

The New People

By C. Jade Wyton

A mimic living in an abandoned house opens its heart to the idea of new owners.

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It was a warm summer afternoon when the new people showed up.

The little shoe-shaped mimic had been minding its own business, napping in the attic, when it had heard the sound of a car pulling into its driveway.

It had clambered up to the little round window and looked out as three new people —orcs, two big and one little— had climbed out of their car and started pulling boxes out into the yard.

Well. The big two were pulling out boxes. The little one was running around and playing.

The mimic huffed as the little orc made for the front door.

*Strange people, coming into its house!*

It didn't like that. Not at all!

Jumping away from the window it landed with a quiet *thump* and skittered around to a small, rat-sized hole in the attic wall.

A little bit of wiggling and it had squeezed through into the structure; using the fire blocks and wall studs as footing as it made its way through the house.

There were a few parts of the insulation it had to press tight to get through; the rodents that it hunted hadn't made the pathways quite big enough for it. But, with its little shape-shifting body, it was at least able to make itself malleable enough to pass through most holes.

*Ah! Finally!*

It broke through into the kitchen and, pressing itself low, crept from dilapidated shelf to dilapidated shelf so it could watch the little orc run around the main room.

It was screaming in a loud, joyous way. Like a baby mimic might trill when its mother would return home from hunting— Only this little orc was twice as shrill and six times as loud as a baby mimic.

The mimic gave a concerned gurgle and took a few steps back towards the hole in the kitchen wall.

*What a loud little creature, that was....*

*Was it a baby?*

The mimic had never seen a baby orc before.

*It seemed playful enough to be a baby....*

It crept forward again, sniffing at the air... but then the front door opened and the bigger of the two big orcs *thumped!* into the room and the shoe-shaped mimic turned tail and made back towards its hole.

'Ma!' the little orc called, giggling as more loud thumping sounded towards it.

'Aw! There you are! How's my little princess?' the large orc, (*Ma?*) replied.

'How are you liking the new house, hm? Do you like it?'

‘Yeah!’

The mimic squeezed itself into the safety of the wall and sat for a moment; waiting for its little heart to calm down as it peeked out at the orcs’ feet.

It saw the little orc’s feet vanish upwards and could only assume it had been picked up by the bigger orc; who proceeded to head back outside, calling out something inaudible as it did.

So....

*Ma and Princess....*

It wondered what the last orc was called....

The mimic gave a little trill and made its way back up to the attic so it could watch the orcs through the window as they began to carry the boxes from the yard into the house.

*Oh. They were moving in, weren’t they?* the little mimic realised with a frustrated gurgle.

That wasn’t good. No.

This was *its* house! Not *theirs*!

They had no right to just come in and start living here!

The mimic settled down as it watched the orcs walking to and fro.

It wondered what kind of changes they were going to make to its house....

It hoped they wouldn’t change *too* much.

If they tried, maybe it would have to stop them?

No, no. That wouldn’t be possible, would it?

People were big! And they were strong!

And people always did what they wanted, no matter what.

The shoe-shaped mimic heaved a sigh as the orcs took in the last box and then didn’t reappear.

It didn’t want to share its house with these people.

*People were no good! And it liked living alone!*

*It liked living—*

The attic door swung open and the shoe-shaped mimic went completely stiff; dropping onto its side and pulling its legs into itself so it could hide.

‘Wow, an attic!’ the little orc’s voice breathed in amazement. ‘I’ve never been in an attic before!’

The little orc came up the last step and shut the door behind it before looking around curiously at all of the old things that had been left behind by the last people, a long long time ago.

‘Wow, everything here’s so old!’ it chirped, wandering from object to object. ‘I bet Grandma would like that! And—’

The little orc’s foot caught on a loose floorboard and it fell flat on its face with a heavy *THUMPK!*

The mimic flinched at the sound.

It sounded very, very painful....

And by the whimper the little orc let out it seemed like it was even more painful than it had sounded.

Princess sat up, then, and its whimpering got louder. And then even louder as it looked down to the small patch of blood on its leg.

And it got *even louder*, as it opened its mouth wide and let out a wail.

The mimic curled up at the noise.

*It was so loud!*

‘MAAAAA!’ it cried. ‘DAAAA!’

No response from downstairs; which the mimic didn’t think was surprising.

It was very hard to hear what was happening downstairs, sometimes....

‘MAAAAAAAA!’

Slowly, the mimic unfolded itself and crept towards the little orc.

Despite the orc being so much bigger than it, the mimic knew it was a just baby... and as scary as its loud cries were it was clearly needing comfort. And it seemed that neither of the big orcs could hear it all the way up here in the attic.... So, as the only other adult in the house, the mimic knew it had to do something to help the little orc feel better.

Carefully, it crept towards Princess. Moving slowly until it was at the little orc’s side....

‘Brrp?’ it trilled to get the baby’s attention.

The little orc stopped wailing, turning to the mimic with a surprised look as it sniffed and wiped its eyes. ‘Hello?’ it managed.

‘Trrp,’ the mimic responded, skittering the last few steps to the little orc.

When it wasn’t shooed away it snuffled at the orc’s knee; touching its lips gently against the broken skin that had been scraped away by the unpolished floor.

*Baby has an ouch,* the mimic purred. *Baby is okay. Lick... lick lick.*

The orc sniffed and flinched as its wound was tenderly licked clean.

*Comfort,* the mimic gave a little gurgle as it finished cleaning up the little one’s scrape, and then climbed into its lap and settled down. *Keep baby warm. Comfort baby. Purr. Purr.... Loud purr.*

The little orc’s hand ran down the mimic’s back (a little too roughly, but the mimic didn’t tell it off— It was just a baby, after all, and clearly didn’t know its own strength yet!) as it gave one final sniff and seemed to calm down.

Then the attic door opened again and the smaller of the two big orcs poked its head in.

‘Princess? Are you okay? I thought I heard you crying....’

‘I hurt my leg, Da,’ Princess told it; though there was no sniffing in its voice now. ‘The shoe kissed it better....’

‘The shoe?’ the other orc, Da, gave a curious trill as it came in and closed the door. ‘Oh! Oh, I see....’

‘Yeah,’ Princess mumbled. ‘I didn’t know shoes could kiss you.’

‘Well, that’s because this isn’t a normal shoe,’ Da explained, crouching down next to the little orc and the mimic. ‘It’s a mimic.’

‘Mimic?’

‘A little animal that can change what it looks like,’ Da told Princess. ‘Like the changelings in your movie.’

‘Oh.... Hahah! She’s purring, Da!’ the little orc made a happy trill down at the mimic, who made sure to purr even louder. ‘Listen, listen! She’s like a cat!’

‘Yeah, she is, isn’t she?’ Da gave a happy little rumble. ‘Do you live here, little guy?’

‘Brrp!’ the mimic chirped its confirmation, and leapt from the little orc’s lap.

‘I think she does, Da!’ Princess gave a trill-like squeal as the mimic wandered over to an old, low-to-the-ground chair and squeezed underneath. ‘She knows where to hide!’

‘That might be her nest,’ Da said, gently sliding over to peek underneath the chair. ‘Ahah! Yep! Looks like it.’

‘Wow! Her legs are like a spider’s!’ the little orc cried with amazement. ‘Can we keep her, Da? Can we keep her? *Please?!*’

‘Well... I don’t know,’ Da sucked in a nervous breath. ‘She is a stray... and it’s going to be very hard to keep her inside while we fix up the house. She might get spooked by all our renovating and leave.’

*Leave? Leave?! No!* the mimic gave a huff. *It was born here! It would never leave here! No, no! Never leave!*

*Such a silly person to think that.... Such a silly person, indeed!*

‘Aw, please, Da?’ the little orc begged. ‘I’ll look after her! I promise! I’ll make sure she has food and water, and I’ll play with her every day!’

‘Well, if she doesn’t run off while we’re renovating, then yeah. I don’t see the harm in keeping her,’ Da said gently. ‘But don’t get your hopes up, okay? She might run off, and if she does there’s nothing we can do—’

*It would not run away!*

The shoe-shaped mimic cut off the large orc with a very loud raspberry that made the little orc shriek in glee.

*It would never run away! This was its home! Home! It would never leave it!*

*No, no!*

*Silly orcs!*

The big orc threw back its head and gave a loud rumble— And at first the mimic was spooked... but then it realised that this was a big version of the happy sounds the little one had been making and it felt itself relax.

‘Da?’ the little orc asked as the big one rumbled. ‘Da, do you think she’s hungry? What do mimics eat?’

‘Meat, mostly,’ Da answered with a smile.

*Meat...?*

The mimic poked its head out from its nest.

‘Just like a *cat* eats!’ the little orc cried in excitement and threw up its hands.

‘Mhm! Just like a cat eats,’ Da purred, and ruffled Princess’ hair. ‘Oh, look. Here she comes.’

‘Brrp?’ the mimic gave a curious chirp and rose up onto its back four legs.

*Meat? Orcs have meat? Meat to share?*

‘I think she *is* hungry,’ Princess decided. ‘Do we have anything we can give her?’

‘Uh...’ the big orc rubbed the back of its neck. ‘Mm... we haven’t set up the fridge, honey.... But we’ll be doing some shopping tonight. We can get her something to eat, then.’

‘But she’s hungry *now!*’ the little orc exclaimed. ‘Can I give her something else? Can she eat chips?’

*Chips? What was a chip...?*

‘I wouldn’t give her chips, they’re not good for her,’ said Da as it rose to its feet. ‘But why don’t we see what we can find? Maybe we’ll have some jerky!’

*Jerk...y?* the mimic licked its lips curiously, and slowly crept after Da as it made for the attic stairs. *Was jerky food? Could it eat jerky...?*

‘Come on, little guy,’ the big orc trilled, bending down to pick up the mimic.

*NO!* the mimic nipped the orc’s hand. *Nip! Growl! Back off! No touching me, big orc! No touching!*

The big orc pulled its hand away and hesitated. ‘Oh, wow, uh—’

‘Don’t bite Da!’ Princess exclaimed, reaching down to pick up the mimic.

‘That’s really mean!’

‘Honey, no! Don’t touch—’

The mimic gave a confused squeal as it was hefted into the air— But it didn’t nip at the little orc like it had the big orc. The little orc was still just a baby, after all! And it didn’t want to bite a baby.

Even if the baby was being very rude and touching it without its permission, it didn’t bite it. It just wiggled its legs and gave a loud huff of displeasure as the little orc held it uncomfortably.

‘Be careful, princess,’ Da said. ‘Don’t hurt her, now. Not so tight.’

The little orc’s grip loosened into a much more comfortable hold, and the mimic stopped wiggling so much.

It wasn’t mad about being held wrong. Babies never knew any better. It was sure the little orc would learn.

*Silly baby!*

‘She likes me!’ the little orc purred. ‘Da! She likes me!’

The mimic gave an unhappy trill as it was lifted higher into the air by the little orc, and wiggled to try and break free.

‘No— No!’ Da quickly made it adjust its grip. ‘Be gentle, princess! Gentle. She’s not a toy, okay? She might look like a shoe but she’s alive and she has feelings, so we have to be nice and gentle with her. Okay? Put her down, now. She wants to get down.’

The little orc did as it was told and put the mimic onto the floor, where it proceeded to rub itself along the old wood with a loud snuffling.

*Smelly! Smelly person! Have to smell like house, not orc!*

‘She’s silly!’ the little orc purred. ‘Why did she bite you?’

‘Cos I tried to pick her up, that’s why,’ Da rumbled.

‘Oh... but she let me pick her up!’ Princess gave a confused trill. ‘Hm.... Why did she let me pick her up but not you?’

‘Well... they say a cat can tell the difference between an adult and a kid,’ Da said. ‘Maybe it’s the same with mimics.’

‘I bet that’s it!’ Princess gave a nod. ‘She’s nice to me cos I’m little!’

‘Hah, yeah.... Hey, why don’t you go ask Ma if she has anything for the little guy, hm?’ Da suggested, motioning the little orc towards the door. ‘Go on. I’ll stay here and make sure she doesn’t run off.’

‘Kay, Da!’ the little orc chirped as it vanished into the stairwell.

Both the big orc and the mimic stayed still as they listened to the little orc hurrying across the house.... Then, Da smiled and looked to the mimic, who froze in suspicion.

‘Patient little thing, aren’t you?’ Da gave a half-happy, half-nervous rumble and slowly reached out a finger to the mimic. ‘Thanks for not biting her. You’re a

good girl, aren't you?

The mimic took a step back as the orc's finger came near, and then paused as the orc paused.... Then, when the orc didn't move, the mimic slowly approached and sniffed its finger.

*Sniff.... Sniff sniff....*

*Lick....*

'Good girl,' the orc rumbled; slowly moving so it could rub its finger on the side of the mimic's heel.

The mimic gave a purr as the orc scratched it in *just* the right spot, and leant into its hand for more.

'Naw, there we go!' Da chirped. 'Such a good mimic.'

*Good orc!* the mimic thought, rubbing into the orc's hand. *Very good orc! Keep patting! Keep scratching!*

*Purr!*

*Purr purr!*

*Yes.*

*Yes!*

*Oh, it liked these new people.*

*It liked these new people a whole lot!*

*These new people could stay!*

—END—

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