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By morning, the rain had stopped, but dark clouds lingered. Mist curled around the ground, weaving between skeletal trees and brushing against the stone walls of the tea house where Mallory, Hadeon, Lady Rose, and Wallace sat. 1

Mallory held her teacup, eyes fixed on the creature beside her. The ghoul was dressed in an oversized cloak and wide-brimmed hat, which concealed most of its twisted limbs, though it still stood out awkwardly. 4

"You shouldn't worry about him. He fits in just fine here," Hadeon teased, setting his teacup down. 2

The server approached, visibly nervous around Hadeon and Lady Rose, who exuded authority and mystery. He stammered, "Is there anything else you'd like me to—uh, bring?"

Mallory offered a small smile. She replied, "I'm quite alright, thank you."

Hadeon's eyes gleamed, his slow smile unsettling the server. "Any chance you have blood cookies?" 3



"Is that... a thing?" Mallory asked, half-frowning.

"Of course, it is!" Hadeon replied with a playful roll of his eyes. Turning to the server, he asked, "Do you have cookies at least?"

The server nodded and was about to leave when the ghoul's bony, clawed hand emerged from the cloak, grasping a delicate teacup. The server's eyes widened. **7**

Mallory quickly reached over, tucking the ghoul's hand back under the cloak. "Old injury," she explained hastily. "He—uh—burned his hand." **5**

The server nodded shakily and scurried away. Lady Rose watched with a contemplative expression. "This ghoul is... unusual."

"What do you mean?" Mallory asked the vampiress.

"Ghouls are usually one track mind and nature, right?" Lady Rose asked, before continuing, "They have one personality, unlike people who walk the living realm. The ghoul has a softness, yet there's harshness to it."

Mallory turned to look at the ghoul, who continued to fumble with the teacup as it tried to drink. She wondered where the ghoul actually



came from. She knew it was hell, but where in hell exactly? Because no human or vampire was blessed or cursed to have a ghoul following them. She then asked Hadeon, 5

"Shouldn't we be heading to the lake?" 2

"Patience, darling," Hadeon replied, his voice smooth and nonchalant. "Most people in Bonelake have little idea of what truly resides in the waters. They avoid the lake out of superstition, which keeps unwanted attention at bay. And besides, the best time to find a soul is at dusk, when the boundary between the living and the dead is thinnest."

"Dusk?" Mallory's voice echoed. "So we just... wait?"

Hadeon's lips curled into a teasing smile. "Or, if you're feeling restless, you could take Duckie for a stroll around the estate. I'm sure he'd love to traumatise a few more innocent bystanders." 14

"Very funny," Mallory muttered, though a small smile tugged at her lips.

"But for now, it would be best for you to drink as much blood as you can. Because we don't know what kind of soul your body might find itself with," Hadeon remarked, with a hint of

seriousness in his voice. 4

As hours passed and the sky began to darken, the group made their way in the carriage to the famous Bonelake. The lake itself was hidden beyond a dense wall of trees and rocks, glimmered with an otherworldly luminescence. The surface shimmered, reflecting the strange, bluish light of the shadows that danced upon it.

"This looks magical..." Mallory murmured while standing beside Hadeon and staring at the sight before her. She had never seen anything like this before.

But as seconds began to pass, there was a certain eeriness to this place. And though there wasn't anyone except for them, she could hear the faint cries that goosebumps form over her skin.

"Welcome to Bonelake, darling," Hadeon presented it with a wave of his hand. "Where the dead whisper, and the living don't step anywhere close to it."

"One step closer to death," Lady Rose said from behind. "How do you plan to catch a soul? I don't think I have ever heard anyone done it before. Like fishing in the lake?"

"That's because they aren't fully equipped, Rosie. But if only that were easy I would have collected some fine souls," Hadeon chuckled. He then said, "The souls we're seeking—blank souls—don't wander near the living. They lack will, and so they will move away, unlike the other souls that are in agony or want to possess the living's body to live again."

"Then how do we catch one?" Mallory asked.

"You'll need to stab it," Hadeon explained, his voice steady. "A blank soul is empty, void of memories or purpose. The moment you stab it, you will have the window to bring the soul out of the waters, and we will merge it with your body. If your body accepts it." 3

"And if my body doesn't accept it...?" Mallory wasn't liking this idea.

"Then we try until we find one. Optimism is a must now," Hadeon clapped Mallory's back in encouragement. 2

"Wonderful," she murmured dryly. 2

Hadeon's gaze softened, and he said, "You'll be fine. I will jump right with you, so you don't have to worry about the parasite souls. Just follow my lead." 5

Mallory smiled at his words before nodding, "Okay." Before taking a step forward, she turned to look behind. The ghoul stood far from them, as if unhappy about the lake that led to its world. She could only imagine that the creature didn't want to return to the dead and liked it here better. 2

It was time to fetch the soul. With that thought, they approached the water.

Mallory stood at the edge of the lake, her heart pounding. Even though the mist had thinned, a heavy, foreboding air pressed down on her. She took a deep breath, trying to steel herself. 2

"Ready?" Hadeon asked, his voice steady, while his hand hovered near hers, a silent reassurance. His red eyes scanned the lake's surface.

"Ready," Mallory nodded.

When Mallory stepped into the water, she gasped at the coldness of it. She was sure if she were a human now, she would turn into a block of ice. As they moved deeper, the mist moved a little away, and they finally dove under the water. 1

The world beneath the water was silent and heavy. Hadeon gripped her wrist firmly. *Stay*

close, he reminded her silently, his lips moving in a soundless command.

They moved deeper. Around them, souls drifted. They were hollow-eyed phantoms with translucent hands. Most of them had faces twisted in silent agony, their expressions frozen in endless torment. The cold grew deeper, until Mallory felt as if she could barely breathe. 2

Where was the soul that had no interest in them? Mallory asked herself, her red eyes looking through the water. She scanned the souls, searching for one that seemed empty, devoid of anguish or purpose. But the other souls had begun to notice them. As if drawn by the warmth of life, they surged forward.

When a skeletal hand reached for Mallory, the bones brushing against her skin left an electric current down her spine. 1

Hadeon's eyes glowed nothing less than a molten lava, which was enough to send the souls away with silent, ghostly wails. They drifted back, but only momentarily. The lake was hungry.

"We have to hurry," Hadeon mouthed the words, his eyes flicking from the souls to Mallory.

Mallory's eyes darted around the shadowy,

distorted forms floating through the water. The souls seemed to drift closer. But then—her eyes caught sight of it. A lone, motionless silhouette, dim and unresponsive, almost lost.

She inhaled sharply, the action sending bubbles spiralling upwards. Tapping Hadeon's hand, she signed to him in the underwater gloom, pointing towards the blank soul. Hadeon's gaze followed her gesture, narrowing as he spotted it. His expression hardened, and he gave her a curt nod of understanding. 2

When a greedy soul came at them, Mallory closed her eyes and the next moment they had apparated away from there to where the lonely soul was. 2

But the moment they appeared near the blank soul, the surrounding souls turned like a swarm, sensing fresh prey. Their skeletal hands reached out, clawing through the water. The souls swam forward, eager and desperate, driven by an overwhelming need to possess something—anything alive.

Hadeon pulled out his gun, shooting at the ghosts in the water. But one couldn't kill the already dead. He turned to Mallory and said, "Now!"



Mallory's fingers tightened on the dagger in her hand and without wasting another second, she lunged forward, aiming for the heart of the intended soul. The soul didn't move, nor did it react.

But just as the blade made contact, a surge of darkness exploded around them. One of the tormented souls had latched onto her, its skeletal arms wrapping around her body like icy chains. 2

"Mallory!" Hadeon's voice was a desperate echo, distorted by the water.

When Hadeon grabbed Mallory's arm, it took all her energy to apparate out of the water and to the land. The four of them fell on the side. 3

"What the..." Wallace frowned, seeing the two extra beings.

Mallory, who continued to struggle to keep away with the greedy soul, used all her strength. Hadeon quickly grabbed the soul who had almost latched on to her and he threw the soul away from her. The soul made screaming noises, wanting to get close but also scared at the same time, before it finally went back into the water.

"Rose, check the soul," Hadeon instructed,

feeling drained himself because of the dark water. He then went to sit next to Mallory, who laid on the ground with her head dizzy. "Doll face, you alright?" 5

"Are you?" Mallory asked, as she gasped for air with her eyes closed and shivering from the cold water they had stepped out from.

A crooked smile appeared on Hadeon's lips and he replied, "I am fantastic." 1

Opening her eyes, Mallory pushed herself to sit upright and Hadeon was quick to help her with it. Noticing the translucent soul beside her, she said, 'I thought the merging should have started.'

It was because Mallory was already sitting in the pentagram circle that had been drawn by Wallace earlier. They would use incantation for the merging to begin and complete.

"I wanted to know what the soul was before we attached it to you. Sometimes residual from the past life can spill to your current one," Hadeon stated, as he patiently waited for the vampiress.

Lady Rose's fingers had dug deep into the soul's chest, and she finally pulled it out. She said, "White witch." 7



"Lovely," Hadeon remarked.

Soon the soul was brought to the circle and made to lay next to Mallory. Its form had begun to waver, before it dissolved into a burst of light that enveloped her. For a moment, there was nothing but blinding luminescence.

The light from the merging soul enveloped Mallory. The pentagram circle drawn began to hum with energy, its lines illuminating with blue-white light.

Mallory could feel the soul's essence begin to seep into her skin, a sensation unlike anything she had ever experienced.

The soul was warm, gentle even, and as it merged with her, she felt a rush of emotions—echoes of a life that once existed. But there were no memories. The effect was overwhelming and disorienting, and her body trembled as if trying to adjust to this foreign energy coursing through her.

Hadeon's red eyes stayed on her, concern etched on his face. He placed his cold hand on her cheek as the light dimmed, darkness prevailing once again.

"Mallory," he called. "Return to me." 9



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Apology for leaving the book on no updates for so long. I had a terrible writers block since June on this book, and though I did try to push through, it didn't work and somewhere my mind broke with this book. I came to hate to write, because I believed I couldn't write anymore. Rest assured, the book will have its updates, and it will be completed before this month end. Thank you for your patience. 🙏

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