

# An Average Night for Ashdown

By C. Jade Wyton

*Dr Ashdown finishes his last check-up for the night, puts young Gix to bed, and attempts to comprehend Raven's convoluted ideas of how to save the people of Weltaron from the consequences of her mother's actions.*

***Contains mentions of medical malpractice, child abuse, murder, abuse of stimulants/drugs, and cults.***

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'Say... *ah*,' Ashdown spoke softly, as he reached out and gently placed a hand on Acorn's cheek.

'Say *ah*,' Gix echoed; opening her own mouth and sticking out her tongue to give an example of what Ashdown had meant. '*Ah*. Like this. *Ahh*.'

Acorn hesitated, before slowly opening her mouth to mimic Gix. She flinched away as Ashdown moved his other hand towards her, though she moved back into place when Gix took her hands and made that wide-mouth motion again.

Ashdown tried to keep his expression cool as the little kobold child made her best attempt to show him her throat; but the deformity in her jaw meant she couldn't open her snout all the way, and it made it difficult to examine her without it feeling invasive.... He still wasn't completely sure her jaw had actually *formed* that way. The deformities in the other clones were clearly birth defects, but this poor thing's misshapen jaw looked far too similar to an injury he had once studied in college, and he had to bite back his anger at Dr Mori, else the poor child think his anger at her mistreatment was anger at her behaviour.

'*Ahh*!' Gix sounded again. 'As wide as you can, Acorn! *AH*!'

'*Ah*!' Acorn copied, clearly trying her best. Her nose twitched in displeasure as Ashdown slipped the wooden tongue depressor into place. '*Augh*....'

'Very... good...' Ashdown managed, his voice heavy through his laboured breaths. It was harder to breathe without his suit and helmet, but the new children were so scared of it; of anything that could even resemble Mori's equipment terrified them. And he was willing to surrender his own comforts to preserve their own. 'Say... *ahh*....'

'*Ahhh*,' she winced as Ashdown gently guided her lower jaw down, but didn't pull away.

Ashdown was as quick as he could be, and when he pulled the depressor out of Acorn's mouth, Gix took her sister's cheeks and squished them; making her giggle.

'Good job,' Gix praised.

Acorn wiggled, her stubby tail wagging.

'Alright...' Ashdown noted down his results in Acorn's files: the residue coating her throat from her time in the tubes had, finally, been completely washed away. And by what he could see, her throat was healing well.

Acorn looked up at Ashdown with hopeful eyes as he finished writing, and

Ashdown smiled back; ignoring the pain in his damaged skin as he did.

He took a small jar from his pocket, and Acorn's tail began to wag even faster; beating against the bed in excitement.

It reminded him of Wonda, when she was little. And so when he opened the jar and removed two small chocolate drops from it, and Acorn leant forward and cupped her hands politely, he couldn't help but smile even wider.

'Here... sweet... heart...' he praised between breaths, placing the chocolates in her hands. 'You... were... very... brave....'

Acorn gave a happy squeak and stuffed the treat into her mouth, sucking on it and wiggling.

Ashdown turned then, signalling to Pauline at the door to the ward, and the caretaker stepped over to pick up the girl.

'Oh, you were so *brave*, weren't you?' Pauline praised. 'Now that's all done we can get you to bed, hm? Genny was helping everyone settle down in their new room. Do you want to go see Genny?'

Acorn giggled again and nuzzled into the woman, who pecked a kiss on the top of her head before holding out an arm for Gix.

'You tired?'

Gix's mouth clamped shut, and she looked to the floor and shook her head.

'You sure?'

Gix stepped behind Ashdown, using him to hide from the caretaker; who simply chuckled and smiled down at the girl.

'Alright. You'll be alright with her, Ashdown?'

Ashdown nodded, lifting his hands so he could sign to Pauline: '*She's a good helper.*'

'*Helper,*' Acorn mimicked the sign, clearly only half-understanding the meaning. '*Helper. Good. Treat.*'

Pauline bit back a laugh at the last sign, though Ashdown couldn't help but let his own out.

'You want... another?' he asked aloud, retrieving a third chocolate and offering it to Acorn. 'Here....'

She took the chocolate, somewhat clumsily, before half-leaning out of Pauline's arms so she could hold it down to Gix.

'*Oh!*' Pauline gave a high, happy exclamation. 'Oh, you're such a sweet thing!'

Gix shook her head at Acorn, gently taking her sister's hands and closing them over the chocolate. '*You have it,*' she whispered.

Acorn didn't need to be told twice, and stuffed the chocolate into her mouth, before nuzzling back into Pauline.

'I'll let you be,' Pauline chuckled, giving Gix a little pet in the head. She gave a sympathetic look to the girl when she moved back behind Ashdown. 'If either of you need me, I'm going to be spending the night with the children, just to make sure they settle in properly after all that's happened.'

Ashdown gave her a short nod and a smile, letting his face fall to its usual neutral expression as she left.

'You... still... nervous... with... Pauline?' Ashdown asked, placing a hand on Gix.

'Little bit,' Gix admitted, quietly. 'With everyone.'

‘You’re... doing well... with me....’

‘Cirrus likes you,’ Gix explained. ‘And I trust Cirrus.’

Ashdown couldn’t help but chuckle.

‘When’s Cirrus gonna wake up again?’ Gix asked.

‘Not... sure...’ Ashdown answered. He wasn’t sure how aware Gix was of Cirrus’ powers, so he didn’t mention them. Though, he did smile as Gix slipped out from behind him and hurried over to Cirrus’ bed.

She pawed up at him, giving his blanket a little tug. ‘He didn’t eat dinner,’ she commented. ‘He was too busy sleeping!’

‘He’ll... be alright...’ Ashdown promised. ‘He’s... like me.... Reborn.... Only... needs to... eat... when... using energy.... When... asleep... magic... is... enough....’

‘Oh,’ Gix shuffled, before resting her head on the side of the bed and peering up hopefully. ‘Do you think he’s lonely, sleeping all alone?’

‘I... think... he’s... alright...’ Ashdown answered; knowing through the eyes of Mr Chess that Cirrus was actually awake in his other body, currently surrounded by his friends.

Gix turned to Ashdown, then, and lifted her hands to sign: *‘But maybe, just in case, I should sleep with him.’*

Ashdown couldn’t help but chuckle, and pushed himself up from his chair so he could help Gix into the bed.

*‘I think that would be alright,’* Ashdown signed, before hefting Gix up and placing her next to the satyr. *‘I’m going to be working late, so you won’t be alone in here. Tell me if I’m too loud.’*

‘I will,’ Gix said aloud, carefully avoiding Cirrus’ stitches as she settled into the crook of his arm. ‘Goodnight, Ashdown.’

‘Good... night... Gix...’ Ashdown pecked a kiss on the tip of Gix’s nose. And then, another, this time on Cirrus’ cheek. ‘Good... night... Cirrus....’

He ignored the laughter in his head, pushing Mr Chess playful taunts away as he tucked the blanket around both Cirrus and Gix and made for his desk.

He was about halfway there when the ward door opened and, with a happy chirping sound, little Allie skittered in on all fours.

Gix gave a small gasp, which was echoed by Allie’s own louder gasp, and the tabaxi rushed for Cirrus’ bed.

‘Allie!’ Ashdown called, but he was too slow to stop the girl from leaping onto Cirrus’ legs and clambering up to bury her face into Gix’s stomach. ‘Allie...!’

The poor kobold froze completely still, her eyes wide with fear as the other child snuffled into her and gave a cough that sprayed droplets of green embryonic mucus over the bedsheets.

Then, almost as fast as Allie had run across the room, her mother was across the ward. She picked her daughter up and flipped her around to scold her, and Ashdown was reminded of a time long ago, when he’d picked up Maggie—then known as Thirteen— and she’d wiggled and squealed and bit at him in much the same way.

Though Allie looked nearly identical to the primary child he’d used to make Raven with, she certainly behaved much more like Maggie had at her age.... Though... he recalled he *had* switched their brains....

‘What’s the rule?’ Raven asked, hefting her daughter up higher. ‘What’s the

rule we have with Gix?’

Allie gave a hiss, and wiggled some more; scrunching up as if wanting to kick her mother, but pausing when her eyes fell on the other young child strapped to Raven’s chest. Moonbeam, Wonda’s new daughter, who was asleep and seemingly tired enough to remain unbothered by the drama.

‘What’s the rule?’ Raven asked again.

Allie carefully put one foot on her mother’s chest, above her cousin, and paused a minute as if calculating something... and then she flicked up her foot, catching the underside of her mother’s beak.

‘You little shit!’ it was more of a laugh than an actual scolding, as Raven flipped her daughter upside down and held her like luggage under her arm. ‘What’s the rule with Gix?’

Allie looked to Ashdown for help; seeming very much like she didn’t remember, so Ashdown decided to help her.

‘Arm... rule...’ he reminded, stretching out his arm.

And a look of recollection appeared in Allie’s eyes as she stopped struggling. She snuffled, green dribble spilling from her lips and down her cheeks as she sniffed back a wet snotty breath. And then she copied Ashdown, stretching out her own arm until her fingers brushed Gix’s shoulder.

‘There... good dis... distance....’

‘Still not putting you down, though,’ Raven chuckled, stepping back a pace and ignoring the loud scream of protest. ‘Sorry, Gix. You alright?’

Slowly, Gix nodded, looking even more concerned now that Raven had joined them. Though, she swallowed down her fear enough to reply, in a shaky voice: ‘I know you said she just wants to play, but she’s really rough about it....’

‘Sorry... sweetheart...’ Ashdown sighed, finally reaching Raven’s side and slowly closing the curtain. ‘Will... give... privacy....’

‘Thank you....’

He closed the curtain fully and turned to Raven, who held her struggling daughter under one arm and pet her sleeping niece with the opposite hand.

‘*You look tired,*’ Ashdown signed.

‘Yeah. I’ve been studying with Samara,’ Raven commented, her free hand mindlessly brushing through Moonbeam’s fur, even though the child was peacefully asleep and needed no comfort. ‘We went to Waterdeep’s library, and teleporting that far after getting everyone back to Traxwood today was *exhausting*. Then coming back here with books? It took it out of me.’

Allie gave an annoyed growl and bit her mother’s elbow; though Raven didn’t respond as she was chewed on.

‘And then of course Allie wouldn’t settle, so I’ve been dealing with her between pages,’ a long yawn escaped her. ‘But we found out some interesting stuff. Samara was right: Arvonfall and Weltaron are the same place. And on top of that, Arvonfall was independent. Not just a city; a *royal* city. With a king. Own laws.... Might still be considered its own territory. Which explains why nobody ever showed up to find us, if it’s been ungoverned lands for the last few-hundred years. Samara’s reading up on it for me, but it might be good news.’

‘*Good news?*’ Ashdown asked. ‘*How is ungoverned land good news?*’

‘Ashdown, you alone are wanted for assisting in the murder and mutilation of

over two thousand children, and that's just *before* Mother found Mori,' Raven pointed out. 'The entire family could be considered accomplices. Even though most of them didn't know any better. The Joneses have *some* sway to argue rehabilitation... but not enough to keep *everyone* safe from Mother's consequences.... If Arvonfall is still recognised as its own territory, then that means that the family settling here was actually *settling* the land. Claiming it. Which means our ways are law, and we can request diplomatic immunity.'

Ashdown snorted, humoured, as Mr Chess' voice silently sounded in his ear: *She really has been reading!*

'I'm hoping that we can argue that the murders were an act of war under my mother's rule, and now that I'm in charge I can put forward a peace treaty.... Maggie told me we have some valuable resources on the mountainside; nothing we'd miss, but things we could offer to neighbouring lands in return for peace.'

'*Metals and saffron,*' Ashdown guessed, thinking of the things the family had gathered over the years but didn't have a true use for. '*Clever. Do you think it will work?*'

'Probably,' Raven's voice took on a grim note, then; so low and serious that it made Allie pause her chewing. 'The rich of the Sword Coast see enough of their impoverished die by their own hand, just to line their pockets. I can't imagine they'll actually *miss* those poor orphans enough to worry about war, if letting it rest helps their wealth grow.'

Ashdown gave a solemn nod of agreement.

'We could start with Traxwood,' Raven continued. 'From what I gathered with my talks with the Joneses yesterday, two of the council members may actually be willing to work with us. One for money, and the other because he's *actually* a good person who seems to give a shit about looking after the poor.'

*And the other two are probably not going to keep their jobs,* Mr Chess added in Ashdown's ear. *Tobias' daughter is ruining his reputation as we speak, and Maggie's proving how alike she and Raven truly are; she hasn't put her books down for hours! Heh....*

'The Joneses have said they think that Jak is embezzling,' Raven continued, unaware of the voice in Ashdown's mind. 'So I'm guessing if we bribe him, and the Joneses add in some blackmail, he'll sign *anything* and we can establish a trade route.'

'*It could work,*' Ashdown signed. '*You'd need to contact the Joneses.*'

'Mm, I want to read some more on it, first— *Allie!*' as if able to read her daughter's mind, Raven intercepted her teeth before they could sink into Moonbeam's tail; instead jamming the side of her hand into Allie's mouth to take the bite, herself. 'We do *not* bite anyone younger than us! We only bite *adults!*'

Ashdown gave a humoured snort as Allie began to chew on her unbothered mother. 'Doesn't... that... hurt...?'

'Eh, I guess,' Raven shrugged, and dropped the girl onto the floor so she could tear around in excitement. 'Better me than the baby.'

Another humoured snort, and then Ashdown's attention was drawn to the open door as Fungus crept in, Genny close at his side as he dragged his feet.

'Fun... gus...' he greeted. 'How... are... the... twins?'

Fungus paused, Genny nuzzling into him affectionately as he did, before

giving a chuff that Ashdown understood wasn't displeased; meaning there was no change... a good thing. They were stable.

A chirp escaped Genny as she pressed firmer into Fungus, and he peered down at her; his miserable expression softening, just a little as he leant down to press his nose into her.

'You... miss... Genevieve...' Ashdown acknowledged. 'I'm... sorry....'

A friendly snort was the reply, before Fungus shook himself down and made for the medicine stores.

He began looking through the jars, refilling any of the medicines that were running low, and letting Genny sniff at each chemical concoction that escaped him, through skin or mouth.

Genny tried to mimic him, though Fungus didn't put her own attempts to create medicine in the cabinets; instead gently placing them by the bin for disposal and giving encouraging nudges that made her grin.

Raven cleared her throat, then, and approached the pair of phylacteries. 'Fungus? I need a stimulant, I'm going to pull an all-nighter and I want to be able to focus.'

Fungus frowned at her, and shook his head, the message clear even without words: *Never again!*

'Fungus! Come on. I just need something to help me stay awake a little longer, so I can figure things out with Samara,' she shrugged widely. 'It'll be fine! *Please?* I'm trying to protect the family.'

It may have been the first time Ashdown had ever seen Fungus sigh. And it was *definitely* the first time he'd ever seen the creature roll his eyes... but when Genny gave a sympathetic whine toward Raven, and then peered up pleadingly at Fungus, the creature caved and nodded— Though he then leant forward and, ignoring Raven's protests, unstrapped Moonbeam from the woman and carefully handed her to Genny; who cradled her with a loving chirp.

'Come on, I'm not *that* bad when I—'

Allie ran straight into a bed, knocking down an entire set of equipment with a loud crashing that cut off her mother, and Fungus frowned harder and pointed, very deliberately, at Allie.

And Ashdown couldn't argue with the man, as he recalled the last time Raven had taken a stimulant; she really *did* resemble her daughter.

Raven heaved a sigh when she realised Ashdown wasn't going to stand up for her, and cast an anxious look down at Moonbeam... before very deliberately tucking her necklace into her shirt, so that Wonda mightn't tune in and notice that she didn't have Moonbeam on her.

'Alright. Fine. But be *careful* with her,' Raven said with a wince. 'She's delicate....'

Fungus gave an offended scoff, and motioned to how gently Genny was handling the child. Then, he retrieved two small, empty glass jars; clearly once filled with spices, each was only about the size of a shot glass.

He filled the two little jars carefully... and Ashdown quirked a brow as he watched.

The first one he gave Raven (which she downed *immediately*) was definitely a stimulate as she'd asked for.... But he could tell just from the colour of the next

dosage that the second one was a *sedative*. The same kind that Fungus would spit onto Digger, when the man was attempting to work himself to failure.

Though Ashdown didn't say anything as Fungus cast him an intelligent look; Raven had barely slept, so by the time she'd try taking the second "stimulant" she'd be at her limit, and it would most likely put her straight to sleep where she stood.

*Clever thing*, Ashdown pet Fungus on the shoulder.

Fungus gave a knowing chuff at Ashdown's nod, and slipped the sedative into Raven's pocket. He then held up all six of his fingers; a reminder not to take it for at least six hours, as was the rule with his stimulants.

'Yeah, thanks, got it!' Raven was already turning for the door. 'I'll make sure to wait— Allie! Come on! We're going back to Samara! You like biting Samara, right?'

Allie gave a happy squeal and rushed out the door behind her mother; seemingly picking up on the rush of energy and being more than happy to match it.

Ashdown and Fungus shared a brief look, one only healers could possibly understand, before they both turned their focus to Genny.

She was purring, nuzzling into Moonbeam —her granddaughter, in a strange way— and rocking the child carefully.

Fungus shifted forward, sniffing at them both in turn, before he returned to the medicine cabinet and continued refilling jars.

And Ashdown offered him a polite nod before returning to his own desk and work; ignoring the loud crash that sounded suspiciously like Raven tripping up the stairs.

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