

Mratel's Reveal  
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It is known, among the unsavory ghouls that reside where shadows align, that the middle child of the moon family was the deadliest of the three. It had gemstones embedded along its face, reflecting starlight like a prism and raining down colors of the spectrum to the revelers below. When it was free, the dark nights were no more and replaced with the shades of the rainbow, like bright jewels sparkling underneath a river.

Most of the decade, it was hidden between its siblings: the obnoxious twins, Seto and Peto. They were massive, white and dull with a chasm of eruptive gas that fogged the weapon between them. For years, the caravan would traverse the night as two old broken down rocks with a haze in the center, except every eight years the brothers would turn away, their gas no longer cloaking their sister.

The butler, Mratel, glared at the garden from the balcony of the family's manor. Below, his flowers were like soldiers saluting him how he pruned them to. He angled himself in the direction of the moons. It was still eve, and the brothers above were still polluting, but the festivities would soon commence.

A spring air caressed Mratel's mustache and the jubilant, authentic smell of his flowers excited him. In just a few short hours, the entire family would soon pollute this manor. Not just the siblings that crossed the sea, but the in-laws that worked simple jobs alongside the commoners as well as the most separated of cousins. All in all, it would be a beautiful night to murder a family.

"Butter, why do you like fowers," said the idiot one. She was only five years grown and the easiest to pluck out, but Mratel must not let himself get too excited. He needed to give each member their due care.

"It calms me, my dear." He turned to find the girl staring at him from within the balcony door frame. He turned and smiled at her with his eyes closed; children could spot fake smiles by glaring at ones eyes. "Hello there, mistress Leona. Turtles, Castles or Rivers?"

"Hide and seek," she demanded.

"Ah a classic! Go on and hide."

She ran down the hall, her little steps disappearing and a headache relieved itself from Mratel. Soon, the embarrassment of being that idiot's nanny would end.

Mratel fixed his bow tie and wiped some dust out his gloved white hands. That garden needed no more tending to. It was perfect. Soon, the moon would reveal itself and so will Mratel.

Mratel entered the manor. A strong warmth welcomed him, hinting at the depth of the cliff in which the Belmont manor had been built upon. Strong white stone-vine penetrated the land in four points, twisting and burrowing until it reached the plane below. The girl had run off to the spiral stone staircase of the northeastern point. Creatures like her are simple in their hiding: choosing dark corners thinking if they can't see you, you can't see them. Mratel turned away to the central staircase to the ground floor of the manor.

Several custodians, dressed in white, bustled through the main floor. The wide front doors were left open and workers hauled in thick crates. Four long tables were to be installed in the dining room and the windows were kept open to keep the broad rooms feeling airy. Mratel hand-picked the company itself. There was lots of fresh blood who wouldn't recognize him even if he had shaved his mustache.

"Mister, the plates?" said a custodian. He was a young man from the city the manor shadowed, poached against the base of the rock wall. One would think the manor folk owned that city and this custodian had made his way up in the world.

"One cup, three bowls and a spoon. Bowls are set like the points of an even triangle and are placed per seating." said Mratel. "No plates. The family is not fond of chewing their food."

He frowned.

Mratel made a gesture with his hand: the universal sign for money. The one gesture all shades of this planet respected.

The boy gave a knowing look. "Rich folk and their customs." He went to the dining hall to complete the task, passing several others.

Mratel moved towards his garden when Mistress' Belta's bell rang. Several workers stopped to take notice at the echo. Mratel waved them back to work. He fixed his bow tie once more, took a deep breath, and found the door hidden behind a curtain. He jingled his keys to alert the Mistress of his presence then unlocked the door.

This floor was more of a safe-keep than a room. It was burrowed into the earth, hot and dense. Mratel had been instructed to keep the valuables locked away, that included the infamous Mistress Belta.

The room had a dark marble floor with tables of goods off to the side including vases, statues and ancient books. Mistress Belta sat, sunken, in the big chair, her eyes deep in an untitled book. She was a prize to behold, being so elderly yet her body hadn't any wear except for those distant eyes.

"You're up early, mistress," said Mratel. "You'll grow tired when the moon shows its face."

"Why are those sheep tapping about?" said the mistress in her usual cold way.

"Preparations for the long night, my dear."

The mistress slammed her book shut. "Why are they moving about freely? Why aren't they sequestered?"

"Don't fret, my dear. I've hand-picked them myself. They are commoners from the city below and as such have no matter in which to know of this family's true identity."

*Or mine*, thought Mratel with a hint of a smile.

The mistress sighed and sunk deeper in her chair. "Have my children arrived?"

"They sent a crow this morning and will be here by sunset. I've had their rooms prepped."

"They need to hurry," said the mistress.

"I could send for a guard to cover them as they approach," said Mratel.

"That will only attract attention," said the mistress, agitated.

"I will bring them in discreetly. My dear, get some rest. The long night is near."

She shook her head. "They are running late. I don't think they want to come."

Mratel approached and placed a hand on her's. "They wouldn't dare."

The mistress grinned. "Get back to work."

"At your command." Mratel bowed and left her.

He returned to the base floor with a renewed anxiety to observe his garden. He locked Belta's door and entered his garden. There was a pathway to several columns of daisies, irises and tulips. There was a white gate that overlooked the cliff, where the city

below will soon alight in festivities. Mratel covered his nose then eyed the center of each bloom. The angle was precise. He needed to trust things will go according to plan.

“Guests sir. A carriage has arrived.” said a voice.

Mratel acknowledged the woman and found himself jogging into the manor. He grabbed an umbrella and hurried out to the front steps. He recognized the hard wood of a luxury ride and guided the rider around to the side of the manor. The rider reigned his horse. Mratel knocked on the carriage door twice and as a courtesy held an umbrella up high.

The doors opened for two men. They looked the same age, but had the same tired eyes their mother had.

“Rather embarrassing entering my own home through the back door,” said one of them. He wore a dark cloak which he used to cover his head and held his own umbrella. He poked his head to look around for any witnesses.

“And the mistress regrets this wholly,” said Mratel. “We’ve employed too many people for the occasion.”

“Did they steal our curtains?” asked the other one.

“No sir, I’ve instructed a deep clean and hid anything a potential thief might take, at your mother’s command. I’ll get your luggage, just follow the windy steps. Your rooms are marked.”

They carefully stepped onto the grass. “Just be sure they wash themselves. I don’t want them contaminating my food.”

Mratel laughed. “I’ve gone through great lengths in preparation. Please enter.”

Those two were his the moment they entered the manor. He brought their luggage to their rooms and locked their doors. Over the next few hours Mratel cared for twenty other members of the family, each of them led discreetly into their rooms. He had to contain his excitement when he confirmed the rumors that a few notable aristocrats were in fact members of this family. No one saw.

The new-dusk had come a few hours later. Mratel instructed all to rest and enjoy the view from the garden. What would have been a soft orange was now a strong red which would soon break into many vibrant colors, the same shades as his flowers.

Mratel worked fast. While the workers enjoyed the view, he locked the front doors and lifted a few marked crates and placed them beside the airy window. He then opened the lid of one of them, just so he had ease of access.

“The mistress is most generous,” said Mratel, to the crowd. “She had bid me to invite you all as our honored guests.”

The workers, about a dozen of them, seemed hesitant.

“Here?” asked one of them, a woman.

“Yes, and they are not feeling well. You may bring the food out in the garden and enjoy the view.”

After a moment, they went inside and brought out their portions. They had paused on several occasions, unsure of the situation, but soon the garden was filled with the joy and laughter that arrive naturally for commoners with full bellies and good company.

Mratel had convinced the workers to pluck out a flower to keep hold of. He told them that rich folk had pruned these flowers to hatch magnificently at the touch of the moon’s light.

“Is this the food?” said the master Loredó.

Mratel turned to find the master hiding within the manor. He dared not be seen.

“Yes sir,” said Mratel with a smile. “We are eating.”

“Why is the food outside? And where are my curtains?” The master remained aloof, still ever careful not to be seen.

Mratel glared at the red moon. The fog still had the most control, but he had lived through many reveals. The moon was blood-red before the jewels gushed out the magnificent colors in much the same way that night is darkest before dawn.

Then a shadow approached from behind the master. “Butler!” cried Belta. “Where are my things!”

Before Mratel could call back, the manors hallway, with its open doors and windows, revealed the shadows of that infamous family wisping about. No one in the garden could possibly know the worth of these shades of darkness and the family was adequately trained at avoiding the spotlight.

But it was too early. Though the moon held a deep crimson and its shape had begun to appear underneath the brothers' pollution, it still hadn't the authority to turn night back into day. Not yet.

Mratel could hear the family whisper to each other, recounting the differing stories he had told them. This was it. He had to take a chance and hope the reveal occurs in his favor.

He lowered himself to his custodians. "My friends," he said. "I require of you a great and noble service on behalf of this nation." He revealed a cylindrical whistle and put it into his mouth like a cigar. The workers stared at him, confused, holding their flowers – their weapons – idly.

Mratel then revealed a mask and wore it, covering his mouth and nose. Before the shadows could react, Mratel blew his whistle.

The flowers hatched to his call. A puff of blue, green and yellow smoke appeared then entered the noses of each holder. Mratel helped a few standers lay down on the soft grass, in deep sleep.

He stepped aside. The moon was still red.

It didn't take long. There was a primitive growl that echoed from the manor, as if it were a beast itself. The shadows arrived in a soundless blink, each member hunched over an unconscious custodian. Belta struck the young man closest to Mratel. She kept her blood-raged eyes on him, fighting her urges, but the scents lured her nature to the free meal he stood over. Her body remained hunched over the young man, her claws naturally gripping his joints and her fangs deep in his neck.

Mratel counted them off. Everyone was here.

Sunlight. He needed sunlight.

He glared at the twin-moons, still polluting. The middle moon had a strong red light, but that wasn't enough to deal with them. He needed the reflections of the sun.

One of the sons twitched his legs as he feasted, nearly tripping Mratel. The butler stepped away from the feast. The flowers had an aesthetic that would numb the mind of the prior twenty hours. These commoners would wake with ash on their person, light-headedness and hunger. Mratel's story was that they had enjoyed themselves with too much wine. He would make sizable donations to each of them to aid in recovery.

It should happen any second now.

But it wasn't happening.

The limp bodies were drained past the point of recovery. They began to shrivel and croak.

Mratel cursed himself and ran into the manor. He found the crates by a corner of the wall, besides the open window. He reached the top one and nearly collapsed at the yellow eyes underneath.

"You found me!" Mistress Leona leapt out from that corner and Mratel pushed her back down. Her voice echoed loudly in this vacant manor.

The mistress frowned, then she began sniffing. He should have closed the back doors.

Mratel removed his mask and forced it on her. "For your safety, dear." He smiled at her.

She sat there looking up at him. She wasn't afraid, but her eyes showed confusion.

Mratel lifted a crate and laid it on top of the table. He broke the lid wide open. There were hard boots stuffed within for the weight. He threw them off and removed the false bottom revealing four metal stakes. They were the best of the guild, each about an arm's length, heavy with the iron metal.

There were only four elderly members of the family. The rest would burn in sunlight, but these four had a defense mechanism in which they turn into stone until the sun sets.

"Butter, here's your fower," said Leona.

She stood further in the hallway, too fast, and too silent, to have gotten there naturally. She held one of Mratel's flowers.

Mratel grabbed a stake. "Put it down."

"You look sad," said Leona. She examined the flower, bringing it close to her eye.

Mratel felt himself flush. Did she turn? If she turned, she would have moved too fast for his ears and he was certain he didn't hear her footsteps. Yet, she wasn't behaving as a ravenous beast.

He couldn't risk it.

Mratel ran to her with his stake up high.

The girl's eyes widened and she screamed. Mratel couldn't let her take a second to realize what she is.

But her screechy voice was a weapon itself. The empty manor enhanced her screams giving Mratel the harshest headache he had ever felt.

Mratel didn't even hear the pop of her flower blooming. The smoke siphoned itself towards him and though he tried to cover his mouth, he was too slow. He gasped, inhaling every bit of it.

Mratel glared at her.

Redness flowed like a pool around her irises and her tears dripped down her cheeks like blood.