

63 Mixed up drinks ¹³

"Who is she?" Hadeon asked abruptly, his voice echoing slightly in the quiet of the hallway. The maid, Ivy, who stood near the door, nearly tripped forward in surprise at the question. ¹

"You don't remember Lady Mallory?" Ivy responded, her expression one of disbelief. ³

Hadeon gazed at Ivy, his brow furrowing as he tried to piece together her words. He murmured softly, a hint of confusion lacing his tone,

"I remember monkey... But there was this momentary haze, as if her existence slipped from my mind. How strange. Could it be the effects of old age?" He paused, a realisation dawning upon him. "Or perhaps it was the drink at the witch's house affecting me after all this time." ¹⁹

With a sense of urgency, Hadeon strode towards Mallory's room. As he entered, the absence of her presence was evident, and his golden eyes swiftly scanned the surroundings. "Her scent lingers here still," he noted aloud. ⁴

Ivy, following behind, widened her eyes in alarm. "Then... she just vanished?"

"People don't just disappear into thin air unless they possess certain abilities or are summoned," Hadeon murmured, his gaze sweeping across the room until it rested on the two paintings hung on the wall. His eyes darted between the painting Mallory had brought from her grandmother's house and the one crafted by Sable. "This isn't the same painting anymore." 12

Ivy, the maid, looked perplexed, her eyes flickering between Hadeon and the painting. She was certain it hadn't changed.

Hadeon strode towards the painting with purposeful steps and placed his finger on one of the houses. He stated, "This house was unlit before, absent of any inner glow. And now, there's a subtle shadow lurking within." He paused, his voice deepening as he concluded, "It seems the painting has ensnared Mallory." 20

Without another word, his form shifted dramatically, shrinking and reshaping into a bat. With a powerful flap of his new wings, he soared out of the window, disappearing into the night sky. 1

Far removed from the imposing shadows of Van Doren's castle and deep within the tangled woods, Mallory found herself bound and



disoriented on the ground, awakening to the unsettling crackle of a nearby fire. Her head throbbed painfully as her vision settled on a figure blocking the firelight.

"You are finally awake, Mallory!" The voice belonged to Sable, but the figure before her bore little resemblance to the woman she remembered. This Sable had wild, unkempt hair and jagged teeth, her skin was marred as though scorched by acid. It took Mallory a moment to realise she was seeing the true face of the witch. 2

Sable's laugh cut through the cool air as she noted Mallory's alarmed expression. "It seems you can see me as I truly am. Yes, I am a witch, though you must have already known that."

"Did you curse the painting?" Mallory demanded, struggling against her ropes, which refused to give. "Why am I here?"

As Sable stepped away from the blaze, Mallory's eyes widened at the sight of a large black cauldron simmering over the fire. Sable turned with a chilling smile, her words dripping with dark intent.

"I've always wanted to cook with you, and now seemed like the perfect time." 18

Mallory could tell that one of the ingredients Sable wanted to cook with was her and it left a trickle of fear down her spine. The witch then replied, "I didn't curse the painting, I only made a door through which you yourself walked. Do you not remember it?"

Mallory struggled to sit up, her limbs tightly bound, shaking her head. "I didn't walk through it," she insisted.

"Are you certain?" Sable's voice was deceptively sweet, belying the malevolence in her eyes.

At midnight, Mallory was fast asleep when she suddenly sat up on her bed with her eyes still closed. The fireplace in her room had extinguished itself, while she got out of bed and walked towards the painting. Just when she touched the surface of the painting, the surface began to waver, and she was pulled inside it.

Mallory looked around the place before she asked, "Where are we?" If this place didn't actually exist and was some other realm, she couldn't bet for Hadeon to come save her from being turned into a type of meal that scared her.

"In a place no one can find us," Sable whispered, as if she didn't want the trees or any other things



to hear them. "But it wasn't purely the painting. Had your drink not been mixed up, it wouldn't be you but him." 9

"Him?" Mallory repeated it before it dawned on her mind, and she said, "Hadeon?" Did she have some scores to settle from the past? Or was it that—

"Yes, Hadeon. All this while, it had been the others' drinks that were getting spiked, but he seems like someone I just need," Sable hummed in glee as she smiled at the end. "Once you are gone, it will be easier to get him to me. Especially after he forgets you being his wife or that you ever existed."

"Sable... Hadeon and I are not married. Neither do I think he is someone you want," Mallory stated the truth, but the witch's smile vanished and she glared at her. As if something registered in her mind, she asked, "What did you mean others drinks?" 1

"Oh, Mal. We have been friends for so long, and now that your end is near, I guess it is alright to tell the truth," Sable's eyes gleamed with a sinister look as she walked around Mallory, while drawing a circle around where she sat. "No matter how pretty or beautiful I appeared,

somehow the boys always gravitated towards you. They liked to talk to you, laugh with you, and want to spend time with you. You know that boy with blond hair? Jase! My bad, you wouldn't remember him because I erased your memory of him, just like Hadeon will forget about you." 16

Jase? Mallory couldn't remember any person by that name, no matter how much she thought about it. She murmured, "I think you are imagining it."

Sable looked upset by Mallory's words, and she threw the sharp stick towards her, which hit the latter's face and drew a line of blood from her cheek. 5

"Jase was in his early twenties and very handsome. Maybe not as much as the yummy Hadeon, but he was so sweet on you. I wish he was like that with me. He even confessed that he wanted to marry you, when you came of age," Sable laughed with bitterness. She then continued, "So I invited you both in. I gave you two drinks, and he came to me one night. It is only a pity that the drink didn't work that well that time. So I had to finish him, while you completely forgot about him." 13

"If you want Hadeon, you can have him. I won't



even stand in your way," Mallory said, feeling her cheek burn. She noticed how the witch had picked up another stick and was writing something on the ground.

But Sable clicked her tongue and said, "That won't do. I will need to kill you for that."

Mallory wished she had something sharp, and at that thought, she saw Sable make her way towards her, which made her heart begin to race. She saw the witch pull out a dagger from her dress and the woman said,

"But not just like that. He seems intrigued and wrapped by you." 13

"I think you have it all wrong... It was just a charade he was playing—!" Mallory gasped upon feeling Sable bring the dagger near her face and collect the blood that dripped from her cheek.

Mallory then saw Sable bring the dagger to her lips, before licking it from the hilt to the tip of the blade, and it was blood curling, unlike how Hadeon had licked the blood off his fingers. 3

"How tasty, Mal. I will enjoy my dinner and then become you," Sable said, and Mallory could only imagine the horror of someone impersonating her. 12

"I have this perfect new recipe for the dish. I can cut the vegetables," Mallory offered with a smile, while nervousness had begun to kick into her body with dread.

"Kindly, until the end, your nature will reflect well on me. Though I must confess, in these decades that I have lived, I haven't envied anyone as much as I have you," Sable confessed to her. "These silvery-like blonde locks and blue eyes, I will pluck them out for myself." 13

"Why did you wait until now then?" Mallory asked, while questioning if Hadeon even knew that she wasn't in her bed! 2

"Because of Selia."

"Grandmother?" Mallory asked. 4

Sable's laughter echoed around them, cold and mocking. "*Grandmother*, indeed. You poor child," she taunted, shaking her head. She then said, "You were an orphan child. Your mother wasn't your mother either, and I know it because I saw her the night she brought you home with her hands covered in blood." 25