

Thirteen and Fourteen

By C. Jade Wyton

When the guild was contacted about a potential child abuse case, they thought it was going to be something straightforward. A simple case of issuing a warning to a misguided father... So they sent the newbies to handle it all. However, upon entering the old medical facility and poking around, the inexperienced group of adventurers find themselves faced with horrors far beyond their worst nightmares.

Contains descriptions of horror, death, child death/harm to minors, suicide, gore, violence.

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It stank like rot.

The laboratory was even more horrid than Blathe had been expecting.

Old blood stained the floor in hideous brown patches that layered over the top of each other; indicating that it had never been cleaned even once in the two decades that horrid scientist had taken it over.

The town had been ignoring him and his uncomfortable mannerisms until just last month.

He had been drinking in the tavern, and let it slip that something was wrong with “those fucking children.”

The barmaid had contacted the guild immediately to voice her concerns— She didn’t know anything for sure, but the man had always acted in such a vile manner that the idea of him being within fifty feet of a child had raised concerns— Let alone if he was keeping them in an abandoned medical facility out in the middle of the woods with little to no contact with the outside world...

The guild had been expecting something much more simple and straightforward than this; a simple case of bad parenting that could be solved with a stern word— Not an entire horror conspiracy complete with half-decomposed organs littering the floor!

If the guild had known it was *this* bad, they would have sent a more experienced group. Blathe was sure of that.... This was only his party’s third mission together, and he felt like they were in *way* over their heads....

But, they were here now. And though they’d sent word to the guild asking for aid they couldn’t just sit and wait for the week-or-longer it would take for backup to arrive from the city! Whatever was going on clearly had to be addressed *immediately*.

‘Ugh!’ a voice grunted, and Blathe turned to see Beth had picked up a jar of...  
*Lungs?*

He felt as queasy as she looked, and had to turn away.

Perhaps Matron Fern had been right, and joining the adventurer’s guild was just a big mistake. Maybe he *should* have taken the stable-hand position she’d gotten him, and forgotten all about becoming a hero— Because if *this* was what

he was going to have to face, he wasn't sure he was going to be able to bear it.  
Cras certainly couldn't....

For an orc, he certainly had a weak stomach.

*Ugh.*

Somehow, Cras' sick smelt *better* than the rot of the room.

Kzaskza rubbed the cleric on the back gently, before looking to Twan and giving a heavy sigh.

'Don't like it!' came the parrot-like voice of Krok, and Blathe flinched as the kenku clung to him. 'Don't like it!'

'I know. I don't either,' Blathe acknowledged, taking a deep breath as he watched Dorndaroth press forward towards a pair of double-doors at the back of the room. 'Just... stay close to me....'

Dorndaroth paused at the door for a moment, leaning the side of her head against it to listen into the room, before slowly pushing it open.

She reeled back immediately, stumbling as the door closed itself and almost tripping over her own tail in her surprise.

'What? What is it?!' Kzaskza asked, rushing forward to put himself between the door and the rest of his party.

Twan was quick to join him; with Beth drawing her sword and standing just behind the pair.

'What is it?!' Krok echoed Kzaskza. 'What? What is it?!'

'I-I-It w-w-w— Ah!' Dorndaroth pressed her claws into her snout in horror. 'I-I-I c-c-c-c-ca— Can— Can't— *Hng!*'

Blathe swallowed as his party all froze, staring at the door.

Then, he took a step forward.

Then another.

Past Beth.

And past Kzaskza and Twan.

Until his hands were against the door, pushing it open to see what had caused Dorndaroth her panic.

It was a horrible sight.

There were fifteen large glass tubes, standing roof-to-floor and wide enough to fit a grown man inside. Each one was opened at the top through a small cover and had a long hose hanging down over a drain as gravity sucked out the murky green-and-brown liquid from them.

And inside each tube, slumped against the glass as the liquid drained and left them with nothing to float in, were corpses.

Children's corpses, made of patched-together parts that clearly did not belong together in any way— An owlin head, a gnome tail, aarakocra wings. Harengon ears on a kobold face. A tabaxi with a triton tail....

The sound of Cras' vomiting made Blathe jump, and he glanced back at his horrified party members with a worried frown.

'Krok?' he asked softly, wincing as the kenku flinched. After a second of hesitation, he motioned to the children. 'We should make *sure*....'

For a long moment, Krok looked like he regretted ever becoming a cleric.... Then he moved past Blathe towards the tubes.

He examined the first one before finding a panel at the bottom and opening

it— The last of the awful liquid spilling out onto the floor as the corpse slipped down and flopped limply at Krok's feet. The stitches holding its neck together came loose and its head rolled several feet before coming to a stop.

'*Fuck*,' Beth breathed, putting a hand to her chest. 'What the hell is this place?'

'I have no idea,' Twan responded, her voice strained as she watched Krok open the next tube and check the child inside for any signs of life.

Nothing; so he moved onto the next.

There was nothing anyone could do but watch as he slowly checked all fifteen children.... Not a single sign of life in any of them....

'No good,' Krok finally said, standing up straight and gazing to the party with a sorrowful look. 'All gone.'

Blathe's heart sank even further, if that were possible.

Then, the sound of the doors swinging open again caught Blathe's ears and he spun around to see a tall, human man staring at the party in shock.

Blathe's lip curled as he looked at the scientist.

He wore an off-colour lab coat that was spattered with black and brown and green; his filthy hair drooping over his wide eyes as he hurriedly fumbled for his pocket and pulled out a—

'He's got a weapon!' Twan cried.

Blathe had barely enough time to draw his sword before he felt a bullet graze his cheek.

He realised was lucky; Kzaskza had lodged his axe into the scientist's shoulder and made the man's shot falter. If he hadn't....

The man gave another scream as Kzaskza yanked his axe back; thick visceral blood trailing after it as Beth ordered that the weapon be dropped.

'We don't want to kill you,' Beth said.

'*Speak for yourself...*' Twan hissed under her breath; just quiet enough that the scientist didn't hear her.

The scientist looked to the group, then, with an equal amount of hatred and fear in his eyes.

'Put down your weapon,' Beth repeated, firmly, drawing back her bow to its full length.

'I... *failed*,' he said, slowly, not complying with Beth's order. 'Again. And again. And again. I keep failing.... She's getting impatient with me.'

'She?'

'She's furious that I can't make more. I don't know what I'm doing wrong— I don't know what I did *right!*' he spat the word, his face contorting into a horrid scowl as he grew angrier. 'I did it *right!* That *one* time, I did it right! I didn't change anything, but I can't replicate the results! I even tried damaging their brains, like Thirteen's! Just to see if *that* was what made it work! But it *didn't work!* It just won't work! She's coming today, to see the results! She'll be here soon! She'll see— She'll see I've failed and she'll— She'll—'

He took a long, deep, trembling breath, and lifted his gun again; taking aim at his own temple.

'If you have any sense at all, you'll do the same before she gets here.'

*Bang.*

The sound of the gunshot echoed through the laboratory as blood and brain sprayed out both sides of the scientist's head and he collapsed sideways to the floor.

Blathe stood in shock as he watched the man fall.

Nobody moved as they all stared, stunned, at the scientist's body....

Then there was a loud thump as Cras fainted, and Krok let out a squawk and hurried to the orc's side.

The others all began to fuss over Cras, helping him sit— But Blathe continued to stare at the scientist's body.... His skin was *crawling* as he thought about the man's last words.

'What...' he started, before swallowing down the lump in his throat. 'What do you think he meant by he did it *right*?'

That caused pause through the room, and everyone went quiet.

They all clearly had an idea. Probably the same one that Blathe did... but nobody wanted to be the one to guess it out loud.

'Let's... keep looking through the facility,' Beth suggested, hesitantly.

'G-G-Good i-idea,' Dorndaroth agreed, clutching her staff tight as she moved to Cras' side and helped him stand steady. 'Wh-Who kn-knows what e-else he-he-he— Who kn-knows what else he w-was doing.'

Slowly, the group made their way through the large, empty building.

There wasn't much to see, at least. And they were grateful for that....

Many rooms had strange ice-boxes that, when checked with detect magic, had some sort of cold enchantment on them....

They only opened one and then couldn't stomach opening the rest after seeing what was being kept inside.

But even without looking into the freezers, the entire facility was covered in layers of grime that made Blathe's skin crawl.

He wanted to just burn the whole thing to the ground; let the world be rid of whatever the hell this horrible place was supposed to be....

But he had a feeling that was a bad idea. At least... for *now* it was.

They had no idea of there were other people in this facility besides the scientist.... And though his head told him that anyone here would be as terrible as that man, his gut told him that the children he was experimenting with had to come from *somewhere*....

'Wh-Wh-What's—' Dorndaroth cut off, pointing ahead instead of finishing her sentence.

There was... a light coming in from under one of the doors down the hall.

'Good morning,' Krok cawed, nodding to Dorndaroth. 'Good morning!'

'Yes, I see it too,' Beth confirmed.

'Mhm,' Blathe acknowledged, his fist tightening around his sword as he and Beth slowly moved ahead of the rest of the group.

The two humans paused at the door, casting each other a nervous glance, before Blathe held his fist up against the door and Beth nodded at him.

*Knock knock.*

Shuffling sounded from inside, as well as a hushed whisper.

A very young-sounding hushed whisper....

Blathe winced, scared of why there might be a voice so young in this horrible

place, and slowly pushed open the door.

‘Hello?’ he greeted, softly, leaning into the room ever-so-slightly as he obscured his sword behind his leg. ‘Is anyone there— *Oh....*’

Blathe cut off as he saw them.

Two young girls, no older than six, dressed in plain white dresses, sat on the floor of a bare, white room. It looked like the sort of room one would find in a city hospital; empty of everything save for a couple of curtained beds and metal trays.

And, well. The children. And the puzzle they had half-finished.

‘Hey, there...’ he said, lifting his sword behind his back and giving it a desperate shake until Beth understood what he wanted and took it from him. ‘What are you two doing here?’

The two girls cast each other confused glances, before looking back up at Blathe and twitching their ears—

Blathe blinked.

*Wait....*

A sick feeling washed over him as he examined the pair.

They were... wrong. In a few ways.

Their proportions were off— Just slightly. Like all their pieces didn’t fit together properly.... Which, they didn’t. Not quite.

At a glance he had thought they were both tabaxi; but he realised with a dry throat that they *weren’t*.

They weren’t tabaxi. They had tabaxi *pieces*, like their ears and tails and black-and-white fur, but they weren’t proper tabaxi. It was like they were four different children who had been pulled apart and put back together.

One had a kenku face, with a beak that seemed a little too big for the rest of her. And she had bald, birdish hands.... That matched the other girl’s feet and aarakocra-like wings.

It made Blathe uncomfortable in a way he couldn’t describe. A deep, unsettled feeling as his stomach turned over.

He thought back to the tubes of sewn-together children and wondered.... *Was this what the scientist meant when he said he “did it right”?*

A gasp sounded from the door, and Blathe glanced back to see the rest of his party had entered and were staring at the girls.

‘*Hey...*’ Cras whispered, his voice barely audible with how soft he spoke. ‘Hey there, little ones.... What are you doing here?’

The kenku-faced girl motioned with her hands; the tabaxi-faced girl watching on intently before nodding and looking to the group.

‘I’m afraid I don’t understand,’ Blathe replied. ‘I can’t sign.... Can you speak?’

‘Oh. Yes. I can,’ replied the tabaxi. ‘Fourteen can’t. Not properly.’

‘Not properly,’ the kenku echoed, the inflection of her voice matching the tabaxi’s exactly.

That was when Krok stepped forward; crouching down to the children’s level and signing a conversation with them.

‘Thirteen,’ the tabaxi said, suddenly. Then her gaze moved up to Blathe’s again, and she motioned to a bright yellow marker on her ear. ‘My name is Thirteen. And this is my sister— Fourteen.’

‘Thirteen and Fourteen...’ Blathe echoed, crouching down to talk on her level.

‘So there are... more of you?’

Thirteen shook her head. ‘Only me and Fourteen. There was ‘s’posed to be more. But they keep dying. Like today. That’s why he’s always so mad. Because none of our sisters ever make it to being born.’

*Sisters?* Blathe’s stomach did a flip. *Were these girls... from those horrible tubes?*

Fourteen signed again, and Thirteen nodded.

‘Yeah, Fourteen’s right,’ she said. ‘What do you mean, asking what we’re doing here? Is there... somewhere else than here?’

‘Yes,’ Beth answered, softly. ‘Many other places to be....’

Thirteen’s ear twitched curiously; though Fourteen’s own folded back nervously.

‘Oh,’ Thirteen breathed. Then, she looked down to her puzzle. ‘Like this?’ she asked, pointing at the faded image. ‘Is this a different place to here?’

It was a painting of a cliffside along a beach; an old lighthouse perched on top with a bright light beaming out to sea.

‘Yes,’ Cras answered, as Fourteen and Krok began to sign to each other. ‘That’s another place.’

‘Wow,’ Thirteen breathed. ‘Have you ever been there?’

Cras shook his head. ‘No—’

‘I-I-I have,’ Dorndaroth answered, then covered her mouth when she realised she’d interrupted Cras. ‘S-So-Sor-Sorry!’

Cras gave her a tired smile, shrugging it off as Thirteen’s ears stood up and her eyes went wide.

‘Could *I* go there?’ she asked.

And then she flinched as Fourteen suddenly swiped the puzzle away; a furious look on her face.

‘Whoa— Whoa!’ Beth put out a hand to block Fourteen from her sister as she rose to her feet and stomped her foot. ‘Hey, hey, hey! What’s wrong? What’s wrong?’

‘Oh... right,’ Thirteen’s ears folded down as her sister signed at her, and she let out a heavy sigh.

‘Oh right, what?’ Blathe asked, as gently as he could manage. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘She’s coming to check on us, today,’ Thirteen said, twiddling her thumbs uncomfortably. ‘And she doesn’t like when we talk about doing things.’

‘Doesn’t she?’ Beth raised a brow. ‘Why not...?’

‘She says it’s a waste of time for us,’ Thirteen explained. ‘Cos we’re not gonna keep our minds in our heads, anyway. When we’re strong enough, she’s gonna pick one of us to keep forever.’

Blathe reeled back.

What the *fuck* did that mean?

He eyed his party members; of whom all looked *just* as confused as him, before swallowing and putting a hand on Thirteen’s back.

‘You sound like you don’t like the idea of that.’

Thirteen shook her head. ‘No. She’s scary. And mean.... I don’t like the idea of being hers forever. Not at all!’

‘Well... why don’t you come with us?’ Blathe offered, carefully.

Both children's eyes widened, at that, and they turned to stare at him again.

'With you?' Thirteen asked, slowly. 'Is that allowed?'

'Y... Yes?' Blathe answered, glancing around his party nervously.

'We can go with you?' Thirteen asked again, though the question sounded more like she was reaffirming it to herself.

'Yes,' Beth confirmed, softly.

Thirteen took a moment to think about that. Her ears pressed back and her eyes darted around the floor.... Then, she lifted her hands, grabbing at Blathe and trying to scale him so she could wrap her arms around his neck and cling to his shoulders.

'Oh— Oh! Okay! Okay,' Blathe gave a surprised gasp, and pulled Thirteen up into a comfortable position. 'I take it you like the idea of coming with us?'

'Yeah,' Thirteen mumbled into his ear. '*If it's allowed....*'

'It is— In fact, it's very important that you *both* come with us,' Blathe told her, rising to his feet and cradling Thirteen close. 'You're so dirty, look at you.... We're gonna help you feel a whole lot better, okay?'

Thirteen hummed in acknowledgment, holding Blathe tight as Cras reached down and scooped up Fourteen.

Fourteen's eyes widened in surprise as she was picked up, and for a moment Blathe worried she might protest or struggle— But then Cras gently brushed a strand of hair from her face and she relaxed; leaning into him and clicking her beak.

'Come on,' Twan shouldered Blathe's hip. 'Let's get the hell out of here—'

'*I don't think so!*' a voice cut in, echoing through the room and causing the party to jump and look around.

Blathe felt Thirteen's claws dig into his back as she stiffened and let out a terrified squeak; and he saw Fourteen's breathing grow heavier as she tried to hide herself in Cras' robe.

Was this the "*she*" that they'd been hearing about? The *she* who made the scientist so scared he'd killed himself...?

Blathe swallowed, trying to find where the voice had come from— And then froze as the door to the room slowly creaked open.

A cloud of dust spun through the now-open door, swirling in a spiral pattern as it blew into the centre of the adventurers and began to compress itself.

The spirals grew tighter and tighter, until they began to take on a recognisable shape.

A gnomish woman. Short. Older. With worn-out skin that held tight to her form and white hair that was thinning into nothing.

Blathe felt his heart beat fast as he watched the woman crack her joints into place.... He'd seen these... these *creatures* in books before. In the guild library— They were powerful and rare, and he never thought he'd see one in real life—

*Lich!*

*This was a lich.*

As she appeared, the children's panic grew, and Blathe found himself wrapping his arms protectively over Thirteen as he stepped back and scowled at the woman.

She glowered back, her lip twitching as she took in the adventurers.... Then,

her expression fell into a false-calm, and she stood up straighter.

‘Did you kill my scientist?’ she asked, evenly.

‘He killed himself,’ Beth growled, putting herself between Blathe and the lich at the same time Kzaska stepped around to block Cras. ‘Said he was scared of you....’

‘Did he...?’ the lich’s eyes tightened, and she gave a haughty sniff. ‘Well. He should know better than to think *death* is an escape from *me*....’

Thirteen whimpered, and Blathe gave her a comforting squeeze.

Then Dorndaroth stepped forward, holding up her staff and pointing it at the lich. ‘W-W-We don’t want a-any t-trouble,’ she said, her lip curling as the lich turned on her. ‘W-We-We-We’ll b-be l-leaving.... N-Now.’

‘Not with my daughters, you won’t.’

‘*Daughters?*’ Twan echoed, bitterly. ‘They’re not your daughters— They’re *terrified* of you!’

‘Just as I was terrified of my mother,’ the lich said, simply. ‘And just as I served her desires; my daughters will serve mine....’

‘Your *desires?*’ Blathe felt himself growling, now.

‘A little different from my own mother’s,’ the lich gave a slow nod, and a sickening scowl as she looked around the adventurers. ‘She wanted easy riches and a life without labour. So she put *me* to work in her place.... Now *I* want a body that doesn’t ache with the constant throbbing of *death* and *rot*.... These two aren’t compatible with my soul. At least not for long term possession.... But they are still *mine*. You might not believe me when I say it, but I *do* care about my children....’

Blathe swallowed, slowing edging towards the door as the lich spoke....

The lich’s gaze turned to him, a furious look in her eyes. ‘Don’t you even think of it,’ she hissed in warning.

Blathe swallowed as the rest of his party slowly circled around to his side; standing firm between him, Cras, and the two young girls.

‘*Ugh,*’ the lich scowled. ‘Don’t make this difficult. Put the girls down now and I’ll let you live. You can walk out of here and go back to your pathetic lives, and forget we ever met.... Oh, don’t look so disgusted! I’m offering you a *kindness!* This isn’t something I do lightly! But I’d rather my girls not witness a fight like I’ll give you.’

Blathe tried hard to keep his gaze firm as he stared down the gnomish lich woman. And he could see, in the corner of his vision, the other members of his party drawing their weapons.

‘Hmp,’ the lich licked her lips. ‘Fine, then. *Have it your way!*’

Before anyone could react the lich leapt forward; her legs taking on a gaseous, dusty form as she flew across the room and slammed into Blathe.

Her unnatural claws dug into Thirteen, trying to yank the child away from Blathe— But Blathe kicked out, sending the lich flying back as Thirteen let out a cry.

The lich hit the ground and vanished into a swirling cloud of brown dust, and everyone in the room turned at once, hurrying out the door and down the hall.

Something hot and wet soaked into Blathe’s chest as he ran, and he looked down at the child. He saw now that a chunk of fur had been torn off her arm; a



layer of skin taken with it to leave behind a large, bloody wound.

*There was nothing he could do about that now!*

A loud hollow sound, like wind howling in a storm, filled the hall; followed by the rattling of doors and windows as it got closer and closer and—

Blathe dared to glance back, just in time to see the lich's dust-cloud form swoop in front of Cras and cut him off from the others.

The orc shrieked as she flew at him, turning his body in an attempt to defend the child in his arms as the brown gust spun over him like a swarm of bees. She enveloped him entirely, scratching against him like gravel and scraping bleeding wounds into the surface of his skin as he desperately struggled to keep a hold on the kenku girl he carried.

But it was hopeless.

The lich ripped Fourteen from Cras' arms, pulling her across the floor as she screamed before digging its dust-cloud fingers into her throat and levering her beak open. It leant forward, then, forcing its incorporeal body into the child's mouth and vanishing inside of her.

The child convulsed; frothing at the mouth as she shook and screamed.

And then she stopped, her chest rising suddenly as she gasped a deep breath and coughed up a spray of ink-black blood.

Everyone was still.

Watching as the child lay on her back, her eyes opened wide as she stared vacantly at the roof.

Then, she let out a loud, low groan, and rolled over; her body moving in an unnatural manner. As if she wasn't used to it....

She closed her eyes tight, coughing up another spatter of inky liquid before slowly rising to her feet and turning to the party.

The look in their now-red eyes was one of absolute contempt.

Carefully, Blathe dropped Thirteen on her feet and gave her a shove down the hall.

'Go,' he whispered.

'B-But Fourteen—'

'We'll do what we can,' he said. '*You* need to get to safety. Get outside.... *Now.*'

'I-I'm not allowed!' Thirteen exclaimed, tears in her eyes as she clutched her injured arm. 'And I— I can't leave without—'

'*Now!*'

Thirteen flinched, stumbling backwards before turning and running towards the stairs.

The lich gave a loud hiss as Thirteen ran, black ooze dripping from her beak as she did.

'Terrible child! Disobedient daughter!' she screeched, making to follow but being cut off by Blathe and his comrades. 'You! You useless wastes of space— GET OUT OF MY WAY!'

'Let the children go!' Blathe ordered, holding out his hand to Beth so she could throw him his sword. He pointed it at the lich, trying his hardest to stop the tip from trembling.

*This was only their third mission.*

*They were not equipped for this.*

The doubts tried to worm their way into his mind as he stared the possessed child down, and he had to force himself firm.

*But they were the only people here.*

*Without them, these children had no chance....*

‘Move, or I’ll kill you slowly!’ the lich hissed.

Nobody obeyed.

Blathe, Twan, Krok, Dorndaroth, Beth, Kzaskza —even Cras— not a single one of them moved as the lich let out another furious hiss.

Then she coughed; loud and sudden, a spray of dust escaping her beak. Her fury wavered for a moment, replaced with a look of worry.

‘*Help*,’ she whispered in a voice much quieter and more fearful than before, before shaking her head and hissing again. ‘Do *not* reject me! I— I—’

Another loud cough, and the lich doubled over, spraying a mess of dust and blood on the floor as she apologised to herself in that same, small voice.

‘Fourteen!’ Beth exclaimed. ‘Fourteen, can you hear me?’

Fourteen’s head snapped up, the reddish glow of her eyes fading as her natural green shimmered through. ‘Help me— *Disobedient children!*’

Blathe flinched as the lich snapped back into control with a furious shout.

Then, to his surprise, the lich stepped back. Once, then twice, then, she lifted a hand. A mist formed around it, glowing a faint dull green—

‘Stop her!’ Cras exclaimed. ‘That’s an evocation spell!’

Blathe’s body moved faster than his thoughts did as he lunged forward, holding out his own glowing hand. He thrust it into Fourteen’s chest with force, filling her with his own magic.

*A protection spell against the undead.*

The green mist dissipated as Fourteen wheezed and choked; coughing up some of the lich’s dust as she stumbled backwards and grabbed at her beak and eyes.

‘Bastard!’ the lich screamed out of her. ‘Bastard! I’ll kill you! *I’ll kill you!*’

Fourteen’s eyes grew panicked as she lifted a hand —clearly out of her own control— and slammed it into Blathe, launching him backwards with a boom of sound.

He crashed into Krok and they both hit the wall; a loud *crack* sounding from the kenku’s bag as a burst of heat blew sideways and a spiral of flame and glass set half the hallway alight.

The lich hissed in confusion, stepping back, before breaking into another fit of coughs that expelled more of her dusty form from Fourteen’s lungs.

Blathe stared, wide-eyed, at the fire that had escaped Krok’s bag. One of the many magical items the man collected being broken, no doubt. Lighting up the chemical-covered building like gun-power in a fireplace.

So fast, and bright, and vicious— Even Cras and Beth’s magic couldn’t put it out again.

‘Blathe!’ Twan’s hands grabbed the paladin’s shoulder and yanked him up, breaking him from his stunned staring. ‘We have to go! This whole place is going to go down!’

‘*Fourteen*—’ Blathe breathed, turning to see the possessed kenku child had vanished.

‘The lich took her, there’s nothing we can do!’ Twan’s face contorted in grief. ‘We have to find Thirteen and get out of here!’

Blathe nodded, and the group of adventurers fought through the flames for the exit; running the same way they’d seen the tabaxi girl flee and calling her name as they went.

There was no sign of her until they made it outside and found her standing at the treeline of the woods; watching with wide eyes as the fire consumed the facility.

She was covered in blood, and dirt, and ash. And her arm still oozed and wept.... But she barely seemed to notice as she stared up at the flames in awe.

‘Thirteen!’ Cras exclaimed, hurrying to the child’s side to look at her wound. ‘Oh, you’re alright! You’re alright...’

Slowly Thirteen nodded, though her eyes didn’t move from the building as a small smile twitched to her lips.

‘Thirteen?’ Blathe asked, kneeling by her other side. ‘Are you okay?’

‘It’s over,’ she said, softly. ‘You stopped it.... They can’t hurt no-one, no more. Not anymore.’

—END—

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