

Chapter 110: Catherine Instructs Aefar

Aefar stood before Catherine in the throne room.

“So now that I’ve explained everything,” said Catherine, “I want you to accompany Midor and Carlyle on their little journey.”

“From what I have heard,” said Aefar, “it is not the best place for a vampire to go. For one thing, the grove is covered in sunlight. And sunlight is deadly to a vampire.”

“There’s only one thing that’s sunlight,” said Catherine, “and that is light from the sun. Whatever is illuminating the grove is not real sunlight. It may look like sunlight, but whatever it is, artificial lights do not harm vampires.”

“And how am I to feed?” said the Aefar.

“How do you feed now?” asked Catherine.

“You know very well,” said Aefar. “You have forbidden me from hunting those in the castle. The forest people shut their doors tight at night. The animal blood does not sustain me in the same way that human blood does. So you have supplied me with a magic liquid which has all the same properties of human blood.”

“I’ve been very generous to you when it comes to sustenance,” said Catherine.

“Although, let’s be honest, we both know that vampires do not need to feed every single night. A vampire can go a whole week without feeding, if circumstances require it.”

“We can,” said Aefar. “Although not without some cost to us. The longer we go without feeding, the more we must drink when sustenance is available.”

“Well, how about this,” said Catherine. “I’ll give you as much of the magic potion as you can fit in a wine sack. I’ll give you enough for two wine sacks. It should be enough for two weeks if you drink it every day. If you ration it out, I think you can make it last for three. But you can ration it as you see fit. Possibly you can even feed on the monsters. If you get really desperate, you can feed on Midor and Carlyle. Although of those two, Midor is the only one that has human blood at the moment, so I’d feed on Midor first. But...,” Catherine leaned forward in her seat, “Ambrosia is to be defeated first, before you feed on Midor. Do you understand?”

“Yes, my Queen,” answered Aefar.

“This is important,” said Catherine. “I want Carlyle dead, but I also want Ambrosia defeated. So don’t kill Carlyle until after Ambrosia has been defeated. In fact, on the journey there, do your best to keep them alive. Help Carlyle and Midor in any way you can. You may even need to help them in the battle against Ambrosia.”

“Yes, my Queen.”

“But on no account is Carlyle to return a hero. Once the three of you have defeated Ambrosia, you are to kill him.”

“Yes, my Queen.”

“Midor I don’t care about. Kill him if you need the sustenance. You can let him live if you don’t need the food.”

“Midor and I have already had encounters,” said Aefar. “I dislike him. I will enjoy feeding on him.”

“Fine, fine. But don’t forget, Midor is the guide. Don’t kill him when you’re lost deep in the monster’s land.”

“It occurs to me,” said Aefar. “If I am to kill Carlyle, can I drink his blood as well?”

“You can if you want,” said Catherine. “But it will be lion’s blood. I thought animal blood wasn’t as sustaining for you.”

“It is my understanding,” said Aefar, “that Carlyle wishes to return to his human form. If you were to return him to his human form, then I could feed on him.”

“Ah, yes, good thinking,” said Catherine. “It would make you both happy. It would make Carlyle happy now, and it would make you happy later.” Catherine thought about it for a second, and then answered, “It’s no good, though. Carlyle’s not that stupid. I’ve already sworn never to return him to his human form. So if I were to suddenly reverse my promise, he would get very suspicious and wonder why. And as soon as he realizes a vampire is accompanying him on his journey, he would put two and two together very quickly. No, I’m sorry, Aefar. I know it’s a bit of a waste as far as you’re concerned, but you can’t feed on Carlyle in human form. You shouldn’t need to anyways. Midor should be able to sustain you for several weeks if you rationed his blood out. Don’t kill him on the first feeding. Take some blood, and leave him alive. You people know how to do that.”

“If I kept him alive, then he would turn him into a vampire eventually,” said Aefar.

Catherine shrugged. “So what? Then let him become a vampire. I don’t care what happens to him.”

Aefar nodded. “So be it.”

“Oh, Aefar,” Catherine said, leaning forward again. “One more thing. Both Midor and Carlyle are extremely cunning, and extremely treacherous.”

“Vampire’s have superhuman strength,” said Aefar. “They could not defeat me in a fight.”

“I know. That’s why I’m sending you. But they won’t try to fight you. They’ll bind you up when you’re sleeping. So on no account are you to sleep near them. First of all, you’ll have to adjust your sleeping patterns so that you sleep when they do. You’re used to sleeping during the day now, but there’s no sunlight in the underground portal, so it won’t matter when you sleep down there. Just make sure that you sleep at the same time Midor and Carlyle do. And when they go to sleep, you transform yourself into a bat, and fly into some tree far enough away that they can’t see which tree you have flown into. Have I made myself clear on everything?”

“Yes, perfectly, my Queen. There’s only one remaining thing.”

“What is it?”

“After I perform this last duty to you, I wish to be released.”

Catherine became angry. “Oh, so now you’re dictating terms to me?” She started to hum, and sparks were flickering from her fingers.

Aefar didn't panic, however. "Catherine, stop the dramatics," he said. "We both know it is not in your interest to kill me right now."

"Kill you?" said Catherine in a menacing tone. "What on earth makes you think I would be so unimaginative as to want to kill you? Don't you think I have a million other spells I would much rather use than a simple kill spell?" Catherine leaned back in her chair. "If the time ever comes that you invoke my displeasure, Aefar, I promise you that I will not kill you. But you will beg me for death." Catherine then changed her tone to make it less menacing. "Although service to me is not without its benefits. Serve me well, and you shall be rewarded. I've already said that you can have Midor. And we may well find other humans in this castle that I am willing to let you feed on. None of my family, of course, but this castle now has several residents who are outsiders--from the lands of Mora. I'm sure you've seen them around."

"I have," Aefar answered.

"Do any of them look particularly tasty to you?"

"Yes, the boy Henry and the girl Grace. They are young and full of healthy blood. And the boy Robert--."

"Robert's off limits," said Catherine suddenly. "He's my grand-nephew. Vivian would never forgive me. But you can have the General as well."

Aefar grimaced.

"Okay, the General is older and past his prime. And, let's be honest, he looks a bit grizzled. But he's tough as nails. There's plenty of strength in his veins."

"I suppose," said Aefar with distaste, "if I got desperate enough, I might..."

"Fine. Suit yourself. But fresh blood is not the only thing I can offer you. I know Vampires are concerned with style. Think of all the wonderful clothes I could provide you with? As well as good old fashioned silver and gold. Which I know is still highly prized in the mountain caves."

Aefar bowed low. He smiled, and his fangs showed. "My Lord and my Queen," he said. He seemed very happy, although Catherine thought she detected perhaps a bit of sarcasm in his voice. She chose to ignore it.

"So, understand each other then, you and I?"

"We do," said Aefar.

"Let's make sure we understand the most important parts then, shall we? When is Carlyle to be killed?"

"After Ambrosia is defeated, and not before," said Aefar, still smiling.

"Excellent. The same goes for Midor. But as for Midor, I don't care. You can let him live or die as you like. But as for Carlyle..."

"He is not to come out of the portal alive," said Aefar.

"Very good Aefar. I think you and I understand each other just fine," said Catherine.