



67 Where the painting leads? 10

Music Recommendation: Professor Stoddard -
Ben Frost 1

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Mallory stared at her grandmother's painting, wondering if it held the key to her answers. Pursing her lips, she remarked, "But Sable's painting led me to a forest." The scene depicted in this painting suggested another forest awaited them. 2

"Not all doors are the same. Witches use dark magic for various purposes," Hadeon explained. "I once knew a witch who lived inside a painting, and that painting hung in a human's household for several years. Interestingly, she ate the servants by dragging them into the portrait, without anyone's notice there." 21

"I don't think I'll ever look at paintings the same way again," Mallory muttered, frowning. 9

"This is why the only paintings you need are mine. The safest of them all," Hadeon said, running his fingers through his hair. 17

"Master Hades always has solutions that work in



his favour," Mallory replied, giving him a look and seeing his grin. 7

Hadeon then grabbed Sable's painting and broke it in half before throwing it into the fireplace.

"Go on," he said to Mallory. "Let's see you open the door your grandmother created for you."

Mallory raised her hand and placed it on the surface of the painting, but nothing happened. She asked him, "Do you think it needs some sort of spell?"

"Hm," Hadeon hummed, his head tilting as he stared at the painting and he said, "Probably. Try to remember conversations that you and she had. Maybe you will find something in there?" 2

Mallory wondered what kind of phrase her grandmother would have kept. Feeling pressured, she turned to Hadeon and said, "I think I might need some time to remember..."

"Of course!" Hadeon responded in an understanding tone and he then walked to her bed before plopping his back flat on it. "Take your time, and I will get some nap in the mean time." 13

"What if it takes a longer time?" Mallory raised her eyebrows.



"Well, isn't that even better? I will get to catch up on my beauty sleep," Hadeon replied, before closing his eyes to sleep. 2

Mallory's mouth was left wide open. Unbelievable man! He had welcomed himself to her bed. She took the couch that faced the painting, while she stared at it. As seconds began to pass in the quiet room, her eyes began to turn heavy and soon she fell asleep.

Hadeon, who hadn't truly fallen asleep, listened to Mallory's steady heartbeat and even breathing. His golden eyes opened, and he quietly slipped out of bed, making his way to where she lay curled up on the couch.

"I guess we can continue tomorrow morning. You did almost become someone else's dinner," Hadeon murmured, watching her shift slightly in her sleep. 6

A strand of her hair hovered near her lips, gently wavering with each breath. Leaning closer, he whispered, "This is the second time I've watched you sleep, Mallory Winchester. You're not as guarded as you think, so vulnerable." With a tender breath, he blew the hair away from her face. 12



Hearing a creak outside the room, Hadeon turned to see Ivy standing at the door, her eyes wide. She quickly bowed to him. 5

"Something you needed?" Hadeon asked, his demeanour subtly shifting.

"I heard from Barnby that Lady Mallory went missing while asleep, so I thought I should keep an eye on her..." Ivy's voice trailed off, internally questioning whether what she had just witnessed was real or a figment of her imagination. 9

"That won't be necessary. You can go to sleep after it," Hadeon dismissed her and the maid nodded. 3

Mallory, who was fast asleep, was pulled into a dream.

Her grandmother combed her blonde hair, while a young Mallory sat between her legs. The young girl said, "Can't I stay here, Grandma? Is it difficult for you?"

"Oh, you silly child. There's nothing difficult with you," her grandmother responded, while lovingly combing her hair. "You need to stay with your uncle and aunt. Your cousin. They will look after you. I won't be around forever, and Reavermoure



is better than this small village for you."

The old woman had brought the young girl home with her after her parents's death. The woman then said, "You are my favourite child, Mallory. Don't you forget that."

"And you my favourite grandmother," the girl murmured. "The best grandmother."

"You bring joy to me, Mal. I will miss you but this is important," her grandmother hugged her from behind. "My sunflower." 12

Mallory's eyes snapped open from her sleep, and she whispered, "Sunflower! That's the one!" She noticed Hadeon, was quietly sitting on the couch next to hers, while the sky was still dark. She murmured, "Sunflower. That's what she used to call me."

"Had I been a witch, the nicknames would range from porcupine and prickly pear," Hadeon remarked with humour. "Let us see if it works." 6

Mallory quickly jumped from her seat and appeared in front of the painting. She repeated the word, "Sunflower," loud and clear, while Hadeon had slipped right behind her, not wanting her sucked in alone. 5



It took less than five seconds, before the surface of the painting began to waver and when Mallory placed her hand on the surface of it, she was suddenly sucked inside. 1

"Ouch!" Mallory murmured, upon being dropped on the hard floor. Right behind her, Hadeon appeared without ungracefully falling like her. When she stood up, her eyebrows furrowed and she asked in doubt, "Are we back..." 2

"Back in your best friend's house? Yes, you are correct," Hadeon remarked in a nonchalant tone. 8

"Grandmother placed the answers in here?" Mallory asked with a confused expression.

"Looks like your grandmother hid the eggs in the fox's forest, knowing the fox would never look into its own forest," Hadeon drawled with a thoughtful expression. "It was the safest place even if someone tried to intrude, it would be guarded. Until you would come to take what she left for you," his golden eyes looked around the place, scanning. 9

Mallory didn't know what they were particularly looking for, or how she would find answers, but she began to look for it by going through the bedroom, while leaving the kitchen to Hadeon.



She went through Sable's belongings, before her hands fell on a book. It was a book that was hidden underneath a stack of other books. Her eyebrows furrowed, and just when she open the book, she felt a zap of current pass, that her softly yelp and drop the book from her hand. 5

"You are going to be the chicken who is going to wake up the villagers who got back to sleep," Hadeon appeared in the room. 1

"I felt a static in my hand," Mallory replied in a whisper.

Hadeon leaned forward and picked up the book from the ground. The outer cover looked like any other book and looked old. His eyebrows then subtly rose with a hint of surprise and he said, "Cannot tell I am not shocked with how bold your grandmother is, in placing this here."

"Sable didn't like to read," Mallory stated, "She liked to make people think that she enjoyed reading."

"Figures," Hadeon remarked, and he then said, "This is a book of memories." 8

"Like a personal diary?" Mallory asked him.

"Well, in a personal diary, a person writes and



reads. In the book of memories, you see things the person wants," Hadeon explained to her. "But not all witches have the ability to capture their memories and it is only creatures of higher class. The ones who can, are the ones who have lived for centuries." 7

To think something like this existed, Mallory thought to herself. She could capture all her memories and keep them here... all the happy ones, and she—

"Don't even think about it," came the blunt interruption from Hadeon, and when her eyes met his, he said, "The witches have to get inside the book to write it. And let me tell you that when these books are burned, the witches die with them if they are in there." 11

"It isn't like I am a witch," Mallory responded to him, because so far she didn't exhibit any of those witch-like physical characteristics.

"Well, you never know. Anything can happen," Hadeon hummed with his eyes slightly narrowed.

While still staring at the book in his hand with her heart thumping, she asked him, "Do you have something like this with you?"



"Curious to learn more about me, wifey? Just ask—I'm an open book, especially for you," Hadeon grinned cheekily. He was about to pass the book of memories to her, when he mindlessly flipped the pages and stopped with the smile on his lips lowering. 10

Noticing his change in expression, Mallory asked him, "What is it?"

Hadeon turned to the first page, revealing a symbol. He then pulled out his pendant and flipped it to show the same symbol on the back. "This is a unique mark, given to my serphant apart from the cross that adorns your delicate neck. It seems she didn't steal my cross from someone," he remarked.

As Hadeon's words sank in, Mallory asked, "Grandmother was a serphant, then?"

"Not just a serphant, but possibly the one I last saw before going to sleep in the coffin." 27

