

Beauty and the Immortal: It started with a dig Chapter 5 - Digging in the rain

Chapter 5: Digging in the rain

"W—where are Father and Mother? Where are they!" Her cousin anxiously demanded, scared at the answer she was going to receive.

Mallory couldn't put it into words. The reality was hard to grasp, and she turned to her left, looking at the room inside which her uncle's body was. She noticed tears brim up in Colette's eyes as she hurried towards the front of the sitting room.

"NO!!!!" came a piercing scream from Colette's lips, before she began to cry with her hand covering her mouth. "This can't be true! Father, please wake up!" the young woman cried.

"It wasn't me, Colette..." Mallory whispered, her tears trickling down her cheeks. "It was Baron Kaiser. He was the one who did this!"

They heard voices from the front of the entrance, and before long, Mrs. Nottingham made her appearance. A gasp was heard from her when she saw Mallory soaked in blood. But at the same time, another person burst into the corridor right behind her, looking confused. It was none other than Baron Kaiser, and a chill ran down Mallory's spine.

"He is the one responsible for all the deaths here!" Mallory raised her voice, glaring at Baron Kaiser with frustration. "Summon the local authorities!"

Everyone's attention shifted towards the baron, who appeared perplexed as he asked, "I'm sorry, Lady Mallory, but I'm not quite following your train of thought. I just arrived a moment ago."

"You are lying!" Mallory shook her head in desperation. "You came here looking for your ring. And we invited you to have dinner with us. A—and by the time I re-entered the room, you had killed them and threatened to kill me too!"

Baron Kaiser's eyebrows furrowed deeply and he appeared taken aback. He said, "I understand that you are in grief, but what you say doesn't make sense."

"He is correct," Mrs. Nottingham replied, her expression filled with bewilderment. "Baron Kaiser just arrived in his carriage a moment ago, right after we got here. How is it possible that it's him?"

This left Mallory dumbstruck, as she didn't know how the baron had made it so. He was in the manor with her, right in front of her, before she had locked herself in the room to protect herself. She knew what she saw!

"I am speaking the truth! Please believe me!" Mallory pleaded with them in frustration. She noticed the sceptical expression on Mrs. Nottingham's face.

"Mallory..." Colette spoke up, inhaling deeply as she composed herself. "If the baron killed my parents... why are his clothes clean and without a drop of bloodstain? Why is it you who has blood on your hands and clothes?"

How would she know why Kaiser had no blood on him?! Mallory questioned herself. She told the only truth she knew,

"By the time I came from my room, Uncle Wilfred was gone... I hoped he was still there, and I tried to wake him up. Colette, you must trust me when I say that the baron is the one responsible for their deaths. Please!"

But Mallory's pleas fell on deaf ears, and Colette stayed quiet. Her eyes shifted to look at the baron, who continued to hold a frown. He said, "Lady Mallory, you can accuse me later. But we should inform the authorities so that they can look into the matter."

"You are right, Baron Kaiser," Mrs. Nottingham nodded in agreement. Seeing Colette continue to sob, she turned to Hattie and asked, "What are you doing, standing here? Go fetch a glass of water."

The maid, not understanding what or how it happened, nodded and left for the kitchen.

Walking towards Colette, the woman put a comforting arm around her while giving a side eye to Mallory before they went to see Lady Doris.

Baron Kaiser stood in the same spot, his eyes meeting Mallory's angry ones, which had tears in them.

"I won't hurt you for now. But it is unfortunate, Lady Mallory. It could have ended in a second, but you chose to drag on the torture," Baron Kaiser threatened in his calm and lowered voice.

Mallory would have never guessed that the baron would be a murderer. Her hands shook beside her. She was scared of him... Of what he could do. It was only now did she realise that he had laid a trap, a trap in which she had stepped into. He had said things he knew she wanted to hear so that he could manipulate her.

She could hear the painful cries coming from the other side of the corridor, which belonged to her cousin.

"Why?" Mallory demanded, the question eating her from the inside. She had seen him holding papers. "How did you do it?"

Baron Kaiser offered her a small smile. He replied, "I needed the manor for reasons."

A tear rolled down Mallory's cheek. He killed them for such a simple reason? She said, "You would have gotten the manor once you married me."

Mrs. Nottingham returned with Colette to where they were. Baron Kaiser sent his coachman to bring in the guards, while everyone waited.

Mallory went to sit beside Uncle Wilfred's lifeless form with a dazed look, while Colette switched between her parents. Hattie would have suggested getting water so that the blood could be washed out and a change of clothes, but her lady was shaken.

Gently, Mallory caressed Uncle Wilfred's cheek, tenderly closing his eyes. Every now and then, she would look up to see the baron walk past the room that was scaring her.

Four guards arrived at the manor, and transported the victims to the carriages bound for the mortuary. One guard meticulously recorded the scene, including everyone's statements, before departing.

Lady Nottingham said to Colette, "This place isn't safe to stay the night. If you want, we can return first thing in the morning, but for now, we should head back to the Nottingham manor so that you can rest the night. Lady Mallory if you—"

"No," came the firm word from Colette, trying to stop the sobs. "S—she won't be riding with us. I don't want the ill omen following us," she said, wiping her nose with her handkerchief.

"If you say so," Mrs. Nottingham said, as if internally relieved not to have the troublesome Winchester woman in her carriage. "Let us leave then."

Mallory, who had turned to look at Colette, saw her refuse to meet her eyes. Her heart broke. She knew her cousin was grieving like her, but it hurt more that her cousin suspected she had something to do with it.

"Lady Mallory, would you like me to drop you off at the magistrate's building?" Baron Kaiser asked with concern in his voice. "We could also speak about why you mentioned me as the killer."

This bastard! "I will be right here..." Mallory clenched her hands. She wanted to punch him, but something in her gut said it wouldn't go well.

"Okay, if you say so." Baron Kaiser didn't insist further, and he walked out of the manor. Mrs. Nottingham and Colette were the next ones to follow him out of the manor, climbing inside the carriage before leaving.

Hearing the carriages leave, Mallory, who had been standing, suddenly flopped on the ground.

"Lady Mallory!" Hattie quickly came to her side, who had stayed back in the Winchester manor.

It took a second before all the emotions broke loose, and Mallory began to cry. Tears continuously spilled one after another, falling on her dress, which absorbed them. Her heart was being wrung by the very thought that her uncle and aunt didn't exist in this world anymore. She tried to grasp her surroundings, but she was being pulled into darkness as if the ground didn't exist.

Hattie put her arms around Mallory, while the latter wailed, the deserted corridors echoing with her voice. Even the maid was left in shock, not able to utter a word with the sight she had been greeted with on her way to the kitchen.

Mallory's chest heaved, and she tried to stop her tears before saying, "We should get inside the room and lock it."

Hattie pulled away from her ladyship, worry imminent in her eyes. She asked, "Baron Kaiser?"

Mallory nodded, wiping her red rimmed eyes with the back of her sleeves. She stated,

"He cannot be trusted, Hattie. I should have paid attention... when I didn't hear the sound of his carriage. He must have left the carriage outside the manor, making it appear he just arrived after sneaking out of here. If only I knew..."

"Please don't blame yourself, milady. None of us saw this coming," Hattie consoled her.

"He killed everyone..." Mallory whispered. "He wanted the manor," and this made the maid frown.

Standing up, they secured themselves in the sitting room, bolting the door and shuttering the windows, curtains tightly drawn. That night was the harshest, and it wasn't because the clouds grumbled in the sky. Mallory and Hattie took turns resting, to make sure Baron Kaiser wouldn't intrude and kill them.

By the time the sun rose high in the sky, word had reached out all over Reavermoure about the massacre that had taken place in Winchester's manor. The news about Mallory being the sole survivor reached the townfolks' ears, eyebrows rose, and the old rumour that had been present but not spoken out loud rose up again with speculations.

George Kingsley, who still vividly remembered Mallory Winchester's unexpected assault on his nose, was quick to fuel the gossip. In a small gathering, he expressed, "I always suspected her heart was not pure. To kill the people who had been feeding her."

"But weren't you pursuing Lady Mallory until recently, Mr. Kingsley?" one of the gentlemen inquired.

George scoffed before remarking, "I was attempting to monitor her behaviour as it seemed rather dubious. Once she stepped inside a room, and when it opened, she wasn't there."

"Do you think she's involved in any sort of witchcraft?" Another person inquired, leaning in eagerly to hear the scandalous gossip, showing little concern for the unfortunate woman at the centre of it all.

"Why else would one kill people? Not sparing the servants either. Poor Lady Colette," George sighed, his tone seemingly filled with sympathy.

"Word has it that she tried to put the blame for the murders on Baron Kaiser. How brave of her to make such accusations against a nobleman like him! And he even called the guards," the second gentleman stated, shaking his head in disbelief. "Trying to cover her sinful actions."

"If the magistrate hasn't decided yet, we should talk to him about punishing her," proposed one of them, who thought he was going to do a noble deed and the others agreed. Because to them, it was clear that Mallory Winchester had killed people in the past, and had struck again.

The following day, Mallory and Hattie visited Nottingham's grand estate.

"I was worried about Colette and thought to come see her," Mallory remarked as Mr. Nottingham emerged at the entrance.

"Colette is still recuperating from the shock, Lady Mallory, and is currently not receiving any visitors. It would be best to give her some time to process it," Mr. Nottingham responded with a wary look. After a brief moment of silence, he replied, "I'll inform her of your visit."

"I wanted to ask her when she was ready for the... burial," Mallory said, and she could tell that the man wanted her off his property.

"I will inform you once I bring it up," Mr. Nottingham curtly responded.

"Thank you," Mallory murmured softly as she exited with her maid.

A day later, Hattie ventured to the market to replenish the provisions. However, she came back with some news in the evening. She entered the manor with haste and called out, "Milady! Lady Mallory?"

Hearing her maid's voice, Mallory stepped out of the room and caught Hattie gasping for air.

"What's wrong, Hattie?" Mallory inquired with concern.

"That, milady, I was in the market and I overheard," Hattie seemed to struggle to find the right words. "Lord Wilfred and Lady Doris were buried last evening, milady... I apologise."

Mallory gazed at Hattie, as though she hadn't quite grasped her maid's words. However, it gradually became clear to her. The manor filled itself with the sound of thunder as dark clouds collided and raindrops started to fall. She softly murmured,

"I understand..." Although she wasn't their daughter, she had longed to say a final goodbye to them. However, her cousin was quite displeased with her, convinced that she had separated them from her.

How could her cousin possibly believe that she would ever cause them any harm? The absence of trust pained her deeply, beyond what words could convey.

As Mallory attempted to regain her composure after the news, Hattie was far from finished. She advised,

"I believe it would be unwise to remain in this place. I happened to overhear a conversation among some individuals, and it seems that there are people who wish to impose some form of punishment upon you. The things they said were disturbing, and I am worried for your safety."

This is why Baron Kaiser hadn't come for her, Mallory thought to herself. He was well aware that he wouldn't have to lift a finger, as the townsfolk would take care of everything. To hunt her down. In the past, there was once a woman who was set on fire after people believed she was a witch.

A shiver coursed through her body as she attempted to come to terms with the situation. Everything was going downhill, and she only had Hattie by her side now.

"Okay," Mallory whispered, nodding to herself. "We should gather the necessary things and depart from this place. There's a little money in the drawer and jewels that can be sold." She didn't want to leave, but did she have a choice?

"Yes, my lady!" Hattie agreed.

Before long, they gathered all the essential items and carefully stowed them in the carriage, ensuring they had enough provisions to fend off hunger during their journey. Thunder and lightning accompanied the rain as it fell from the sky, intensifying the storm.

"I would like to visit Uncle and Auntie before we leave," Mallory remarked softly.

"Then we shall," Hattie replied. The two women took the coachman's seat, before leaving the manor.

Upon reaching the church, they parked the carriage beneath a tree and proceeded to the back of the graveyard with an umbrella over their heads, even though they were drenched. After carefully searching the area, they eventually found the graves.

Mallory felt a pang in her heart as she gazed upon the graves and the names inscribed upon them. She wanted Kaiser to face the consequences of his actions, yet she felt utterly helpless. Furthermore, the townspeople were planning to condemn her for errors she had not committed.

Praying for their souls' peace, Mallory and Hattie were about to depart, when a thought suddenly struck the former. It seemed rather insane for her to entertain such thoughts, but there was no harm in trying it.

But what if...?

"Hattie, wait!" Mallory halted her maid, who glanced back at her with a quizzical expression. "We should dig the ground."

Hattie's complexion grew ashen. "You want to bring them along?" she inquired. There was no space inside the carriage, and it was not a good idea, unless her lady wanted to have a final glimpse of them before they would start to decay.

"No, not them," Mallory quickly replied. She then turned in the direction of the older graveyard, which was locked.

It took the maid five seconds, before her eyes widened and she shook her head. She said, "It is the restricted side of this place, and you said it yourself that it is cursed." Evening had passed, inviting night and she didn't feel it was safe.

"But what if my grandmother's stories were not mere fabrications? What if the object that has power will help me put Kaiser in his place?" Mallory asked with hope, knowing she sounded crazy. "Desperate times need desperate measures," she added.

Hattie appeared torn. She remained devoted to Mallory, yet hesitant to explore the forbidden land. She admitted, "I am frightened, Lady Mallory."

"I will be with you, Hattie," Mallory promised, and the maid gulped. "We need to look for shovels. They should be around here."

With the rain pouring, it camouflaged their figures. While Mallory found the shovels, Hattie picked up two lanterns from the backhouse of the church and lit them. They then made their way to the front of the older graveyard, which was locked.

"Look there!" Mallory gestured in a particular direction. "There appears to be a gap!"

As Mallory attempted to pass through the wired fence, a barbed wire unexpectedly pierced her left arm, causing her to let out a cry of pain.

"Are you okay?!" Hattie asked in concern.

Mallory suppressed her pain, her lips tightly pressed together. One end of the wire had dug into her skin, leaving an open wound with blood seeping out of it. She replied, "I am fine." She pushed the wire aside so that Hattie could pass through.

Once inside, they split up and looked for the squarish headstone. With the bushes and trees surrounding this locked graveyard, it hid the light of their lanterns. After nearly fifteen minutes, Hattie found the headstone and shouted over the thunder, "Lady Mallory! I think I found it!"

Mallory hurriedly arrived beside Hattie. She raised the lantern, such that light fell on the nameless grave. The tombstone was short and covered with moss, as if to attract less attention.

"This must be it," Mallory whispered, her heart racing.

Setting aside the lanterns, the women started to dig the ground. With the rain, it made it harder as the mud felt heavier.

Hattie occasionally paused, feeling fatigued. However, Mallory, driven by an insatiable desire to discover this artefact, persisted without pause. It took them several hours before Mallory's shovel made contact with something.

The two women stared at each other. Having heard it was cursed, the maid quickly withdrew her shovel from the grave. She asked for permission,

"Milady, may I go up?"

"Yes," Mallory replied, her eyes set beneath her. She continued to remove the mud, until she found the upper door of a coffin.

"How big is this object we are looking for?" Hattie asked from above, who held the lanterns above the grave they had dug.

"It should be small," Mallory shouted. Maybe this is how people buried valuables many years ago, she thought to herself.

Taking a deep breath, her trembling fingers found the edge of the coffin's door and pushed it upward. At the same moment, lightning struck in the sky, momentarily lighting up the ground, which briefly revealed a person inside the coffin, before darkness fell again.