

The Mawtah

By Matthew Halim

Statement

Saturday, 7:13 PM

It's saturday's night. I've always liked the weekends. They're quiet in a way the weekdays aren't, they are slower and softer. Long enough for me to catch my breath, even though I have all the time I want now, but tonight is different. It's prom night.

I wasn't planning on going but my friend Endora wouldn't hear it. She and Mathias insisted I go. She even made sure to tell her boss to let me perform tonight, she put me into an awkward situation, how could I refuse anyway.

I stood facing the long standing mirror in my room, making sure that everything looked so perfect, the hair glowing chestnut brown, loose waves framing my face just the way I like, the skin looked like glass glowing under the light. My gown, green velvet clung delicately to my form like a forest kissed by morning dew, bodice hugged tightly with buttons at the front, the sleeves fell like water when I moved, and from the waist down, it fell effortlessly like a waterfall, the accessories how can I forget, the pendant at my neck and my tiara, regal but not loud, catches the light. Everything is perfect. I loved it, as if I was casted from another time.

Behind me, my violin waited in its case on my bed. And while the radio played softly in the background, a slow, familiar violin piece that was mine. My music, the same one I'll play at the prom tonight. I called it "Ever Since His Spring Became Mine". After a few notes, I turned it off, moved towards the window, and pulled back the curtain. I could feel the cold breeze of the wind against my skin, it was so refreshing.

Outside, beneath the flickering glow of a dying streetlamp, stood Mr. Parker—impossible to mistake with his long coat and rigid posture. Beside him was a man I couldn't recognize. And even though I couldn't see clearly. They appeared to be arguing.

I stood there, curious about the strange man. Then my phone rang on the desk, making me jump. It was Endora.

“Hello?”

“Hey, where are you? You’ve got to hurry!” Endora said, her voice tinged with excitement.

“I’ll be there, I’m on my way” I lied

“Great! Mathias and I are already at the venue. He’s here too, keeping an eye on things.”

“Alright, I’ll be there soon. I don’t want to miss my performance.”

“Good,” she said. “And remember, this night is yours!”

I ended the call and took a deep breath. I picked up my violin-case and wore my heels so fast as I walked through the hallway, when I exited the apartment. I noticed that Mr Parker had left his apartment door slightly ajar, so unlike him. I was in a hurry so I went to the elevator and swiped my card through the scanner. It took me 3 tries, it took some time to reach. It's the 8th floor and the last floor, and while I waited, I could hear the church ringing bells through the hallway, carried in the wind. It looks like someone is on the balcony, maybe it's Julien. He usually takes care of the plants over there with Mr parker.

When the elevator reached my floor, the doors slid open — and I saw her.

A woman in gardening clothes, yet even in them, she was breathtaking. Her blue eyes sparkled with quiet joy, and her golden-ginger hair flowed over her shoulders in soft, graceful waves, like a character out of a medieval tale.

“Good evening,” she said.

“Good evening,” I replied, caught slightly off guard. I hadn’t seen her before.

I stepped aside as she moved closer to the exit. The scent of flowers — jasmine and soil — followed her, filling the atmosphere around us.

Just as I was about to enter the elevator, she turned back to me with a delicate smile. Her gloved hand rose to adjust a strand of hair behind her ear.

“What a beauty,” she said, her smile deepening. “Your hair... your jewelry — exquisite. You look like you stepped out of a painting.”

I blinked, surprised. “Oh — thank you... It’s for a prom, actually.”

“I’m Rosette,” she continued, without hesitation. “I’ve come to tend the cleomes in the garden.”

“Oh,” I nodded. “The ones on the balcony? It’s just down that hallway.” I pointed toward the end of the corridor.

“Yes, exactly that,” she said, glancing that way. Then with another soft smile, she added, “Thank you.”

“Your welcome,” I said as we reached the ground floor

“Have a lovely evening!”

“You too,” I said.

I swiped my card again and stepped into the elevator. The doors opened slightly again, then closed with a soft chime.

As I descended to the ground floor, her words lingered in my mind. I smiled to myself. She seemed to be a nice person.

When I walked into the reception room I heard Eleanor talking on the phone. I walked calmly as if I wasn’t there so she won’t stop me and ask me any questions. And as I was walking by her reception desk, she finished her phone call and she called upon me

“Melody!”

“Yes mom” I took a deep breath and turned to her with a smile.

“Where are you going young lady? You look so beautiful. Is that the dress I got you for my niece's wedding party? Oooh look at you, are you going to the same prom, performance or a date?”

“No, I’m not going on a date, its a performance”

She smirked looking at me proudly as if she said “that was my daughter” yet I felt as if I was guilty.

“I’m going to perform at the art gallery event, Endora and Mathias organized everything so I can perform there and attend the prom ”

“Ah, I see, so you will be the star, enjoy your night my dear” she said nodding her head proudly

I noticed the disapproval within her, even though she looked happy and excited because I haven’t got so many friends after my graduation. My mother loved Endora and raised her as her own. But at some point, she didn’t like me hanging out with her a lot. although she never said so directly, I could notice it, with her questions, gestures, and expressions.

“Have you met the gardener? ” – She asked

“Yes, I met her in the elevator, she seemed nice”

“ I wasn’t expecting a lady when I called, she looked so beautiful even for her status, may she treat the Cleomes, the neighbors started to complain about the dead leaves falling over their homes, I couldn’t take this anymore so I called her”

“That’s good. I see you are managing the residence like a boss, no?”

“You think so, am I not making a strict powerful boss!” – she said smiling her with arms around her waist

“ You called a gardener?” – a man interrupted surprisingly from nowhere

It was Mr Parker, he looked at me with admiration, so I cheered him.

“Hey Mr Parker”

(Mr.Parker): “Melody, you look so pretty, you will melt the hearts of lovers”

“Thank you” – I replied as I laughed

(Mr.Parker): “Are you going to perform, I see you holding the violin”

“Yes, actually I am, it will be “Ever Since His Spring Became Mine” It’s my best one yet

(Mr.Parker): “Oh, I love that one, it's my favourite! I’m your number 1 fan you know”

“Thank you” I smiled. I felt so happy that some people as nice as Mr.Parker liked to listen to my music.

(Eleanor): “Anyway, Professor, I called the gardener she is up there treating the Cleomes” – My Mother Replied

(Mr.Parker): “I told you I will take care of it Eleanor!”

(Eleanor): “Well I can’t handle all the neighbors complaints so I had to call a specialist”

Mr Parker never really liked anyone to touch his Cleomes, he only trusted Julien with it, they were precious to him in a strange way, As I stood there while they argued my eyes caught the man I saw earlier with Mr Parker waiting outside and looking at us. I was curious...

While I was standing there curiously, Mr Parker said goodbye and went to the elevator, to his garden perhaps.

The stranger is unsettling, pale as bone, he looked dusted as a corpse, no hair, no eyebrows. He had a piercing on his bottom lip, and multiples on his ear. His eyes are sunken deep into his skull, giving him the hollow look of something not quite alive. Dressed head to toe in black, There’s something profoundly wrong about him.

Eleanor: “You need to adjust your tiara a bit” pulling me out of my daze

“Hurry up, there is a mirror by the restroom over there” she pointed down the hallway

I nodded and stood before the mirror. I started to adjust it. my hair wasn't sitting quite right either. I started to adjust a few sections back into place. a guy in his early twenties stepped out of the restroom. The girls restroom. I froze. What was a guy doing in the girls' restroom?

He was skinny, with olive skin that looked as if he was kissed by the sun. His soft messy hair looked fuzzy and partly covered his eyebrows. He wore a dark green shirt that hung loosely over his frame. He didn't say anything, he glanced at me so I turned my eyes to my reflection and continued to do my thing. He stood there next to me and stared at me. I ignored and kept adjusting my hair as I looked at our reflection, completely weird out of the situation.

"Leave it as it is" – He said "It looks better this way" – He continued

I turned to him and in an awkward silence. I wanted to say something but I was confused, then he walked away. I blinked, still processing what just happened. I looked at my phone and saw Endora was sending me messages. So I picked up my violin case and walked to the lobby again.

There he was again—talking to Eleanor at the reception desk.

"...You'll be staying in 3C," Eleanor said, handing him a keycard. "It's quiet there, not too much foot traffic."

"Perfect," he replied softly. "I don't like noise."

Eleanor smiled warmly. "You'll get along well here, then. Just don't forget the main entrance locks at midnight. If you're late, buzz me."

He gave a small nod. "Thanks. I'll be back by then—usually."

"Oh? Night shifts?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Sort of. I work at a bookshop," he said. "Evenings mostly. I prefer that time of day."

"That explains the quiet energy," Eleanor said, chuckling. "Well, welcome to the residence, Jam."

Just then, I approached the desk.

"I'm leaving now," I said.

Eleanor turned to me. "Okay sweetie, take care."

Jam glanced at me briefly. Our eyes met for a second—but neither of us said anything.

I walked through the exit, and there—standing right at the door—I ran into the pale man I saw earlier. He stared at me with wide, unblinking eyes. the weight of his gaze shivered down my spine. I didn't say a word and just walked away with accelerating steps. I didn't want to be late, and I didn't want to know what that look meant.

I turned the corner, heart already racing, and headed toward where I was supposed to catch a taxi. But as I rounded the street, lost in thought, I bumped into a tall figure, I stumbled and fell to the ground.

When I looked up, my breath was caught in my throat.

Towering over me was a massive nightmarish hound. Its fur was black and slick like spilled oil. It stood completely still and silent, its hollowed eyes locked onto mine—silent, unblinking, as if staring straight into my soul. I couldn't move.

"Are you okay?" a voice asked—low and calm, bringing me back to reality. The man stepped forward and offered me a hand.

After a moment of hesitation, I reached out. He lifted me with ease, and I brushed the dirt from my dress.

"I'm really sorry," he said, bending down to pick up my violin case. He handed it to me with care.

"It's okay," I replied, my voice quieter than I expected. I took the case and looked up to thank him properly—and it was when I noticed it.

A scar ran from the corner of his mouth all the way to his left ear, crudely stitched as if sewn in haste. I couldn't help but stare. His skin was pale and glassy, glowing faintly like a mirror reflecting the city lights. His eyes, dull and lifeless, like his pet, held a flicker of something I

couldn't place. His features were too sharp as if he had been carved from marble by someone who had never seen a human before.

"Thank you again," I said, forcing myself to break the stare.

He nodded once, silently.

I turned and walked off, heart still racing. After a few steps, curiosity tugged at me. I glanced over my shoulder.

He was still there. Standing in the same place. Facing me. Watching—like a predator sizing up his prey.

I snapped my head forward and hurried to the waiting taxi. I climbed in and gave the driver my destination. As we pulled away, I glanced out the back window.

He hadn't moved. Still watching.

Only when the taxi gained speed did he turn and begin walking in the opposite direction, his Doberdane walked beside him. Silently like his shadow as the city swallowed him from the view.

"Everything alright, miss?" the driver asked, his eyes flicking up to meet mine in the rearview mirror.

"Yes, everything is just fine."

He nodded like he didn't believe me but wasn't about to press. I was grateful. He was older, with soft, sleepy grey eyes and tousled hair that looked like it hadn't seen a comb in days and yet it looked good. Faint stubble shadowed his jaw—evidence of a recently shaved beard that hadn't quite given up. His face was worn, His voice deep and slow as someone who'd seen every kind of night the city had to offer.

The taxi rolled to a stop beneath a canopy of lights strung over the entrance of the art gallery. As I entered with the violin case in hand, I could feel their eyes. Their expressions were a mix of admiration, curiosity and envy. A hush followed me as I walked in, but I kept my chin lifted, a soft smile on my face.

Endora noticed me first, spinning out of Mathias's arms and rushing toward me with a gasp of joy. Stunning in her black dress. It had a hint of violet that shimmered when she moved, it hugged her figure with the kind of elegance that didn't beg for attention but got it simply by existing. Her hair was freshly cut into a sleek, mid-length bob that framed her face with delicate jeweled headpiece rested on her head, adding a soft sparkle. Endora was always comfortable in her body with her style and fashion, she didn't even seem to notice how much attention she was getting, how effortlessly she stood out just by being herself.

(Endora): "Melody! You look so beautiful!" she said, eyes wide with awe. "No, not just beautiful—like a princess!"

"me!? Look at you! You look stunning!"

(Mathias): "Melody! You made it, what do you think?"

"great job you did, the event organizing is crazy"

(Endora): "come on, your perform is about to start"

Endora grabbed my hand and tugged me gently through the crowd, weaving between glances and whispers that followed us. She didn't notice, or maybe she was just used to it. The way she carried herself—confident, light on her feet, glowing—it made people turn without even knowing why.

We reached the side of the stage where the lights were low and the sound of soft chatter filled the space behind the music. I felt a bit nervous but yet I'm so happy

(Endora): "You've got this," she said, squeezing my hand. "You always did."

I gave her a small, grateful smile, trying to hold onto the calm in her voice.

(Mathias): (approaching from behind) "Everyone's waiting for you, Melody. Go show them what real magic sounds like."

"Thank you guys for making this happen, I really can't thank you enough"

(Endora): (waved a hand playfully). "Don't mention it. That's what friends are for."

(Mathias gave a half-smile. “Just remember — posture straight, chin proud, it's not your first time you are talented”

Endora glanced at her phone. “Oh — Leyla and Eeshai just got here. We’ll be at the tables. You’ll see us!”

“Good Luck” Mathias added with a wink as they both turned away, disappearing into the gently lit crowd.

I was left in the hush of the backstage glow. I picked up my violin and let my fingers rest over the strings, steadying my breath.

Peeking through the curtain, I watched the presenter on stage, smiling as he welcomed the guests, his voice echoing lightly through the speakers. I knew my name would be next.

I stepped into position, just behind the curtain.

The lights brightened. The audience quieted. And then—

“Please welcome to the stage....Melody Demissy”

A hush fell over the room.

I walked out.

The lights bathed me in gold. My dress shimmered faintly with each step. I lifted the violin to my chin, closed my eyes for a moment, I smiled, and let the first note bloom like spring unfolding.

And as the melody filled the air—my melody—everything else faded.

What came after was applause, and faces I didn't recognize clapping like it meant something. I bowed. I smiled. I sat at my table. And the night rolled on.

But that was hours ago...

Now—I was lying on one of the lobby’s couches, my dress wrinkled beneath me. My chest felt tight, my face sticky with dried tears. I sat up, heart pounding as everything came rushing back. The screaming. The blood. Mr. Parker.

Endora was beside me, curled in on herself, crying silently into Mathias's shoulder. His face was firmly still, one arm wrapped tightly around her as if she might disappear if he let go. They both looked shattered.

A hand extended towards me, holding a bottle of water. I blinked. It was a Jam. He was seated just a bit apart from the others, his expressions were unreadable.

"You okay?" he asked, his voice low.

I didn't answer. I took the bottle and drank. My throat burned.

"She woke up," I heard Eleanor's voice say in the background, strained and tired.

I looked around the room. There were people—too many—Police officers moved in and out, talking on radios, taking statements. Red and blue lights pulsed from the open doors.

I saw one of the officers, a broad man with a rough beard, speaking to Eleanor. Another was standing by the elevator, blocking anyone from going up.

"Where's Julien?" I asked hoarsely.

No one answered right away. Then Mathias turned his head.

"He's outside with one of the officers," he said. "He was the one who...found him."

Oh poor Julien. He is just a teenager. He must've gone up like he always did to hangout with Mr.Parker.

"Mr. Parker..." I whispered. My voice trembled.

(Jam): "They think it happened not long after you left" his tone low and steady.

(Endora): "His eyes..." her voice fragile and shaking, she couldn't finish. She wiped her tears with trembling fingers.

When she said that, a flashback struck me, sudden and violent.

The sound of Julien's scream echoing down the corridor. Endora and I had run instinctively, blindly toward it. He was frozen by the door, pointing inside, his face drained of color.

Inside, there he was.

Mr.Parker

Slumped in his armchair with a pool of blood stretched beneath his feet, creeping into the cracks of the floor. His eyes, torn out, leaving behind a gaping, hollow socket that stared into nothing with blood trails beneath them as if he cried blood. His mouth was still open, as if he had tried to scream. Or plead. Or maybe he never had the chance.

I screamed, started shaking and crying.

Endora dropped beside me, her legs giving out.

I remember grabbing the doorframe to keep me from falling. At least this is what I remember before everything went black.

Investigation

Saturday, 11:33 PM

My mother was crying, her shoulders trembled as she covered her mouth with both hands. Her eyes were wide open at first—haunted by something only she could see—then slowly shut, as if trying to lock the grief away before it broke her completely.

I approached quietly and crouched in front of her.

I didn't know what to say.

I hesitated.

I had never seen her like this before.

She had always worn her strength like armor—draped in pride and glory, in that commanding presence only she knew how to carry. But now, all that glory had folded in on itself.

I reached for her hand, held it gently, and kissed it. I looked at her as our eyes met.

“Mother,” I whispered, “I beg you... don't do this to yourself.”

She looked at me as I was her only comfort, and passed her hand on my hair. She pulled her hands and wiped her tears.

“I keep thinking I should have done something,” she whispered, her voice cracking. “Maybe if I hadn't called the gardener...” she continued with a higher tone.

“Eleanor,” Eeshai said softly, “this isn't your fault. No one could've known.”

