

Chapter 7 Shock

Kate stood there for a few seconds, confused as to what had happened. The dull pain she felt from her legs and face slowly crept to the foreground with her skills now disabled. She grit her teeth, bringing a hand to her head as the exhaustion came over her. It felt similar to coming down from an intense adrenaline rush, just ten times more extreme.

“Got to get back,” Logan murmured as he turned around.

She wiped at the blood dripping from her brow. *Shit.* Her focus was on the crowbar on the ground. The bloodied crowbar. Corpses, goblins and orcs. Heads smashed in. Kate doubled over and puked her guts out.

“Are you...” Grey asked but stopped himself when she held up a hand.

“Help Logan,” she said, blinking her eyes to regain some resemblance of focus. Her head thrummed. Something had cut into her legs. *Blood. Gotta get back. Where’s my crutch?*

She remembered leaving it on the ramparts. *Wait... my stomach doesn’t hurt.* She raised her shirt and found the bandage still covered in blood but the pain was gone. *Shock?* she asked herself but it didn’t make sense. She felt the pain from her legs and face. *Focus. Focus. Not important now. Get back inside.*

Grey had gone to Logan, unsure how to help the man. Logan looked over and put an arm around the young man’s shoulders, his steps really more akin to shambling.

Kate followed when she saw the large two handed sword still stuck inside one of the orc’s necks. She froze, the sight simply bizarre. *What the fuck?* she grabbed the slightly raised handle and ripped on it a few times until it came loose. The wet sound reminded her of preparing meat. *Of course it would. It’s the same thing, Kate,* she thought, smiling for some reason. *Go back. You lost a lot of blood.*

She dragged the large weapon behind herself, the thing sliding on the earthy ground and occasionally bumping into a rock. *He needs the weapon. For more battle.*

A sudden confusing thought made her stop. She stood there, bathed in early moonlight before she turned towards the line of trees. There were goblins still alive. Her right eye twitched, a drop of blood rolling down into her eye. Kate wanted to rub it but found the sword too heavy to lift her hand. And she couldn’t let go either. *We didn’t kill them all.*

A part of her knew that fact was bad news. Scouts, reinforcements, information on their location, numbers, abilities, armor. But what confused her more was that she felt angry. Something cold. The enemy had to die, but it had escaped. Why?

“Kate, don’t stop, come on,” Jonathan walked closer. His movements slowed before he came to a halt a few meters away from her.

She turned to look at him with the one eye not blinded. Was he scared? Was there a monster behind her? She looked and found nothing. *Well, I’m covered in blood and whatever else stuck to my clothes. That was quite the rampage... anybody would be scared.* She grinned at the thought before her face turned serious. *What the fuck is happening to me?*

“It hurts,” she said.

The look in his eyes changed and he rushed to her, grabbing the large sword before he moved his arm below her shoulder. “I’ll help. You did well. We won. We survived. Come, it’s just another few meters.”

Kate didn’t talk. She felt the pain, the confusion, the joy of killing. *Joy of killing?* Her breathing sped up. She was panicking. It had happened before, she knew what it felt like. Mostly when she had still been a child. Unable to do anything, unable to fight, or help. That wasn’t her. Not anymore. Kate didn’t panic. Kate was in control. Kate was experienced. And yet even though she knew what was happening, she was powerless to stop it. *Just let it pass. Focus on something else. Blood. No. Something nice. Death. NO!*

“It’s gonna be okay,” Jonathan said, his voice calm now. They were through the gate.

Something snapped, the spiral gone as she broke down to her knees. She took a deep breath, then another one, and a third.

“Mel, Kate is injured too,” Jonathan said.

Too? she looked up, smelled puke and blood now. Her own. A hand went to her nose but the touch stung. *Broken.* She snapped it back into place, groaning at the pain. Her hand came away bloody, but what else was new? Someone shut the gate behind them. The sound of the heavy wooden bar sliding into place somehow grounded her, just a little. Something heavy between her and the monsters out there.

Beside her lay the armored man, Logan. Kneeling next to him was Melusine. She checked the armor for cuts before she went on to the dented head. “Nobody move him. Grey, go get me a pillow.”

“He was hit on the head...” Kate said, still on her knees. *I hit him. Why did I do that?*

“Kate, I need you to focus. Listen to me, look at me,” Melusine said.

She did as the woman asked.

“Jon, come and hold his head. Careful,” the woman said and slowly handed him over before she walked to Kate. “I need light. Bert, move over.”

The old man grunted and stepped over with the lantern in his hand, an electric one giving off a warm light.

Kate blinked at the light and turned away slightly.

“You’re in shock. Lie down,” the woman said and helped her. “Tell me where you’re injured.”

“Cuts on legs. Face, broken nose, blood,” Kate murmured.

“Good. You’re gonna be fine,” the woman said and moved to her legs. She checked each cut in the pants before she sighed. “Nothing dangerous. I’ll disinfect them later but you’ll survive. No stretcher here Bert?”

“Nah,” he muttered.

“One of the beds then,” Melusine said. “We can’t leave them out here.”

“What about the corpses in the barracks? I don’t know what I should believe but we should keep the

door closed. If Grey and Kate were right about the undead...,” he said.

Grey returned with the pillow and gave it to Jon, the two carefully stabilizing Logan’s head, eliciting a groan from the large man.

He moved his hands up.

“Stop! I’ll take it off soon. Just lay down, you’re probably concussed. At least,” Melusine hissed and raised Kate’s legs as well as she could. “Grey, get me a bed frame and mattress from somewhere. How are we doing, Kate? Talk to me.”

Grey nodded and rushed off to Bert’s house.

The old man muttered something before he put down the lantern and followed with a slight limp.

“Spinning,” Kate said.

“Good. You will spin for a while. But it will get better,” Melusine said.

“Killing... I killed... killed so many... it... it,” Kate said before she sobbed. She rubbed her eyes again but all she did was smear around the blood and tears.

“They came to kill us. It was self defense,” Jon said in a calm tone.

You don’t get it. I enjoyed it. I loved it. I want to go kill more! What is happening?! She gulped, forcing herself not to share the insane thoughts flashing through her mind. It was her Class, she realized. It was obvious. Berserker. Isn’t that what Berserkers do? Lose their minds? Go and kill until they’re incapacitated? Until they can’t move anymore? Is that happening to me? Is it infecting my brain somehow? Changing me?

She closed her eyes and took in a sharp breath. Everything that had happened in the past days came crashing down on her. The monsters, the magic, all that death, and killing. All that violence. The feelings, fear, confusion, pain, anger, the frenzy. She felt goosebumps. *Fires are out. What you saw. What you did. Think after a good night’s rest. You lost a lot of blood. You’re not yourself. But you will be again. This magic shit saved your life. It saved everyone’s lives today. That’s all that matters.* The thought helped. Calmed her just a little. Gentle hands led her onto a soft mattress. She looked up and saw Melusine’s face, slightly strained but smiling. The world rocked lightly, then up and up until she was moved down onto a bedroll.

“That was the easy one,” Melusine said as she brushed sweat from her face.

Eloise stood up.

“You can help carry,” the woman said as they once again heaved the frame and mattress down and away.

Kate smelled the blood, the stuffy air. And death. She smelled death. Not her. *The woman. The blonde haired woman. Did she come with Logan? Who was she?*

“Are you okay?” a voice asked.

Deep brown eyes stared down at Kate, the girl crouched and with her arms crossed. “You have blood on your face,” she added.

“Thanks. I didn’t know,” Kate deadpanned, exhausted and apparently in shock. *Where’s my blanket?*

The girl smiled. “No problem! Do you want to wash it off? There’s a rug here.”

Kate smiled back. “That would be nice.”

Celeste stood up, a few quick steps resounding before she was back, water dripping on Kate’s face. She carefully brought it down when she noticed Kate didn’t grab for it.

A cool feeling came to her face, her eyes covered by the wet fabric as a sigh went through her. “Thanks. Celeste?”

Two small steps resounded, the girl moving closer.

“Is there a blanket somewhere?” Kate asked.

More steps before something rough was pulled onto her. The girl didn’t quite manage to cover her but the effort alone was warming.

“Thanks,” Kate whispered.

The girl returned to her corner and sat down, the two of them silent for a while, their breaths the only sound in the room. Whistling wind moved past outside, the noise dulled.

Kate snuggled into the blanket. She felt safe, the spirals in her mind slowing down, exhaustion taking over near entirely.

“Did the woman die?” Celeste asked in a whisper.

She was quiet for a while. “I think so. I’m sorry.”

The girl didn’t reply for a few seconds. “Oh.”

Kate didn’t know what to say. Dealing with kids that age wasn’t exactly her strong suit. The truth in a gentle way was her usual approach.

“Will you die too?” Celeste asked, the sound a little weaker now.

“Someday,” Kate said and turned towards the girl. She moved her hand and lifted the rag slightly. “But not today, or tomorrow. Not for a long time,” she said and flashed the girl a grin. More confident than she felt.

Celeste giggled. “I think you’re right.”

“How come?” Kate asked.

“The monsters hit you yesterday. And now there’s more blood. You’re like Logan!” she said.

Kate put the rag back and rested her head on the shit pillow. “He was pretty strong with his armor, like a knight.”

“No. The one with the claws,” the girl said.

With the claws? What does she... ah. I see, she thought and started laughing.

Noise came from below, the remaining people bringing up the injured man before they shut the door behind themselves. Melusine spent the next ten minutes carefully taking off the man’s helmet before she applied an ice pack. He muttered complaints but lacked the strength to stop an experienced nurse from doing her job.

Kate fell asleep what felt like a few minutes later, the cool rag coupled with the warm blanket

bringing her back to ages past, her mom bringing her hot soup when she was sick. She heard someone talk about a brave knight facing down a dragon, unsure if it was Jonathan's attempt to distract his daughters, or just a dream. Either way, she was glad for it.

The rest of the night, she slept like a rock. Chirping birds woke her coupled with shuffling steps. Sunlight came through some of the cracks in the ceiling, the air even worse than she remembered. She felt her face sting, just like her legs. Her whole body felt like she had gone through a sixteen hour shift twice in a row. Her stomach rumbled. A good sign, she thought and turned to the side.

The blonde woman was no longer there, dried blood on a bedroll the only thing that remained of her. The red haired man was still sleeping. He twitched occasionally. Neither of the girls were there but Logan lay in his bed, her previous bed, and glanced her way. Green eyes, tired, with bags under them. He had a bandage strapped around his head, an ice pack entangled within. Logan no longer wore his armor, the pieces stacked up in a pile nearby, his sword resting against the wall.

"Good morning," he said.

"Morning," Kate said and rubbed her eyes. Her skin was dry, bits of blood flaking off when she touched it.

"You look horrible," the man said.

"Appreciate the pep talk," she answered in a dry tone. "You're charming too, with that head wear."

He smiled ever so slightly. "Glad you made it."

Kate stood up, slow movements to prevent her from getting dizzy. She looked down and found her work pants cut in several places. Everything was covered in blood. "Lovely," she muttered. "I need about eight baths."

Logan huffed. "Go get them then. I believe in you."

"Feeling okay?" she asked.

"Better than yesterday. Concussion probably. Can't really move straight," he said.

Oddly straight forward, Kate thought with a light smile. "You'll survive. Thanks for yesterday, and... sorry for hitting you. I don't know what got over me."

"Some magic shit probably. Don't worry about it, you hit like a woman," he answered.

Kate blinked. "Well. Yes." He was bullshitting her of course. His helmet alone had prevented worse coming from that punch.

"I did get a Class too," he said and closed his eyes, resting his head.

"Oh really? Valiant Knight?" she asked with a smile.

"Something like that," he said. "I think Eloise made food by the way, said she's in the kitchen next door if either of you wake up and can move."

"Sounds wonderful. I'll go wash my face first," Kate said, mumbling the second half.

"Good idea," Logan mused.

Kate glanced at the sleeping red haired man. Logan had mentioned his name but she had forgotten. She glanced at the large knight and decided not to ask right now. Plenty of other things interested her too but that could all wait. She was filthy. Filthy and hungry.

She stepped down the stairs and out to the courtyard. A few clouds were visible in the sky but it was mostly sunny. A chill wind blew through, reminding her of the autumn. Nobody else was outside, so she went over to the old barracks, wooden stairs leading her to the second floor where a toilet sign led to an open door.

Inside the small room, she found two closed doors, a basin, and a broad mirror. She nearly took a step back, seeing the zombie staring back at her. *The undead are real. But it's me. Holy shit*, she thought and glanced to the door, hoping nobody else had seen her. *Bert might actually just shoot me on sight.*

She turned on the faucet and carefully washed her face. Several bits burned and stung, others near entirely numb. Her nose definitely didn't feel right but it mainly just hurt when she touched it. She could still breathe and smell. Kate looked back up and smiled lightly. *From Halloween costume to MMA fighter.*

Her face was covered in bruises and cuts. Her cheeks felt numb, the right side of her visage a little swelled. *Looks like I got into several fights.* Kate's grin vanished when the thought crossed her mind. She lowered her head to the basin and retched for a few seconds. Nothing of substance came out. She brushed away the spittle hanging from her lips and shuddered. Images of smashed in goblin heads came to her mind. She forced herself to think back, reliving the battle with a clear mind. *There were so many. I didn't hesitate at all. Just went out into the forest and killed them all.*

She no longer felt the strange joy. More apprehension, fear of a loss of control, and a strange confidence. Her dream made sense. Of course it did. She had thought she could fight, and she really could. Injured and armed with a crowbar of all things. Kate checked the bandage now, still seeped by now dried blood. She pulled on the fabric and raised it a little. *Skin... perfectly healthy.*

"Hmm... toll for the living indeed," she mused. Kate closed the door for a moment and pulled down her pants. Most of the cuts were indeed shallow, two bandages likely taking care of the worst ones. The wound from the arrow didn't hurt anymore, a quick check revealing the skin perfectly recovered as well. *Scary. But I won't complain.* She forced herself to look at the corner in her vision, messages expanding when she focused on them.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Goblin Archer]'

'ding' 'You have defeated [Goblin Archer]'

...

'ding' 'You have defeated [Goblin Archer]'

There were nine in total.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Orc Raider]'

'ding' 'Berserker reaches lvl 2'

Stat points +2
Perseverance +1

'ding' 'Mindless Ferocity reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Furious Dance reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Toll for the Living reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Courage of the Unarmored reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches lvl 2'

Kate instantly allocated the new stats into Vitality.

The whole thing definitely felt weird. But right now she was more worried about getting some fresh clothes, food, and most importantly, a coffee.

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: -