

Chapter 120: Catherine Joins the Quest

After several days of walking, they got to the swamp lands.

"I'll put you down here," Midor said to Jacob the frog, taking him out of his pocket and putting him in the water. "You can swim around just as easily as I can carry you. Careful though. There are plenty of monsters in the water."

"Well don't put him down then," said Aiden. "Pick him up and help carry him. Don't leave him as bait for the monsters."

"When the monsters attack," said Midor, "They could swallow me whole just as easily as they could swallow Jacob here. So I don't think he would be any safer in my pocket. In fact, it's probably better for him to not be in my pocket, so that the monsters can't devour both of us at once. This way, if the monsters get me, at least Jacob still has a chance to escape. That, plus another pair of eyes in the water will help us. Jacob can help alert us to what's in the water."

"I will strive to do my best," said Jacob.

"I've explored the outer-reaches of this bog a little bit," said Midor. "But I've never gone deep into it before. So as we get deep into the bog, we'll be going into areas I have no direct knowledge of."

They trudged through the swamp. The muddy ground made a sucking sound as they pulled their feet up.

"I've just lost one of my boots," Aefar exclaimed.

"We can wait for you to find it," said Midor.

"I can't find it," said Aefar. "It's disappeared deep into the mud."

"Let me help you find it," said Henry.

"Yes, we should all help find it," said Carlyle. "We don't want to be losing our footwear now. We've got a lot of walking to do."

"Yes," said Midor. "Although I'm not sure what use the boots are going to be through the mud."

"You know," said Carlyle thoughtfully, "I've never thought to ask before, but when you transform into a bat, what happens to your clothes?"

"This isn't the time for stupid questions," snapped Aefar. "Can you help me find my boot?"

"What I mean is," continued Carlyle, "is that when you transform into a bat, the clothes seem to transform with you. Are the clothes like a part of you? If you lose your boot--"

"The Clothes are not a part of me, you idiot!" snapped Aefar. "Clearly you don't understand how magic works."

"No, of course I don't," said Carlyle. "But it occurs to me that if the clothes aren't a part of you, then they must disappear every time you turn into a bat. And if that's the case, then they must be recreated every time you resume your human shape. And if that's the case, then maybe--"

"Shut up you idiot!" screamed Aefar.

“Hey now!” said Conn. “Don’t talk to Carlyle that way. He’s our friend.”

“Besides which,” said Brenna. “We’ve already got your boot. We pixies are quite good at finding things in the mud.”

The pixies were holding up the boot, and showed it to Aefar. He snatched it from them angrily.

“Leaving aside the question of where your clothes go,” Midor said cautiously, “I do wonder if you’d be happier flying through this mud instead of walking through it. If the mud sucked up your boots one time, they could likely do so again.”

Aefar didn’t respond, but flung his cape around him, and transformed into a bat.

There was a bellowing sound off in the distance. “That sounds like one of the ancient monsters,” Midor said.

“Well of course!” snapped Aefar. “What else could it be?”

“Shhh!” Midor chastened them. “If it doesn’t know we’re here, we won’t have to fight it. Everyone get low.” Midor immediately lay down in the mud. Henry followed his example.

“I’m not getting into the mud!” snapped Aefar.

“Get high then!” Midor said in a loud whisper.

Aefar the bat and Carlyle the winged lion flew into the air. The rest of them lay low.

There was another bellowing sound, this time much closer.

“It’s Rogbel!” said Midor. “One of the flying monsters. Carlyle! Aefar! Get down!”

It was only a few seconds later that in the dim light they could see the outline of a monster flying through the sky on gigantic leathery wings.

Carlyle immediately dropped down to the mud.

Aefar was slightly slower, and the monster opened his jaws, and gulped down the bat as it flew by.

And then, the monster was gone before the rest had time to react.

“Did we just lose one of our companions?” asked Conn.

“He was a bit of a jerk anyway,” said Brenna. “I can’t say I’m too sorry to see him go.”

“Well, he’s definitely been swallowed whole,” said Midor. “But the question is, what does that mean to a vampire? Vampire’s can usually only be killed by a stake through the heart, or so Aefar has always claimed. So what happens when he’s swallowed whole by a monster?”

“Probably one of two things,” said Carlyle. “Either he’ll be digested in the stomach, or else he’ll come out the other end.”

“Either way, I guess we can count him out of the rest of our adventure,” said Midor. “I’m really not sure what to think. I suppose it’s for the best. He could be difficult.”

“It is most assuredly for the best,” said Carlyle. “He was Catherine’s creature, after all.”

“At any rate, he is no longer necessary,” said a voice. “Catherine herself is here now.”

They all turned around when they saw the voice, and saw Catherine and Alfred approaching. “We got a bit of a late start,” said Catherine. “But we were able to catch up quickly. After all, I do possess some remarkable abilities.”

“Catherine, what are you doing here?” asked Carlyle.

“Carlyle, my brother, you know it pains me to say this. But I have thought everything over, and I’ve decided that you are correct. Ambrosia is my old enemy, more so than she is yours. She is mine to meet in combat, and she is mine to defeat.”

“So you have come to help us?” asked Midor.

“I have,” answered Catherine.

“Great,” said Midor.

“I had a feeling you might change your mind on this,” said Carlyle. “Your hatred of Ambrosia must be greater than your hatred of me.”

“Let’s not get carried away just yet,” said Catherine. “There’s plenty of room in my heart to hate the both of you. I shall never forgive you, Carlyle, for what you did to me. No matter what happens. But I have come to fight against Ambrosia. It’s rather dark in here, don’t you think? Shall we have a little illumination?” Catherine waved her wand, and a flame of light appeared at the top of it.

“Catherine, put that out!” said Midor. His voice wasn’t quite a yell, but it was frantic. “You’ll attract every monster in this place.”

“Good,” said Catherine. “I’d prefer to just face them head on. I don’t like to crawl around in the swamp like you are doing.”

“But some of these monsters are resistant to magic. Some of them can