

## **Brentberch Castle**

*By Priscilla Eve Adams*

*My Dearest Olivia,*

*It is my sincerest wish that if I ever pass on that you should be a ward of my brother, Count Archibald Brentberch. Given the circumstances, I will not be able to explain much about him, but I hope that you find the castle to your liking. Although, I hope that you don't travel too far within it, there are certain things that should not be discovered. And if they are, in a manner of speaking I'd like to say that you end up inheriting Brentberch Castle.*

*Sending my love always,*

*Victoria Brentberch*

This is the letter I looked over as I watched outside of the carriage taking me to Brentberch Castle. It has been nearly a week since the sickness has taken my mother, and I'm not quite sure how to cope. But, given the current situation, I was hoping that living at Brentberch Castle could be suitable for me. For it was not the same home I had in London with my mother, which holds so many memories, in that way, living here may be comforting.

However, as the carriage pulled forward into the entrance to a metal gate, I looked up and out at the dark structure, built like a mansion, but in stone, with four towers on each side. It was daylight, but the foreboding willow trees made it seem like it was darker outside than it was. As we approached, I noticed that vines were growing on the walls, yet every other kind of plant outside of the castle walls

seemed to have withered and died. After passing through the first wall, a courtyard with a more tended to garden surrounded us as we approached a massive bronze door with two men waiting for us.

The first was older, with graying black hair that swept around his head to make a neat point at the top with a pointed beard and slight, wiry mustache. He was dressed in the finest of coats with a cane made with gold encasing wood in the shape of a lion. The second was younger, with curly black hair, with no facial hair, dressed in second best in comparison to his father. For this must be the two that I've heard of Count Archibald Brentberch, my uncle, and Alexander Brentberch, my cousin.

I was helped out of the carriage by the driver by one hand and holding my skirts in the other as I looked at the massiveness of the castle.

“Welcome to Brentberch, Olivia, we've been expecting you.” Archibald greeted.

“Sorry for the delay, we had to switch horses half-way.” I added and curtsied and they bowed.

“It's quite alright, this is my son, Alexander.” Archibald introduced.

“Good day, M-miss.” Alexander stuttered.

“Excuse his stutter, he's not good with visitors.” Archibald continued, “Come, let's show you around the castle.”

It took about an hour to go through most of the towers, the main entrance way, the sitting room, the garden, and we would've explored more, but Archibald yawned as he checked his gold watch and invited, “Would you like to sit for a while and have some afternoon tea?”

“Yes, please.” I entreated.

We returned to the main sitting room, while servants brought in the tea, some cakes and cookies, “So, where are you from?” Archibald inquired.

“London.” I replied.

“All the way out to Brighton? That must have been quite the exhausting trip.”

“Not exactly, it wasn't that much trouble.”

“Still though, I'll have Leslie show you to your room after you've had your fill of tea and

cakes.”

“So, how much did you know about my mother?”

“Not much, she was a quiet child and after I went to the university I didn't see much of her or the rest of the family. Has it already been a week since she was taken by the sickness?”

“Yes, I'm not sure how to deal with death, would you mind me asking about your wife?”

“Oh Lilith? Well, there isn't much to say, she died suddenly of an illness, much like your mother, but Alexander took it the hardest. He said that he missed the simple things she would do, but it's already been nearly twenty years since then. You move on eventually, right Alexander?”

Alexander looked away but complied, “Yes father.”

“See? It's not that bad. After a couple years I'm sure you'll hardly even think of her. Anything else you would like to discuss?”

“No...If it's quite alright I would like to return to my room for a while, I am feeling quite tired.” I requested, feigning a yawn.

“Why, of course,” He snapped his fingers and called, “Leslie!” A maid appeared in only a few seconds and stated, “Yes, my lord.”

“Show Miss Olivia to her room.”

“Right away, my lord.” Then she beckoned me to follow her.

I sat up, curtsied, and followed the maid through various staircases and halls, as I asked, “So, what do you know of the castle?”

“Not much to speak of, it is a quite lovely, very large castle, and his lord wishes that you have a comfortable stay here.”

I remained silent for a while before asking the next question, “Anything I should be aware of?”

She paused, as we were right outside a door, and whispered in my ear, “Beware of anything downstairs.”

Then she was gone, I opened the door to the room and found a large, nicely furnished room with

an ornate dresser, mirror, and chair, next to a bed with red and gold covers. I sank into the bed and cried, thinking of how cruel Archibald had sounded describing that I would “barely think of her in two years.” And as I was lying there, I realized just how tired I was, I took off some of my skirts and layers of clothes, and fell asleep.

I was awakened by what seemed like a moan coming from downstairs, it was night by then and some candles were lit in my room. I put some of my layers and skirts back on and took a candle to see what it was. As I was going further and further down, the same maid stopped me and greeted, “Oh, I was about to see how you were doing.”

This startled me, so I took a few steps back, “Would you like something to eat? Count Archibald and the young Master Alexander have already retired for the night, but I'm sure we can procure some soup and bread for you.”

“Yes, that would be lovely.”

So, she pulled me away from the third staircase I was about to go down and steered me back into the dining room. In a few moments, some soup and bread were offered and I ate some before wondering what to do next. I was wide awake by now and so I asked if I could go see the garden, the maid led me to it and left me to explore outside. I wondered where the cemetery was, but I somehow ended up in the stables, a young man with shoulder length brown hair and green eyes was combing a black steed when I asked, “Um, excuse me.”

He looked up from what he was doing “Yes, miss?”

“Do you know where the family cemetery is?”

“Why, of course, would you like me to show you the way?”

“Yes, I admit I am a bit lost.”

So, I followed him past the stables, through a path through a small forest, as I asked, “So, what is your name?”

“My name? Why it's Leonardo, and you must be our guest, Miss Olivia.”

“Is it strange to request a servant's name?”

“Why yes, we are considered beneath the need of knowing our names, so I was taken aback by the question.”

At the end of the path was a small gate, which he unlocked, as he stated, “Here it is, Brentberch Family Cemetery.”

I looked at the gloomy place and was about to say, “Thank you.” but he was gone. So, I explored the place, looking at all the graves of our ancestors who had passed, being fairly kept, moss growing over some of the oldest ones. Until I happened upon one with vines growing over it, not being kept up at all, I pulled back the vines and it read: *Lilith Brentberch 1801-1831 May she rest in pieces.* I was about to question as to why that was when a ghostly figure emerged from the graves, half of her face crushed and her arm and leg barely hanging on.

“He made it look like an accident.” The ghost said, “When he pushed me off the ledge,” then she pointed at me with a stern look in her eye, “Fair maiden, I have only one warning, do not trust Archibald Brentberch, for it will be your doom.” Then she faded away, back into the grave.

I stayed on the ground for a moment, for I was knocked back when I saw her ghostly form and contemplated what she had said and in knowing the truth of his wife's death, it made me question him even more.

Just then, Leslie had found me and ran towards me calling, “There you are!” When she caught up to me, she helped me up and asked, “What are you doing in a place like this?”

“Just curious, I suppose.” I answered.

“Well, it's about time to head back to the castle, here let me guide you.”

So, she guided me back to the castle and to my room where I read for a few hours before falling asleep just before day break.

When I awoke again, it was afternoon, and I headed downstairs, dressed in the next day's attire and overheard Archibald remarking to Alexander in the sitting room over afternoon tea, “Well, it seems

our new guest fancies sleeping all during the day and being awake for most of the night.”

And when I entered he exclaimed, “Well, here she is, good afternoon Miss Olivia.” They stood and bowed.

“Good afternoon, Count Archibald and young Master Alexander.” As I curtsied to each.

Then we sat, and Archibald pushed some cake towards me and added “Here, you must be quite peckish, and tell me what you think of the tea.”

I chewed the cake cautiously and sipped the tea thoughtfully, as he asked, “Well, is the tea not bitter?”

“It is slightly bitter, but I confess I like my tea bitter or sweet.”

And at that very second he summoned a maid by calling “Candice.” she appeared and said “Yes, my lord.”

“This tea is too bitter, please make us a better batch.” He ordered, practically pushing the tea tray onto her.

She grabbed it alarmed and shaking replying, “Y-yes, right away, my lord.” And left.

“Useless servants, we have no need for bitter tea, right Alexander?”

“Yes father.” Alexander replied.

“Yes, and once you are quite done with your tea, as soon as the next batch is ready, and the cakes I should like you two to go horseback riding.”

“That sounds lovely,” I commented, “I’ve never ridden a horse before.”

“You haven’t? Well, it is all good fun, right Alexander?”

“Yes, father.”

Archibald tsked and added, “I can hardly have him say a word for the life of me.”

Then the maid came back with a fresh pot of tea, she poured and as he sipped he stated, “Much better, although I expect such results on the first try.”

“Yes, my lord.” The maid complied and left.

Then he stood and stated, “Well, are you two ready?”

We sat as we tried the newly arrived batch of tea, chewing the cakes thoughtfully, and Alexander replied, “Not quite, father.”

“Alright.” And he sat back down.

Later, we did go horseback riding as Leonardo helped us into our saddles and we took the horses out for a brisk ride in the forest. As we rode faster I admit I felt more alive and it was the first time I really saw Alexander smile. When we had returned to the stable and handed the horses back to Leonardo he asked, “Did you enjoy yourselves?”

“Yes, very much so.” I replied.

“Good, I'm glad.”

“And I must admit that even the horses seemed well today,” Alexander commented and gave Leonardo a coin, “Keep up the good work.”

“Yes, young Master Alexander.” Leonardo thanked with a bow and he smiled at me as we left.

I smiled back as we headed back to the castle for dinner, as we entered Archibald twisted the chain on his watch impatiently and asked, “So, how was it?”

“Good,” Alexander replied “I really-”

“I was more asking our guest, Miss Olivia.” Archibald interrupted.

And, with that, Alexander replied with the more morose and automatic, “Yes, father.”

“It went well, I had fun and I think even the horses did, too.”

“The horses you say?” And Archibald let out a huge laugh as we walked to the dining room.

We sat and the maids and servants served up the courses and wines in silence, as we also sat in silence. After the meal, Archibald stared at me, wine glass in hand as he invited, “Would you like to come to my personal sitting room, Olivia? There's something we need to discuss.”

I kept a wary eye on him and remembered the ghost's words, “Don't trust him.”, but I complied as we sat up and left up a couple flights of stairs. We arrived in an area with a few comfortable

armchairs and a fireplace as I sat down across from him.

When he finally spoke he said, “Surely, from today you have deduced that my son and the stable boy are idiots, but I'm sure that you are sensible enough to want a more educated man. While you were sleeping I found your diary and the note that your mother left you, it seems she wants you to inherit Brentberch Castle. You may not be able to do that, but you can run it alongside a sensible, more mature man, who dislikes the immature game of horseback riding.”

I eyed him suspiciously.

“Yes, me, we should get married and then we can rule over Brentberch Castle, whilst Alexander and the rest of the lot twiddle their thumbs as we have...more suitable heirs.”

At this I got up and exclaimed, “I'd rather not.”

As I started to leave he caught me by the wrist, “But, it's your mother's request, rule over Brentberch.”

He looked into my eyes meaningfully and I looked away, and just as I was going to try to pull away, Alexander walked in.

“Father!” He pulled me away from him and interrogated, “What is the meaning of this? Grabbing a young maiden's wrist so suddenly?”

“Stay out of this you arrogant boy!” Archibald growled.

“No! I will not stand idly by any longer,” He turned his face towards me, “Come, let us escape.”

And I followed him out the door, “Alexander!” Archibald raged as he chased after us.

As we ran I realized that we were only going more and more downstairs as the castle got darker and darker. At one point Alexander grabbed a candle and Archibald grabbed a torch, until we came upon the darkest part with our backs to a door. Alexander went through his keys with shaky hands until he found the right one and unlocked the door and said to me, “Run!” As he shut the door behind me and handed me his candle.

Archibald was upon him on the other side and as I walked steadily through the darkness I heard



them argue.

“Insolent boy! Do you know what's in there?”

“Anything in there is long dead.”

“You fool! Don't you know of the shadows that haunt this castle? It could have been brought back.”

“You mean him? Impossible!”

And as the voices faded I heard a moan, a moan of pain and sorrow, huddled in a corner, I saw it, rather a male-looking figure, but with a mouth sewn shut and empty eye sockets where the eyes should be and three fingers with claws. I screamed and he noticed me turning his head to the side as if listening for the source of the noise claws reaching out for me. I covered my mouth with my hand as I backed away and then turned around and ran back towards the door. I pounded on it as I heard,

“See! It's him, give me the damn keys or I will smite you with this cane!”

There was a jangling of keys as the door flung open, I ran out and as the monster did, Archibald put Alexander between us and him. And the monster stuck his claws into him and tore him open, Alexander screamed and died. Then Archibald swung his cane in one hand and a torch in the other saying, “Back away beast!” And we ran, the slight creak of a door left open rang out behind us.

The next morning Archibald and I sat and stared at each other from across the long table over breakfast. Mine was a grimace from how he could have possibly let his son die like that, his was an amused stare over how upset I was. After last night, Archibald ordered to have all the downstairs regions of the castle closed off after retrieving Alexander's body. And after breakfast, we would have the funeral, so that we can, as Archibald put it “Put that damn boy in the ground and be done with it.”

So, breakfast passed in silence and so did the funeral, but afterwards Archibald said, “Now that he's gone, there's no one to keep me from you.”

He made an advance to grab my wrist again, but I refused and ran away from him into the

forest, he called, “Olivia!” as him, Candice, and Leslie came searching for me. I held my breath as I hid behind a huge oak that Archibald was passing by, and once they were out of sight I darted in the opposite direction. And I ended up at the stables, Leonardo was there and he could tell I was panicked as he asked, “What is it, my lady?”

I caught my breath and stated, “I am in a bit of trouble, Archibald is after me and I must hide.”

He paused a moment to think, and then we heard voices approaching and he said, “Over here.”

We crouched inside one of the stalls where the black horse was sheepishly chewing some hay, and the barn doors burst open.

“Olivia, I will find you!” Archibald growled, “Candice check this side, Leslie check the other.”

Archibald was hovering over Candice while she checked each stall on the opposite side of ours, so when Leslie opened ours with Archibald inquiring “Anything Leslie?”

Leslie put a finger to her lips and called back, “Nothing, my lord.”

As she closed the stall and Archibald concluded, “Well, they must have taken off somewhere else.” And angrily stomped out of the stable followed by the maids, Leslie looking back and winking.

When we were certain they were out of earshot, we emerged and I dusted the hay off of me as Leonardo asked, “Well, what should we do now?”

“I believe I must stay here until...I don't know. But, I can't go back to the castle, no matter what.”

“What's in the castle?”

“Well, Archibald for one and there is also a creature like a man haunting the place. I fear there is nothing else much I can do, except hide.”

“Hm...I probably won't be able to take the stagecoach until night, since it is outside of the castle in the courtyard. But, at that time, we can make our escape.”

After a pause I added, “To be frank, I wasn't sure that you'd help me.”

“Oh, do not worry. My father and I came here when I was small to negotiate some things, I

wasn't sure what they were. But, then my father disappeared and Archibald left me to be raised by the servants as a stable boy. I...really don't trust the man, though, I feel like he's responsible for my father's disappearance somehow.”

“It would not be above Archibald. I found out, recently, that he murdered his wife.”

“Murdered? I've heard the rumors...but I believed she fell. I guess trust was never a commodity that I put into Archibald, though.”

“Well, you shouldn't. He wants...to marry me, his niece, and...have heirs.”

“That's terrible! I'll make sure he never gets his hands on you.”

“Thank you.” I said and gave him a hug.

For hours we took care of the horses and he shared some of his lunch with me, it was nice getting to know how to take care of the majestic creatures. Until dusk when the horses were tired, and so were we, but it was then that we heard the shuffling of feet in the distance. We hid again in the stall, the barn doors burst open and it was Archibald, alone with fresh blood on his hands. He twitched in a way that was unnatural and his hair was in disarray as he yelled, “Olivia!”

The door to our stall burst open, but Leonardo whistled and the horse took off, pushing Archibald down as we made our escape towards the castle. Archibald took a second to recover, but was right behind us, we ran for what seemed like miles, Archibald never faltering. Until we reached the courtyard and found that the gate to the stagecoaches was locked, we turned around as Archibald held keys in the air, “Looking for these?”

We rushed in the castle, the only place left to run, but we were confused by a room we had never seen before, not knowing where to go next. And from behind Archibald knocked out Leonardo with his cane, “Leonardo!” I cried. Then I continued to run, until I was in the sitting room where I saw Candice and Leslie in the seats with their throats slit and I fainted.

I awoke on Archibald's bed and he emerged from his washroom with clean hands stating, “Now it's just you and me.”

He was in more informal attire, dropped his cane, and beckoned, "Come to me, Olivia."

I noticed that someone was in his closet, hoping it was Leonardo, I complied and slowly stepped towards Archibald. Suddenly, all the candles were blown out, and Archibald was run through with one long nail, it was the monster. He groaned as he let Archibald's body slip off his finger, then I darted out of the door the monster followed. Desperate moans and claws outstretched to catch me, until I closed and locked a door to one of the rooms behind me.

I fell to the ground to catch my breath, but I didn't have much time, because the monster was tearing at the door. So, I stood, but as I did, someone grabbed me from behind, "Olivia!"

I screamed, but then I felt the person's face and sighed, "Oh, Leonardo!"

We embraced for a moment, but then the door was torn open and we had to run, running upwards until we were stuck at the highest tower. We shut and locked the door behind us as we collapsed again in each others arms, but now there was nowhere to run. As each tear brought the monster closer and closer to us, I sobbed in fear, Leonardo was overcome with fear as well and shook as he made one last attempt to save us by saying, sounding much like a scared little boy, "Please, don't hurt us."

The door was torn open, but the monster stopped, we stopped sobbing as the monster was moving his lips until he ripped his mouth open. In a voice of a tired old man he pointed to us and uttered, "You...are...the...one."

Then, in an attempt to grab his lips in pain, he decapitated himself, stale blood poured out, I turned around and hugged Leonardo. But, he just kept staring and shaking,

"W-what is it?" I asked.

"That...was my father. I-I recognized that voice...Mandrake was his name."

"Mandrake? My mother mentioned that my father's name was Mandrake, but...he left when I was still in the womb."

Then we looked at each other, "Why did he leave?" Leonardo asked.

“To discuss the rightful heir of Brentberch...he...never came back.”

Leonardo was silent as he closed his eyes and stated, “I remember that, they kept talking about rightful heirs.”

“But...why wouldn't she mention you?”

“I guess no brother is better than knowing you have a brother that may never come back.”

“So, you're my brother?”

“It seems so...how did our father become this way, though?” He looked at the body and noticed how it could have been a man once, “Torture...endless torture.”

Then, as if possessed, Leonardo opened the window, he looked out and I called, “Don't-”

But it was too late.

After his funeral, I was in a daze, but I gathered the courage to lay claims to Brentberch Castle, as the only living heir. I hired a new staff to clean up the messes and any given skeletons in the closet, but I couldn't live there. I tried for a week, but bad memories and foreboding feelings overtook me and I sold the property and traded the staff for a great sum that should tide me over financially for the rest of my life. As I moved back to London to reclaim my mother's house, because I realized that I'd rather be surrounded by the memories of my mother than that of Brentberch Castle.