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Mallory stood by the window, her fingertips lightly brushing against the cool, misted glass, eyes narrowing as she tried to make sense of the fog-cloaked world outside. The persistent rain blurred the horizon into a hazy grey, turning everything into a cold, wet canvas. 1

"I thought winter was close, but the weather here..." Mallory's voice was soft, almost swallowed by the unrelenting patter of raindrops against the windowpane. 6

Beside her, Hadeon gazed out into the opaque curtain of rain, his figure casting a shadow against the dim room. His lips curled in that familiar way, a half-smile of amusement, as if he found humour in the gloom.

"Welcome to Bonelake, darling," Hadeon drawled, his voice a low murmur that held a hint of mischief. "Where it rains pretty much all the time." 4

The downpour had accompanied them since the moment they had crossed into the eastern lands, a constant companion, wrapping the Perone estate in its watery grasp. The estate belonged



to an acquaintance of Lady Rose knew. It was as if the heavens themselves had forsaken the land, leaving it to drown beneath the relentless sheets of rain. For two days, the weather hadn't faltered, as though Bonelake were determined to wear them down with its sombre persistence. 6

Mallory exhaled softly, her breath fogging the window as her eyes swept over the hazy grounds outside. The soil, a dark and murky mess, clung to the buildings walls that seemed to blend with the touch of darkness.

"There's something off about this place," Mallory muttered under her breath, barely audible over the drumming rain. She had experienced rain, but never like this. 2

Hadeon pulled away from the window and moved to the armchair near the fire. His pale fingers opened the cigar case he carried with a soft metallic click.

"Bonelake wasn't always like this," he said casually, as if he were recounting an old tale rather than speaking of the land's cursed state. He ignited the end of his cigar. "There was a time when it had lush greenery and bright skies—like Valeria or Woville." 6



He exhaled a slow stream of smoke, watching it curl into the air. "This land carries more than just rain," he added, his lips quirking in dull amusement. "There's a story buried beneath these endless clouds, one that humans hold dear to their hearts." 10

Mallory turned from the window, her frown deepening as she crossed the room to warm herself by the fireplace. She remarked, "Why do I get the feeling it's not the kind of dear that people usually think of?" 3

The flames danced before her, their light flickering against the stone hearth as the temperature in the room dipped lower. Even though she was a vampire now, she could still feel the cold creeping into her bones, a reminder of the frailty she had once known as a human. In the far corner, their ghoul companion stood motionless, a shadow blending seamlessly into the room's dimness. 9

Hadeon's eyes gleamed with mischief, pleased that Mallory had caught on to his words. Leaning back in his chair, he started.

"There once was a healer. A middle-aged woman who lived on the outskirts of Bonelake, back when humans still ruled these lands. She was



known for her gift with herbs, healing the sick with remedies no one else could match. The people trusted her... for a time." 4

Mallory turned her body to face him, giving all her attention to him.

Hadeon continued, the embers of his cigar glowing faintly as he said, "Then, the plague came. It swept through the village, turning people sick faster than anyone could imagine. The healer tried everything, but nothing worked. Instead, it made it worse. Even her son fell ill." 3

"Was she a witch?" Mallory asked him.

"Maybe. She was desperate," Hadeon continued, his voice light against the dark story that resembled the rain-soaked clouds outside. "In a last attempt to save her son, she left her home in the dead of night, rushing to the village for more herbs. But the guards didn't believe her. They accused her of black magic, said she was using the herbs to curse the village rather than heal it. So, they threw her into a cell. And when her son died, with him, her humanity did too." 9

"Did she get out of there?" Mallory turned curious, and in between she raised her palms to feel the heat coming from the fireplace.



Hadeon shook his head, "No. Before her death, she was consumed by grief, and she turned to forbidden magic—magic that no living soul should ever touch. In exchange for the souls of the village, she offered her own. She unleashed a curse upon Bonelake, a curse that would claim the lives of the very people who had condemned her. Death swept through the land, draining the life of the humans, and their bodies sank into the lake's dark waters. Finally, the vampires took over." 9

Grief could drive anything, especially death, thought Mallory to herself. The pitter-patter of the rain continued. She murmured, "So it rains because of the tragedy."

"Some say that, in her final moments, she begged the dead to let her son live in exchange for all the human souls," Hadeon's voice drawled. "Her wish was granted, but not in the way she expected."

Mallory's brow furrowed in confusion. "He came back to life?"

Hadeon's grin widened, though the gleam in his eyes. He replied, "He did. But not as she had hoped. He became a guide, a ferryman for the dead—forever bound to this cursed land, rowing



souls across the lake of the dead." 19

Hadeon flicked the ash from his cigar, the embers glowing briefly in the dim light. He remarked,

"They say the rain that falls over Bonelake is her tears. That her spirit lingers here, keeping the land alive with her grief, her sorrow feeding the storm that never ends. Of course, the land has its sunny days, but not many."

A sigh escaped from Mallory's lips. And as her eyes shifted from Hadeon to look at the fireplace, she was startled upon seeing the ghoul standing on the other side of the fireplace with its woody, long fingers stretched out like her. 5

"What... what is it doing?" she whispered, almost afraid to break the silence.

"It thinks like a little duckling following its mama duckling," Hadeon chuckled at the sight before him. 16

Any more closer and they would have a bonfire out of the fireplace, she thought to herself. Though she had spoken to the ghoul, it hadn't spoken once, and it made her wonder if the creature was mute.



"Do you think he has a name?" Mallory asked Hadeon, who extinguished his cigar.

"I doubt they have naming ceremonies in Hell, Mal doll," Hadeon replied. "If you are going to call him Duckie, I am in support of it." 16

"You shouldn't be allowed to name anyone," Mallory's lips pressed into a thin line. She muttered, "Especially in the future." 17

Considering how bad he was at nicknaming people, no wonder people jumbled up his name! Mallory thought to herself, before looking back at the ghoul, who had pulled its hands away from the fire like her.

At her words, Hadeon's eyes sparkled, and he remarked, "Perhaps we can name the children alternatively. That only sounds fair." 21

