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When the coachman halted the carriage at the edge of the forest path, Mallory stepped out and noticed the tall trees, their tops seeming to touch the bright sky above. She turned to look at Hadeon, who was staring off into the distance. She asked, "Is everything alright?" 1

Hadeon turned his golden eyes to meet Mallory's and smiled, "Perfect so far. You should get your water bag, as yours is empty." His keen observation took her by surprise; her water bag was indeed empty. Without looking away from her, he instructed his coachman, "Barnby, have the horses drink water and feed them. Mallory and I will be taking a walk." 7

"Yes, milord," Barnby responded with a bow.

Hadeon extended his hand, inviting Mallory to take a walk with him. They strolled through the forest, the birds chirping and the sound of gushing water reaching her ears. 9

"Have you been to this place before?" Mallory inquired, holding the empty water bag in one hand and lifting the front of her dress to avoid the broken branches and trees around the area.



"A couple of times," Hadeon replied. When Mallory turned to look at him, she noticed his eyes were scanning their surroundings. Sensing her gaze, he met her eyes with a wicked smile. "When I first came to the living realm, apart from the pleasure of drinking blood and bathing in it, I explored the lands until I found the best one to build Van Doren Castle in the west." 8

Hadeon slowed his steps to match Mallory's pace, allowing her to walk next to him. The ground was slightly slippery because of the previous night's rain.

"What comes under 'best'?" Mallory asked. 7

"Hadeon Van Doren, without a question," Hadeon responded cheekily. When Mallory stared at him, he asked, "What? Do you want me to put you on the list? I will consider putting your name right under mine," he winked. 19

"Thank you for your generous thought, but I shall pass on it," Mallory replied, shaking her head with a smile. She then clarified, "I meant to ask why you find West to be the one." 2

"For starters, the passage of hell is located only in the west and east. And secondly, it is far away from the royal court. I have no interest in that



kind of drama and we have rules," Hadeon explained to her. 5

"The pureblooded vampires?"

When Hadeon smiled, Mallory caught sight of his sharp fangs. He replied, "That's correct, yet there are some vampires who don't care about the ordeal. When pureblooded vampires were sent to the living realm, we were told to maintain decorum. Like not hunting the royal families or touching the white witches, which, as you know, are the good ones." 6

Upon reaching the gently running river, Mallory walked to the edge and filled her water bag for the journey. The water was clear and when she leaned forward, she could see her reflection in it. She moved closer to wash her hands, scooping up the refreshing water to drink. When she turned, she saw Hadeon once again scanning the surroundings. 2

"Are you looking for something?" Mallory asked, picking up her water bag and standing up. 2

"My mid-day snack. Ah, found it!" Hadeon remarked, his eyes brightening.

As Mallory turned to see what Hadeon was eyeing, a look of worry fell over her face. There





stood a four-legged, innocent creature with antlers. "You're going to kill the deer? I thought you had enough blood packed for the journey." 8

"Packed food turns stale after a while, and I have a palate for fresh sustenance. Considering I'm at the top of the food chain, it becomes my meal, and I'll be good for the next few hours," Hadeon replied, raising his eyebrows as his gaze returned to the deer.

"Don't kill it!" Mallory urged, her voice filled with concern. "It's an innocent creature." 3

Hadeon tilted his head and asked, "Did you ever think the same about the meat you eat?" 13

Mallory's hands clenched, her heart racing. Her ability kicked in, and she disappeared from his side, reappearing right in front of the deer as if she could block the pureblooded vampire from reaching the animal.

"I'll give up eating meat if you spare these innocent creatures," she said, her voice firm and determined. 2

"Hmm, let me think," Hadeon hummed as if he were putting real effort into it before he stared at her and said, "I don't see how that is even remotely beneficial to me. So unfortunately, I will



have to pass on this one. By the way, I will give you a point in the attempt to come between me and my meal, unless you are offering yourself." 7

Mallory's eyebrows furrowed, "You want my blood..." 3

Hadeon feigned a surprised look, "That definitely didn't cross my mind!" A crooked smile formed on his sinful lips, and he remarked, "What a noble woman. Glad that you didn't meet the rest of the vampires and are bound to me," his eyes subtly narrowed, "It would have been a bloodbath. So what do you propose?" 2

"Is becoming a vegetarian an option?" Mallory asked him and Hadeon laughed before the look in his eyes changed. "We should be able to find something here." 5

"If you are asking the sides to go with the barbecued deer, sure! Barnby is an excellent cook when needed," Hadeon stated in a cheerful voice. 4

"Hadeon," Mallory frowned.

"Mallory," Hadeon uttered her name. Then, in a blink of an eye, he was standing two steps away from her, where the leaves momentarily flew above the forest ground because of the speed at



which he had moved in. He then took purposeful steps with the eyes of a predator. He said, "I don't believe in taking things by force when it comes to women." 7

Mallory asked, "So you persuade them?" She couldn't help but feel that the trickster had laid a trap for her and she had walked right into it. 4

One corner of the pureblooded vampire's lips curled. He replied, "Indeed. It is only a shame that people who were persuaded aren't alive to tell the tale." 3

Mallory watched as Hadeon craned his neck to the side, eyeing the deer that had moved to graze a nearby plant. Suddenly, the pureblooded vampire growled, a deep, menacing sound that sent the animal bolting for its life. Mallory's soul nearly escaped her body, her eyes wide with shock.

"One of my many talents," Hadeon shrugged, a smirk playing on his lips.

"Was that really necessary?" Mallory asked, her voice betraying her. The hooves of the deer receded as it ran away from them. 2

Hadeon leaned forward and remarked, "I thought you wouldn't like spectators."





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Mallory's heart trembled at his words. Even though she knew Hadeon wouldn't harm her and would keep her alive, it was his innate nature that concerned her, like now. She replied, "I didn't agree to anything yet."

"Yet," Hadeon murmured under his breath. He then said, "I don't know if you are aware of this, but I should warn you that a pureblooded vampire like myself cannot stay hungry for long. Things can turn...worse. Well, I guess you have time until the blood bags run out to decide. If its carriage, forest, or..."

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