

Chapter 56 Warmth

Kate woke up early on the next day. She usually did now, her Vigor stat points from Omen of Vengeance starting to make a real difference to the resting time she required. She had experienced plenty of work shifts on too little sleep, after a while it had always started to fuck her up. Now however, she had not slept more than around five hours every night in the past week and it still felt like she had always gotten eight.

With all the shift plans, emergencies, and most notably the dreaded night shifts she'd had to deal with in her life, she considered Vigor one of the best benefits she'd had unlocked so far. Of course the super strength and insane durability was kind of alright too.

She took over Jon's shift and let him go back to bed, situating herself up on the ground floor of the armory, the small room lit with warm light. She'd found a bottle with hot coffee in the cellar, prepared by Eloise who'd had an earlier shift it seemed. The others stayed in the cellar for their shifts but by now it just felt claustrophobic to her. If any monsters came to the castle, she would hear them long before they could reach the door.

Kate sighed and drank from her coffee, relaxing on the couch with her hammer to her left and her axe to her right, fully loaded Glock and rifle magazines ready for her to take out when they were ready to leave. She would've liked to put on some music but she was the only one awake and she neither wanted to wake up any of the others nor did she want to attract any monster attention.

Her axe, she found, was sharper. And it looked good as new, all the dirt and grime but just as much the scratches gone entirely. *Looks shinier too. What did you do, Allison?* she wondered and drank some more of the coffee. *Hmm.* She looked at the bottle and took another sip. It was good but she felt like one of the reasons she'd always loved it was how it woke her up in the morning. But now, with all her magic, it just didn't quite feel quite the same anymore. She felt awake as it was, even without the black liquid.

She still drank it of course. It was delicious either way.

Veronica had once tried to explain to her that coffee didn't actually make her more awake but that it simply dulled the brain's ability to detect tiredness.

Wonder if she made it out, Kate thought, sighing as she thought of the smooth and calm voice the woman had always had. She'd been the dispatcher and secretary of their firefighting force. *Would've made for a better radio host, that's for fucking sure. But then I suppose her skills would be more suited to actual battle coordination.* She smiled to herself. *Veronica with vision from a chopper and me with all my skills active and an ear piece in my ear guiding me to the next target.*

She hoped the woman hadn't died.

Kate glanced over to the hatch when she heard someone else wake up, their breathing changing. It was Logan based on the slight grunt. She could feel the vibrations in the floor when he stood up and grabbed his things. Allison got up as well, earlier than usual, she liked to stay up late.

Kate drank from her bottle and looked to Logan when he climbed up, the wooden ladder steps creaking under his weight. He still slept with his armor on. The few pieces that were still usable.

"Morning," he said, glancing at her and then to the coffee.

“Morning, sunshine,” Kate said with a flat tone, closing the bottle before she held it out towards him.

He grunted and grabbed it, drinking as Allison rose from the hatch, the bags under her eyes and the hunched shoulders suggesting she might’ve needed a few more hours of sleep.

“You know you can sleep longer, I’m on guard duty,” Kate said.

“Gotta finish something,” Allison murmured under her breath, walking up the stairs without another word.

Logan looked after her, Kate soon hearing the generator upstairs come to life, followed by the loud tacking sounds of the Strohringer 1986 punching through whatever material Allison had chosen for her next creation.

“How are you holding up?” Logan asked, closing the bottle before he handed it back to her.

Kate looked at him, then back at the entrance. She made to speak but closed her mouth again. How was she holding up? “Does it matter?”

Logan took the hammer and sat down on the couch. He didn’t speak.

Kate felt her blood pulse. Something clicked in her right ear and she could hear a ringing for a few seconds, the sound declining before it vanished. “Yourself?” she asked.

He grunted, then chuckled to himself.

“Pretty fucked up,” he said finally.

They were quiet for a long moment, Kate hearing the whistling winds flowing through the castle yard beyond, the rustling of snow covered leaves.

Logan looked the hammer over, its surface entirely clean, the dents and slight bend it had developed gone entirely. He grunted and held the weapon out towards her. “Ready for more?”

“Yeah,” Kate said, hearing the sewing machine above stop, soon replaced by the sounds of metal hitting metal. She scooted over and leaned against Logan, quiet as she listened to their cosplayer turned magical crafter work. She sighed, nestling herself against his shoulder.

“You’re not falling for me, are you?” Logan asked after a while.

Kate turned her head, her face close to his. She didn’t see a hint of embarrassment or confusion in his face. She stayed there for a moment. “Might have a few years ago,” she said and turned back. “Bad idea to be with someone in this job.”

He put a hand around her shoulder and closed his eyes. “Yeah. It is.”

It felt good, to feel his warmth, to hear his heart beat so close to her. It calmed her down, knowing what they would have to face out there. Knowing what they had lost already. She could feel her heart beat a little faster, could feel her breath change. She smiled at it all, reminded of how simple life could be. She thought of her first kiss, how embarrassed and disappointed she had been. She thought of the first time she’d had sex, how nervous and tense she’d been. *All the things we are told, all the things we should and should not do, should or should not feel.* She could feel the warmth of the man sitting next to her and closed her eyes.

It was simple. And it felt nice.

Kate woke up with a slight start, breathing in fast before she realized where she was. She moved away but saw that Logan had taken his arm back.

He glanced at her, a slight smirk tugging at his lips.

She felt embarrassed for a split second before she smiled. "Charming."

"Cute," he said and sighed. "Guess you needed the sleep after all."

"I didn't," Kate said and stretched now. "Just felt nice, to be close to you."

"Now don't give me ideas, I'm still human," Logan said.

"Think of how powerful our babies would become, with all this fucked up magic," Kate said, starting to prepare her gear when she heard Eloise stop at the ladder. "You can come up, we're clothed."

The girl scrambled up, looking everywhere but at the two people. "Sorry, I... I mean, I didn't..."

"She was just joking, Eloise," Logan said with a calm voice. He smiled at the girl. "Thanks for the coffee. Allison's been working, might want to check out what she's been doing." He got up and made his way towards the stairwell, gesturing Eloise to follow.

Kate glanced at the girl and nodded towards the stairwell too, herself finishing up with her preparations. She sighed, catching herself imagining herself with Logan, alone on the couch. She shook her head, thinking instead of the undead who had barged in here. She supposed things could still feel nice from time to time, and life could sometimes still feel simple too but they had work to do.

"Kate, might want to come check this out," Logan called out from above.

She saw Jon peeking out from the hatch as well now, his hair slightly disheveled. "What's going on? Good morning."

"Not sure," Kate said. "Morning. I'll be upstairs for a moment."

"No worries," Jon said as he clambered up.

"Not quite good as new, but it should fit at least," Allison murmured, her voice a little tense.

Kate entered the room and whistled, seeing the knight armor pieces repaired and mostly dent and scratch free.

Logan put on the helmet and closed the visor. "Yeah, this will work. Didn't know you turned into a smith."

"I haven't. Not yet at least," Allison said. "Just a general mending and repair skill, aided by magic. Suppose your armor isn't magical in the slightest so it wasn't that much effort." She stepped over and grabbed a direwolf pelt from one of the glass cabinets. Allison shook it out and held it up. "This one however, is."

"A wolf pelt cape?" Kate asked.

Allison glared at her, her eyes blood shot. "Cloak. What the fuck would a cape be useful for. No, you add it to the chest piece of your armor. Low grade cold resistance on this one, should help you stay warm, and with the hood up, you'll be harder to spot."

The dark gray pelt looked smooth, Allison clipping it to the large back piece of Logan's repaired armor before she flapped the hood, glancing at Kate.

Kate nodded, not about to be snappy with the overworked and tired smith.

"Made one for you too but I don't know how the magical effect will work. I tried wearing both but could only have one effect active in the torso equipment slot," Allison said and handed Kate both her patchwork jacket, repaired, and a dark gray direwolf cloak. "Try to focus on the cloak, might just be my skills but maybe you can figure it out too."

Kate looked at the jacket and raised her brows. There were yellow scales now covering the chest and stomach, as well as her back, replacing the boiled leather that Allison had put there before. "You improved it."

Allison grunted with a slight smile and gestured her to do what she had said.

Kate put the jacket on first, and then the cloak above, the latter covering her shoulders and reaching about halfway down her thighs.

Checking her status, she found the patchwork armor showing up.

Equipment:

Torso: Patchwork Scale Armor [Common]

- Low grade Acid Resistance

Legs: -

Trinket: -

Food: -

No change, despite the added scales.

Kate felt something however. When she touched and focused on the cloak, she could tell there was some kind of choice to make, as she could instinctively tell there was something she could switch. It took a minute or two to focus on it but then something changed.

Equipment:

Torso: Direwolf Cloak [Common]

- Low grade Cold Resistance

Legs: -

Trinket: -

Food: -

"I switched the bonus," Kate said. "So the acid resistance doesn't work on the scales anymore now?"

"I have no fucking clue," Allison said. "Don't get hit by acid, I guess."

"I mean it's an entire cloak, I'd rather have the cold resistance. The armor still does what armor does," Kate said, tapping the scales covering her chest.

“That it does,” Allison said. “Though I did make something else for you as well.”

“Is that?” Kate asked, her brows rising as she looked at the pair of sturdy pants Allison held up. The thighs and shins, both in the front and back, were protected.

“Bone,” Allison said with a tired grin, a sparkle in her eyes. “Fucking nightmare to split, let alone the stench and all the shit I had to carve away.”

Kate breathed in and glanced at Eloise.

The girl looked back at her, entirely unbothered. “I’m a cook.”

“Right,” Kate said and turned back. “They look... great.”

“They look terrible but they’re magical, so take and wear them, if they don’t impair your movements too much. Think they shouldn’t,” Allison said and handed them over. “That’s it, I’ll go hit that ibuprofen and catch a few hours of sleep, my head is killing me. Make sure to come back in one piece.”

“We will,” Logan said.

Kate looked at the pants, then glanced at Logan, the man wearing his knight helmet with a closed visor. She smiled at the absurdity of it all, then took off her pants to get on her new bone armor.

Equipment:

Torso: Direwolf Cloak [Common]

- Low grade Cold Resistance

Legs: Splintered Bone Armor [Common]

- Low grade Fire Resistance

Trinket: -

Food: -

“Fire resistance on my legs,” Kate said. She tapped the bone plates with her hammer before she moved around a little and crouched, then jumped. Movement wise, the armor didn’t obstruct her much if at all, and while there was no physical damage resistance listed, she could tell the bone was quite sturdy. She wasn’t sure if the scales or bone provided the better protection but she would gladly take either.

She noted that Allison hadn’t used the direwolf heads as the hoods for the cloaks, instead having sown other pieces together. *More difficult? Or did she feel bad for the critters?* She didn’t mind either way. Without teeth or ears on her head, the chance of having an enemy grab onto something was smaller, not that she planned to wear the cloak during any large scale engagements anyway.

Kate rolled her shoulders and moved to help Logan put on his armor but she found Eloise had already done as much, the large Paladin checking the individual pieces with his visor down. She took a moment to look at him. When he had first worn the armor, while impressive, it had looked out of place, Logan moving slightly awkward in the large metal gear. Now? He stood with far more confidence, casual even as he checked the different straps and metal pieces. He looked heavy. Like he belonged into the historic set of armor.

She nodded and walked past, tapping his shoulder before she went downstairs to prepare the rest of their gear.

“I laid out what you asked for yesterday,” Jon said, nodding to the table on the ground floor. “Eloise is preparing food, including rations for you two to take with you in case the Word spell works and you can go out farther.”

“It’s called Word?” Kate asked, looking at the small battery powered radio and the laser pointers.

“It is,” Jon said.

She pointed the lasers at the wall and used them, seeing the small green dots light up. Kate checked the frequency on the radio and turned it off when she heard Valery Lang’s voice reciting the same message she had heard a few times already by now.

Kate turned when she heard Logan come down the stairs, his steps heavy and followed by slight sounds of metal. She didn’t miss Jon’s inhale when the large warrior joined them.

“We eat, then we go?” Logan asked.

“That’s the plan,” Jon said. “We’ll test if the Word spell has any obvious limitations and you can go on to hunt more undead.”

“We should take bags too, if we can leave farther,” Kate suggested. Cars were out with the snow, at least the ones that they had available but they could still reach another village in a few hours’ walk. And if the message spell reached them without limitations, they could in theory even stay the night.

“Can you fit them into your pack?” Logan asked.

“I’ll have to take a bigger one but then, sure,” Kate said, looking at the small rucksack they’d taken on their ventures so far.

They ate, a hearty vegetable and bacon stew infused with magic.

Eloise set down a few metal containers as well, pointing at the first. “Mana infused honey, porridge you can heat up or eat cold, more vegetable stew, and,” she said, setting down a zipper bag.

“Treated and mana infused bacon. Jerky, I suppose. Note down if the magic bonuses remain and what they provide, I’ll want to hear about it when you return.”

Kate looked at the young woman, seeing the intense look in her eyes. She nodded. “We will.”

Their preparations done, Kate put on her direwolf cloak, her heavy backpack, and all of her weapons. It didn’t feel heavy. Glancing at Logan, she took in a deep breath, glad they were going out there again.

Logan shouldered his greatsword, the knight armed with a sniper rifle, assault rifle, pistol, and his shotgun. He grunted and motioned for the others to open the door.

Kate gripped her rifle, her hammer strapped to her belt and her axe to her large pack. Checking the chamber of her gun, she nodded to Jon and Melusine. “Ready to go.”

Kate Lindgren

Unspent stat points: 0

Class: Omen of Vengeance – lvl 25

- **Active: Mindless Ferocity** – 2nd lvl 16
- **Active: Blood Frenzy** – 2nd lvl 13
- **Active: Vengeful Charge** – 2nd lvl 5
- **Active: Reaper Jump** – lvl 12
- **Active: Blood Rupture** – lvl 16
- **Passive: Blood for the Living** – 2nd lvl 11
- **Passive: Fury of the Unarmored** – 2nd lvl 6
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting** – 2nd lvl 12
- **Passive: Unrelenting Carnage** – lvl 20
- **Passive: Terrifying Presence** – lvl 7

Support class: Roaring Pursuer – lvl 21

- **Active: Thunderous Shout** – lvl 13
- **Active: Reverberating Charge** – lvl 16
- **Active: Aura of Silence** – lvl 16
- **Passive: Sound Perception** – 2nd lvl 3
- **Passive: Echo Awareness** – lvl 8
- **Passive: Tremor Sense** – lvl 12

Support class: Locked

Status:

Vitality: 30

Vigor: 11

Endurance: 24

Perseverance: 15

Strength: 25

Brutality: 6

Dexterity: 8

Intelligence: 7

Wisdom: 12

Serenity: 15

Equipment:

Torso: Patchwork Scale Armor [Common]

- Low grade Acid Resistance

Legs: Splintered Bone Armor [Common]

- Low grade Fire Resistance

Trinket: -

Food: Hearty Bacon Stew [Duration 6 hours]

- Stamina regeneration +10

- Low grade Fire Resistance