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The thought of death patiently waiting to knock on her door stirred a churning unease in the pit of Mallory's stomach. Her life felt like a can of troubles, each one tumbling out in relentless succession, as if all sought to find their resolution only in the icy grasp of death—a fate for which she was unprepared. A nervous laugh escaped her lips, which was shaky. 1

"I guess no one is going to be haunted by me then," Mallory said, attempting to mask the fear she felt. 7

"And to think I had already made plans for the future," Hadeon murmured with a look of disappointment. "It looks like there's no other way but to find the ghoul and end it." 16

The death reaper, a shadowy figure cloaked in darkness, said, "Ghouls are the waste of the dead world, which the Hawverts don't manage. They roam aimlessly and feed on negative energies or on themselves. Because her death is not inscribed in the Death Book, no reapers will come for her—not from where we stand. But that does not mean the ghouls will cease their relentless hunt." 11



"Ghouls?" Mallory frowned, a flicker of confusion crossing her face. "I thought there was only one pursuing me." 3

"When a ghoulish is assigned a task and fails, another one will inevitably rise to take its place. Even if you manage to eliminate the person who unleashed these creatures upon you, it will not bring an end to the hunt," the death reaper explained, his words landing heavily on Mallory's heart. "Do you want to make a transaction?" he asked her, "To see if you can keep your soul?" 10

Hadeon's eyes narrowed at the reaper's words. "If you are looking to take hers, it belongs to me." 11

A soft harrumph escaped the death reaper's lips, laced with a hint of exasperation. "I was merely trying to help." 5

Mallory, intrigued by the implications of the reaper's statement, couldn't help but question. "How would that be possible? My soul wouldn't exist after death." After all, that was what Hadeon had just implied. 3

"By attaching another soul," Hadeon declared and Mallory felt her head spin for a moment with the information being filled into her. She caught the

flicker of conflict in the pureblooded vampire's eyes over his nonchalant face. 8

"The last transaction payment is still ongoing. I don't think it would be wise to initiate another one," Mallory replied with a lightened voice, while the look on her face carried worry.

Suddenly, the distant tolling of the tower bell resonated across the town and where Hadeon and Mallory stood. The death reaper reached into the tattered folds of his worn robes, retrieving a rusted pocket watch.

"If you are still interested, I will find the one who sent the ghoul after her," the death reaper said, before pausing for a moment. "Don't take so much time that you have no time to regret it when death reaches out to you," the raspy voice, sounding grave. With that, he vanished in the blink of an eye, as if the shadows themselves had consumed him. 2

Mallory stood frozen, her heart echoing like the toll of the tower bell resounding in the distance, each thud resonating with a chilling finality. She stared at the empty space where the reaper had stood mere moments before.

"Your hand...!" Mallory gasped, her attention



drawn to Hadeon's bloodied arm, where the wound was knitting itself closed before her very eyes. She watched in muted awe as tissues and muscles began to weave together, the raw edges of his flesh melding. 8

Turning to meet Hadeon's gaze, she confessed, "I don't want to die, Hadeon. I want to live long enough to see my hair turn grey." 6

Hadeon clicked his tongue, shaking his head with a wry smile that held both amusement and mock sorrow. "I thought you were going to say until you saw your grandchildren. You know, if you were a vampire, you could live longer than a human. I'm just saying this based on statistics." 8

Mallory knew she was leaning on Hadeon like a steadfast anchor, afraid not only of drifting aimlessly into the abyss but of being utterly shattered by the raging storm. Her lips pursed as she looked away from him. How much could he protect her? She had always tried to be self-sufficient, and she knew she couldn't not be prepared for the worst. She couldn't uselessly sit around and wait.

They left the place, making their way back to Delcrov's mansion.



As they walked, curiosity tugged at her, and she finally asked, "So, how does this soul-attachment thing work?" Her voice was a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. "Putting a request for the soul maker?" 2

The death reaper had not bothered to explain it to her, probably knowing that Hadeon was well aware of it. Hadeon had slipped his hands in his trouser pockets as he walked next to her, pausing his whistling. 2

"Soul maker," he chuckled softly at her query, the lightness of his voice contrasting sharply with the heavy topic. "People who are devoid of souls —they only get used ones. Souls that once lived and died long ago. These fragments have wandered for so long that their memories have faded, rendered almost as blank as an empty canvas." 3

Mallory felt a chill creep down her spine at the thought of utilising another's essence. The idea settled uncomfortably in her mind. 3

Hadeon's expression grew more serious as he continued, "The real challenge lies in selecting the soul from the dead realm. While the concept of binding a blank soul to yours sounds appealing, these attached souls come with the



risk of corruption. It's similar to when a human transitions poorly into a vampire, turning into a corrupted vampire." 3

"That doesn't sound good at all," Mallory murmured to herself. 3

By the time they returned to Delcrov's mansion, the sky had surrendered its light to the darkness. Inside the mansion, flickering candles cast a warm, golden glow, illuminating the intricate architecture and furnishings. Torches blazed outside the walls of the mansion, letting one see the guests who were roaming around.

As they navigated the wide halls of Delcrov's mansion, her gaze fell upon a small boy—the same one she had spotted earlier. Curiously, she asked, "Is that Lord Salvador's son?"

Hadeon's eyes lazily drifted to the child. "Yes, that's Zachary." 13

"Where's Lady Delcrov?" Mallory asked, as her blue eyes looked around.

"In the coffin," Hadeon replied, his tone nonchalant. She turned sharply to meet his gaze, confusion knitting her brow. "She was a human." 8

When they further entered the hall, the crowd



quickly shifted their attention to Hadeon, their eyes lighting up with respect and admiration. They began to speak to him with high praise, while Mallory felt relegated to the background, sidelined as if she were a mere wallflower clinging to the walls of the grand hall.

When fifteen minutes passed, the lively chatter around her faded into a distant hum, and she decided it was a good time to retreat to her room. Taking a discreet step backward, she readied herself to leave the room, but just as she turned away, Hadeon's hand closed around her wrist, preventing her from leaving the room or his side. 16

