit her lip. "I will hunt them down."

She breathed.

"Every. Single. One."

Logan locked eyes with her. His face was stone, his eyes cold. "You may die."

She stared at him.

He gripped her shoulder harder. "Good. Then that makes two of us."

They stood there for a few seconds before he let go of her shoulder and started back towards the castle. "Don't lose yourself. Don't act stupid. We do this the right way."

Kate followed, feeling her heartbeat as she listened to the surrounding forest. "I'm not a child."

"No," he said and kept walking. "You are human."

Getting back into the castle proved more difficult for Kate than she had expected. The exhaustion from the fight was hitting her now and she knew the hole she felt in her stomach would stay the same for some time. She wanted to just sit down in the snow and sleep but there were people who depended on her. People whom Grey and Ethan had given their lives to protect.

She would not forget that.

*And though the fires may rage, all consuming.*

*We shall stand.*

*We shall fight.*

*We shall prevail.*

She repeated the words in her mind as she walked past the dead monsters and back into the armory.

Logan stopped behind her at the entrance.

*I almost forgot,* she thought as she looked at him, seeing the slight bobbing of his shoulders. *He is human too.*

"You've done enough for now. Go to the cellar," Kate said. "I'll throw out the bodies and cover our friends. Then I will join you."

Logan didn't move, his eyes focused on Ethan.

Kate walked over. "Make sure Eloise prepares some coffee for me. We have a lot of work to do. Right?" She touched his shoulder.

He winced and looked at her.

"Right?" she asked.

He nodded. "Right."

Kate went to the hatch and opened it, helping the man down before she closed it again without another word. She found one of their packs and covered her nose and mouth with a filter mask.

*Distance. Do not think. Work.*

Breathing in, she walked to the door and started with the first body.

Kate put all of her new points into Endurance and Strength, both to help with the work and for whatever was to come.

It took a while to clear out the ground floor of the armory. Kate strained her already frayed limbs with every corpse she moved but it helped, she found, to focus on the physical work.

She left the broken furniture and jumbled supplies for now. Blood had soaked into the wooden floor but at least the cold made everything less pungent. She stopped near the three bodies left.

Their eyes were closed.

She sighed and looked at Ethan.

*At least he's not going to burn down the castle,* she thought and chuckled, wiping at her eyes before she shuddered.

She went upstairs and got three blankets, quietly going back down before she covered each of the dead in turn. Then she grabbed them one at a time and moved them upstairs. She got a few of the bedrolls and blankets before she left the room and closed the door behind herself. Careful not to drag any of the blankets over the blood soaked floor, she knocked on the latch and handed everything down to Jon. She heard Melusine talk to her daughters in a whisper.

"... and they were brave. Grey fought like a knight..."

"Are you coming down as well?" Jon asked.

"In a few minutes," Kate said.

"There is coffee," he said.

She nodded and closed the hatch. Kate found the slightly splintered door and raised it up, moving it to the open entrance before she placed it and wedged it in with a single kick. She went over to the sofa and moved it back in front of the door. It wouldn't hold back much of anything but they would at least hear it.

She turned around, her headlamp lighting up the dark room.

*Dating apps and level ups,* she thought, looking up at where the fairy lights had hung just a day prior. It had been warm. Had smelled of vegetable soup and coffee. Now it felt cold and empty. Just another home destroyed by those creatures.

She breathed in and walked to a pile of debris. Crouching down, she pushed aside the splintered table.

Kate reached down and grabbed the bloodied katana.

He had saved her life more than once in the past week. And she had saved his. Until today.

She found the sheath and put the weapon inside.

**'ding' 'Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 16'**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Goblin]'**

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Eratur]'**

...

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Undead Ogre]'**

**'ding' 'Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 17'**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**'ding' 'Omen of Vengeance reaches lvl 18'**

**Stat points +2**

**Vigor +1**

**'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'**

...

**'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 5'**

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches lvl 20'**

...

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Active: Blood Frenzy – 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1**

**Give in to your rage and become one with the blood and pain of battle. You strike harder, increasing your damage with melee weapons by up to 15.5%, sacrificing up to 10 points of health for each attack. Your senses are focused on battle alone. Each creature you kill while Blood Frenzy is active returns 7.75% of your damage dealt as health.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> stage: Your blood surges and ruptures the insides of those you strike.**

**'ding' 'Blood Frenzy reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Vengeful Charge reaches lvl 18'**

**'ding' 'Reaper Jump reaches lvl 6'**

**'ding' 'Reaper Jump reaches lvl 7'**

**'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches lvl 20'**

**'ding' 'Blood for the Living reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'**

**Passive: Blood for the Living – 2nd lvl 1**

**Your anger knows no bounds. When you slay an enemy, you absorb 7.25% of their total health and stamina. Find and kill them, all.**

**2nd stage: You may drink the blood of those you have slain to absorb whatever life force remains in their blood.**

**‘ding’ ‘Fury of the Unarmored reaches lvl 20’**

**‘ding’ ‘Fury of the Unarmored reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1’**

**Passive: Fury of the Unarmored – 2nd lvl 1**

**Your body is a tool for war, forged in battle. While you are not wearing armor made of metal or above 25% of your body weight, your skin, muscles, and bones are 15.5% more resilient to both physical and magical damage. Magic surges when your blood is spilled, burning those who would strike you down.**

**2nd stage: While the first stage requirements are met, you gain a low grade resistance against physical damage.**

**‘ding’ ‘Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches lvl 19’**

...

**‘ding’ ‘Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1’**

**Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – 2nd lvl 1**

**You have chosen to forego both shields and subtlety. While wielding a weapon with both hands, you deal 15.5% more damage.**

**2nd stage: Weapons wielded with both hands require a static 10% less stamina to use.**

**‘ding’ ‘Unrelenting Carnage reaches lvl 8’**

...

**‘ding’ ‘Unrelenting Carnage reaches lvl 12’**

**‘ding’ ‘Silent Striker reaches lvl 11’**

**Serenity +1**

**‘ding’ ‘Silent Striker reaches lvl 12’**

**Serenity +1**

**‘ding’ ‘Silent Striker reaches lvl 13’**

**Serenity +1**

**‘ding’ ‘Heightened Hearing reaches lvl 15’**

**'ding' 'You have unlocked the active skill: Aura of Silence – lvl 1**

**Active: Aura of Silence – lvl 1**

**Focus on your magic and remove all sound in a range of 0.5m centered on yourself.**

**Kate Lindgren**

**Unspent stat points: 0**

**Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 18**

- **Active: Mindless Ferocity – 2nd lvl 5**
- **Active: Blood Frenzy – 2nd lvl 2**
- **Active: Vengeful Charge – lvl 18**
- **Active: Reaper Jump – lvl 7**
- **Active: Blood Rupture – lvl 6**
- **Passive: Blood for the Living – 2nd lvl 1**
- **Passive: Fury of the Unarmored – 2nd lvl 1**
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – 2nd lvl 1**
- **Passive: Unrelenting Carnage – lvl 12**
- **Passive: Terrifying Presence – lvl 7**

**Support class: Silent Striker – lvl 13**

- **Active: Frightening Growl – lvl 6**
- **Active: Bewildering Wave – lvl 4**
- **Active: Aura of Silence – lvl 1**
- **Passive: Heightened Hearing – lvl 15**
- **Passive: Echo Location – lvl 5**
- **Passive: Hushed Presence – lvl 3**

**Support class: Locked**

**Status:**

**Vitality: 27**

**Vigor: 3**

**Endurance: 20**

**Perseverance: 15**

**Strength: 20**

**Dexterity: 8**

**Intelligence: 7**

**Wisdom: 10**

**Serenity: 13**

**Equipment:**

**Torso: -**

**Legs: -**

**Trinket: -**

**Food: -**