

Chapter 76 Fall

Kate looked out from the first floor of a large warehouse in the easternmost part of Falstadt. She could see the Weywater lake extending out before her visibility ended in the same gray mist that had covered the valley since the blizzard many weeks past. There were no lights, no boats, nothing that indicated that anyone inhabited this region. The air was fresh and cold. No snow was falling but the nearby roofs were still covered in it.

She looked down at her hands, her arms protected by scale armor made from the Overakar herself and Logan had killed. The leather below taken from the undead direwolves that they had fought. The set felt heavier than what she'd worn before but the weight felt comfortable if anything. It fit perfectly, some of the scales jutting out but none of them got in the way of her range of motion, and while it was a little bulky, she was used to more from her former job. When it came to the weight of it all, she was sure her high Strength made the whole thing feel far more comfortable than what it would've been back before they'd gotten magic.

The only real downside was the helmet. Her hearing wasn't quite as good, still far better than it had ever been but she preferred having no helmet on. The same was true for her vision. The see through material Allison had used was good but her peripheral vision was slightly impaired. All of course a trade off to protect her head from monstrous undead or for example small arms fire.

Her blood pulsed and she felt it resonate with the entire set of armor, her magic flowing through her, and through her weapons too, all of it enchanted. Jon had worked overtime, Logan's armor and guns enchanted now as well, adding even more protection to the already sturdy metal.

The last light of the day was fading, the Union already gone from the city, left through the corridors of the dungeon, the uppermost layer now equipped with motion sensors, the group additionally using drones and rc cars with small cameras strapped onto them, an entire wireless network set up throughout the corridors and quickly expanding out through the city, all of it powered by generators and batteries. Courtesy to the non combatant engineers and IT people who had survived the apocalypse.

Kate herself preferred a more hands on approach. She walked over to Logan, the man standing on the other side of the floor, looking out into the city with his night-vision goggles strapped to his helmet, tape added to make sure they would stay in place. She had the same set but wasn't sure yet how effective it would be to fight with them. It was likely preferable to using flashlights in the city, the danger of attracting dozens more undead very much a reality.

It was unclear how well the undead saw in complete darkness, if it depended on the species of the undead, or if they generally trusted other senses more, simply attacking without thought. Few of them had ever tried to dodge Kate's attacks before but she wasn't too concerned about the lack of light. She knew that with her spells active, she could trust her hearing, echo, and tremor perception even more than with light present, all of her senses focused to fight and kill monsters.

Next to the night-vision goggles, the Union had equipped them with modified gps systems, to both track each other and to track their location in the city, all prepared shelters already marked and added to the system. As long as they were outside, they would show nearby safe spots equipped with tinctures of life, spare gear, ammo, food, and defenses like reinforced doors and windows, depending on the specific location.

Several hundred people that had once lived here had worked together to set all of this up, to share information, keys, defensible locations, and ideas to fight the undead.

And this was the first test run for a lot of that gear, and the first test run to see if night-hunts were feasible at all.

Kate wasn't worried.

She was ready.

To finally get a good fight in again. To finally slaughter more undead.

"We watch for another fifteen minutes, then we go out there," Logan said.

Kate raised her hand and summoned her axe, the heavy enchanted weapon slamming into her hand a moment later. She sat down on an office chair and started spinning her axe to pass the time. She had waited for four days, she could wait a little longer.

When the time was up and the last light of the day was gone, Logan turned around. He only had his enchanted two handed sword with him, neither Kate nor him wearing a pack. Logan checked the only gun he had with him, an enchanted and silenced handgun, the silencer given to him by the Union. They had hiding spots now within the city, a few of them memorized in case they lost or broke their navigation tools. Kate had her handgun but didn't plan to use it due to the lacking silencer. Both of them had utility belts with additional magazines, three vials filled with tincture of life, and rations to keep their stamina enhancements going beyond what the recent dinner provided.

"I know you've been waiting for this," Logan said as he checked his pistol, removing the magazine, then slotting it back in. "Remember, we're here for the same reason. We're more effective if we stay close to each other, if we work together. I'm your ally."

Kate stopped spinning her axe and stood up. She checked if her Glock was holstered, then checked her enchanted war hammer, and her combat knives, all of them enchanted now as well.

"I will remember," she said. "Ready?"

Logan gave her a nod, holstered his pistol and shouldered his sword. "Lead the way. I have your back," he said and lowered the night-vision goggles.

Kate did the same, turning them on with a click. She could feel her heartbeat picking up as she stepped down the stairs and towards the exit of the warehouse. Her blood pulsed and she could feel herself smiling. It didn't bother her anymore, not around Logan. *Let's get to work.*

She stepped out onto the street, the dense clouds obscuring any light that could've come from the moon and stars, leaving the city in utter darkness. She found the goggles helpful, but barely. What she noticed immediately was that her hearing felt even more present, her echo awareness providing an impression of her surroundings with every step, her tremor sense showing her exactly where Logan was walking.

Kate felt the cold wind brush past as she walked into a random street. They didn't have to search long. Less than five minutes later, Kate felt the nearby vibrations, then heard the familiar groans. She tapped the blade of her axe twice to indicate danger, Logan stilling behind her.

She waited, listening. The undead were coming closer, stalking through the night. Five, six, seven of them, two or three orcs, the rest humans. She knew that Logan would wait to engage until they were attacked or she made a move. Kate heard the undead, her echo awareness already showing

them to her before they stalked into the dim vision of her goggles. She waited, watched, and listened.

They can't see us, she thought, gripping her axe tighter as her smile widened. The motion made a slight noise, two of the undead looking her way, searching in the dark. *Looking for something?* she thought and activated her magic. The world narrowed as she breathed in, the air tasting so very fresh this night. Kate felt her blood pulsing, she could hear the enemies before her, one of them moving closer still. And she watched, quiet, waiting. When the undead reached her range, she swung her axe, her enchanted blade slicing through the creature with a wet sound, alerting the others. She moved, swinging her axe where she heard the monsters, cleaving through three of them with heavy strikes before one of them got past her range and ran straight into her.

She could feel the weight and power of the undead orc, sliding on the cold concrete before she stopped the creature's movement. It struck her helm with a wild strike, Kate catching its neck and letting go of her axe, unsheathing one of her knives as the creature struck her head once more. *Is that it? Is that what you have?* she thought, then slammed the knife into and through its head, cutting through bone with a crunching sound. She left her axe on the ground when she heard her ally cut through one of the creatures, then another. Wide and heavy swings, to compensate for the lack of light. She saw the last one rush towards her and kicked at its leg right before it reached her. Kate took a step back to see the undead land on the floor, catching itself with both hands as she stepped above it, went down, and slammed her knife through its neck, severing its spine.

The surroundings were quiet and she breathed out, listening for more creatures before she deactivated her magic.

"Clear," she said.

"Hurt?" Logan asked.

"No," Kate said and heard a distant roar breaking through the silence.

"Overakar?" Logan asked.

"Sounds like it," Kate said. "Think we should try that again?"

"They're dangerous creatures. We shouldn't rush in there without a plan," Logan said as he wiped his blade against a dead orc. "Try not to jump this time."

Kate walked in the direction of the roar and heard the next group of undead just two side streets later. This time, she didn't wait, charging her axe with sound before she walked closer. She heard the undead turn her way, snarling right before she stomped her foot down, a cone of blood flashing forward and into the group. She heard the sizzling sounds of burning flesh and threw her axe, grabbing her hammer and running forward as her thrown weapon cut through one or two of them, she wasn't sure. Her magic active once more, she moved with small and fast steps, her ally next to her. They moved fast, didn't hesitate, the injured undead taken out with brutal blows to their skulls and cuts through their necks and heads. The hammer felt right in her hands, her magic thrumming.

Kate heard a different sound and sheathed her hammer, summoning her axe back into her hand just when she saw an Emissary step out from a nearby alley. She kept her gaze focused on its chest and faced it. She saw it crouch and rush forward, Kate swinging upwards to block its hand, her blade cutting through its arm with barely any resistance, the creature roaring back as its hand splattered to

the ground. She heard another strike coming for her and used her charge to rush past and avoid it, then turned around.

“Blind,” her ally said.

She closed her eyes just before she heard the thrumming sound of his sacred magic. Raising up her goggles, Kate saw the golden hue of her ally’s sword halfway through the Emissary’s chest. She raised her axe and threw it, aimed at the back of the creature’s head, the blade thudding deep into the monster’s skull before it fell to its knees, no longer moving.

She breathed in deep and grabbed her hammer, hearing several noises nearby. “Company,” she said and lowered her goggles once more.

She heard her ally step closer, before his back touched hers. Kate breathed in, hearing the snarls of the undead that had seen the light. She growled back and swung her hammer at the first, shattering its skull before she struck the next, every blow sending blood magic rupturing through them, shoulders, chests, and heads exploding with blood. She felt an Ogre closing in with heavy steps and warned her ally, finishing the closest three undead before she summoned her axe and charged it with sound. When she saw the large creature approach, she ran towards it, reaching it before it could react. With a shout, she slammed her charged axe into and through its right leg, moving on to the left as the ogre roared and slammed his fist into the ground where she had just stood.

Kate stumbled two steps and caught herself, then cut into the monster’s other leg. This time, she had to strike twice to get through the bone with a splintering sound. Then she jumped, up onto its back as it fell forward. She brought her axe down and cleaved deep into its flesh and spine, then held herself there while the monster collapsed. She unsheathed her hammer and charged it with sound, then walked two steps forward while the ogre tried to push itself up from the ground. Kate brought her hammer down onto its head with another shout and all the strength she could muster. The impact reverberated through her arms, blood and sound magic exploding into and through the ogre’s head, its skull shattered, flesh and bone splattering to the ground before it slumped down, unmoving.

A shriek resounded from above, closer with every passing second. Kate jumped to the right, down and away from the ogre right before she heard the wings and impact.

“We stand and fight, we stand and fight in the dark,” her ally spoke, white light glowing from the slit in his helmet, his sword piercing forward to stab through the chest of an undead rushing towards him. “Raise your weapons, and fight, fight until dawn breaks.”

Kate felt a pulse, raising her goggles up to see her ally wreathed in flowing golden light, his blade raised before him as the Undead Wyvern stepped off the dead ogre, turning away from her and towards her ally.

She felt the power of his magic flowing through her and stood up, sheathing her hammer as she raised her hand and walked parallel to the large winged beast.

It snarled, retching before it spat venom towards her ally. He jumped aside while Kate rushed forward in the same moment, her axe landing in her hand before she charged it with sound, waiting as the monster moved down. Then she swung, her axe cutting halfway through its neck, scales splintered and broken. She ripped out the blade when the monster kicked at her with one of its legs, sending her up and away before she landed with a heavy impact, rolling away right after when she heard it stagger towards her, clawed feet scraping the concrete.

Kate staggered up and backwards, raising her axe to catch the jaws of the Wyvern that came her way.

It raised her up and tried to throw her to the side but Kate held on. She heard dulled shots from her ally's pistol, golden flashes impacting the wings and chest of the large screeching monster.

It let go of her axe and she fell, landing a few meters down with a roll. When she came up, she heard moving wings and saw the outlines of large claws grabbing her, her axe clattering to the side as she pushed against the strength of the creature, its claws scraping against her scale armor before she heard its wings move again, air rushing past. She still pushed, feeling the air rush by, all the light gone again when she got one of her arms free, calling for her axe. She could feel the monster's claws pressing down into her chest when the familiar weight of her weapon slammed into her palm. She closed her hand around it, took the second to charge the blade with sound, and swung upwards, the blade digging into flesh. She heard another roar, their flight more chaotic now. She ripped out the weapon and swung again, cutting something else. The air flow changed and the creature whirled down in the dark, its grip on her loosening. Kate held onto the monster's leg and her axe, pulling herself out of its grasp, trying to keep herself steady as they whirled towards the ground.

She could barely tell up from down, considering where she should try to go to when a heavy impact rocked through her entire being, her world going dark for a moment with a ringing sound in her ears. She opened her eyes again and coughed. Her entire left flank felt heavy, her left arm didn't feel right, and something large was on top of her. A wing, she realized. Kate groaned and gasped for air, checking her belt and fiddling with one of the pouches. The glass containers hadn't broken. She raised one of them to her face, undid the first clasp on her helmet, and pushed it up, then ripped away the cork and drank the contents.

Warmth flooded her and she grabbed her left arm. The angle was strange, so she sucked in her breath and bent it back into the right direction with a wet crack. A blinding pain shot through her but she stayed conscious and pulled herself out and away from the wing, staggering a few steps, disoriented before she caught herself. She now heard the gasping sounds of the Wyvern. Kate pulled her helmet down and focused, then clicked her tongue. She raised her right arm as she saw the mangled body of the Wyvern before her with Echo Awareness. She took two steps to get close to its head, her axe slapping into her hand before she brought it down onto the injured neck, cutting into the scales and flesh. Another strike cut deeper, the next glanced off, and the fourth cut through, silencing the monster.

Kate breathed out, feeling the pain in her chest, arm, and head lessen. She listened but there were no undead nearby, so she deactivated her magic.

Her breathing hastened immediately. Confusion, adrenaline, fear, and excitement mixing into a cocktail that nearly overwhelmed her. She made a strange gurgling sound when she suppressed laughter that welled up from her chest. *Quiet*, she reminded herself, checking another pouch and hoping that the gps hadn't broken with the fall. She must've landed on the wing or something, with the vials still intact but she couldn't be sure. She was here, standing, and that was all that mattered.

The gps device had a cracked screen but still worked, showing her location in the streets of Falstadt, and a moving dot where Logan would be. She checked for noise and started in his direction. *We flew six blocks.*

She realized in the same moment that her goggles were gone. Not a surprise. What surprised her more was the fact that she had just started walking towards Logan, the darkness nowhere near as oppressing as it should've been, her other senses taking over. She breathed slow and deep to try and

calm herself down, clicking her tongue regularly while trusting her echo awareness, tremor sense, and hearing.

When she turned into the same street that Logan was on, she saw golden flashes around fifty meters down, undead creatures hounding the man as he walked fast and shot at them with his sacred bullets.

No rest, she thought and started running, her magic activating once more before she rushed past her ally, right into the pursuing mob of undead flesh. She was injured after all, and needed to kill more of them to heal.

Her ally broke into a building soon after, Kate following as she swung wide, dulled shots resounding from her ally, sacred bullets ripping through two or three of the normal undead at a time but more were still coming. She entered the building and slammed the door shut, keeping it there as the tide of undead slammed into it.

“Safe house in the building next to this one. To the roof and over, this way,” her ally said and started up the stairs.

Kate waited for a few moments before she ran to follow him, the door crashing open with undead rushing after her.

They bounded up the stairs, her ally stopping to shoot down and past her before he continued running.

Kate got to the last door and slammed it open with her shoulder, catching herself before she ran over the edge. She waited for her ally to pass through and closed the door again. She heard him holster his pistol before he threw his sword, the weapon clattering to the ground somewhere ahead.

His form glowed white and gold before he ran and jumped over the edge, landing on the other side with a heavy roll.

She looked up but all she saw was darkness. If any Wyverns had seen, she would just have to deal with them too. Kate felt the impacts against the door now and ran, power flooding through her legs before she jumped, landing in a crouch on the other side. She ducked low and deactivated her magic, on the ground now right next to Logan as she listened to the screeching undead spill out onto the roof, several of them running too far and falling down, either dying from the fall or heavily injured.

She heard Logan breathing hard.

“Injured?” she asked in a whisper.

“No,” he said. “Let’s move before any fliers arrive.”

“I’ll follow,” she said and listened as he crawled over the roof.

More undead still arrived on the roof they’d come from, a few of the butterflies now as well.

Logan stopped and grabbed something from one of his pouches, then threw it to the side, hitting another roof.

The fluttering sounds of the butterflies followed, to the other roof and down into the street below.

Logan kept crawling, and Kate followed, the two reaching a large wooden hatch that Logan opened.

Kate checked their surroundings and followed him in right when she heard a butterfly flutter up to their roof again. She quietly closed the hatch behind herself and listened for a while. She heard Logan reload his gun before he holstered it again.

“We’re clear,” she said in a whisper. “How are you holding up?”

“Need to catch my breath, meditate for a moment, and heal some bruises, yourself?”

Kate wondered if he could imagine the wide smile she had under her helmet. He probably heard it in her voice. “That was crazy,” she said.

“Yeah,” he said. “Let’s get to the third floor, supplies there and a place to rest.”

She nodded and gulped, then followed him down through the darkness.

They found a heavy door and entered an apartment. Logan shut the door behind himself and locked it with the key that was already in there.

He checked the room and walked to the kitchen counter to the left. Raising his goggles, he lit a match and lit the candle of a small lantern. Heavy black drapes covered the windows, preventing most if not all of the light from escaping.

“You turned off your magic, didn’t stay to fight on the roof,” Logan said.

Kate nodded to herself. “Yeah. I don’t know. It felt right, easier than ever before.” She paused and watched as he removed his helmet. There was some blood and he looked tired but focused. “Like you said, I think I let go, didn’t try to fight it.”

Logan pushed some air out of his nose and sat back, leaning against the wall. He sighed, then smiled a tired smile. “How was the flight?”