

Mercy

By C. Jade Wyton

*Leena makes the hard decision to tell Wonda about her romantic feelings....
And Wonda's sister, Fourteen, quickly unmakes that decision for her.*

Contains descriptions of violence and cults.

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Leena Benson had spent the last hour staring at her own reflection.  
She was simmering, again. Trying to pluck up some sort of courage to face her best friend and admit her feelings.

She'd come close to it yesterday until Blathe (fucking *Blathe!* Always fucking *Blathe!*) had interrupted her and she'd lost her nerve.

Blathe.

Oh she hated Blathe. With every fibre of her being!

He was a deeply disturbed man. And he treated Wonda poorly. He treated *everyone* poorly—

Leena couldn't believe he had been allowed to join them. She still remembered the jumble of feelings that had shook her when she had learnt he had defected his adventuring party to serve Wonda's mother.

*He had been an enemy to the lich; how could he now be one of her most trusted men? How could Blathe have risen so quickly in the ranks, when he had killed followers as loyal as Leena's parents! That should have been her mother, standing at God's side!*

Then, that disbelief had grown into disillusion.

*How could the lich not see how insane a choice she had made in trusting Blathe? She was supposed to be knowing; a god! But maybe— Maybe she wasn't so smart. Maybe... Maybe she wasn't so godly. So all knowing and holy. Maybe the lich was an idiot.*

*Just like all of her followers!*

The thought had made its home in the back of Leena's mind for years until she had realised she believed it.

The lich was an idiot.

Her followers were a cult.

Everything she had built was on lies and fear and luck.

Leena had wanted to leave this godforsaken place for a long time. But she couldn't.

*Where else would she go?*

*How else would she live?*

This life was all she knew.

And Wonda— Wonda!

She couldn't leave her friend behind.

Her *friend*.

With her disillusionment towards the lich had come a sense of realisation

towards her childhood companion.

Once, she had worshipped the ground at Wonda's feet.

She had been raised to all but lick at the satyr's heel; pressured by her parents to approach the girl to serve her personally....

All Wonda had ever truly asked for, though, was her friendship. Even when Leena had been eager to serve and gone out of her way to make sure the satyr's life was as perfect as she could make it; the only thing Wonda had ever *asked* for was companionship.

The realisation that the person she had grown up serving was not a god should have shattered Leena— Her entire life had been built around a lie. She had been raised to put Wonda before anything; including her own happiness and health. And she had done so without question for so, so long.

Though, somehow, the thought that Wonda wasn't some otherworldly being was actually quite reassuring.

Wonda was a person, just like her.

Wonda was just a person. *Just like her.*

And their friendship was as real and as important to the woman raised up on a pedestal as it was to the woman pushed down in the dirt.

It meant that she didn't have to beg for Wonda's friendship; she just had to be there. She just had to *exist*.

She wasn't just some replaceable servant that Wonda didn't care for— Who she was actually *mattered* to Wonda. She *mattered*.

And once she had realised that, it hadn't taken long for her feelings to deepen further than they had ever done before.

So now she stood, alone in her bedroom, staring at her own reflection and practising what she wanted to say.

But words alone didn't seem like enough. Not when what she truly wanted to do was press a kiss against the satyr.

Cheek, lips, neck— Anywhere would do as long as Leena would finally be able to taste Wonda's skin on her lips.

She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly.

'Wonda?' she started, her voice trembling as much as her hands. 'I—'

'Leena!' it was the lich's voice, and Leena flinched as her bedroom door was thrown open.

She turned, expecting to see the gnomish woman— But what she saw was much, *much* worse.

Fourteen kicked the door shut behind her; her sharp green eyes cutting into Leena as she snorted and approached.

'*I know what you're doing,*' Fourteen signed. '*Don't you dare. You put it out of your mind right now!*'

'F-Fourteen, no! I-I was just—'

'*Don't you dare!*' the harsh clap of Fourteen's sign cut Leena off. '*Don't you dare do that to Wonda! You know Mother hates you! You know she thinks you're weak! A drain on our resources! You know the the only reason you're still here is that you entertain Wonda. If Mother heard that Wonda had intentions of pursuing you romantically she would kill you to stop it! And Wonda would never forgive herself for it! If Wonda thought she got you killed she would never*

*be happy again! So don't you dare! Don't you dare break my sister's heart by making her fall in love with you when you know Mother will never let it be! If I even think that you are going to tell Wonda, I will cut out your tongue and break off your hands so you can never speak to her again! Do you understand? I will not allow you to ruin Wonda's life!*

'I...' Leena's gaze fell to the floor.

*'If Mother thinks that Wonda is ready to be in a relationship but is too stupid to choose a good partner, she will pick someone for her. Do you understand?'*

Fourteen repeated forcefully; moving so Leena couldn't avoid her signing.

*'Wonda will be trapped with someone who will never understand her, and she will have even more expectations put on her from Mother than she has now! Do you understand? Do you understand?'*

Leena felt her brow furrow, and she scowled as her gaze lifted back up. She could feel tears of frustration welling in her eyes as met Fourteen's own frown and silently stood her ground.

*'Don't give me that look!' Fourteen returned Leena's furious glare. 'I am giving you my mercy by warning you with words! This is not a grace many receive from me and you know it. Be grateful!'*

'Grateful?' Leena's voice shook as she grit her teeth. 'Why should I be grateful? You've never done *anything* for me to be grateful for!'

Fourteen took in a long, deep breath as Leena spoke back.

Her composure was cool as she stood with her arms crossed and her tail tip twitching.... But her eyes betrayed her; she was furious.

*'Don't,' she signed in warning. 'I'm giving you my mercy so Wonda won't have to beg for Mother's. Don't make me hurt you, Leena. Wonda hates it when you are hurt. Do not make me hurt you when you know it will upset her.'*

Leena was too angry to speak— To angry to *think!*

She couldn't stop herself as hot white anger flooded her veins and she lost control; raising her fist and lashing out at the woman in front of her.

She made contact with Fourteen's beak with enough force to make them both stumble.

It was a mistake.

Fourteen's feathers stood on end as she took a breath and a wild look flashed in her eyes.

Her rage broke through and she lashed out; slashing with her sharp claws across Leena's face and sending a spatter of blood over the floor.

Leena stumbled, crashing backwards into her desk and sending several pieces of furniture toppling as Fourteen let out an unnatural screech and lunged again.

The air was knocked out of Leena as Fourteen's knees slammed into her ribs; the woman's full weight thrown down onto her as Fourteen grasp her throat in a hand and drove the knuckles of the other into the side of Leena's head.

Fourteen hit her again and the loud *CRACK* of fist against teeth was echoed by the mirror as it fell and shattered.

The tang of blood stung Leena's tongue as the force of Fourteen's blows against her jaw slammed her teeth together in a way that ricocheted through her skull and into to her brain.

*She was going to die.*

She was sure of it, as her chest ached under Fourteen's weight and her lungs screamed for air and her vision blurred and faded darker and darker with each furious strike against her face.

*Fourteen was going to kill her.*

And all she could do was scrabble helplessly at the hand around her neck and kick out at the empty air at her feet.

Another punch hit Leena just under her eye and she felt Fourteen's nails dig into her skin as the grip around her throat tightened— Though she didn't have time to take in the pain before another blow caught her in the side of the head.

Another to her jaw.

Her eye.

Her lip.

Her ear.

Her jaw.

Her head.

Her nose.

Her cheek.

Then it stopped.

Leena took in a deep gasp of air as Fourteen released her throat. Her vision shot back to her with a bright hot flash of white and colour, like a week-long migraine compressed into a single second, and the agony in her lungs was relieved.

She wasn't sure if the hot wet lines trailing down her cheeks were tears or blood as she choked and wheezed and rolled to her knees.

She'd barely gotten herself upright when Fourteen's palm met her cheek.

'Look at me!' Fourteen spat in her mother's voice.

Leena obeyed, timidly turning to Fourteen so she could be signed at furiously;

*'I don't want to kill you, Leena! You make Wonda smile. You are one of the only tolerable people in this entire fucking castle! I don't want to kill you!'*

Fourteen's scowl grew darker, then. *'But I will! I will kill you to keep my sister safe. I would kill every person here! I would burn this city and all of the valley around it to ash if it would keep Wonda from harm. Do you understand?'*

Leena wheezed, still catching her breath....

And Fourteen grabbed her by the throat again; forcing her to her feet but not cutting off her air as she held her gaze and signed with one hand:

*'I would pull my own bones from my flesh for Wonda without hesitation. I would pluck my feathers from my skin just to hear her laugh. I would gouge my eyes from my skull and slice my heart from my chest if it made her smile— So don't think for a second that I wouldn't hesitate to rip you limb from limb to keep her safe,'* the kenku leant in close, then, speaking with her mother's voice again as she growled; 'Do. You. Understand?'

'Ye-Yes, F-Fourteen,' Leena managed; feeling blood dribbling from her busted lip down her chin as she stammered and sobbed. 'I-I understand. Tha-Thank you f-for your m-mercy—'

Fourteen released Leena; letting her crumple to the ground.

*'This never happened,'* Fourteen signed, before turning for the door.

All Leena could do was nod. Nod, and lay on the floor; letting the cold touch of

the old wood soothe her her wounds as she tried to breathe.

She should have known better than to talk back to Fourteen, let alone *strike* her!

She was lucky to be alive.

—END—

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