

Chapter 10 Blood

Kate couldn't hear her own breath or her own heartbeat. The ringing in her ears had stopped. *Quiet. Sleeping.*

She repeated the words inside her head as she crept into the restaurant she had once known. They had taken it, were sleeping on the floor as if it was theirs.

Kate felt the resistance as she pushed down the sharp hunting knife. She removed it and crept on to the next monster. Bloodied blade in hand, the woman crouched down to each of the small green creatures. She stabbed into their throats with slow and calculated movements, the gurgling sounds now louder as they drowned in their own blood.

She grit her teeth. *Quiet. Fight! Quiet.*

Her body twitched as she bit her tongue, the taste of blood filling her mouth as she continued through the room. The dull pain felt good, calmed her down. She wanted to use her crowbar, wanted to crush their skulls, wanted to see their fear, hear their dying words. But she stayed calm, forced herself to move through the room.

Another was by her side now. An ally, she remembered. He helped. Killed with her in tandem. And he would fight, when the time came.

His mouth moved when their work was done but she didn't listen to his words.

There were more, she knew, upstairs. And so she crept onward, ignoring the sounds of all the monsters they had left to die. *They have to pay. All of them. Have to pay.*

She ground her teeth, blood dripping from her chin. A glance around the corner revealed a monster at the end of a long wooden corridor. Its yellow eyes were half closed, the creature forcing itself to stay awake.

Too far, she knew. Quiet. Impossible.

She tried to communicate her frustration but failed to form coherent words, maybe because of the blood in her mouth. It was terribly hard to focus on talking.

Her ally looked at her and glanced around the corner. He lightly tapped the wall near the stairs.

Not quiet!

She grabbed his chest but he just pointed towards the corridor, fear in his eyes.

Kate stopped. She heard the sound of tapping feet, confused sounds coming from the creature woken by the noise. *Smart*, she thought and pressed herself against the wall, blade at the ready.

She turned the moment the creature came close enough, her knife ramming into the being with a hook like blow, the weapon penetrating into its chin and through half its skull as she raised it up from the ground. She let it fall and stabbed it a few more times to make sure. Blood splattered onto her clothes, the stench of shit and piss mixing in with everything else.

"Kate, we should go," her ally whispered.

She looked at him with a confused expression. *More enemies.* The thought was clear, she could tell there were more. The one green monster was guarding others. Six closed doors remained in the hall and she had to kill what hid within. She stepped over the mutilated corpse and ripped her arm free of the pathetic grip of her ally.

He was scared. She could downright smell his fear.

Kate opened the first door. *Quiet.* A dark room lay within, a bit of light coming in through the half closed blinds. She shut the door behind herself and moved, quick steps bringing her next to the large bed. A sleeping orc lay within. Kate aimed her blood soaked hunting knife and stabbed down at the large monster's exposed throat.

The weapon sunk into its flesh. Yellow eyes shot open as it went to grab its throat, the creature rolling out of the bed and clattering to the floor with a gurgling sound.

Kate raised her crowbar and waited for the opening. It came a second later as the beast looked up. She ripped off half his face with the first strike. The next one broke something. It took another five strikes to kill it. She closed her eyes and shuddered, blood pooling below the cooling corpse.

Her ally had entered the room as well, his stare the same as it had been before.

Fear.

She touched his shoulder and squeezed. *Quiet.*

"We... will... win," she whispered and locked her eyes with his. "Not... afraid."

He took a deep breath and got out of the way, his blade half covered in blood.

She smiled at the sight. He was with her.

The opposite room was much darker but she could hear the enemy. Could see the silhouette. A single goblin, sleeping on the floor and on top of a blanket. He wore more clothes than the others, trinkets and monster pieces in its thin gray hair and beard. The creature died the same as all the others. It gurgled and sputtered as it tried to raise its hand towards a small wooden staff. Kate stomped her foot down on its small fingers, bones breaking as the creature whined. *Yes. Die,* she thought and grabbed its bleeding neck, her knife falling onto the blanket. She raised it up and looked into its eyes. *You made. A mistake,* she thought. The words didn't come out but she knew it understood. *Pain and fear.*

She let him fall onto the blanket and grabbed her knife again.

Her ally stood next to the door, waiting with his blade.

Kate turned around, alert as she heard steps from beyond the closed door. Heavy impacts shook the wooden frame as her ally jumped back. She pointed at a dark corner and threw her knife aside. More noises, a set of shouts. Doors slamming. She pointed at the entrance and then down towards the ground floor, two fingers there. "Three. Enemies."

The door was opened with a strong push, a massive orc stepping inside with his chipped and bloodied curved sword in hand. He uttered something as his eyes fell on Kate. He charged with a shout when he saw the dead goblin.

Kate sidestepped the powerful strike. She swung her crowbar in return but found the orc crouching before he slammed his shoulder into her. The blow raised her off the ground, all the air in her lungs punched out with blood splattering from her bitten tongue. She landed on her legs but stumbled,

hitting the wall behind her as she watched his blade descend from above.

She held up her crowbar with one hand, just barely slowing the blade before it dug into her jacket covered shoulder. It severed the fabric and bit into her flesh. Kate grinned and raised her other hand with another one of her hunting knives, the weapon digging into the underside of his left arm. She let go of the blade and pushed up with the crowbar, using both hands now. She just barely managed to get the hooked weapon out of her shoulder before she kned him right between his legs. A steel blade came in from the side and stabbed into his neck before he staggered back and growled something in his guttural tongue.

Kate didn't let him finish. She had taken another of her knives and held it up at the height of his face. Reckless charge activated as her body was forced forward with a surge of energy. Her blade impacted his face with a dull sound. Her wrist broke from the impact, the two falling down with her weapon embedded deeply in its head.

She stumbled up and heard steel hit steel, something clattering to the ground. Kate rushed up to see her ally dodge a blow before he was stabbed in his stomach.

No.

Her charge activated once more, her crowbar swinging forward and impacting the large orc in his chest. She took a step to the side, the orc doing the same as they glared at each other. A gash showed on his chest, his weapon gone as he reeled over. Her descending crowbar was caught in his hand before a blow hit her head. This time no teeth went flying. Her nose didn't break. The second strike made her head snap to the side, her hand going for the last knife on her belt, too slippery to grip the handle.

Another strike hit her head, Kate falling to the ground with her vision swimming. The ringing sound returned. A kick sent her on her back, the air pushed out of her. She scrambled up as the orc recovered his sword. He swung down at her but she rolled aside. The being staggered when the bloodied tip of a blade broke out of its stomach.

"Fuck you," Grey murmured before they both went down in a clatter.

Kate grabbed the knife and moved to the orc, a heavy strike into his neck severing the spine. She felt her vision go dark when a bit of energy returned to her. The world had gone back to normal, her focus gone, pain coming from her face and shoulder. She fell to her knees and puked. Her eyes opened wide. "Grey!" she turned him around, a slight smile on his face as he looked up at her. Blood soaked through his jacket. "Fuck... we have to get you out of here... there was another one," she said with a stuttering voice, grabbing one of the knives and pushing it into the sheath on the side of her belt.

"It... s... okay," the boy got out.

"You shut the fuck up and stay awake," she answered.

Kate grabbed her crowbar and raised him in a princess carry, hoping the sword hadn't penetrated all the way through. He wasn't heavy, but neither was she in any state to carry someone. And yet she pushed on. She listened as she stumbled down the stairs. Her eyes fell on the near twenty goblins on the ground, all their throats cut. She knew it had been her. Her and Grey. *What the fuck did I do?! Why? We were supposed to get supplies and leave. We're not here to...* She remembered the face of Lars, an arrow in his eye, thought back to the massacre on the main square, the moving legs of the man eaten by a Warg. She gulped. She understood.

It was supposed to be me. Just me, she thought and hurried out into the open. An orc lay in front of the skiing store, a wooden bolt stuck in its head. She walked past and inside. “Jon. Help me, he’s bleeding out,” she said, forcing herself not to shout. She knew there were more monsters around. At least her state of battle didn’t push her to fight on. In a way she was glad the orc had punched in her face. She set Grey down at the back of the store and opened her pack. Jon did the same, spilling out the medical supplies he had in his, hands shaking as he looked for something appropriate.

Kate grabbed the first large bandage she could see and rushed back to Grey. She opened his two jackets and moved back his shirt, wiping away the blood from his stomach with a clean cloth. The wound looked bad but there was no time to consider. She pushed the gauze down and grabbed another. “Jon, come here, put pressure on it,” she said and started moving the bandage around him.

Jon listened to her words, stepping next to her and applying pressure to the bandage.

Quick breaths and adrenaline kept them going, the three people entangled as layer after layer of cloth was wrapped around the injured man’s abdomen. Kate slapped his cheeks when the second bandage was done. “Stay with me, Grey,” she said and wrapped a third one around him. “We need to get out of here. Fast,” she said.

Jon just shook his head slowly, eyes on his blood covered hands as his breathing sped up.

Kate grabbed his face with both her hands. “Focus. We’re here. You’re here. Wipe the blood on a cloth, pack the bags again. I’ll get us that truck,” she finished and stood up. Kate ran towards the exit when her legs gave under her, just barely managing to catch herself on the door frame with her vision blurring. *Magic.* She focused on the bottom right of her vision.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Goblin Warrior]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Goblin Scout]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Orc Scout]’

She moved past the kill notifications to what she deemed relevant.

‘ding’ ‘Berserker reaches lvl 3’

Stat points +2

Perseverance +1

‘ding’ ‘Berserker reaches lvl 4’

Stat points +2

Perseverance +1

‘ding’ ‘Mindless Ferocity reaches lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Mindless Ferocity reaches lvl 4’

‘ding’ ‘Furious Dance reaches lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Furious Dance reaches lvl 4’

‘ding’ ‘Furious Dance reaches lvl 5’

'ding' 'Reckless Charge reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Toll for the Living reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Toll for the Living reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Courage of the Unarmored reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Two Handed Weapon Fighting reaches lvl 3'

Stats, I can't fucking run anymore. Endurance, and we have to carry him. Strength.

She put two points into each of the stats. The plan had been more Vitality but if she wanted Grey to have a chance at survival, she had to move. Now. Kate felt a surge of energy flow through her, as if someone had injected her with a cocktail of steroids, caffeine, and methamphetamine, only one of which she was familiar with. But it sure as hell felt like a punch. Her vision had returned to normal and she felt ready to run for hours. Kate could feel the muscles in her arms and core straining. She took in a deep breath and blinked her eyes. Then she ran.

Lars lay where they had left him. She turned him around and searched his pockets, ignoring the panicked thoughts and sinking feeling in her stomach. The keys were there. *I'll come back for you, I swear it*, she thought and grabbed her crowbar, running off towards the general store on the same street. Kate looked at the road and gulped. There were no monsters in sight at least, but a few corpses would be in the way.

The windows to the store were shattered, a chaos on the floor inside. The vegetable and fruits section was emptied. Much of the rest seemed either damaged or thrown to the ground.

She didn't go inside, instead running past the building and to the parking lot at its side. Three cars were parked, the last one being the white truck of Lars. Kate could see various dents and scratches on the vehicles but most of the windows were still intact. *Too high for goblins and wargs*, she thought and rushed to the door. Kate fumbled with the keys until she managed to get it open. A glance to the loading area showed a few empty crates but more than enough space for her companions. *Don't you dare fucking dying.*

The car sprung to life, a quick check of the fuel gauge showed just about full. "Thanks old friend," she murmured and reversed, punching the gas to get out onto the street. Kate hadn't exactly known Lars well. They had exchanged pleasantries whenever she had bought something. She distinctly remembered him hitting on her a few years back. A nice gesture really, but her stance on dating hadn't changed, and with the shit that was happening now, she didn't think it ever would.

"Don't get too close to people, you idiot," she said to herself in an angry whisper. Kate felt goosebumps on her arms when she drove through the bloodied street in reverse, wincing when the truck went over a bump. She stopped in front of the skiing store, a last glance taking in Lars's prone form. It still didn't feel real. And in a way she felt more connected to him than ever before. Kate opened the door and stepped out, her hand gripping the crowbar as she looked towards the central square, dull pain coming from her shoulder. Concerns for later.

She rushed inside and shoved a jacket under the door. "Get the bags, I'll take him," she said.

Jon nodded and rushed past her. He had moved the bags closer to the entrance, now chucking them into the back of the truck.

Kate moved down to Grey. He still breathed. She lifted him with one arm below his knees and one

below his back. Kate had trained carries like this one many times before but not once had she been able to lift an adult this easily, let alone a man. She looked at Jon's strained face as he came back inside.

"The d... dogs," he said.

"Get your crossbow, and jump on the back," Kate said and moved outside, Jon coming out behind her. "Help me with him."

She raised Grey onto the loading area of the truck, Jon helping from the other side as they set him down as gently as possible.

He's gonna feel that drive, if he survives, Kate thought as she went back into the car. The growls she heard coming closer were muffled when she shut the door, two approaching wargs visible in the rear view mirrors when she slammed her foot onto the gas.

Kate Lindgren

Unspent stat points: 0

Class: Berserker – lvl 4

- ***Active: Mindless Ferocity – lvl 4***
- ***Active: Furious Dance – lvl 5***
- ***Active: Reckless Charge – lvl 2***
- ***Active:***
- ***Active:***
- ***Passive: Toll for the Living – lvl 4***
- ***Passive: Courage of the Unarmored – lvl 3***
- ***Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – lvl 3***
- ***Passive:***
- ***Passive:***

Support class: Locked

Status:

Vitality: 14

Endurance: 14

Perseverance: 4

Strength: 11

Dexterity: 8

Intelligence: 7

Wisdom: 10

Equipment:

Torso: -

Legs: -

Trinket: -

Food: -