

108 Awaiting the night ¹¹

When Mallory awoke the next morning, she noticed the bed beside her was empty. Pushing herself upright, she glanced around for Hadeon, but he was nowhere to be found. Just as she turned to the bedside to reach for a glass of water, her eyes landed on a neatly folded note resting there. ¹

'I will be downstairs, annoying and belittling the deserving.' ²²

"You didn't have to leave a note for that," Mallory murmured, her gaze lingering on the message. ¹¹

Once she finished getting ready, she moved towards the door, but her eyes fell on the boundary of salt laid meticulously around the room. A grim reminder of the protective measure against any lurking ghouls. ²

Yesterday, in a moment of impulsivity, she asked to be turned into a vampire. Now, the weight of that decision felt even more daunting than before. She would be the creature who had killed her relatives. Yet, deep down, she clung to the hope that she could be different, that she could forge her own path and not become like most of



them. 8

Stepping out of the room, Mallory walked towards the stairs when she caught sight of Lady Reagan standing at the railing, gazing down at the people below. Just as she was about to pass the vampiress, the woman turned to her and said, "I wanted to apologise for my words yesterday." 13

Mallory's eyebrows subtly raised, and her footsteps halted, curiosity piqued. Lady Reagan continued, "My words stemmed from a place of hurt and abandonment—likely due to the lack of closure with Hadeon. I should have handled it better as he was part of my past." 7

"You should have," Mallory replied in a calm voice. The vampiress looked taken aback, her carefully constructed polite facade faltering for just a moment. 7

Lady Reagan scoffed softly, her expression turning to one of incredulity. "You have no empathy for what happened to me?" 10

Mallory offered Lady Reagan a composed smile, her tone steady and measured. "I do feel for you," she replied, pausing for a moment before continuing, "but only because you chose not to



heed what Hadeon said. Strange as he may be, I believe he has always been straightforward about his intentions. You call him your past, yet in the present, I see you watching him with a longing expression. Whatever you're feeling, you should consider letting go and moving on, milady. Begging doesn't look nice." 18

The vampiress looked offended, her expression darkening as she stared at Mallory, shock and displeasure flaring in her eyes. "I approached you with the intention of being friends, and you tried to humiliate me." 6

"Pardon me, milady, but that wasn't my intention," Mallory replied, her voice steady. "I merely aimed to enlighten you about the undesirable qualities one should avoid when trying to win a man's affection." She maintained her calm demeanour, a stark contrast to the vampiress, whose glare could have pierced through stone. "It seems we can't be friends, as you judge too quickly. Excuse me," and she made her way down the stairs. 12

Mallory had ghouls and other vampires to contend with. She didn't have the energy to waste on a jealous vampiress who couldn't see that after seven centuries, it was time to move



on rather than vie for Hadeon's affection. Somewhere, it made her wonder if her emotions were turning numb.

Once she arrived on the ground floor, Mallory strode down the corridor and spotted Hadeon engaged in conversation with a rather young man. As if sensing her approach, his gaze swiftly found hers.

"Happy Hallow. Slept well?" Hadeon inquired, taking note of her presence. She nodded in response. "Meet Reuben, the man who stands in opposition to the royals, advocating for fair rights for both humans and vampires." 26

As Mallory observed the young man, she noticed his striking red eyes that seemed to burn with passion. She offered him a polite bow, her curiosity piqued. "Mallory Winchester. It's good to know there's someone fighting for human rights."

"A pleasure to meet you, Lady Mallory," Reuben replied with a respectful nod. "But I must take my leave now, as there is still much to do. I look forward to what the future holds." 4

"Oh, we all are," Hadeon said, a smirk curling on his lips as he watched Reuben make his exit.



"I didn't know you were interested in the betterment of humans in these lands. What happened to vampire superiority?" Mallory asked, her eyebrows arched in curiosity. 5

Hadeon chuckled, a hint of amusement dancing in his eyes. "I still believe in the superiority of vampires—specifically, the pureblooded ones. But I've been having a slight change of perspective lately. I thought... poor humans need my help. It's agonising, really, to carry such kindness," he added with a mock sigh. 5

Mallory rolled her eyes, sceptical of his seemingly altruistic motives. "You think the current royal family will allow it? They won't relinquish control easily."

"Oh, darling, did you forget how persuasive I can be?" Hadeon replied nonchalantly, his confidence radiating. "Besides, it's high time the royal family surrendered their greed and power. They've been treating everyone else like puppets, and I believe the strings need to be cut. Frankly, I would like it very much if the strings came into my hands, all my little puppets to play with." His eyes sparkled with excitement. 7

"There is the answer," Mallory muttered while watching Hadeon play the scene in his mind.



They made their way to the dining room for breakfast, the air thick with excitement from the other guests who buzzed about the ball scheduled for that evening. Laughter and chatter filled the mansion, creating a lively backdrop.

Mallory's eyes wandered to the decorations, her heart quickening in anticipation. The ballroom hall stood poised and ready, its doors closed, concealing the lavish arrangements within—a dazzling display waiting to be unveiled once the sun dipped below the horizon.

"When I was sixteen, people could barely wait to ask me to dance. It was such a wonderful time!" said a middle-aged woman, a nostalgic smile spreading across her face. "It's important to enjoy these moments when you're young."

"I prefer the ambiance of the night, along with the blood," chimed in the vampiress sitting next to Mallory. "A time when we don't have to pretend to be part of society. Isn't that what Hallow really means?"

Mallory couldn't help but imagine that this was no ordinary ball. It was intertwined with the celebration of Hallow. Today, she would experience just a few fleeting hours of living as a human. Slightly apprehensive about what



midnight would bring, she picked up her glass and took a large sip. Her face contorted at the taste of wine. It seemed the festivities had begun early. Feeling the eyes of someone on the table, she looked around but saw everyone busy talking to each other. 4

"What about you, Mallory?" the middle-aged woman asked, her tone warm and inviting. "You must be quite popular in your town."

It was actually quite the opposite, thought Mallory to herself. Men were so scared that she was cursed and carried bad luck with her that they kept their distance from her during social gatherings. 3

"That is true," Lady Rose responded with a secretive smile, her eyes kind. "Mallory was the most spoken about of the four towns." 9

It wasn't wrong, Mallory thought to herself. Not many could claim the opportunity of having their faces plastered across the walls of the towns. But this time... the arrival of the ball felt different. As if she wouldn't be standing in the corner of the room. 15

