

Couples Night

By C. Jade Wyton

Don Flamingle thinks it is a very beautiful night. The stars are out and the backyard is beautiful and full of life.... He wants to share this moment with his pretty pink Mimi. So he slides open Alpha Becky's window and the two sneak out together to frolic in the streets together— And then, together with one— No, two— No, three! Three of Don's friends!

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It was a beautiful, cloudless night.

Stars hung in the sky, dotting the black above with tiny white specks like the pattern rain would make on concrete before a storm.

The air was crisp and cool, contrasting the warmth of the day, and smelt of pollen and freshly-cut grass.

Not this house's grass, of course. They didn't bother to mow the lawn, here; it was the back neighbours who had mowed just before it got dark, and the smell of their grass deposited to compost was wafting over the fence and into the garden shed.

Don sniffed the air.

*He liked this smell.*

It was orderly, and domestic. The smell of people who didn't have to fight and struggle and bully each other to survive. Not like the mimics back at his old nest had to.

Don was glad he had left.

He wasn't a very good fighter.

Or hunter.

Or shapeshifter.

Or anything, really.

Even *he* wasn't sure how he had survived so long without Alpha Becky to look after him.

He liked Alpha Becky. She was patient with him, and made sure he had food that was easy to eat with no bones and small bites.

*It was nice not to feel hungry all the time.*

It had just been a *feeling*, when Don had decided to follow Alpha Becky home.

Just a tug in his heart that told him that she was going where he needed to be.

She'd been so kind, and gentle, and soft, as she'd given all of the other mimics treats. And then she'd been curious and kind to the other upright-walking people—people who were complete strangers to her at the time— making peace and friends with them instead of fighting over territory.

She'd had a smell to her that had tickled him, too.

Don had liked that smell. He had liked that smell a *lot*.

Strong. And musky. And healthy.

One of dominance, and love, and a marking of family and territory.

One that said *this person is mine!*

He soon found out that had been Mimi's smell.

His pretty pink Mimi.

And now she had marked *him* with that smell, too. Her dominant alpha smell that said *this is Mimi's Flamingle, and if you bite Mimi's Flamingle Mimi will bite you!*

Don liked how his smell had changed since he had come to the Bloom House.

He didn't smell like a tired and sick omega who scavenged for scraps anymore; he smelt like a very loved beta who got to share food (*real* food, not just the yucky-tasting leftovers) with his family.

Sniffing the air again, Don slowly rose onto his thin, spindly legs and shook himself down. Scraps of the sponge he had chewed on earlier flung themselves across the shed.

He scrambled his way up onto the abandoned lawnmower and perched at the very top of it on its handle so he could look out the window.

Mimi had told him that Alpha Jareth and his brother Benny used to mow the grass down with this lawnmower. But since Alpha Becky had gotten her druid powers, the grass would spring back up too fast to control. So now the lawnmower didn't do much besides sit in the shed as a perch for Don when he wanted to watch the rain without getting wet.

The little pink mimic looked out over the yard, letting his long tongue loll out the side of his mouth as he panted and drooled.

The lawn looked very different than when he had first come to live here.

Before, it had been almost all one type of grass. Very straight. And very pale green. With no variation and not many flowers or fun-looking weeds.

But Alpha Becky had worked very hard on it. She had done something she called *over-seeding*, and planted a lot of native grasses and flowers. So much so that the regular lawn grass couldn't grow properly and was out-competed by the native plants.

Some seeds, Don knew, had been given to her by the erkling. These ones she'd planted under the tree by her window.

The rest of the plants she'd either bought on her computer, or gone out into the woods to find.

And now, after months of hard work, the entire yard was pretty. With patches of bluestem, and switchgrass, and coneflowers— Don liked the coneflowers a lot.

They were pretty pink things, with large middle-bits that made bees very happy.

Don liked the smell of them, too.

Don liked a lot of smells.

And he also liked the paving stones that Alpha Jareth and Benny had put down, leading all the way from the back door of the house to the shed.

It made Don so happy! They'd done that *just* for him! So that he could walk to and from the house easily.

Don really liked the house because that was where his pretty Mimi lived— But he loved the shed, because it was *his*. And he was allowed to make it look like however he wanted!

But he also loved Mimi. So much so that they were going to be *married!*

Don gave a happy snuffle as he thought about his beautiful mate and climbed

down off the lawn mower.

He wanted to see his special, beautiful, pretty pink Mimi. So he slipped out the little mimic-flap in the shed door that Jareth had installed for him as a “Christmas Present” (what a wonderful alpha Jareth was!) and began to snuffle his way slowly over the path.

He found a bug (which he ate) crawling in along the gap between the stones and then veered off into the grass towards the tree that grew up to Becky’s bedroom window. On the way he found a fallen leaf (which he also ate) and then tripped on a stick. But tripping over didn’t deter him as he got back up and scaled the tree, using the rough textures in the bark as footholds for his tiny little feet.

Snuffling deep in the back of his throat Don smelt along the gap in the window.

Alpha Becky had taught him how to open doors. And since then he had realised that *most* person-things worked a lot simpler than he had first thought.

There was a thing called a *hinge*. And if something had a *hinge*, you could almost always open it.

But you couldn’t open it from the side that the hinge was on— You had to go to the other side of the thing, where there were no hinges.

The breadbox had a hinge.

And so did some of the windows around town.

Not all of them, though. Some of them slid sideways, like the back door did.

Becky’s bedroom window slid sideways. Don knew this because he had watched her do it before.

But it was a little bit different from the back door because it only unlocked on *one* side. And that was the inside....

But Don knew that Becky never locked her bedroom window. Just in case she stayed out late and wanted to sneak back in— Or if Bianca wanted to come over she would sometimes use the window.

*So it should be as easy to open as the back door....*

Don wedged his beak against the window’s frame and slowly —carefully— nudged it.

It moved, and he heard a happy trill as he slid it open and flopped inside.

His Mimi was excited to see him! And he was excited to see her!

There was a quiet *thump* as Mimi leapt off the bed and skittered over to lick at Don as he stumbled to his feet.

The two mimics sniffed and licked each other, circling and purring compliments as they did.

*Clever Flamingle! Handsome Flamingle! Special Flamingle!*

*Pretty pink Mimi! Pretty Mimi! My pretty pink Mimi!*

It was a good moment as they greeted each other warmly.

Then, Mimi rubbed her face into Don’s side, pressing tight and releasing her smell onto him.

*Flamingle belongs to Mimi. This is Mimi’s Flamingle. Mimi loves Flamingle.*

Don purred harder as he was scent-marked, and shifted so Mimi could rub him all over and get her smell on all of him.

He loved being Mimi’s Flamingle.

Mimi gave a trill when she was finished scenting Don and skittered over to the

open window, curiously sniffing at the air outside.

She wanted to know how he'd done it....

But Don had promised he wouldn't teach Mimi how to open the doors, and he assumed that meant he couldn't teach her how to use the windows either....

Don quickly communicated this, and Mimi gave an understanding gurgle.

She understood; Becky was an alpha. An alpha above even Mimi! Which meant if she didn't want Don to show Mimi something, then Don couldn't.

Don purred as Mimi came back to him and licked his face.

Mimi was the best mate! She loved him so much!

And Don loved her!

Don gave a happy snort and bounded around Mimi, tapping his feet in excitement before jumping up at the window and huffing for her to join him.

But Mimi gurgled again. And this time it was nervous.

And Don knew what Mimi was thinking about; even before Mimi trilled and leapt back onto the bed to check on Alpha Becky.

It had been a big day for the alpha. And even if she hadn't realised it, it had left her very tired.

She'd left for school early, leaving Don behind for once because it was the first day of a very special week in school.

Mimi and Don had heard Becky's parents talking about it. Yes. Yes they had!

*Exam* week.

Neither Don nor Mimi knew what an *exam* was, but they both knew that a week was many days put together.

Alpha Isa had been very worried about Alpha Becky's "attitude" towards the exams. She said that Becky hadn't seemed to care, and had been distracted with other things before going to school.

*She'd not been the least bit worried about failing!* Alpha Isa had fretted.

Don didn't understand why Alpha Isa and Ken were so worried about Becky *not* being worried....

It was smart of Alpha Becky to clear her head and keep calm, Don thought. If this *exam* was to do with testing her druid powers (as what Don overheard seemed to imply), being stressed out was only going to make it harder. Her powers were connected to her emotions, after all!

And, after coming home for the night and being asked how her exams went by her father, she'd made what Don thought was a very good point:

She'd said that she had done her best, given the circumstances. And that she thought she was doing very good at being a druid considering she'd only known she was one for less than a year. Some of her classmates had been practising their *whole lives* and she couldn't expect to suddenly be on the same level as them when she was only just *now* learning how to keep her clothes on while wildshaping.

She'd said that druidry was a skill that took time and if she failed, it just meant she needed a bit longer to hone her skills and get more familiar with her magic. It wasn't a big deal!

There had been a bit of an argument, then. With some back and forth between Alpha Becky and Alpha Isa about how serious these exams were and how serious Becky should be taking them. That was, until Becky had lost her patience and

snapped that she had *tried!* She had tried the very best that she was able to, and she'd *actually put effort into her work today* and that *nothing she did was ever good enough for them!*

Don thought that Ken looked like he was going to collapse when Becky had yelled that last part. And Alpha Isa was stunned into a moment of silence; which Becky had used as an opportunity to storm up to her room and slam the door.

Alpha Becky's upset had been short-lived, though, as Isa had gone upstairs and spoken to her. Something about worrying about her future and how Alpha Becky was *so much smarter* than she thought she was and how they just wanted what was best for her....

Becky had loudly sulked about how *nobody understood her* for the rest of the evening, before heading to bed much earlier than usual.

So of course, after all that, Don hadn't been surprised when his pretty pink Mimi had spent all of the night so far curled up against Alpha Becky's chest....

Mimi finished licking Becky's hair and turned back around to Don, giving a quiet chirp and jumping down to the floor.

She had confirmed that Alpha Becky was fine and didn't need her comfort, so she wanted to go into the backyard and play with Don.

*How exciting!*

Don couldn't help but tap his feet as Mimi joined him on the windowsill.

They shared a quick, affectionate lick, before making their way down to the ground.

Don slithered down the tree, staying close to the truck and dropping from branch to branch; while Mimi climbed down the slatted wall of the house with her long beautiful spider legs.

She got to the ground first and waited for Don as he flopped off the last branch and landed clumsily in the soft, long grass with a quiet *honk!*

Mimi ran over and licked at him as he lay on his back, his little legs scrabbling in the air until he managed to role over and lick her back.

They showed their affections for a moment before Mimi paused and sniffed; suddenly very interested in the air.

Don gave a snuffle, but found he couldn't smell what Mimi had smelt past the flowers in the yard. Even so, he understood Mimi's excited chitter. And when she hunkered down and shifted her form into a rock, Don lifted his leg and curved his neck and stood very, *very* still for her.

She was *hunting*.

And Don was very excited to watch.

So he stood still in the mid-length grass, his long legs holding him up high and tall so he could survey the yard.

He tried not to make too much noise, though it was hard. His breathing was rough and ragged as always, even when he tried to hold his breath. And the force of his panting made him wobble on the one thin leg that held him upright.

Mimi gave an encouraging chirp, and then another chitter, before slowly edging her way into the taller grass.

Don didn't dare follow. He just watched as the slow, barely-there rustling of the tall grass marked Mimi's movement.

Then it stopped, and Don went as still as he possibly could as he waited....

And waited....

And waited....

The grass rustled frantically and a mouse let out half a scream that was cut off a loud *crunch!*

Mimi had caught it!

Don was so proud of her!

She was a good hunter. Yes. A *very* good hunter!

He tapped his feet in excitement as Mimi brought the dead mouse back and dropped it at his feet.

She gave an affectionate chirp, and Don honked back.

She wanted him to eat it!

It was a gift, for her most precious Flamingle!

Don was so excited that he swallowed the dead mouse whole.

Then he choked, spraying saliva across the grass as he hawked it up again and spat it to the ground with a quiet *plap*.

Mimi chattered lovingly as Don shook himself down and tried again to swallow the mouse.

And again.

And— There! He kept it down that time!

A happy shake, an affectionate nibble, and then Mimi took off across the yard.

Don gave a surprised honk and followed after her. He ran circles with her around the shed before she broke away and made towards the gate separating the back yard from the front.

She bounced off its painted wood with a *thump*, bolted back around the shed, and then rushed back and leapt up again; gripping the gate with her spidery legs and climbing to the other side.

Don quickly followed her, scrabbling on the wood before hefting himself over and falling heavily onto the front lawn.

Another flurry of licks met his face before the two mimics were frolicking down the street together, weaving between bushes and bins and car tires.

It really was a beautiful night.

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It had been at least two hours since Don and Mimi had left the yard to play in the streets, and Don had been showing Mimi all of his favourite places to go when he was left alone.

There was the chair by the park where he'd once found half a sandwich.

The rock shaped like an egg.

The lawn with the collection of lawn-flamingos in funny outfits.

The garden owned by that old lady who didn't get mad when she found him eating her carrots.

The treehouse where a child was trying to hide their newly-summoned familiar (a turtle with a *great* sense of humour!) from their mother.

And the alley at the strip mall behind the hot topic where he'd found his first pop vinyl to start his collection (it was half-melted, though that didn't bother him).

Now finally, after wandering around town for so long, the two mimics were starting to get tired. So they headed for the nearby park and settled down under the stars together.

The sky was very beautiful. Bright white stars speckled the dark blue-black, shining like glitter. The moon shone in a very pretty way, its bright silver glow illuminating the park as brightly as the nearby street lamps.... And the few clouds that had formed since the mimics had left kept their distance, forming funny-looking shapes but not obstructing the view.

Don felt Mimi shuffle closer into his side as he looked up at the sky, and he let out a deep purr before laying his head gently over her.

They'd have to go home, soon, to check on Alpha Becky. It was getting to that time of night when she'd have her dreams.... If she had a bad one she'd need them there to comfort her.

That was Don's job, after all. His very important job that he had been trusted with. And he thought he was getting very good at it!

Whenever Alpha Becky would forget where she was and accidentally get stuck in her own head, Don was able to bring her back. Even when she started panicking, and scratching or biting at herself; he would worm his body into her way so she couldn't, and she'd pat him instead and use his calm composure (which was *very* hard to keep sometimes, because of how nervous he always felt!) to remind herself she was okay....

Yes. It was almost that time of night Becky would wake up from her nightmares. They should probably go home to check on her.

Don communicated this to Mimi with a low gurgle and whine, and she trilled her agreeance back before rising up and shaking herself out. And Don followed suit; though when he shook himself down he sprayed spit across the park.

Then, Don paused as he looked across the grass.

Someone else was here....

A shadow no bigger than a cat (but much rounder and lower to the ground) was slowly snuffling its way from patch of dirt to patch of dirt.

Mimi gave a low warning growl as she followed Don's eye, but Don comforted her with a snort.

It was a familiar shape. One Don had seen many many times before. So many times before that he hadn't really thought to ever pay attention to it....

Ah!

Yes!

Don gave a happy honk as he realised who this was.

Tex! The armadillo! He was one of Becky's classmates!

Er... no. Wait.... That was't right....

He was one of her *classmate's familiars*. Though, from what Don saw, Tex paid more attention to Professor Crane in homeroom than his owner Romero did.

Either way, Don knew Tex from school. So he gave a loud, friendly honk to get the critter's attention before stumbling over and tripping on him.

Tex didn't care. He was too busy digging a big worm out of the ground. He chewed it loudly, the unnatural green goop that leaked from the undead armadillo's orifices mixing with the mushed up worm and leaking down his chin.

Only after he was done eating did he turn to sniff at Don, who had managed to

roll over and was panting happily.... Then, Tex sneezed, spraying his green goop over Don. So Don stood up and shook himself down, ridding himself of the green spit and accidentally flinging his own over Tex.

So Tex shook himself down, too. And got more green all over Don.

So Don shook himself down again, getting more spit on Tex.

This cycle repeated itself for a few minutes before Mimi gave a loud chirp and told Don to roll in the grass to wipe himself clean, instead.

Don did as he was told, rubbing himself in the short grass and flailing his legs around as he did. When he was finally clean he stood back up and honked to Tex, who sniffed loudly back.

Tex was looking for bugs to eat. But he was having a lot of trouble because the grass was so short and the dirt so hard and compacted.... So Don offered for him to come home with them!

Their grass was *very* long, and their dirt was very soft. And Alpha Becky looked after the yard in a way that made bugs want to live in it because, even if bugs scared her, she had put plants in *just* to attract them because she knew they were important to have around.

Tex liked this idea. He was happy to go anywhere that had bugs he could eat.

So the trio made their way slowly through the streets together, heading back in the direction of home. They chittered and honked and grunted in conversation as they did, discussing important things. Like food and water and their owners and food and grass and bugs.

Tex was rather pleasant company, Don thought. Even if Mimi and he had *loudly* disagreed on what flavour of chips tasted the best.

It was then, about halfway home, that Don noticed *another* familiar shape.

This one was very loaf-like. With a long, bald tail and polite demeanour. This was Jeremy Spoils; an opossum familiar that Don got to see whenever Becky went over to her friend Portia's house (or sometimes, if she was caught in the woods at night by Ranger Stephen and he brought her home).

He was a lovely, lovely opossum... so Don thought it was odd that he was chewing on the window pane of a house that most certainly was not his!

Hurrying over, Don gave a honk to get Jeremy's attention— And then realised with a surprised snort that! Oh! That wasn't Jeremy's reflection in the window! It was a different opossum inside!

That made sense, now! Jeremy had told Don all about his girlfriend, Pockets, and their tragic love.

Separated! All because Pockets was an indoor-only opossum who wasn't allowed to go outside to spend time with him!

Don understood that pain. Mimi was supposed to be indoor-only, too, unless she was with Alpha Becky.

A groan of sympathy escaped Don as Jeremy went back to gnawing at the edge of the window, and he licked his good friend's side.

If only there was some way to help Jeremy....

Don carefully examined the window.

This one was locked, unlike Becky's. And there was no way to unlock it from the outside....

Hm....

Don gave a honk as he had a thought, and told Pockets to hurry to the front door.

Her ears perked up curiously, and she politely grunted before jumping down and vanishing from view.

The other animals all watched Don curiously as he stumbled over to the front door and made a very big leap up to the handle. He clung on tight and pulled himself up so that he could stick his thin little leg into the keyhole....

Carefully he felt his way inside, shifting his leg's form until it fit in perfectly and—

Click!

The door unlocked.

Chrnk!

Don turned the handle.

Creaaaaaak....

Slowly, the door opened, revealing a very surprised-looking Pockets on the other side.

Jeremy was over the moon as he ambled over and licked her cheek; their first real touch, fur to fur, without glass between them.

Their kisses and licks were much more polite than Don and Mimi's. They took some time to groom each other's fur, and then turned to the group as Tex complained loudly of being hungry.

A few chitters, and grunts, and snorts, and it was agreed that Jeremy and Pockets would enjoy Becky's backyard as well. So they joined the trio, turning it into a group of five, and headed through the streets to Becky's house.

It took a while before they arrived at the house. Jeremy was a slow walker; which was okay, because they still got home eventually.

The gate wasn't hard to figure out. The latch was new, and a little confusing, but Don had seen Alpha Jareth open it a few times and knew you had to... pull up this part and....

It swung open easily, and the animals below Don all made happy thankful sounds as they entered the yard and began rooting through the grass.

Don showed Tex over to the back fence where Becky had pulled up the grass in preparation to plant some bushes, and Tex immediately started digging, excited about the soft rich dirt and its many grubs and worms.

Then, when Mimi trilled for Don, he hurried over to meet her at the tree by Becky's window and they climbed up it together to check on Alpha Becky.

She was still asleep, looking rather peaceful. And she barely stirred when Mimi licked her cheek; so the two mimics went back to the yard and showed Jeremy and Pockets around.

They were a lovely couple of opossums. Both very polite; they made sure not to pull up Becky's plants as they looked for seeds and bugs to eat.

Jeremy even asked how the wedding plans were going and was excited to hear that there were very few things left to plan— The venue, music, and exact date were all that was left to figure out. But Becky had been told to take a break by a friend who was worried for her health; so Mimi and Don were going to wait until *after* all the other stressful things were over. Because it was important to them that Becky enjoyed their wedding, too!

Jeremy thought that was smart. Then asked if he could bring Pockets.

The answer was, of course, yes. Pockets was wonderful and she was more than welcome to come.

She thought it was sweet, but said she would have to ask her wizard,
Baloney—

Baloney!

Baloney was Malinka's boyfriend!

Don knew him! And he knew if he asked his Alpha Becky, she would convince him to bring Pockets.

So it was settled; Pockets would be coming to the wedding!

Tex let out a loud sneeze and complained of being thirsty, so Don showed him his water bowl.... Which, oops. Was empty!

Don gave a snuffle, knowing there was water in the kitchen, and led the armadillo to the back door.

He opened it and Tex started to head inside—

Mimi blocked him off, demanding that he wipe his feet on the mat first, because he was very dirty and this house had rules!

Tex reluctantly did as he was told and wiped his feet and underbelly clean before Mimi let him inside and guided him to the kitchen.

Pockets and Jeremy didn't need to be told to wipe their feet. They found a clean spot on the mat and made sure they weren't going to track dirt through the house before following Don in.

They didn't much want to drink out of the bowl after Tex had slobbered in it, so Mimi let them up on the counter (something that wasn't *supposed* to be allowed, but that Mimi thought would be okay under these circumstances) and Don turned on the kitchen sink for them.

They had been *very* nice about not leaving marks on the bench top; Pockets even going as far as to wipe away one of Jeremy's footprints with her elbow fur.

After having their drinks, the group headed into the lounge room to rest and take a break. They leapt up onto the soft, leather couch (not Becky's special one—She wouldn't like the stains Tex would leave!) and settled down together.

Mimi found the remote where Ken had lost it between the cushions and gently chewed on it until the television turned on.

All of the animals' attentions were immediately drawn as a cat food advertisement played.

Then, their attention fell as the *actual* program showed up again, and they began chattering with each other as they waited for the next ad break.

Dog food! Lamps! A car!

Oh, the boring murder mystery came on again....

Lawnmowers! A restaurant! Children's toys!

The murder mystery....

Cat food! Board games! Another car—

Footsteps stumbled on the stairs and Don turned to watch as Ken, bleary-eyed and still obviously half-asleep, stumbled into the room.

All of the animals stopped chattering as he walked past them to the kitchen. They heard him fill a cup of water and drink it. Then he had another.

Then he passed the animals again, stumbling through the lounge and back

towards the stairs—

His footsteps paused, suddenly, and he quickly returned to the lounge to stare at the group of creatures on his couch.

He stared.

They stared back.

He squinted.

Don realised he wasn't wearing his glasses.

Mimi gave a chirp of greeting.

Ken's eyes widened.

Tex sneezed.

Ken slowly backed out of the room.

'Beecky?'

—END—

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