Chapter 24: The Battle Against the Four Monsters

It had been an exhausting day, but the sun was beginning to set, and it was time to head home. “We should get back home as fast as we can,” Shawn said. “We don’t want to be caught out after dark.”

They headed back, but they had misjudged how much time it would take them to get back. Bats flew in the sky, and some of the bats swarmed around their heads. And then, one of the bats transformed into a vampire right in front of them.

The vampire grabbed Carlyle by the throat with his hand, and picked him up. Carlyle struggled and kicked the vampire, but it was no use.

“What are you doing?” Catherine asked the vampire.

The vampire turned to face Catherine. “What do you think you’re doing?” the vampire asked. “How can you hope to stand against our might?”

The vampire threw Carlyle down, and advanced on Catherine. Catherine’s hands glowed, and she readied herself to fight the vampire. As it approached, she grabbed at it with her hands. The vampire suddenly changed into a bat, and flew out of Catherine’s reach. Then the bat flew behind Catherine and transformed into a vampire again. “Behind you,” it taunted menacingly.

Catherine turned around, but before she could act, the vampire seized her hands by the wrist, immobilizing her hands. Catherine couldn’t use her powers against the vampire if she couldn’t grab him with her hands.

The vampire leaned down so that his face was level with Catherine’s. His breath was horrid, and she tried to pull away, but he held her wrists tightly, and kept his face close to hers. He opened his mouth, and showed his fangs.

The ravens Branoc, Bettina, Balsamer and Baldrick all fluttered around the vampire, and pecked at him furiously, but the vampire paid them no notice, and the pecking didn’t seem to hurt him at all.

Carlyle was back up on his feet now, and had his sword ready. He swung it at the vampire, but the blade did not hurt the vampire at all.

“Fool,” said the vampire. “Blades of steel do not harm vampires. Do you know nothing?”

The vampire then inched its fangs closer to Catherine’s neck. Catherine was squirming, and trying to pull away as much as she could, but the vampire had a tight grip on her.

It was Gabrielle who saved the day. She took out one of her wooden arrows from her quiver, and ran forward and impaled the vampire’s chest with it. The vampire let out a huge screech, and immediately let go of Catherine’s hands. He fell over backwards, clutching the wooden arrow. His body quickly decayed into dust.

The other bats flying above their heads started flapping their wings furiously. Several of these other bats transformed into vampires.

“Why did you do that?” asked one vampire. “He was a good companion.”

“He tried to harm Catherine,” Gabrielle said defensively.

“He was only trying to eat,” the vampire lamented.

“Who are you?” Carlyle asked.

“I am Aefar, leader of the vampires,” he answered.

“I’ve heard of you,”Carlyle said.

“Yes, I expect you have. I am famous in these mountains.”

“Have you come to harm us?” asked Carlyle.

“We have come to talk to you,” Aefar answered. “We have heard that you are battling the creatures on the mountains. We have come to instruct you to stop.”

“Creseus the Minotaur has come as well,” said a voice. They looked, and saw a huge creature with legs and body like a man, but with a head like a bull.”

“As well as Serif, the Serpent.” A huge snake-like creature slithered into view.

“And I, Garot, the Bugbear,” said a voice, and a huge monster that resembled a giant bear shuffled into sight.

“Is that all?” asked Carlyle.

“What do you mean?” asked Aefar.

“Are there any more monsters who are coming to declare themselves, or is this all of you?”

“We have many more friends in the mountains,” said Aefar. “But these are all that you may expect tonight.”

“Well then, since you have come to parley, and not to fight, I will return the courtesy,” said Carlyle. “These are our terms. You are welcome to remain in these mountains as long as you do not harm any of the mountain folk. But if you harm any humans, then we will kill you.”

“The wolves, the bears and the ravens are also under our protection,” Catherine added.

Aefar laughed. “Foolish children. I have a message for you as well. If you persist in trying to fight us, we will destroy you.”

As soon as she heard this, Gabrielle grabbed another wooden arrow from her quiver. She darted forward toward Aefar, but Catherine held up her hand.

“Wait,” Catherine said. “We have promised a parlay. For now, Aefar is free to say whatever he wants to say without fear of violence.” She turned towards Aefar. “That is what you want, right? Or did you want to fight tonight?”

Aefar smiled. “Your choice, my dear.”

Catherine smiled back, but spoke very slowly. “Don’t…tempt…me,” she said.

Aefar looked into Catherine’s eyes. He expected to see some fear there, but when he didn’t, Aefar’s eyes narrowed in rage. “I suppose there’s no point in delaying the inevitable,” he said. “If we are destined to fight, why not just fight now?”

There was the sound of Carlyle unsheathing his sword. “Would you like a couple minutes to position yourself?” asked Carlyle. “Or are you ready now?”

Again, Aefar was surprised by the lack of fear in the boy. And again, it angered him. “Now,” he yelled. And suddenly Aefar darted at Carlyle.

Carlyle thrust his sword at Aefar. The metal blade could not kill the vampire, of course, but it did at least act as a physical object which impeded his momentum. Aefar was stopped by the sword.

Gabrielle rushed at Aefar with her wooden arrow, and would have driven it into his chest, but Aefar changed into a bat and flew away. But the bat didn’t get far before Branoc, Bettina, Baldrick and Balsamer attacked it. The ravens caught at the bat’s wings with their feet, and pecked at the bat with their beaks.

While Aefar the bat was shrieking in agony, Creseus the Minotaur let out his battle cry. He shook his huge bull head, and pawed the ground with his hoof like feet. Then he lowered his horns and plowed into the group. Several wolves leapt at the minotaur and sunk their teeth into him, but Creseus shook them all off.

Kevin had a club which he hit the minotaur with, but it hardly seemed to affect the minotaur at all. The minotaur just lowered his horns, charged into Kevin and knocked him straight down.

“Enough,” Catherine shouted at Creseus. “Deal with me next!”

Creseus bellowed in rage and charged full speed at Catherine. Catherine’s hands were glowing. Her powers gave her extra strength, and as the minotaur charged into her, Catherine was able to hold her ground without being knocked over. She grabbed the minotaur with both hands, and allowed the energy to flow through her. The minotaur howled in pain.

Meanwhile Serif the serpent reared up to show his huge fangs. He darted forward to strike, but his fangs were blocked by the swords of Paul and Marcus, who battled with him.

Meanwhile Lucinda, Stella and Molly fended off the Bugbear with their spears, ax and staff. The wolves also attacked the bugbear.

It was a fierce battle, but the humans, ravens and the wolves had the advantage of numbers. The monsters couldn’t compete.

Aefar and his fellow vampires fled. Creseus freed himself from Catherine, and fled. Serif slithered away up into the mountains. Garot the Bugbear turned and left.

“We won,” said Shawn, exhausted.

“But we didn’t kill them,” said Carlyle. “They’ll be back.”

“That’s why we need to keep getting stronger,” Catherine said. “And adding more to our numbers.”