

Chapter 74 Possibilities

Kate soon joined Logan in searching through the rest of the cellar, Aathi slowly clearing out the corpses of the butterflies, using various large bags and empty crates they'd found in the station. They found more of the same weapons they'd found in Grenndorf, handguns, sniper rifles, and assault rifles, including another stock of ammo. More than in Grenndorf too.

"Enough gear here to equip around twenty people," Logan said after a while.

"Sounds good," Kate said. "What now?"

"We radio the others, report, see how they're progressing, then we move on to the next target," he said.

"I'll help Aathi with the corpses, let me know when we're leaving," Kate said and got to work.

Kate and Logan left again soon after. The Union fighters had checked several locations in the meantime, and they'd started categorizing and bringing supplies to their base at the villa. They would later move on to the police headquarters as well to move what Kate's group had found. Aathi stayed to prepare things to be moved.

Their next target was the military address in the northeastern section of town that Logan had learned about. A small fenced off square building, one story high.

"Doesn't look like much," Kate said as she looked around the desolated streets to see if any undead were nearby.

"They made the effort to fence it all off," Logan said and swung his sword through the steel wires.

Kate smiled when she saw that he'd cut through with barely any resistance.

"Let's see what's inside," Logan said and led the way, Kate following.

The steel door was locked, the few windows grated and shuttered.

She checked for monsters and then kicked at the door, the walls shaking slightly but the lock held. She grunted.

"Do it again," Logan said.

She did, and this time, the door bent inward at the lock. She kicked a third time and the door flung open. Kate smiled to herself before she saw a man in greens sitting against the wall a few meters ahead. He held a pistol in his right hand and fired at her, the bright flash followed by the loud reverberating sound. Kate felt her head rock backwards before she felt more impacts hitting her chest, her skills activated on instinct before she dodged aside and pressed her back against the wall right next to the door. She breathed fast, waiting for the gun to run dry then heard the groan afterwards, and the sound of the undead reloading.

Her ally said something from the other side of the door but she couldn't waste the opening, rushing inside and using her charge to close the distance. She slammed her axe into and through the sitting undead's head with a close and upper cut move, lodging the enchanted steel in the wall beyond.

Kate kicked away the handgun that fell out of the undead's hand before she listened for more. There was nothing. She felt slight pain from her brow and her chest, resting against the wall before she deactivated her magic. "Clear," she said, her voice raspy. The pain was worse now but manageable, nothing compared to the venom or acid of the butterflies.

I was shot, she thought, heart pounding in her chest. She saw Logan rush inside with his headlamp on. "He hit me in the chest," she said, gulping. "And grazed my head..."

Logan touched the side of her head. He stared at her brow with wide eyes before he started opening her jacket.

"What? How bad is it?" Kate asked, her voice frantic, a ringing noise in her ears, from the gunshots or the fact that she'd just been shot.

Logan helped her out of the jacket, several bullets falling to the floor with the motion. "Stay still," he said and raised her shirt. He looked up at her. "They all... only two bullets pierced but... I can see them, just a few centimeters deep. How bad is the pain?"

"It's not too bad," she said. "Can I move?"

Logan hesitated for a moment. "Yeah, I think so. Let me see if I have anything to get them out."

He set down his pack as Kate raised her hand to her brow where the bullet must've grazed her skin. She froze when her fingers touched something hot. A piece of metal.

A bullet.

It was stuck in her brow, lodged in the skin, and her skull.

"It didn't graze my head. He shot me in the head," she murmured.

"Good aim," Logan said.

"You're... you're not supposed to survive that, are you?"

"No," Logan said. "Probably not. Now hold still, this will hurt, but probably less than I think. Check if you can hear anything nearby, those shots might've attracted a horde."

Kate listened, watching in disbelief as Logan extracted two bullets from her chest with tweezers. It hurt but just like he assumed, not as badly as she had expected. The disinfectant was worse, and worse still the itching from his healing when he closed the small wounds. "Can't hear anything out there," she informed when he moved on to her head.

"I think it'll start to bleed once out," he said.

"Just get it out," Kate said. She watched as he set the tweezers and pulled, then slid off.

"Lodged," he said.

"Let me try," Kate said and set the tweezers. She slid off too. *Bullet stuck in my head*, she thought.

"We'll need pliers," Logan said. "Just leave it in if it's not uncomfortable."

Kate looked at him and raised her brows. The motion hurt a little. Not much. "Sure," she said.

She ignored the bullet in her head for the time being, as best as she could, the two of them checking the surroundings and waiting for a few minutes, checking with the others as well but no undead horde seemed to move in their direction.

So they started to look through the small military building. The room itself was simple. An office with a few screens. Compared to all other places they'd visited, there were blinking lights visible here. When Kate touched the keyboard in front of the screens, they turned on. She stared at the open web pages, news articles about monsters appearing in New York, Sidney, Tokyo, Shanghai, all kinds of creatures. There were photographs too. A video she clicked didn't load, another did.

Screaming sounds came from the monitors, a massive scale covered insect crawling past the windows of an office building before a crash resounded somewhere, people hiding with frantic expressions, some staring into nothing while others talked over each other. The video ended when something large crashed through a nearby door, everything cut off as the video ended.

Kate stared at the screen. She opened another tab and checked if there was a connection. The new youtube tab didn't load but the icon on the task bar suggested there was internet. *Shit.*

"Seems like they have emergency power," he said, looking at the screens. "Here you go," he added, handing her a set of pliers. "Want me to take a photo before you take it out? Not everyday you get shot in the head and live to tell the tale."

"Funny," Kate said and set the pliers around the bullet. It took a moment but she got a good grip then and pulled. She didn't like the sound that her skull made at all but powered through, checking to make sure she wasn't pulling out more than intended. The bullet came free a moment later and Logan pushed a gauze against the wound to stop the bleeding. His hand glowed in the next moment.

"Good as new," he said. "Felt like it barely used any mana too."

Kate still didn't quite grasp that she'd been shot in the head. And survived. *What does that mean about the power of those butterflies? They pierced my skin... though I suppose not all of them could, and they didn't get deep either.*

She thought back to the first few undead they'd faced back in Grenndorf, how much more powerful those monsters had felt compared to the orcs and goblins they'd had to face before. She'd become stronger since then, that much she knew. *Clearing an entire cellar of monsters, all by myself.* She breathed. *Maybe the hordes aren't as far away as I'm thinking.*

"There are stairs going down. I got his keys as well," Logan said.

Kate glanced at him. She saw that he had covered the body. "Let's check it out then," she said and summoned her axe from within the wall. It took a little longer as the blade wedged itself out and then flung into her hand.

She turned on her headlamp and took the lead, rubbing the itching part of her brow as she sighed. She glanced over at the wall where the undead had sat, and saw the streak of blood leading away. Not from her axe, she realized, and there was nothing else in here either. She ground her teeth, and checked down the stairs.

A single locked door was at the end of it, opened with one of the keys that Logan had taken.

This time, Kate didn't stand right in front of the entrance. "Seems clear," she said after a moment of listening. Her Echo Awareness let her know what was inside right when Logan found and flicked on the lights.

She stepped next to him and looked into the large cellar, turning off her headlamp. “Well.”

“Yeah,” Logan said.

“Think this will do?” she asked.

He nodded slowly to himself.

Kate looked into a long cellar lined with large machine guns, ammo boxes, crates, large shells, tubes she assumed to be artillery launchers, and large weapons suggesting either grenade launchers or rocket launchers, maybe even both.

“Yeah. Yeah, I think this will do,” Logan said.

Kate tried to connect to other websites on the working computer and documented anything she deemed relevant from the still open sites by taking pictures with her phone. She checked through the local files too but while there was no password on the pc itself, there were plenty of security measures for any programs she tried to open. For many of the files, she simply got server errors. There was still quite a bit to sift through when Logan returned from the cellar.

“Got a rough inventory now,” he said. “We should probably meet up with the others and discuss the next steps. It’s getting late too,”

“Sounds good,” Kate said. She prepared her things as Logan reported to the others and suggested a meeting back at the villa.

“Ready to go?” she asked.

He gave her a thumbs up.

“I think his name was David,” she said, having seen the username on the computer.

“I know,” Logan said and got something out of his pocket. A set of dog tags, the silvery plate caught by the metal chain. “Let’s make sure what he was protecting is put to good use.”

Kate nodded, stepping out into the fallen city with her axe at the ready. Their levels were growing with every fight, as was their understanding of magic, enchanting, crafting. But all that didn’t mean they couldn’t use what the military had left behind.

They reached the villa at Schlosstrasse 14 without further issues, Kate noticing the tremors of a moving horde at one point, but too faint to be an issue. They announced their return and found Lewis opening the gate for them.

“Welcome back, Exterminators,” he said and grinned. “Heard about the police station.”

“Nasty fuckers,” Kate said.

“The maggots, or you?” Lewis said and clapped her arm. “I’m kidding, great job. Come on in, we’re making coffee.”

Kate entered to find the ground floor of the villa slightly rearranged. There were a dozen filled sports bags and a few crates standing nearby, categorized with colored labels.

Valery stood next to a large dining room table, talking to Alexander about logistics. They'd gotten a blackboard into the villa too, a small list of prioritized loot and locations listed, some ticked off already. A large map was taped to the table.

"The heroes return," Latia said, the woman sitting on a nearby couch, the lounge on the ground floor remaining as it was, though it felt a little bit more cramped with the addition of their gathered supplies, or loot, depending on perspective.

Aathi nodded in their direction, sipping from a steaming cup.

"You look right at home," Kate said as she walked over and sat down.

Aathi smiled. "Always wondered how a place like this looked on the inside. Not exactly creative, and there's so much space that's not really being used."

"You're missing the artistry," Latia said. "But yes, I understand you mean a more practical use." She looked at Kate and smiled. "Coffee?"

Kate raised her brows and smiled back. "Sure."

Latia grinned and got up, pouring a cup for Kate before she handed it to her. "Fine now that you know you can't be poisoned?"

Kate took the cup and looked at it. A beautifully crafted porcelain cup that she'd expect an old British woman to own. She supposed it fit to the villa. "We don't know if it was poison or acid," she said and took a sip. "Don't think that's how poison works either. Thanks, Latia."

The woman bowed her head lightly before she sat down. "I love tea time."

"We're drinking coffee," Aathi said.

"Don't ruin the mood," Latia said with a perfect smile.

Kate closed her eyes and relaxed into the fancy couch. She looked up at the wooden ceiling and sighed, then drank more of the coffee.

"We found a military storeroom," Logan said.

"You did?" Valery said, looking at him with a piercing gaze. "What's in there?"

"I took inventory," Logan said. "High caliber machine guns with tens of thousands of rounds. Not the kind that are supposed to be carried, though I guess those with high Strength can give it a shot. Several dozen frag grenades, mortars and shells, and anti tank launchers."

The others were quiet for a long moment.

Alexander turned to Valery. "Do you think that counts as that shred of hope you were looking for?" He spoke with a dry tone.

Valery smiled. "Let's get this info to Maximilian. Thanks Logan. Before we discuss our next steps, do you two mind if we use you in a little bit of marketing?"

Logan glanced to Kate before he looked back at Valery. "What do you have in mind?"

A few hours later, before night would fall, Kate and Logan led the others back through the dungeon tunnels and out of the city. They met a few undead on the way, the Union fighters taking care of them. No special variants showed themselves.

“Good work today,” Valery said when they reached the chemical plant office building. “Rest up, and we’ll see you here again tomorrow.”

Kate nodded. “Do be careful on the way back.”

Lewis smiled. “We’re ten people, you’re two.”

“I’d bet on them, to be honest,” Aathi said.

“Looks like you got close,” Bastian said when he joined them outside the office building. “The others are ready to leave in a few minutes.”

“Good, should be gone before night falls,” Valery said. “You be careful out there too,” she added, tapping Logan’s arm with her fist before she did the same to Kate. “More work tomorrow.”

“More work tomorrow,” Logan repeated and nodded to Kate.

She shouldered her large pack and lifted the heavy bags as well, ready to return home, to their castle.

The way back was mostly unproblematic, though they did have to hide from a group of undead rushing back towards Falstadt, not because there were too many to face but they didn’t want to risk damaging the gear they had with them in a fight.

Logan informed Jon as soon as they were in range of their radios, Allison, Jon, and Melusine helping them up and inside the castle walls before they returned back to the armory. The sun had set by then, Kate leaving the heavy gear near the couch before she sat down and opened her jacket.

“Survived another day out there,” Allison said and then squinted her eyes. “What are those?” She got close and checked Kate’s jacket. “Archers?”

“I was shot,” Kate said. “By an undead.”

“That’ll be annoying to fix,” Allison murmured. “Try not to get shot next time.”

“Got it,” Kate said.

“You’re alright though, right?” Allison asked.

Kate gave her a smile and nodded. She was glad Logan didn’t jump in to tell them that she’d caught a bullet with her head as well.

Melusine was already checking her with her magic. “Getting more and more tough,” she said when the glow around her fingertips waned again. “You’re healthy as can be.”

“Yeah, I’m not even that exhausted,” Kate said. *Not enough fights today.* She remembered the cellar of the police headquarters but she supposed a few more of those kinds of fights were in the cards now, with all of her stat points and skills. As long as there were things to kill to get resources back.

“Show off,” Allison said with a grin and sat down next to her. “I’m exhausted myself.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Kate said.

“I know, just fucking with you,” Allison said.

“Food is ready soon,” Eloise said as she came out from the cellar hatch. “Did you-”

“I drank from mine,” Kate said. “Worked like a charm. Well, like a spell.”

“Yes!” Eloise exclaimed, a broad smile on her face.

“Our alchemist,” Jon said and walked over before he touched her shoulder. “Well done.”

Eloise beamed with joy before she got serious and nodded to them. “I’ll check on the food.”

Kate watched her go before she glanced at Allison. “Any progress on armor?”

“Hey, hey, let’s not rush things here,” Allison said. “Can’t fart out art in a single day.”

“She made those potions in a few hours,” Kate said, glared at her, then laughed. “I’m just fucking with you.”

Allison rolled her eyes.

“A helmet would be nice though,” Kate said.

“I’m working on it,” Allison said, her voice serious.

“Mel got her support Class too,” Jon said and smiled.

“Ah you don’t have to,” Melusine said.

“No, go on,” Jon added.

“Well, I’ve been growing that plant with the light spell I had, and now, I’m a magical gardener, or something like that,” she said and smiled. “It’s quite exciting but with the recent weather, it’s not really something immediately useful I suppose. I’ve moved a few pots into the upper floor, still just testing things but it would be nice to be able to grow our own food, assisted with magic.” She walked closer to Kate and Logan and whispered. “And magical ingredients for Eloise.”

It was obvious that she liked that thought, and Kate liked it too. More so the food however. Their stocks would run out eventually, maybe not for a long time, with Falstadt and other settlements around but once that was gone, they had to hunt or plant their own vegetables, berries, and fruit. And with how devastating the monsters had been to not just humans but animals too, she wasn’t sure the hunting part was feasible. If they didn’t plan to start eating monster meat. *No bograths, orcs, or goblins... maybe Wyverns.*

“How was your trip, other than getting shot of course?” Jon asked. He had his magical tome open, pen at the ready, an intense look in his eyes.

“First off, we brought you something,” Logan said and opened the large pack that Kate had lugged back.

“Wasn’t that heavy,” Kate said.

“Barbarian,” Allison whispered.

“I hear you,” Kate said.

"I know," Allison whispered.

"I have no idea what that is," Jon said as he looked at the large box.

Logan extended a large antenna. "It's a radio. With enough range that you should be able to communicate with the Union. Valery gave us a frequency too, and she's very interested in our enchantments and potion making."

Jon smiled and started writing. "Tell me everything that happened."

"I'll go take a shower first," Kate said.

"Go on, I like this part more than you do," Logan said and took her spot on the couch. He got out his own notebook and started.