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As Rose's words settled in her mind, Mallory found herself reflecting on how much she had evolved in Hadeon's presence. It wasn't merely change, she realised, but growth. This thought brought to mind something her grandmother had once told her: 1

'One day, Mal, you won't have to shoulder everything on your own. Someone will be there to carry the burden with you, and life will become easier.' 8

A smile touched Mallory's lips at the memory, though it quickly faded. Sensing the shift in Mallory's thoughts, Rose added gently, "Not every death must be tragic. I sense that Hadeon has already decided how he wishes to meet his end."

Mallory's brow furrowed in confusion. "How so?" she asked.

"Now that Hadeon loves you, he will go to great lengths to be with you. And as tragic as it sounds, even to the point of embracing death," Rose remarked, a hint of fascination in her voice. She paused, letting the weight of her words



settle before continuing, "One cannot forge a bond without a soul. The irreversible bond demands that two souls be entwined together, inseparable and eternal. This way you won't kill him, but he will die when you die. Completing the prophecy." 16

The thought that Hadeon had considered such depths for her left Mallory astounded. She had never realised that someone would care so profoundly to contemplate such sacrifices for her sake. It was a revelation that warmed her heart and filled her with an unfamiliar yet comforting sense of belonging. 6

Less than five minutes had passed when Hadeon returned, with Wallace trailing closely behind, his expression darkened by a deep frown. Hadeon broke the tense silence with his report.

"There are skeletons," he announced grimly. 2

Mallory, recalling how Rose had mentioned the absence of animals in the area, immediately asked, "Of animals?"

Hadeon shook his head and replied, "Humans. And there are too many of them. It seems like someone killed and ate them." 7

At this revelation, Lady Rose whispered, "They



sound like ghouls."

Suddenly, a strange rustling in the trees caught their attention and they turned to look in the direction. There was an abrupt screech that echoed through the forest. Mallory's eyes seemed to sharpen and focus on the tree-line, feeling the vibrations travelling through her boots. Something was coming—something large.

Hadeon stepped forward, pulling out his guns. "Looks like we are being greeted by a dozen of them," he remarked. 4

Suddenly, ten ghouls appeared, lunging at them at a speed Mallory had tried to brace herself with. Hadeon's gun cracked the silence, silver bullets whizzing in the air and hitting the ghouls' heads. The creature convulsed, dissolving into mist before crumpling into a pile of ash. 6

Rose lifted her hand when another ghouls came behind her. Shadows swirled at her fingertips, and with a flick of her wrist, the long tendrils of shadow shot out from the ground, ensnaring the ghouls in their deadly grasp to be pulled down to the forest floor. 3

On the other hand, Mallory apparated and reappeared a few feet away just as a ghouls



claws slashed through where she had stood. The creature spun, confused, before spotting her, looking angry. And though Haden got most of the ghouls away from her, the creatures continued to appear like hydra.

"Did all the ghouls from Hell end up here?"

Mallory questioned in worry because the number never ceased and seemed to be multiplying. The ghouls kept coming, faster and more furious with each passing second. 3

"This is going to take forever!" Rose shouted as she brought down another ghoul.

Hadeon reloaded his guns with practiced ease, firing shot after shot, each silver bullet exploding into the nearest ghoul with deadly accuracy. His dark eyes raked through the ghouls, as if trying to figure out something. He shouted over, "These are just dummies. There's a main one that is controlling the rest of them. We need to find and kill it." 3

"How do we find it?" Wallace asked, his dagger slashing through the ghoul's robe, only to have him picked and thrown to another side.

"Probably draw it out," Hadeon replied, shooting five more ghouls.



"I can do it," Mallory volunteered, as she felt useless without any weapon. "If the ghoul was made by the creator of hell, then maybe I am on the head ghoul's list." 3

Hadeon's eyes narrowed with concern. "It's too dangerous. You've just turned—and we don't know if your body will switch back. One run into your chest or rip of your head will be the end. You are not going anywhere without me and take this," he threw a silver knife her way, which she caught. 5

The forest became eerily silent as Mallory and Hadeon moved deeper into its heart, the sounds of battle fading into the distance. The further they went, the colder the air became, and the deeper the shadows seemed to grow.

"Where is it?" Mallory asked, while she was on guard.

"Perhaps it needs a little motivation," Hadeon said, before pulling Mallory into his arms and kissing her lips. 14

When he pulled away, Mallory muttered against his lips, "This is not an appropriate time for it." 3

"Oh? I needed a little motivation myself," Hadeon joked, and he said, "If we are baiting, let us do it



right." His wings sprouted from his back and he flew up in the air, observing her from above.

Mallory clutched the knife tight in her hand. What seemed like an eternity, the main ghoul finally appeared before her. It was taller and its robe murkier with its fingers made of woody fingers, which crackled as it moved. 2

Just when its hand moved towards her, Mallory apparated and Hadeon took the opportunity to shoot the creature, but instead the creature disappeared in an instant, following her closely. She made a few attempts to surprise the creature to stab its chest or back, but the ghoul was faster. It dodged her, making it difficult for her as well as Hadeon to trap it.

At one moment, she swung the knife, but the creature twisted its body unnaturally, knocking the weapon from her grasp. Panic surged through her veins. 2

Hadeon flew towards them with great speed while Mallory, about to apparate to safety, felt the ghoul's hand reach for her. In reflex, she placed her hand on its body as if to ward it off.

Several gunshots echoed through the forest before the forest fell utterly quiet.



Mallory, who had momentarily closed her eyes, finally pried her eyes open to see the ghoul standing before her, unscathed, which left them confused.

Rose and Wallace quickly made their way to where they were, as the other ghouls they were fighting had disappeared into a mist.

"You killed the ghoul!" Rose exclaimed in relief, but Hadeon stared at the ghoul that didn't move an inch. Finally noticing the scene on the side, her eyes widened, and she asked, "What's going on??"

"The silver bullets didn't work," Hadeon said, cracking his knuckles. "And they both seem to be frozen in time." 6

Mallory could *feel* the creature and it was an odd feeling. The rage and darkness she had felt earlier while dodging the ghoul had now disappeared, replaced with... warmth and it was a strange feeling. 7

It was as if her touch had rendered it powerless. The creature then suddenly dropped its hand and bowed its head in submission. 21