



120 Ghoul that follows 6

Mallory was engulfed in confusion, leaving her speechless along with the rest of them. She could feel the residual coolness from her contact with the ghoul seeping into her skin, a strange connection that she hadn't anticipated. Realising her hand still lingered on the creature's shadowy form, she quickly withdrew it and vanished from sight, reappearing by Hadeon's side. 1

The ghoul turned its body slowly, but its posture remained one of humble submission, its dark and towering silhouette unwavering. 3

"Don't tell me the ghoul had a love at first sight," Hadeon muttered, his eyes narrowing as he lowered his gun, now aware that its bullets were useless against it. "Tell it to raise its head," he suggested, his tone carrying a hint of curiosity and incredulity. 15

Mallory glanced at Hadeon before looking back at the creature. She complied, instructing, "Raise your head..."

To her astonishment and that of the others, the ghoul obeyed, lifting its head to gaze in her direction. Rose gasped softly, the sound barely

audible amid the whispering trees. The pureblooded vampiress murmured, her voice threaded with disbelief, "Ghouls have never followed anyone's orders, least of all a newly turned vampire." 2

"Unless... they were shaped by grief and blood," Hadeon mused aloud, boldly approaching the ghoul, which stood tall and dark like a shadow carved from the night. "There have been tales by the reapers of such occurrences." 7

Mallory's brows lifted slightly, the questions swirling in her mind mirroring her confusion. She studied the creature, which stood still as though awaiting her next command. "Do you think... it happened when I was little? When my adoptive parents died?" she asked. Memories of spending hours with their burnt bodies haunted her thoughts. 9

"If that were true, the ghoul might have appeared next to you at the same time," Hadeon stated before clicking his tongue thoughtfully, and tilting his head as he scrutinised the creature.

"Perhaps something changed when Mallory turned into a vampire," Rose suggested, a frown creasing her brow, the notion almost too



implausible to accept. 3

"I don't think so," replied Hadeon, turning his attention to the ghoul. "I would like my bullets back if you aren't going to die from them. They are quite expensive." 20

The ghoul remained motionless, rooted like a tree, save for the gentle ripple of its robe in the breeze. Mallory hesitated to approach, the fear of death by a ghoul's hand still a chilling reminder of curses and the prophecy that threatened both her and Hadeon.

"Can you return the bullets to him, please?" Mallory requested softly. A slight shift in the ghoul's posture signalled compliance. Its long, woody fingers delved into its robes, pulling out the bullets and presenting them in its open palm. A wisp of mist curled from Mallory's lips as goosebumps danced across her arms, the chill air brushing her skin.

Hadeon retrieved his bullets, observing the ghoul's body tense, almost as if it were readying for combat.

Reflecting on how her fears had shifted in such a short time, Mallory found it odd that the ghouls, once her would-be assassins, now included one



that seemed inclined to obey her every word. The creature stood there, seemingly on standby, waiting for her next command with an intensity that made her uneasy.

Breaking the silence, Hadeon's voice cut through her contemplations. "Let us see how far the ghoul will go, shall we?" he suggested. 2

In a swift movement, Hadeon raised his hand, this time aiming it directly at Mallory's temple. In an instant, the ghoul lunged at the pureblooded vampire, its fingers piercing through Hadeon's chest, aiming for his heart. 8

"NO!" Mallory cried out in horror, her voice raw with fear and shock. The ghoul hesitated, turning its head toward her, the movement accompanied by a creaking sound like twisted wood. Reading the panic in her eyes, it withdrew its hand, a gesture of submission, before bowing its head like a chastised pet. 12

Mallory rushed to Hadeon, who, rather than being angered, chuckled, the sound rumbling from deep within his chest before blooming into full laughter, clearly amused by the unexpected turn of events.

"If anything, it seems the ghoul is under



Mallory's control now. Congratulations, dear, you have a pet," Hadeon remarked dryly, as his chest began to heal from the wounds inflicted on him just a few seconds ago. 10

"I don't need a ghoul as a pet..." Mallory muttered softly. She noticed the ghoul's shoulders sagging, eliciting an unexpected pang of guilt. It was strange how quickly she seemed to empathise with something that had aimed to harm her just moments ago. This strange turn of events left her baffled. 5

"Maybe the devil made an exception if your partner was a vampire," Rose mused aloud.

That night, they didn't camp and instead got back inside the carriages before continuing their journey towards the east land, which was the infamous land called Bonelake. But they had one other unexpected passenger riding with them, the ghoul. 1

When Mallory had politely suggested that the ghoul accompany them, she hadn't truly expected the creature to climb into the carriage with them. Yet here it was, sitting primly upright with the poise of a distinguished gentleman, its back straight and its face hidden by the deep shadows of its cloak. 12

Mallory turned to glance at Hadeon, noticing how his gaze was fixed on the creature across from them, even as the ghoul's eyeless attention rested solely on her. 5

"I would have found a way to throw the creature into hell's fire, but it might prove useful by keeping the other ghouls at bay," Hadeon remarked with his eyes narrowing slightly as they continued to observe the ghoul seated across from them. 2

"I don't understand what happened," Mallory admitted, voicing her confusion about the strange turn of events. How could they possibly have a ghoul accompany them out in the open? 3

"Perhaps the creature has answers. If it obeys your words, there must be some connection it understands," Hadeon stated, raising Mallory's already existing curiosity. 1

She shared a connection with the ghoul? But how was that even possible? 18