

Chapter 71: Slvenkor

Midor, General Graten, George, Rufus and Talon led a group of soldiers and went hunting for the monsters. Henry also insisted on coming along.

"I don't get it," General Graten growled. "We all saw those beasts. They were huge. Why can't we find them now? How could anything that big stay hidden?"

"It's a big forest," said Midor. "Most people only stay on the paths. They have no idea how thick and deep the forest can get. Plus, these monsters are nocturnal. You won't see them moving around in the daytime. They'll be sleeping somewhere deep in a thicket or in a hole under the ground."

"Well, you should know," said Graten. "You spent long enough with them, didn't you? Trapped in that portal."

"I did," said Midor quietly, with a glance at Talon. General Graten smirked when he saw that his remark had hit home.

"But surely Midor," General Graten said, "Surely nothing in this forest stays secret from you. Don't all the animals report to you?"

"They don't report to me," said Midor. "It's true that I get information from all over the forest, but I have to seek that information out. I've sent out word that I'm looking for the monsters, and we'll see what information returns to me."

It was just at that moment that a fly started buzzing at Midor's ear. "Yes Bartholomew, what is it?" Midor asked. The fly buzzed something that was difficult for the others to hear, but Midor seemed to understand it. "The termites have found the giant spider," he said. "It has burrowed into the ground about a mile from here."

"Do you know where it is?" asked George.

"Yes, it's in a thick part of the forest away from the paths, so the going will be a bit rough."

"The getting there is the least of our worries," said General Graten. "You saw what that thing did to my men the last time it got near them."

Midor nodded to Talon. "Talon, you'll be ready, won't you? You saw what that big blue monster did to Catherine, didn't you? You're going to have to say your spell before the monster gets close enough to attack. We'll try and draw the monster out, but then have to be ready."

"I know what I have to do," said Talon in an irritated tone.

General Graten chuckled out loud that time, but then, as if irritated at himself for breaking character, he barked back, "That's enough bickering ladies. This is my show you're all on. Catherine has made me her chief commander, remember. I'll give the orders and I expect you to jump. Talon, you can hang back if you think it will give you more time to get your spell ready, or you can go upfront if you like, but we'll need that spell as soon as the monster comes out of his hole. I don't want a repeat of last night."

“Understood, commander,” said Talon, but there was a bit of sarcasm in his voice. Midor wondered if Talon was entirely happy in his role being subordinated to General Graten. This was probably not the deal he had originally made with Catherine.

They followed Midor’s directions, until they got to the spot. It was a huge tunnel in the side of the hill. The entrance had been covered up with some large leaves and branches, but they were able to remove those easily enough. The tunnel was about the height of a man.

“Get your spell ready,” General Graten said under his breath to Talon. “Right, gentleman,” General Graten said, turning to his men. “Who wants to go there first?”

“Not for a king’s ransom,” shouted one of the men back.

“Typical,” said General Graten. “If there were any loyalty or determination in the lot of you, you’d all still be in King Richard’s army.”

“I’ll go,” said Henry, drawing his sword.

General Graten laughed. “Typical,” he said. “You already had your shot at fighting the monsters last night, and you couldn’t do it. What makes you think you can take them on by yourself now?”

“I didn’t get a fair chance,” said Henry. “There were too many people in the way.”

“Very well,” said General Graten. “We need someone to act as bait to lure that spider out. You may as well be it.”

“Hold on,” said Midor. “That might not be necessary. Let’s try talking to it first.”

“Oh, this will be good,” said General Graten.

“I can do it,” Henry insisted.

“I know,” said Midor. “Keep your sword ready boy. We might need you after all. Just let me try this first.” Midor walked to the entrance of the tunnel. “Hello!” he called out. “We know you’re in there Slvenkor.

“You know it’s name?” said Henry, amazed.

“I spent two years in the portal with the monsters,” said Midor. “I know most of their names. Slvenkor and I have even encountered each other a few times before in the past.”

“What exactly happened to you in that portal?” asked George. “How did you survive?”

“An interesting question for another day,” Midor answered.

“Typical,” grunted General Graten. “You really do know the name of every creature in this forest.”

“Midor, is that you?” came the voice from the tunnel. “I will plunge my fangs into your flesh and suck your innards dry.”

“You couldn’t catch me the last time,” Midor said. “And this time, I am armed with a sword.”

“A sword?” the monster chuckled. “You think a sword will protect you against me?”

“I guess there’s only one way to find out,” said Midor. “Come out and face me.”

“Ah, Midor, I thought you were smarter than that,” said the voice. “You think you can lure me out so easily. I know you have brought extra men with you. I can sense their vibrations. And I can easily guess, because I am not a fool, that one of them is a magician.”

“I won’t deny it,” said Midor.

“And yet, to show you how little I fear you humans, I will come and face you anyway,” said the voice from in the tunnel.

“Get ready,” said Midor to everyone, tightening his grip on his own sword.

But it was hard for anyone to prepare for the speed in which the onslaught actually took place. The spider came out of the tunnel so quickly that no one had a chance to react before it had knocked over all the men standing by the entrance, including Midor.

Henry rushed at the spider with his sword, but the spider quickly knocked Henry over with its legs.

Everyone noticed that the spider’s legs had all regrown over the night. Vivian had cut several of the spider’s legs off the night before, but they had all regenerated themselves.

The spider pinned Henry down to the ground with two of its hairy legs, and brought its fangs down to strike Henry’s body. General Graten rushed forward to try to save Henry, but the Spider knocked him backwards with another one of its legs.

“Now Talon!” shouted Midor. “Quick!” Midor made the mistake of looking at Talon as he shouted at him.

“Ah, so there is your magus!” said Slvenkor. “I knew you would give him away.”

The spider moved like lightning. Before anyone could react, it had left Henry, and charged at Talon. Talon barely had time to raise a protection spell around him, which raised a yellow shield of light that deflected the spider’s attack as Slvnekor tried to bite him with his poisonous fangs.

“Come on lads,” yelled General Graten to his soldiers. “You know why you’re here! Take some of the pressure off the sorcerer!”

The soldiers surged forward, but the spider knocked them all back quite easily with its legs. It seemed ready for another attack at Talon, but in the short respite that the surge gave Talon, he was able to chant his spell, and the mighty Slvenkor shrunk down and was transformed into a hamster.

“A hamster,” said General Graten. “Isn’t that what you did with the last one?”

“What of it?” said Talon. “It doesn’t do to get too creative. A hamster will be just fine.”

“Are we going to take this one back to Catherine?” asked Midor.

“It seems like a waste of time,” said Talon. “But we should give it the option at least.”

“Slvenkor,” said Midor, “Would you like to go back to the castle and meet our queen? She will turn you back into your true form if you promise to serve her?”

“She will, of course, use magical charms to bind you to her,” said Talon. “So it’s no use imagining you could deceive her, and then kill her once you returned back to your original form.”

“The moment I get back to my original form, I will kill all of you,” said Slvenkor. “That is a promise.”

“Well, we tried,” said General Graten. “Should I step on the hamster now and squash it?”

“There’s no need,” said Midor. “Just leave it alone in the forest. It can’t possibly harm us in its present form.”

“Indeed, there have been rumors going around that not all of the predators in the forest have been respecting the ancient laws,” said Talon. “Things could be dangerous for a small hamster. I wouldn’t be entirely surprised to hear that it got swallowed up by a snake or a fox.”

“I am not afraid,” squeaked Slvenkor in his small hamster voice. “We monsters don’t fear death like you humans do. We live to create fear and death, and then when it is our time to go, we fear nothing.”

“It does seem a bit cruel though,” said General Graten, “to leave him as such a cute little hamster. Couldn’t you have changed him into something uglier or scarier? It was already a spider, why not just leave it as a miniature spider?”

Talon just smiled and turned away.

“Right,” said George. “That’s one giant monster down, two more to go. If we can find the other two before night sets.”

“It’s not wise to be out after dark with these monsters in the forest,” said Midor. “We should go back to the castle now.”

“Agreed,” said General Graten. “We can set out again tomorrow.”