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For Mallory, the question wasn't just how she would return to being human, but when. Surely there must be some kind of trigger, she mused. As she stood by the carriage, watching her trunks being loaded. Another carriage behind them that belonged to Lady Rose was loaded with their belongings as it had been arranged for them to travel to Bonelake too. 1

"Lady Mallory, do visit us again when you can," Lord Salvador said warmly. "Valeria is especially beautiful after winter."

"Thank you for your kindness, Lord Salvador. I will make sure to visit," Mallory replied, offering a polite bow. He nodded with a smile.

"Until later, Vlad," Hadeon said as they settled into the carriage. Shortly thereafter, the two carriages departed from Delcrov's mansion, making their way towards Bonelake.

Having only recently transformed, Mallory quickly fell asleep, resting against the side of the carriage. When she awoke, the darkness outside greeted her, the forest around them cloaked in deep shadow with only patches of moonlight



breaking through the canopy. The air was rich with the earthy scent of damp leaves and pine, adding to the surreal quiet punctuated only by the distant rustle of nocturnal creatures.

She noticed Hadeon sitting with an expressionless face, staring out the window. The journey felt surprisingly tranquil, enveloped in a serene silence, unmarred by the sounds of wheels turning or hooves striking the ground. She asked him,

"Where are we now?"

"In Rotheram Forest. In two hours, we will be entering Bonelake," Hadeon answered, turning to face her. "I told them to take a break near the clearing. It would allow you to rest better. Did you sleep well?"

"I did. Almost as if better than when I slept in bed," Mallory replied with a slight frown.

"Temporary or not, you are a vampire now. And vampires like to sleep in the day," Hadeon hummed, his hand reaching for her face before tucking an errant strand from her sleep behind her ear. His fingertips lingered on the back of her ear. "It is going to take some time to fix the sleep routine, unless you don't mind." 4



His hand reached out to hers, taking it in his to hold. Mallory's pale cheeks coloured pink at the action as she welcomed this new fluttering feeling, which didn't have to do with her feeling thirsty to hunt and drink blood. 2

Even though she and Hadeon were doing fine by themselves, Mallory thought it was kind of Lady Rose to tag along with them.

"Let us get some fresh air ourselves," Hadeon proposed, and they got down from the carriage.

Mallory noticed the darkness that the forest was mostly covering it, if not for the moonlight that fell on the forest floor. She turned to look at the other carriage, which seemed empty and quiet now.

"Rose and Wallace decided to take a walk in the forest. For some fresh food," Hadeon informed her and she nodded quietly. "What ails you, my beautiful wife?" 12

Before Mallory could reply to his question, her lips curled, and she pointed, "We aren't married." 7

"Is that what troubles your mind? I already have a so—" 5



"No, it wasn't that," Mallory replied with a shake of her head. "I was just wondering about the failed attempt on Lady Rose. Would it be bad if I said I am happy it didn't work?"

"Probably if Rose heard it," Hadeon tilted his head with the corner of his lips curling. He pushed the branch that was before them, letting her pass first before he followed. "But you made someone else happy."

Wallace, Mallory thought silently. "Why, then?" she voiced.

"Why choose death when your partner is still alive?" Hadeon asked rhetorically, receiving a small nod from her. "Since she never formed a bond, I suspect Rose doesn't feel as deeply as he does." 5

"A bond?" Mallory inquired, curious.

Hadeon nodded thoughtfully. "There's a theory that when vampires first infested the living world, a vampire woman fell in love with a human. The heavens were moved by their love and gifted future generations with different types of bonds. One such bond is irreversible, meant for couples who choose to share their lives so deeply that when one dies, the other



follows almost immediately. It is done by biting the partner." 14

"Oh..." Mallory responded, slightly taken aback that something like that existed.

Though Hadeon was talking to her, there was a touch of silence as if his mind was occupied, and it was very rare for him to be like that. He had been like this since the failed attempt on Lady Rose. 2

"Is something the matter?" She asked him, seeing him stare at her.

"You turning back into a human is a cause for concern," Hadeon admitted. "It's not that I dislike you as a human, but this change carries the risk of a corrupted heart." 4

A frown appeared on Mallory's face as she responded, "I thought only vampires suffered from corrupted hearts."

"If it were just humans, it would be different," Hadeon explained, his expression tightening slightly with annoyance. "But moving between human, vampire and human states is damaging. That's what happens with the newly transformed vampires, whose bodies cannot handle the change. This is one of the reasons we're heading



to Bonelake—Hopefully, the soul we attach to you will try to keep the corruption at bay." 3

Though Mallory had agreed upon it, she was still a little apprehensive about what changes the soul could bring to her body, mind, and life.

"Is it the only bond?" Mallory asked intrigued about it.

"There's a sire bond, pretty much the master and slave bond. That's a gift from hell."

Upon reaching the clearing, Mallory bent down to collect water in her hands. For the briefest moment, she felt a jolt of surprise at the absence of Hadeon's reflection in the shimmering surface. She had forgotten that he didn't have a reflection. 2

"Lady Mallory, you are awake," came Lady Rose's voice from the other side. The vampiress delicately wiped the corner of her lips with her finger. "The weather is lovely, but strangely, there isn't a single animal in sight. I was thinking we should camp here now that we're out in the open." 2

Camp in the middle of the forest? Mallory questioned inwardly. But what could be scarier than the vampires? And she was one now. She

replied, "I guess so..."

Hadeon's red eyes skimmed through the place before he said, "No animal in here? That's definitely strange unless someone kidnapped them for the Hallow that passed by."

"I will go bring the woods," Wallace said, while Hadeon decided to go scout the forest to see if anything stood out there, leaving the women behind.

While Mallory's vampire ears picked up little sounds like the rustling leaves and chittering of the insects, she realised Lady Rose's eyes on her, who simply smiled at her before remarking.

"You've changed, Lady Mallory, and I don't mean just because you're a vampire," Lady Rose said, her voice softer than the gentle rustling of the leaves around them. "When we first met, you were always tense and on guard. That was before you awakened Hadeon from his grave. There's calmness around you now. A woman often blossoms in the care of the right man, learning not to carry the weight of the world alone." 17