

Chapter 58 Contact

Jasia looked at the radio, the group quiet for a moment.

Bastian glanced at them. "Roger," he said and pointed in the indicated direction. "Out."

"Get ready to fight, everyone," Mateo said. "Guess there's no easy way out."

"Why did he ask us not to attack some woman?" Niklas asked as they got in position.

The next gunshot sounded closer. A level higher, Jasia assumed.

They prepared in their usual formation, Bastian in the front with his shield.

Jasia glanced past him and into the hallway. She could probably force one or two more spells out but it would cost her dearly. She gripped the combat knife in her hand and focused.

"Steady now," Mateo said, preparing his bow.

Another gunshot resounded. On the same floor, down the hallway and to the left, facing the elevator doors.

Jasia heard the undead moaning, running steps. She gulped, holding her breath. The door to the stairwell slammed open, undead screeching as they ran into the hallway facing the elevator doors. Light now came from the left, illuminating the undead.

A close by scream made her lock up, Jasia watching with wide eyes as the undead stumbled in their steps, disoriented for a short moment before someone crashed into them, downing two of the dead humans before they swung a large medieval axe in a horizontal arc. A strange sound thrummed with the movement, three of the creatures cut in half with the single strike before the axe dug into the wall with a dull thud, the corpses falling as more of them rushed towards the fighter.

Jasia took a slight step back.

The red-haired woman.

The woman kicked away one of the undead, taking a hammer out from her belt before she swung right, bone broken and blood exploding outwards with a strange wet sound before she hit the next creature.

Jasia heard the woman laugh, realizing that none of their group had moved. They all just stood there and watched as more and more of the undead came out from the stairwell, chests dented in and heads splattered by the now hammer wielding woman, swinging her weapon in wild and powerful arcs. She stomped down on the ground, a wave of red flashing up, splashing and slowing some of the creatures before a gunshot sounded out from behind the fighting woman, a flash of golden light impacting one of the undead heads, bone and blood exploding backwards to paint the elevator doors in red.

Three more shots struck three more undead, backs and heads exploding with gore wherever the likely sacred magic hit.

The woman had pushed ahead, fighting on top of the corpses as bullets flashed past. One of the undead caught her hammer, more pushing against them before she let go, slamming a combat knife

into the creature's head before she moved on to the next. Again, she screamed and Jasia felt terror down to her very bones. She couldn't move, standing entirely frozen as a ringing sound came to her ears. She watched the woman stab through the neck and chest of another undead, charging forward with a strange burst of speed before she slammed the blade through the stomach of another, the strike lifting up the monster before she kicked it away.

An undead grabbed on to her arm, another stabbing with a knife at her face as she held the creatures back. The woman turned both herself and the undead sideways before a loud blast resounded, the first undead sent flying towards the elevator. Another flash of gold from close by removed the other undead's head in its entirety, the last one that had been moving.

Jasia watched as the red haired woman covered head to boot in blood and guts grabbed on to the battle axe stuck in the wall, pulling at it before her hands slipped off. A large figure walked past her, a man clad in a set of medieval knight armor, his helmet visor closed as he aimed his shotgun towards the stairwell door.

While the red-haired woman had fought with wild movements, the man's steps were measured and deliberate.

The knight glanced in their direction and nodded slightly, checking the chamber of his shotgun before he stepped in their direction, his back turning towards them, headlamp shining towards the stairwell door. He carried several rifles and a small pack. "More coming," he said, the same voice as they had heard through the radio, calm and measured.

Gripping her combat knife, Jasia watched the blood covered woman stumble past the corpses, wiping the blood off her hands before she glanced in their direction. A wild gaze, considering, then losing interest. She found her hammer and put it back onto her belt, then turned and walked into the stairwell.

The knight loaded shells into his shotgun, reloading when he was done and turning towards them. "Come with us, and stay close. This might take a while."

More.

Kate heard them in the hallways below. Running, crawling, undead monsters waiting to be killed. There were more allies now, following them. They were afraid, she could tell by the way they walked, the way they breathed, the way their hearts beat in their chests.

She kicked down the door before her, rushing to the first undead before the creature even turned around. She swung her axe, cutting through the monster's neck without feeling any resistance. They couldn't do much without a head, she found. Turning right, she blocked the incoming sword of an undead orc, kicking the creature back before she swung again, her strike snapping back his raised weapon, Kate lodging her axe deep inside his chest.

She let go and jumped back when two undead humans tried to tackle her. She caught the small kitchen knife one of them wielded with her hand, the blade barely cutting into her fingers as she

punched with her right hand, breaking the monster's nose before she cracked its skull with a second punch, annoyed that her blood magic rupture did not work with her fists.

She found the other undead already falling, an arrow through its skull. Glancing back, she saw the ally who had shot it and smiled. A good weapon, she found.

The fight went on, her allies occasionally helping as she slaughtered her way through the undead, every one of them that she killed healed the minor wounds that she sustained, every one of them she killed, gave her more strength to keep on fighting.

When the last one fell, Kate wiped at her face and listened. There would be more of them outside, she had seen them in the distance but the fight here was over. She breathed faster, fighting her instincts and the urge she felt to go and look for more. Kate closed her eyes, staggering backwards and hitting a wall before slowly, she deactivated her spells.

"Back?" Logan asked.

She glanced at him and nodded. "Yeah. I'm here. You alright?"

He gave her a nod. "Let's get to the western entrance and discuss our next steps there, before more of them show up."

Kate found a few of her skills had leveled up but no Class levels or any tier upgrades.

She glanced behind Logan to see an entire group of people. The allies that she had seen but only now did she really look at them. They all wore a mix of black, gray, and dark green winter clothes. One of them, the largest one, wore blue and black riot gear, including the shield and helmet. She glanced at the fire axe in his hand, not recognizing him, though he did seem vaguely familiar.

The one wielding a modern archery bow had greasy and curly black hair and a beard, tanned skin, and blue eyes. He was smaller than the riot gear man with brown eyes. They were the only two in the group that didn't look outright terrified of her. She didn't blame the others, smelling the blood, even tasting some of it in her own mouth. She spit it out and nodded to the group. "Kate, nice to meet you all."

"I'm Bastian. Think I've seen you before," the large man said. "Emergency driver or firefighter?"

"Firefighter. What about you, police?"

He gave her a nod and then pointed towards Logan who had taken the lead.

"Anybody else make it?" Kate asked. The question was out before she could really think about it. Did she want to know?

"I think so. A few from Falstadt. Don't know their names, there are some three hundred people in the bunkers." Bastian said.

Kate followed behind Logan, feeling her heart beat, a pulse going through her, hearing the words of the man. She focused, listening for more undead as they made their way through the dark corridors.

"You two the only ones in your group?" Bastian asked.

"We are... seven now. The others don't fight out here anymore," Kate said.

They were quiet for a while until Bastian spoke up again.

"I'm sorry."

Kate shook her head.

Logan entered into a spacious office once they reached the closed exit facing the western part of the large structure. The way they had come from.

“You’re not injured?” one of them said, a woman close to Kate’s own age if she would’ve had to guess. Tan skin, black eyes and hair, the latter up in a bun. Green eyes with a focused gaze, most of the fear gone now, it seemed. She was smaller than Kate.

“I heal when I kill monsters,” Kate said.

“Handy, wish some of them had that, might’ve saved me from a headache or four. Aisha, good to meet you,” the woman said and reached out her hand.

Kate showed her bloodied hand, seeing Aisha nod and smile.

The others still seemed apprehensive but Kate didn’t care much as long as they didn’t do anything stupid. She was glad they were safe, glad that they had arrived in time.

“How are we looking?” Logan asked, looking at her.

“Clear for now but that could change any minute,” Kate said, tuning out the others for a moment to listen to the surroundings.

“You said you’re with the Falstadt Union? Are you with Valery Lang?” Logan asked.

“We are,” Bastian said. “I assume you heard the radio transmissions?”

“We did, came to find out more about the undead. To come and fight them,” Logan said.

“Us as well,” Aisha said. “Didn’t quite go as planned.”

“You saved our asses,” the archer said. “I’m Mateo. With your armor, and that axe... you raided Keilberg Castle?”

“The gear is from there, yes,” Logan said.

“You came here to find out more about the undead? What happened?” Kate asked.

Mateo nodded lightly. “We did.” He sighed. “We’ve made discoveries that suggest there are places changed by magic. Underground tunnels and caverns that didn’t exist before.” He raised his brows. “You found something similar?”

“Near Keilberg, there is a massive cave entrance that shouldn’t have been there,” Logan said.

“Stone stairs inside as well.”

“Exactly,” Mateo said. “And that’s also where most of the creatures come from. Not all of them but we’ve seen enough to be sure there are nests, summoning magic, or whatever else they do to gather more monsters in there.”

“We’ve seen corpses rise in Grenndorf,” Kate said, thinking back to the police station and their first encounter with the monsters.

“Yes. That was early on, when the initial skirmishes and raids killed a lot of people. But with all the predators and the snow, we’ve not seen that happening much anymore. And yet there are still more of them coming.”

“From the direction of Falstadt,” Logan said.

“You found out where exactly,” Kate said. She felt another pulse go through her blood.

“We did. An entrance into the side of a hill. A white marble stairwell led down, dim red light within. We had to retreat when one of the monsters spotted us despite our magic,” he said. “Didn’t look like an undead. It was tall and thin, with claws and antlers. It was...” He gulped.

“Skinned,” Bastian said.

Mateo nodded. “We found a lot of undead near the entrance, coupled with bloodied foot and shoe prints leading into the place. It’s possible that whatever has caused all these corpses to rise, it may be somewhere down there.”

Kate touched the head of her hammer, gripping the metal.

“They were moving in groups, hunting in the forests. Do you know if there is someone more intelligent commanding them?” Logan asked.

Mateo shook his head. “We haven’t found out. Based on current theories, the undead, similar to the Eratur that seem to originate from Kloster Buchneit, have instincts and goals but they are not willing to engage in communication of any kind and they attack on sight. It was the same with the orcs and goblins. We haven’t been able to determine if there is a more complex hierarchy in place.

“The creatures, all of them, don’t seem at first glance to plan or hunt with deliberate thought nor a lot of strategic understanding but on a tactical level, they can make decisions. The Eratur retreat when outnumbered and use ambush tactics and traps. Orcs and goblins flee when overwhelmed or injured. The undead don’t. The main thing they all have in common, is killing anything that isn’t them.”

Kate looked at Logan.

He glanced at her and nodded.

“We will go and have a look,” Kate said.

She saw the group exchange glances.

“You want to go down there, just the two of you?” Aisha murmured.

“We need to rest,” Mateo said, glancing between them. “You should come with us, retreat north, and we can discuss our next steps with the Union.”

“We failed,” the man with two blades in his hands said. “Every minute, there will be more of them. And there are already hundreds...”

Kate ground her teeth.

“He’s right,” Kate said. “Besides. We didn’t come here to escort others back to safety.” She paused. “We came here to fight the undead.”

The others were quiet before Bastian spoke up.

“Those of us who can still fight should join,” he said.

Kate shook her head. She had heard them talk about the monster that they’d found. None of them wanted to go back in there. And she had seen them stand, when her and Logan had found them, frozen with fear. Of her or the undead, she didn’t know but she knew that she didn’t want them anywhere close by when she fought, especially in an unknown place.

She could tell that there was more to it, her reaction too strong, too emotional. But she didn't care.

"No," she said. She looked at Logan, giving him a questioning glance. She knew he had come out here to kill the undead just as herself but finding new people might've changed things.

She found no hesitation in the look he gave her.

He sighed and shook his head. "I agree with her. We don't know each other, don't know what we're capable of. Your group should retreat and report. We can meet here again in a few days to discuss what we have found," Logan said.

The other group exchanged glances. Kate saw worry and uncertainty but just as much exhaustion.

Mateo sighed and shook his head. "Alright. We'll rest up and report back. Hopefully we'll be able to return with more people as well."

"We can bring you to the outskirts of the industrial sector, and you can decide when to leave," Logan said.

"We appreciate that," Mateo said. "We will wait until nightfall, and then we go north. We will be back here in three days, at six in the evening. This same room."

"We'll be there," Logan said. "Now, the location of that entrance you found," Logan said.

Mateo gulped. "Sure. I'll mark it," he said and got out a map of his own.

Logan looked at the map and copied the marker that the man pointed out. "We leave when you're ready, and find you a place to stay until nightfall."

"Thank you," Mateo said. He opened his mouth to speak but then chose not to.

Kate packed her own things before she put on her cloak and pack. "Let's get you out of here then."

Kate checked the surroundings with her hearing, herself and Logan soon leading the group from Falstadt through the industrial sites, occasionally hiding or changing directions to avoid small groups of undead.

They reached a guard house at the edge of the structures and the group decided it would be the best place to stay until night fell.

"Safe travels to you all," Kate said and meant it. She saw that none but Aisha and Bastian met her eyes. And she was glad that none of them had pushed to join them.

"And to you. We'll be seeing you in three days from now," Mateo said in return. "Good luck out there."

Kate nodded, glancing at Logan before they left, silently walking through the snow covered and empty industrial complex. They soon reached the office building where they had fought before.

She thought back to the moment when they'd first heard a new voice through one of Jon's radios. When they had learned that they weren't the only ones left alive in this valley. When she knew that they weren't fighting alone.

The realization had made her feel hopeful, as if their castle didn't seem like the last bastion in the world anymore. But the thought of going with them now, of fighting with them by her side, it made her stomach tighten, made her think of Grey, Bert, and Ethan. People ripped away from their lives, to fight undead monsters in a city they no longer knew.

She had seen how terrified they were, had heard their heartbeats. They were survivors. But they were not here to fight by choice. The choice was taken from them.

And she didn't want more of them to die.

She didn't want to see it.

Didn't want to feel it.

But what she knew that she could do, was use the fucked up powers that were given to her, to kill every last one of those monsters.

So that they didn't have to.

Soon, Kate and Logan came up on the field of snow between them and the supposed underground entrance. Already, she could hear and see some of the creatures moving in the distance.

Kate set down her pack and gripped her battle axe. The blade of it was bloodied. "How's your ammo?"

"Low. I'll need yours," Logan said.

She nodded and set down her pack and rifle. "Don't think I'll need it. Your magic?"

Logan went through her pack, stocking up with ammo. "It runs out when it runs out," he said.

She grinned and waited as he reloaded and checked his weapons.

"Whatever we find in there," he said. "We stick together."

She felt the weight of her axe and closed her eyes. All of the death she had seen. All the fear, all the pain, all of it, all the shit that the past weeks had brought here. Had brought to the Maar Valley. To Falstadt. Kate felt her blood pulse and opened her eyes. She was calm and breathed deep, then started walking, hearing Logan follow.

"We stand against death, and fight for the living," he said, a slight hum coming from his direction when his magic took hold. "Monsters have come to our home. Now let us go, and hunt them down."