

Sober Up

By C. Jade Wyton

Kenneth Bloom hates his sister-in-law. He hates her with a passion. But when she asks him to help her stay safe meeting a potential date, Ken recounts an old memory and knows that, even if he hates the woman, he cannot in good conscious leave her to meet with a stranger alone.... It's just not what his Barbra would have wanted.

Contains some mentions of rape, violence, alcohol.

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Kenneth Bloom couldn't believe he was doing this.

He couldn't believe that he was driving all the way to Warm Waters, at fucking *ten at night*, to meet with his sister-in-law.

He hated Isabel.

He had *always* hated Isabel.

And he was pretty sure that was *never* going to change. There was just too much history between the two of them to ever forget. Or to ever forgive....

He was going to hate Isabel for as long as he lived, and probably long after his death.

His ghost would be sitting in the graveyard a thousand years from now, pacing back and forth and thinking about how much he wanted to wring her stupid neck!

Racist cow.

Attention seeking whore....

Ken sighed as he finally reached town, and unmuted his GPS so it would lead him to whatever dumb club it was that Isabel had wanted to meet at.

He hated Isabel but... when she'd called him just a little over an hour ago, her voice trembling as if she was on the brink of tears, she had fearfully brought up an incident from a long, long time ago....

It was while he still worked the job with Isabel at the old studio— Before that awful mess with the engagement and Barbra's parents.

Isabel had met a man for a date, not thinking to tell anyone where she was going, and come to work the next day with a haunted look.

He'd never forgotten that look as she cried into her sister's arms and recounted her rape.

Barbra had stroked Isabel's hair, and held her close, and promised she would "deal with" him.

That was the first time Ken had ever seen Barbra with blood on her. She'd shown up at his house, her knuckles stripped raw from beating the man within an inch of his life....

Ken hadn't known the sheer force of that sort of anger until the incident with Becky in France.

And from what he'd overheard about what happened with Romero, and

Guillmero, and that cult that tried to take Malinka— It sounded like Becky had that same fire.

*How terrible it was to live in a world where so many people had such bad intentions.*

He could understand why Isabel was so scared and panicking about this date she had arranged with some stranger from the internet. And he knew why she had called him, begging him to be there to meet them just in case it all went wrong.

Apparently he was the scariest person she could think to call on.

*Him.*

The man who had ended up in the E.R once because his wife's friend had laughed just a little too loud and sudden and frightened him so badly that he had jumped in fear, tripped on the rug, and hit his head on the coffee table.

*He was one of the scariest people she knew.*

It was so unbelievable that he almost laughed.

Almost.

He wasn't *quite* in the mood.

He hadn't really wanted to help Isabel with this. It was so incredibly out of his way, just to do a favour for someone he didn't even like....

But, as Isabel had begged him, he'd thought about Barbra.

He knew that Barbra wouldn't have wanted Isabel to face this alone.... Even if they hadn't spoken for over a decade before she'd died, Ken knew that Isabel had meant a *lot* to her.

She wouldn't have left Isabel feeling so terrified and distraught.

So he couldn't leave her, either—

Ken hit the breaks, laying on his horn as he was cut off. 'You stupid woman! The light is red! You will cause an accident— NO! Mange ma merde! NO! Salope! SALOPE!'

He beeped again as the woman flipped him off, before throwing his hands up furiously at her and watching her drive away.

'Stupid cow,' he mumbled, shaking his head and making the turn he was entitled to.

*'Your destination is on the left.'*

Ken grumbled to himself as he pulled into the club parking lot and took a moment to breathe.

This looked like that same club that Mattel had been dumped at in that video.

A little harder to enjoy watching it, since Guillmero had psychologically tortured and then attempted to *murder* his daughter and her friends; though the memory of Mattel having a drink poured on her head was still very funny to him.

It was a nice little bit of karma after all the harm she'd done to Becky.

Ken felt his heart sink as he thought about it all.

He'd thought he was going to lose her. He thought his little girl was going to get lost in that horrible world of hate and bigotry, with no way for him to pull her out.

But she'd ended up pulling *herself* out....

Ken's phone buzzed, and he looked down to check the text he'd gotten from Isabel asking where he was.

A sigh escaped him, then, as he undid his seatbelt and climbed out.

Isabel was trying to do the same, wasn't she? Trying to pull herself out of a terrible situation and be a better person than she'd been before.

But it was much harder for her; she had been born into it, and she didn't have anyone to fall back on.... When Becky had left Mattel she'd had somewhere to come home to. Somewhere safe to retreat to and recover.

Isabel didn't have that. She didn't have that safety net— She *lived* with the horrible things she was trying to escape. And she had no income. No friends to stay with. Nowhere safe to run to.

Maybe, if he somehow survived all this awful calamity business... he could clean up a spare room for her. At least until she was well enough to find somewhere else.

Ken couldn't believe he was actually considering it, but... Barbra had loved her. And it was clear Becky cared about her, too. And he couldn't in good conscious leave her to suffer.

Even if the thought of being near her made him want to *gag*.

Hm. Maybe he could buy her a house on the opposite side of town and be her landlord or something.

*God, he wished Orson hadn't taken the last of his Tylenol....*

Ken wondered how the drow and his daughter were doing. Apparently they had some important meeting or another at the school. Something about the student council holding an information session for all of their year level? He wasn't completely sure.

He gave a sniff as he walked past the bouncer without showing his ID (sloppy, sloppy work! Even if he *looked* of age there was a *legal* requirement for it!) and looked around.

He could see Isabel at the bar, hunched over on a stool and bouncing her leg as she drank something colourful.

Oh, alcohol was the *last* thing that blabbermouth needed!

Ken rolled his eyes as he approached her, taking her in.

Her outfit didn't suit the club scene (though, to be fair, neither did his own). It was a yellow sundress down to her ankles, with a floral pattern over it.

And as much as it pained Ken he had to admit she looked *nice*.

'Isabel,' he greeted, curtly, as he took a seat next to her.

'Ken!' she exclaimed, jumping in fright as she put down her drink and turned completely away from it.

'Isabel!' Ken scolded, grabbing her hand and planting it firmly over the top of her cup. 'T'es vraiment trop débile! You're going to get yourself *killed* one of these days!'

'Oh, you said that twenty years ago!' Isabel waved her free hand dismissively, rolling her eyes and leaning forward in a way that indicated this was *not* her first drink. 'And, yet, here I am!'

'Oh, you absolute bordel...' Ken sighed, shaking his head. 'Look at you. I almost feel bad insulting you. It's no fun when you're this....'

He motioned to all of her.

'You.'

Isabel let out a long whine and leant back, fondling the rim of her drink.

‘What... do I do?’

Ken took a deep breath. Then planted his palm loudly across Isabel’s cheek, almost knocking her out of her chair as half the club turned to stare.

‘Sober up,’ he said, firmly. ‘I did *not* drive all the way up here for you to vomir à votre rendez-vous!’

‘Ooh, yes! Oui!’ Isabel sat up straighter, shaking herself out. She seemed *much* more alert, now.

And just in time, too. As she looked past Ken and gasped, grabbing him by the shoulder and shaking him. ‘That’s her! That’s Moon!’

‘*Her?*’ Ken echoed, turning to see a ginger tabaxi with a greying snout by the door. ‘Wait— The tabaxi?!’

‘Oh, god, do I look okay?!’ Isabel gasped, quickly making to fix her hair. ‘Ah, I’m so nervous! Oh, my god she saw me!’

‘*Your date is a woman?*’ Ken dropped his voice as the tabaxi (Moon? Isabel had called her Moon) began her way over. ‘*You’re seeing a woman?! I thought you were straight!*’

‘*I mean— Maybe?! I never really thought about it because Mother would have killed me for even just looking at another woman but I just—*’ Isabel’s cheeks went deep, dark pink as she watched the woman. ‘*I’ve always had such rotten luck with men and— And I know Dad will be furious if he finds out but— Look at her! She’s just so beautiful and—* Hello, Moon! Hi!’

Isabel gave a stiff, awkward wave as Moon reached the pair, and Ken *really* wished that Orson hadn’t taken the last of his painkillers.

‘Hey, Isabel,’ Moon smiled warmly, giving the woman a short hug. ‘It’s so nice to meet you in person. You look even lovelier than in your profile photo!’

Isabel blushed, fumbling a sip of her drink, before returning the compliment. ‘You look wonderful, too, Moon— Uh, so. This is... this is Ken. I told you about Ken, right? He um. I asked him to come because, uh.... Well...’

‘I *completely* understand,’ Moon reassured, petting Isabel on the shoulder before motioning back towards another, much younger, tabaxi at the door as he seemed to be arguing with the bouncer about his ID... so they *did* do their jobs, hm? ‘My cousin came to make sure I’d be alright.’

‘Oh!’ Isabel perked up, at that. ‘Ah! That’s um... that’s good. Maybe... maybe Ken and him can sit together and—’

‘Absolutely *not*,’ Ken interrupted.

Both Moon and Isabel went quiet, for a moment, before Moon snickered and sat down on Isabel’s other side.

‘He is *exactly* like you described!’ she said with a humoured purr.

Ken frowned at the knowledge Isabel had been talking about him, but then his eyes widened as Moon held out her hand.

‘I’m Moon in a Cloudless Sky. Or just Moon for short.’

‘K... Kenneth Bloom,’ Ken managed, taking her hand and shaking it. Her fur was soft and, for once, he didn’t have the urge to wipe his hand off on his pants after letting go.

But then a different hand clapped onto his shoulder and he cringed so hard he thought he might invert out of his skin.

‘Heya, friend, the name’s Guiding Firelight, though everyone just calls me

Cheeto. You here for Isabel?’ said the tabaxi that Moon had pointed out earlier. ‘I’m Moon’s cousin, here to make sure nothing bad happens to her.... Oh, shit! You got glasses? Can I try them on?’

Ken slapped the boy’s hand away from his face as he reached for his glasses, and leapt to his feet defensively. ‘Do not touch me!’ he hissed. Then, he saw how young the boy looked and reeled back. ‘Wha— What! Who let you in?! You’re *certainly* not old enough to be here!’

‘Bro! Why’s everyone keep *acting* like that!’ he threw up his hands in frustration and flopped into Ken’s chair. ‘I’m twenty-three!’

Then, both Ken and Isabel’s phones went off and Ken glanced down to see Becky had posted in the family group chat—

Oh, she was *not* happy with how the meeting she’d been at went.

She rarely posted more than two sentences at a time but this.... *This* was a furious *essay*.

And it was even more incomprehensible than usual....

Something about nobody doing enough to prepare for the disaster. And the need for a relief and relocation fund....

Ken let out a long, heavy sigh as Isabel tutted.

‘Oh, she’s so much like Barbra,’ Isabel said with a mournful shake of her head. ‘Always looking out for everyone.’

Ken couldn’t disagree.

—END—

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