

## Chapter 39 Lunch

Logan finished his lesson and had everyone repeat the rules several times.

“So when do we actually get to use one of those dangerous tools?” Ethan asked, making finger quotes with his hands at the last two words.

“You already have your fire, that’s dangerous tool enough for you,” Logan said.

“Really? We’ve fought monsters together, man,” Ethan said, leaning forward on the couch.

Celeste next to him mimicked the gesture.

Logan looked at the young man and gave him a long stare. “I will give you a weapon, when you don’t want to play with one anymore, and treat it with the respect they require. Not because I think you’re irresponsible or unable to use it. As you said, you have fought monsters. But summoning and flinging a fireball takes a few seconds, it is something you have trained, something you at least somewhat understand by now. A bullet is faster, and far more dangerous to us. If you don’t treat a gun with the proper respect, it will be a greater danger to yourself than it is to the creatures we face. Work on your magic. If I do give you a gun, it will be for backup, and not something to rely on.

“You have to understand that this isn’t a movie. While a rifle is incredibly deadly in trained hands, it is loud, very much so, and it is difficult to hit moving targets in the heat of battle. We might get the time to train with them, but I have a suspicion that your magic will serve you better,” Logan explained.

Kate listened to the explanation, leaning against one of the walls in the armory. *Good thing he’s taking the time to explain it. Ethan might very well sneak down there and grab himself what he wants otherwise.*

Just knowing there were actual rifles with real ammunition in the castle made her feel a little strange. But with all the fights she’s already had, all the death and blood, it was just another thing to add to the pile.

“Alright. I just always wanted to shoot one. What about the shotgun?” Ethan asked.

“That one is probably the most dangerous one,” Logan said. “And it’s mine.”

“Fuck, that’s so unfair,” Ethan grumbled. “We found it!”

“You did, and I might put it to good use,” Logan said. “Maybe one day, but I doubt you’d want to shoot it for fun by then.”

Eloise leaned her head past the entrance of the packed room and called out. “Lunch is ready. Mom, can you grab the plates?”

“Sure, sweetheart,” Melusine said and got up from the couch, leaving her blanket with Celeste.

*It’s almost cozy in here by now,* Kate thought. The couch and armchair had been moved, as was the small wooden table from the living room with a lower height than the dinner table. Most of the games and books were sitting in loosely organized boxes and bags. Shelves and dressers had been added for general storage needs, the space next to the large oven occupied by the former beds from the barracks, reduced to solid firewood.

Kate deemed the thing safe enough to use. They were built to last, and to withstand the fire. If anything in this old burg was to remain, it was the walls and the oven.

The lighting in the armory wasn't great without any windows, but the added security was more than worth it. Plus, they had plenty of artificial light sources already. And they would get more.

Eloise had cooked up a risotto, without cheese but instead plenty of saffron. "Eat well, you'll need it."

Kate closed her eyes when she ate the first spoonful. *Perfect consistency.*

Eloise suddenly took in a sharp breath. "Oh."

They all looked her way, the armory quiet besides the sound of everyone eating.

"What happened?" Jon asked after he swallowed.

"I j... I just got a Class option. It's called Cook," she said, blushing slightly as she looked at her dad.

"That's wonderful!" he exclaimed and stood up.

"Well done, Eloise," Melusine spoke, a wide smile on her face.

"We can finally figure out the food section in our status," Grey murmured to himself.

*Right. I had kind of forgotten about that,* Kate thought, looking at her risotto. *Are you magical?*

*Thought not.*

She continued eating whilst Eloise accepted her Class and read the benefits to everyone while Jon wrote it all down.

Eloise received an additional stat called Versatility, apparently something that helped with picking up random talents.

"Cooks need to use a lot of different tools, I assume that's what it's for," Allison suggested.

"Tools and techniques," Melusine added.

"Sure," Allison said, resuming her lunch.

"There's one skill for cooking, apparently I can infuse food with magic? But it doesn't specify anything. The other one is heat manipulation. Does that mean I don't have to burn wood to make a fire?" Eloise said.

"Maybe you can boil water with magic," Grey said. "That would be fantastic."

"Coffee," Kate said.

"Showers," Allison added.

"And hot water bottles, we might not even need the heater," Kate said.

"Seems like you just became the most important asset in this burg," Melusine suggested.

Bert grumbled something about magic. Kate ignored it.

"I also got cooking tool mastery," Eloise said. "It says I'm more efficient with cooking knives and the like. And the damage is higher too," she added, some of the color fading from her face.

“Oh that’s the same one I have for medical tools,” Melusine said.

*Scalpels and kitchen knives. If that isn’t a mother daughter nightmare combination.*

Kate smiled at the thought and finished her plate.

“Wait, I have to try the cooking one. Maybe it helps when you leave!” Eloise said and quickly went to the hatch.

“You’re not even stopping her,” Ethan complained with a look to the armored Logan.

Logan just looked up from his plate and continued eating.

Allison laughed.

“Shut up,” Ethan said, but his heart wasn’t in it.

Eloise came back up with an open packet of toast and some cheese that was left. “This should technically count,” she murmured and put together a basic sandwich. Just that she did it with focused eyes and sweat pooling on her brow. Kate thought she moved as if in a trance, her hands quick and deliberate, though that could’ve just been her experience as a cook.

*But how often does a cook have to make toast sandwiches? Maybe if she’s ever worked in catering.*

Eloise took in a deep breath. “I think I need to sit down.”

“Come on, it’s really not *that* hard,” Ethan said.

“She used her skill, and I... likely mana,” Grey said from the side.

Ethan looked at the sandwich. “So it’s magical? A magical cheese sandwich?”

“Try and eat it,” Eloise said with a smile.

The young man looked suspicious but did grab the sandwich when he realized the others were watching him.

He looked at it and took a bite. He chewed and swallowed, taking another bite. “Thish ish reallly good holy shit,” he muttered in between, taking the last bite before he swallowed. “Wow, that was the best sandwich I’ve ever eaten.”

“I feel sorry for you,” Allison said with a slight hint of disgust on her face.

“It’s supposed to taste nicer too,” Eloise said with a wide smile.

“Does your status show anything different?” Grey asked. “In the section that says food.”

“Oh, you’re right. It says *common cheese sandwich plus ten Stamina regeneration. Duration two hours,*” Ethan said, looking at Grey right after. “Is that good?”

Grey scrunched up his face. “I have no clue.”

Ethan laughed, Allison shaking her head and some of the others smiling.

“It’s better than nothing,” Logan said. “How long is the drive to Kahrsdorf?”

“Twenty minutes, give or take. Not sure with the ash, maybe fallen trees. It’s not on the slope either, so the roads might’ve been hit by whatever the military dropped,” Kate said.

“The truck we have should be able to handle some off road driving in this area,” Ethan said.

“Any idea how many of those you can make?” Logan asked.

Eloise considered, looking at the toast and cheese. “I mean it’s enough to make four more, but I’m already a little bit dizzy.”

“Just keep an eye on it,” Melusine said. “I feel the same when I heal too much. You can go for a while longer. Until the near blinding headache starts.”

“What blinding headaches?” Jon asked.

“Shush, dear. Do not worry about us,” Melusine said.

He squinted at her. “We’ll have a conversation about that when the others are gone.”

She avoided his eyes and instead smiled at Eloise.

The girl started using the same magic to make sandwiches.

“One step towards equality, and one step back,” Allison whispered to herself.

Kate smiled. She didn’t exactly see a sexism issue with a professional cook receiving a cooking Class. *I do wonder what other benefits different foods can provide.*

“Grey, Jon mentioned you got a support Class as well. Did you want to test and show us what you got before we go?” Logan asked.

Grey got up. “Sure!”

Kate followed them outside as Eloise prepared the rest of the food.

“So, this skill should just make me faster and lighter with wind magic somehow. I tried it a few times already but it feels a little weird,” Grey said. “I’ll take five steps and attack twice, first without the skill and then with it,” he said and took his five steps, his hand going to the hilt of his blade before he sliced the air once, then twice in a fluid motion. The blade went back into its sheath without so much as a sound.

*That already looked impressive,* Kate thought with a smile.

Allison raised her brows whilst looking at Kate.

“And now this is with the skill active,” Grey said. Something about the air around him changed in the next moment, but Kate couldn’t quite place it. His movements seemed to float, the five steps seeming like three to her, the sound less pronounced as well. This time, the blade came out of the sheath faster than she could see it, the air sliced twice before Grey’s hand came to rest at the sheath, the blade back inside.

*The sound was weird,* Kate realized. She hadn’t so much as seen the air around him change, but she perceived it instead. *My fucking hearing.*

“That was insane,” Ethan murmured. “I got this one after Grenndorf,” he said and flicked his wrist, a bright flame flashing outwards for about half a meter in front of him.

Kate felt the heat from over four meters away.

“Wish I’d gotten that before the police station,” Ethan said. “What else did you get?” he asked, looking at Grey.

*Oh. I thought he was just boasting.*

“That’s awesome. Like a melee fire spell. Any idea how much mana it uses?” Grey asked.

“Nope. I just use the spells until my head starts hurting,” Ethan said. “This one doesn’t seem super expensive.”

“Cool,” Grey said. “The only other thing I have is Wind Awareness. I can tell when there are changes in the wind. It’s strange, but I can kind of tell when someone is approaching behind me, just based on the wind. It feels like, some kind of sixth sense to be honest.”

“The more the better,” Logan said. “I’m still at the same ones.”

“Then let’s go level!” Grey exclaimed, his bright smile quickly faltering before he looked at the cobbled floor. “I mean... I... let’s get s... supplies. S... safely.”

“Safely,” Logan said but he couldn’t quite hide the slight smile.

Kate looked at them all as they prepared. She couldn’t help but feel a little more ready for whatever was to come. Compared to the absolute chaos before, they now had their packs, weapons, and magic they all felt somewhat familiar with. Logan would have his heal in case any of them got injured and everyone had a few points in Vitality at least. They were quite literally not the same people anymore.

“Kate, join me for a second,” Logan whispered from near the armory.

She glanced his way and saw him go in. Following, she climbed down into the cellar where she had seen him go.

“The boys aren’t ready,” he said in a quiet voice, setting out the large shotgun shells they had gotten from the police station. He put one of them into the shotgun and loaded it, checking the mechanisms and listening to what happened inside. It all seemed smooth to Kate. The man did something with the loading mechanism before he turned the shotgun to the side, the shell falling into his hand again.

Logan grabbed one of the pistols and turned to look at her. “You on the other hand, I trust with a gun.”

“I don’t want one,” Kate said.

“Exactly,” the man replied. “They have several mechanisms that prevent accidents. Remember the rules I taught you all, point at something, and shoot. It may be useful for emergencies. I’ll have both a pistol and shotgun next to my sword. And I want you to have at least a pistol. It shouldn’t get in the way of your fighting either, there are holsters too. With a safety strap.”

Kate considered it. She really didn’t feel comfortable with a weapon like that but she saw the use of it. Of course she did. Better to have more options. She nodded.

“I’m sorry,” Logan said, looking at her for a few seconds before he joined her side. “Let me show you how it works.”

Kate exited the cellar a few minutes later, the new addition to her arsenal strapped safely to her belt, one extra magazine added in the holster. She shouldered one of the prepared packs and turned her hammer in her hand. It felt light, compared to the gun on her belt. *And yet it’s just as deadly, if not more so. Familiarity will change how I feel about it.*

She considered that at least a hammer couldn't misfire, but Logan reassured her that the guns were well made, and if used according to instructions, were just as safe as anything else.

She found Eloise sitting with her mother, the girl pale and sweating.

"I did it," she whispered with a light smile on her face.

"Yes, that you did," Melusine said.

"Is she alright?" Kate asked.

"She is. Magic is quite an interesting thing indeed. It's like a new muscle, one that I cannot see. She's exhausted. Comparable to a day of physical and mental activity, but I think recovery is faster. I'll keep an eye on her," Melusine said.

"Here is yours," Celeste said, holding up a sandwich wrapped in cling film.

"Thanks," Kate said and took the thing, putting it into one of her jacket pockets before she watched the girl look down into the cellar to find Logan.

Jon was waiting outside, a small table set against the armory. "Kate," he said when she walked out, glancing at the holster before he gave her a small nod. He motioned to the map pinned onto the table. "How familiar are you with Kahrsdorf?"

She looked at the map and found it. "Been there a few times. It's smaller than Keilberg. A few stores that could be interesting. I was thinking the farms just north of it could be good places to go as well."

"It doesn't sound like I can add anything to that. Good. There is only one road that leads north from here," Jon said, pointing at it on the map.

"I don't plan for us to drive into the village itself," Kate said, turning her head when she heard the truck thrum to life. She found Ethan with one arm leaning out the driver window, his perfect confidence faltering for a split second when they locked eyes. She let him be.

"Bags are empty and ready, kits are loaded, and we have our food thanks to Eloise," Grey said when he approached, scanning the sky before he looked at the map.

"Enough juice to cross the valley a few times as well," Ethan added.

"I couldn't find a map of the village itself, but if you're familiar with it, it may not be an issue," Jon said.

"I should have an offline map on my phone, but it's really not that large," Kate answered, looking at the armored Logan, the dented plate helmet on his head, large sword shouldered with a shotgun strapped to his backpack and a pistol holstered on his belt.

"I think we should be ready," the man said. "Ethan," he said, the young man twitching ever so slightly when he heard his name. "You drive."

He opened his mouth for a moment and then smiled. "Yes, sir."

"Kate, passenger seat. Grey and me on the loading area. Fine for everyone?" Logan asked.

The others affirmed.

"I want to see that offline map. Then let's go to the next village," he said. "And see what we'll find."

“Anyone needs to pee, now’s your last chance,” Kate said as she entered the passenger seat.

“I already went,” Ethan said after a moment, both hands on the steering wheel, eyes staring forward.

“Good,” Kate said, managing her hammer and pack in the somewhat tight space before she put on the seat belt. “You okay?”

He glanced her way and raised his brows. “You’re pretty scary.”

“Don’t drive us into a tree, and we’re golden,” she said. “No music this time. We stop about the same distance from the village as we did in Grenndorf.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Ethan said with a smile.

She didn’t correct him this time.

Jon and Allison opened the gate as Ethan turned the car, driving out into the ash covered forest of the Maar valley.

Kate refocused on her hearing as the gates closed shut again. They were back outside of their walls. She took in a deep breath and gripped her hammer.