

## Chapter 8 Eggs and Bacon

Kate closed her eyes as a warm feeling spread through her, the feeling likely caused by the two new points added to her Vitality. The stinging pain from the many cuts and bruises didn't feel quite as present anymore. She closed her hands into fists. It almost felt like her skin had become harder, or thicker. She stretched and flexed her muscles before she allowed herself a small smile. *It does feel better. Definitely the right decision.*

She grabbed her crowbar and rinsed it under warm flowing water. A rag helped get rid of the dried blood and the few pieces still stuck to it. Kate tried not to look too closely, her eyes focused on the reflection of herself in the large bathroom mirror. She thought her cheeks had a little more color compared to before, but it could've just been the light. *Not an absolute mess anymore, just a mess.*

Done with the quick cleaning, she went to the bathroom and washed her hands after. Her stomach growled. "Yes. I agree," she murmured.

Kate left the bathroom, greeted by the morning sunlight and an expanding view of Maar Valley, snow topped mountain chains in the distance. The air was crisp but not yet freezing. A sweater alone wasn't quite enough anymore to stay outside for long. She took a deep breath and walked over to Bert's house. Hearing voices from within, she opened the door and went inside.

Kate rubbed her hands as she entered, shivering at the sudden change in temperature. It was a little too warm for her liking, but she assumed it was the old man's doing. The ground floor was split into an open kitchen and a spacious living room. An older TV sat on a long wooden cabinet, a yellow leather sofa in front of it with a brown arm chair to the side. The kitchen housed various shelves and cabinets mounted to the walls, yellow tiles with inlaid flower designs giving it an eighties feeling. Sunlight came in through the front windows, a floor lamp in the living room adding its warm light. Wooden stairs to the right led up to the first floor of the home.

Jonathan, Melusine, Celeste, and Grey sat around the dining table in the kitchen, most of their plates already empty. If not for the tired expressions on their faces, one might've mistaken them for a family on vacation. Eloise wore a white apron, her hair bound in a messy bun when she turned and looked at Kate. "Eggs and bacon?" she greeted with a light smile.

"God, yes," Kate murmured. "Don't suppose anyone has a fresh sweater?"

"I'll fetch you one," Melusine said and stood up. "Your pants are all cut up too."

"I noticed," Kate said, looking for coffee when Eloise handed her a mug.

"Black, no sugar, right?" the girl asked.

Kate smiled, receiving the mug with near divine care before she sat down on one of the empty chairs and rested her crowbar against it. She closed her eyes and drank. Hot but not scalding. She sighed and set down the mug, half empty already. Eloise walked over with a smooth motion and refilled it.

"Thanks," Kate said.

Melusine joined them again. She put down a set of clothes on the table. "The shower is upstairs. You're filthy, darling."

Kate just smiled at her.

“You look better than yesterday,” Jonathan said. “How are you feeling?”

Kate looked at him and sipped from her coffee. “Hungry, tired, scared, confused. I’m focusing on one at a time.”

A light smile tugged on his lips. “And here I hoped you’d be the hero we saw last night.”

*That wasn’t me. Not fully.*

She didn’t dare voice the thought, silence descending on the room. Her spoon clinked in the mug as she took another sip.

Eloise put down a plate in front of her, the scent of freshly fried bacon getting her back on track.

She wolfed down the food in less than a minute before she sat back and slid down in her chair a little. Kate took her mug and sighed. “So, any plans?”

Jon scratched the back of his head and looked at Melusine. “It depends on... how everyone’s doing. You, Logan, and Grey most of all. We... need supplies. Ethan is getting worse. The faster we can get them the better. I-”

“I’ll go,” Kate interrupted him and took a sip of coffee. “Grey, think you can come with me? I’d take Logan too but he didn’t seem perfectly healthy.”

“Concussion. He has... magic,” Melusine said. “Without it, I didn’t like his chances.”

*Him as well. Hopefully something that doesn’t change him into a thoughtless murder machine,* Kate thought and puffed. Deep dark energy filled her veins, her body supplied with caffeine and calories to burn.

“I... yes, if,” Grey said and glanced at Jon.

“Bert is on guard duty now. I’m up next. The gate is closed and it should hold for a while, even if... monsters come again. We have crossbows and if all that fails, Bert still has his shotgun. Nothing else attacked since the group last night,” Jon said. “Others will be scavenging what they can as well. If we can find more people, that would help too, but medical supplies are the priority.”

“I used up nearly everything we had here already. I prepared a list. Painkillers and fresh bandages are the highest priority,” Melusine said and put a piece of paper on the table.

“There’s a pharmacy in Keilberg. We can check out the general store too,” Kate said.

Grey gulped.

“Cars outside yours?” she asked.

Eloise had sat down as well, eyes focused on the table.

Jon showed her the keys. “Yes. The Mercedes.”

She looked at him but he avoided her eyes. “I’d prefer the other one. Looked smaller, less loud probably.”

“It’s a hybrid. Noise shouldn’t be a problem. Probably better secured too, more space, and less likely to break down,” he said.

“Fair enough,” Kate said. “Can you drive, Grey?”

The man shook his head.

"I can," Jon said.

Melusine touched his hand. The two shared a look, quiet for a few seconds.

"We will just get supplies," he said. "I can take Bert's car. He gave us the keys, I think he understands the gravity of the situation now as well. Maybe the... battle, last night got to him."

"We take one car. His has too little space. If we find the time, we can get another one in town. I know Lars has a truck. We'd get ten times as much stuff back with that one," Kate said.

Jon nodded, his eyes not meeting hers. He looked to his daughters instead. "Celeste, do you want to go check on Ethan and Logan? You can bring them some food as well."

"Okay," the girl said and stood up. She grabbed two plates and left a minute later.

"Have you dealt with the bodies already?" Kate asked. "Even if the undead thing isn't going to happen, we shouldn't leave them around."

Jon hesitated. "Is it really necessary? Can we not just bury them?"

"Maybe. Look, we all know pretty much nothing about what the hell is happening. But with what we Do know, I think it's best we make sure. The smoke might attract other things but so will the bodies of all those goblins and orcs," Kate said. "And maybe it will attract survivors."

"You want to burn the m... monster bodies too?" Eloise asked.

"Wild animals and disease would be troublesome," Melusine said. "Especially without access to an equipped hospital. The nearest one is in Falstadt, and with everything happening, it's not sure we'll have electricity forever."

"Nothing new on the radios either," Jon said. "Bert says he saw a plane earlier, but likely not military. The valley has quieted down too."

"Same warning still on all frequencies?" Kate asked and received a nod in response. "Thank you for the breakfast, Eloise. We'll try to get some nice food back too. Before it all goes bad," she said and stood up, not about to waste anymore time. If they wanted to survive, they had to prepare as well as they could. *And there might still be people in Keilberg, hiding.* She pushed away any thoughts of people she knew there. Worrying would not help. *Keep busy. Do what you can,* she reminded herself. *Don't let it overwhelm you. The flames will spread, every step can be the difference between saving a life and losing one.*

Kate stood up and grabbed the clothes. "I'll get that shower. Melusine, I'll need a first aid kit with everything you can put together. The thickest pants, jackets, and gloves you can find for me and Grey. Knives, a fire axe, small weapons in case we lose ours. Food, water, backpacks, and bags. And anything else we could need," she said and touched Grey's shoulder. "You're sure you're ready for this?"

He gulped and avoided her eyes. Then he nodded, ever so slightly.

"That's my katana guy," she said and squeezed his shoulder. "Good job last night. You saved our lives," she added and walked up to find the shower.

Warm water ran down her hair and body, the experience not exactly pleasant with all the small cuts she still had. And still it felt good. Important. She dried herself off and put on a fresh shirt. A little

too large for her, then a hoodie, boxer briefs, a pair of jeans, and her slashed work pants on top. The bathroom was small, a shower and toilet squeezed into the room with a tiny basin and a mirror. Her reflection looked less dead by now, red hair wet and clinging to her face. She took a deep breath and bound it all into a secure bun. “You can do this, Kate,” she said, noticing her lightly shaking hands. She made fists and then grabbed the crowbar.

The preparations took half an hour, everyone decked out with warm and thick clothes, weapons, water, food, and small backpacks. Larger ones and bags were stored in the car’s back seats.

Grey wore a brown skiing helmet and a blue balaclava that covered all but his eyes. A green and pink winter jacket over a few pieces of mismatched armor, black skiing pants, and thick military boots. He looked like a kid who had raided Bert’s closet, holding his katana with slightly drooped shoulders.

*Good thing the old man is a fucking hoarder*, Kate thought, her own jacket and gloves a little tight around all the clothes she wore below. Everything was quite used and rather old, but high quality.

“Return before nightfall,” Bert said, holding his shotgun in a casual manner. He had donned a hunting hat, the existence of the accessory giving Kate a bit more confidence in his ability to wield the weapon.

“We will. And you shut yourselves into the armory while we’re gone,” Jon said. He had donned a few pieces of armor just like Grey, a scabbard with a short sword strapped to his belt and a crossbow in his hands, currently not loaded.

Kate gripped her crowbar as she waited for the man to say his goodbyes to Melusine and their daughters. She had wondered many times if the walls she put up with other people were worth not having what they had. Right now she was glad she didn’t have to worry as much. It didn’t feel right to take him along, but three people had a much better chance than two. And they could get another car. Jon was afraid, but so was she, and so was Grey.

“We should get going,” she said and started towards the castle gate.

Grey followed, Jon too a few seconds later.

“I didn’t ask before, but do you have relatives in Keilberg?” Kate asked as she removed the heavy bar at the gate.

“My... m... mom. But she’s... on a business trip,” he said.

Kate looked up. “Where is she?”

“I d... don’t remember,” he said, looking at the ground. “She’s not here... often.”

“I see,” she said and slowly walked outside, checking for any creatures Bert might’ve missed before. Visibility was good and she could neither hear nor see anything. “Looks clear,” she said and opened the car. They had agreed that she would drive, knowing the area much better than Jon.

Jon got in next to her. He fumbled with the crossbow and his sword but finally sat down and put on his seat belt. Grey got in one of the back seats, his Katana sheathed and held with both hands.

Kate turned the key and the car sprung to life, near fully silent. Jon gave her a quick run down

before she drove out of the parking spot, the gravel ground below the tires, bodies already moved aside. Melusine and the kids waved from the battlements, Bert ushering them back down.

They had about fifty kilometers left on electricity before they'd have to switch to the combustion engine, more than enough for a few trips down to Keilberg. "The drive shouldn't take more than fifteen minutes. But I think it's best if we park at a viewing spot above the town. Higher chance of not getting detected if we move down on foot."

"A map would've been useful," Jon said.

Kate got her pack and gave it to the man. "Phone in the small pocket at the top. Code is four five four five."

"Google maps needs internet," Grey said.

"Exactly. Which is why I downloaded the offline maps, both for wandering and from google. Open the latter, it has all the buildings in it too," she said.

Jon fiddled with it for a little while before he glanced over. "I'm getting a lot of errors."

Kate took the phone and held it behind herself, eyes on the road as she drove slowly through the forest, trees moving past on each side with sunlight breaking through.

Grey took it and handed it back to Jon a few seconds later. "It's in airplane mode too," he said. "Might use less power if it doesn't try to connect all the time."

"Thanks," Kate said, tempted to put on the radio before she remembered it only had one channel at the moment and that one wasn't music.

"Oh... the pharmacy is pretty central... baker... the skiing store might be good too. No police?" Jon asked.

Kate puffed. "Really? In Keilberg? Nothing happens here, other than one brutal murder every thirty years."

"Really?" Grey asked.

She sighed. "No. But I wouldn't be surprised. It's always towns like this in thrillers."

"In reality as well?" Jon asked. "Not much else other than a few restaurants and hotels."

"How should I know? I'm a firefighter, not a police woman. And yes, not much around here. Hotels should be quiet too. Even in the skiing season they're not particularly busy," she said.

The conversation died after that, everyone sitting with their thoughts for the rest of the short drive, there sure as hell was plenty to process.

Kate parked in the first spot at the viewing point, the entire parking area empty. She waited for a moment and turned to Jon. "Leave it running?"

He nodded, hands white as he gripped his weapons.

"Let's move then," she said and left the car. Down here it felt a little warmer already, but she assumed it had more to do with her clothing than the change in altitude. A simple paved road led down into the small town. Houses dotted the area, most of them rather old with brown or red tiled triangular roofs. The forest moved into the town from the slope of the mountains, brown and golden leaves rustling in the wind.

Kate had chills on her arms. It was quiet. Granted, Keilberg was always quiet, but never quite like this. “Get that crossbow loaded,” she said.

Jon did as she suggested. It took a moment because he looked up a few times but in the end he managed.

Grey had strapped the scabbard to his backpack, the sword held with both hands and aimed towards the ground.

Kate led them, her crowbar at the ready as she walked down the slope in the hopes to get some more cover in the trees. They soon reached the first building, so far no sign of any monsters in the area. She moved close to the wall and walked towards the edge. Looking around the corner, she could see the side street leading down into the town proper. Kate was about to turn around when she heard a tearing sound from the left, her breath caught as she signaled her companions to wait.

The sound came from within the house. A few growls in between the tears.

*Something biting down... into flesh*, she thought and gripped her weapon. “Something inside, eating,” she whispered to the others, listening to hear if the being heard her speak. She crept towards the door a few meters ahead, the house a single story home with windows all around. Kate couldn’t see anything until she came to the open entrance, the wooden door splintered and broken in. A glance around the corner revealed a dog like being. She thought it large and downright made of muscle, its maw biting down into a corpse.

She moved back and held her breath, taking a few seconds to calm herself as well as she could. Kate pointed at Jon’s crossbow and then towards the door, she made a monster like expression to indicate what was waiting inside. *The legs were moving. It’s eating a person.* The thought was pushed back as she gripped her weapon.

Jon crept closer and took a look as well. His arms shook as he aimed. He took a deep breath and held it, his eyes focused on the monster before he fired.

The twang of the string resounded as the bolt was fired forward.

Kate pulled the paralyzed man back as she prepared her weapon. She looked around the corner and saw the beast turn around with a staggering motion, a whine resounding as it tried to get to its back with its clawed front paws. Its face looked hideous, long teeth lining its jaws, beady black eyes looking down the small corridor as it growled and charged.

She trusted her weapon and stepped aside, the being staggering out of the entrance before she slammed her crowbar into its skull.

Kate jumped back when it lashed out with its clawed hands. Another strike punched its head to the side before Grey slammed his blade into the monster’s neck.

The thing sagged down, whimpering one last time before it died.

***‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Warg]’***

Kate shuddered, waiting for more monsters to come but nothing happened. She started towards the corridor when Jonathan touched her shoulder.

“No time,” he said with an apologetic tone.

“Right,” she murmured and tried to at least close the door. The hinges were broken. She gulped before she crouched down and pulled out the crossbow bolt from the monster’s back. Her

companions had strained expressions on their faces. They were looking at her. *Fucking hell.*

Kate took a deep breath and started towards the main road.

### ***Kate Lindgren***

***Unspent stat points: 0***

***Class: Berserker – lvl 2***

- ***Active: Mindless Ferocity – lvl 2***
- ***Active: Furious Dance – lvl 2***
- ***Active: Reckless Charge – lvl 1***
- ***Active:***
- ***Active:***
- ***Passive: Toll for the Living – lvl 2***
- ***Passive: Courage of the Unarmored – lvl 2***
- ***Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – lvl 2***
- ***Passive:***
- ***Passive:***

***Support class: Locked***

***Status:***

***Vitality: 14***

***Endurance: 12***

***Perseverance: 2***

***Strength: 9***

***Dexterity: 8***

***Intelligence: 7***

***Wisdom: 10***

***Equipment:***

***Torso: -***

***Legs: -***

***Trinket: -***

***Food: -***