

The Great Battle.

By **Oksana Barron.**

Once upon a time, many centuries ago, there was a forest. And a frightening forest it was! Unseen dangers lurked, hidden, among many cold shadows.

A small settlement beside it was full of wary people who named the forest Vyllvyl.

The forest of Vyllvyl was deep and dark. It was cold, too. Chilled droplets of rain created a thin film of wetness over the many tropical plants in the woods. The only trails were animal paths. Legends surrounded the forest. The town that had been founded beside it centuries ago, Rooksville, lived in fear.

The people of Rooksville were rightly afraid of the forest. Two terrors inhabited it: a giant black mastiff and a huge silver wolf. Each monster was the size of a horse.

When the sun was up, these terrors would slumber, but that didn't make Vyllvyl Forest safe at daytime. Day was when poisonous snakes, spiders, and scorpions roamed about.

And at night, the sinister green eyes of the mastiff would glow in the shadows, and the menacing red orbs of the wolf would light up the dark. Whenever one of these monsters sensed prey, they would advance slowly and quietly, then lunge. The helpless victim would be gone in an instant, leaving no trace the following day.

For five years, the people of Rooksville lived in fear. Then, one day, they decided that they would form an army, enter the forest, and end the nightmarish reign of the monsters.

The hastily composed army wandered through the forest, searching in vain for the creatures' lairs. But they were going in circles.

The two monsters smelled the army. They began to follow their tracks, hungry for the people in their forest.

For several hours, they searched. Then, suddenly, wolf and mastiff met in a clearing. A growl shook the throats of both beasts. They had never met before. They had each lived separate lives, sleeping by day and terrorizing Rooksville by night. Each wanted control of Vyllvyl Forest. And each would fight to the death in order to rule the forest unchallenged.

Hackles bristled. Teeth were bared. Wolf and mastiff got ready to fight.

Crash! Two heavy bodies collided. Claws ripped flesh. Teeth raised blood. Fur flew everywhere. For several minutes, the two beasts dueled, each unable to dispatch the other. Then, there was a loud snap that echoed throughout the forest. The monsters' teeth and claws had broken.

Eyes narrowed with fury, the wolf and the mastiff glared at each other, spitting out blood and flexing what was left of their claws.

Both beasts backed down, shaking the roots of broken teeth out of bleeding gums, scuffling the ground with clawless paws. Unable to fight, afraid, both creatures fled. They each found a remote corner of the Earth, where they hid.

In time, their claws and teeth grew back. But the wolf and the mastiff never returned to Vyllvyl Forest to fight, in fear of being rendered harmless again. So they each stayed in their separate, hidden places.

Now, thousands of years later, stars form a constellation of a wolf and a mastiff rearing up, ready to claw and bite at each other. The great battle of Vyllvyl Forest will be preserved forever in the sky.