

## Chapter 41 Shopping

Kate waited in a crouch between stacked tables, a hunting knife ready. The room was too cramped for even her hammer. She glanced towards where she saw a piece of Logan's armor. *His sword will be too large as well.* The table in front of the entrance shook and shifted. Three times before guttural voices resounded and a larger creature punched a small one. Another impact, this one heavier, the table shifted enough for the creatures to enter.

Kate heard them all, her echo location giving her a good image of where the loud creatures were. Two orcs pushed past and into the store, followed by four nimble goblins, two more orcs in the stairwell. The orcs stumbled past, the smell of blood and sweat entering her vicinity when she saw the first goblin pass. She held her breath and came face to face with the second goblin.

It looked at her, frantic glances stopped as its eyes went wide.

Kate stabbed her knife straight into and through its head with a wet sound. She let go of the handle and stood up, unsheathing another blade as she emerged behind the two orcs, neither turning yet. She heard the yelp of a goblin behind her when she turned her blade and grabbed the orc before her with her left arm. Her right one slammed the hunting knife down into his neck. She ripped it out as his arm came up to stop her. Kate waited as the sounds and movements of everyone around her exploded into chaos. She angled her blade and slammed it into and through the skull of the orc, the handle snapping off with the force.

Unarmed, she came face to face with the second orc before her, raising his blade as he looked at her, eyes narrowing. She watched the angle of his sword and activated Vengeful Charge, her momentum and weight crashing into him before both of them slammed into the shelves behind, sewing machines shattered and more of them toppling down from above. Kate felt dazed, looking at the orc before her. Her left arm was numb. She grit her teeth and held onto his arms, fighting against his strength with her own. She won out, pulling back her head before she headbutted him into his face. Kate took three steps back when the top shelves started to collapse, grabbing another blade when something bit into her calf.

She turned to find a goblin, its head pierced by Grey's blade in the same moment. Beyond, she saw more creatures pushing past the entrance, a bright flare of fire lighting up in front Ethan, burning the face of another orc as boxes started to fall, bits and pieces cracking and breaking below the boots of the fighters.

Hissing at the pain in her calf, Kate turned and activated Mindless Ferocity, her world narrowing as the pain and shock of the battle moved to the background. She unsheathed another blade and took a step towards the scrambling orc, his face bloodied as he tried to get an angle to strike at her.

She moved, hearing his sword scrape against the shelf to her left before it got stuck in the wood. Kate reached him, her right hand catching his before she pushed it aside, stabbing into his chest and throat with her blade several times, finally angling the blade upwards and slamming it into his jaw and through his head. She ripped it out, hearing the tumbling mess of goods clattering to the ground as the sounds of steel slashing flesh mixed with flaring fires, moans, and screams.

Kate saw Grey to her left, his weapon deflecting the small blades of three goblins, one of them atop a table. She closed the distance and grabbed the closest one, turning before she screamed and slammed its head into the edge of another table. Turning, she saw the two goblins unmoving, one of

them collapsing as its head fell, Grey almost sliding past the table before he intercepted the sword of an orc going for Ethan. Kate went towards Logan at the front of the store, seeing a flash of fire erupt from Ethan's hand and straight into the face of the orc now engaged with Grey.

She unsheathed her hammer, not to strike but to block as she saw two more orcs enter the now entirely open entrance. Her spells would disrupt and injure her allies in the tight space, so she simply rushed towards the orcs, nearly stumbling on the mess on the floor before she blocked a sword strike with the handle of her hammer. She let go with her right hand and punched the orc in its face, hearing something crack. Stepping to the left, she jabbed her hammer head into the shoulder of the other orc whose focus seemed on Logan.

Another orc entered through the door, pushing into the jumble of limbs and bodies, dead goblins on the floor with a burning orc screaming behind Kate.

"Ears!" Logan shouted.

She deactivated her hearing ability and grinned, pushing back against the three orcs before her. She didn't budge. Kate locked eyes with the one right in front of her when the right side of his head exploded outwards. A ringing came to her left ear. Another shot resounded, another chunk of brain and blood splattering against the wall. Kate couldn't hear anymore but grabbed the last orc whose eyes were wide.

*Fear*, she thought and saw his blade stuck against the table next to him. A third shot echoed through the store, taking the jaw of the orc before a fourth shot broke through his skull.

Kate tasted blood and wiped at her eyes. Clicking her tongue, she unsheathed another blade and went into the stairwell, meeting four more goblins. She saw them tense up and kicked the first one straight into its chest, hearing it dent inwards. She followed as it fell and downed the others in a chaotic scramble down the stairs. Closing the distance to the first, she raised her boot above the dazed goblin before she brought it down, breaking its head and the wooden stairs below.

Her foot stuck, Kate growled at the last two goblins standing up before her.

One of them raised its blade before it let go of the weapon and ran. The other followed before another shot echoed from above, striking its back. It fell and crawled onward when a second shot struck its head, its face slapping against the road.

Kate could hear more monsters fighting in the village, ripping out her leg before she sheathed her hunting knife. Three blades were left.

She felt someone grab her shoulder and pulled herself free with ease.

"Kate!" Logan shouted. "We need you here."

She heard an impact in front of the store and saw Grey sliding in front of her.

His hands moved fast before a dark cloud slapped into her face.

The smell of coffee.

She breathed it in and coughed, the smell intensifying as she managed to disable her spell. She spit out blood and bits of flesh. Neither hers. Her leg felt a bit strained and her muscles were tense. She breathed hard but she felt no pain. Her right ear still rang. She glared at Logan who holstered his handgun once more.

"Tight space. There were too many," he said.

"I know. Just wish you had a silencer," she said. "The bags. Let's get out of here before the entire village comes for us." She didn't hear any creatures just around the corner, their battle likely alarming everyone close by.

"Holy shit, that was crazy," Ethan said, his breathing fast as he leaned against the wall with both hands on his knees.

Grey sheathed his blade as him and Kate moved away the bodies and collected their bags.

Logan did the same and shouldered his massive sword again.

"Street is clear," Grey said after a moment.

"Ready?" Logan asked.

Kate and Grey affirmed.

"Catching my... breath," Ethan said.

"Five seconds. Breathe slow and deep," Logan said. "In. Out. In. Out," he said and nodded. "Alright?"

Ethan nodded.

"We move," Logan said and Kate rushed past him, the heavy bags hardly noticed as she stepped past the dead goblins in the stairwell, avoiding the crack she had left and pointing it out to the others. She strained her hearing, finding noises coming from the left but still farther down the street and behind the two story houses. *Undead*. She moved fast, crossing the street and stopping behind the last cottage at the edge of the village, this one having avoided the bombing, it seemed.

She set down her bags and glanced around the corner to see the first undead running onto the street, a few more orcs running away from them as the creatures jumped and downed them, snarls and screams echoing through the village before the orcs were silenced.

Kate breathed out when she heard a roar, the last of the two story buildings exploding with flying bricks and debris as an ogre stumbled past, his left leg sending one of the undead humans flying. He swatted away three goblins that jumped him and started stumbling in Kate's direction.

She raised her brows when she saw another ogre step out behind him, that one with half its face missing, fire burning on its shoulder. Blue eyes.

"We leave. Over the field and towards the first barn. We try to hide in that copse," Kate said, no longer keeping her voice down as she pointed.

"Keep the cottage between us and them," Logan said as they rushed towards the field covered in ash, hearing loud roars and impacts behind them as the ogres fought.

Kate started to feel the weight now, shifting her shoulders as she kept up the pace. The last roar of the ogre sounded out in the village before silence returned to the valley. She reached the first trees of the small copse and set down her bags, her left ear still ringing. She noticed the carcasses on the ground when she heard scraping sounds from above.

"Above!" Grey shouted when the first Bograth jumped down.

Kate activated Vengeful Charge to avoid the large claws coming at her face. She slowed and turned, grabbing her hammer and clicking her tongue. Her echo location was slightly blurred but she could tell there were seven. She watched as Grey and Logan swung their blades, cutting through the

critters as she stepped up and slammed her hammer into the first, then the second. Fire flashed up as Ethan engulfed one of the creatures that jumped at him.

Grey flowed through the air in what seemed like a single step before he slashed into the backs of the last two fleeing critters. They screeched and stumbled.

Kate closed the distance and killed the first, looking left to see Grey standing above the second.

She felt some energy return to her. *Blood for the Living.*

“Anyone injured?” Logan asked, swinging his heavy sword to let the blood on it splatter to the forest floor.

Grey shook his head, falling against a tree as he caught his breath.

Ethan shook his head, sitting on the floor now as he stared at the creatures. “Is... nowhere... fucking... safe?”

“Pursuers?” Kate asked.

Logan nodded, his armored chest heaving with heavy breaths as he walked to the edge of the copse, moving his backpack before he grabbed his binoculars. He came back a moment later. “Three undead are heading this way. Not running, but we should move. Either that or we fight.”

“Need a break,” Grey said.

Kate looked at the others. The kills got her enough energy for another fight she felt but her team needed a break. “Towards the barn.”

“I can’t,” Ethan said.

Kate grabbed her bags, then his, shouldering everything before she reached her hand towards him.

He glanced at the bags, then at her, and shook his head. “Fuck,” he groaned and stood up himself.

Kate steadied him for a moment before they started moving. “Logan, holding up with that armor?”

“Struggling,” he said.

“Your bags.”

He hesitated.

“Strength,” she said and took his loot, barely enough space on her shoulders, back, and in her hands to carry everything without too much shifting weight.

Logan shouldered his sword and followed. “Warriors. Do not falter in the face of danger. Keep moving. Steady. Until victory is ours.” Faint light came through his visor and the cuts in his plate armor before he straightened slightly.

Kate felt the energy as well, the bags feeling a little lighter. She pushed on, hearing the hard breaths of the others as they moved onto another field.

The way to the closest barn wasn’t far but the exhaustion coupled with all the gear made it a hard fought battle. Kate considered letting go of the loot but pushed on. She still had her skills if another fight broke out, and for every killed enemy, she regained some strength.

“Wyverns in the distance. Closing in, I think,” Grey said when they reached a wooden fence going around the farm.

“Stay low and moving, to the farmhouse,” Logan said, helping Kate move the bags over the fence before he was helped in turn with his plate armor.

They kept a lookout for the Wyverns and other monsters in the vicinity. The barn, silo, and a few trees that hadn’t burnt down, providing some cover for their group clad in gray.

Kate listened as best she could, the ringing in her ear gone now, after the Bograth attack. The battle now felt convenient to her but she supposed no battle at all would’ve left their entire group far more rested than just her getting back some health and stamina.

Reaching the farmhouse, she could now see a burnt down bonfire, stakes, and stacked up wood to build palisades.

“Started to build a camp here,” she murmured, clicking her tongue and listening. “Seems abandoned now.”

“Can’t feel anything either,” Grey said.

“Inside then,” Logan said.

Kate walked up to the door, set down her bags, and kicked in the wooden entrance.

She waited again and listened as the door crashed against the wall, rattling in its hinges. “You take the bags inside while I check,” she said and raised her hammer, glad the entrance room wasn’t as cramped as the store they’d just fought in. She heard the others move, each grabbing a few bags and moving them inside.

She waited until Grey closed the door behind himself.

“Breather, then we clear the house,” Logan said.

Kate glanced at him and went towards the windows before she slung her pack around her shoulder and got out her binoculars.

Heavy breaths came from the others, followed by gulps of water.

“Drink slow,” Logan said. “And not too much.”

Grey started coughing a moment later.

Kate checked but found he had drunk too fast. “Wyverns haven’t followed. I think they’re circling Kahrsdorf now.”

“Going for the undead?” Logan asked.

“Just circling at the moment,” Kate said. “I can’t see the three undead you saw.”

“Two humans, one orc, I think,” Logan said.

“Where are they coming from?” she murmured, keeping a lookout as the others recovered their breaths.

Ethan slumped to the ground and sat against the wall. “Starting to see why you said I should invest in Endurance and Vitality.”

“Personal fitness is the baseline for survival,” Logan said, still wearing his helmet, his sword lightly scraping against the floor.

“Good thing we have magic to speed things up,” Kate said.

“Sandwiches make things better too,” Grey said. “They should last a little over an hour now.”

*Food magic*, Kate thought with a slight smile. She kept watching the patch of forest they had come from but nothing came out of it. “I think we’re clear for now.”

“Plenty of undead in the village,” Logan said. “But it’s the Wyverns I’m worried about. I heard about your fight.”

“They’re tough,” Kate said. She didn’t know how they would fare against one out in the open.

“Do you t... think they’re smart enough to grab people, fly up, and drop them?” Grey said.

“I don’t plan to find out anytime soon,” Kate said.

“We’ll keep watching them, document their behavior,” Logan said. “Two of us should clear the house, while the other two stay and keep a lookout.”

“I go with Grey, then we have two people who can take a hit,” Kate said.

“And two damage dealers,” he said.

Kate raised a brow at him but didn’t comment. *I’m more than capable of dealing damage myself.*

She only now noticed the mist before her face, her breaths visible but she didn’t feel cold. If anything, she was sweating. The farm house was large, likely once accommodating an entire family, and a few dogs according to the bowls she saw in the entrance. Most of the jackets and shoes had been left alone by the intruders, same as the windows and furniture. She assumed it had to do with their wish to make this a camp, instead of a place to only plunder.

The power was out, the gray skies providing enough light for them to see without their headlamps. She wanted to avoid the additional illumination, in case it attracted undead or even a Wyvern.

“We’ll check through the rooms. Radios if anything comes up.”

“Testing, over,” Logan said through his.

The noise came out on the three other radios carried by the group.

“Received, over,” Kate said, her voice repeated thrice before she strapped the radio to her jacket. She kept on her backpack just in case, holding her hammer with both hands before she nodded towards Grey. “Ready?”

“Ready,” he said, his sheathed blade held to his side.