

Ticklish

By C. Jade Wyton

A giant gazebo-shaped mimic is witness to a young couple's proposal.

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It was a comfortable Summer's day.

The sun was shining. Birds flitted about in the trees. And the breeze was cool and carried the scent of barbecue from the nearby lake.

It was beautiful, really. A picture of perfection.

Warm. Sunny. Quiet.

*Oh, yes.*

It was the perfect day to be a gazebo settled in a sunbeam.

The gazebo gave a long, contented sigh as it shifted, turning around so that the warm rays touched the other side of its white lattice fencing.

*It was a very pretty gazebo*, it thought to itself. Prettier than some of the gazebos it had seen when it was little.

A long time ago the gazebo had been a very small mimic living in a very big and popular homemaker centre. There had been lots of things for it to explore and learn; though its favourites had always been the gazebos.

Even when it was too small to be a proper and full-sized gazebo, it had always enjoyed transforming as best it could into miniature versions of the structures.

Now, though, it had grown big enough to turn into a full-sized gazebo. And even though it had long since been chased out of the homemaker centre, it still remembered those beautiful buildings.

The flat wooden floors.

The thin, delicate benches.

The tiled roofs, sloped to run-off the rain.

The flowers growing up the painted lattice.

It wished it could be a gazebo every day; though it was not an efficient form for hunting....

*Oh?*

Was that voices that it could hear approaching?

Careful not to move too much, the gazebo side-eyed where it thought the voices were coming from and saw, making their way up the trail, a young couple.

From what the mimic could tell by their voices and clothes, they were both women. A human and a catfolk; one pulled behind the other as they ran along the old cracked path, they giggled playfully as they stumbled and danced around the broken pavement. They held onto each other's hand like a possum to its mother's back, and with their other hands clasped the high-heeled shoes that usually would have been on their sockless feet.

*It must have been some sort of courtship*, the gazebo figured as the people paused by its side and admired what they thought were real flowers.

'I wonder what type of flowers these are?' the human mumbled, reaching out to gently brush a finger along one of the flowers the mimic had shaped over itself.

'I've never seen anything like them, before. They're so beautiful...'

'Ain't as beautiful as you,' the catfolk told her, wrapping her arms around the human's waist so she could rest her chin on her shoulder.

The human giggled, though didn't answer as she leant forward and sniffed at the mimic's side. 'Oh, that's an unusual smell!' she exclaimed, crinkling up her nose. Though, her grin didn't disappear as her catfolk partner took her hand again and led her up the step into the mimic's deck. She sat down on the bench, placing her shoes at her side and taking a deep breath. 'This place is so beautiful... Did you know this was here?'

'Nah, didn't have a clue!' the catfolk admitted, wandering around the deck with her shoeless feet. The gazebo tried not to quiver as the catfolk's furry toes tickled it. 'Didn't think there was much up here. Must be new or something. Heh. S'bout time the council put in something nice, innit?'

'They should fix the path, too,' the human noted. 'People would be more inclined to come up here if they did!'

'Y'ain't wrong there, love,' the catfolk said as she swiped her tail low, brushing it across the deck.

The gazebo felt its surface twitch; though it luckily went unnoticed as the catfolk stepped up onto the bench opposite the one the human sat on and took ahold of the supporting post so she could hang off it and look out over the trees.

'I think you can see the lake from up here!' she said with a purr. 'Ain't that something pretty?'

'It's a shame we ate lunch in the car,' the human giggled. 'We could have had a picnic!'

'Heh, maybe next time?' the catfolk suggested, swinging around so she could plant her rump on the top of the baluster railing. Her tail hung low, tickling the mimic's side, and it did all it could not to shiver or twitch or trill.

*It didn't want to ruin their courtship... they seemed so sweet...*

'So, uh,' the catfolk twitched an ear. 'You been having a good time?'

'Always, when I'm with you,' the human replied, her smile so big it pressed creases into her eyes.

The catfolk gave a happy purr, her entire body rumbling in a very ticklish way as she leant against the post. '*Always...*' she echoed in a whisper. Then, she cleared her throat loudly and clambered down from where she sat; her composure breaking in an anxious way as she stuffed her hand into her pocket and pulled out a small box.

'Heather...?' the human's loving gaze wavered; her eyes widening and her smile falling as her cheeks turned a crimson red. 'Heather, is that—'

'*Madeline,*' the catfolk blurted, dropping down on one knee. 'Madeline, I... I've been wanting to ask you this for a long time, but... it never seemed like the right moment to do it.'

*'Oh my gods, it is...'*

'Madeline, would you...?' the catfolk swallowed, her whiskers twitching nervously. 'Will you marry me?'

The human let out a noise —the halfway between some sort of sob and some sort of scream— and covered her mouth. Then, she leapt to her feet, stumbling over to the catfolk and all but throwing herself on top of her partner. '*Yes!*' she

cried, loudly. ‘Heather, *yes!* Yes! Oh my gods, a thousand times *yes!*’

The catfolk fell backwards onto the deck; her barely-clothed furred body tickling the gazebo all over as she grabbed the human in a tight hug and rolled in joy.

*Oh, it was too much!*

The gazebo just couldn’t *take* it anymore!

It didn’t want to be the one to ruin this moment— But it couldn’t stand the feeling anymore!

The creature quivered, its deck twitching and sending the couple tumbling sideways as it suddenly looked a lot less like painted wood and a lot more like quivering, formless jelly.

The human gave a fearful scream as the mimic sprouted stout, beam-like legs and shook itself in a shudder.

‘Madeline!’ the catfolk cried, holding her partner tight as they were both expelled from the no-longer-gazebo and tumbled into the grass at its feet in a loud, fearful heap.

The catfolk was on her feet in seconds; standing protectively over the human as her fur bristled and she let out a defensive hiss.

Though the mimic didn’t hiss back. It just shuddered again, its skin twitching in all the places it had been tickled, and shook itself down.

‘What *is* that?!’ the human cried, rolling into a sit but failing to clamber to her feet in her panic.

‘I think it’s a mimic!’ the catfolk replied as she lowered her ears and growled.

‘A *mimic?*!’ the human’s voice broke in fear. ‘It’s the size of a *truck!*’

‘Just— Just stay behind me I-I won’t let it hurt you!’

*It was brave in concept*, the mimic thought as it licked its lips and shivered out the last of the ticklish feelings from its surface. *But not a very realistic promise. Not when they were both such small creatures....*

Though, luckily for them, the mimic had no interest in hurting these people.

It had bitten people before, back when it was very small, and always thought they tasted terrible. So it had never really cared to try *eating* a person. Which, really, was the only reason a creature its size would ever have for hurting something as small as they were....

The mimic gave a low groan, settling itself back into the grass and slowly letting its gazebo shape reform.

It needed a good sunbathing session to get over *that* drama....

‘Is it...’ the human started, stopping to swallow down the nervous squeak in her voice. ‘It’s sitting back down?’

‘Hm...’ as slowly as the gazebo reformed; the catfolk’s fur began to lay flat. ‘It uh... I don’t think it’s gonna... do anything.’

The human swallowed again as the catfolk turned to her and offered her a hand. ‘Well...’ she managed. ‘That... explains why the flowers smelt weird...’

There was a second of silence.

And then the catfolk gave a chuckle.

‘It does, don’t it?’ she asked, her voice laced with relief. ‘Ah, ooh.... That was terrifying!’

‘Oh, my gods, wasn’t it?’ the human giggled. ‘*That’s* going to be a story!’

‘Hah! Yeah! Yeah,’ the catfolk gave a heavy sigh, and leant forward to rest her hands on her knees. ‘*Woof...*’

The gazebo shuffled in place; not bothering to be subtle or to try and hide its movements as it got comfortable and turned so the side it wanted to sun was the right way around.

The two women eyed it nervously, though they didn’t move away from it as they caught their breath.

‘Oh, gods,’ the human finally gave a laugh and brushed back her hair. ‘Where do you think our shoes ended up?’

‘I dunno, probably— Aw, *shit!*’ the catfolk gave a dismayed cry and dropped to her knees, searching desperately through the grass. ‘The *ring!* Where did the *ring* go?!’

‘*Oh!*’ the human echoed the dismayed cry and joined her partner in searching the ground. ‘Oh my gods! No, the ring!’

‘Agh, where is it?!’

*The ring?*

The gazebo let out a long, tired sigh as it watched the two people shuffle through the grass.

It knew what rings were. It had seen people wearing them a lot when it was little.... They had something to do with the way people did their courtships, didn’t they? Like how when it was courted its partner had presented it with a dead deer....

Without the ring they mustn’t be able to court each other properly.

What a shame that would be, indeed.

*Oh, no, that just wouldn’t do....*

The mimic stretched out one of the long flowery vines it had formed, snaking it along the ground as it carefully felt for the little piece of metal....

‘Wh-What’s it doing, now?’ the human asked; sounding equally nervous and curious.

‘I uh...’ the catfolk paused and swallowed. ‘I guess it’s... *mimicking* us? That’s... what they do, ain’t it? They mimic things?’

‘I thought they just mimicked how things looked...’

The catfolk shrugged and, cautiously eyeing the tendril that slid by her tail, returned to searching for her ring.

*Ah. There it was!*

The gazebo gave a grumble as it felt its tendril brush against the ring, and it carefully gripped it and lifted it up.

‘Oh my gods! It— Heather! Heather!’

‘Holy crap! I don’t believe it!’ the catfolk exclaimed, her eyes widening as she rushed for the tendril. ‘It found the bloody ring!’

‘Heather— Heather, be careful!’

The catfolk stopped just short of the ring, pausing to glance at the gazebo. She brushed a loose strand of fur from her eyes, tucking it behind her ear, and then used the motion to begin reaching out to the ring.

Carefully, cautiously, the catfolk took her ring back.

And then slowly, in a relaxed manner, the mimic withdrew its vine-like appendage and wrapped it back in place around its lattice-shaped railing.

The catfolk gave a short, sharp laugh of disbelief as her human stepped to her side; her eyes not moving from the gazebo as it shuffled again to get comfortable. *'Hah! Wow.... Just unbelievable.'*

*'Yeah,'* the human whispered as she rested her head on the catfolk's shoulder. Her gaze was focused entirely on the ring as she echoed in a happy sigh: *'Unbelievable....'*

—END—

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