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Under the growling clouds that intermittently lit up the sky, Mallory followed Hadeon through the forest path in the rain. She used his coat to cover her head, shielding herself from the relentless downpour. The continuous rain had turned the forest floor into a slippery mess, making it difficult for her to walk in her new shoes. She knew it was only a matter of time before her bottom would touch the ground. 1

"Master Hades!" Mallory shouted through the rain. "I cannot walk in these shoes any longer!"

"Do you want me to carry your shoes for you, then? You are, after all, carrying my coat." Hadeon turned his head slightly, "Or are you suggesting that I carry you?" he teased 17

Mallory narrowed her eyes at the back of Hadeon's head, aiming to throw him off balance with her retort. "I am your faithful human servant. Shouldn't you be obliged to—"

"Very well," Hadeon cut in smoothly, his quick agreement throwing her off as he turned to face her fully. 8

Mallory stumbled, catching herself on a nearby



tree. "What?"

Hadeon wore a crazy smile on his lips. Mallory couldn't help but think to herself that this is how one dug their grave. "Come on, then. By the looks of it, you might get carried away with the rain water considering your beaver height. Let's rescue you before you sprout roots." 7

"I am not so short to be of a beaver's height!" Mallory frowned with a soft glare. 5

"Truth is bitter, monkey. But it is what it is. Jump like a monkey now. Quick," Hadeon retorted with a theatrical sigh, his arms open wide. 13

As Mallory contemplated the mechanics of her leap—specifically, whether a strategic kick might grace his smug vampire head or simply end with her sprawled in the mud—she opted instead to walk past him. 6

"Hm?" Hadeon's head tilted, with mock surprise in his eyes. "Here I am, offering a noble lift, and you decline?"

"I think it would be best not to burden you, Master Hades," Mallory muttered, picking her way along the path with renewed determination. 5

"Are you blushing?" Hadeon teased her, poking



her gently. "Afraid you might find too much joy in being swept off your feet, or is it just your small-sized stature? Fear not, we'll secure you taller heels on our next shopping trip." 3

Mallory's frown deepened at his words, and she turned to face him with a mix of irritation and defiance. "Master Hades, how about we continue walking and you keep your charming commentary to yourself? It might help me focus on not slipping." 9

Hadeon's laughter echoed softly through the rain, as if he were enjoying his time here. "As you wish. Lead the way, my little navigator." 4

Hadeon followed quietly, creating an unusual peace between them as they threaded their way along the path. She held the front of her dress with one hand, while the other hand was used to place it on the trees and move the bushes ahead of her as she was walking ahead of Hadeon.

The forest seemed to stretch endlessly, with no hint of civilisation piercing its thick veil. Mallory's steps grew heavier, her feet aching against the confines of her impractical shoes. The temptation to cast them off and tread barefoot grew with each step.



Mallory stopped in her tracks, a weary sigh escaping her lips. "Why haven't we seen any village or town?" Her tone was tinged with suspicion as she turned to face Hadeon, seeking answers from the inscrutable vampire. "Master Hades?"

"Hm?" Hadeon looked up, his expression one of feigned innocence mixed with a hint of amusement. "Are we lost? I thought you knew the way." 8

Mallory barely had time to fume before Hadeon deciphered the situation. Her confession came through clenched teeth, "I've lost our way."

"Oh, really?" Hadeon drawled, rain mingling with the smirk on his face. "Hardly a shock. Given your stature, it's not like you have to stretch to see the forest floor rather than the path."

Mallory shut her eyes briefly, collecting herself.

"Are you trying to control your anger from making a punch, monkey?" Hadeon teased, a glint of provocation in his eyes. "Doubt you will be able to make a hit—" 1

Before Hadeon could finish, Mallory's fist sliced through the rain towards his face. With an effortless sidestep, Hadeon let her fist cut



through nothing but air. "Poor Georgie must truly be out of practice to be caught by such an amateur swing," he chuckled, dodging her blow with ease, his taunts unrelenting. 9

Mallory's frustration from the day's events fuelled her determination as she continued to advance on Hadeon, fists clenched and ready to unleash her pent-up anger. Yet, for all her efforts, she couldn't land even a glancing blow. The pureblooded vampire's superior combat skills were evident, his movements were fluid and tauntingly precise, always one step ahead of her attacks.

Despite her resolve, deep down she knew the futility of her attempts—she had witnessed his prowess firsthand, and understood that his teasing was just that, a playful challenge, underscoring her own ineffectiveness against him.

Hadeon's eyes narrowed, a glimmer of intensity flickered through them as he watched Mallory's clumsy attempts. "Is that all you've got, Mallory Winchester? It is pitiful," he remarked, his voice deepening with sincerity rather than mockery. 6

"You can't act so cocky when you're a pureblooded vampire!" Mallory retorted, teeth



gritting as she relentlessly followed him, her punches continuous but ineffective.

"Then give up," Hadeon countered smoothly, his stance relaxed as he effortlessly evaded her swings. "A powerful being can be rendered useless, and even the weakest creature can rise with the right tools. I am barely moving to dodge your attacks."

As Mallory threw another punch, as if misguided by her frustration, it missed Hadeon entirely and was about to painfully connect with a tree. However, just before the impact, Hadeon's hand flashed out, catching her wrist in a firm but careful grip. He held her there, preventing the collision and possibly saving her from a serious injury.

Seizing the moment of his brief distraction, she pushed with all her might, toppling him into the muddy forest floor. The surprise on his face was worth every ounce of effort, and even as she hovered over him, her voice filled with triumph. 10

"Weakest what?" 1

She raised her fist, ready to finally land her hit, but it took Hadeon only a moment to recover and reverse their positions. Now straddling her



with his hand catching both her hands above her head, he looked down with a smirk, his amusement clear. He remarked, 1

"Touche, monkey. I'm fifteen percent impressed. But too bad you're fighting me—this is why the wise choose to fight alongside me." He then used his other hand and pressed the tip of her nose, "Boop. So adorable." 17

Hadeon released Mallory's hands, standing up with an effortless grace and extending his hand to help her up. Mallory, her pride slightly bruised but her spirit undimmed, begrudgingly accepted the assistance, pulling herself to her feet. As she stood, she couldn't help but notice the state of their attire—both were plastered with mud. 2

Now that she felt calmer compared to when they had left the church, Mallory asked him, "Master Hades, where are we?"

"Well, if you really want to know, if we walked for an hour more we might reach the church. Because we are where you almost started to navigate," Hadeon responded casually. 4

"What?! How did that happen?" Mallory asked, her eyes wide. She then questioned, "Why didn't you tell we had taken a turn?!"



"I wonder who told them they didn't need direction. Surely not you," he teased, his eyes narrowing with mock seriousness. Though he internally admitted that her wrong direction had gotten quite a few chuckles out of him.

Mallory pinched the bridge of her nose, and she asked, "What do we do now?"

Without a word, Hadeon transformed into a bat, the transformation swift and smooth under the relentless rain. Mallory watched with fascination, as he disappeared into the night. Moments later, he returned to his human form beside her, causing her to jump slightly at his sudden reappearance. 1

"There's a village nearby, it might take twenty more minutes on foot," he reported. "We can check there for a spare carriage we might use."

Mallory followed Hadeon through the shadowy forest, each step bringing them closer to the promise of shelter and possibly a solution to their transportation dilemma. When they finally arrived at the village, they made their way to an inn illuminated by a single lantern hanging outside, casting a warm glow through the night's dampness.



Upon entering, they were greeted by a middle-aged couple who managed the inn. The warmth inside was a welcome change from the cold rain. Mallory approached them, her manner polite and hopeful. "Do you have a spare carriage that we can use? We will pay handsomely and ensure its return by tomorrow."

The man shook his head regretfully, his voice apologetic. "Unfortunately, though we have carriages, we're short on horses at the moment. The ones we had available left the village this morning."

The woman nodded in agreement, her expression sympathetic to Mallory and Hadeon's plight. "It's been a busy day, I'm afraid. Many travellers passing through have stayed in the inn and there's just one left."

"Looks like we will just have to stay the night here then," Hadeon decided, as he had begun to feel hungry. 10

"Are you two married?" the man asked with a suspicious look now. "You see, our inn is only for married couples." 1

Mallory was not only hungry, but also tired. She wanted to rest her feet. As she contemplated,



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she caught the subtle shift in Hadeon's demeanour. His hand lifted slightly, fingernails beginning to elongate—a clear sign of his readiness to resort to more persuasive, if not violent, methods. His lips curled into a sly, dangerous smile.

"Oh, well, that can be fix—"

"Yes!" Mallory replied with a forced smile, before Hadeon decided to use violence. "Yes, we are married." 

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