

The Vampire 170

Chapter 170 170: The Terror of Demons

While Ashlynn led Heila and her companions to do battle with merchants in search of new outfits for her lady-in-waiting, a very different battle was unfolding in the forests outside the Vale of Mists.

"How many of them are there?" Owain Lothian snarled as he hunkered behind a large tree and glared at the Inquisitor who had forcefully joined their hunting party.

When they entered the forest, Owain brought four knights, including his new Steward, Sir Hugo, plus thirty soldiers and a number of camp attendants. As hunting expeditions went, it was already sizeable. Inquisitor Diarmuid, however, had nearly doubled the size of the party, arriving with three templars including Sir Tommin, twenty more soldiers from the Church's private army, and their own collection of under-priests and deacons.

Yet now, this mighty force of over fifty men had been pinned down by a small group of demons and their devilish traps.

"I count six of them," Diarmuid said from his own position behind a tree. A bandage wrapped around his upper arm where he'd narrowly dodged an arrow fired by one of the demons and sweat soaked his brow after his attempt to use sorcery to locate their enemies. "Even with the Blessing of Illumination, they're very hard to locate," he said.

"Useless," Owain spat, looking around at the state of their soldiers.

Of the fifty common soldiers they possessed, twelve had already fallen to a combination of devilish traps and demon arrows. The first trap they encountered had been simple and crude, a stack of fallen tree trunks that came tumbling down a hill at their exposed column as they followed a game trail through the forest.

While it was simple and crude, it was still absolutely deadly. Each rolling log weighed at least five hundred pounds and when they slammed into soldiers who couldn't get out of the way fast enough, they shattered bones and crushed bodies.

Worse, half of the hunting party's scouts had fallen victim to cleverly disguised pit traps filled with sharpened stakes or ambush by demon archers who fired with enough accuracy to place an arrow through a person's eye, even if they were wearing a helm!

Now, having lost one out of five fighting men, the group had come under direct fire from several demon archers. Diarmuid's divination revealed that there were only six of them but Owain struggled to believe it was so few. They were firing from too many different angles and the arrows rained down too quickly for it to be so few people.

"Six?" Owain asked, hating himself for relying on the Inquisitor for information. "You're sure that's the limit of them?"

"Positive," Diarmuid answered. "They move and hide behind hunter's blinds or piles of sticks and leaves, but there are only six of them."

"Fine," the young lord spat. "I'm going to borrow one of your men," he said in a tone that made it clear he was giving an order rather than making a request. "Tommin, do you still remember how to fight or have you been spending the past several months on your knees?"

"Left or right?" Tommin asked, ignoring the insult. He'd been Owain's personal guard for over a decade and he'd fought with Owain against the demons of the Southern Steppe. Even though he'd left Owain's service after the young lord murdered his wife, he was still capable of fighting at the man's side when they stood against demons.

"Advance on my right," Owain said, lifting his kite-shaped shield into place. "Fight on my left."

"My Lord," Sir Rian protested. "If you need a man at your side..."

"Shut it," Owain said, cursing as another volley of arrows whistled by. Some thunked harmlessly into trees but most found a target. Several soldiers screamed in pain and one let out a gurgling cry before collapsing to the ground with a black fletched arrow protruding from his neck.

"I need a man who can fight on my left," Owain explained. He hated that he had to, but the knights he'd recruited from the western barons didn't know him well enough yet to understand. If he didn't make things clear, they would do foolish things in search of personal glory or out of a misplaced sense of duty.

"Tommin is left-handed," he said, looking at the direction the arrows had come from and making his decision. "We've fought together like this for years. Let us clear the way. You men," Owain yelled, pointing at a small group of their own archers. "See that fallen log they're hiding behind? Volley over it, make them keep their heads down. Tommin, with me!"

Once he'd given his orders, Owain wasted no time, charging out from behind cover with his shield leading the way. Tommin fell in beside him, taking a position on Owain's right comfortably, as though they'd never left.

Arrows pelted the men, from the flanks, peppering their shields or glancing off the coats of heavy mail they wore over padded gambesons. Both men wished they could wear heavier armor to endure the deluge of arrows but it was impossible to do so in the terrain of the forest.

More arrows whistled overhead as their own soldiers maintained a continuous stream of arrows at the hunter's blind that Owain had targeted. Without them doing so, the demons hiding behind the fallen logs would doubtless have fired their own arrows at the advancing knights and their shields wouldn't have been able to defend from enough sides at once.

Despite the weight of their armor and the rough terrain, Owain and Tommin moved rapidly toward the blind, crossing the distance in a matter of seconds.

"All who threaten my brothers, shall be cut down!" Tommin shouted, swinging his gleaming Holy Light Blade in a powerful overhand swing while they were still several feet short of reaching the blind. Brilliant light flared from the holy sword, and an arc of light more than ten feet long cleaved through the air before cutting the fallen logs of the hunter's blind in two.

"Die!" Owain shouted, charging forward using his shield as a battering ram to knock the logs aside while Tommin slid behind him, changing his position from one where he served as the shield on Owain's right side to the sword that swung on his left.

Two flat tailed demons hiding behind the blind abandoned their bows, pulling long bladed knives and diving at the knights who were suddenly among them. One of the two fought with an arrow protruding from his arm but he seemed to be either immune to the pain or too crazed by fear and anger to be hindered by the wound.

At range, with bows, the flat tailed demons were some of the most deadly opponents that Owain had ever faced. Up close, with nothing but knives in their hands and no armor other than their camouflage cloaks, they were no match for a pair of armored knights with swords who had come to kill them.

In a matter of moments, both demons lay dead at Owain and Tommin's feet. At the edges of the battle, arrows stopped flying as the remaining demons seemed to melt in the forest as though fearful that they would be next.

Owain, however, was certain that they'd fallen back to yet another of their well-prepared position, hunkering behind even more devilish traps and waiting for him to send his men into the meat grinder.

"There," Owain shouted down at his men who were slowly emerging from cover. "Was that so bloody hard? There were six of them, now there are four. That's four gold sovereigns waiting for someone to claim their tails for a bounty," he said, kneeling down and using his sword to lop the tail off one of the fallen demons before holding the bloody trophy up high over his head.

"Now who is going to show me what it means to be a real man and claim their prize!"