



## 81 Travelling to north 14

The carriage left Van Doren Castle just before noon, heading north towards the royal family's domain. The steady rhythm of the four black horses' hooves echoed through the forest, creating a comforting cadence. With Barnby guiding the carriage, Hadeon and Mallory settled into their seats inside, the dense canopy of trees casting patchy shadows. 1

Noticing the letter in Hadeon's hand, Mallory asked curiously, "Is that the letter that was sent to you?" 1

"It's from the same place, but it isn't addressed to me. It's to the dead man who can't speak anymore," Hadeon replied, twirling the letter in his hand with a subtle smirk. "To the switcher." 8

"You think the king was the one who sent out the order to kill my mother first and then me?" Mallory's eyebrows shot up, a mix of shock and contemplation crossing her face as she imagined the dismay this revelation would bring to the people. 4

Hadeon's gaze softened momentarily before he continued, "Well, I'm not sure if it's the king who



sent it, but it did come from there." He unfolded the letter, pointing to the red borders around the parchment. "The double red border is a symbol used by the royal family. It could be them or someone within their circle pulling the strings. At least we know we're heading in the right direction." 7

"May I?" Mallory asked, her voice steady but her hands slightly trembling as she reached for the letter. Hadeon handed it to her, their fingers briefly brushing. She unfolded it and read: 3

*'It is good to hear that you have found her, but I need you to pull her away from there. See if she has the key that we have been looking for, if she doesn't know, it means she doesn't know about the prophecy either. She shouldn't find anything and if she does, kill and dispose of her immediately. R.G.'* 8

Mallory's eyes traced the elegant but ominous letter. The weight of the words settled heavily on her shoulders. She looked up at Hadeon, her eyes reflecting both determination and fear. "This... This means they've been watching me all along. They found me, whoever 'R.G.' is," she whispered. She then asked him, "Where did you find this letter?" 3

"Cawlin intercepted the message before the switcher got their hands on it," Hadeon stated. 1

"You knew... which is why you were prepared with Ivy's clone," Mallory muttered under her breath as it dawned in her mind. "What if things went too far?" she asked, her frown deepening. 2

"It wasn't going to. Not under my eyes or nose," Hadeon replied calmly, taking the letter from her before slipping it inside his coat. "Though the letter was en route and your maid was the main suspect, the culprit could have turned into someone else. Sometimes you bait the prey, monkey. Not directly hunt," he explained, his expression unreadable. Mallory had had enough time to realise that the shape-shifting creature had long since taken the place of her maid. The encounter had been designed to ensure she understood the truth. 2

The pureblooded vampire watched Mallory as she sat across from him in the moving carriage, her eyes reflecting the flickering sunlight that filtered through the trees. There was a determination in her gaze that he admired, a strength that intrigued him more with each passing moment. 11

Mallory, on the other hand, took a deep breath



before letting it out through her lips. She prayed for Hattie's soul to be at peace after the torture she must have faced at the hands of the switcher.

"How long until we reach the royal castle?" Mallory inquired, as she had never travelled far from Reavermoure.

"Three days," Hadeon replied, lounging with his legs crossed and one side of his head resting on his hand as he watched her. "The Grimaldis, who are the royal family, have an intriguing tradition for claiming the throne. One that I do enjoy." 9

Mallory gave him a curious look. "How so?"

Hadeon's tone was nonchalant as he explained, "No one can become king unless they're the last heir standing, with the rest dead and having bitten the dust. Siblings kill siblings in the most cunning way possible. Pureblooded vampires like us used to bet on which heir would triumph, much like betting on horses." 15

"That's horrible!" Mallory exclaimed, her face scrunching at the thought.

"Hey, hey! Don't blame it on our taste when the actions come from human nature. If I've learned anything about humans, it's that they can be as



barbaric as possible when they want to claim something," Hadeon's eyes twinkled at the thought.

Mallory shook her head. "No, that was meant for the royal members. Then it's possible my mother was hunted for similar reasons." 3

"That's indeed highly possible," Hadeon affirmed. "Smart monkey, you catch up fast. But from what I've heard, the current king isn't too smart, which makes him an excellent puppet in the hands of an expert puppeteer." 5

"People trying to pull strings from the backdrop?" Mallory questioned him and she received a hum in response.

"Truthfully, I have no interest in what happens with the royals or who wants to pull whom. That is, unless someone meddles in my business. Then I need to eliminate them for some peace and quiet," Hadeon replied casually, glancing out the window. He then turned back to her and said, "Seeing as we have nothing much to do, how about we work on your ability?" 8

Mallory was slightly taken aback since they were in a moving carriage, unless Hadeon was proposing to stop at the side of the road. She



replied, "I'm getting better at moving short distances. You saw what happened yesterday, didn't you?"

"Just because it worked two or three times doesn't mean you can't sharpen it," Hadeon gave her a pointed look. 1

"Let me see how much you can control without breaking. And if I am not wrong, fatigue must be kicking in right after you use it. It only means you aren't used to wielding it." 1

Mallory pursed her lips, because it was true.

"Okay. How do you propose I practice it? Should I ask Barnby to pull over?"

"That won't be required," Hadeon said calmly, making her look at him suspiciously. "I will instruct you, and you will follow it." He uncrossed his legs and leaned back. "Apparate to the right." 3

It took Mallory ten seconds before she managed to apparate right in front of Hadeon. He explained, "Last night your concentration was high because of the alertness, but sometimes danger doesn't inform you before inflicting it. With the carriage moving, it loses balance and takes extra effort. Your body will need to adapt,



and it has to be smooth." 2

Mallory nodded, diligently listening to Hadeon.  
"Okay."

"Now move back to your earlier seating," Hadeon continued to instruct, and once Mallory did it, she got a little more confident. "Now move to the centre. To the left again. To the front. To the right." 3

Mallory, focused intently on Hadeon's instructions and her own burgeoning ability, didn't notice the exact direction she was aiming for. In a blink, she vanished from one side of the seat and reappeared—this time right in Hadeon's lap. 52