

Blathe's Mistake

By C. Jade Wyton

As Blathe prepares for a long trip on the road, the darkness in his chest whispers harshly about his to-be travelling companion, and it takes an action they will both deeply regret.

Contains descriptions of violence and abuse, and mentions of death.

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Blathe had spent the last hour packing for his solo mission.

He had everything he needed. Weapons. Food. Weapons. Map. Weapons....

*Horse....*

Blathe frowned as he pet his pockets, and quickly began searching through his bag.

*Where was it?!*

Where the *hell* was it?!

If she thought that he'd lost it, even for a moment, she would *kill* him—

'Why did Mother give you her blood?'

Blathe's lip twitched at the sound of a familiar young voice.

'Oh! It's a teleportation spell! Are you going to pick up Thirteen?'

*Wonda.*

Pretty little *Wonda*.

He remembered caring about this creature. A long, long time ago.

But now, it took all of Blathe's effort not to spit in contempt; though he wasn't sure why he felt such hatred for the young girl whom he had once sought to rescue. That little voice inside him whispered about her often, even more than about the others in the "family," and the more it whispered, the harder it was to push it down.

Perhaps it was her youth. Or maybe it was her beauty. Maybe he was jealous of how little Wonda was expected to do compared to the others. Or perhaps it was her air of innocence and hope that she always maintained, in this terrible place. Or, perhaps, it was that she continually got him into trouble with her mother.

*No*, the voice whispered up from his chest, hissing in pleasure. *You hate her because she is good, and you are not.*

Blathe pushed the feeling down, and rounded on Wonda.

'Give me that!' he snapped, yanking the bottle from the woman's grip. 'This is important! Too important for you to be involved in! Go— Go play with your dolls!'

Wonda flinched back as Blathe growled at her—not a fearful motion, but an instinctual reaction of offence— and he watched as she lifted her hands to rub at her horn. Or, more, the empty place on her head where her horn had been growing until last night. Until her Mother had burnt herself on it while braiding her hair and had called on Dr Mori to remove it again.

He saw, as she slowly lowered her hands, that the day-old bloody bandage was already yellowing at the edges.

A small flutter of sympathy tried to push its way out of him, but it was quickly swallowed up by the darkness. And too tired to fight the vicious feelings, Blathe snorted as Wonda sighed.

‘Does it still hurt?’ he asked.

Wonda nodded.

‘Good,’ he muttered, unable to stop himself poking firmly at the spot of blood as the voice inside him took control, and he winced as the harsh jab he’d given caused Wonda to give a cry of surprise and back away. But, still, he couldn’t help himself as he grumbled, ‘Leave me alone, or I’ll do that again.’

Wonda shook her head and frowned, gripping at the bloody patch on her bandage as the red mark thickened and slowly oozed to twice the size it had been before.

Blathe just sniffed, pushing down the flicker of guilt some old part of him was attempting to feel as Wonda took another few steps away from him and bumped into the castle’s side-door.... And as she bumped it, it opened, and Ashdown stepped out of it.

*Horrid fellow*, thought Blathe; both the vicious darkness in his chest *and* his old heroic instinct feeling disgusted at the sight of the man. *She should have just left him dead. He’d chosen to blow his brains out— Surely, without half his head, the man couldn’t be smart enough to be any use....*

Blathe’s eyes tightened as the hazard-suit clad corpse stood completely still, filling up the entire doorway as Wonda whirled around to look at him.

The saytr relaxed when she saw who she’d bumped into, lowering her head in a kind politeness at the scientist; who took the motion as an opportunity to gently place an ice-pack onto Wonda’s bandage-covered wound.

The woman looked grateful for it, and held it gently against her head as Ashdown stood, completely motionless, staring down at her.

‘Thank you,’ Wonda said softly.

Ashdown slowly raised his hands to sign to the girl, ‘*Less swelling. Faster healing. Healing faster makes you happy. If you are happy, Fourteen is happy. If Fourteen is happy, Mother is amicable. Better for everyone.*’

*Hm*, Blathe gave an annoyed snort.

Maybe the man hadn’t blown out *all* of his brain.

Ashdown pet Wonda’s shoulder with one of his heavily-gloved hands before turning and making his way back inside.

As he stepped out of the doorway he revealed a tall, dark silhouette that made Blathe freeze in fear.

‘Fourteen!’ Wonda exclaimed, throwing out her arms and making a mock-grabbing motion towards her sister. ‘Blathe’s going to go pick up Thirteen!’

‘I didn’t say that,’ Blathe grumbled; instinctively ducking his head down as Fourteen stepped out of the door and stood by her sister. *Even the darkness filling the cavity of his chest feared Fourteen’s anger....* It feared that it might be torn straight from between his ribs and beaten against the ground like a dirty, balled-up sock. And Blathe almost found himself wishing she *would* tear the horrid feelings from him— Though, the thought of death made his skin crawl too

much for him to suggest it.

Fourteen wrapped one arm around Wonda, half-returning the saytr's hug in a protective way as she ran a hand through her mane and onto her shoulders. Her large eyes were locked onto Blathe's the entire time; her pale green iris no more than a thin strip around her slitted pupils as she stared him down with an expression that betrayed her silent fury at him.

Blathe swallowed, averting his gaze to the ground as Fourteen stepped past her sister, her arm limply slipping from Wonda to rest at her side.

She kept her eyes on Blathe as she approached him; one agonisingly slow step at a time.

*She moved as slow as one of the damned corpses!* Blathe thought to himself, not daring to lift his head as she came to stand in front of him.

He could feel her eyes boring into him and twisting into his brain like a knife in his flesh. And the darkness within him chuckled at his pain.

For a moment, Blathe wondered if Fourteen had seen him assaulting Wonda.... But then he reassured himself that she couldn't possibly have seen it; the door had been shut when he'd done it. And she had been inside. And.... She....

Blathe set his jaw as Fourteen slowly, almost mechanically, lifted her hands and signed:

*'Mother said Wonda goes with you.'*

*'WHAT?'* Blathe screeched, his eyes going wide as his head shot up. *'No!'*

*'Yes,'* Fourteen replied, simply. *'Mother said so.'*

*'M-Mother said I—'* Wonda's arms rose to her chest, and her head ducked down as her tail lashed sideways and she gave a surprised stumble. *'Outside? Really?'*

Fourteen nodded, turning now and opening an arm for Wonda to stumble into.

The saytr wrapped her arms around her sister again, nuzzling into her side. *'Ooh.... I'm— Nervous! Excited but— Oh! I should pack—'*

Fourteen raised a finger, and Wonda went quiet as the kenku reached up and yanked the air; pulling out an already-packed bag.

Wonda's jaw dropped in surprise, and Fourteen's hard look finally broke as she smiled and gave her sister the bag.

*'You packed for me already?'* Wonda asked, running her paw-like hands over the pack's buckle. She grinned when Fourteen's arm fell around her again, squeezing her tight. *'You're the best.'*

*'Wrong,'* Fourteen said out loud; her mother's voice echoing from her beak as she poked her sister on the nose. *'You.'*

Wonda gave a giggle, beaming up at her sister, and Blathe felt his stomach churning.

Something inside him ached as he watched the girls. Like he was trying to remind himself of something.... Something he had once felt a long time ago....

But then he met Fourteen's eye and his fear gripped him; that unbearable feeling squashing down every other emotion he had ever known as the woman's face fell again.

She signed to him: *'You take Wonda with you.'*

*'I'm not going to—'*

*'Mother said so.'* Fourteen reminded, her hands clapping together loudly in her firm exclamation.

Blathe swallowed, taking a step back and bracing himself. *'She did? Well.... That.... That certainly doesn't sound like her!'*

*'Are you calling me a liar?'* Fourteen's face twisted into a scowl as she signed the words, and Blathe took *two* steps back as she opened her beak and let the voice of the lich escape her. *'You vile man! You worthless worm! Putrid thing! You do as my daughter says! She is as holy as I am! You worm! You creature! You scat! Shut up and do as you are told! You serve me! Would you rather perish—'*

*'Okay! Okay! I get it! I get it!'* Blathe cut Fourteen off, ducking his head down in submission. *'I'll take her! I won't complain!'*

Fourteen gave a loud, furious snort, before signing with her hands, *'That's better!'* then, she turned to Wonda again, her features softening as she leant down and nuzzled her cheek. *'I have a gift for you.'*

*'A gift?'* Wonda echoed, her face breaking in a grin. *'Really?'*

Fourteen nodded, reaching into her pockets and retrieving a blue butterfly-shaped pendant on a thin metal chain.

*Of course it's a damned coffin angel,* Blathe thought bitterly. Though he didn't dare think the rest of the thought when, as if reading his mind, Fourteen's eyes cut to him and tightened into a glare.

*'Oh wow, it's beautiful!'* Wonda exclaimed, letting her sister slip it over her head before she took the pendant to examine. *'Thank you!'*

*'It is to keep you safe,'* Fourteen signed. *'You don't take that off, you understand?'*

*'I understand!'* Wonda beamed; though Fourteen's face only grew more serious.

*'I mean it,'* Fourteen told her. *'You promise me that you will wear that chain, from the moment you step out that gate to the moment you come home. Promise me now.'*

*'I promise?'* Wonda blinked up at her sister, confusion written all over her face— As if it wasn't obvious that Fourteen had enchanted the damn thing for her!

*'I promise?'* Wonda blinked up at her sister, confusion written all over her face— As if it wasn't obvious that Fourteen had enchanted the damn thing for her!

Though, it seemed to humour Fourteen, who gave a chuckle and signed, *'Promise better!'*

*'I promise I won't take it off!'* Wonda promised obediently. *'From the moment I step out that gate, until I get home!'*

*'Not even when you bathe!'* Fourteen teased, pausing her signing to tickle her sister's neck. *'You keep it on! Always! So that snakes don't come out of the river and bite you!'*

*'Like what happened with Joanne?'* Wonda asked, clearly trying to hold back her giggles at her sister's affection.

*'Exactly like that. And there are a hundred times more snakes and spiders and scary creatures out there. So you keep that on! Do not take it off. No matter what. Not even for a second!'*

‘I promise! Not even for a second!’ Wonda confirmed. ‘I promise!’

The voice in Blathe’s chest scoffed, and it escaped out of his own throat. Both he and the darkness in his soul regreted the sound immediately, because as soon as it escaped him, Fourteen’s hand was around his throat; yanking him up and cutting off his airway as he scrambled uselessly in her grip.

She spoke in her mother’s voice; her words broken and contorted as she mimicked different inflections and combined multiple sentences into one.

‘If Wonda is— Hurt— Upset— Even LOOK at me the wrong way— Fourteen— Is going— Ask your sister— Why is she crying— And then— If this is *your* fault young lady— *I believe a dissection is in order!*’

Blathe recognised almost all of the words and their tones as things that the lich had said recently. Except for that last sentence, which had come from Dr Mori.

And he understood their meaning:

*If Wonda came home and said he had treated her poorly, Fourteen would torture him to death.*

Death.

It made his skin crawl with fear.

He couldn’t die.

Not again.

Never again.

He couldn’t go back to that place.

Not that awful, horrible place where the wind didn’t blow and the vultures circled and that man —that *damned* man— had driven that putrid black spike through his already-wounded heart and tauntingly told him to *say hello to Fern*.

Blathe had only been dead a minute before Cras had brought him back with revivify, but it was long enough for Blathe to have seen the hell that he was going to find himself in upon his death.

And ever since he had returned, that dark voice had been bubbling up from the wound in his heart, whispering vicious, evil things:

*What was the point of being good, if he would end up in a place of such torment? He should just give in. Give in to the selfish feelings. Let himself have whatever living pleasures he wanted....*

It was too hard to disagree, now. Too hard to suppress the voice.... Too hard to keep the darkness separate from himself, any longer.

He was better off serving the lich and her daughters; at least when he was here, doing as the voice told him, it would relent and let him enjoy *some* pleasures.

Blathe crumpled to the ground as Fourteen released him, and gasped desperately for air.

‘Am I clear?’ she said in her mother’s voice.

‘*Crystal*,’ Blathe coughed, rubbing at his throat in an attempt to sooth the sore spots that Fourteen had dug in her claws.

Fourteen nodded, then, and turned around— But she only took two steps before raising a finger, clearing mocking remembering something.

‘Oh!’ she said out loud, before turning back to Blathe and signing, ‘*And this is for your little jab before.*’

‘My little what—’ Blathe cut off, giving a cry of pain as Fourteen suddenly pressed two fingers into the centre of his forehead.

There was a burning sizzle of a sound before he managed to react and pull away from the sorceress, and he saw her fingers were as red-hot as a fire poker.

*‘If you ever touch Wonda’s horn again,’ she signed, smoke flicking from her fingers with the motion. ‘I will burn off your cock!’*

—END—

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