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The creature leaned closer to Mallory, its hooded face near her as it sniffed her. At the same time, Mallory's eyes opened and she saw a blurry figure above her. 1

"Ah...!" 2

Mallory gasped for air as she shot upright in bed, her heart racing. She scanned the room frantically, searching for the shadowy creature that had hovered above her. But there was no one there—only the stillness of her surroundings. Had she been dreaming? The chill lingered on her skin, and goosebumps prickled her arms.

It was so strange to dream something out of context, something she had never seen or heard of, thought Mallory to herself. When the doorknob turned, her heart made a dive for a moment, and she felt it resurface upon seeing Hadeon. 1

"It is you..." Mallory murmured, feeling her mind slightly disoriented.

"Why do you look like you just saw a ghost?" Hadeon teased, closing the door behind him and



walking towards her with a playful smirk on his lips. 8

"I had a strange dream," Mallory murmured, still trying to shake off the unsettling feelings. "But everything's fine now."

As Hadeon moved closer, his expression shifted slightly, his eyes narrowing as they dropped to her neck. He looked annoyed and demanded, "Who touched you?" 13

For a moment, Mallory frowned, a knot of unease forming in her stomach. She quickly crawled out of bed and stood before the mirror, stretching her neck to examine the red line marring her skin. There was an obvious hint of blood on the line. Could it be that she hadn't been dreaming after all? 4

Turning to Hadeon, Mallory whispered, "Something unbelievable happened before you returned." 1

"Tell me, and I'll believe you. Try me," he replied, irritation lingering in his tone. The annoyance he felt at the sight of her mark hadn't dissipated. It gnawed at him that someone had dared to touch her in such a way. 10

"It wasn't a person, or at least, I don't think it

was," Mallory began, trying to keep her voice steady and not sound insane. "I was resting when this shadowy thing crept up to me. Its hands reached for my neck, as if it intended to squeeze. I say 'it' because the fingers didn't look normal. They were elongated, like sharpened sticks. And for just a brief moment, I thought I saw someone—" 8

"In a cloak?" Hadeon interjected, a grim expression settling on his features.

Mallory furrowed her brows in confusion. "You know about this?"

"It's a ghoul from the dead realm—one that hunts and claims souls that have been assigned. A creature that wears a hooded and ragged cloak," Hadeon explained, his words sending Mallory's balance teetering. "The prophecy hasn't been fulfilled, which means someone has altered your time of death and wants you gone. Someone suspects you." 10

"Time of death...?" Mallory's throat felt parched, the weight of the revelation settling heavily on her.

She didn't want to die so soon! Why her? She had been trying to live her life, and now



everything seemed to be collapsing around her. She hadn't harmed anyone enough to warrant a ghoul chasing after her. 3

"We buried the book where no one would find it. How could anyone know about it unless they've read the book before?" She argued, grasping at straws. Was someone following them? No, that couldn't be. If it were so, Hadeon would know.

"Because sometimes, clues alone can shift the tide of battles. It's the witches who must be helping. Hard to say which one," Hadeon said, his gaze sharp as he noticed the worry etched across her face. "Certain witches possess the ability to guide people in the right direction—others can glimpse into the murky shadows of the future."

Suddenly overwhelmed, Mallory's knees buckled, and she sank to the floor, cradling her head in her hands as she struggled to process the chaotic turn her life had taken. Sharp, steady footsteps approached, halting right in front of her.

"Look at me, Mallory Winchester."

Slowly, Mallory raised her head, her blue eyes filled with worry as they locked onto his golden



ones. "I'm not ready to die, Hadeon. Not like this." 1

"You won't," he replied with unwavering confidence, kneeling on his heels to meet her gaze. 7

"It's easy for you to say," Mallory muttered, a hint of bitterness in her voice. "There's no reaper chasing after you. Maybe I should start picking out my coffin." 15

Her words drew a chuckle from Hadeon. "That's not a bad idea at all. In fact, I know some excellent craftsmen who create coffins in a variety of styles," he joked, but his demeanour quickly shifted to seriousness. "We need to discover who sent the reaper after you. There must be someone with ties to the dead." 8

Mallory's mind was racing, struggling to make sense of everything. "And how do we find out who sent the reaper?" she asked, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

Hadeon's lips curled into a sly grin. "Why, by speaking to the dead, of course!" 5

Her eyebrows knitted together in confusion. "When the devil created me, I had time to learn a few things before I was sent to the living realm,"



he continued, his confidence unshakeable. 1

Would they really get answers? Mallory couldn't shake her scepticism. It felt far too simple. A knot of anxiety formed in her stomach as she worried that the ghoul would come after her again to finish the task it had been assigned. 6

They both stood up, straightening their postures. While Mallory was consumed with worries about the ghoul, Hadeon's gaze returned to her neck. Without a word, he licked his thumb and gently smeared it across the inflamed red line. 8

"There. Much better now," Hadeon declared, watching as the red line faded away beneath his touch.

Mallory felt the gentle pressure of Hadeon's finger on her neck, lingering for a moment before it slowly slid away. Unconsciously, they found themselves sharing the same intimate space, their breaths mingling in the charged air. She glanced down, feeling a mix of vulnerability and confusion, before clearing her throat.

"I..." she began, momentarily at a loss for words.

"I know," Hadeon replied, his steady gaze locking onto hers once again. 3



Constantly flirting with death, Mallory had always managed to escape thanks to Hadeon's repeated offers of help. It remotely registered to her, how she relied on him and owed him. And somewhere, it worried her. They were people of two different worlds, who were brought together because she had dug him out that night. 6

"What should I do if I run into the ghoul again?" Mallory asked, seeking his advice. It was better to be prepared than have a surprise visit.

"Do what you did the first time we met in the inn: carry salt with you," Hadeon replied. "We'll create a protective border around this room to ensure you can find some peace here. However, be warned—outside isn't guaranteed safety, as there are those who can break the boundary of salt." He paused for a moment, a playful glint in his eyes and said, 3

"But this gives you all the more reason to stay by my side. If the ghoul shows up, I'll be right there to send it back to dust." 20

