

# Care Packages and Wedding Plans

By C. Jade Wyton

*Becky Bloom has been organising the wedding of her two pet mimics, Mimi and Don. Today, she has to go downtown with her pets to speak with some of the stores about food and decorations, and she uses the opportunity to visit some of her friends; most of who have been having very hard weeks.*

***Contains mentions of violence, death, ptsd, and trauma.***

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Becky was ready for a day of receiving long, weird looks from people.

She'd cleaned up her face and arms after her panic attack, making sure the scratches were either fully scabbed over or properly under a bandage, and dressed in something nice. A dress; which she rarely wore. Something her dad had made for her after she'd cleaned out her wardrobe. Which, being designed by her father meant that it was a modest trim; down well past her knees, with high-ish neckline that he had accented well with shoulder-cuts on the sleeves.

*Very* different from the dresses and skirts she would pick out for herself.

But she wanted to feel pretty, today. Because she deserved to feel pretty. And sometimes, feeling pretty was a nice change from trying to be sexy.

It was definitely easier to achieve, she thought.

And, besides. Today wasn't about *her*.

Today was about two of the most important, precious, loveable little things in her life.

Mimi and Don.

Today, they had decided, was the perfect day to get some of the wedding planning done!

Becky was feeling good and she could hear her mimics *very* clearly today, so she could ask them questions!

And even if she knew it would get her some funny looks, she was ready to do it. Because they were worth it and deserved the *entire world*.

If they wanted a dream wedding then they would *get* it!

Plus, she could combine their first few stops on the list with another errand she still had to run.

Bringing all her friends post-injury supplies. Her mimics (the absolute angels they were) had agreed to let her visit all her friends first, before they headed to the strip mall.

Becky currently had two of her friends on bed-rest, and one who wouldn't leave her room in grief.

Adam, after having his bolts ripped out by Guillmero, was still recovering from that mess.... Though he was *alive*, which meant the world to Becky. Adam was like a brother to her. She wasn't sure she'd be able to *survive* without him!

And then there was Malinka and Wendy, who had been practicing their sparring and been in an... accident that left them both hurt. She hadn't watched

the video of what had happened; Jareth had told her to avoid it. But he had explained it.

The girls had been sparring and a misplaced shot triggered Wendy's lycan instinct, and she'd clawed Malinka violently.

Becky had been so worried to see the long, jagged wounds over Malinka's chest and neck. So worried that she'd shown up on Malinka's doorstep at three in the morning with the medical supplies she had left over from her car accident. Disinfectant, gauzes, creams, bandages, painkillers, and some print-outs that Mr Frankenstein had put together for her about how wounds should heal and what was a reg flag for infection.

And Wendy wasn't doing much better. The accidental blast of magic that had wracked her body had shaken her deep to her core, sapping her energy and leaving her exhausted both physically and mentally.... Which was why Becky had packed a lot of high-energy food into the package she'd made for Wendy. She still wasn't completely sure what Wendy's favourite treats were, so she'd gotten a little bit of everything from the junk food section.

*And then there was....*

Becky paused her packing as her hand hovered over the package she'd set up for Jezzibeth.

*Jezzibeth.*

God, Jezzibeth had been so brave.

Her friend had appeared out of nowhere at *just* the right moment. Guillmero was right on Becky's heels, chasing her down in the street after she'd distracted him from her injured friends, giving them time to get to safety as the demon targeted her and her alone with his rage— And then, Jezzibeth had saved her. She'd swooped in on wings made of holy magic and fought Guillmero; saving Becky's life.

Becky had never really thought of Jezzibeth as a fighter. But she'd done an *amazing* job taking down Guillmero. And Becky knew it couldn't have been easy... Jezzibeth had loved the man so deeply, and so recently, before he'd revealed his horrible nature and habits....

It made Becky's heart feel... *fuzzy*.

Her friend had put herself through so much just to protect her.... Becky couldn't take it for granted. And though Jezzibeth was alright, Becky still found herself fussing over her friend's black eye.

She was so, so glad that was the *only* injury Jezzibeth had gotten.

Considering what Guillmero had done to Adam and Malinka....

Becky still couldn't believe he hadn't died when they'd killed him before— Well. He *had* died. But only kind of. He'd gone to hell, and then come back with the help of his older brothers and sisters....

Who Becky was still texting about a potential visit, actually.

She wasn't... entirely sure how she'd managed to befriend Guillmero's sister, Delta. The entire day was sort of a haze because she'd not slept the night before and then been pumped full of adrenaline fighting for her and her friends' lives.

Though she *did* remember Delta threatening to beat her up or something like that. And then it was sort of a hazy, sobby memory that Becky couldn't completely recall as she'd burst into tears and several of Guillmero's sister's had

felt bad for her and sat with her, trying to talk to and comfort her. And she also remembered Delta giving her some very, very good life advice.... If only she could actually remember the advice, itself.

Oh, and she remembered that she promised them lunch. And to copy her harddrive of movies for them. Which... was taking a while, because it was a solid 5TBs of data. It had already been copying for about twenty hours, and still had five or six more to go!

It might have been less if she'd filtered what she gave them, but she wasn't actually sure what they liked.... They were succubus, though, so she figured that the porn would be fine. And they'd seemed interested when Becky had mentioned Mimi, so the animal documentaries should be okay....

But maybe she should have removed series she'd recorded off the TV while in France? They were all in French, with no subtitles, and still had the ads in them. Even *she* had a hard time watching them, with the very limited amount of French she'd picked up. And she doubted a bunch of demons from hell would be interested in *Sammy le chaton sauve Noël 2 : La revanche du cyborg!*

Or maybe they would. She wasn't the boss of them.

'Alpha Becky?' came a nervous snuffle, and Don wormed its way under Becky's arm. He trilled quietly to himself as he reached out his neck to peck at Becky's frozen hand. *'Disrupt the thought.... Touch... remember the contact cues.... Alpha Becky? Is my Alpha Becky okay?'*

'Oh, yeah,' Becky pulled her hand back, using it to gently stroke down Don's back. 'Hey, boy. I'm fine. Sorry, I got distracted. Good job.... You're supposed to be off-duty, though!' Becky picked Don up so she could peck a kiss on his beak. 'Today is a special day for you, you're not meant to be looking after me!'

Don's little feet wiggled in the air in an excited tapping motion as Becky pecked another kiss on his face. *'My pretty pink Mimi was worried! And I don't want my pretty pink Mimi to be worried! No, no! Pretty Mimi cannot be worried!'*

'Mimi was worried?' Becky asked, looking around for her other mimic and scooping it up when she saw it. 'Aw, come here, stinky! You don't have to worry about me!'

Mimi made a fart noise before transforming into a scarf and wrapping around Don playfully. *'Mimi loves Mimi's Flamingle! Mimi's Flamingle is a good boy. Flamingle makes Mimi very happy! Happy! Happy! Best Flamingle!'*

The compliment seemed too much for Don, who began to vibrate with excitement before collapsing sideways onto the bed, its legs out stiff and its neck in that familiar s-curve.

Becky wasn't sure whether to laugh or not as she pet her pet. 'Aw, buddy. You alright?'

Don let out an unintelligible murmur before his legs regained their movement and he slowly rolled to his feet.

*'Is the kind and beautiful Alpha Becky ready to leave?'* Don asked, licking at Becky's arm. *'I would like to leave. I would like to make my Mimi happy and start making things ready for our wedding!'*

'Yes! Yes!' Mimi trilled. *'Mimi and Flamingle's wedding!'*

Becky gave a giggle and quickly stuffed the rest of the packages she'd put

together for her friends into her bag of holding. 'Alright. You want in or out of the carrier, Don?'

Don gave an unsure gurgling noise, and looked to Mimi.

'*Mimi wants out of the carrier!*' Mimi demanded.

'*Out of the carrier!*' Don echoed. '*I would like to be outside of the carrier!*'

'No, Mimi,' Becky shook her head, and picked up her backpack carrier, unzipping the top and holding it open for Mimi. 'You have to be in your carrier.'

'*Why!*' Mimi huffed.

'Because you're a naughty little stinker,' Becky said, simply, motioning for Mimi to climb into the carrier. She gave the mimic a pat as it obeyed. 'Good girl. Thank you.'

'*I would like to change my answer,*' Don whined, stumbling over and licking the clear plastic between him and Mimi. '*I would like to be inside the carrier with my pretty pink Mimi.*'

'That's alright,' Becky held the opening of the carrier down for Don. 'You're a good boy, so you get to choose.'

'*Thank you, Alpha Becky!*' Don gave a happy snuffle and fell head-first into the carrier on top of Mimi; who trilled with joy and turned into a plush bear.

Becky scratched gently down Don's back before withdrawing her hand and zipping up the bag.

She slipped it over her back, slung her bag of holding awkwardly over one shoulder, and headed for the door.

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Becky's first visit was Wendy; even though she wasn't a part of the plan for Mimi's wedding, Becky still wanted to see her today.

She'd chosen to go to the Shedskin house, first, because she hadn't heard from Wendy since the video that someone had posted online.

It made her mad that Romero had recorded that video at all— And absolutely *furious* that whoever had stolen his phone had posted it online. Because now Wendy was miserable and blaming herself for something that was *not* her fault!

And, according to Mr Shedskin, she was refusing to come out of her room or let anyone in to see her.... But Becky wasn't going to let the fact that Wendy had jammed a chair under her doorknob stop her; windows were her preferred method of entrance into people's homes, anyway. She'd use the window.

And use the window, she did.

The scream Wendy let out as Becky tumbled onto her floor was high and loud. And the pillow that hit Becky in the side of the head with a *thwump* caused Don to echo Wendy's scream.

'Hey Wendy!' Becky greeted warmly, brushing away the pillow and shutting Wendy's window so she could let out her mimics. 'How you doing?'

'I...' Wendy, who had thus far been standing in a stiff, terrified, wide-stanced pose on her bed against the wall, began to slowly deflate. 'Not... good?'

'Yeah, I figured you were feeling a little fucked up,' Becky said, unzipping her bag of holding and fishing around inside it. 'So I got youuuuu.... *This!*'

She pulled out a bottle of Mountain Dew.

‘Uh— That... uh...’ Wendy sat down, again, staring at Becky with her single eye wide as Don and Mimi both climbed onto her lap and curled up, purring loudly as they pinned her to the bed. ‘Okay....’

Becky made to hand her very stunned friend the drink, and then realised that, being a kobold... the drink was almost the same size as her.

‘Oops,’ Becky mumbled, putting it on Wendy’s desk instead. ‘Shouldn’t have gotten the two litre one. At least it’ll last you, though!’

Wendy just looked dumbfounded.

‘So, like. Are you gonna keep yourself locked up?’ Becky asked; her voice finally dropping to show her concern. ‘Cos everyone’s worried that you’re not like, replying to us. We wanna know how you are.’

‘Well... I’m *not* coming out of my room,’ Wendy said, her stunned tone turning defensive. ‘So don’t try and make me!’

‘I’m not here to make you come out of your room,’ Becky comforted, petting Wendy’s hand. ‘Or to judge you. I lived in *my* room for almost three months after *my* accident. So, like. I get it. Sometimes you gotta hibernate your brain and live like a sewer rat for a while. It was easier for me, though, cos I had an on-suite. But hey. Maybe you can, like, use this when you’re done with it or whatever!’

Wendy grimaced in disgust as Becky motioned to the large bottle. ‘I’m not using a bottle as a toilet, Becky.’

‘That’s fine, I wouldn’t want to either,’ Becky shrugged. ‘It was just a suggestion.... Anyway, I also got you some more stuff! Do you like chips?’

Wendy gave a hesitant nod.

‘Awesome!’ Becky went back to her bag, and pulled out several plastic shopping bags that had been tied shut. ‘I got you, like, loads more stuff. That one just didn’t fit properly in any other bag so it was loose. I got you chips, cookies, tinned tuna, plastic cutlery, water, soda, some tinned vegetables— Non-perishables, you know. So you can, like, you know?’

‘Yes... but, uh...’ Wendy tapped the top of one of the tins. ‘How am I supposed to open—’

She cut off as Becky handed her a can opener. And then, her eye widened again as Becky pulled out a desktop mini-fridge, a toaster, and a microwave-airfryer-oven bench-top combo.

‘Becky?!’

‘What?’ Becky asked. ‘So you can have cold drinks and hot food!’

‘My... room is cramped enough as it is,’ Wendy managed. ‘I don’t need more stuff— Is that a poster? Becky— Don’t hang *posters* in my room!’

Wendy tried to stand, but the weight of Becky’s two pets prevented her from getting up as Becky unravelled a large piece of paper and climbed onto Wendy’s bed beside her so she could tape it to the roof.

‘Becky don’t—’ Wendy cut off when she saw what Becky had hung up above her. ‘Did.... Did you draw that?’

‘Yep! Just for you!’

It was a piece of art Becky was very proud of. It was her, Wendy, and their mutual friends —Adam, Malinka, Portia— with big text saying “WENDY U R LOVED” on it.

It looked a little bit like a child had drawn it, but still. She hoped it would be a

good reminder for Wendy.

'You know, Wendy, if your room is too cramped you're welcome to come stay in one of our spare rooms at mine,' Becky offered.

'I appreciate it, Becky, but I just don't want to be seen by anybody.'

'Hey, neither does my dad, so like. You get it,' Becky gave a small chuckle, and then shrugged again. 'And.... I get it. You know? I know what it's like to hurt people.'

'Hm,' Wendy just grunted, and looked to the wall. 'Could you please put Don and Mimi away? They're making my legs go numb....'

'Oh, yeah, sure,' Becky picked up their carrier, and called her pets in.

Neither animal did as they were told; simply sliding off Wendy to sit beside her.

'Babies?' Becky asked.

'*Mama's friend is sad,*' purred Mimi. '*Just like Mama was after Mama's accident. Mama's friend needs purrs and cuddles like Mama did.*'

'*Sad friend,*' Don whined, nuzzling into Wendy. '*We will make her feel better.*'

'Aw, Wendy,' Becky sighed. 'They're really worried about you.'

'That's sweet of them,' Wendy half-smiled, before her face dropped again. 'I don't deserve it, though.'

'You do, Wendy.'

'No.'

'Yes.'

'Hm.... Well.... Thank you again for the food, Becky,' Wendy pushed herself up to sit properly. She still avoided meeting Becky's gaze. 'I appreciate it.... But I'm not sure if you three should even be here, considering what I did to Malinka....'

'Malinka said it was an accident,' Becky said, simply. 'And I believe her. It's okay.'

'No. It's not okay. I got *careless*,' Wendy scowled, rubbing her hands together. '*I mauled one of my best friends.*'

'Accidentally,' Becky added.

'That doesn't make it *better*,' Wendy sighed.

'Yeah, it does!' Becky gave Wendy a friendly nudge, and tried desperately to get her friend to look up at her. 'I mean, like. If I accidentally trip and spill my drink on you, that's *way* different from if I deliberately pour it on you, right?'

'Si, but almost killing someone is different from spilling a drink.'

'True. But there is a distinction between manslaughter and murder for a reason,' Becky pointed out. 'Also, Coke and Pepsi. Both are types of cola, but they are *not* the same!'

Finally, Wendy looked to Becky. But it was a very *confused* look. 'Are you comparing manslaughter to... Coca-Cola?'

'Ah, I'd compare *murder* to Coke,' Becky shrugged. 'Coke was, like, rated as one of the more unethical companies. While Pepsi was rated in the, like, top... *ten*? Most ethical companies. So Pepsi is manslaughter, while Coke is murder.'

Wendy just stared at Becky, her brow furrowed. Then, she sighed. 'Becky.... I appreciate your concern but... I don't think you understand,' she said, seriously. 'What it's like to be a *literal* monster.'

Becky bit her lip. Now *she* was the one averting her gaze. 'No. You're right.'

But... I *do* know what it's like to lose control. I— I know that it's, like, not the same thing. But like... you weren't at the Fall Formal, were you?'

'No,' Wendy confirmed.

'I mauled someone, there,' Becky said. 'A couple of someones actually. I don't care that they were, like, vampires or whatever. They were, like. Still people. Right? And then, like. During the fight I accidentally side-swiped Orson. He was, uh... pretty mad at me for that.'

'You're the one who gave Orson the blood nose?'

'Yeah, heh,' Becky shrugged. 'Accidentally.... And like. I know it's not the same and stuff. I'm not saying it is. I'm just saying that, like. I half-get it. I don't fully *get get* it, but I get that I don't get get it. I get that I only just sorta get it. You know?'

Wendy shrugged, fiddling with her claws as Becky leant closer and lovingly adjusted her shirt collar. 'I just... I completely lost control, Becky. I didn't know what was going on. I barely knew who I was! All I knew is that I was hurt, and I was scared, and I couldn't control who I took that out on.'

'Babe, that's my *entire* high school experience,' Becky joked, giving Wendy an affectionate tap on the nose. 'If I was able to wildshape ages sixteen to nineteen? I think I may have ended up, like, eating Toast or biting Joe's ears off! I mean, you saw me in homeroom the other week, right? How I, like. Woke up from that nightmare and punched Jareth? I don't know, like, the exact experience you're having and stuff. But I know the experience slightly to the left of it. So I know that, like, it hurts more than people realise.'

Wendy gave a sad half-chuckle, and took Becky's hand to pet it. 'Thanks for caring, Becky. I understand what you're trying to say, but I think the issue is just a little bit more complex than you realise....'

Becky nodded in confirmation.

'I think I just need some time alone,' Wendy told her. 'Look. I'll text you if I need anything, si? You will be the first person I call.'

'Okay,' Becky gave a sigh, and pecked a kiss on each of Wendy's cheeks. 'À bientôt, Wendy.'

'Hasta luego, Becky.'

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The next on Becky's list was Malinka; as per Don's insistence. He wanted her familiar, a little bat named Grigori, to be the ring-bearer.

Mimi was content with this, too; though Becky was only half-sure Mimi wouldn't try and take a bite out of the little guy if he got too close. But she'd promised she wouldn't. She didn't want *any* drama at her wedding! She wanted it to be *perfect*.

And Becky wanted it to be perfect for her, too. So she was willing to do anything she could to make sure Mimi got what she wanted.

It was a fair hike to Malinka's house from Wendy's. Adam's place would have been *much* easier to get to, but Don rarely asked Becky for things and she wanted to encourage him to speak up.

So, to Malinka's house they went; ignoring Bird as he ran up and started

squawking at them.

*'WHORE! Ginger WHORE!' Bird screamed, flapping his wings and trying to make himself seem big as Becky casually strolled towards him. 'The ginger WHORE is here! Filthy dirt-eating WHORE!'*

'Hello, Bird,' she greeted, grinning as she approached and he began to back away. He always bigged himself up and made a lot of noise— But Becky knew he was really just a big soft daddy's boy who wouldn't do more than peck at her ankles. 'I'm here to see Malinka.'

*'Malinka,' Bird growled, a sharp hissing sound escaping his beak. 'Malinka does not be needing your bothers! Father said she is to REST! Mother said she is to SLEEP! And that ginger whore is not to be climbing in her windows after sun has gone down!'*

'Well, the sun is still up and I'm using the front door,' Becky said simply, reaching a hand back to gently pet the plastic bubble on the carrier as Don let out a whine. 'And besides, I'm not here for *just* Malinka. I need to talk to Grigori and Mr Malinka, too.'

*'You are knowing that Father does not like you calling him that,' Bird hissed. 'Annoying whore!'*

'Shhhhhush,' Becky shushed, tapping Bird on the beak and causing him to let out a furious scream as she skirted around him and made for the door.

She didn't need to knock. By the time she reached it, Mrs Grimalkin was opening it.

'Ah, Becky!' she beamed, holding her arms out to embrace the girl. 'How are you being? Your face is looking better. Malinka has been very very vorried that she cannot be keeping her eye on you while she is resting!'

'Hi, Mrs Grimalkin,' Becky greeted, hugging her tight. 'How's Malinka been?'

'She is healing vell,' Mrs Grimalkin answered. 'But I am vorried she may be getting scar. Vound is very deep.'

'Aw, yeah, I know what that's like,' Becky chuckled, leaning back and pulling aside the neck of her dress to show off her own scars. 'You wanna try and, like, avoid it scarring and stuff if you can. Not that it like, looks bad or anything. But sometimes it like, itches.'

'Itches?' Mrs Grimalkin echoed.

'Yeah, if the skin gets like, dry or anything it gets *super* itchy!' Becky explained. 'The doctor recommended me a gel for it. If Malinka has any issues I can like, get her some. Just like, let me know.'

'Ah, ve vill, dear,' Mrs Grimalkin smiled back. 'Can I be getting you anything to eat?'

'Oh, no thank you,' Becky felt herself blushing. 'I just, uh, came from the Shedskin house and, like. I wasn't sure Mrs Shedskin was going to let me leave without gaining at least five pounds, hah! Thank you though, Mrs Grimalkin.'

'Please, my darling! I have told you before, be calling me Tanya,' said Mrs Grimalkin— *Err, Tanya.*

'Okay, Mrs... Tanya,' Becky gave a chuckle as she almost immediately fell back to her habit. 'Oh! Could you, like... do me a favour?'

'Of course, my darling.'

'Could you take Mimi and Don up to Malinka, and tell her I'll be in soon?'



Becky asked, carefully taking the carrier off her back to offer it to Tanya. 'I need to talk to Mr Malinka— Uh. I mean, Mr Grimalkin, about something.'

Tanya chuckled at Becky's name for her husband, and accepted the animals. 'Of course, Becky. He is in shed.'

'Thanks!' Becky beamed, waving as Tanya headed upstairs.

Then, she took a deep breath and made for the backyard to have what she knew was going to be a *very* awkward conversation.

Baran was in his shed, just as Tanya had promised.... He was cutting up a dark brown buck (as Becky could tell, by the freshly-skinned pelt he'd laid to one side), though he put down his knife as Becky knocked and entered.

'What do you *vant*— Oh. Becky. It is you,' Baran's usual frown turned to a smug look as he watched the girl enter. 'I see you are no longer muddy and deer. You are looking healthy. No more bags under eyes or tangles in hair. I vas right, da? Home is better!'

'Yeah, you were right,' Becky agreed as she smiled, warm and wide, at Malinka's father. 'Thanks for, like, talking sense into me. I was in a *really* bad place. I think if you didn't drag me home when you did I might have, like, lost my mind.'

Baran's smug expression grew smugger, at that, and his fur puffed up in pride. 'Da. Boy is not vorth running away for. It is better to be home. Vith your parents. And your medication.'

'Yeah,' Becky chuckled.

'Da,' Baran nodded, and then turned to return to his work without another word.

Becky watched as he continued slicing into the deer, and her eyes trailed to the pelt.

Hm....

This... pelt looked a little bit familiar....

Baran's ear twitched as Becky stepped forward and touched the deer skin, and the man put his knife down again.

'Ah...' his ears folded back. 'Vas this one of your....'

'Hm. Oh, no,' Becky shook her head, and gave a small laugh. 'Stick's the only buck I know personally. I think I recognise this one, though. Tenderhoof kicked him because he was bothering Spring Dancer.... See that mark in the pelt, there? Tenderhoof did that to him last week because he wouldn't leave the girls alone. He was really awful, so... like. *Yeah*.'

'Ah,' Baran gave a short nod. 'I see.... Hm.... Becky? Are you who has been putting collars on deer?'

'Oh, yeah. Just my own herd, though,' Becky nodded, grinning widely. 'You've seen them?'

'Da. I am not shooting them, for you.'

'Thanks,' Becky chuckled. Then an awkward moment of quiet passed, and she gave a cough. 'Sooo.... Have you apologised to the squirrels yet?'

'*Nyet*,' Baran's natural frown returned as he answered Becky's question. 'I am not needing to apologise to little creatures.'

'You really, like, *should*,' Becky told him. 'I mean, like. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have been able to help Malinka.'

A low, discontented hiss escaped through Baran's teeth; though it didn't deter Becky from continuing. Nor did it stop her smiling ear-to-ear.

'Like. They were scared to help, cos of how you'd like. Hurt them and stuff,' Becky told him. 'It's just like, lucky I was able to convince them to take us to save her. They deserve an apology for how badly you treated them— Or at *least* a thank you!'

Baran just responded with a grunt, and went back to carving the dead buck.

'You should, like. Leave out a gift for them at least,' Becky told him. 'They *really* like the nuts and seeds that grow in the trees in your yard. If you take them to the edge of the property and scatter them, that would be enough.'

'And *why* would I do this?' Baran asked with a frustrated sigh, though he didn't pause his work. 'They are just squirrels!'

'Because without them, your daughter would be dead,' Becky said, her tone still cheerful as she put her hands behind her back and rocked on her heels. 'And if you don't buckle down and start being nice to the woods, one day it's going to decide that you're its enemy. And it will take the people you love away from you and not give them back.'

Baran stopped his carving, at that, and very slowly turned to face Becky. She couldn't tell if he was confused, horrified, or just simply annoyed by what she'd said. So she clarified:

'That's what Tenderhoof told me, anyway.'

Baran's look slowly became more neutral (which, for him looked furious) as he watched Becky. 'Tenderhoof,' he repeated, slowly. 'Is this deer?'

'Yeah.'

'Is this deer that *attacked me*?'

'Hah, *nah*,' Becky chuckled. 'That was Grass Sway. If it was Tenderhoof that went for you, I wouldn't have been able to talk her out of beating you up! You'd probably be dead.'

Baran gave another discontented hiss, before picking up his knife again. He motioned with it at the shed door, signalling for Becky to leave, before turning back to the deer carcass.

But Becky didn't leave. She just stood in place, rocking on her heels again as she bit her lip.

She still had to ask him what she'd come in for....

Mimi's wedding.

Mimi's *cake*.

'Soooo...' Becky cleared her throat, continuing when one of Baran's ears swivelled back to listen. 'I have a... *weird* question. But is it possible to make a wedding cake out of raw meat?'

'A *vhat*?'

'Wedding cake.'

'Out of *vhat*?'

'Raw meat.'

Baran slammed his knife into the chopping board. 'Get out!' he exclaimed, turning and pointing to the door. 'And do not be coming back until you have *sense* in your head!'

'I was just asking because—'

‘Nyet! Go!’ he ordered, stepping towards Becky and herding her to the door. ‘Leave! I will not be answering such ridiculous question!’

‘Ah! *Fine!* Be useless then!’ Becky whined as she was shoved out of the shed. ‘*Whateeeeeeverrrrr!*’

Becky gave an exaggerated shrug as Baran slammed the shed door, and then huffed and looked up to Malinka’s window.

Her friend was staring down at her with an expression Becky had grown very used to.

It was what she had begun to call Malinka’s “*Oh, Becky...*” expression.

Ah, well. If she was already getting the look she might as well take the shortcut to Malinka’s room!

‘Becky, no!’ Malinka yelled through her window as Becky made a running jump at the house and began to scale the wall. ‘Becky! Don’t— Aw, *Becky...*!’

‘Hey, Malinka!’ Becky greeted as Malinka opened her window. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘Get inside!’ Malinka scolded ‘You’re going to hurt yourself, Becky!’

‘It’s fine, I do this all the time!’ Becky chirped, tumbling into Malinka’s room and flopping on the floor. ‘Oh! Hey, Baloney.’

‘*Mrow?*’ Baloney meowed, glancing to Malinka and quickly signing something.

Malinka sighed and signed back; returning to her bed and sitting down.

Becky didn’t understand either of them, but it was clear Baloney was fussing.

‘*Mama!*’ Mimi gave a happy chirp in its carrier, and Becky scooted over.

‘*Grigori! Mama must ask Malinka about Grigori!*’

‘Oh— Yeah, of course!’ Becky exclaimed, turning to her friend. ‘Malinka? I have a question?’

Malinka quickly finished her conversation with Baloney before turning to Becky. ‘Yes, Becky?’

‘Soooo, like. You know how I’ve been like. Busy lately?’

‘Yeah...?’

‘Well. It’s because I’ve been, like. Helping Mimi and Don...’ Becky paused, making a face that let Malinka know she was *sorry* for how ridiculous she was about to sound. ‘Plan their dream wedding.’

Baloney gave a snicker, which he quickly smothered. Though Malinka didn’t react beyond an attentive twitch of her ear.

‘So, uh. Yeah. They like, want to get married and stuff,’ Becky continued. ‘And they really want Grigori to be the ring-bearer.’

‘*Flamingle’s friend Grigori is the ring-bearer!*’ Mimi chirped.

‘*My friend Grigori will be the ring-bearer!*’ Don echoed.

‘I feel like I *should* be surprised,’ Malinka said, humour in her tone as her lip twitched into a grin. ‘But I’m not.... You’re welcome to ask Grigori, if you like, but just a warning that he tends to get... distracted during these things.... Grigori?’

Grigo—

The little bat landed on Malinka’s face seemingly from nowhere, and began to crawl around happily.

‘Hello, Grigori,’ Malinka chuckled, scooping her familiar into a hand.

‘*Grigori! Grigori!*’ Don chuffed and snuffled in excitement, drooling all over

Mimi as Becky opened the carrier to let him out. *'Hello Grigori! Hello! Hello!'*

*'Mimi will stay inside Mimi's carrier,' Mimi purred. 'Because Mimi has not had dinner yet. And Grigori is shaped like dinner. And Mimi is a good girl.'*

Becky bit her lip and gave Mimi a gentle pat. 'Smart girl,' she said, eyeing as Don clambered up Baloney's side so he could leap onto the bed next to Malinka and pant at Grigori.

*'Would you like to come to Mimi and my wedding?' Don trilled, tapping his feet and licking his lips loudly. 'You would be the ring bearer! A very important job! Yes! A very important job for my very important friend! Yes? Will you come? Will my friend Grigori come to my wedding?'*

Grigori watched Don for a moment before yawning loudly. *'Okay.'*

Don honked loudly in joy, jumping so high he flipped backwards off the bed and landed on Malinka's floor with a soft *thump!*

*'Oh!'* Malinka gasped.

*'Don!'* Becky exclaimed, hurrying over to help Don as he scrabbled uselessly on his back, unable to get to his feet. *'Aw, baby, you're okay. Let me help you up.'*

*'Thank you, Alpha Becky,'* Don gave a chuff as he was rolled to his feet.

*'So, I take it Grigori said yes?'* Malinka guessed with a light chuckle.

*'Yeah,'* Becky confirmed.

*'Does that mean I'm coming, or is Grigori going without me?'* Malinka asked. *'Either way's fine, I just need to know.'*

*'Guests can bring their own guests!'* Don confirmed, leaping up to Malinka and bobbing his head like an excited parrot. *'Grigori can bring you! And you can bring Baloney if you want! Yes!'*

*'Yes!'* Mimi echoed. *'Mimi wants everyone to come, because Mimi wants everyone to see how special Mimi's Flamingle is! All of Mimi's friends! And all of Don's friends! And all of Mama's friends! And all of Mama's friend's friends! Everyone must see that Mimi's Flamingle is special!'*

*'That's a yes,'* Becky translated with a chuckle. *'And they said you can bring a plus one—'*

*'Plus EVERYone!'* Mimi screamed.

*'Plus everyone,'* Becky corrected, much to Malinka's amusement.

*'The hell was that noise?!'* a voice called through the door, and Becky winced as Malinka's... step? Brother? (She *still* wasn't sure what exactly they wanted to be called) Bojangles, entered the room. *'Are you alright... ah. Becky....'*

*'Hi!'* Becky chirped, waving her hand at Bojangles, who did not look impressed as he stared at her.

*'You're... dressed... for once,'* he said, slowly.

*'Yep!'* Becky smiled wide and nodded. *'I mean. Like. I wear clothes, like, at least forty percent of the time! Even if our introduction didn't really make it seem like it!'*

*'Mm....'*

For a moment, him and Becky looked at each other in silence.

Then Bojangles shut the door and headed back to his room; his footsteps creaking on the wooden floor as he went.

*'Byeeee!'* Becky called after him, before turning to a giggling Malinka. *'He's so funny!'*

‘Yep,’ Malinka sniffed, trying to muffle her laughs. ‘Aw, speaking of you being dressed, Becky— You look *really* good. Did you dad make that dress for you?’

‘Yeah!’ Becky chirped, spinning around to show off her outfit. ‘He used the fabric I like, too! So it’s pretty *and* comfy!’

‘Aw, that’s so sweet,’ Malinka said, reaching up to scratch at her bandage.

‘No!’ instinctively, Becky lunged forward and slapped Malinka’s hand away from her neck. ‘No scratching! You’ll make it infected!’

Malinka froze, staring at Becky for a moment. She seemed taken aback by Becky’s firmness. Which wasn’t surprising, as it was usually *Malinka* scolding *Becky*.

‘Excuse me?’ Malinka finally managed.

‘Don’t scratch,’ Becky repeated. ‘I know how itchy it gets under the bandages, but scratching is why I ended up with scars on my elbow and knee!’

As Becky spoke, she lifted her skirt to show off the scar on her left leg.

‘If I didn’t scratch, this would have healed better!’ she said. ‘But I scratched and it got infected and then took longer! So you’re *not* allowed to scratch your neck, no matter *how* itchy it gets— Baloney, if you see her scratching you have to stop her!’

‘*Mreow?*’ Baloney looked terrified to be getting orders from Becky, and he looked between the two girls nervously.

Malinka seemed to find Becky’s demand humorous, as she grinned widely. ‘Becky... that’s the sort of thing *I* would expect to be saying to *you*.’

Becky blushed, and rubbed at the back of her neck sheepishly. ‘I don’t know about much, but I *do* know about what it’s like to take a hit.’

Malinka smiled— And then... paused, looking pensive. ‘Oh... hm.... Speaking of, Becky.... Your wrist....’

‘My wrists?’ Becky asked, holding up her arms. ‘What about them?’

‘The one... that Guillmero broke...’ Malinka trailed off as a dawning look crossed Becky’s face.

‘*Oooh...* Because he broke your arm...’ Becky gave a knowing nod, then looked down at her now-healed wrist and tenderly ran a finger over it. ‘It feels wrong, doesn’t it? Like your brain doesn’t realise it’s not broken anymore....’

Malinka gave a nod.

‘Don’t worry. It fades eventually,’ Becky promised. ‘At least for me it did. It kinda takes about the same amount of time it would have taken for your arm to heal naturally, for your brain to catch up. Or like, maybe you’ll catch up faster. Cos your brain works better than mine!’

Malinka snickered, shaking her head playfully at Becky.

‘Oh! Hey— Also! Before I forget!’ Becky literally jumped as she remembered the things she’d packed in her bag for Malinka. ‘I got you gifts!’

‘Gifts?’ Malinka asked, curiously. ‘Becky, you didn’t have to! You already gave me the bandages and—’

‘Books!’ Becky exclaimed, slamming a heavy box onto the foot of Malinka’s bed. ‘And snacks!’

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After Malinka, the easiest friend to see next was Portia. It was just a hike through the woods, which both Mimi and Don were very excited about.

Portia, unlike Becky's other friends who'd been involved in the fight with Guillmero, hadn't suffered any sort of physical injury this week. But Becky still wanted to check up on her and make sure she was doing okay. She'd stabbed Guillmero in the crotch, after all. And that *had* to have at least *some* affect on her already-fragile mental health.

She knocked on the front door but there was no answer; probably because Portia and her family were all too busy making mountains of noise in her lounge room. There was no way that they'd heard Becky knocking, so she walked around the side of the house so she could be seen through their window.

'AWWWWW FUCK!' Portia screeched, as soon as she laid eyes on Becky. 'BECK! It's fucking *Beck*! Get on in here ya slut!'

Becky didn't hesitate; as soon as Portia had thrown open her lounge room window, Becky was climbing through it onto the back of the couch.

'Aw, Portia— Becky, no!' cried Stephen, Portia's father. 'Use the door like a sensible person!'

'I tried, but nobody heard me!' Becky exclaimed, flopping onto the floor and quickly jumping up. 'Oop! You alright babies?'

'*Mimi is fine*,' chirped Mimi.

'*I'm okay, too!*' agreed Don.

'Aw, you got the little ankle-biters out with ya today, aye?' Portia laughed, unzipping the carrier and reaching in to grab Becky's pets. 'Give 'em here! Jeremy and Sheila are having watermelon! Mimics can eat watermelon, right?'

'Yeah, a little bit,' Becky chuckled as Don and Mimi were deposited next to Portia and Stephen's familiars; a stunningly capable goanna named Sheila, and a very large, polite opossum that she knew as Jeremy.

The pair of familiars greeted the mimics and immediately began discussing.... the socio-economic politics of the local animal population? Man, Becky was *not* equipped to join in this one, so she turned back to Portia and gave her a friendly punch in the shoulder.

'Hey, girl!' Becky greeted. 'Just wanted to check that you were alright after that fight with Guillmero! How *fucked* is it that he came back from the dead?'

'Oh, yeah, real fucked up!' Portia laughed. 'But nah, I'm fine. Want a snag?'

'A what?'

'Sausage, mate!'

'Oh, no, I visited Wendy, and her mother... *phew*.'

'Hah!' Portia gave a cackle, and motioned to her friend Bianca. 'More for us then, aye B? HEY! T! How's the next lot coming along?'

'Already finished them!' Toast called back.

'Bring 'em out then!'

'Oh, no, I can't!'

'Aw, why not?'

'I already *finished* them!'

'T!' Portia cried. 'What the *fuuuck*!'

Becky couldn't help but laugh. 'Busy day for you, huh?'

'Hah, don't ya know it?' Portia grinned. 'Aye, though, aye! It's Jeremy's

birthday!

'*Birthday!*' Bianca echoed, putting on a very strange, nasally voice.

'Oi! Bianca!' Portia burst into laughter. 'Don't you fucking do the ad! Don't you fucking do that fucking ad! I don't drive a fucking Mistsubishi!'

Becky blinked, stunned.

What *language* were they speaking?

'But it's Jeremy's birthday!' Stephen cried, shaking his daughter playfully.

'*Birthday!*' Bianca teased again.

'Yeah, I don't know what they're talking about, either,' Jackie's voice spoke from behind Becky, and she spun around to see him smiling warmly at her.

'When I asked about it they showed me some really weird car ad that was apparently popular in Australia.'

'*Apparently?!*' Portia gasped, mock-offended. 'Cunt it *was* popular!'

'Hey Hydesy, how's the cake coming along?' Bianca called out.

'Aw, fuck, yeah, the cake!' Portia exclaimed, grabbing Bianca by the arm and running off with her into the kitchen.

'*Wow* they're full-on today,' Becky laughed as her friends vanished into the other room.

'Hah, and that's coming from *you*,' Jackie chuckled, petting Becky on the back. 'How have you been? Staying out of trouble, I hope.'

'Trying to. Not really succeeding, though,' Becky admitted.

Jackie gave a light chuckle and nodded. 'Portia told me about what happened with Guillmero.'

'Ah.'

'Yes... is he what's had you down, these past few weeks?'

'Mm... yes and no,' Becky shrugged. 'Like. He contributed, definitely. But like. The world's ending and stuff, so... yeah. You know. Even if he wasn't, like, trying to fuck with my head, I still probably wouldn't be doing too good, you know?'

'Right, I see,' Jackie looked concerned. 'You still think the world's ending?'

'Yeah, of course it is,' Becky said. 'But I've decided I'm only allowed to worry about it from twelve at night until two in the morning.'

'That... explains a *lot*,' Jackie's brow raised, and he looked up at Stephen.

'Yeah, cos if I'm spending all my time being worried then, like, what's even the point? You know?' Becky shrugged. 'I don't know *when* we're all gonna die, so we might as well all have fun until it happens.'

Jackie looked very, very concerned. As did Stephen.

'Well... that's... an uplifting way to look at it,' said Stephen, slowly. 'Then, if the world *doesn't* end, you'll be pleasantly surprised that you didn't waste all that time being miserable.'

'Yeah, *exactly!*' Becky nodded. 'If I'm wrong then, no harm done!'

Stephen gave a short laugh. 'So. Any plans for today?'

'Oh, yeah! I'm doing like, a bunch of wedding planning!'

'W-Wedding?' Jackie looked taken aback. 'You and Jareth?'

'Oh, *no*, don't be silly!' Becky giggled. 'Jareth said I am *not* in the right state of mind to make big choices like that, just yet. Mimi and Don are getting married!'

'Your... your mimics?' Stephen asked.

'Yeah!' Becky nodded. 'Mimi wants, like, a really big wedding and stuff! And

like—‘

‘How old’s Jeremy turning?’ Hydeson’s voice spoke from the kitchen, interrupting Becky’s thought.

‘Aw *fuck*, hold on—’ Portia stuck her head out. ‘Oi! Jeremy! How old you turning, mate?’

‘*Oh, hmm, well...*’ Jeremy paused eating in order to look deep in thought. ‘*Well that’s a tough one. I have to think on that one....*’

Becky watched as Jeremy pondered for a moment, before looking back to Stephen. ‘And like, I didn’t even know Mimi knew what a wedding even was!’

‘Uh... huh.’

‘But then, like, she came up to me and was like— She wanted to get married to Don!’ Becky explained. ‘So we’ve been planning their wedding and stuff!’

‘That’s... hm,’ Jackie still looked fairly concerned. ‘And you’ve been taking your medication?’

‘I’m not crazy,’ Becky said, putting her hands on her hips. ‘I’m a *druid*.’

Jackie and Stephen just cast each other a glance, which made Becky huff in frustration.

But then, Stephen grinned and looked back at Becky. ‘Am I invited?’

Becky shrugged. ‘You’ll have to ask Mimi and Don about that.’

‘Hah,’ Stephen looked over to the mimics. ‘Mimi? Don? Can I come to your wedding?’

The two mimics looked up at him, then chirped to themselves quietly before Mimi gave a loud trill:

*‘Mimi wants all of Mama’s friends to come! And all of Mama’s friends’ friends! Mimi wants every person in the world to see how special Mimi’s Flamingo is!’*

‘She said yes,’ Becky translated. ‘So, like.... I dunno. I’ll give you the RSVP deets sometime?’

‘Sure,’ Stephen laughed, taking Jackie by the arm and resting his head on his boyfriend. ‘Can I bring guests?’

‘Yeah, she said she wants everyone there,’ Becky sighed, playfully rolling her eyes... then, she had a thought. ‘Hey, Officer Jackie?’

‘Yes, Becky?’

‘If you marry Portia’s dad, are you gonna end up being called Jackie Jackson?’

The laugh that escaped Stephen made him sound like he’d been punched in the gut. ‘*I hadn’t thought about that!*’ he wheezed. ‘*Oh, noooooo!*’

‘Oh, god,’ Jackie winced. ‘Don’t tell Portia *that* one. I’ll never live it down.’

‘Don’t tell me what?!’ Portia exclaimed as she hurried back into the lounge carrying a large cake. ‘Don’t tell me what?! Becky, tell me!’

‘No—’

‘If Jackie marries your dad, he’ll become Jackie Jackson.’

Portia almost dropped the cake as she made the same ugly noise that her father had made, and Bianca collapsed to a wheezing heap on the floor behind her.

Toast and Hydeson had seemingly missed the statement, coming in only a few moments after it had been said, and just watched as all of the Australians fell to their knees cry-laughing.



Hydeson took the cake and placed it on the coffee table; defending it from the animals as all four converged on him with curious trills and chirps.

‘Alright, kids! Time to sing! Everyone come sit down!’

Portia’s family all hurried to the couches, fighting over seats and pushing each other around; with Becky lagging slightly behind as she looked for a free spot.

‘Hey, Becky!’ Bianca called, tapping her leg. ‘Here!’

Becky grinned wide, making her way over to the woman and sitting in her lap; revelling in the feeling of Bianca’s arms wrapping around her waist.

‘*Guh*, really?’ Portia mock-gagged. ‘You’re really sitting like that, in front of our lord and saviour, Jeremy Spoils? On his *birthday*?!’

‘Aw, I don’t mind a bit of *young love*,’ Jeremy said. ‘*I’ve got myself a bit of an interesting lass, too. I know how it is.*’

‘Yeah, see, it’s fine!’ Becky laughed. ‘Mimi! Don! Come on up here.’

Mimi and Don gave happy trills, distracted from bothering Hydeson, and leapt into Becky’s lap to settle down.

‘*Mimi likes Sheila!*’ Mimi said. ‘*Mimi has invited Sheila to be one of Mimi’s bridesmaids!*’

‘*Jeremy would like to come, too,*’ said Don. ‘*I said that was okay. I hope that is okay.*’

‘Of course that’s okay,’ Becky said, petting her pets gently. ‘Good babies.’

‘Now, I didn’t know how old Jeremy was,’ Hydeson spoke up. ‘So I used the first two candles I could find.... I don’t think he’s actually sixty-nine years old, but it seemed a little more likely than ninety-six.’

‘Heh, nice.’

‘Nice.’

‘Noice!’

The sentiment echoed around the room.

‘Light ‘em up, Hydesy!’ Portia demanded happily.

The following thirty seconds was the weirdest, most off-key rendition of happy birthday that Becky had ever been involved in.

All of the animals joined in— Including Jeremy, who didn’t seem to know the words and was surprised when everyone chanted his name. And Portia played her cat keyboard the entire time. And Hydeson sneezed halfway through....

It was a mess, but Jeremy seemed very pleased by it. Especially when Stephen helped him blow out the candles and cut the cake. A chorus erupted as the knife came out dirty, and Jeremy was taught about the age-old tradition of having to kiss the closest boy... which was, of course, Stephen.

‘Get some, Dad!’ Portia joked.

‘He’s already getting *plenty!*’ Bianca shot back, before immediately being hit in the face by one of Portia’s flip-flops. ‘Ow! Fuck me!’

‘Later,’ Becky offered playfully. She was then hit with Portia’s other shoe. ‘Aw!’

‘Get fucked, the both of you!’ Portia laughed— Then, she leapt to her feet as Mimi let out a loud growl.

‘**PORTIA HIT MAMA!**’ Mimi snarled, advancing on Portia. ‘**MIMI BITE! SNARL! BITE! BITE! GRAB! RIP!**’

‘Mimi, no!’ Becky exclaimed, scooping up her pet before it could sink its teeth

into Portia's tail. 'She was playing! We were *playing* baby! You don't have to protect me!'

'*Mimi bite!*' Mimi growled. '*Mimi bite! Bite bite! Snap! Snarl! Growl! Mimi protect Mama!*'

'Mimi, baby, no!' Becky held Mimi to her chest. 'Shhh, it's okay. Portia was playing. Just fun! We were just having fun!'

'I'm *still* having fun!' Hydeson chuckled. 'Let her go! I want to see the fight!'

'Yeah, let her go!' said Bianca, picking up Don and cuddling him as he nervously chewed on his head. 'Fight, ya mongs!'

'The fuck's a *mong*?!' Jackie asked, exasperated, as he instinctively put himself in front of Portia to protect her from Mimi.

'Shush!' Becky scolded, giving Bianca a playful kick in the ankle. 'You're gonna work her up more! Mimi, baby, it's okay. Calm down. I'm not in trouble. Portia was just playing.'

'Yeah, I was just teasing!' Portia laughed, poking her head around Jackie and offering a finger to Mimi. 'C'mon. See? No harm done. We're all friends!'

Mimi nipped at Portia's finger, making a fart noise when she pulled away. '*Mimi will keep Mama safe. Mimi is a good girl.*'

'You *are* a good girl,' Becky confirmed. 'But you don't need to protect me. I can protect myself.'

Another fart noise, and Mimi transformed into a scarf so it could wrap around Becky's neck and lick her cheek. '*Mimi loves Mama.*'

'I love you too,' Becky chuckled. 'Now, do you forgive Portia for throwing her flip-flop at me—'

'Thong,' Portia corrected. 'I'm Aussie, so it's a thong.'

'*Shh!*' Becky hissed playfully, slapping at Portia. 'I'm trying to mend your relationships!'

'Aw, yeah, I need help with that lately, aye?' Portia chuckled. 'You, and Dad, and fucking Celeste, aye!'

'And Leeway,' Toast piped up.

'Aye? Leeway?' Portia pulled a disgusted face. '*Ugh. No....*'

'You really should consider talking to him again,' said Toast. 'He's really not that bad. It was just... poor wording. You used to like him!'

'Yeah, well... *nyeh!*' Portia pulled a childish face, and crossed her arms. 'I'll think about it.'

'*I'm full, thank you,*' Jeremy said, suddenly, and Becky realised he'd been eating the entire time they'd been arguing. '*I'm going to take a nap, now. Goodnight.*'

'Night, Jeremy,' Becky chuckled.

'Jeremy—' Hydeson turned, and gasped. 'He hate more than half the cake?! That thing was as big as he was!'

'Becky?' Bianca gave a cough. 'Uh— Don is... melting. What do I do?'

'What? Oh— Baby!' Becky cooed, sitting next to Bianca and gently stroking Don down his back. 'It's okay. You're alright. Everyone's safe, you don't need to worry.'

'*Please don't let anyone hurt my pretty pink Mimi,*' Don whined. '*My pretty pink Mimi is too pretty to get hurt....*'

*'Mimi would not have gotten hurt!'* Mimi reassured, climbing down Becky to lick Don. *'Mimi would have won! Portia ran away from Mimi! Because Portia knew that Mimi would win!'*

That seemed to comfort Don, who slowly began to reform. *'Yes. Yes. My pretty pink Mimi is right.... You're strong. You're very strong! Only Alpha Isa is stronger than you.'*

*'Aw, there's the flamingo we all know and love!'* Bianca giggled, moving her hand to pat Don— And then pausing. *'Uh.... Dumb question. Where should I pat him?'*

*'Oh!'* Becky stroked Don's back, gently. *'He likes it when you pet along his back, here—'*

*'You mean the back of his head?'* Portia interrupted.

*'What?'* Becky hesitated. *'No, his back. I mean, he likes the head too but—'*

*'Nah, nah! But see; that's where his mouth is!'* Portia pointed out, shifting so she could motion at Don. *'So wouldn't that be his head? See, his mouth and stuff's all here in this area, right? And then when ya go up this, the only things ya little mate's got are his eyes, right?'*

*'He has his beak,'* Becky corrected.

*'It ain't a real beak tho, is it?'* Portia said, and Becky felt her eyes widen at her friend's observation. *'It's more like some sort of, I dunno. Horn. But also it's not made of bone or cartilage, it's all meat. It's a pseudo-beak! Not a mouth or nothing.'*

*'Oh my god, you're right...'* Becky breathed. *'But if his body is his head, then what's his head?'*

*'Technically I think it'd be some sort of eye stalk,'* Portia shrugged. *'Like a snail or crab.... Though I ain't know of any animal that has two eyes on one stalk before!'*

*'Oh. My. God,'* Becky breathed. *'Everyone. Shut! Up! I need to process this!'*

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Upon hearing that Adam was the next visit, Mimi had begun vibrating with excitement.

She wanted to see Fuzzy, Adam's....

Pet? Robot...?

Son?

It was complicated.

Fuzzy was a modified Furby toy, given sentience with magic alongside other features. And that sentience made him smart. *Very* smart.

He could talk, sort of like a parrot. But Becky had caught him doing a puzzle, once— Not very well, but the fact that he was actually *starting to figure it out* was something.

Sometimes, Becky wondered if Fuzzy was smarter than *she* was.... Because it wasn't really *that* low of a bar, was it? As far as people went she was kinda dumb. And it wouldn't be the first time she'd been outsmarted by an animal; Baloney's possum, Pockets, for example, had absolutely *blown her mind* by doing the classic hide-a-peanut-under-a-cup trick and making *both* cups empty so Becky

couldn't win (as it turned out, she'd eaten the nut).

That had been a decently embarrassing thing. Even more so, because it had happened in homeroom where *everyone* had been watching.

But people thinking she was dumb was, honestly, the least of her problems.

Becky gave a sniff, and looked up the side of the tall, beautiful house until she spied the window into Adam's room.

Ah. *There* was her goal.

'Hold on tight, babies!' Becky laughed. 'This is gonna be a little bumpy!'

'Yes Mama!'

'Yes, Alpha Becky. Thank you Alpha Becky.'

Becky made her way to the front porch, and traced her fingers along the beautiful wooden trim of the support she always used to heft herself up to the first floor.

No matter how many times she saw it, it was still *gorgeous!*

Shaking her head to bring back her focus, Becky lifted herself up onto the roof of the first floor and found her balance.

She wasn't sneaking in, today, so she didn't have to avoid Igor's study window. She just waltzed past it, giving the man a friendly wave when he looked up from his work and sighed at her.

*We have a door!* he mouthed.

Becky just scrunched up her nose stuck out her tongue at him.

Then she climbed up the side of the textured wall, to Adam's window....

Which she threw open and leapt inside of, stumbling and falling flat on her face as she did.

'Hey, Beck,' Adam said, coolly. 'I was wondering when you'd show up.'

'Hey, Adam!' Becky chirped, pushing herself up and checking on her mimics. 'You alright, babies?'

Both mimics gave chirps of confirmation, so Becky shut Adam's window and let them out.

They immediately climbed on top of him and began licking at his face.

'Still in bed?' Becky asked.

'Yeah, for a while,' Adam chuckled. 'I heard from the girls that you're doing a bit of a drive-by of everyone's houses?'

'Yeah!'

'You bring snacks?'

'Duh!'

Adam was promptly smacked in the head with several consecutive bags of chips.

'Ow, Becky!' he laughed, holding up his arm to deflect the food that was thrown at him. 'Careful! Stop!'

'Oh! I got you a gift!' Becky exclaimed as she pulled out the last of the food she'd gotten for Adam. 'Wait, it's here— It's here.... *Here!*'

Adam flinched as he was covered in a mountain of video games and two different handheld consoles. 'Beck?! No! Why—'

'Cos you're *always* getting hurt and stuck in bed, and you can't sit up at your desk to play games when you're in bed!' Becky explained, motioning to Adam's computer and— Doing a double take. 'Oh my god. Okay. Two hot questions; one.

What the fuck is that new setup? I *adore* it! And two. Why is it *on*?

'Uh...' Adam looked nervous as Becky approached his hot pink gaming setup. 'Mm....'

'Have you been *getting up* to play computer games?!' Becky scolded, examining the screen and seeing that a game was on and paused. '*Adam!* You're meant to be in *bed!*'

'Uh... *yeah*,' Adam winced, and Becky got the weird feeling he was trying to hide something—

Which absolutely *couldn't* have been right, because Adam almost *never* kept secrets from her....

'Beck, this must have been expensive,' Adam winced, looking through the games Becky had dumped on him. 'You shouldn't have—'

'Eh, it was only about the same as the microwave I got Wendy!' Becky waved a dismissive hand.

'You got Wendy a microwave?'

'Yeah, an airfryer-oven combo one,' Becky nodded. 'Cos she doesn't wanna come out of her room, and I want her to have, like, good food.'

'So you brought Wendy a fire hazard?' Adam joked. Then he looked worried. 'She's not doing well, is she?'

'No,' Becky confirmed. 'She's about where I was after my accident, mentally. Physically, she's doing better, though. I... uh. Tried to reach out and let her know we love her and are here for her, but I didn't want to scare her into not talking to *more*, you know?'

'Yeah, I do,' Adam sighed.

'I, like, know that I maybe shouldn't have given her the means to stay in her room longer,' Becky admitted. 'But the way I see it is if I fought her on it instead of supporting her decision, she wouldn't trust me to help her if something else bad happens, you know? And like a *lot* of bad stuff has been happening lately so I want her to have someone she feels safe calling on. You know? If she knows I'm supporting her choices, she won't be scared to ask for help cos she knows I won't use that to make her do something she doesn't want to do. You know?'

'That's... smart,' Adam told her. Then he chuckled. 'Oh, yeah. Malinka said you scolded her?'

'Hah, yeah!' Becky chuckled. 'I guess *I'm* being the sensible Mom Friend, for once. Which is like, *weird!* Cos I'm *never* sensible!'

'It certainly *is* a change,' Adam laughed. 'But it means a lot that you're doing this.'

'You all mean the *world* to me! And, like, if nobody else is gonna step up and look after you, then I guess it's gotta be me!' Becky told him. 'But, like. As soon as you're better, I'm being a bimbo again! Okay?'

'*Pfft*, alright,' Adam agreed. 'We're practising our turn-taking, are we?'

'Yeah,' Becky snickered. Then, she turned back to Adam's computer and grabbed the mouse, making to close Adam's game. 'Anyway, you really shouldn't be sitting up at your desk.'

'Oh! Becky, don't turn that off—'

'Please. Do not turn off Takogatcha's game,' a high, robotic voice spoke through the computer, and Becky paused; the mouse hovering just over the *save*

and quit option.

‘Uh...’ Becky paused. ‘Takogatcha? As in... the streamer?’

‘Yes.’

A long, quiet pause passed. Then Becky slowly stepped back from the computer, raising her hands submissively. ‘Shit. Sorry. I, uh. Didn’t realise you were.... I can’t see you. Are you like, a ghost?’

‘Takogatcha is not a ghost,’ replied Takogatcha; and then a familiar avatar appeared on Adam’s computer. A goat furry woman that Becky had seen in her recommended many, *many* times before. ‘Takogatcha is Takogatcha!’

Another pause, before Becky gave the computer finger guns. ‘Okay then.... Are you streaming, right now?’

‘Takogatcha was preparing to stream. But Takogatcha is not streaming, now.’

‘Okay, good. Cos I like, don’t wanna be disruptive or anything...’ Becky turned away from the computer now, back to face Adam, and motioned with a wide hand. ‘Adam?! You know Takogatcha?!’

‘Uh... *yeah*,’ Adam admitted, rubbing the back of his head awkwardly as Mimi nipped at his nose. ‘Mimi, stop— Takogatcha is.... Uh....’

‘Oh. My god,’ Becky’s eyes widened. ‘Is she an A.I? Did you *make* her?!’

‘Takogatcha is much older than Adam,’ said Takogatcha. ‘Takogatcha is ancient. Takogatcha is powerful. Takogatcha. Is.... Sexy.’

‘You sure are, girl. Keep it up!’ Becky didn’t look back as she gave Takogatcha a thumbs up. ‘Adam? Is she like, an A.I?’

‘Uh...’ Adam’s blush deepened, and he averted his gaze. ‘It’s a little... complicated?’

‘Oh.... Is she related to you?’ Becky asked.

‘No. She’s not.’

‘Ah...’ Becky’s brow furrowed. ‘So she’s just. Like... your roommate now?’

Adam’s brow raised. ‘Not *technically* wrong, but also.... I dunno. I’m.... *It’s hard to explain.*’

‘Oh. Okay. Well, you don’t have to explain if it’s like. Private or whatever,’ Becky gave a shrug. ‘I don’t mind.’

‘You... don’t want me to explain?’

‘No, I said you don’t *have* to explain,’ Becky corrected. ‘I *desperately* want you to. But, like. You know.’

‘Ah. Maybe later, then,’ Adam relaxed, giving a nervous chuckle. ‘I know you’ve got a busy day, and I don’t want to distract you too much. Malinka said something about planning a party for Mimi?’

‘*WEDDING!*’ Mimi screamed, right in Adam’s face as she licked him. ‘*Mimi is having a wedding with Mimi’s most special Flamingo!*’

‘Oof, she’s excited, huh?’ Adam chuckled. ‘What’s the event?’

‘She’s... gonna marry Don,’ Becky felt herself blushing.

‘What?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Did *she* ask for that, or did you—’

‘She asked! I hadn’t even *thought* about it.’

‘HAH!’ Adam pet Mimi, ruffling along her back playfully. ‘You’re getting married! Aw, that’s so cute. Is there anything I can do to help?’

*'Adam can help Mimi by letting Fuzzy come,' Mimi chirped. 'Mama! Mama! Ask Adam if Fuzzy will be Mimi's maid of honour!'*

'She uh... she wants...' Becky bit her lip and took a breath, trying not to laugh as both her mimics began to leap around on his lap in excitement. 'She wants Fuzzy to be her maid of honour.'

Adam snorted, biting his own lip, before giving a nod— And twitching his one long ear as a happy chirp sounded from under his bed.

At the mention of its name, the little robot shuffled out from under Adam's bed and held up its arms. 'Becky!' he cried.

'Fuzzy!' Becky greeted, picking Fuzzy up and giving him a cuddle. 'Hello!'

'Hello!'

*'Fuzzy!' Mimi trilled. 'Mimi's best friend! Mimi's best friend, Fuzzy! Hello! Hello, Mimi's best friend!'*

'Mimi!' Fuzzy chirped. 'Hello!'

*'Hello!'*

'Hello!'

*'Hello!'*

'Hello!'

*'Hello!'*

'Hello!'

Becky set Fuzzy on the bed with Mimi, letting the two continue to chirp at each other happily. 'So... do you think Fuzzy would be interested?'

'He would *love* to, I'm sure,' Adam chuckled. Then, his grin grew cheeky. 'I'll have to make him a little dress! Aw. Is it formal wear?'

'Yeah, Mimi wants it to be formal,' Becky confirmed.

'Oh, *yes!*' Adam laughed. 'Aw, this is gonna be great! Is there anything I can do to help? Do you need... uh... I dunno, help decorating? Oh— I can do photos and video, if you like!'

Becky gasped. 'Oh, that would be *perfect!* Yes! Like. Oh my god. Yes!'

'Awesome,' Adam laughed. 'Aw, man. Is Mimi going to take Don's name, or—'

*'Mimi is a feminist!' Mimi chirped, loudly. 'Mimi wants to keep Mimi's name, because Mimi's Mama gave it to Mimi!'*

*'I am honoured to be named after Mimi's family,' Don chuffed, tapping his feet and jamming his head into his mouth to chew on it. 'Honoured! So honoured!'*

'Don's going to become a Bloom,' Becky answered, simply.

'Aw, that's sweet,' Adam grinned. 'You'll have to give me the details, when you can!'

'I will, when I have them,' Becky laughed. 'I've got to swing by Jezzibeth's place, and then I'm heading to the strip mall to do some more planning. You know. Talk to... the florist and... yeah.'

'You're not going to grow the flowers yourself?' Adam asked.

'No, they deserve something special,' Becky answered. 'And, like. I can't reliably like, grow certain types of flowers and stuff. I'm still like, a little wild with my magic. So I wanna get them *good* flowers, you know?'

'Aww,' Adam made a teasing face, and batted at Becky. 'Your little baby's getting married! You're gonna be Don's mother-in-law!'

‘Oh, god, I am!’ Becky laughed. ‘Ugh, though. *Ugh*. I gotta, like, figure out the cake situation!’

‘The cake situation?’

‘Yeah, like. Mimi wants it to be made out of raw meat,’ Becky explained. ‘But, like... Mr Malinka did *not* take well to my questions about it. So now I’m gonna, like. Have to figure out how I can, like. Make *that*....’

For a moment, Adam looked pained. Then he sighed. ‘Ask Dad.’

‘What?’

‘Ask my dad. Victor,’ Adam said, his voice strained. ‘He’s made cakes out of raw meat before....’

‘Oh, shit, for real?’ Becky blinked. Then grinned. ‘Awesome! That would, like. Be a *huge* help! Should I go ask now?’

‘Yeah, sure,’ Adam shrugged as Don began to scale him, his little flamingo face rising up closer and closer until it was pressed into Adam’s cheek as he honked and begged for a pat. ‘Heh. Good boy.... Oh, Beck. While you’re down there, could you ask Pops when lunch is gonna be ready? I’m starved.’

‘Yeah, sure!’ Becky beamed, picking up her pets’ carrier and plopping it on the bed for her mimics. ‘And then I gotta go. I wish I could stay but, like, Portia took up a *lot* of time and I don’t want things to close before we get to like, the strip mall!’

‘Hah,’ Adam gave a laugh as Don flopped away from him and scurried into his carrier. ‘That’s fine. Taka’s gotta stream, anyway.... See you soon, though?’

‘Yeah, *duh*!’ Becky laughed, punching Adam playfully in the arm. Then, she made for the door, whirling around as she walked through. ‘Hey, Takogatcha! Add me on Steam! We can play Stardew together!’

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Convincing Mimi to leave Adam’s house was unexpectedly difficult.

The little mimic hadn’t wanted to stop talking with Fuzzy; even though the conversation was just mindlessly repeating two words over and over (and over and over and over).

But, when Becky had mentioned Jezzibeth and Don had gotten excited to see Applesauce, Mimi had wanted to make Don happy and climbed into the carrier with him.

So, now, Becky was sitting on Jezzibeth’s bed; waiting for her to get out of the shower so she could say hello.

She wondered, for a moment, if she should have come in the front door instead of via the balcony. But she didn’t have time to finish the thought as Jezzibeth came into her room— And screamed.

‘Oh my *lord*, Becky!’ she exclaimed, clutching her towel against herself as she leapt backwards and almost tripped. ‘Hon! You’re going to give me some sort of heart attack! Don’t *do* that!’

‘Hey, Jezzi!’ Becky greeted cheerfully, waving to her friend as Don and Mimi bolted under the woman’s feet and began trilling at her in greeting. ‘How you doing?’

‘Becky, honey— I’m fine,’ Jezzibeth let out a half-exasperated sigh and shut



the door behind herself; placing her hand on her heart and shaking her head. 'Or I *was* fine, until you decided to scare me right out of my own skin!'

'Sorry,' Becky chuckled. 'I, uh... didn't want to come in the door. Jude still has that goose and, like... I don't want it to bite me again. Or pick a fight with Mimi.'

Jezzibeth gave a knowing nod and brushed the hair from her eyes— And Becky felt her heart drop as she saw the healing bruise Jezzibeth had gotten during the fight against Guillmero.

'Honey, what are you doing here?' Jezzibeth asked.

'Well... uh,' Becky rubbed the back of her neck. 'A couple of things. First, like. I just wanted to say thank you for, like, helping—'

'*FIRST IS APPLESAUCE!*' Mimi demanded. '*Mama! Tell Jezzibeth about Mimi's wedding! Don wants Applesauce to come! Jezzibeth HAS to say yes!*'

'Ah,' Becky's cheeks went pink as her mimic leapt into her lap, chirping and trilling loudly.

'She's talkative today,' Jezzibeth pointed out, giving the mimic a pat along its pillow-shaped back. 'What's gotten into her?'

'She, uh... she wants me to tell you about her good news,' Becky gave a giggle. 'Before we get distracted with talking.'

'Oh, well, of course! Sure,' Jezzibeth smiled warmly. 'What is it, hon? What's this good news?'

'Mimi and Don... are... getting married,' Becky told her.

Jezzibeth's hand was back over her heart. 'Aw. That's so precious!'

'*Because Mimi loves Mimi's special Flaming! And Mimi wants everyone to know how special Mimi's Flaming is!*'

'Mimi uh, wants everyone to know how much she loves Don,' Becky explained. 'And, um... Don... wants Applesauce to come.'

'Aw, of course!' Jezzibeth exclaimed. 'Applesauce would *love* a little bit of socialisation! Where are you having it? Your place?'

'*No! Mimi does not want a backyard wedding!*' Mimi exclaimed. '*Mimi wants a SPECIAL wedding! Mimi wants a real wedding! Mimi wants a wedding like in all of Mama's movies!*'

'No...' Becky sighed, feeling her blush growing. 'Mimi wants to hire out a venue.'

'Mimi wants to—' Jezzibeth cut off, looking like she was holding back a giggle. 'Aw, Becky. You'd do anything for her, wouldn't you?'

'She's my baby,' Becky felt herself give a grin as Mimi turned into a plush toy and climbed up to her neck to nuzzle her.

'*Mimi is Mama's baby,*' Mimi confirmed. '*Mama's special stinky girl.*'

'Yeah, my special stinky girl,' Becky agreed, quietly. Then she cleared her throat. 'I, uh. Still have to break the news to Katie and Marilyn. But... I'm not looking forward to Katie's reaction. She's gonna make fun of me, I think.'

'Oh, Becky, she won't...' Jezzibeth trailed off, and closed her eyes with a sigh. 'Ah, what am I saying? Of course she will.'

'*Yaaaah,*' Becky drawled. 'Marilyn's going to be happy about it, though.'

Jezzibeth gave a giggle, and motioned for Becky to turn around. 'Becky, could you please...'

'OH! Right, yep!' Becky spun around to face the wall, focusing *very* hard on a

slightly off-coloured patch of paint that she knew was from the time Katie had accidentally put her fist through the plaster. 'Sooooo.... I was gonna say before. But. Like... *thanks*.'

'Thanks?' Jezzibeth questioned. 'For...?'

'For not, like... letting Guillmero rip me to literal pieces,' Becky said with an awkward chuckle. 'Cos like. I think if he caught me, he was going to, like, play doctor and remove all my organs.'

'Mm,' Jezzibeth gave a low hum. 'Becky... honey. I could *never* let him hurt you. You know that.'

'Yeah, but, like— I still appreciate it,' Becky said, playing with her nails. 'And like. I know it wasn't easy. You know? You really liked him. And what happened, like... *sucked*. For you. And I want to acknowledge it sucked for you, cos I don't think anyone has like... really done that? Like. Everyone's talking about how cool you were, or how like. Scary the demons all were. Or like, a *general* sense of how it sucked for *everyone*, but.... I don't think anyone's like... just thought about how shitty the situation is for you. And like. You *specifically*. You know? You had to make a really hard choice, and hurt someone you really liked. Like.... I don't think I could fight Mattel, if she came at me with a knife. I mean— Maybe I could? But like. It would *suck*. A lot. And you having to fight Guillmero when you really liked him for a really long time really *really* sucked. You know?'

Becky heard Jezzibeth give a sigh, and then felt her friend's hand on her shoulder. 'Thank you.'

'I just...' Becky echoed Jezzibeth's sigh, and turned to let her friend embrace her. The feeling of Jezzibeth's hand in her hair brought tears to her eyes, and she sniffed. 'I hope you know that I don't take you for granted.'

'I know you don't, Becky. I know....'

~~~~~

Becky hadn't meant to cry, when she'd been talking to Jezzibeth. But she had.... She'd become a sniffly, snively, emotional mess who couldn't stop telling her friend how much she loved her. It had been a *wonder* that Becky had been able to calm down enough to continue her day.

But, with a little bit of help from her friend, Becky had managed to stop crying, fix her makeup, and head down to the strip mall.

She had slowly been making her way down the list of places she had to visit.

From making a rather large order of treats from Mr Muffins for the buffet and being told that hosting a mimic wedding was very "on brand" for her, to spending two solid hours at the florists, translating Don's questions about flowers and bouquets... which would be safe for mimics... which would be pink... which smelt the best....

Becky was sure that not a single one of the shop owners she'd spoken to about Mimi's wedding wasn't convinced she was completely, utterly, fully *insane*.

Well. Maybe *Raymond* didn't think she was crazy. But that wasn't going to stop him from making fun of her, she was sure.

And now, she was trying to plan out the venue.

*Twelve different places they'd been.*

And Mimi hadn't thought a *single one of them* was good enough.

Becky was *actually* reaching the end of her rope.

Her and her mimic had made the deal; indoor venues only. Because too many of the guests were animals to risk the thing being outside.... But Becky was almost ready to let Mimi choose somewhere outside; because nothing indoors was what she wanted!

She didn't want Town Hall. Or the church. Or *any* of the halls and venues they went to!

Mimi was so, so incredibly picky....

And, like. Of course she was allowed to be picky! Becky wanted her wedding to be *perfect*! But she was about to lose her mind and just *build* something for her baby to get married in!

Oh, *sweet lord*. Becky wanted to find somewhere Mimi liked.

'No,' Mimi decided, giving a low trill. '*Mimi does not like this restaurant. Mimi thinks the lights are too yellow. And the walls are too ugly. Mimi does not want to get married here. Mimi would like to please see the next place.*'

Becky heaved a very, very heavy sigh. 'Mimi, baby, I think this is the last place in town that'll let us hire them out,' Becky sighed. 'Sorry, baby.'

Mimi blew a short raspberry before licking Becky's cheek. '*Mimi is sad. Mimi does not like any place that Mimi has seen.*'

'Aw, baby—'

'*Maybe we can look at the Other Place!*' Don suggested with a loud honk. '*Where Alpha Becky goes to see Alpha Goodhuman? There are lots of pretty places there! Lots of places that are pretty like my pretty pink Mimi is! Yes! Yes! Maybe there, we will find the right place!*'

Mimi gave an excited trill, and tightened its grip on Becky's shoulder. 'Yes! Yes? Please, Mama?'

'Um... sure,' Becky said, tentatively. 'But, like... not today. Okay? We don't have time left to look, today.'

'*Mimi can wait until later,*' Mimi purred, nuzzling into Becky's neck. '*Mimi is tired. And Mimi would like to go home.*'

'You'd like to go home?' Becky asked.

'Yes.'

'Okay, we can go home,' Becky said, giving her mimic a kiss between its eyes. 'Come on, babies. We'll talk to Dad and Isa about the venue thing, and see what they think....'

~~~~~

Becky arrived home to an absolute mess.

She wasn't sure, exactly, *what* her father had been thinking— But he was apparently just as excited to be helping with Don and Mimi's wedding as Don and Mimi were to be having it. And he had spent the entire time that Becky had been out designing... so many different things.

He'd made, like, *fifty-billion* concepts for outfits for the mimics to wear.

And at least twice as many rough designs for the invites and RSVP cards.

Becky picked up one of the *probably-four-hundred* pieces of paper that were

scattered across the lounge room and hall, and read the fancy text her father had written:

*“The Bloom household requests the honour of your presence at the wedding of*

*MIMI BLOOM and DON FLAMINGLE*

*on the (date)*

*at (location).*

*-Catering provided (animal, people, and vegan options available)*

*-Formal dress required*

*-Gifts optional”*

Wow... he'd been busy.

Becky put the paper back down *exactly* where she'd picked it up from, and carefully stepped over her father's work to get to the stairs.

'Isa?' she called out. 'Dad? Are you home?'

'I'm upstairs!' Ken called back. 'Come up, sweetheart!'

Becky hurried up the steps and glanced around the hall; her father's bedroom door was half-open, so she guessed her parents were in there.

'Rebecca, hello!' Ken greeted warmly as she poked her head in. 'Come in, come in!'

'Hey, Dad,' Becky greeted back, giving Ken a tight hug and then slipping off the carrier and letting Mimi and Don out. 'You've been busy, huh?'

'Yes— Isa is making me take a break. She said it is not healthy to— Oh! Hello Don!' Ken's warm smile grew wider as Don leapt into his lap and settled down. Ken scratched down the mimics back as it panted, but anxiously withdrew his hands when Mimi climbed up his leg and lay over the top of Don. 'Ooh, h-hello, Mimi....'

'Hello, Pépé,' Mimi gave a trill, and then began to purr.

Becky giggled as her father very, *very* slowly lowered his hands onto her mimics.

Then, she looked around.

She didn't come into her father's room, often. She never really had a reason; if she had a problem, Isa was usually her go-to....

*Oh?*

Becky spied, hanging on her father's wall by his desk, some of her old schoolwork.

There was an art project she'd done in primary school.

And one of the sports participation awards she'd (thought) had been put into storage years ago.... Her first C+ (which, until this year, had been her *only* C+).... A photo of her with her childhood dance class....

Becky's ear twitched.

She didn't realise he was proud of her for these things.

None of them were actually *good* achievements— Like her cheerleading awards she kept in her room.... This was the stuff she'd always considered pointless, or garbage....

'Becky?'

'Huh?' Becky looked back to her father.

'Are you alright?' he asked. 'You were staring.'

‘Oh, uh— Sorry,’ she sat down next to Ken, and pet her knee to call Mimi over. ‘So, uh.... Hey.’

‘Hello, sweetheart,’ Ken said softly. ‘How did everything go, today? How are your friends?’

‘Aw, mostly good,’ Becky answered. ‘Adam and Malinka are recovering. And Portia’s being... Portia. But I’m worried about Wendy.’

‘The... little kobold girl, yes?’

‘Yeah,’ Becky confirmed. ‘She’s not doing the best. I’m worried, but like... there’s not much I can do unless she asks me to help her. You know?’

‘Yes, I do,’ Ken wrapped his arm around his daughter and pulled her close. ‘I know *very* well how hard it is to wait for someone you love to reach out to you.’

Becky blushed, giving a cough and biting her lip.

He was talking about her; there was no way he could have possibly made that clearer, except for maybe for stating it outright.

‘Uh... so, I saw the invites you were working on!’ Becky tried to change the subject. ‘They’re looking really good!’

‘Oh, yes!’ Ken clapped his hands happily, and then leapt to his feet (picking Don up and holding him like a baby as he did) and hurried out the door. ‘Would you like to see the one I like the best, so far?’

‘Sure,’ Becky laughed, though she was sure she wasn’t going to get a choice. She put Mimi on her shoulder as she followed Ken.

She’d barely made it to the stairs by the time Ken was coming back up them; a piece of paper in his hand.

Becky took it, looking at it carefully.

It had the same text as the one she’d seen previously, but was much prettier.

At the top was a rough concept of Mimi and Don, sitting together; their names written in cursive underneath.

The rest of the invitation text was written in regular block letters, and the trim of the card was decorated with winding pink flowers and little brown plush bears.

The date and location was blank, as they didn’t actually know either of these things, yet.... But the card was beautiful. Even in its rough state.

And, as Becky held it up for Mimi to see, she got confirmation that the mimic liked it through a happy scream and immediate zoomies up and down the hall.

*‘Pretty! Pépé Ken made Mimi and Flamingle the prettiest card!’*

Ken’s face lit up as Don looked at the card and shared Mimi’s excitement; tapping his feet before running after the other mimic.

‘They like it?’ Ken asked.

‘They *love* it!’ Becky confirmed.

‘Oh! I will— I will work on it more!’ Ken exclaimed, taking the card from Becky and hurrying back downstairs. ‘I will do the art of them, now! Yes! Yes! Don! Come, Don! Mimi, too! Mimi! *Pspspsp*! I need you as reference! Come! Come pose for me!’

The two mimics all but leapt down the stairs after Ken, and the three of them vanished into the lounge together.

Becky giggled, as they did. And then slowly let out her breath....

*Where was Isa?* she wondered, looking up and down the hall. All the doors

were shut, so... maybe....

Becky gave a very light knock on Isa's door and listened for a response.

Nothing.... Isa was either asleep or outside.

Slowly, Becky opened the door, and peeked into the room.

Isa was in bed, laying on top of her blankets, fully dressed except for her shoes and hair-pins.

Mimi gave a loud, happy chirp downstairs and Becky quickly hurried into Isa's room, closing the door so the noise downstairs would be muffled and not disturb her mother.

Then, she quietly made her way to the bed and laid down with Isa. She snuggled against Isa's chest as the woman, still mostly-asleep, wrapped an arm around her daughter and pulled her close.

Isa took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as her face buried into Becky's hair, and the last thing Becky heard as she drifted off was her mother's calm, even heartbeat.

—END—

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