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The next moment, when Mallory woke up, she felt a pain shoot up to her heart even though it wasn't beating as she was a vampire. A soft gasp escaped from her lips, and she met Hadeon's concerned eyes. 1

"Nightmare?" Hadeon inquired, to which Mallory shook her head.

"I am not sure. It felt too dark... you think it has something to do with the soul that's attached to me now?" Mallory asked, pulling herself to sit upright. 1

"As we chose a blank soul, it shouldn't be causing you any trouble," Hadeon responded, sitting up with her and leaning forward to take a look into her light red eyes. When a frown appeared on his face, she asked him,

"What is it?"

Hadeon pulled away from her face and replied, "You have black specks in your eyes. Something is causing a corruption in you." 9

Hearing this, Mallory's stomach dropped. This was not supposed to happen. A vampire having

corruption was nothing less than a disease that would eventually spread and take over her senses.

"Doesn't that mean that it is better for my body to turn into a human?" Mallory asked him.

"Mm, it is the best and only choice that will keep the corruption out," Hadeon responded, before pulling her into his arms. "I won't let anyone steal our time." 5

Once they got ready, they stepped out of the room, to hear sounds coming from the kitchen. Upon moving closer there, Mallory noticed Lady Rose wearing an apron around her waist, while she stood next to Wallace, who was teaching her how to cook. At the island, the ghoul sat eating the batter which was yet to be cooked. 1

Noticing Mallory, Lady Rose's smile widened and she was going to ask if she and Hadeon had a good night. But then she noticed the tense shoulder and asked,

"Are you alright, Mallory?" Lady Rose asked from across the room, her sharp gaze fixed on her. "You look worried."

"I am fine," Mallory replied quickly, forcing a smile.



But then the ghoul slipped from the chair and glided to where Mallory stood. The creature sniffed the air around her, that resembled a dog. This caught Lady Rose and Wallace's attention.

"You..." Lady Rose frowned deeply. "You are corrupting... How's that possible?" 2

"Ever heard of the phrase, don't touch if it ain't broke?" Hadeon stepped into the room.

"Apparently attaching the soul wasn't a good idea. But now that it has been meddeled with, the only way is to force her to return to be a human."

Mallory had hoped that attaching a soul to her body would help her, but it was only causing her stress. She doubted it was possible to remove the soul that had merged itself with her last night.

"There's a witch that lives up in the mountains. Perhaps she might have answer to it?" Wallace proposed. 2

"How far is this mountain?" Mallory asked him.

"An hour to the mountain and an hour to find her maybe," Wallace replied. 1

Mallory turned to look at Hadeon with hopeful

eyes. Because no one knew how long it would take before the corruption started to affect her and would finally take over her senses.

"Let us head to the mountain," Hadeon remarked.

The journey to the mountain forest was silent except for the crunching of the leaves beneath their shoes. Mist covered the path ahead of them, while the trees grew thicker as they climbed.

Mallory walked beside Hadeon, their steps matching in a comforting rhythm, though occasionally she felt like a bolt of lightning hitting her heart. Before heading here, she had drunk five glasses of blood, and each sip had tasted better than the last.

"Is it me, or has the path become more difficult to see?" Lady Rose's voice was heard at the back.

"It must be the witch's deception," Hadeon replied, before asking, "What is this witch's name?"

"Aurora," Wallace replied.

"A little too sweet name for a witch, isn't it?" Hadeon hummed.

"The people around say she has been trying to collect souls from the Bonelake to create creatures," Wallace explained as they continued to move to the higher ground. 2

The ghoul, who had been following behind them, sniffed the air and let out a low, uneasy growl. Hadeon raised an eyebrow and questioned, "What do you smell, Duckie?" 5

The ghoul let out another growl, shrinking back as they approached a stone archway, ancient and covered in moss. Mallory was about to ask what happened, when she heard something slither and for a second she paused.

"Is it snakes?" Mallory asked, feeling something almost graze her ankle.

"Let us see, shall we?" Hadeon said taking a sip of alcohol from the bottle he carried and then snapping the lighter for it to create a spark. Suddenly, there was fire, and the mist disappeared for a few seconds, revealing the vines on the ground and around them, that had sprung to life. 2

The vines coiled around the trees, crawling over stones and slithering through the ground like serpents awakened from a long slumber. Each



vine was studded with thorns. 3

"A deadly garden just waiting to embrace us. How lovely," Hadeon murmured in a dry tone, while Mallory's eyes widened in shock. 1

Before they had time to react, the vines had slithered their way to them.

Mallory barely had time to think, as one of the vines wrapped around her wrist, its thorns biting into her skin. She gasped, struggling against its hold as the vine tightened, twisting up her arm and inching towards her neck.

Lady Rose slashed at the vines with a small, silver dagger, managing to free herself, but the vines only multiplied, coiling around her legs and pulling her towards the ground. Wallace was similarly ensnared, his face a mask of concentration as he tried to shake off the thorny tendrils.

Mallory did the best she could in this situation, and she apparated from the vines hold. But the longer she avoided the vines, the faster and more of them came at her. She asked, "How do you stop these?!"

"They are called the Gravebinders. We need to find the root and burn it if we want to stop it!"



Lady Rose shouted, while struggling to keep the vines away from her. 2

Hadeon moved to help Mallory, but a thick vine wrapped around his torso, pinning his arms to his sides. He struggled, but the vines only tightened, their thorns piercing his flesh. The vine began to constrict around his chest and neck, coiling with deadly force. Mallory's eyes widened in horror as his body buckled under the pressure. With a sickening crack, his body crumbled, breaking into a mass of twisted flesh. 4

"Hadeon!" Mallory cried out, her voice laced with panic.

In that instant, Mallory apparated, slipping free from the vines' hold and reappearing a few feet away, panting.

"It looks like it was all just a handsome face with no value," came a whisper of a woman, which had Mallory look around to see where it came from. 2

When the mist began to disappear, their eyes fell on a woman whose grey hair was dishevelled as if it hadn't been combed for several years. Her cheeks hollow and her eyes golden slits like a snake. The witch cackled and said, 2

"All vampires, I will be sure to use you in my

caldron." 3

But then there was a crackle, where Hadeon's body lay. The mass of flesh on the ground began to knit itself back together, each fragment merging until he was whole again. He dusted himself off with an almost casual nonchalance, casting the witch a dry look. He remarked,

"It takes more than a few garden weeds to keep me down." 4

The witch scowled at first in anger that she hadn't been able to kill even one person here. But as her gaze fell on Hadeon, a sudden glint of interest sparked in her golden, slit-pupil eyes. Her lips twisted into a cunning smile, and she tossed her tangled grey hair over her shoulder with an air of calculated allure. 2

"You know, vampire," the witch purred, "I could overlook the... unpleasantness if you and I were to join forces. Why waste your time on these fools, when you could have me at your side? I am... quite the catch." 2

Hadeon raised an eyebrow, a flicker of amusement crossing his face. He glanced back at Mallory, his mouth curving into a smirk before turning back to the witch.



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"Ah, Aurora," Hadeon's tone dripped with sarcastic sweetness. "I fear you're just a bit too late. I'm already married for eternity." He placed a hand over his heart in mock sorrow. "Besides, I'm afraid I have rather... selective tastes." 7

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