

## Chapter 4 Pain

Kate woke up with her stomach rumbling, the pain of her injuries already less pronounced. She turned her head to find the familiar face of Melusine smiling back at her.

“You’re still alive,” the woman noted.

“Well observed, now I know you really are a nurse,” Kate answered.

Melusine raised her hand and giggled. “You’re lovely, Kate. Here, Eloise made some broth. I hope it doesn’t just flow out into the bandage, but you should be fine.”

“Very reassuring,” Kate said, moving her arm before she winced, hissing at the pain.

“I can feed you,” the woman said.

“Thanks, but I’m a little too old for that,” Kate replied and moved slower, going for the spoon.

Melusine looked at her with a curious expression, her eyebrows quirking up before she cleared her throat. “It wasn’t a suggestion. Your wounds shouldn’t even allow you to move, let alone... please lie down,” she said.

“It doesn’t feel like I’m doing as bad as you think I am,” Kate said, lifting her sweater and shirt to show the expertly made bandage.

“The painkillers should’ve worn off... you should be screaming,” Melusine said.

Kate glanced at her. “Should I? I can scream pretty loudly. Jokes aside, I agree. I mean I should’ve died yesterday night... wait, how many goblins did I kill when I came up here?” she asked, ignoring the queasy feeling in her stomach.

“Three, I believe,” Melusine said.

“I got... a Class, I don’t know if you figured out how to see your status already,” Kate said.

“The nice boy that came with you, Grey was it, he showed everyone and keeps talking about skills and potential combinations and stat efficiency. To be honest, I’d probably suggest various medication if I didn’t see a status myself. I didn’t quite understand what this all means, but it seems to be something like a game?” she said. “How is that relevant to your injury?”

“I got a Class through the things I did, fighting and killing those... monsters. The Class gave me skills too, like... special abilities, think something like a magic spell. To make light, or fire. One of them lets me get back health from enemies I killed,” Kate explained.

Melusine gave her a puzzled look before she focused on the plate of broth. “So you absorb a part of their soul...” she murmured. “That’s pretty scary,” she said and gave her a bright smile.

Kate blinked her eyes. “Yes, yes I suppose it is. Not quite as scary as the monsters now walking through this forest. How are things outside?”

Melusine got up and moved the chair near Kate’s torso. “I suppose you really can eat yourself. But don’t overexert yourself and check the bandages. I don’t want to see you bleed out, even with the screaming remains of monster souls inside of you.”

Kate ignored the remark and started eating, expecting a plain oat broth but instead tasting a creamy mix of flavorful vegetables and oats. She sighed, smiling as she forced herself to move and eat slowly.

“The others are doing... as well as can be expected considering the circumstances,” Melusine said, her expression more serious now. “We closed and locked the gates but Jonathan is still arguing with Bert. Ah you don’t know them. Jonathan is my husband, we were on vacation in Keilberg with our daughters Eloise and Celeste. The latter was allowed to choose a destination yesterday, and Keilberg castle was her choice.”

“Vacation in Keilberg, not the usual destination,” Kate said with a smile.

“Exactly, but I’ve been to Falstadt before and knew how beautiful the area was. Not very touristy either,” Melusine said. “You’re from here then?”

“I am... or was, a firefighter in Falstadt. I lived in Keilberg, was hiking when this thing started,” she said.

Melusine sighed. “A travesty it is, and the weather was so nice. Now the kids have to work through all that horror. I’m glad to have you here then, and again, thank you for saving our lives.”

“It’s part of the job,” Kate said, smiling lightly. “And I was too late to save everyone.”

Melusine looked up at the ceiling. “One step at a time. Always forward.”

They both remained silent for a few seconds, sitting with their own thoughts and memories.

“So who’s Bert?” Kate asked, taking another spoon full of broth.

“An old grumpy man, and the caretaker of this castle. We had to argue for nearly an hour to even get in here yesterday, despite the radio messages, military planes, gunshots, and screams,” Melusine said. “He has also complained about us moving everything into the armory. Jonathan thinks none of the things here are insured, hence the concern.”

Kate couldn’t help but laugh, wincing again at her stomach tensing up. “I think we have more pressing concerns than insurance companies.”

“Says the firefighter,” Melusine murmured with a smile as she stood up. “I will go talk to the others again, let me have a last look at your wounds. When you feel a little stronger, I’ll have a look at that arrow.”

Kate’s smile dropped. “I don’t suppose you have some morphine?”

“Oh, darling. I wouldn’t waste it on that. You’re a tough one, you’ll be just fine,” she said, checking the bandages before she grabbed the empty plate and left.

*God, I’m glad she’s here, Kate thought. And I’ll have to thank Eloise for that broth.*

Left to her own devices, Kate fiddled around with the information at the edge of her vision, checking the status to see if she could gain any more than the obvious.

***Kate Lindgren***

***Unspent stat points: 2***

***Class: Berserker – lvl 1***

***- Active: Mindless Ferocity – lvl 1***

- **Active: Furious Dance – lvl 1**
- **Active: Reckless Charge – lvl 1**
- **Active:**
- **Active:**
- **Passive: Toll for the Living – lvl 1**
- **Passive: Courage of the Unarmored – lvl 1**
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – lvl 1**
- **Passive:**
- **Passive:**

**Support class: Locked**

**Status:**

**Vitality: 10**

**Endurance: 12**

**Perseverance: 1**

**Strength: 9**

**Dexterity: 8**

**Intelligence: 7**

**Wisdom: 10**

**Equipment:**

**Torso: -**

**Legs: -**

**Trinket: -**

**Food: -**

*Berserker. That doesn't sound like me, she thought but found herself enjoying the title regardless. It had helped her survive, and allowed her to protect the people now taking care of her. The abilities had all sounded terribly game like. She wouldn't try them out here in her bed, especially in such a wounded state.*

*The tunnel vision and focus on battle seem a little questionable. Was that what helped me yesterday? After I killed that monster?*

Kate found herself not regretting that one in the slightest, reminded of the dead human. If she could change anything about it, she would've come in and killed the orc before he even attacked.

Adrenaline and stress often brought her into a state similar to what she had experienced, but never quite as pronounced. She could still think, mostly. *Could've also been the blood loss. And pain. Though I don't remember being in much pain... just being... angry.*

She grinned to herself, shaking her head in a slow manner as she considered the implications. Some kind of magical Class that now influenced her behavior in profound ways. *A survival instinct in a way, she thought, comparing the effects to performance drugs, or enhanced coffee.*

*Thinking of which, she mused and looked around, finding her backpack below the bed. Her canteen was still inside, the coffee now obviously cold but she didn't particularly care. It lacked the same punch but she knew the caffeine was still there. It would suffice. For now.*

*Mindless Ferocity is some kind of defensive thing? Sacrifice what is not required... well that could*

*be a lot depending on interpretation. Guess I'll have to test it. And five percent doesn't seem like too much, but I suppose that gets better with higher levels.*

She had to look around the room, feeling a bit ridiculous at these considerations. *We're here now. Gotta use what is available.*

Kate changed the value of auto activation to twenty five percent, not planning to find out what it felt like to get to that level of health. *Losing both arms and legs? Half my head? I'd think you'd die pretty quickly when you reach that level of health. How can something like a health value even be associated with the human body? I suppose it's just a general state. So if I'm bleeding out, I would continuously lose health?*

She couldn't find an actual health number anywhere however.

*Furious dance is pretty straight forward. I assume I'm just going to be more reckless while it's active, justifying the increased damage and stamina consumption. Now Reckless Charge... that's like an actual game thing. I suppose that's the spell I have for now.*

Kate didn't know how to feel about magic. Some kind of force bending the rules governing physics. *Or it's just some new source of energy that allows for it to have a real impact?*

She had to smile, thinking of all the scientists currently tearing out their hair to try and figure out what the fuck had happened. Assuming of course this was as widespread as the radio broadcasts suggested. *I suppose it's better than a black hole or solar flare just wiping out everything in an instant. If only just a little.*

*Toll for the Living... likely what saved me yesterday. I didn't even notice getting the Class but I guess it must've been after killing that Orc.*

She confirmed it by going back through the messages, seeing three Goblin Scout notifications after all her Class information. *In a way they saved my life too*, she thought. At least she had confirmed that everything wasn't some kind of misunderstanding and the Goblins were in fact just straight up murdering people.

*Not that it was really ever hard to understand*, she thought, reminded of the arrows immediately fired at her back in the forest. It had just been so very absurd. *Must've been the last thought of a lot of people... just straight up confusion.*

She tried not to think about it, shoving the fate of the world, even that of Keilberg and Falstadt to the back of her mind. She couldn't deal with the implications right now, and there was nothing she could do in her current state.

*Courage of the Unarmored... seems kind of... weird. Some steel armor is probably still better, but if the numbers go up... or if I wear something like leather or hide armor*, she thought and chuckled. *Like some kind of cosplayer.*

Kate had seen some impressive pictures before but the hobby seemed entirely too complex and expensive to her. She had no talent in sewing or fashion design. *Should be around seventeen to nineteen kilos? Less than the heavy gear at work, but that's not suitable for... fighting monsters... that's just weird... should still allow for some useful equipment however, if not heavy medieval steel armor*, she thought, looking at the museum pieces in the room.

The two handed weapon fighting skill was more than self explanatory. Kate considered using a shield instead but wielding a weapon to fight moving creatures would be difficult enough. *One handed with a shield in the other hand would require a lot more training that I never had. There's a*

*reason we use both hands when handling chainsaws, hoses, and axes. If I really have to fight, might as well do it in a way I'm somewhat confident in.*

*"I'm really considering the pros and cons of different weapons to fight actual monsters," she murmured to herself. I'd leave myself open without a shield or armor, but the Class is kind of pushing me towards that anyway.*

*She thought about it for a while and came to the conclusion that she didn't dislike the style. The overly aggressive approach had worked for her the day before, and she didn't see a reason to switch it up for now. Less to think about.*

*Now I have two stat point thingies, and a lot of stats.*

*She tried to focus on the first one.*

***Vitality – Determines your total health pool and overall ability to sustain damage without dying.***

*Figures. And most certainly what I'll be focusing on for the foreseeable future.*

***Endurance – Determines your total stamina pool and overall ability to subject your body to continued physical activity.***

*That makes it sound like physical activity is some kind of horrific torture. Another really good one. Being out of steam in a flooded basement while clad in gear is not an enjoyable experience.*

***Strength – Determines your ability to lift things and the damage you deal with blunt, two handed, or heavy weapons.***

*Concern for later... my crowbar seemed plenty effective so far, she thought, resisting her gag reflex when she thought back to the goblin pulp she had produced.*

***Dexterity – Determines your ability to be light on your feet and the damage you deal with slashing, piercing, or light weapons.***

*Yeah, no. I'm not about to study fencing.*

***Intelligence – Determines your ability to think quickly and the damage you deal with abilities using mana.***

*No spells so far. And my abilities require stamina, she thought. There was a part of her a little disappointed at her lack of elemental spellage, but Kate didn't really see herself as some kind of witch or wizard. Even in the few role playing games she had played, she usually ended up with something a little more direct.*

*And Wisdom is for mana.*

***Wisdom – Determines your total mana pool and your ability to resist spell fatigue.***

*Wait, I also have the unique one from Berserker.*

***Perseverance – Endurance specialization. Increases your ability to continuously focus on a single task. Slightly increases your ability to resist damage over time effects.***

*Useful I suppose. But indeed a specialization. Are the stamina costs just reduced as I focus on something? she thought, wondering if a single task constituted something like cutting wood, or if it could be vague like fighting monsters for an extended period of time. Kate hoped for the second, assuming her Berserker Class wouldn't award the unique stat otherwise.*

*The obvious choices for now are Vitality and Endurance, no matter how many points I get.*

She tried to select Vitality and managed to put both of her available points into it, seeing as her Endurance was already at twelve. Kate felt her chest heat up. She could hear her heart pounding in her ears before her body calmed down again. *Freaky*, she thought, noticing that her wounds didn't hurt quite as badly anymore, the ones on her leg barely noticeable if she didn't move.

*Ah magic, my salvation. Now I just need a bunch of health potions and I'm golden. Maybe some coffee spiked with them.*

The food section in her status still didn't show anything but Kate assumed it was similar to the clothing situation. Maybe it just needed something with magical energy in it to provide benefits. She would certainly not consider eating goblin flesh, not until she was literally starving. A blue butterfly however, she might actually try.

Kate moved back slowly, trying to sit up in the bed while constantly checking her bandages. They held up. *Did she give me stitches too?*

She knew she should be resting but at the same time she really wanted to know what was going on. The previous day nearly felt like a nightmare of sorts. Kate knew it had all really happened, but accepting these changes would take more than a single day. "Melusine?" she asked, repeating the word with increasing volume. She decided not to actually shout, in case any monsters were nearby. The paved yard outside was rather spacious however and the walls would probably eat some of the noise as well.

The woman came up a few seconds later, immediately rushing to the bed. "You shouldn't sit!" she said as she checked the bandages again.

"I should be a little more sturdy now," Kate said. "I increased my Vitality."

"You're a woman of flesh and blood. Don't talk about Vitality like you're not covered in severe injuries!" Melusine said but didn't actually press the issue, her checkup apparently satisfactory.

"I think you can get the piece out now," Kate said. The longer they waited, the higher was the chance for infection. With anything unpleasant, she'd rather have it done and over as soon as possible.

"Are you sure? I would've suggested at earliest tonight. How do you feel?" the woman asked.

"I'm good. The pain is barely noticeable at this point, and I don't want to sit in a bed while the world is ending," Kate answered. "Also my coffee is cold."

"I can heat it up for you, but I understand. Let me grab a few things and then we can start," she said.

Kate didn't have to wait for long, the woman soon bending over her leg. Pants down and a piece of at least furnished wood between her teeth, Kate held on to the bed frame and looked at the nurse slowly open up the bandage on her thigh. It didn't look pretty. "Remind me," Kate said as she removed the piece of wood. "You've been working in your field recently?"

Melusine looked up and gave her a bright smile. "Oh no, it's been at least a decade. Let alone something as delicate as this. But don't worry, while it's not easy to process, I've seen people die. I'll work through it."

"You're lovely," Kate said as she lied back, a dark grin on her face as she bit down on the wood. "Don't bullshit me."

“I won’t lie to you, Kate,” the woman said in an absentminded tone as she started examining the wound. The pain started a moment later. “Not a lot of blood flow. I think it missed anything important,” she said. “But I can’t tell for sure without any scans. If it’s the same type of arrowhead as the other creatures had on them, it’s going to be difficult not to cause more issues when I remove it. And I’ll have to do it slowly, or it might break off inside.”

“Do it,” Kate said and bit into the wood.

Melusine looked at her with an expression of pity before she stood up and closed the door. “You will scream,” she said and sat down, glancing at Kate again as she hesitated. “I could... look again, if there’s morphine or something else to knock you out.”

Kate just gave her a glare. And then she screamed.