



## 497 The Montagues

72:00:00 1

### Shadowhunt

Montague did what he did best, the royal court, at council meetings, at business proposals, in revenge for Danielle; he waited. He had learned well to not strike first, because one barely struck true.

The air in the dense woods was neither humid nor frigid. It was saturated with dread that made you force the oxygen in your lungs to stop so you could listen for the cue you needed to strike.

They acted as though the red haze over the world did not exist in the moment.

The gammas in his division flanked him, all positioned at strategic points. Some in the trees, others holding their places amongst trunks, most camouflaged in uniforms that made them blend with abundant foliage.

The heat registers picked up more and more figures in the distance. The heat registers picked up more and more figures in the distance. The numbers climbed steadily—twenty, fifty, a



hundred, more—until the thermal display looked less like a tactical readout and more like a swarm. 2

Montague's expression didn't change. His hand remained steady on his rifle, finger resting just outside the trigger guard. Around him, his gammas held their positions, invisible in the foliage, waiting for his signal.

The figures drew closer.

Through his scope, Montague could make out shapes now—moving too fast, too erratically. Not the measured advance of trained soldiers.

Ferals.

Darius was sending his monsters first. The ones too far gone to feel fear, too consumed by bloodlust to feel pain. The ones that would tear through anything in their path until they were put down. 1

Smart, Montague thought grimly. Use the expendable ones to test our defenses. Find the weak points.

But there were no weak points here.

A feral burst into view—massive, hulking, its form more beast than man. Red eyes gleamed in



the Bloodmoon's light. Saliva dripped from its jaws.

It was thirty meters out.

Twenty-five.

Twenty.

Montague's gammas tensed, waiting.

Fifteen meters.

Ten.

Wait, Montague thought, his finger sliding onto the trigger. Wait...

Five meters.

The feral opened its mouth to roar—

"Now," Montague said quietly into his comm.

The woods erupted---with a hoard of these monsters. Montague barely felt the sweat that dripped down his temple as the herd came fully into view. Snarling snapping, jaws large and wild and filled with teeth that jutted out in all macabre angles.

These were wolves of anarchy, charging only on instinct to harm what they have made to detect as the enemy.



Them

Their twisting growling echoed all around them

Still... none of them moved from their positions.

Even with their finger already on the trigger, they waited.

"Hold," Montegue muttered. He found that he could smile even as the enemy charged at them. Because this was the thing about their terrain. It was their terrain and no one knew territory more than its owners and inhabitants.

Or knew where the traps laid just waiting to be triggered.

As if the moon goddess had heard, the first feral whined low as it was caught in a snare, and just like in a domino effect, when one fell the rest did the same as the singular trigger sprang up the iron netting that lay buried under the soil.

Without prompting a gamma handed Montegue a pair of binoculars and just like that he watched it all happen all at once the netting around the perimeter where the gammas had been positioned activated catching all the feral whose instinct had drawn right to the gammas.

Right into the trap.



It was placing a large number of baits into a large wide net while fishing causing numerous fish to swarm the net for food only to all be caught at once.

The gammas led by Montegue had been the bait and now the fishes had been caught.

They all writhed, struggling against the restraint, devoid of intelligence to attempt to step back from the trap, instead still trying to reach the set bait by using claws to tear at netting. Their growls and snapping only grew more frantic and erratic as the monsters could not get free.

But the waiting was not done. More ferals came, only to join in the inescapable tangle.

The woods shook, the trees trembled from the charging and struggle of the beasts.

The person that deployed them might have tracked our heat signature but traps had no heat signature.

Then it stopped, probably the deployers realised.

It was time for the next part, through my comm I reached out to Hades who was waiting. "Now, over,"

He understood and activated the trap, the net



moving automated to form a circular cage trapping them fully into a bouquet of ferals.

"Neutralize," I commanded, the cue rippling through the woods.

They all moved synchronised, retrieving the anti feral artillery, I watched as they transferred the weapon to the gammas already in the trees. They operated it, aiming for the centre on bouquet, and then he let it rip as he recoiled back so far the shooter had to be held back from falling.

The artillery fired.

The sound was deafening—a deep, concussive THOOM that shook the trees and sent birds scattering from the canopy. The projectile streaked through the air, trailing smoke, and struck the dead center of the bouquet.

The explosion was not fire.

It was light—blinding, searing white light that erupted outward like a miniature sun. The ferals didn't have time to scream. The specialized round—designed specifically for creatures twisted beyond recognition—detonated on impact, releasing a burst of concentrated silver particulate and wolfsbane extract.

The effect was immediate and absolute.



The ferals convulsed, their bodies seizing as the toxins flooded their systems. Foam erupted from their jaws. Their eyes rolled back. One by one, they collapsed, twitching, until the movement stopped entirely.

Silence fell over the woods.

Montague lowered his binoculars, his expression unchanged.

The net sagged under the weight of the dead, the iron mesh now slick with blood and other fluids he didn't care to identify. The stench would come later—rotting flesh, burnt fur, the acrid tang of silver. For now, there was only the ringing in his ears and the heavy stillness that followed violence.

"First wave neutralized," he said into his comm, his voice flat. "Sixty-plus ferals down. Zero casualties on our side."

A pause, then Hades's voice crackled through. "Confirmed. Well done, Shadowhunt. Stay sharp. This was just the opener."

"Understood. Shadowhunt holding. Out."

Montague scanned the tree line. His gammas remained in position, eyes forward, weapons



ready. Good. Disciplined. Just as he'd trained them.

But the woods were not quiet for long.

A low rumble echoed through the darkness—not ferals this time, but footsteps. Organized. Measured.

Montague's eyes narrowed.

"Movement," one of his gammas reported. "Grid nine-four. Multiple contacts. Human signatures."

"Numbers?"

"At least forty. More coming."

Montague's jaw tightened. So Darius wasn't a complete fool after all. Send the ferals first to trigger the traps, then send in the real soldiers.

Predictable.

"All units, stand by," Montague said. "Enemy gammas inbound. Do not engage until they're in the kill zone."

Through his scope, he watched them emerge—Silverpine gammas, moving in loose formation through the trees. They were cautious now, eyes scanning for traps, weapons raised.

Smart.



But not smart enough.

Montague allowed himself a thin smile. They'd learned from the ferals' mistake. They knew the woods were trapped.

But what they didn't know was why Darius had sent ferals through the woods in the first place.

Because it's what they always do, Montague thought. Predictable.

The first feral attack—the Beasts of the Night, the ones that had taken Elliott months ago—they'd charged straight into the woods. Instinct. Cover. Darkness. The forest was where predators felt safe.

Darius's forces had operated in these woods for years during the skirmishes. Every time, the same pattern: use the cover, move fast, strike hard.

Silverpine had grown predictable.

And Montague had spent the last six months preparing for predictability.

"Second line traps armed?" he asked quietly.

"Affirmative," his lieutenant, a lesser Alpha by name of Korvan replied. "Pressure plates are

active. Tripwires set."

"Good."

The enemy gammas advanced, stepping carefully, checking the ground.

But they were looking for nets.

They weren't looking for the thin wire strung between two trees at ankle height.

The first gamma tripped it.

A snap—a tension release—and a spiked log swung down from the canopy, slamming into three soldiers at once. Bones crunched. Bodies flew.

Chaos erupted.

"Now!" Montague barked.

His gammas dropped from the trees, emerging from cover, weapons blazing. The enemy forces tried to rally, tried to form a defensive line—but they were fighting on Montague's terms now. Close quarters. Tight spaces. The kind of brutal, intimate combat his gammas had trained for their entire lives.

Steel met steel. Claws met flesh. The woods became a whirlwind of violence—controlled on



one side, desperate on the other.

Montague moved through it like a conductor through an orchestra, his gammas flowing around him in practiced synchronization. One enemy soldier lunged; a gamma intercepted, redirecting the attacker into a snare that yanked him off his feet. Another tried to flank; two gammas boxed him in, driving him backward into a pit trap concealed beneath leaves.

It was choreography.

Brutal. Efficient. Deadly.

Montague fired twice—center mass, both targets down—and reloaded without looking.

And then he heard it.

A voice.

Familiar.

Impossible.

"Father."

Montague froze.

His mind went blank—just for a heartbeat, just long enough for the world to tilt sideways.

Felicia.

He saw her in flashes, unbidden:

Holding her for the first time, so small she fit in the crook of one arm, her tiny fingers wrapping around his thumb.

Her first laugh—bright and pure, the sound that had made Danielle cry with joy.

Her first steps, wobbling toward him across the parlor, her face scrunched in determination.

The way she'd looked at him when she was eight, asking if he'd always protect her.

Always.

The memory shattered.

A gunshot cracked behind him—so close he felt the air split.

Montague's instincts kicked in. He twisted, dropping into a crouch, his hand going to his sidearm—

—and stopped.

Because standing ten feet away, rifle still raised, smoke curling from the barrel, was his daughter.

Felicia.

Her green eyes—Danielle's eyes—gleamed in the



Bloodmoon's light. She was dressed in full tactical gear, the Silverpine emblem stitched across her chest. Her black hair was now its natural brown, like Danielle's had been. It pulled back in a tight braid. She looked older. Harder.

A soldier.

Montague's stomach turned.

She lowered the rifle slightly, just enough for him to see the small smile curving her lips.

"Close," she said lightly. "But not close enough."

Montague's gaze flicked to the tree behind him. A bullet hole, dead center—right where his head had been a second ago.

A kill shot.

She'd aimed for a kill shot.

He turned back to her slowly, his expression carefully blank even as something cold and sharp twisted in his chest.

"Felicia."

Her smile widened. "We meet again, Father."

Around them, the fighting continued—gammas grappling, shots firing, bodies falling. But in this

small pocket of the woods, it was just the two of them.

Father and daughter.

On opposite sides of a war.

Montague's hand tightened on his rifle.

"You're wearing his colors," he said quietly.

"I'm wearing my colors," Felicia corrected, her tone light but edged with something darker.

"Silverpine is my home now. Has been for years. You just never bothered to notice."

His jaw tightened. "You were safe in Obsidian. Protected."

"I was a prisoner," she shot back, her smile fading. "A pretty little hostage kept in line. Unable to pursue the things that made me whole. I could not be too happy because poor little Danielle died. I was an after thought. You think I didn't know? You have always loved her more."

Montague said nothing.

Felicia's eyes hardened. "Darius gave me a choice. A real one. Fight for something that matters, or rot in a gilded cage pretending my



life was not a perpetual hell even after I tore that bitch of a sister I had. I did not need to lie and pretend. I could simply be. Because you might claim to love me but you locked me up for taking just one life, and embraced the mutt who has the blood of hundreds on her hands." 1

The words hit like a blade. 1

Montague's expression didn't change, but something in his eyes flickered—just for a moment.

Felicia raised her rifle again. "You are a horrible father. You lost one daughter and could cling to the one you had left." 3

"I'm not the little girl who needed you anymore," she said softly. "And I'm not going to miss next time."

Montague stared at her.

His daughter.

His daughter.

Wearing the enemy's colors.

Aiming a rifle at his heart.

"Then don't miss," he said quietly.

For a heartbeat, neither of them moved.



Then Felicia's finger tightened on the trigger— 1

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