

CHAPTER 16: MONSTERS

Tum tum tum

It's claws dug into the freezing snow, propelling its body forward and digging deep gashes in the ground. Catra was aware of her muscles, tensed to the max as her back hunched at an impossible angle; the monster's breath quickening as it sped through the thicket of the forest; the frantic sniffing of its nostrils, following the sweet trail. The beast roared euphorically. It was close, very close. It could almost feel its fangs cleaving the soft flesh of its prey's neck, sucking rapidly, as the warm blood rushed down its parched throat, reviving every cell. The monster remembered the sensation, it had experienced it not long ago. Saliva started running down its chin. The beast ignored the twigs snagging on its skin.

It was very close

It accelerated even more, sprinting through a group of bushes at full speed, ending up in an explosive run that ended in cleared area of the forest. Floating lights raised from the ground, but the monster didn't paid attention to them. It stopped dead in its tracks, completely motionless, a predator on the prowl. Its pupils dilated until they filled the entire iris; red completely eclipsed the blue and gold of Catra's eyes. Saliva began to drip from the corners of its half-opened lips, unable to contain the affiliated fangs that decorated its mouth as the beast sketched a brutal smile. Because in the middle of the clearing, folded in on herself and trying to catch her breath; golden tresses dangling from an unkempt ponytail, there was its prey. Her scent reached its nostrils more intensely, and it could contain himself no longer. The beast dropped its stealth. Its claws snapped the small branches beneath its feet. The girl was startled by the sound and turned. The beast could smell her fear, her desperation. That racing heartbeat that pumped blood faster and faster. It and tensed the muscles of its entire body, ready to pounce on her. And at that moment, in a corner of the beast's mind, Catra screamed voicelessly as she witnessed it all.

Adora didn't look back. She closed the door to the ritual room in a hurry and rushed into the hallway leading to the room. She pondered for a second whether to stop and try to block it with something, but something told her that any barrier she tried to put between her and whatever was chasing her was not going to give more than a few seconds of headstart. She chose to flee. She run through the corridors at full speed while her heart raced trying to escape from her chest. Just as she reached the base of the stairs she heard a rumble behind her and a triumphant howl. Her heart skipped a beat; it seemed that the doors she had closed did little to stop her pursuers. She pulled herself together and began to ascend the stairs as fast as she could. It had been a mistake to go there alone, she should have listened to Catra. She didn't wallow too much in that thought either. It was done, she wasn't going to waste time whipping herself over it. The important thing now was to escape. Adora staggered into the clearing of lights again, and tried to catch her breath. The orbs still floated towards the vault of branches on top, giving her a false sense of security. Adora looked around frantically. There was nowhere to hide, nothing to block the exit of the temple. Her options were either trying to get into the forest praying that her legs were fast enough to give her enough of a head start to find shelter, or climbing one of those trees and crossing her fingers that whatever was chasing her didn't know how to follow her. She decided



on the tree. Adora stood up determined to find a suitable trunk to climb when she suddenly heard a creaking sound behind her. Her frozed in her veins. She turned slowly and looked at the creature lurking behind her.

She knew that silhouette, that figure that at times had seemed to her even fragile, coiled up, ready to attack; the fangs that had fascinated her for weeks now peeked out from under lips oozing with saliva, uncommonly large. That mouth that sometimes smiled shyly at her was disfigured into an animal grimace. But it was the beast's eyes that let Adora know Catra was not there. Red had engulfed the girl's uneven eyes.

Adora backed up, slowly, and its back bumped into the trunk of one of the trees that surrounded the clearing. What had been Catra licked its lips with anticipation as it approached her; Adora could see how its whole body tensed, ready to pounce on her and tear her apart.

“No...” she quivered.

Adora didn't have time for anything else. A new howl pierced the night. She looked toward the entrance of the temple startled, only to see her hopes of survival dwindle from improbable to zero. Three huge wolves had just burst into the clearing. Wolves was the only word that came close to describing these creatures, though it was a term that did not fit the monsters standing before her. They were three shaggy-haired creatures, matted specimens, much larger in size than any normal wolf. Their forelegs were stouter than their hind legs, and they ended in claws that looked more like blades, as if their creator had designed them to give them the perfect weapons to tear their prey apart with a single movement. The corners of their jaws stretched almost to the height of their ears, taking up almost their entire face, and forcing an everlasting studded with fangs. But what was most striking were their eyes; they were silver-gray, almost white. Those eyes shone with unusual intelligence. Of the three specimens, the one advancing in front, a female of considerable size, looked particularly fierce. She gave a short bark without taking her eyes off Adora, and at her command her two companions separated as they slowly closed in on the girl.

Adora could no longer stand the tension, her legs were trembling. She let herself slip to the ground, defeated. All was lost, this was the end of the adventure. She had no energy left for anything else. A looked away from the wolves, which were getting closer and closer, to turn to the beast Catra had become. If she was going to die, Adora would rather be her the last thing she saw, even if Catra wasn't really there anymore.

It was instantaneous, the moment her body collapsed to the ground, Adora heard the triumphant roar of the wolves, who pounced on her. Almost in slow motion, Adora's eyes met the vampire's inhuman gaze; blue against red; a split second that turned into hours. Adora dived into the monster's eyes trying to find any indication that Catra was still there, but she couldn't find her. She gave up, there was no point anymore. Adora closed her eyes, accepting her end as the vampire burst into an explosive rush towards her as well.

Her body was again moving against her will. The tension had reached its peak, and had led to a full-throttle race to seize the prey in front of her before it was snatched away.

Catra was aware of everything; she saw Adora's body slumped against the tree, her gaze terrified. The wolves pounced on her. She tried to scream, urge her to flee from there, but it was useless.



Adora looked away from the death that fell upon her to look at the monster that controlled her body. Their eyes met for a split second; Adora seemed to be searching for something, for hope, she was not sure what. She did not find it. The girl closed her eye, defeated.

The monster took it as a sign, and shot towards her as well, a hungry growl scaping its mouth. Its paws were closing in on the girl, just a few feet away from her claws....

Catra couldn't take it anymore.

She summoned all her remaining willpower, all her stubbornness. She seized the beast's blinding bloodlust and redirected it against the wolves.

If the monster wanted a prey she would make sure it got it.

A wet crunch followed by a stifled moan was the next thing Adora could hear. She had curled in on herself, instinctively covering her face with her arms in a vain attempt to protect herself, to prepare for the pain, but it had not come.

She opened her eyes slowly, only to be greeted by a nightmarish scene. Catra's beast had pounced on the wolves instead of tearing her throat open. She was holding the smallest of them up in the air now, as if the creature were nothing more than a rag doll in the wind; the vampire's claws pierced its neck, the animal's muscle fibers tangled in her claws as blood splattered her face. She didn't seem to mind at all. The two formed a Dantesque image in which the vampire's unearthly immobility contrasted with the wolf's stertorous spasms. When the animal's body became immobile, the vampire threw it several meters away as if it were offal. She still held the creature's windpipe in her hand. She looked at her trophy with disinterest and then tossed it to the other two wolves, who were frozen in place. Adora could clearly see a cruel smile spread across Catra's face, baring her fangs even more.





The provocation seemed to bring them back to reality; with beastly speed, both wolves pounced on the vampire's petite figure, claws bared ready to tear her apart. Just as it seemed that the leader's jaws were about to close on her neck, Catra disappeared. In a fluid motion that looked more like a dance step, the vampire moved out of its way, positioning herself behind the larger specimen. She shot a claw forward, grabbing it by the nape of the neck, and slammed the creature to the ground in a brutal blow, shattering its cervical vertebrae. The animal whimpered and fell silent, laying crumpled on the ground, motionless. The leader of the group didn't take long to react this time, it rolled half-jumped and launched a bite in the vampire's direction. Catra had time only to cover herself with her arm. She roared in pain as the she-wolf's teeth pierced the flesh of her forearm. The female clenched her jaw viciously, and Adora was able to hear the unpleasant crunch of bone that had just snapped. The vampire howled rabidly. She tugged in an attempt to disengage from the bite, but the animal's fangs dig into her flesh, tearing her forearm even more.

Adora watched the scene horrified. She stood up trembling, leaning against the tree trunk behind her. Catra was trying to free herself from the bite of the she-wolf; she was roaring out of her mind and her eyes were wild. The huge animal had started dragging her unceremoniously towards the entrance of the temple, but the vampire dug her heels into the ground in an attempt to slow its advance. Adora extended an arm in their direction and took a step, staggering. The vampire swiped at the she-wolf relentlessly as the beast kept growling, spitting bloody saliva as it bit her arm even more viciously.

Adora had to help her. There was no doubt in her mind that she herself was going to die that night, whether at the hands of the wolves or the vampire, it didn't matter. But she had to at least try to save Catra. She had doomed them both by going there on her own. She owed her.

Catra was blinded by pain. There was blood everywhere, the smell of it clouding her senses. She could not think clearly. She felt the wolf's fangs tearing at her musculature. Splinters of her fractured radius were digging into her flesh, intensifying the sensation until it became unbearable. If she kept this up she would end up losing control of her body again, and that she could not allow. She couldn't let her instinct take over, because she was sure that the first thing the monster would do after getting rid of the she-wolf would be to pounce on Adora.

She sensed a movement at her back, a slight breeze that alerted her and gave her just enough time to turn her head away. A quick hiss passed just millimeters from her ear, exactly where her head had been seconds before. It landed with a wet thud into the neck of the creature that was tearing her apart. Adora's warm breath caressed her cheek, her intoxicating scent masking the scent of blood. Catra felt her warmth, her chest pressed against her own back as Adora held tightly the dagger she had just used to stab the creature.

Catra thought she wouldn't mind dying like that, just before she fainted against Adora's chest.

Adora twisted the dagger viciously into the animal's neck, which roared in agony. It finally freed the vampire's arm. Catra collapsed on top of her, and Adora only had time to drop the ceremonial dagger to hold her before she fell. She dragged them both as far away from the dying creature as possible.

“Catra?! Please look at me.”



Adora placed her hand on Catra's cheek to examine her face. The vampire half-opened her eyes with difficulty to look at her. Adora noticed that they had returned to their normal colouring.

"A...adora..." Catra said in a whisper.

Adora couldn't help but let out a chuckle of pure relief.

"Yes, I'm here, don't worry. I'm going to get us out of here." she wasn't sure how, but she would.

The vampire's arm was mangled. Blood soaked her entire side, reaching almost up to her leg, and it was beginning to stain the grass they were sitting on. If she didn't stop the bleeding adora was soon going to bleed out. Adora untied the ribbon that held her hair back and wrapped it around Catra's arm just above the elbow. She tightened the knot as much as she could, trying not to cut off her circulation completely. She had to keep her arm from gangrene.

Catra opened her mouth, trying again to speak.

"I'm sorry..." she muttered.

"Don't worry, I know it wasn't you," Adora whispered.

Catra smiled weakly. She closed her eyes slowly, exhausted, dropping her head on Adora's shoulder. Her heart skipped a beat. "

"Catra, Catra! No, no, no" Adora shook her urgently trying to wake her up, but it was useless.

"Don't do this to me," she moaned desperately.

Her olive skin had taken on an ashen hue that did not bode well. Adora held her tightly, burying her face in her neck as she rocked her. She could hear her heartbeat, steady though faint. She would recover, she had to.

"You're going to be fine," she murmured, in an attempt to convince herself.

Adora stayed like that for a while, listening to the vampire's breathing, making sure she didn't fade from her arms, until an animalistic whimper brought her back to reality.

Adora raised her head and looked at the collapsed body of the she-wolf only a few feet away. The silver hilt of the ceremonial dagger peeked through her fur, and a trickle of blood spurted from the gaping wound in her neck. It looked at them in agony, almost as if pleading them with its gaze. The animal whimpered, as the pool of blood around it grew larger and larger. It soaked its light brown fur an arterial red. Adora noticed its eyes; they had lost that toxic silver coloration and were now a bright, warm green. Something stirred inside her under that gaze; they didn't look like the eyes of an animal, they were too human; and the creature watched them both as if apologizing.

Adora could not determine how long they remained there, herself holding Catra as the animal slowly faded away. Its breathing turned to agonizing rales. The glow in its eyes gradually dimming, until it was gone.

And meanwhile, the full moon rose proudly in the night sky,

