

Beauty and the Immortal: It started with a dig Chapter 4 - Tend to my garden

Chapter 3: Locked Graveyard

By the morning, the pouring rain from the night had stopped in Reavermoure town. It had left the ground wet and puddles filled with water, where water splashed when the wheels of the carriages moved over it.

One such carriage had come to a halt before the Winchester's manor. It was Mr. Nottingham who had come to visit Colette, who now sat in the drawing room under Lady Doris' supervision.

Elsewhere in the manor, Mallory had decided to step out to visit her parents' graves, as it had been a while since she had last paid a visit to them. She turned to look outside the window and murmured,

"The clouds have begun to gather again."

"Seems so, milady. An early rainy season," Hattie agreed, helping Mallory dress.

Mallory shifted her gaze from the gloomy sky to Hattie and asked, "How are things going downstairs?"

"Mr. Nottingham has extended an invitation to Lady Colette, suggesting a tour of his orchard," Hattie relayed. They stepped outside the room, and the maid walked behind Mallory. She whispered, "If you ask me, the man seems like he is going to propose to her at any moment."

Mallory offered a small smile and said, "Colette will be over the moon."

If her cousin had her way, she would have debuted last season. But Uncle Wilfred believed it was too soon, as he felt her cousin was immature. Lady Doris didn't share the same thought and believed that he was pushing their daughter's debut to give Mallory time, which had created a rift.

"And what about your own suitors, milady? Should we wait a little longer in case they show up?" Hattie asked, tailing right behind her.

"If the suitors are truly interested, I don't think they would mind waiting for me to return," Mallory responded. She held her head high as she walked through

the corridors, even though she felt her chest tighten. But the truth was that her maid was just too kind to think someone would appear at the door for her. If people had to come, they would have by now, she thought.

Hattie informed her, "I shall fetch the umbrellas, lest the sky decides to weep upon us," and she left Mallory's side.

As Mallory made her way towards the manor's entrance, she walked past the drawing room. With the door open, it gave her a glimpse of Mr. Nottingham lounged at one end of the plush couch. And when their gazes locked, his demeanour shifted from relaxed to rigid. Subconsciously, his hand moved to his nose as if to hide it.

Mallory grimaced inwardly, bowing slightly to the man before she and Hattie departed in the carriage. She looked outside the carriage's window, watching trees move past them, such that it painted a canvas of continuous green.

Arriving, Mallory climbed out of the carriage, Hattie at her side with umbrellas in hand. The church's walls had faded from white to beige. The entrance doors were left wide open for visitors. It had several stained windows with beautiful paintings on them. She remembered how much she enjoyed it during the summer when she used to visit it with her parents.

The graveyard was located not too far behind the church.

"Lady Mallory. It has been a while since you last visited us," a voice greeted from the altar. The priest was in his late-thirties with brown hair and glasses. He offered a welcoming smile. Mallory and Hattie bowed at him.

"Father Shane," Mallory acknowledged, her voice soft. "I apologise for my absence. How have you been?"

"Just the same as when you last saw me. Except for some occasional backaches. I seem to be growing old sooner than I expected," Father Shane jested. "Though I must confess to you that I didn't expect to see you today out of all the days, I hear it's the season's time. Did something happen there...?" His voice trailed off because he had heard about her last season's encounter.

"Something always happens," Mallory said with a hint of bitterness. It was because, even though she knew she wasn't in the wrong, she was silenced, with men like George Kingsley getting away with it. The fault was with the world they lived in, she thought to herself.

"Perhaps you would like to talk about it?" Father Shane turned his head in the direction of the confession box.

"There's nothing much to confess. I opened the door on George Kingsley, hoping to break his nose." Mallory sighed, her eyes moving to the candles that were now burning brightly.

Father Shane looked around quickly, noticing it was just them. Hearing her dejection, he asked, "Are you regretful of your action?"

Mallory's gaze returned to the priest before she whispered, "Not in the slightest. I wish I had slammed the door harder." Hattie coughed at her words, turning around to make sure no one was listening to her lady, because if word reached, it could cause her ladyship trouble.

"..." Father Shane was left speechless. Fixing his expression, he said, "Violence is not the way to deal with things. Especially when you are dealing with a person whose family is four ranks above yours. It could be damaging," he reminded her at the end.

"I understand," Mallory murmured, and the truth left a bitter taste in her mouth.

Father Shane had known Mallory since her childhood and the tragic fire. He remembered her parents to be well-regarded figures in Reavermoure, though he had never conversed with them. He suspected her rare visits to the church stemmed from the horrors of the night when she lost them.

Mallory inhaled deeply, "Next time, I'll handle things differently."

"I hope in managing the situation and not in the strength of turning Mr. Kingsley noseless," Father Shane hoped. He then stated, "You have a good heart, Lady Mallory. Good things come to the ones who deserve and earn them."

After Father Shane was called away, Mallory slipped out of the church, leaving her praying maid behind, and made her way to the graveyard. The vast, leafless graveyard of Reavermoure, filled with uneven gravestones, stretched out before her.

As Mallory walked, a crow suddenly crossed her path, making her abruptly pause her footsteps and gasp softly. She saw the bird fly to one of the nearby trees before perching on it and looking at her.

Ignoring the bird, she headed in the direction of her parents' graves. Upon reaching them, she noticed her parents' graves were wet and clean because of the previous night's rain. Memories of her last moments with them surfaced, and she clenched her fists as her breath shuddered.

"Forgive me for not visiting you both sooner..." Mallory's voice broke the silence. "I have missed you both dearly."

She didn't know if her parents could hear her. In the days following their departure, her grandmother had become her solace, gently guiding her through the maze of loss.

Her grandmother would encourage her with a knowing smile. 'You should talk to them, Mal. Even if they don't reply, it's important they don't feel lonely.'

'Are they really listening?' Little Mallory asked while holding her grandmother's hand.

'Oh, yes. I'm certain they're eager to hear all about your adventures,' her grandmother reassured her with a smile. 'You want them to know, don't you?'

A smile flickered across Mallory's face at the memory. Back then, her grandmother's fanciful tales were a balm to her aching heart, offering brief comfort. As she finished talking to her parents' graves, Hattie approached, stopping at a respectful distance away to wait.

"More than often, I find myself wishing that the past was nothing more than a prolonged dream from which I've yet to awaken," Mallory said, who had heard Hattie's footsteps on the wet ground. "And upon waking... they would be right there with me."

Hattie could feel the sorrow in her lady's voice. She attempted to comfort her, "Perhaps, in another realm beyond our reach, they continue to exist, milady. My mother used to say that those who depart from us become stars or the very air we breathe."

"Something to look at... knowing they won't be taken away from us," Mallory mused with a tender smile on her lips. She took a deep breath, before letting it

out. "Once I cried... too hard, wanting to see my parents, even though I knew I would never. My grandmother, bless her soul, suggested a whimsical search for their spirits here among these graves."

"Lady Selia must have been an interesting person to be around," Hattie stated, watching Mallory's smile grow.

Mallory turned to meet Hattie's eyes and remarked, "She was. She helped me stay intact, preventing me from losing myself. She was like a blanket. A warm person." She had hoped for her grandmother to stay around forever, but time wasn't anyone's friend. Her grandmother had passed away when she was twelve years old.

Just as they were about to head back towards the church's entrance, where their carriage awaited, Hattie sent a curious look towards the wide, rusted gates.

"It's always under lock, isn't it, milady? I can't recall ever seeing it open," she remarked softly, a hint of wonder in her voice.

"Indeed. That one is the older graveyard," Mallory acknowledged, the crow's caw echoing once more in the background. She then shared in a hushed tone,

"My grandmother used to tell me that in older times, treasures were hidden in these very graves, not just those of the royal blood. According to her, which is supposed to be a secret of the royals, within that very graveyard lies a square headstone, beneath which lies a weapon. It has a stone, which she described as blue as the night itself, which holds unfathomable power but is a curse at the same time."

"Really??" Hattie gasped at the thought of a curse.

"Grandmother's tales were vivid, perhaps too much so," Mallory said. Her grandmother had such wild stories that sometimes it made her wonder if it was one of the reasons why Aunt Doris wasn't too keen on inviting her to the manor.

At the same thought, she hadn't forgotten last night, where the pendant had stopped glowing after a minute. It made her wonder if she was imagining things.

Hattie shook her head and looked in the opposite direction of the inner graveyard. She proposed, "Perhaps it's time we headed back, milady."

Mallory quietly laughed, knowing Hattie was scared at the mention of possible curses and ghosts. Despite the four-year gap between them, Mallory found great solace in Hattie's company.

When they arrived back at the manor, Mallory found another carriage waiting not far from the entrance. It seemed like Colette was going to be busy today with the suitors vying for her attention.

Hattie excused herself from Mallory's side, while the latter made her way through the corridor.

"Mallory!" Uncle Wilfred called out. "Where have you been?"

"At the church," she answered, a crease forming between her brows. "Is everything alright?"

"Far better than alright. Do you recall our conversation from yesterday?" Uncle Wilfred asked, and just then, a series of footsteps echoed from the drawing room.

The person to whom the footsteps belonged finally stepped out of the room. It was a tall man with sandy blond hair and grey eyes. He wore a brown coat over his pristine white shirt.

"Baron Kaiser..." Mallory breathed out, her voice laced with surprise.

"Good afternoon, Lady Mallory," the baron greeted, his voice smooth as he inclined in a respectful bow, a warm smile gracing his lips.

"Good afternoon," she managed to respond, still taken aback.

Following closely behind the baron were Lady Doris and Colette. Her aunt revealed, "The Baron has come specifically to meet you, Mallory."

Chapter 4: Tend to my garden

Right now, the baron had settled himself on the couch opposite Mallory in the elegant sitting room of the Winchester manor. Aside from them, the only other individuals in the room were her aunt and cousin, who gracefully relocated themselves to a nearby corner to take their seats.

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"Would you care for a cup of tea, Baron Kaiser?" Mallory asked.

"No, thanks. I am fine. But if you desire to have some yourself, please don't hesitate. The weather is a little chilly," Baron Kaiser responded, and Mallory shook her head. "I heard you went to visit the church today."

"I did. It has been a while since I last visited," Mallory replied, feeling at a loss for words as she struggled to comprehend the presence of the baron before her.

"I hope that the heavens have answered your prayers," Baron Kaiser said with a smile, causing Mallory's pale cheeks to tint pink.

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Mallory had heard a great deal about Baron Kaiser from people in the past. He was in his early thirties. The man exuded an air of refinement, and his family boasted a long-standing lineage, holding the esteemed title of baron. Women admired his charming presence.

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Three years ago, his wife had passed away, and he had been noticeably withdrawn from any social gatherings. In addition to the fact that he resided in Wingston, a town that was located in the north, rather than Reavermoure which was in the east.

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"Do you visit the church often?" she asked.

"Not much. I have a difficult relationship with God, particularly considering our history. But I am hopeful that he will bestow his blessings upon me soon," Baron Kaiser replied, the volume of his voice falling. It made Colette nearly lose her balance on the chair she was sitting on, even though she was

supposed to act as if she were reading a book. "I consider myself fortunate to have the opportunity to see you at this moment."

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"I believe it is my family and I who feel fortunate to have you here at our manor, Baron Kaiser," Mallory said with a slight bow.

She saw him smile at her before realising he was studying her appearance. She heard him ask her, "What do you like to do in your free time?"

With her mind unfocused, the first thing that came out of her mouth was, "Gardening."

"Gardening?" Baron Kaiser asked with astonishment.

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Gardening? Lady Doris pondered silently. The girl could have mentioned her needlework or something of elegance. No wonder the suitors didn't show up for her, thought the older woman with a frown.

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"Uh, I meant to tend to the plants in the garden and watch the flowers," Mallory quickly said with an awkward smile.

Baron Kaiser chuckled at her response. He inquired, "Would you be so kind as to show me around the garden, if it's not too much trouble?" He then glanced at Lady Doris, who had turned to meet his gaze.

"Certainly, Baron Kaiser. Mallory will be delighted to show you the front garden," Lady Doris replied.

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Mallory and Baron Kaiser stepped out of the manor, while Lady Doris and Colette stayed behind in the room. Only this time they didn't have to pretend as if they were doing something and came to stand before the windows where they could see the pair.

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Once Mallory had finished touring Baron Kaiser through the garden, he addressed her with a formal tone, saying,

"Lady Mallory, I trust you comprehend the purpose of my visit today." His words had her turn to him. He continued, "I won't mince words, as I feel I am too old for it. But if you permit me, I would be honoured to have you as my wife."

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She was aware of his intention but did not expect it to be revealed this soon. Was he unaware of her dispute with George? Perhaps the man was probably too preoccupied with the memory of his deceased wife to pay any attention to gossip, she thought to herself.

2

"But why me?" She inquired, curious about what he found appealing about her that others did not.

"Because, unlike most people, you don't feel the need to rush into marriage. And not hastily seizing the first opportunity that presents itself, which I find quite admirable," Baron Kaiser informed her. "It is commendable. Especially with the world that we live in."

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His words brought peace to her mind. To think that they shared similar thoughts about it.

"How was your marriage?" Mallory asked the man.

"It was beautiful. From the start to the end," Baron Kaiser stated with a pensive expression. "Arielle was a lovely and kind woman. We were very happy, until illness claimed her life."

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"My deepest sympathies for your loss, Baron Kaiser," Mallory said, genuinely feeling sorry for the man. "It can be quite difficult when loved ones depart, causing us to long for their continued presence."

Baron Kaiser nodded in agreement. "Indeed, you are correct. But that's just how life goes... People rarely stay as long as we want. We just need to keep them in our memories."

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Mallory noticed a connection with Baron Kaiser, as they shared a profound sense of loss and held similar views. He then remarked,

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"Furthermore, to add to my previous response, you hold a captivating beauty, Lady Mallory." After a brief pause, he went on, "I'll be staying in Reavermoure for a month and am looking forward to spending more time with you, Lady Mallory. I'll eagerly anticipate your response whenever you are ready. I hope you will tend to my garden one day."

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Mallory smiled and said, "Thank you for your kind consideration, Baron Kaiser." Unlike the other times where men had pursued her in the initial year of her debut, she felt relaxed and not pressured now. After a few minutes, the baron left in his carriage.

6

As the season progressed with grandeur and festivity in Reavermoure, Mallory discovered herself increasingly in the company of Baron Kaiser. Always surrounded by Mr. Nottingham and her cousin, with Lady Doris trailing behind alongside Mr. Nottingham's mother.

By the second week of the season, Mr. Nottingham and Colette were engaged. The discussions about their venue for the marriage, their wedding clothes, and their guest list soon followed.

9

One afternoon, as Mallory was in the sitting room engrossed in a book, her uncle made an appearance in the room. She gently set her book on her lap as soon as she noticed his presence.

"What are you reading?" Uncle Wilfred asked, taking a seat beside her.

"Mr. Rosher's travel diary about his time in France," Mallory replied, and she could tell her uncle wanted to talk about something with her. "You should rest your feet, Uncle, you have been busy. If you would like, I would be happy to accompany you."

Uncle Wilfred waved his hand and said, "I will be fine. Always worrying about me," he added. He said, "Once Colette and you marry, your aunt and I will miss you two. Terribly."

2

"I do have some time left before it, Uncle," Mallory replied, feeling a tinge of sadness at the prospect of departing from this manor.

"Does the baron not interest you?"

"No, he does plenty."

"Well, it seems that it's just a matter of time. I've already completed the paperwork and obtained the town's head's signature." Uncle Wilfred's words made Mallory look at him in question. He clarified, "The papers for the manor."

"You don't have to do that at the moment," Mallory said, but Uncle Wilfred shook his head. He took her hand in his, enclosing it with both his hands.

"This manor rightfully belongs to you before me, Mal. I know you won't need it with the baron in the picture, but it holds memories, doesn't it?" Uncle Wilfred asked softly. "Your parents would be proud of you if they were here. To see their Mal all grown up and ready to settle down with the right man."

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"You say it as if I'm about to walk down the aisle tomorrow." Mallory smiled, happy to have her uncle's support.

"I say it because I know most of the men here in Reavermoure aren't to your liking. But Baron Kaiser, he seems to be well put together," Uncle Wilfred squeezed her hand.

1

"I will visit you often once I am married," Mallory promised, and her uncle nodded.

"I am confident you will. Your uncle will be sad if you don't," Uncle Wilfred stated, a hint of sorrow coming to his face. "You girls grew up too fast. It is hard for us parents, even though we are happy to see you going to have your own family, but nonetheless difficult."

2

Mallory allowed her head to gently rest against her uncle's shoulder. She softly murmured, "You've done an excellent job raising us." They sat in quiet companionship, finding solace in each other's presence, while being able to hear Colette's voice eagerly asking her mother when they were going to visit the modeste's shop next.

"Mallory?" Lady Doris summoned her. "We are going to visit the shop. Come now."

3

In the last week of the season, the Nottinghams invited the Winchesters for a brunch, as well as to discuss the last details of the wedding preparation of Colette and her fiance. The dowry had been handed. When it was time to leave in the evening, Colette had to go visit the modeste, and she decided to go with her future mother-in-law as the lady had to pay a visit too.

"You don't have to worry about Colette, Lady Doris. We will make sure to personally drop her off at your manor," Mrs. Nottingham relayed, placing her hand on Colette's shoulder.

"Hattie," Lady Doris summoned the maid, "accompany Colette and Mrs. Nottingham. Assist them if they need any help."

"But if we require assistance with carrying items, we can always rely on the coachman," Colette blurted out, only to receive a quiet disapproving look from her mother.

This naive child. Despite Colette's approaching marriage into the Nottingham family, Lady Doris was determined to protect her daughter's reputation as Mallory's behaviour had already been quite challenging.

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"We could use some additional assistance," Colette said with a nervous smile and Hattie joined her.

And so, the remaining members of the Winchester family made their way back to the manor. Upon returning to her room, Mallory decided to switch out her elegant silk dress to a humble cotton fabric dress. Descending the staircase, she caught the sound of her uncle engaged in conversation with someone at the entrance.

Curious, she headed towards the entrance hall, only to find Baron Kaiser waiting there. When did he arrive? She had missed the sound of the carriage wheels.

"Lady Mallory," Baron Kaiser greeted her with a respectful bow, which she gracefully returned. "I thought I might have left my ring here yesterday when I came to meet you. But it seems not. I should get going now."

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"It is late right now. Why don't you have supper with us, Baron Kaiser? I am sure we have enough for another person, and Mallory would like it too. Isn't that correct, Mal?" Uncle Wilfred asked, turning to her.

Mallory agreed with her uncle and said, "We would be delighted if you could join us for supper."

"If you insist," Baron Kaiser replied, before he was led to the sitting room. Lady Doris joined them, while Mallory decided to quickly change her attire once again.

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Excusing herself, she went to her room to fix her appearance to make sure it was presentable enough. It took her a good ten minutes before she made her way back, when she felt the sitting room was rather quiet.

Did they move to the dining room already? Mallory questioned herself.

But before she could walk past the sitting room, she caught something from the corners of her eyes. And when she turned, the blood in her face drained. Her feet grew cold, and she felt her throat close up at the sight that greeted her.

There lay Uncle Wilfred on the ground, with blood surrounding his body.

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"U—Uncle?" Mallory whispered, running inside the room.

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Reaching him, she kneeled down and tried to wake him up... but he was gone. "No, no, no! You can't die!" she cried in desperation as her eyes stung.

Her hands covered themselves in blood, and her changed dress began to soak itself in the blood from the floor. How could this happen? Her breath started to turn harsh, and her head turned dizzy.

2

"Aunt Doris!" Mallory called in a shaky voice, silently promising her uncle to return before going to look for her aunt.

But the moment she turned in the corridor, she noticed the once white walls were now splattered in blood. Her legs shook as she walked, only to find the servants' necks slit. Walking further, she finally found her aunt, who had received the same fate as the others.

2

"Baron Kaiser?" Mallory called out feebly. And she wondered if she was the last one who was going to die. Was the murderer still present?

Mallory's eyes welled up with tears, as she tried to look for any survivors. She heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps echoing through the corridor, before Baron Kaiser arrived at one end of the hallway.

"Baron Kaiser, there's a killer in the manor. We should call for help immediately!" Mallory was overwhelmed with panic. And it was after she had uttered that she noticed him calmly standing there without attempting to move. "Baron... Kaiser?" Her heart sank further.

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"You are a lovely person, Mallory. And just as I told you on our first meeting, you will tend to my garden by lying beneath it," Baron Kaiser calmly said, his face blank of any emotions. "I thought it was only right to keep you last."

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"W—Why?" Mallory asked with disbelief. "What did we do to you?!"

"Nothing. But I cannot have any survivors," came the simple words, while he held papers in his hand.

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When he took a step forward, Mallory ran as fast as she could before locking herself in the sitting room, where her uncle lay cold. Her heart pounded in her chest, and she could hear her heart beating in her ears.

What was going on?! Questions rushed across Mallory's head one after another, while she heard the echo of his footsteps grow closer. But then it stopped. At the same time, she heard a carriage arrive at the front of the manor.

Colette and Hattie were here! She should inform them! She thought to herself. Looking below the door, she found no signs of shoes. She gave it a minute before unlocking the door and stepping out of the room.

2

"Mallory?" Colette called upon seeing Mallory step out of the sitting room. Right behind her appeared Hattie.

But when their gazes fell on Mallory's blood stained dress and hands, their eyes widened in shock, and their faces turned pale.

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Colette questioned in horror, "What have you done?!"

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