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Hadeon took a slow, deliberate sip of the juice, savouring the flavour before he remarked with a theatrical click of his tongue, "Ah, this is absolutely scrumptious. Now I see why wifey here might like it." He paused, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "But wasn't this supposed to be herbal tea?" 1

Mallory's eyes shot wide open from across the table, as she shot Hadeon a glare for his playful antics. Meanwhile, Sable seemed momentarily baffled, caught between the 'wifey' comment and Hadeon's unexpected question. 4

"Yes, that is indeed herbal tea," Sable managed, her smile strained but polite. 9

"Really now?" Hadeon leaned back, crossing one leg over the other with casual elegance. He finished the entire glass and Mallory noticed how nothing happened to him. "It's quite flavourful. What exactly is in this concoction?" 7

"This blend contains ribwort, bearberry, and thistle grass," Sable explained, her voice brightening as she addressed Hadeon. "I'm pleased to hear you enjoy it." She then turned



towards Mallory with a thoughtful look. "Would you like another glass?" 7

"That's okay," Mallory replied, dismissively waving her hand. "I'll stick with the tea since the herbal juice has been so popular."

Hadeon wasn't subtle when it came to testing the tea too, and he then offered it to Mallory with a grin. He stated, "Sharing is caring in marriage and love." 16

If Mallory was drinking the tea now, she would have sprayed it out of her mouth for the words he uttered. She laughed, "Ha ha ha... Hadeon likes to joke." 6

"Rarely," Hadeon shot back, his tone dropping to mock-serious. "Indeed, Mallory Winchester and I are married. It's a true pity you missed the ceremony, Sable." 17

Sable's eyebrows lifted slightly in surprise before she regained her composure, smiling warmly. "Oh, I hadn't heard. Congratulations, Mallory. I wish I could've been there. I'll need to think of a suitable gift."

Mallory shook her head gently and waved off the offer, "That's not necessary, because—"



Hadeon quickly chimed in, smoothing over the moment with his characteristic charm. "Mallory is right. There's no need for gifts. We appreciate your thoughts far more," he said, flashing Sable a disarming smile which she acknowledged with a subdued nod.

Despite his previous offhand comment about Sable being a witch, Mallory found herself grappling with how to broach more delicate topics. She took a couple of sips from her teacup and was unaffected by it.

"Sable, has anyone come by Grandmother's house since her funeral? To ask anything about her," Mallory inquired, her voice steady but curious.

Sable's response came with a furrow of her brow, reflecting deep thought. "Recently, after I heard about your uncle and aunt's passing, a man came here. He had the air of a distinguished gentleman, judging by his appearance and the carriage he arrived in. Yet, he didn't even stay for a cup of tea and soon left." 4

"It was probably Kaiser," Mallory murmured under her breath, then looked up curiously. "What did he want?"



"He seemed quite interested in your grandmother's family history," Sable explained, her eyes searching the distance as she tried to recall the details. "He asked about where the family members were buried, wanting to visit their graves. But I barely know anything," she shrugged apologetically. "If only my parents were still around, they might have known more."

Mallory nodded slightly, then pressed further, "You've been her neighbour for years. Do you know where Grandma lived before she moved here to this village?"

Sable leaned closer, lowering her voice as if sharing a confidential matter. "Silvervein," she whispered. "That's what my parents mentioned. She was an orphan and had a rather difficult life," she added, her expression softening with sympathy.

Mallory's question hung in the air, delicate and probing. "You were there when she passed away. Did she mention anything unusual before that day?"

Sable shook her head, her expression thoughtful. "Not that I can recall. Didn't your grandmother ever share anything about your family history with you?"



Mallory returned the shake of her head. "We mostly talked about the present, not the past." She sighed softly, her mind drifting to the painful memories of her parents, who had perished in a fire. The past was a topic wrapped in silence and shadows, seldom visited.

Changing the tone, Sable brightened and offered, "You know what? You should come and stay here for a while, for old times' sake." 7

In a town rumoured to be filled with witches? Mallory hesitated inwardly at the thought. Nonetheless, with a smile that masked her reservations, she responded warmly, "Of course."

As they prepared to depart, Sable, unwilling to let her guests leave empty-handed, offered, "It would be rude not to give you something as a parting gift. How about a flower pot? Or maybe some of those tea leaves?"

Mallory gently refused, shaking her head, "There's really no need for it."

But Sable persisted, "Please, I insist!" 5

Hadeon stepped in, his tone gracious yet firm, "Mallory mentioned that you once saved her life. Truly, there's no greater gift than that."



Sable looked around and then picked up a painting from her wall and presented it to them. "This is all I have with me for now," she explained. The painting depicted two houses at dusk, a tree standing beside a long path. 4

"Ah, thank you for this," Mallory responded.

Once outside, Mallory and Hadeon headed back to her grandmother's house to start their task of digging out the plants. The pureblooded vampire said, "Did you notice how easy it is to pull out the plants, and some even appear dead? You would think it is because no one is watering them, but the ground is wet."

"You think Kaiser already dug this place out?" Mallory's lips pursed.

"So it seems. He tore your house down. Plants are barely an issue for him," Hadeon stated, dropping the gardening tool from his hand. "But your grandmother must be smarter than just hiding it here." 7

Mallory then asked him, "Do you think my grandmother knew Sable was a witch?" as she was still squatted down with a gardening fork in hand.

"Probably not. Witches don't reveal themselves



to even their own kind," Hadeon's reply was clipped and dismissive. "I've found that witches often harbour darker secrets, far worse than anything us pureblooded vampires might entertain. Of course, we conduct our affairs with a certain... elegance that these beings cannot match."

"Master Hades, remember, we are not married. Not by church, not by law, and certainly not engaged. Perhaps you should find another who will willingly dance to your tunes," Mallory retorted in a whisper. 3

"If I wanted mere obedience, I might as well have opted for a snake as a pet," Hadeon remarked dryly, the corner of his mouth twitching upward. With a casual wave of his hand, he beckoned to her, "Come hither, darling." 6

Mallory waddled over from her position, maintaining her squat as she approached him, not bothering to straighten up. Settling down in front of him, she looked up and slightly exasperatedly asked, "What?" 2

Hadeon only raised his hand towards her face and placed his index finger on her forehead. He then said, "The world is a deception filled with colours over the grey. Now you will see what I



see for the world the way it is." 8

Mallory felt a little current run down her spine at Hadeon's touch, and she didn't know if it was because of what he did or if it was from the close proximity the two of them shared once again. 6

As if that wasn't enough, Hadeon leaned closer to her, almost stealing her breath, when he said, "Your cheeks are appearing to look like ripened apples." 3

Hadeon had a knack for enjoying others' discomfort, and Mallory was convinced he found particular delight in her embarrassment. Embracing her rebellious streak, she leaned in closer, managing to mask her fluttering heart with a playful smirk. 1

"Keep calling me your wife like that, and I might just start taking it seriously," Mallory teased, her voice laced with allure. 18

"Perhaps we should go visit Father Shane to get his blessings then," Hadeon teased right back at her, and Mallory narrowed her eyes at him.

"No, thank you. I finished visiting church yesterday," Mallory muttered, before pulling away from him as they sat too close to each



other.

While returning towards the carriage, Mallory's heart almost jumped out of her chest upon seeing people with their cracked skins and slit eyes, along with untamed hair which looked like they hadn't been combed in several years. 4

"Master Hades... am I dreaming?" Mallory asked him in a lowered voice, while moving closer to him as she noticed the true colours of witches walking among the humans. 9

"I thought you would like to see what is behind the veil of deception," said Hadeon, as they continued to walk through the village. "I just can see things clearly." 2

"You know..." Mallory drawled, as her heart pumped. "Grandmother's hair was a little like that." 3

"How wonderful! She wanted to stay true to herself and was not into appearances," Hadeon exclaimed in a delightful voice, while Mallory was still digesting the fact that she saw witches walking near them.

They finally returned to Van Doren's Castle. At night, Mallory was in her room when she decided to hang the painting on the wall along



with her grandmother's painting on the other side of the wall. 2

"A decoration for the room!" Ivy popped into the room. "Would you like me to bring dead flowers into the vase?" 10

"I think the paintings should do for now. Thank you, Ivy," Mallory replied with a smile, knowing Ivy's version of beauty was the same as Hadeon's. A yawn escaped from her lips. 2

"Your dresses came earlier," Ivy said, raising the two boxes in her hand and placing them on the bed. "I will be going then!"

As the night deepened, Hadeon lay sprawled across his bed, his gaze fixed on the shadowy contours of the ceiling. Abruptly, the stillness was broken by sharp knocks at the door. Ivy burst in, her eyes wide with urgency, and she delivered her news breathlessly,

"Lord Hadeon! Lady Mallory is missing from her room—and she's nowhere to be found within the castle walls!" 36