

The Wedding

By C. Jade Wyton

In a small town known as Shadow Oaks lives the Bloom household. They are a quirky family that has collectively survived a lot of trauma and, in the past few years, been working hard to mend bridges and get their lives together. Things have been changing for the better and their future is looking bright. And now that things are good it is time for a long-awaited event; the wedding of the family's beloved pet mimics, Mimi Bloom, and Don Flamingole.

Contains mentions of mental illness, attempted suicide, self-harm, and abuse. Mentions of queer relationship trauma and compulsory heteronormativity. And some non-explicit sexual content.

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### Part 1: Becky

Shadow Oaks was a small town with a lot of life to it; though in previous years, it may have been described as a dying shit-hole. But a lot had changed in the past two years.

Only six months ago Shadow Oaks had been threatened by a catastrophic disaster that was determined to destroy both the town and its people. Many of those that had been exposed to the horrors of this destructive calamity and prevented its success had, after discovering just how far they were willing to go for the safety of their town, been working towards making Shadow Oaks a better place.

The first few months after the calamity were the shakiest, of course. Many people were traumatised, and only half the town seemed to believe that there had even been any sort of danger to begin with... they hadn't seen it personally, after all, so it *must* have been made up!

They were lucky, to be able to live so ignorantly.

Privileged, to not have been exposed to the horrors that much of the youth of the town had faced.

Because, while the town had been saved, not everyone had gotten out in one piece.

Both figuratively and literally.

Many of those who had saved the town had found themselves emotionally and physically drained. Some had contacted doctors and therapists, or gone on holiday to try and de-stress and gain back some sense of control....

Or, like poor Becky Bloom, some had found themselves completely broken by the trauma of it all, and been admitted into psychiatric care....

Today was the end of Becky's second week home after her stay in Warm Waters Psychiatric Hospital, and she was waiting for her stepmother Isa'vanna to

come in and wake her for breakfast.

*And waiting... and waiting....*

Perhaps it would have made sense to simply get up and feed herself. She was awake, after all. And lately she'd been in the habit of getting herself dressed and downstairs for breakfast.

But today, she was craving the familiarity of Isa tugging her blankets away and scolding her for sleeping in. That strict attention that Isa always paid her as she was nagged out of bed was something Becky had missed deeply these past few months, and she was hoping that if she didn't show up downstairs Isa would come up and fetch her.

*Footsteps.*

Becky's ear twitched, and she heard the excited chirping of her pet mimics in their pen by the window as the unmistakable sound of Isa approaching her room filled the hall.

But... instead of the loud, startling knock Becky had grown up with... Isa paused at the door.

Becky raised her head in anticipation, waiting a very long moment before a gentle *knock-knock* was tapped out.

'Rebecca?' Isa called, her voice soft. 'Becky? Are you awake?'

Becky bit her lip, and lay back down to snuggle deep into her blankets. If she stayed in bed, Isa would surely come in to get her....

*Knock-knock.*

'Becky?'

Becky's silence was followed by the sound of Isa turning on her heels— And Becky sat up and let out a horrified whimper as she realised that Isa *wasn't* coming in to get her.

'*Huwnk!*' a honk sounded from the pen under Becky's window and she heard a quiet *thump* as Don Flamingle, her lawn-flamingo shaped assistance animal, leapt out of the pen and landed in a heap on the floor. '*Huwnk! AWK!*'

Isa's footsteps paused as Don's own *tap-pap-tapped* their way to the door and he leapt up at the handle. He grabbed ahold of it, contorting his body to twist it, and the door *creaked* open.

Slowly, Isa entered; scooping Don into her arms as she bit her lip and looked to her daughter.

'Becky? You're awake?' it was half a question, half an acknowledge. 'Sorry I... mustn't have heard you answer me.'

Becky swallowed, and opened her mouth to reply— Only for the words to catch in her throat again and nothing to come out.

'Oh, Becky!' Isa let out a mournful sound as she hurried to her daughter and sat beside her. She wrapped an arm over Becky, holding her close and tight, and pecked kisses onto to the girl's face. 'Oh, honey. I'm sorry. I didn't realise....'

Becky let out a heavy sigh, and leant into Isa's embrace. '*It...*' she managed. '*It's... okay.*'

Another kiss on her cheek; this one interrupted by Don attempting to join in and licking both women on their mouths.

'Ugh, Don!' Isa scolded, jerking her head back and giving the mimic a disgusted look. 'Young man!'

‘*Brrup!*’ Don responded, stretching out his long neck so he could peck at Isa’s mouth with his pseudo-beak. His real mouth, the one on his stomach, was open wide as he panted and snorted and drooled with his tongue lolling out to the side. ‘*Gorp! Glup! Trup!*’

‘Good boy,’ Becky scratched at the spot where Don’s neck met his back, and she felt her words coming out easier as she grounded herself with him. ‘You’re my good boy, aren’t you? The best boy!’

‘*Brup! Brrup! Brrest! Brest! Boy! Best boy!*’ slowly, but surely, Don’s trilling and snuffles became clearer and clearer to Becky as she pet him; sounding more and more like words as her head cleared and the druidic magic in her blood began to work again. ‘*I am the best boy! I take care of my Alpha Becky! Yes, yes I do! I am a very good boy! I don’t bite. No I don’t! I am a good beta! The best beta! I make friends! Lots of friends! And I have a very important job! Yes I do!*’

‘Yes, you do!’ Becky confirmed, picking Don up and holding him high as he wiggled his legs in excitement. ‘You’re a very important boy! Very important!’

A laugh from Becky’s side drew her attention back to Isa; who was grinning wide-but-tired at her daughter.

‘Ilhar?’ Becky started, Isa’s native term for *mother* sliding off her tongue easier than any other word that morning as she lowered Don and lay her head back against the older drow woman. ‘I love you.’

‘I love you too, Becky,’ Isa’s fingers played with the ends of Becky’s hair as they sat together.

‘*And I love my pretty pink Mimi!*’ Don declared, stretching his neck out to its full length and waving his head from side to side. ‘*My pretty pink Mimi! I love my Mimi! Yes! Yes I do!*’

‘*Mimi loves Mimi’s Flamingle!*’ a trill called from the pen; followed by the excitable chirps of infant mimics. ‘*Yes! Oh! Yes, babies! Mimi also loves Mimi’s babies!*’

Becky grinned as Don leapt from her arms and hurried back over the fence of his pen to his family. She watched as he licked at Mimi (a beautiful pink mimic that she had cared for since her early childhood) and then giggled as he settled down and scooped his brood close (four little mimics that, during Becky’s time away, had been affectionately nicknamed “the chirplings”).

‘Heh,’ Becky rubbed a hand on her cheek before realising with a jolt— ‘Wait— Ilhar? What’s the date? Isn’t today...?’

Isa grimaced, and Becky immediately knew the answer.

‘It’s the *wedding!*’ Becky exclaimed, leaping to her feet and rushing for the door. ‘Oh, my god! Why didn’t you tell me?! We have to get *ready*, Ilhar!’

‘Becky— Becky, relax!’ Isa called after her daughter, and followed her down the hall and stairs. ‘It’s not until this afternoon. You have plenty of time to prepare—’

‘No! It has to be *perfect!*’ Becky retorted, running into the lounge and narrowly avoiding slipping on all the documents she’d left lying out as she’d prepared for the wedding that she was hosting later today.

It wasn’t her own wedding of course— If it was she wouldn’t be *half* as worried. No; this wedding was *much* more important than her own could *ever* be!

It was her mimics’ wedding.

Mimi and Don had been wanting to get married for almost a year, now. And incident after incident had pushed the preparations back until about five months ago when Becky had taken Mimi out and booked a venue and told everyone that *this was the date. And it was not changing.*

She felt so incredibly guilty that her babies had been forced to wait this long; it wasn't fair! And the only way Becky could think make it up to them was to make sure that today was the best and most special day of their entire lives!

'I need, like, *all of today* to get it ready!'

Isa rubbed her temples as Becky began frantically sifting through the papers scattered across the floor. 'Becky. It will be fine! She'll be happy with it, however it goes—'

'It has to be *perfect!*' Becky repeated. 'It has to be *exactly* what she wanted, or she'll be *so* upset!'

'Becky— You know that's not true,' Isa gave a sigh, and shook her head. 'She was happy with a piñata full of meat for her bachelorette party. I don't think she's going to notice one or two things out of place on her wedding.'

'It has to be *perfect!*'

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Part 2: Isabel

Isabel Parker had been homeless for five and a half months after accidentally burning down her house while celebrating the death of her abusive father. Now she was living with her brother-in-law, Kenneth Bloom, and helping maintain the house in trade for food and board.

Brother-in-law?

Was Ken still technically her brother-in-law?

Her sister, his wife, had died almost ten years ago.... That seemed like it would mean they weren't in-laws, anymore....

Not that the semantics of it all mattered, really. Ken was the father of Isabel's niece, Becky, and in her mind that meant that he would always be Barbra's husband. Even if he had a new partner now; he was still the man Barbra had loved enough to give a child to. Which meant that he was family.

And probably some of the only family Isabel could bare to be around, now.

She let out a small chuckle as she watched herself brush her hair in the reflection of the old vanity mirror she'd found on the side of the road, and thought about how utterly *fascinating* life was.

For twenty years she and Ken had practically wanted each other dead. Isabel had actually *stabbed him through the hand* with a hat-pin when she'd heard about his engagement to her sister. And just less than a year ago, Ken had full-body tackled her in the street and started a public screaming match with her.

But now, somehow, their relationship had spun itself around on its heels and they'd turned Saturday night into "BFF night."

BFF night was fun, Isabel thought. When Ken's girlfriend, Isa'vanna, would go

out on her weekly outing to the cinema, Ken and Isabel would go out drinking and causing trouble around town.

She could still remember the time that police officer, Jackie something (Jackson? No, that didn't sound quite right), had pulled over to check on them as they'd danced down the road— And she still remembered the confused look on his face as he'd realised that Isabel was *not* Becky, but someone else entirely. And that she *was* actually of drinking age, unlike her niece— Because Jackie was, apparently, quite used to picking up a drunken Becky and taking her home.

Isabel hadn't known Becky used to drink and so asked Ken about it; getting the explanation that Becky used to steal his wine, but hadn't drunk anything since she'd been put on her antidepressants.

It had been a surprise. But then, a *lot* of things about her niece had been a surprise.

Though Isabel didn't mind. She was just glad that she was finally allowed to be a part of the girl's life! After her sister cut her off she'd been worried she'd *never* be allowed to meet Becky....

Nothing in Isabel's life had ever been more wonderful or life-changing than that chance phone call she'd receive from her niece. That lucky opportunity Becky had given her to be a part of the family again.

Isabel regarded it as one of the best days of her entire life—

'*It's the wedding!*' Becky's voice cried from the other room, and Isabel heard the girl rush through the house and down to the family room. 'Oh, my god!'

Isabel took a sharp intake of air as she listened to her niece's panic.

Ah. That was *today*?

Ooh... she wasn't sure how she felt about attending another wedding.

The last two weddings she'd been to were her mother's; which said all anyone needed to know about them. And then, the one before them was....

Barbra and Ken's wedding.

Isabel swallowed as she remembered her sister's wedding. It had been such a beautiful one, and yet she'd been a *miserable* excuse for a guest. And an even *worse* excuse for a sister!

She'd taken the fact that she was even invited completely for granted— She should have realised that it was a show of trust, when she was the *only* one of their family Barbra had let come. But, instead, she'd spent the first hour of it trying to talk her sister into leaving Ken at the alter.

At the time she'd thought it was the right thing to do; their parents had threatened that Barbra wouldn't be a part of the family anymore, if she went through with marrying an elf. And that had *terrified* Isabel....

In the end Barbra had made Isabel leave. And that was the last time they'd ever spoken to each other.

Isabel regretting hurting her sister like that more than she regretted anything else in her entire life.... And she regretted a *lot* of things.

'*It has to be perfect!*' Becky cried, and Isabel heard a concerned chirping from the other side of the hall. So she rose to her feet to check on her niece's pet mimics.

She passed by Don as he ran for the stairs, and then slipped quietly into Becky's bedroom.

She didn't think Becky would mind her doing so. Not if she was just checking on Mimi and the babies.... She wouldn't look at anything else!

'Prrrp?' Mimi gave a curious trill as Isabel made her way over to the corner of the room that had been fenced off into a pen. 'Trprp!'

'Hello, Mimi,' Isabel greeted, bending down and offering a finger to the pillow-shaped creature. When Mimi licked at her hand instead of nipping her, Isabel knew it was okay to pat her.

She stroked her hand down Mimi's back (*did mimics have backs?*) and felt her start to purr.

Then, the four little trinkets at her underside gave high-pitched chirps and wiggled out to try and play with Isabel's hand.

'Hello, cuties!' Isabel cooed, wiggling her fingers for them to bite at with their toothless mouths. 'Hello!'

There were four babies, in total.

Runt, Blue, Sock, and Hiccup.

All names that had, apparently, been chosen by Mimi and Don.

The reason Runt and Blue had their names was clear; Runt was the tiniest of all the brood, and Blue hadn't yet figured out how to be any other colour besides... *blue*. And though Isabel wasn't *completely* sure why Sock and Hiccup had their names, she could guess they were as descriptive as the other two.

'Brrp!' Mimi trilled as Isabel played with her babies. 'Trrp!'

'Brr!' Isabel imitated; much to the glee of the brood. She had no idea what she'd said, but it seemed to entertain the mimics, so she continued. 'Brrp! Brrp! Brr!'

'Trr!' Mimi rose to its feet, shaking itself down before skittering to the edge of the pen and leaping over into the main part of the bedroom.

The babies all let out cries and tried to follow their mother; though they were unable to make it over the knee-high barrier.

Mimi gave a comforting gurgle to her babies. Then, she looked up to Isabel and gave a happy trill before rushing out of the bedroom (presumably downstairs to see Becky).

'Oh,' Isabel watched as Mimi hurried away. 'Ah. I'm babysitting, am I?'

The mimic didn't reply, of course, as she was a mimic and couldn't speak—Well... She *could* speak to *Becky*, but that was a little bit different. Becky was a druid and could speak to animals! And that magic was from her father's side of the family, not her mother's side....

The baby mimics all gave playful cries as Isabel very (*very!*) carefully stepped over the barrier and sat down. They began climbing on her and nipping at her and her clothes, and she found herself giggling as she made sure they didn't slip or fall.

What beautiful little creatures these were! Becky was very lucky to have such wonderful pets to keep her company!

Hm... Isabel scratched Blue's underbelly with a finger, and wondered if she should get a pet for herself when she was able to get her own house again. It would certainly help her feel less lonely....

Not a mimic, though! She would lose the poor thing. Perhaps a dog? Something she could cuddle with.

‘Becky— Becky!’ Ken’s voice called from his office, and Isabel heard as Becky came up the stairs and beelined for her bedroom again. ‘Becky, mon bébé! Come and talk with me!’

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### **Part 3:**

### **Ken**

Kenneth Bloom had awoken to the sound of his daughter panicking downstairs, and gotten dressed to the ambience of her running from room to room as she gathered everything she needed for her pet mimics’ wedding, before he finally headed into his office to search for his glasses.

*A wedding for her pet mimics.*

Ah, it made him concerned about the state of her mental health— Even more than he usually was!

She’d *never* been completely put together; but after her second time being admitted to the mental ward in a year, and the new cocktail of medications and mood stabilisers she had been put onto, Ken was wondering if he shouldn’t have done more to take the stress of this preparation off her shoulders.

He had done whatever he was asked to, of course. And had helped Becky with the budget and bought her anything she needed to get this wedding done. He hadn’t hesitated one moment in making sure she had everything she needed!

Of course, Isa had tried to get him to discourage Becky from this expensive venture— Though he couldn’t bring himself to tell her (or Don, with those *adorable* little red eyes) no.... Instead, he found himself *encouraging* them to go with the more frivolous options.

Besides, the wedding only came to, what? Fifteen-thousand dollars? His own wedding cost *twice* that much!

Sure, fifteen-thousand dollars was a *bit* of a ridiculous amount to spend on a couple of animals getting married (Ken wasn’t *that* oblivious!) but Mimi and Don were both extremely important to his daughter and he knew that their happiness was directly linked to her own. They kept each other company, and looked after each other.... And Becky was just always so much happier when she had a mimic on her person!

And they were good mimics, at that.

Don was trying his hardest to look after Becky and learn to be a good assistance animal; he had stopped her from harming herself too many times to count and deserved something nice to reward his hard work.

And Ken *certainly* hadn’t forgotten about the time that Isa said she’d discovered Becky had been contemplating suicide, only for Mimi to stop her from going through with it! After saving his daughter’s life Ken thought that the little beast deserved literally anything and everything it ever wanted. Even if it still thought tripping him over was funny, he was grateful that Mimi was there for Becky.

So of course he had made sure that they received nothing but the *best* services

for their wedding! Even if he knew Isa was going to give him an absolute *earful* when she eventually, come tax time, saw the receipts for it all.

*But that was alright*, he thought as he finally found his glasses. *It would be worth it to see their daughter so happy.*

He hoped so, anyway....

Ken twitched an ear as he heard Becky start back up the stairs, and quickly poked his head out of his office door. 'Becky— Becky!' he called as she reached the top and made for her bedroom. 'Becky, mon bébé! Come and talk with me!'

'I can't! I have to get everything ready for the wedding!' Becky exclaimed, pausing for a moment to readjust her armfuls of things. Mimi ran ahead of her as she did. 'If I mess up—'

'Becky, mon bébé, don't be so worried! It's okay,' Ken reassured, hurrying to lighten his daughter's load. 'Trust me, my love. I have organised a wedding before; the less you run around, the smoother things will go.'

Becky swallowed and, though her shoulders slacked, Ken saw that she was doubtful.

'If you are worrying too much you will miss things,' he said. 'And then when you notice you have, you will panic and miss more. Trust me; I know this from experience. Deep breaths, now. Relax. One thing at a time.'

Becky took a slow breath; copying her father's breathing as he began walking by her side to her room.

'Your father's right, you know!' Isabel exclaimed, and both Becky and Ken jumped as she stood and, carefully placing the chirplings at Mimi's side, stepped out of the mimic pen. 'I remember when he and Barbra got married and how that all went!'

Ken frowned at that; but bit his tongue instead of snapping that she'd been *kicked out of the wedding*. He wanted to see where she was going....

'When we were teens, she used to always talk about how she wanted a *huge* wedding!' Isabel laughed, motioning widely with her hands. 'She would always go on about a pure white dress, and a church, and all the hundreds of guests that would be there! Hah!'

'Ah, yes,' Ken felt himself echoing Isabel's laugh. 'But then when we got married it was at the lake. Still expensive and fancy, of course— But we had less than a hundred people there. And your mother wore baby blue.'

'Really?'

'Mhm!' Isabel nodded. 'Mother ruined the dress Barbra bought and apparently all Ken had to fix it was blue silk!'

'She ended up loving that dress even more than before...' Ken recalled. 'After that, she always wore blue.'

Becky nodded, slowly. 'I... remember. Blue was her favourite colour.'

'Before she met Ken, it was red!' Isabel chirped. Then she lowered herself down off her toes, and spoke in a surprisingly soft tone; 'Listen, honey. Sometimes what you want, and what makes the day *actually* perfect, are very different things. Surprises don't *have* to be unpleasant. Do your best. Let things happen how they want to happen. And remember to forgive yourself.'

'Ah, *now* I see! You've been spending time with Cheeto again!' Ken scoffed, scrunching his nose up at the thought of the boisterous tabaxi man that Isabel



considered a friend. ‘Why would you subject yourself to that?’

‘Because I think he’s charming!’ Isabel defended, much to Becky’s amusement. ‘And he’s a wealth of knowledge!’

‘He’s a catnip stoner who once described the concept of fate to me as “gods rolling dice”!’ Ken argued, before waving a hand dismissively. ‘Ah. Non. It doesn’t matter. What am I saying? I can’t complain; he’s better company than you used to keep!’

Isabel laughed loudly at that, and pet Ken on the back. ‘At least I *had* company! Unlike *someone!*’

Ken gave a mock-offended gasp, placing his hand to his chest and flicking his ears straight up.

Then, he spied Becky giggling as she placed her things at her desk and began to flap her arms in joy— Summoning a flurry of magical pink petals that made Ken beam with pride.

*He’d made her feel better.*

It had been something he had been trying to learn how to do for *years*, and finally he was figuring it out!

How to make her smile.

How to make her *laugh*.

Making her happy was all he had *ever* wanted— And he was finally *doing it!*

‘Becky! Ken!’ Isa’s voice called from the direction of the kitchen, cutting through Ken’s thoughts. ‘Breakfast!’

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Part 4:

Isa

It had been an exhausting morning for Isa’vanna Vastille, and it wasn’t even nine yet. Becky had been running from room-to-room since the moment she’d realised what day it was, and Isa had given up on chasing her around the house; instead opting to do something much more productive and cook everyone breakfast.

She wished she could keep her daughter under control. But sometimes it was just impossible.

Becky had always been... a *handful*.

But, then, there was a reason that Isa had dedicated the last twenty years to caring for Becky.

She loved her. She loved her so damn much it *hurt*.

She hadn’t meant to fall in love with Becky. It had just happened! She’d not intended to stay on and work for the Bloom family for more than a few months; she was just supposed to help with the household chores while Barbra was pregnant. But then, one thing after the other, there was just always something else they needed help with. And doing something else meant that Isa didn’t have to start the long, gruelling process of job hunting all over again (a dread that, for a long time, stuck in the back of her mind). But then... one night, Isa had found

herself rocking a two-year-old Becky to sleep, and she just... couldn't help herself. And fell in love with her.

Falling in love with *Ken* was a surprise, though.

Isa sighed, shaking her head, and flipped the last of the pancakes off the frypan and onto their plates.

'Becky! Ken!' Isa called across the house as she turned off the stove and masterfully picked up all four plates to carry to the table. 'Breakfast!'

'What about me?' Isabel asked from upstairs.

'Starve!' Isa replied; hoping her playful tone came through, but not being completely sure if it did. Then, she looked down to the small children's table where Don was licking his breakfast bowl clean (apparently Becky thought that her mimics deserved the "dignity" of eating at a table...), and motioned with her head at the animal. 'Don, would you please go and make sure Ken heard me?'

'*Huwnk!*' Don replied happily before hustling out of the room.

'Good boy!' Isa called after him, placing the plates of food on the table and heading over to wait at the arch that connected the dining room and the lounge as she heard her family start downstairs.

Becky was the first in the room; practically running across the lounge in her hurry to get ready for the day.

'Ah! Nuh-uh!' Isa exclaimed, quickly scooping an arm around Becky's middle to stop her rushing past. 'You slow down!'

Becky let out a whine as she was blocked off from her breakfast. 'But Ilhar I just—'

'Nah!' Isa cut Becky off, leaning her hand against the wall so Becky couldn't pass her. 'No excuses. Slow. Down.'

'But Ilhar it's—'

'Nah!'

'But Ilhar—'

'Nuh-uh!'

'But—'

'No!'

Becky bit her lip, shuffling from foot-to-foot and tugging on her sleeves, before she took a deep breath and slowly nodded.

'Alright, good,' Isa lifted her arm and let Becky past. Then she leant against the wall again as she waited for Ken and Isabel to finish their slow descent down the stairs.

As she did she eyed Becky, who had seated herself in her usual spot by the window and was poking at her pancakes with her fork.

The girl cast Isa a childish glance, clearly trying to gauge if she was being watched, before picking up the maple syrup and—

'Becky!' Isa scolded as her daughter drank the syrup straight from the bottle.

Becky hurriedly put the bottle back on the table and tried to act as if she'd done nothing wrong. 'What?'

'I saw that,' Isa told her.

'Saw what?' Becky asked, sheepishly returning to poking at her breakfast. 'I didn't do anything.'

Isa rolled her eyes, trying not to laugh at her daughter's ridiculous lie, and

made her way over to stand by Becky. 'You didn't do anything, huh?'

'N... No.'

'Really?' Isa asked, stepping behind Becky and looming over her playfully.

'No,' Becky bit her lip, clearly trying to look serious.

'*Really?*' Isa grinned wide, and leant over her daughter so she could press a kiss into her cheek and whisper in her ear. '*You're not drinking my condiments again?*'

'Noooo,' Becky giggled.

'You're not?'

'No!'

'No?'

'Nooooo!'

'So you're *not* drinking my condiments? Huh?' Isa took Becky's head in her hands and gave it a gentle shake from side to side. 'And you're not lying to me? *Hmmm?* Is my daughter a *liar?*'

Becky snorted a laugh, flowers sprouting from her hair as her happiness triggered her druidcraft, and she pulled away from Isa. '*I'm a liar,*' she admitted through her giggles.

'Oh! *Oh!*' Isa mocked offence; casting a glance to Ken and Isabel as they finally made their way into the room; Don at their heels. 'You are, are you? You are?'

Becky was giggling too much to reply as her father sat down and, seeming to think his girlfriend was sufficiently distracted by their daughter, took his own sip of the maple syrup.

'*Excuse me?!*' Isa's head shot up, and Ken fumbled the bottle in his panic, dropping it to the floor. 'Kenneth Bloom, you know better!'

'Ah, so *that's* why you told me to buy the plastic bottles when I went for groceries!' Isabel observed, retrieving the syrup and placing it back on the table. 'Oh, Isa! This looks wonderful! Thank you so much!'

'You're welcome, Isabel. It's nice to be appreciated,' Isa grinned. Then she ruffled Becky's hair and made her way back into the kitchen to retrieve the girl's medication. 'I don't know why I even *bother* making meals for you two!'

Becky snickered and shrugged as she was given a small handful of tablets to take. She swallowed them with a cup of juice, before stuffing an entire pancake in her mouth. '*Mamk yuh Ewhah!*'

'Don't talk with your mouth full,' Isa reminded, before finally taking her own seat and politely cutting up her food to eat. 'And you're welcome.'

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## **Part 5:** **Mimi**

It was a fantastic day to be a mimic; and an even more fantastic day to be Mimi Bloom!

Because today was a very special day. A very special day indeed!

Today was Mimi's *wedding day!*

Mimi had been looking forward to this for a year, now. Ever since she had gotten engaged to her wonderful Don Flamingle.

*Mimi's handsome Flamingle....*

Oh, Mimi loved her Flamingle!

He was the most handsome and thoughtful boyfriend that Mimi's Mama Becky could have ever brought home for her! Even if he was brought home on accident.

That had been another fantastic day to be Mimi Bloom.

Actually, a whole lot of days were fantastic days to be Mimi Bloom!

And all of those fantastic days were fantastic because of Mimi's Mama Becky.

Mama Becky was the best mama that Mimi could have ever asked for; for seventeen years, Becky had always done everything she could to make sure that Mimi was as happy as it could possibly be at all times.

Mimi loved her mama.

Mimi loved her mama a *whole lot!*

And, now, Mimi was a mama, too!

And Mimi was going to be a great mama, just like Becky!

And Mimi was going to make sure its babies always had fantastic days, just like Becky did for her!

'*Babies!*' Mimi gave a happy chirp, and licked each of her four babies in turn as they tongued her underside for their breakfast. '*Perfect babies! Special babies! Good babies! Mimi loves Mimi's babies!*'

The babies chirped happily in response.

'*Love Mama!*'

They replied.

'*Love!*'

'*Mama!*'

'*Love Mama!*'

Another round of licks were pressed onto the babies' faces, and Mimi began to loudly purr.

Today was a very good day to be a mimic. And an especially good day to be Mimi Bloom!

'Kenneth Bloom, you know better!'

Mimi trilled with humour as it heard its P     Ken being scolded by M     Isa.

P     Ken had done something naughty again!

P     Ken was *always* being naughty in some way or another.

Like when he would leave doors open.

Or sneak Mimi and her Flamingle treats under the table at dinner.

Or pretend he wasn't home when someone knocked on the door.

P     Ken was funny like that, Mimi thought.

'*All done!*'

'*Done!*'

'*Full!*'

'*Finished!*'

Mimi's babies finished feeding and began to playfully tumble around the special little pen that Becky had set up for them, and Mimi took the time to stand up and shake herself out.

Mimi loved its babies. And it was very happy that Becky was letting her keep them.

Not all mimics got to keep their babies when they had them. Mimi's first mama hadn't been allowed; that was how Mimi had ended up with Mama Becky!

But Mimi was very lucky, and was allowed to keep all four of her babies!

In return Becky had made Mimi promise not to have any more babies. Which Mimi agreed was a good idea.

She loved her babies, of course, but she never ever *ever* wanted to go through giving birth again. That was the worst and most painful thing Mimi had *ever* been through in its entire life!

*EVER!*

And Mimi's Flamingale had agreed that it was far too scary to watch Mimi be in so much pain; so they would have no more babies! At least not for a long time, and not without a lot of *very* serious thought about it, first.

It also made Mimi very happy that she was allowed to be left unsupervised with her Flamingale now. And she didn't want to make her Mama Becky feel like they had to be separated at night again by breaking her trust and having another brood.

'Mimi!' Becky's voice called from the kitchen, and Mimi gave a trill and stood to attention. 'Baby! Baaaaby! Breakfast! I have beef mince!'

Mimi's mouth watered so much she had to lick her lips; but she didn't move.

She wasn't going to leave her babies alone.

No, no. Mimi was going to be a *good* mama! And that meant that Mimi's babies couldn't be left on their own! Not until they were older!

Mimi knew this was how to be a good mama because when Becky was a very little girl, *she* wasn't allowed to be alone. Someone had to keep watch over Becky at all times to make sure she didn't get hurt!

So Mimi wasn't going to leave her babies alone. Not even for beef mince!

No! Oh, no!

Not even for *sausages*!

'*Pretty pink?*' a honk sounded from the door and Mimi saw Don stumbling in. '*Pretty pink Mimi? My pretty Mimi! Breakfast is ready! Go eat! I will watch the brood!*'

Mimi gave a grateful trill as Don leapt the barrier and licked her on the face. '*Perfect Flamingale! Mimi thanks Flamingale.*'

'Mimi baby!' Becky called again, and Mimi hurried out to find her mama. 'AH! There you are, baby! Hello! How are you?'

'*Mimi is good!*' Mimi replied. '*Mimi is happy! Mimi cannot wait for Mimi's wedding!*'

'I know, right! I can't believe it!' Becky exclaimed, placing Mimi's breakfast on the small dining table that sat in the corner of the room, near the big dining table that the rest of the family ate at. 'Are you nervous?'

'*Mimi is not nervous!*' Mimi answered, jumping up on a chair and chomping down on her meal. '*Not at all! No, no! Not nervous! Excited!*'

'Good, good,' Becky let out a long breath, and Mimi paused to look up at her.

'*Mama's nervous?*' Mimi asked, giving a comforting trill when Becky nodded. '*Mama should not be nervous! Today is going to be a good day! A very good*

*day! Yes! A very, very good day!*

'I hope so,' Becky gave an anxious chuckle before standing up and stretching. 'When you're done with breakfast we'll, like, go and stuff, yeah? Get there early and stuff and set up. Make sure everything's where it needs to be.'

'*Good idea! Mama is very smart!*' Mimi chirped as its Mama Becky began to pace. 'Mama is very—'

'Becky, bébé!' Ken's voice called from the other room. 'Could you please come here?'

'Kay, Daddy!' Becky called her response, before crouching down to peck a kiss on Mimi. 'Alright, you eat up. I'll go get your carrier, yeah?'

'Yes!' Mimi agreed, and went back to its breakfast. '*Mimi will eat up! Mimi needs to eat a lot, so that Mimi can make a lot of milk! Milk for Mimi's babies!*'

And Mimi *did* eat! Every single scrap in its bowl. And then, just for fun, it nibbled on the bowl a little before finally jumping off its chair and heading into the lounge.

It could hear Becky and Ken in the garage, packing things into the car, and decided... *not* to go and get under their feet today.

Maybe next time.

Mimi shook herself out, stretching each of her long, spider-like legs in turn, before leaping onto one of the couches and licking at the leather.

*Lick! Lick!*

*Lick lick lick!*

It felt very nice to lick the couch.

Very nice!

And Mimi was *very* excited and couldn't help herself!

*Lick lick lick!*

*Lick lick!*

Today was going to be a perfect day! So very very perfect!

Only one thing could have made this day more perfect, and that was if—

Mimi paused her licking, slowly pulling her tongue back into her mouth as she recalled a very special person; one that she hadn't seen for a very long time.

*Mamé Barbra.*

Becky's own mama.

A very kind-but-firm woman who always made sure Mimi and Becky were behaving.... She'd gotten very very sick one day, and then never come home.

Mimi missed its Mamé.

Mimi missed its Mamé a whole lot....

*The only thing that could have made today more perfect was if Mimi's Mamé could have come....*

A low whine escaped the mimic as it gazed around the room; its eyes falling on the large wall of photos Péné Ken had set up.

There were lots of pictures of Mamé Barbra on that wall. All different pictures of her. Very very nice pictures of her.

Mimi gave a chirp and skittered along the couch so it could get a closer look at the pictures. Then it used its sticky, spidery legs to slowly scale the wall up to a very pretty picture of Mamé Barbra... and lick it.

*Lick....*

*Lick lick....*

'You miss her, huh?' Isabel's voice spoke from the doorway, and Mimi glanced up to her with a sad trill. 'Yeah... me too.'

Mimi shuffled on the wall as Isabel approached; affectionately licking the woman's finger when she held it out, and purring when she was pet down her back.

'She was beautiful, wasn't she?' Isabel asked, her eyes falling to the pictures of Barbra. 'She never used to smile that much when we were young. You're lucky you got to see it.'

'*Mimi was very lucky,*' Mimi agreed, licking at the photo again. '*Mimi's mamé was a very good mamé....*'

'Do you want to bring her with you?' Isabel asked— And Mimi perked up with an intrigued chirp.

*Bring Mamé?*

'I'm sure Ken won't mind if you do,' Isabel commented, and Mimi gave a surprised trill as she reached over and removed the picture from the wall. 'You want to take her?'

'*Yes! Yes! Oh! How clever! How clever!*' Mimi gave a loud, excited cry as it scooped the picture of its mamé into its mouth and leapt off the wall onto the couch.

It ran back and forth on the couch, excited by Isabel's very smart idea, before running off to tell Becky it had one more thing to bring.

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Part 6: Don

Every day, Don Flamingle lived in awe that he had found such a wonderful family.

He still couldn't believe it! It had been over a year since he had been adopted by the Blooms and, still, every single day he would wake up excited to say hello to all of the people he loved.

It was very different from when he lived with the mimic colony in the woods.

When he lived with the colony he would wake up hungry and scared; wondering who was going to bully and bite him.

Now he would wake up to a bowl of tasty bacon off-cuts (all of the parts that Ken didn't like to eat went to Don!) and loving scratches on the top of his head from Alpha Isa and Omega Isabel as they made breakfast together.

And, sometimes, Alpha Becky would be in the kitchen too! Helping to make something! And he could ask her to please boil some carrots for him— And she *would!*

Oh, oh! It was so amazing! So so amazing, that he could ask an alpha for something and they would be *happy* to give it to him!

And now— Now, they were having a big party! A very very big party! Just so that his pretty pink Mimi could show everyone how much she loved him!

It made him so happy that he thought he might burst!

Don tapped his feet, eliciting a giggle out of Isabel as he wiggled in her lap— And then he found that he couldn't sit still and stood up; pressing his face into the cold hard glass of the car window so he could watch the world pass by.

It was a very familiar road. Don travelled it with Alpha Becky and her boyfriend, Alpha Jareth, often. Every time Becky had to go see her doctor the three of them would take the hour-long drive there and have a date!

Don liked when Becky would go on dates with Jareth; because they'd go all sorts of places and Don would get to meet all sorts of people!

And Don loved meeting people.

The more people he knew, the more people he would be able to make happy. And he *loved* making people happy! He was specially trained to help make people happy!

Though, he had to try and remember that his very important job was to keep *Alpha Becky* happy. And that he had to stay with *her* and not get too distracted by other people.

Becky was the only person he was *responsible* for. And he had to try and remember that he didn't *have* to make *everyone* around him happy....

He was still allowed to be social and make people laugh, of course; as long as it didn't disrupt his work with Becky, he could do anything he wanted!

'Aw, he's so excited!' Omega Isabel commented, stroking down Don's neck gently. 'Are you excited to get married? Are you? You are!'

Don gave a honk of agreement, stretching out his neck to tap his beak against Isabel's lips.

'*Mwah!*' she kissed him, and he gave a happy gurgle as he snuggled into her. 'Naw, you are just the sweetest thing, aren't you?'

Yes.

Yes he was!

And he was so happy to be in the car with Omega Isabel and his best friend Ken!

The only thing that could have made it better was if everyone else he loved were also in the car— But sadly, Alpha Becky and Alpha Isa had taken his pretty pink Mimi and their brood in the other car. They said it was "traditional" for him to not see Mimi before the ceremony (whatever all that meant; he still wasn't actually sure he understood what a wedding really was, besides a party used to show people you loved someone).... Though it made him very sad. He wanted to be with his pretty pink Mimi all the time! And with his brood, because he was a good papa! A *very* good papa!

But his Mimi had wanted the wedding to be a *real* wedding and not a fake one in the backyard. So even if Don didn't understand *why* they were doing certain things, he was happy to do them for his Mimi.

Anything to make his Mimi happy!

Oh, how he loved his Mimi!

Don pressed his face up against the glass window again, and gave a happy pant.

He would *never* have to live in those woods again! He had a home now. A good home, with a good family. He loved his family! And more importantly; they

loved him back!

He was *never* going to be alone again!

Not ever!

Don gave a happy honk and pecked another kiss onto Isabel's lips, before turning and trying to do the same to Ken.

'No, my friend— I can't kiss you while driving,' Ken reminded the mimic.

'Isabel, hold him in your lap.'

'I *am* holding him!' Isabel argued. 'His neck is just— *Really long!*'

Yes. Yes it was! And he was *very* proud of it!

'Ah, Isabel! You get more and more useless every day!' Ken laughed and, without taking his eyes off the road, reached out a hand to bat at her in a teasing way. 'Get a job! Get out of my house! *Aah!*'

'Aah!' Omega Isabel echoed, batting Ken back before breaking down into a fit of giggles. 'Aw, no, though, Ken. I... I really appreciate you letting me stay with you. I know we haven't always really... you know. Gotten along. So it means a lot that you'd let me stay.'

'Ah, no. See; I don't have a choice!' Ken chuckled, his grin growing as he eyed his in-law. 'I can't just kick you out now; I would never hear the end of it from Becky!'

Don agreed; Alpha Becky loved Omega Isabel, and if Ken made her leave when she needed help, Becky would be *very* upset.

'Still, though. I feel like I'm not doing enough,' Isabel said. 'Is there anything else I can do to help out?'

'Die,' Ken said, flatly. Then, he snickered and shook his head. 'No. Non. I'm joking. Is there anything *you* are needing help with? Clothes? Furnishings— Barbra would have my *head* if she knew you were pulling furniture out of garbage off the curb! Let me buy you new things, oui? *Clean* things.'

'*Nooo!*' Isabel argued, and Don felt her shift in an embarrassed way. 'It's fine, Ken! I don't want to be any *more* of a burden—'

She was trying to make her tone playful, but Don could hear the anxiety underneath; that omega tone, where she wanted something but couldn't ask for it because it was her job to be good and submissive and obedient....

That tone was usually reserved for addressing alphas, though.... *Did Omega Isabel see Ken as an alpha?*

How ridiculous!

Oh, how ridiculous!

Ken was not an alpha!

Not at *all!*

Not in anything he ever did!

'Besides, Moon says recycling furniture like that is good for the environment. Also! Old furniture is much sturdier than new stuff!'

'Eh...' Ken gave a shrug. 'I sort of see your point.'

'Yeah, and why would I make you pay for something new when I could get it for free?' Isabel asked, scratching the crease where Don's neck met his body.

It felt *very* good (Don couldn't reach that spot, himself!) though Don knew it was a way for Omega Isabel to keep herself grounded. She was doing exactly what Alpha Becky would do and focusing on Don instead of what was making her

upset.

That was okay; Don didn't mind.

'I don't mind cleaning it up,' Isabel told Ken. Then, her voice dropped and she let out a sigh. 'It.... Being self-sufficient makes me feel better.'

'Better?'

'Yeah. Dad used to always say that I...' she paused, and Don saw her swallow.

She was nervous.

Anxious.

And Don couldn't blame her.

He'd never actually *met* Isabel's father before the man died. He was one of the very few people Don *didn't* want to meet. Because Don knew that he was a terrible person. Terrible and mean.

The mimic could remember one time that he had been outside Omega Isabel's old house, when Alpha Jareth and Alpha Becky had gone to pick Isabel up for some shopping, and they could hear the two screaming at each other from the street!

And that man had said terrible, horrible things to poor Omega Isabel. Things that had made the neighbours come out of their houses and look very worried as they stared at the house with their phones in their hands; ready to call for help if things got worse.

'Ah,' Ken said, softly. 'Hm.... Well, uh.... Here we are?'

Don perked up his head when Ken mentioned their arrival— And he realised that yes!

Yes!

They had arrived at the wedding!

Don let out several happy honks and leapt to his feet; pressing his face tight against the window and panting as he looked into the parking lot.

There were lots of people here!

People he knew!

People he was friends with!

And there were all here for his wedding!

Oh!

Oh!

He couldn't *wait* to greet them all!

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## **Part 7: Becky**

Everything had to be perfect!

Everything had to be *perfect*!

Becky paced the hall, tugging on the hem of her dress as she ran over all of the preparations in her mind. She had to get everything *perfect* for Mimi's wedding day, or she would *never* forgive herself!

God, what was she missing? She was obviously missing *something*!

*What was it?!*

Okay, okay— One thing at a time....

*Photography.*

Adam was here and ready to handle the photography. And he had accepted the offer of help from Mr Shedskin, so now there were *two* photographers; which had been a *massive* relief for Becky to know. Especially with Mr Shedskin being a kobold. He was so much shorter than Adam (Mr Shedskin was only two feet tall, while Adam was *eight foot*) and was going to be able to get completely different angles— They had come to the agreement that Adam would focus mostly on photos of the people guests, and Mr Shedskin would focus on photos of the animal guests—

God, *Shedskin!*

Right!

*Wendy!*

Becky still had to talk to Wendy Shedskin about the officiation!

Her friend was a legally recognised celebrant, now. And even though she had thought Becky was being a little eccentric, she'd understood that this was important and agreed to help with the wedding.

Becky almost kicked herself as she looked around for her friend. She still needed to talk to Wendy about what she was going to say, exactly, and figure out the paperwork!

She had to—

Becky's phone buzzed and she glanced down at it.

It was a text from her boyfriend, Jareth; asking her what was wrong. He could see her pacing.

Becky took a deep breath and glanced over to the main part of the hall where Jareth was standing. He caught her eye, giving her a warm-but-worried smile, and she let out a long breath and texted him back.

**Becky:** i dont no were wendy is

**Becky:** i need 2 no about paper work

**Jareth:** Don't worry babe. I already spoke to Wendy and that's all sorted

**Becky:** u did??

**Becky:** thank u!!!

**Jareth:** I've got your back baby don't worry 🤝

Becky let out another breath and looked back up at Jareth.

Thank *god* she had Jareth! She wasn't sure how she'd be surviving this without him— She wasn't sure how she would have survived the last *ten years* without him!

He was the best. The absolute *best* man she ever could have found.

He had always there for her; ever since they were kids. He was always driving her places, buying her gifts, keeping her safe— And he never asked for anything more than her love in return.

Becky couldn't help but grin at the orcish man as he began to mime to her; pointing at his brother Benny before motioning with a tap to his head and a roll of his eyes that read very clearly:

*Benny's being an idiot!*

It made Becky laugh, and she felt herself relaxing.

She didn't have to worry so much; Jareth was here to help her. Him, and so many other people.

Jareth had somehow convinced all of his friends to come and help set up the wedding. He'd brought them in to move furniture and hang up decorations, but they'd ended up doing so much *more* than first asked, and Becky was extremely grateful.

Even if they'd made fun of her, a little bit, for being so "*Becky*."

Honestly. She probably would have made fun of *herself* if she wasn't so stressed about making sure everything was perfect for Mimi....

Mimi.

*She should go check on Mimi.*

Becky turned on her heels, heading for one of the hall's private back rooms, and knocked before entering.

'Mimi, baby?' she asked, glancing around until she found her pet curled up on one of the room's couches, feeding the chirplings. 'How are you doing?'

'*Mimi is good!*' Mimi answered, licking at its babies affectionately. '*Mimi's babies were hungry, so Mimi stopped grooming to let them eat!*'

'Aw,' Becky cooed, carefully taking a seat next to Mimi and petting her down her back. 'You are *such* a good mama.'

Mimi beamed, giving a happy trill, before licking at her babies again. '*Mimi needs help with Mimi's hat.*'

'Ah, your veil!' Becky nodded, and hurriedly searched the room for the tiny bridal veil her father had made. She found it quickly, sitting by Mimi's carrier, and helped set it in place on top of Mimi's head.

'*Thanks, Mama!*' Mimi chirped. '*Has Mimi's Flamingle gotten here?*'

'Uhh... I think they were pulling up as I came in,' Becky said. 'Do you want to see him?'

'*Yes!*' Mimi trilled. '*Mimi wants to see Flamingle! But only when it is time to see Flamingle.... Is it time to see Flamingle yet?*'

'Uh, not for another... hour? Probably,' Becky estimated.

Mimi made a mildly irritated fart noise before returning to grooming its babies. '*Mimi will wait. Mimi's Mama has done very good with Mimi's wedding. Mimi does not want to be impatient!*'

Becky couldn't help but chuckle at Mimi's compliment.

It was nice to know that Mimi appreciated what she was doing for it....

'Is there anything else you need, baby?' Becky asked. 'Before I go back out?'

Mimi looked like it was in thought for a long moment.... Then it slowly reached out a long, spidery leg and tapped at Becky's side.

'*Mimi would like to nap in Mama's lap!*'

'Oh...' Becky hesitated. 'Um... I was supposed to be out there to keep an eye on the guests, but.... I can ask Jareth for help.'

'*Do! Yes!*' Mimi trilled. '*Mama must nap with Mimi!*'

Becky pulled out her phone, then, and quickly sent a text to Jareth.

**Becky:** hay bab e mimi wants me 2 sat in hear with her 4 her nap

**Becky:** r u o k 2 do prep on own 4 a wile?

**Becky:** she is tied and want me their with her

**Jareth:** 🙄 🙄 🙄

**Jareth:** I've got your back, baby girl!

**Becky:** thank u

**Jareth:** You should get a nap in, too, while you can!

**Becky:** im 2 nervous

**Jareth:** Even if you are you should at least lie down and close your eyes

**Becky:** wat if i miss impotent fone call?

**Jareth:** You'll feel better

**Jareth:** If anything important happens I'll handle it!

**Becky:** o k

**Becky:** u r best jareth

**Jareth:** 😊

**Becky:** thank u

**Becky:** u r big help

**Jareth:** That's what I'm here for, babe 🤗

**Becky:** o jareth?

**Jareth:** Yeah?

**Becky:** wen we get marry

**Becky:** plese

**Jareth:** When? 🤔

**Becky:** small wedding

**Becky:** i cant do this a gain

**Jareth:** Noted ❤️☐

Becky felt herself smiling at Jareth's texts, and let herself give a sigh of relief. She could have a ten minute break.

Jareth was here. And so were many other people (like Isa, and Wendy, and Mrs Slader) who all just wanted to make sure everything went well...

A short nap wouldn't hurt.

Becky put her phone down and carefully slid her legs behind Mimi so that she could stretch out on the couch and lay down with her pets.

Mimi gave a happy trill; which all of her babies echoed as they began bouncing around in excitement.

*'Mamé!' they chirped.*

*'Mamé's napping with us!'*

*'Yay!'*

*'Love Mamé!'*

'I love you too, babies,' Becky cooed, laying her arm down so that the chirplings could all snuggle up underneath it. 'Let's all get some sleep, so that we're ready for your mama's wedding!'

A chorus of happy trills filled the room as the four chirplings cuddled into Becky's side; and Becky grinned at Mimi as it skittered up to lick her cheek.

*'Mimi loves Mama!'* Mimi purred. *'And Mama loves Mimi!'*

'I do,' Becky agreed. 'I love you more than the whole world.'

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Part 8:

Isabel

Jareth had asked Isabel to greet the guests while Becky took a short nap, and it made her absolutely *giddy* that she was being trusted with such an important thing!

She honestly didn't think Becky would have trusted her with it (she still often said the wrong thing to the girl's friends; asking questions that she didn't realise were inappropriate, or commenting on things that were apparently rude to comment on) but Jareth had said that she was the only free person with a good enough "social battery" to do it.

He'd said there was going to be at *least* thirty-six guests... and Isabel had to agree that shaking that many people's hands would probably send Ken to the hospital.

So she'd agreed to do it. And was now standing out the front of the hall welcoming people and pets as they entered, all while trying her hardest to be polite and not say anything offensive.

It was proving *much* harder than one would think, after more than forty years surrounded by the bigots she'd called family....

She was just glad Becky's friends were so understanding and kind, and willing to correct her instead of getting mad and yelling!

Even if some of them found her lack of education *funny*....

Some of them, like—

'Orson! Honey! Hello!' Isabel held her arms out when she spotted the young drow; who approached but didn't reciprocate as Isabel embraced him tightly. *It was Orson! One of Becky's friends!* 'Oh, it is *so* good to see you! How are you? How's the gender going? Are you still a man?'

'Gender's doing fine,' Orson chuckled, wiggling out of Isabel's grasp and reaching up to pat at the beautiful stoat on his shoulder. 'And, yeah. Still a man.'

'Wow! I still can't believe it; medicine has really come so far!' Isabel exclaimed. She knew it was, perhaps, a little strange to be so excited over someone else's gender— But she still couldn't believe how amazing the whole "trans" thing was!

Especially since she'd discovered that Isa was a trans woman and it wasn't just women turning into men— But the other way around as well!

It just amazed her in every way that people could do something as phenomenal as changing their sex. She'd always thought of it all as such a rigid thing with very strict roles and rules— But since escaping her father she had learnt it was *so much more*!

The stoat on Orson's shoulder gave a noise of greeting and Isabel grinned and reached out to pet her.

She was Orson's familiar, Hot Dog! A wonderful, friendly thing that often outsmarted Isabel when they played together.

'Hello, dear!' Isabel cooed. 'You look so *beautiful* today! Did you get your fur done? Aw, and your little bow! How charming.'

'Well, the invitation *did* say formal dress,' Orson grinned, adjusting his cuff-links. 'A little silly, but it was great to have an excuse to finally get myself a suit! Just... don't tell my parents that this was for a *mimic* wedding— They think

it's a real one.'

'This is a real wedding, though!' Isabel argued.

'A people wedding, then,' Orson corrected. Then, he glanced Isabel up and down and gave a curious hum. 'Hm. Is that dress vintage?'

'Oh, I have *no* idea!' Isabel gave a giggle, holding out her arms and spinning so the pretty green dress she wore spun around her. 'I found a dresser on the side of the road, and this was inside! I got Ken to fix it up for me.'

'Still collecting junk, then?'

'Oh, I wouldn't call anything I pick up *junk*!' Isabel waved a hand at Orson and grinned; watching another car as it pulled up. 'Almost all of it is still in *such* good condition! People just don't know how to fix up furniture, anymore, and— OH! Malinka! Malinka, hello, love!'

Isabel held up a hand, leaning past Orson so she could wave frantically at the young tabaxi woman as she exited the car.

It was another of Becky's friends— A wonderfully sweet and intelligent black-furred tabaxi who was always so patient when explaining things!

Malinka waved back, giving Isabel a friendly grin, before turning back to the car to retrieve her familiar (a little bat called Grigori) and a gift that was beautifully wrapped.

How sweet of Malinka to get Mimi and Don a gift!

Then, Isabel saw more people getting out of the car Malinka had exited. She recognised Malinka's boyfriend, Baloney; but not the other two tabaxi who followed. Perhaps... Malinka's parents?

Of course she knew that it was rude to assume people were related, just because of their race— But this was more than that! There were other context clues to their relation:

Besides having showed up in the same car, Malinka shared the fur and eyes of the grumpy-looking man (who awkwardly adjusted his high-collared shirt as if he thought it was going to strangle him)... and she had the same smile as the beautiful tortoiseshell woman who pushed (what Isabel could only assume was) her husband forward as she scolded him in... Russian?

Russian!

Malinka's parents were *Russian*! Becky's friends certainly *were* worldly!

Oh— Who was *that*?!

Isabel reeled back as she spied a very... *different* looking man.

What the *hell* was he?!

He didn't look tabaxi. He looked somewhat... human? But also catlike. With patchy fur, and an almost-bald tail. And... uh... *hm*....

He reminded Isabel of an old documentary she'd watched on late-night animal planet, where they'd pulled a cat out of a sewer drain and treated it for mange.

'Ah, I see you've noticed *Bojangles*,' Orson whispered, leaning close to Isabel and nudging her. 'He's a *werecat*. You should ask him about it!'

'Becky said not to trust you, when you tell me to ask people things!' she whispered back. 'She said that you cause problems on purpose!'

'No, I'm serious! He loves talking about it!'

'He does?' Isabel blinked, looking at the very annoyed-looking Bojangles as he

sighed and brushed back his hair. *'You're not lying to me again?'*

'I'm not lying!' Orson pressed. *'Bojangles loves personal questions!'*

'Oh, you are surely lying to me, you absolute scoundrel!' Isabel decided. *'Malinka's told me not to—'*

'Oh, shit! Benny's already here?!'

Isabel didn't have time to fully comprehend Orson's question before he had rushed through the hall's door and over to Benny Slader; a charming and wonderful orc who was brothers with Becky's boyfriend. She watched as the pair began to chat... and then turned back to wave at Malinka again.

'Hello, Malinka!' Isabel beamed, pushing Orson's fibs to the back of her mind as she gave the woman a quick hug. *'Ah, how are you? Your dress is so beautiful!'*

'I'm well, thank you,' Malinka replied, softly. Then, she motioned to the tabaxi behind her and chuckled. *'These are my parents. My mother, Tanya. And my father, Baran.'*

'Yes! I can see where you get your looks from!' Isabel beamed; throwing her arms around each of Malinka's parents in turn— Though, she'd barely touched Baran when he let out a furious hiss; his fur puffing up and his ears pressing back as he bared his teeth at her. *'Oh!'* she exclaimed, stepping back. *'Oh, I see! Your father's clearly not where you get your wonderful personality from!'*

Isabel realised immediately after the words had left her that they were not appropriate, and slapped a hand over her mouth.

'I am so sorry!' she blurted, staring at Malinka's parents with wide eyes. *'That was so rude of me! Oh my god! It just came out!'*

'O, net,' Tanya tutted, her brow raising as she shook her head and crossed her arms. *'Teper' ya ponimayu, Malinka, pochemu ty predupredila nas o yeye tete.'*

'Aga. U neye net fil'tra,' Malinka responded; her ears flicking up in a humoured way that made Isabel relax a little (even if she didn't understand what was being said). *'No ona ne sovsem ne prava naschet papy!'*

'Ona takaya zhe nadoyedlivaya, kak i yeye plemyannitsa,' Baran mumbled, before pushing past Isabel and heading inside. *'Pochemu ya dolzhen byl priyti? YA luchshe ostanus' doma....'*

Malinka rolled her eyes, and lightly pet Isabel's shoulder. *'Don't take it personally. He doesn't like anyone.'*

'Oh, that's a relief!' Isabel gave a nervous chuckle, raising her hand to her chest. *'Ah. I am sorry, though. That was completely inappropriate. I'll do better next time.'*

'You'll get there,' Malinka reassured, before casting a glance behind her and waving to a pair of young human men. *'Okay. So. I'm going to head in and make sure Dad doesn't start a fight. But we can talk later if you like.'*

'Oh! Yes! I would love that!' Isabel nodded, stepping out of the way so Malinka and the rest of her family could get past her. *'Have a good time, love!'*

'We will!'

Isabel gave one last wave to Malinka before turning back to the two human men that were approaching.

She didn't know these two as Becky's friends; though she was sure she'd seen them around before.

One was a tall, dark-skinned man with a very raw sort of charismatic charm to

him— Ah! Isabel recognised him as a busker who would play guitar around town in order to earn a living. That was where she knew him from!

And the other....

The other was a sickly-looking man who wore a filthy fireman's jacket. He... didn't look quite right. His skin so washed out and ill-coloured he looked like he might have been dead!

No, wait....

Ooh.... Oh!

Isabel realised as he approached that half of him, split right down the middle, *was* dead! He must have been some kind of reborn!

Ah, yes. That made a lot of sense. Especially when she saw the little armadillo he was carrying; a charmingly gross-looking thing with green liquid leaking from his nose and mouth. It snuffled and wiggled in the man's arms, and Isabel thought she remembered Becky saying something about this armadillo being one of Don's friends.

Isabel wondered how the two had met; but only for a moment as the armadillo and his owner got close enough for Isabel to smell them.

Oh that man smelt *horrid!*

Like he hadn't washed himself in months!

Oh, no, don't look disgusted! Isabel told herself. *It might be because he's a reborn! Don't be racist! Say hello!*

'Hello, boys!' Isabel greeted, forcing a smile on her face as she greeted the pair. 'It's nice to meet you—'

'Oh, *no!*' the undead boy scrunched up his face when he saw Isabel, and reeled back. 'The last thing I needed to see today was a *second* Becky!'

'*Ro-Ro, be nice!*' warned the other man, nudging the first man before he held out his hand to Isabel. 'Hey there! I'm Zombi. This is Romero. And of course, the actual invitee; Tex!' the armadillo let out a very wet sneeze as he was named, and Zombi pet him on the head. 'So... are you Becky's... *mother?*'

'Ah, no, that was my sister,' Isabel felt herself give a nervous laugh as she shook Zombi's hand. 'I'm Becky's aunt, Isabel. Are you friends of Becky's?'

'Eugh, gross! No way!' Romero gave a disgusted snort and slipped past Isabel into the hall. 'I'm only here for the free food!'

'Ro-Ro!' Zombi called after Romero, before rolling his eyes and shaking his head. 'Ah. Don't worry. Him and Becky just kind of have this... *thing* between them. A mutual disrespect? Apparently it's been going on for *years!* But he's not going to cause any drama or anything.'

'Oh... uh... alright,' Isabel didn't understand it (mutual disrespect? Did he mean this boy was her niece's *enemy?*) though she didn't pry as Zombi shrugged and headed into the hall; she was too distracted by the next guest who stepped out of their car—

It was—

Oh!

OH!

It was—

It was—

'*MOON!*'

The most beautiful, kind, lovely, and sweet person Isabel had ever known!

Isabel let out a joyful squeal and rushed across the parking lot to throw her arms around the wonderful orange tabaxi; pressing a kiss into her greying snout as she did.

It was Moon!

Isabel's most wonderful girlfriend!

Then the sound of laughter followed by a car door slamming loudly came from Isabel's side and she glanced over to see Moon's cousin, a young man who went by the nickname *Cheeto*, leaning on his car and winking at the pair.

'Hey there, Isabel!' he greeted, holding up a neatly-wrapped gift box. 'Where do I put this?'

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## **Part 9: Ken**

Ken had spent the last hour locked away in a quiet back room helping get Don ready for the ceremony.

He had dressed Don in the little jacket and hat that he had sewn for him; though dressing the creature had been surprisingly difficult. Not because it was ill-fitting, or because Don didn't want to be dressed— Don was simply too excited to hold still, and Ken couldn't get him to stop wiggling for long enough to get his clothes over his head.

It had taken at least thirty minutes for Ken to get it all on. And once he did he had then made sure to explain, very carefully, how each step of the wedding was going to work.

That Don would go to the alter first. And he would wait for Mimi to enter the room.

He had impressed upon Don the importance of *not* running down the aisle to meet her. He had to stand still as *she* came over to *him*, and then there would be the speaking of vows (Ken still wondered how *that* was going to go...) before Wendy would marry them to each other.

It had been a long, long explanation. Broken down step-by-step, with the important parts repeated at least three times so that Don would remember them— Though, Ken wished that he had *some* way to know if Don had actually understood him and wasn't just snuffling agreeably because he was excited....

But, according to Jareth, Becky had fallen asleep and was *not* to be woken until she absolutely *had* to be!

So short of his long-repressed childhood magic suddenly returning to him and letting him speak to animals again, Ken wouldn't know if he had gotten through to the creature until the ceremony actually took place.

Don gave another honk and ran to the door; leaping up to undo the handle.

'Don— Don, wait!' Ken exclaimed, following the mimic as it ran out into the hall. 'You cannot leave! You must stay— Oh, hello Igor!'

Ken stopped in the doorway as he spied why Don had escaped the room.... It

was Igor Frankenstein; father of one of Becky's closest and most treasured friends, Adam Frankenstein. And one of the very few parents-of-Becky's-friends that didn't make Ken feel like he had to retreat into his office and hide in a pile of fabric for a hundred years to avoid them.

Igor was a fine man. Polite, and respectable, and honest....

And best of all: Igor never tried to *touch* Ken!

Ken shuddered at the thought of Jareth's father, Mr Troy Slader, clapping a friendly hand against his back again. He didn't hate Mr Slader, of course. But he certainly did hate when the man tried to be friendly with him!

'Hello, Ken!' Igor gave a laugh as Don scaled him to his shoulder and tried to lick his ear. 'Oh, no! Don't do that!'

'Ah! Why hello, Kenneth!'

Ken's skin crawled as he heard another voice.... Ah.... So it appeared that Victor Frankenstein, Adam's *other* father, had managed to clear his schedule....

Ken quickly stepped away as Victor attempted to give him a friendly pat on the leg; being careful not to trip on the very short gnomish man as he did.

The last time Victor had touched him, he had left a stain on Ken's pants that had taken *four* different day-long soakings to remove!

'Vicky, give Ken his space,' Igor reminded his husband, reaching up to remove Don from his ear. 'And Don, I think you need to give me mine!'

'*Huwnk!*' Don honked back, wiggling his feet at Igor in joy.

'Yes, yes, I love you too,' Igor commented, before holding Don under his arm like a sports-ball. 'So, Kenneth! How has Becky been? We haven't seen her all day!'

'Yes! Usually she is such wonderfully loud girl!' Victor chimed in. 'Impossible to miss! I was expecting to see her running around all over the place!'

'Jareth convinced her to take a nap,' Ken explained. 'And honestly, this is the best she's slept all week, so we agreed not to wake her until we had to.'

'Ah, yes! Of course!' Victor put his hands on his hips, standing proudly as he beamed up at Ken. He had that look on his face that he always had before he did something stupid, and Ken felt himself growing suspicious.

*Was Victor going to take advantage of the fact Becky was asleep and try to cause problems?*

Ooh... not if Ken could help it!

'Understandable,' Igor said. 'Poor girl never sleeps well. Best to let her get it when she can.'

Ken nodded, his eyes falling on Don as loud laughter came from the main hall and the mimic began wiggling in excitement. 'Oh, uh... Igor? Could you do me favour? And take Don out to greet some of the guests? I think he is getting too excited. It might help him calm down.'

'Oh, of course I can do that!' Igor agreed with a smile. 'It wouldn't be a problem at all!'

'Thank you,' Ken smiled back and slowly crossed his arms over his chest.

'And, uh— Victor? While he does that, may I speak to you? Privately?'

'Ah, but of course!' Victor beamed. 'What about, my friend? What about?'

'M... Medical...?' Ken lied. 'Something... embarrassing? I need advice for it.'

'I'll leave you to it, then,' Igor chuckled, giving a wave before he headed for the

main hall. ‘Don’t worry, Ken! It’s probably just stress-related.’

‘Eheh, *yes...*’ Ken gave a sheepish wave back, waiting until Igor was out of view before turning to Victor.

‘So, my man! What seems to be the—’

‘Victor, we’re friends, *oui?*’ Ken interrupted, his voice firm.

Victor paused, seemingly taken aback by Ken’s sudden change in tone. ‘Well, yes. Of course we are.’

‘And you know that I wouldn’t lie to you about things, *yes?*’

‘Why, of course you wouldn’t! Why would I think you would—’

Ken bent over, scooping Victor up by the collar of his jacket, and slammed the gnome into the wall behind him. ‘So you believe me when I say, that if you do *anything* today to put my daughter’s hard work at risk, that I will stuff you into Mimi’s carrier and *mail you back to Germany?!*’

Victor just laughed, at that. ‘Hah! Oh, Kenneth! You think I’m scared of being locked in a box for a month or two? That’s child’s play!’

‘Victor, I am not joking!’ Ken growled. ‘If you do *anything* to upset Becky—and I mean *anything*— I am going to—’

‘Oh! Are we yelling at Mr Frankenstein?’ a familiar voice exclaimed down the hall, and Ken felt Victor tense in fear as another of Becky’s good friends, Malinka Grimalkin, made her way over. ‘Can I join in?’

Ken narrowed his eyes at Victor as he realised... *he was scared of Malinka....*

Ah, that was perfect!

He lifted Victor away from the wall, holding him up with one hand as he turned to Malinka.

‘If he ruins this wedding,’ Ken growled. ‘I’ll be your *alibi*.’

‘Oh, he was thinking of *ruining the wedding*, was he?’ Malinka’s bright eyes narrowed into thin yellow slits and her ears pressed back.

‘N-No! No, my d-dear!’ Victor stammered as he stared at the young woman. ‘I-I wasn’t! I-I promise! I was just— Well, you see I was— I— Ahah! I wasn’t going to do anything! Why would I ruin a *wedding*? Oh, it’s ludicrous!’

‘Mhm...’ Malinka crossed her arms, twitching her whiskers in distaste. ‘You can put him down, Mr Bloom— But I’m watching you, Frankenstein! And if you do *anything* to upset Becky....’

She made a motion that Ken didn’t understand (and he wasn’t sure he *wanted* to understand, with how wide Victor’s eyes opened when she made it) before crossing her arms again and watching Victor rush away down the hall.

Then, once Victor had vanished, Ken gave a cough and scooted to stand by her side.

‘Thank you, Malinka,’ he said. ‘I appreciate that a lot.’

‘It’s my pleasure,’ Malinka’s whiskers twitched again; though this time it was humoured. ‘Let me know if he gives you any more trouble, right?’

‘Of course, of course!’

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Part 10:

Isa

It was finally time for the wedding to begin, and Isa had just gotten everyone settled into the hall and ready to begin the proceedings.

Much to her surprise, it wasn't the animal guests who had caused the most problems— It was several of the *people* guests (namely, that gnoll girl Cackle and Malinka's adoptive brother Bojangles) that she had to grab by the ears and drag down the aisle to their seats.

Really, actually, the only *animal* that gave her any trouble was that armadillo, Tex— And that was Orson's fault, as the man had discovered the creature would chase the tiny dot of light that reflected off his cuff-links around the floor. And once she figured out who was causing the problems, it was easy enough to put a stop to it.

Now all they had to do was wait for the bride and groom to make their appearance; as Ken was just explaining what Don was to do one last time, and Becky was helping Mimi find the *perfect* form she wanted to shape-shift into for the ceremony.

Isa had decided to use this small window of time to quickly go over everything again....

She pulled out the notes Becky had made and examined them carefully.

"no balloons - don scared of them"

Read the first one; so Isa did a quick lap of the hall to make sure that nobody had tried to be helpful and brought any balloons in.

She was satisfied to find that nobody had, and so moved onto the next item.

All of the major decorations were correct; the flowers were pink like requested, and the arch had been set up at the altar.... The catering had all arrived and been put in place at the sides of the hall (including the *horrifying* raw-meat wedding cake) and almost everyone was in proper formal dress.

Mimi's maid of honour, a sentient little robot called Fuzzy, was doing a little dance to entertain the bridesmaids (which consisted of a goanna named Sheila and Becky's genasi friend, Marilyn Berger). They were all dressed accordingly— Though Isa wasn't sure how Marilyn had the patience to wear matching dresses with a robot and a lizard....

The music wasn't playing, yet; though the DJ Becky had hired (luckily she'd been able to talk Mimi out of *live music*) was alert and ready to start....

Isa turned, scanning the room again.

Jareth and Isabel were in their places sitting in the front with Mimi's brood.... Malinka was getting Grigori ready to carry the "rings" down the aisle.... Poor Benny was getting ready for his assigned role as the flower girl (though, as he picked at the basket of petals in his hand and flourished it like a weapon, Isa wondered if he wasn't going to enjoy his role). And the officiant, a kobold called Wendy Shedskin, was standing at the altar; waving to her boyfriend in the crowd and grinning widely....

The only people left now were Ken and Becky; of whom were caring for the bride and groom.

Oh this whole thing was just ridiculous!

Isa let out a breath and shook her head as she gazed over the event.

Hm... who was *that*?

Isa's brow furrowed as she spotted an unfamiliar drow loitering around the hall's entrance.... This wasn't anyone she recognised, and she was fairly sure that Orson hadn't brought any of his family with him (and if he had then, well, *they* could deal with scolding him when he heckled the other guests!), so she made her way over to them with her arms crossed tightly and stepped in front of them to block their view of the event.

'Can I help you?' Isa asked, curtly.

'Oh— Uh...' the drow hesitated, for a moment, before regaining their composure and clearing their throat. 'Yes. Hello! My name is Tebryn and I really hope I'm not intruding— Nobody was out the front and the door was open... I saw that there were some animals hanging around just inside it, so I thought I might just pop in to make sure it wasn't meant to be shut?'

'Oh, yes, thank you,' Isa let her shoulders relax and nodded; making for the door to check it was closed and that none of the animal guests had gotten out.

When she was satisfied that nobody had escaped, she half-closed the door before turning back to Tebryn; waiting for them to pass her and head outside.... Though, they simply stood there, gazing around at the event hall with wonder.

'Is this a wedding?' they asked.

'Yes,' Isa replied, her curt tone returning when she realised they weren't getting the hint to leave.

'Oh, that's wonderful! Who's getting married?'

'You wouldn't know them,' Isa replied.

'Oh, heh, no. Of course not!' Tebryn waved a dismissive hand, and Isa narrowed her eyes as she braced for the obviously-coming pitch. 'It's just... well... I work for a local news website, and I write columns about events and other things that happen in town. And I mean, a wedding is always wonderful to read about— Especially one like this! It's absolutely gorgeous!'

'That would be my daughter's doing,' commented Isa; opening the door wider to indicate to the drow to *leave*.

'Oh, is this her wedding?'

'No.'

'Then who's?'

Isa's eyes narrowed, then. 'I don't think that's really any of your—'

'Mon amoureuse?' Ken's voice cut in, and he poked his head out of one of the side-rooms. 'Becky has just texted me. She is ready; and so is Don.'

'Ah, are they the bride and groom?' Tebryn asked— And Ken gave her a very quizzical look.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'I'm a local event reporter,' they explained. 'I was wondering if I could, perhaps... take some photos and write an article?'

'Do you think you will *survive* it?' Ken asked, grimacing as he looked them up and down. 'Because a Becky-run event is not for the faint of heart!'

'Honey, I'm from the Underdark,' Tebryn reassured. 'I can survive *anything*!'

Isa let out a curt hum as she cast Ken a glance— And Ken just shrugged.

'Ugh, okay, look—' Isa sighed. 'I don't have time to chase you out, so just.... You can stay, as long as you keep out of the way and don't make fun of my

daughter in whatever you write!’

‘Make fun of? Why would I...’ Tebyrn trailed off as Don walked out from behind Ken and gave a chorus of joyful honks to get their attention.

‘*Huwnk! Hoonk! Hahwnk!*’ he exclaimed, before shaking himself out happily and tapping his feet.

Tebyrn just stared.

It was clear that they understood, now, whose wedding this was.

‘*O-hoh!*’ they breathed a laugh of disbelief. ‘Oh I *see*. That’s... that’s adorable!’

‘Mm,’ Isa gave a hum, turning away from Tebyrn and ushering Don towards the main hall. ‘Ken? Did you explain everything to him?’

‘As best I could,’ Ken told her. ‘Though I’m not sure that he understood the concept of “vows” so I, uh... I told him to just say something from the heart?’

Isa let out a long breath, before motioning to Don. ‘Alright.... Don. Do you remember how Ken explained to do this?’

‘*Hownk!*’

‘Mhm,’ Isa nodded. ‘I go first. Then, once I get to the end of the aisle, you and Ken walk down. Okay? It’s easy enough. Can you do it?’

‘*HWUNK!*’

‘Good boy,’ Isa praised; though she had no idea if it was actually deserved or not as she quickly brushed her hair down and entered the hall.

She motioned to the DJ, who turned on the music and made the guests all fall silent as they turned to watch the processional.

A deep breath and, not quite liking the amount of eyes that were on her, Isa began the slow walk to stand to the side of the alter (besides the photo of Barbra that Mimi had apparently *insisted* be present).

She wasn’t sure if the fact she knew most of these faces made this whole thing better or worse— All she did know, was that when she reached the end of the aisle and turned around, Don let out the loudest honk he had ever honked before; drawing all attention to himself as he began to tap his feet and circle excitedly.

‘*Don! Don! Down the aisle!*’ Ken laughed, giving the mimic a nudge that sent it sprinting towards Isa. ‘Oh— No— Slowly, Don!’

‘*Hwunk!*’ Don replied, skidding to a stop at the alter in front of Wendy; where he proceeded to continue his foot-tapping dance.

It sent a wave of laughter through the guests; some of them even clapping and cheering for the creature as Ken took the opportunity to hurry down the aisle without being looked at.

He took his place just behind Don, leaning over to pet the animal into settling down; and then motioned for the rest of the wedding party to come and join them.

Okay... so far so good, Isa couldn’t help but smile as each member of the wedding party made their way over. *Benny— Oh, no! Benny!*

Isa had to bite her lip as Benny squeezed a handful of petals into a tight ball and hit his friend Hazelnut in the back of the head with it.

‘*OW YOU CUNT!*’ she shouted— And immediately covered her mouth and curled up to make herself small. ‘*Ow, you cunt!*’ she repeated in a hushed whisper.

Benny chuckled until he caught Ken’s eye— And Isa realised the man’s

dagger-like glare was even more vicious than her own as he motioned to his throat.

I will kill you! Ken mouthed; much to the humour of the other guests.

At least everyone seemed to be having fun....

‘Now, will everyone please stand for the bride?’ Wendy’s voice cut in over the giggles, and the room fell silent again as everyone rose to their feet and turned to the end of the aisle—

Well, almost everyone. Isa spied Romero sitting and fiddling with his sleeve until the man he had come with slapped him on the back of the head to get his attention and pulled him up.

And, then... Becky and Mimi stepped into the room.

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## **Part 11: Mimi**

Mimi was trembling with excitement.

Such an amazing thing was happening!

Her Mama Becky had put all of this together for her and her Flamingle; a whole day of fantastic things, just so Mimi could show the world how much she loved her handsome boyfriend!

Oh, how Mimi loved its Flamingle!

Mimi loved its Flamingle so much!

And it couldn’t wait to show everyone just *how* much it loved him!

‘Now, will everyone please stand for the bride?’

‘Alright...’ Becky breathed as she bent down to give Mimi a quick pet on the back.... Then she swallowed and looked back at the hall door; her voice quivering with nerves. ‘You ready, baby?’

*‘Mimi is ready!’* Mimi chirped. *‘Mimi can’t wait to marry Flamingle!’*

‘Mhm,’ Becky squeaked as she nodded, and slowly held down a pink floral bouquet for Mimi to take. Once Mimi took the flowers into her mouth, Becky sucked in a deep breath and stepped forward.

Mimi stayed close by its mama’s side as the pair entered the hall together— And it trilled in excitement when it saw the room.

*It looked even more beautiful than she had imagined!*

*‘Pretty Mimi!’* Don honked; causing Ken to quickly shush him. He hunkered down; tapping his feet, and began to make an excited grumbling sound deep in his throat. *‘Pretty! My pretty! Oh, oh my pretty Mimi! My pretty Mimi is here! My pretty pink Mimi! Yes! Yes! My Mimi has arrived! My Mimi is here! My most beautiful Mimi! I love my Mimi! Yes! I do! And my Mimi is here! My Mimi is finally here! Oh! Oh! I am excited!’*

Don’s excitement filled Mimi with her own; and she found herself bouncing from side to side as trilled up at Becky.

*‘Mimi’s Flamingle is extra handsome!’* she told her mama, her chirps muffled through the flowers. *‘Handsome! Handsome! Very handsome!’*

Becky smothered her giggle, happy petals falling from her hair as she shook



her head, before clicking her tongue in a familiar command and stepping forward.

Mimi walked in pace with her obediently as it was escorted down the aisle. It looked from side to side, purring loudly as it saw all of the people who had come to watch it get married; until it reached the alter and received a loving lick on the cheek from its Flamingle.

*'Pretty pink!'*

*'Handsome!'*

'Good afternoon, friends, family, and familiars,' spoke the voice of Mama Becky's good friend, Wendy the kobold. She held a microphone to her snout, speaking in a sweet-but-firm tone as she addressed the room. 'Today we have gathered to witness the loving union between two very special mimics; Mimi Bloom and Don Flamingle.'

Mimi chirped as she was named, trying to hold still but feeling herself trembling with excitement— And she could see Don doing the same.

'These two strong, impactful souls have brought joy to all around them— And now, they shall show us how they bring joy to each other....'

Mimi heard a quiet snuffle, and eyed its Mama Becky.

She was crying into her hand. Watching the ceremony with a happy smile that was so big it made tears come to her eyes and flowers sprout from the floor around her.

Mimi felt itself purr; it had been a long time since Mimi had seen its mama get so happy she cried. The last time was when Papa Jareth had asked if she would be his girlfriend....

'And so it is that Don and Mimi have asked you all here today to share in their joy; so that it may inspire you to bring joy to those *you* love,' Wendy continued. Then, she turned to Becky. 'We shall now hear their words of love to each other. For the non-animals of the crowd, their words shall be interpreted by Mimi's beloved druid mother.... Becky, if you would?'

Wendy held out the microphone to Becky; who almost couldn't stop crying for long enough to accept it. She fumbled it a little, causing a ringing tone in the speakers, before sniffing and lifting it to her lips.

'Go on, babies,' she said, her voice quivering as she addressed the mimics.

Don tapped his feet, turning in a circle, before giving a loving honk. *'Pretty pink can go first!'*

Becky translated; barely managing to squeak out the words through a sob as Mimi purred and licked its Flamingle.

Then, Mimi shuffled, standing tall on all eight of her spidery legs as she put down her bouquet and chirped out loudly: *'Mimi loves Mimi's Flamingle!'*

Becky translated Mimi's chirping with a sniff, and the crowd all gave affectionate coos and *awws*.

*'Mimi's Flamingle has made Mimi very happy. Very very happy! Flamingle gave Mimi babies! And Mimi loves having babies,'* Mimi looked down to its brood, and gave them an affectionate trill. *'And Flamingle helps Mimi to care for Mimi's babies when Mimi needs to rest! Just like Flamingle cares for Mimi's Mama when Mimi can't care for Mama. Flamingle is very good. And very thoughtful. And this makes Mimi love Flamingle a lot— And Mimi wants*

*everyone, everywhere, to know how much Mimi loves Flamingle! Because Mimi loves Flamingle. And Mimi will love Flamingle forever and ever and ever.'*

Mimi waited patiently as Becky sobbed out the translation. It watched out over the crowd as they all smiled up at the mimics with affection.... And once Becky was done, Mimi turned to Don and announced that it was his turn.

Don had to take a moment to stop tapping his feet and purring before he was able to find his voice.

*'My Mimi!'* he gurgled, stretching his neck up and wiggling it playfully. *'My Mimi loves me! Oh! Oh! Happy! I am so happy!'*

The crowd all stifled their laughter as Ken leant forward and nudged Don.

*'Your vows, my friend,'* he said quietly.

*'Vows!'* Don honked, pulling his neck back down and stumbling. He shook himself out (sending globs of spit in all directions) before giving a loud snort and forcing himself to stand still.

He didn't say anything for a long moment as he just stood and panted, and Mimi wondered what he was going to say....

But then he met her eye, and she felt a shiver run along her back as he slowly drew his tongue back into his mouth and looked very serious. His eyes darted over Mimi —full of deep thoughts— before he finally let out a low, loving rumble.

*'My precious Mimi,'* he began, taking a half-step towards Mimi that made her heart beat so fast she had to purr to stop herself from running around in joy. *'My prettiest, pinkest mate. You are the most special mimic I have ever known. And I have known a lot of mimics. A lot. Yes. A very much lot of mimics.... I did not have a good life before you, my pretty pink. No. No, I did not. I had a very bad life. I was lost. And scared. And unhappy.... Oh, so... so very unhappy.... I was bullied. An omega. The lowest omega. Nobody cared for me. Never. And nobody wanted me. Not ever. Even when I was a good omega. Even when I was the best omega I knew how to be.... But then! Oh, you! You wanted me. And I became your very handsome Flamingle. And now I am found. And I am loved. And I am happy. I am not an omega anymore. No! I am now a beta. And a very good boy. With a family that loves me. And with lots and lots of friends. I have so much. But most important... is that I have you, my special pretty pink. My pretty Mimi, you are the most precious, and most special, and most stinkiest good girl in the whole entire world. No other mimic is as pretty or special as you. And I will do everything I can to make you happy, my pretty pink. I will be your mate. And I will bring you food. And I will lick your itches. And I will snuggle warm with you when it is cold. Because you have made me important. And you have made me happy.'*

Don bent down, then, and pressed his head lovingly between Mimi's eyes; matching her purrs with his own.

Then the microphone let out a thump, and another ringing sound, and Mimi saw her Mama Becky crumple to the floor as she let out a loud sob.

A very, *very* happy sob.

And from the other side of the alter came another loud sniffle, and Ken stumbled over to his daughter so he could kneel and cry with her held tight in his arms.

A moment passed as Becky and Ken cried and Mimi and Don nuzzled and

purred.... Until Wendy retrieved her microphone and cleared her throat.

‘Some beautiful words from our groom,’ she said, softly. Then she took a long breath and asked; ‘Don? Do you take Mimi to be your wife? Your mate, who you will care for and cherish forever?’

‘*Yes I do!*’ Don huffed lovingly; not breaking from his embrace with Mimi.

Wendy cleared her throat again. ‘And... Mimi? Do you take Don to be your husband? A partner who you will show patience to, and keep safe, forever?’

‘*Of course Mimi does!*’ Mimi trilled.

‘Now, we shall have an exchange of rings,’ Wendy announced; motioning for Malinka to release Grigori.

The little bat carried a small parcel with him as he flew from his warlock’s hands and landed —*plap!*— on Don’s back. He deposited the parcel before leaping back into the air and returning to Malinka....

And Don carefully tore the parcel open to reveal two plush-toy golden rings. He took one, gently placing it on the top of Mimi’s head; before letting Mimi do the same to him with the other.

‘And now, by the power vested in me by my holy work, it is my honour to declare you husband and wife. You may seal this declaration with a kiss.’

Mimi and Don exchanged purr-filled licks.

‘Congratulations, Mimi and Don.’

Mimi chirped her thanks to Wendy, before picking up her bouquet and giving it a violent shake that sent it flying across the room.

Up, and up, and across it went; sailing over the heads of the guests before arching down and down and—

Romero was too busy staring at his boyfriend to notice as the flowers came towards him, and they collided with the side of his face with a quiet *pap* and loud “*FUCK!*”

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Part 12:

Don

Apparently Don’s vows had been very very good ones, and they had made Mimi very very happy.

It was a relief for the mimic because, until about three hours ago, he’d had no idea what vows even *were!*

But then Ken had told him: speak from the heart.

So Don had!

He had looked at his pretty pink Mimi, and he had felt all his feelings, and instead of keeping them inside his little body he had let them purr out of himself and into the air.

He hadn’t meant to make Alpha Becky and Ken cry— But apparently they were happy tears, because they had felt so much they couldn’t keep it inside.

Don figured it was like when Becky would watch her romance movies and tear up....

'Bite! Bite! Rip!' Mimi tore the wrapping paper off another gift, and then trilled loudly. *'Flamingle! Flamingle! Look at this gift!'*

Don broke away from the scratch he was receiving from Omega Benny, and hurried over to look at the plush bear and chewable treat that his Mimi had revealed from its pretty paper wrapping.

'Treats and toys!' Don honked excitedly.

'Share!' Mimi trilled, holding up the treat for Don and, when he took ahold of the other end, she bit it into messy halves that made the people around them coo and murmur.

Then she scooped up the plush bear she had received and began shaking it violently; harder and harder until she finally dropped it back to the floor and bounced around it.

'Oi, hey, does that mean she likes it?' came the voice of Alpha Portia; one of Becky's very best friends.

'That means she loves it,' replied Alpha Adam, holding up his strange square "camera" again. *'The more violent she is with a toy, the more she enjoys it.'*

'Hah! Hey. She's kinda like me, then, aye!' laughed Alpha Portia. *'Ah, glad the little ankle biter likes my gift, though. If she didn't I'd look like a right bloody galah! Oi, hey! What about you, Don? You like me gift, too?'*

'Lots and lots!' Don honked, tapping his little feet on the ground and spinning in a circle.

He loved any gift that made his Mimi happy!

'Bloody beauty!' Portia cheered, pumping her fist. Then she pet Adam on the back and gave a sniff. *'Right, then, I'm gonna go see if I can't convince that DJ to play music that ain't actually good, huh?'*

'I wouldn't,' Adam warned. *'Becky spent hours on that song list. She'll kill you if you mess with it.'*

'Ah, I ain't scared of Becky!' Portia cackled, taking one step back, then two. Then three— Then she spun around and gave a high wave. *'Ain't like we haven't had a punch-on before or nothing!'*

'Portia— Ah, whatever. Your funeral,' Alpha Adam gave a shrug, and turned back to take more photos of Mimi as she ripped open the next gift. *'Mimi! Can you hold that up for me? Show! Show me!'*

'Show?' Mimi chirped, rising up on her hind two pairs of legs and holding up the toy that was now in her mouth. *'Mimi knows show! Mimi will show Adam! Look! Good thing! Yes! Mimi is supposed to have this thing! Yes! Yes!'*

'Good girl!' Alpha Adam praised. *'Very good girl!'*

'Good girl!' Mimi echoed, dropping back down all eight of her feet and shaking the toy violently. *'Mimi is a good girl! Mimi is the best girl! Yes!'*

'Yes! Yes! The prettiest and most best girl!' Don honked his agreement as he began to dance around his pretty pink Mimi. Then, his attention was drawn back to Omega Benny as he heard the orc say something about his beautiful mate.

'Oh, yeah, I still remember when Mimi got out,' Benny said. *'You think Becky's crazy now? Man! You didn't see her after... I think it was a week without Mimi? God it was bad. She was literally ripping her hair out!'*

'Really? Jeez,' sniffed one of Omega Isabel's friends, Cheeto (a beta, just like Don!), with a twitch of his orange-furred ears. *'I mean, I've heard some stories'*

about Becky from Jude, but I didn't know Mimi ever got out!

'Ah think Ah remember hearin' 'bout that,' Alpha Angelo nudged Omega Benny, and gave a chuckle. 'My parents were helping look for the little critter, and they weren't having much luck.... Ah think that was the same week Baran almost got arrested for firing off a gun behind the strip mall!'

'Oh, yeah! I heard about that!' said Hazelnut (one of Alpha Jareth's friends; a small-but-strong gnome girl) as she climbed up the shoulder of a gnoll girl (Alpha Cackle! Another of Jareth's friends!) and threw up her arms. 'Apparently he saw this *massive* mimic and was scaring it off! Like, *massive!* Dumpster-sized!'

'Yeah, it was big,' Alpha Cackle confirmed. 'I know because it almost *trampled* me!'

'Hah! Sounds like you have a lot going on in your little town,' Cheeto gave a laugh, and took a drink out of a can that's colour matched his fur. 'I'll have to go down and visit, sometime!'

'It's not worth it,' Cackle grumbled. 'It's a shit-hole.'

'Yeah, but ain't it *our* shit-hole!' Angelo retorted. Then, he saw Don watching them and grinned wide. 'Aw, hey buddy! You wanna get all on up in this here conversation? Come on! Uh— What's that command again...? *Up?* No.... Oh! Yeah! Perch! Don, perch!'

Don felt himself straighten up at the familiar word.

Perch?

Perch!

Angelo held down his arm, and Don let out a loud honk and ran for it.

'PERCH!'

He was on Alpha Angelo's arm in a second— And in two, he had scaled the man to sit on his shoulder and honk into his ear.

'I am a good boy!' Don told Alpha Angelo. 'I have perched! I did as I was told! I am a good boy! Yes! Yes! A good boy! A very good boy! I am the best boy! Best boy! Very very good! Yes!'

'Hey, baby! Get yerself a pic of this!' Angelo called out to Adam; who laughed held up the camera. 'Ah, god, critter, yer loud! Do ya have t'yell right in my ear?'

'Ear!' Don echoed.

He knew what an ear was!

Mimi had taught him that an ear was the perfect place to put his tongue!

Though, with the sound that escaped Angelo; Don wasn't sure the man agreed.

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## **Part 13: Becky**

The ceremony was finally over, and Becky was able to take a break. Sort of.

She'd lay down on the floor of the hall and watched as her mimics had opened all of their gifts; barely registering anything else that was happening around her until Jareth had come over and lifted her up to sit in his lap.

She'd loved the feelings of his arms around her, and had buried her lips into his neck as she watched her two precious babies play and enjoy themselves....

Then Mimi had gone to feed the chirplings, and Don had wandered off to socialise— So Jareth hefted Becky up and carried her to a back room to deposit her on a couch and lay his jacket over her.

He'd gone to get her a drink, he'd said— Though she'd heard his friends call his name, followed by the sound of thumping and cheering, and knew he'd been tackled to the floor.

It wasn't so bad, Becky thought. This was a nice, quiet room... the lights had been left off so they weren't so harsh and bright in her eyes, and—

'Oop!' the familiar voice of Bianca, one of Becky's friends-with-benefits, squeaked as she loudly threw open the door. 'Aw, sorry, love! I didn't realise someone was— Oh, it's just you Beck! Hah! Aw, that's not so bad. You wanna join in?'

Becky turned to Bianca, then, and saw that she had her arm around another of the guests.

It was one of her friend Delta's sisters, Becky recognised. A demon from another plane that Becky had somehow made friends with after she and their brother had tried to kill each other.... That story was long, and tiresome, and not something Becky really wanted to think about right now; though she was glad to have come out of it with new friends....

'Really, Bianca?' Becky asked, flatly. 'You really think this is appropriate?'

'I mean. Yeah?' Bianca shrugged. 'You said we had to come in wearing formal-dress, not that we had to keep it on the whole time!'

'Bianca.'

'Look, if you don't wanna be in a threesome, ya can just say nah, yeah?'

'Nah, yeah,' Becky chuckled, turning back to the roof. 'Maybe later. If Jareth wants to.... Ugh. I'm not going to be able to convince you to go back into the main hall, am I?'

'I mean, if y'want me to, I can,' Bianca laughed. 'But I don't think the other guests wanna see what we're about to do!'

Becky heaved a sigh, and waved a dismissive hand as Bianca blew her a kiss and retreated back out of the room.

'You get some rest, aya, Beck? Love ya!'

'You too,' Becky mumbled. Then she closed her eyes and let out a long, heavy breath.

God, she was *exhausted*.

She'd barely slept a wink all week!

And now that the stress of the wedding was *finally* ending, she felt... heavy.

Heavy, and tired.

So, so tired....

Another deep breath....

And then Becky woke up with a jolt as she heard the door open again, and looked over to see....

*Who the hell was that?*

'Hello?' Becky asked, her brow furrowing as she watched the stranger slip into the room and close the door; distracted as they went through their bag.

‘Oh! I’m so sorry!’ the unfamiliar drow exclaimed, looking up and taking a step back. ‘I was just going to make a phone call! I didn’t realise anyone was in here!’

‘It’s fine. I was just having a break,’ Becky yawned and sat up to stretch. ‘Have you seen Jareth?’

‘I’m afraid I’m not familiar...?’

‘Orc guy. Uh— Tall, short dyed hair—’

‘Ah! Yes,’ the drow gave a humoured grin. ‘I think I saw him being dragged outside by a group of barbarians? He was arguing with them the whole time, but I asked about it and was told they were his friends.’

Becky nodded, rubbing her eyes. ‘Yeah.... I’m sorry. I don’t recognise you. Who did you come with?’

‘Oh uh, nobody,’ the drow blushed, then, and offered Becky their hand. ‘My name’s Tebyrn. I’m a local event reporter. I spoke with... I don’t think I caught her name, actually— A very curt drow woman?’

‘Isa,’ Becky said, shaking Tebyrn’s hand. ‘She’s my ilhar.’

‘Ah, yes! And you’re Becky, correct?’ Tebyrn beamed. ‘Mimi and Don’s owner?’

‘That’s right, yes,’ Becky nodded.

‘Fascinating that you can speak with them!’ said Tabyrn. ‘I thought that mimics were considered monsters? I wasn’t aware druids could understand them?’

‘Most can’t,’ Becky confirmed. ‘I’m not sure why I can. I just... *can*. And it was really hard, at first. Like. My powers have always been a little shaky because I’ve only been a druid for like. A year or two now. And that was like. A shock to discover. So. you know?’

Tebyrn gave a nod and pulled out a notepad. ‘Really? A shock? You didn’t become a druid by choice?’

Becky shook her head, eyeing Tebyrn as they began to jot down the conversation. ‘Uh... no. It just sort of... happened. Apparently Dad used to have powers as a kid, but now he doesn’t.’

‘He’s *not* a druid anymore?’ Tebyrn raised their brow. ‘I wasn’t aware druids could lose their powers. How did that happen?’

Becky just shrugged. ‘He doesn’t like to talk about it.’

‘Completely understandable,’ Tebyrn said. Then, they seemed to notice Becky watching them take their notes, and gave a chuckle. ‘I can put this away if you like— Sorry. I thought it was implied that I was looking to cover the wedding in an article, but perhaps I should have been clearer.’

‘No, sorry, I just woke up so I’m a little... slow,’ Becky gave a sheepish chuckle— Then blushed as the room’s door opened again and she saw Jareth coming in with a drink in each hand. ‘Jareth! Hi!’

‘Hey baby girl!’ Jareth greeted, kicking the door closed behind him and holding out one of the drinks to Becky. ‘Feeling any better? Who’s this?’

‘I am, yeah!’ Becky nodded. ‘And um. This is Tebyrn. They’re, like. A uh... news reporter or something?’

‘Yes, for local events,’ Tebyrn confirmed. ‘Isa said I could stay. Provided I didn’t cause any trouble! I hope that was alright?’

‘Oh, yeah, it’s fine,’ Becky waved a hand and managed to grin. ‘I’ll be blogging about it tomorrow, anyway! You know?’

Tebyrn grinned back. ‘So I should publish my article tonight, so I don’t have to compete with you for fame?’

The joke hit its mark, and Becky giggled. ‘No, please. Mimi would go *nuts* to see her wedding in the news! The whole reason she wanted it was so that, like. As many people as possible know that she’s in love with Don.’

‘Ooh... so, the *mimics* requested this wedding, then?’ Tebyrn asked, scribbling down notes again. ‘That’s fascinating! Mostly when I cover pet weddings its the owners wanting to show off their pets! Not the pets actually wanting a wedding.’

‘Hah!’ Jareth gave a loud laugh and shook his head. ‘No, this wedding was *all* mimic! They’ve had Becky run off her feet for months to get everything how they wanted!’

‘Well... I wanted them to be happy!’ Becky defended. ‘Like. It’s *their* wedding, you know? And like... You know?’

‘Yeah, baby, I know,’ Jareth pecked a kiss on Becky’s cheek. ‘You did great.’

Tebyrn grinned at the couple as they finished writing their notes. ‘I’d love to hear more about them. How did you get them? Do you keep them separate at night? I saw they had babies, was that a deliberate breeding? And what’s it like living with mimics? Would you recommend them as pets?’

Becky bit her lip, at that.

*Was Tebyrn really... asking her to talk about mimics?*

She looked up at Jareth, who raised his brow at her in a humoured way.

‘I think they’re asking you to talk about mimics,’ he said, slowly, and Becky felt her excitement building.

*God, she was being asked to talk about mimics!*

Mimics!

Oh, oh!

Someone wanted her to talk about mimics!

She was practically *vibrating* at with excitement!

*No! No! Be normal about this, Becky!*

*Don’t info-dump!*

Don’t!

*Be normal!*

Just answer the questions like a normal person!

*Like a normal person!*

‘Is she alright?’ Tebyrn asked. ‘She’s... trembling.’

*Oh, but mimics!*

*They wanted her to talk about mimics!*

‘Brace yourself, Tebs,’ Jareth chuckled, petting Becky on the back. ‘It’s gonna be long. And it’s gonna be loud.’

‘What?’

*Oh she couldn’t hold back any longer!*

‘OKAY! SO, LIKE—’ the words practically exploded out of Becky as she leapt to her feet, unable to contain her excitement any longer. A sudden burst of flowers scattered around the room as she began bouncing in place and flapping her arms, and talking perhaps a little too loudly; ‘So! Like! Like! I got Mimi when



I was, like! When I was like. Like, four—‘

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Part 14: Isabel

Isabel wasn't ashamed to say she'd spent the entire wedding reception glued to Moon's arm.

Don's speech had really touched her in a way she hadn't expected it to. Somehow, that little mimic had managed to put into words the feelings deep within herself that she'd never been able to understand.

That aching loneliness and misery, broken by a chance encounter that turned her entire life on its head and filled her with a happiness so strong she could barely even comprehend it....

She knew she was quite new to this whole “queer” thing, but now that she wasn't living with her father she had been able to explore this untouched part of herself freely. And she'd realised that the way Moon made her feel was intense—More intense than she had ever felt about *anyone* she had dated before.

It was to the point that it had her wondering if she'd ever *actually* been attracted to the men she had been with, or if she was just tolerating the expectations put on her by her parents.... Because now that she was allowing herself to feel the things *she* wanted to feel, and allowing herself to be open about her attraction, being in a relationship was actually making her feel *good* about herself!

So she wasn't going to hold back.

She loved Moon.

She loved her with all her heart.

And she wanted *everyone* to see it!

So she'd clung to Moon's arm and dragged her girlfriend around the wedding; showing her off to all the other attendees like a teenager bragging about a new phone.

She just couldn't help herself. Though, luckily, nobody seemed to mind. Moon herself seemed to find it charming, as she let out a purr-like laugh and twitched her whiskers every time Isabel introduced her to someone new.

She had been especially interested in Malinka, who Isabel had told Moon about many times before; talking about how patient and kind the girl was to her whenever she had questions.

They had stopped and talked for a while with Malinka and her boyfriend Baloney; helping the pair keep another guest's familiar (a hefty wall-eyed opossum male that Malinka called “Jeremy”) away from Baloney's own familiar (a very soft-tempered female of the same species, named “Pockets”). By the end of it all, Isabel had opted to pick up Jeremy and hold him swaddled in her overcoat like a baby.... She was worried he wouldn't have liked it. She didn't want to be cruel, after all! But after only a few minutes the creature had fallen asleep in her arms.

She didn't mind that it drooled on her a little. Or that it let out a very loud fart into her coat. Both of those could be easily fixed with some nice-smelling fabric softener.

Then as Malinka was telling them a story about her father's own familiar, Bird (who had explicitly *not* been allowed to come, due to his bullying of Don in the past), she'd cut off and folded down her ears; spying something behind Moon and Isabel.

When Isabel turned, she saw a little gnomish man standing by one of the hall's mounted television's screens. He was looking at it, tapping his chin as if deep in thought....

Then he glanced around as if making sure he wasn't being watched.... Pausing with a nervous look on his face when he met Malinka's eye.

'I... have to go,' Malinka muttered, making her way towards the gnome— Who panicked and sprinted away.

'*Huh...*' Isabel breathed. 'I wonder what that's all about?'

'*Mrow,*' Baloney meowed, before signing to Isabel (with a motion that Malinka had explained previously was a way of saying "goodbye") and heading off to follow Malinka as she stalked away after the gnome.

'Oh, alright. Goodbye, dear!' Isabel called after the man. 'You have a good time!'

Moon giggled out another purr as the young couple chased after the older man, and turned to rest her hands on Isabel's shoulders from behind. She peered over Isabel at Jeremy, who let out a loud snore, before kissing Isabel on the cheek. 'So, Malinka said that belonged to a man named... Stephen?'

Isabel nodded, pursing her lips, before admitting; 'I have no idea who that is.'

Another laugh and kiss from Moon, and Isabel felt herself being turned towards one of the catering tables. 'Come on, honey. I'm peckish. And I can see that there's still some spring rolls that haven't been snapped up!'

'Ooh, spring rolls!' Isabel echoed, letting her girlfriend lead her across the room.

She watched as Moon gathered up a plateful of finger foods... and then, when a piece of shrimp was held out to her, Isabel let Moon feed her.

'*Mm!*' she hummed, happily. 'That's good!'

'Isn't it?' Moon agreed. 'Becky really made some good choices!'

'Mhm!' Isabel nodded.

'Yeah!' another voice spoke from behind the women, and they turned to see Orson down his drink. 'That bimbo sure knows how to throw a party, huh?'

'Orson, don't call Becky a bimbo!' Isabel scoffed, batting a hand at the boy. 'She's a lovely girl!'

'A lovely girl who once swallowed a hot dog whole like an seagull swallows a fish!' Orson teased, playfully throwing his head back and mocking swallowing a hot dog.

'*Orson!*' Isabel scolded through her laughter. 'Please! That's my *niece!*'

'I'm just saying what I saw,' Orson raised his hands submissively and grinned. Then, he motioned to Jeremy and his grin turned to a devious smirk. 'Is this one yours, then? I can see the family resemblance. Who's the father?'

Isabel shook her head, giggling too much to respond, before feeling the

opossum in her arms stir. 'Oh, no. I'm sorry. Was I laughing too much? Did I disturb you?'

Jeremy gave a wiggle and a chitter, so Isabel unswaddled him and put him down gently on the ground. He immediately made for the animal's catering table, just to the side of the human one, and began eating some strawberries.

The trio watched him quietly for a moment before Isabel looked back to Orson.

'So... Orson? Do you know who Stephen is?'

'Oh, yeah, sure. That's him over there!' Orson said; pointing at a black-furred tabaxi man sitting by a decorative pot of flowers that Isabel recognised as Malinka's father....

'You're lying to me again,' Isabel raised her brow in humour. 'That's Baran. And his familiar is a vulture, not an opossum.'

'Alright, you got me,' Orson laughed, and raised his hands. 'Okay. For real this time.... See that human man over there? With the dark black hair and fancy boots? *That's* Stephen.'

Isabel looked over at the man. He was tall and tan; with a very old style coat on him.... And he was looking around in a worried way; scanning the floor for something—

Ah!

Yes.

He was probably looking for Jeremy!

'Ah, wonderful, thank you!' Isabel gave Orson a tight hug, before heading over to Jeremy and tapping him on the head. 'Hey, buddy. Stephen looks like he's worried about you. Let's get you back to him, hm?'

Jeremy gave another chitter, obediently waddling alongside Isabel as she made her way over to the tall, worried human.

'Hello, hi— Stephen, is it?' she asked, tapping him on his arm to get his attention. 'Are you looking for Jeremy? I have him right here, if you are!'

'Oh, um... no. My apologies,' the man gave Isabel an apologetic look. 'I'm afraid I'm not Stephen. My name is Igor. Igor Frankenstein.'

'Oh.... Ah. Orson lied to me, then,' Isabel cast Orson a very firm *look* that made him burst into laughter, before turning back to Igor with wide eyes as she registered the last half of his name. 'Oh! You're *Adam's* father, aren't you! He is *such* a wonderful man! So polite and kind! You must be *very* proud of him!'

'We are, yes,' Igor stood straighter, then, his polite smile turning into a wide beam of pride as his son was complimented. 'We couldn't have asked for a better son!'

'Yes, whenever he comes over he is just the *sweetest* thing!' Isabel told him. 'And he is such a good friend to Becky! Always looking out for her, and checking in on her. He's very sweet.'

'Thank you,' Igor's smile, somehow, managed to grow even bigger. Then he glanced around. 'Now, I *do* wish I could stay and chat, but I'm afraid I've lost my husband....'

'Oh, dear. *Lost?*' Isabel placed a hand on her chest. 'How do you lose your husband?'

'Well, he *is* rather small,' Igor commented. 'And fast—'

'UNHAND ME, YOU MERCILESS SADIST!'

'Aaaand that would be him...' Igor muttered, the smile falling from his face as he winced and turned around.

Isabel trailed his gaze to across the hall, where she saw Malinka had caught the gnomish man and was holding him up by his tail as he scrabbled to not drop what looked like the inner pieces of a toaster.

'I warned you, Frankenstein!' Malinka snapped. 'I warned you!'

'It was just a little bit of tinkering! It didn't even *explode* this time!'

Igor heaved a sigh and, with an apologetic look cast to Isabel, started over towards his husband. 'Victor! What are you doing now?'

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## **Part 15:**

### **Ken**

Ken was currently faced with a terrible dilemma.

A terrible, *terrible* dilemma....

He really wanted to stand next to Isa; but she was currently holding a conversation with three other women; Mrs Grimalkin, Mrs Shedskin, and Mrs Slader.... And Ken most definitely did *not* want to talk to any of them.

Not that they were bad women, of course— But talking to them involved *talking*. And Ken didn't like to *talk* to people.

At least, he didn't like to talk to people who weren't Isa.

Isa was different from all the other people he knew.

Isa was wonderful.

Firm. And Beautiful. And strong. And soft.

She had always been there for him.... And, more importantly, she had always been there for Becky.

How could he *not* have fallen in love with her, when she loved his daughter —his most precious treasure— with so much of herself?

And since Don's touching speech, all Ken had wanted to do was wrap his arms around his beautiful woman and hold her close.... But if he tried to do that here, now, in front of all these people— In front of *Mrs Slader*?

The idea of that many eyes on him at his most venerable made him want to retreat into himself like a frightened tortoise.

And it looked like he wasn't the only one having these sorts of feelings.

Mr Grimalkin was also there; trying (but failing) to hide himself behind one of the decorative floral displays as he watched his wife and her friends with a jealous frown.

Ken hoped that *he* didn't look like that....

*Probably not*, he thought. *He had been described as "pathetic" a few too many times for him to believe he could look as menacing as Malinka's father....*

He heaved a sigh and tapped his knees; looking back at Isa and catching her eye. She smiled at him warmly, and motioned for him to come over and join her— But Ken simply blushed and shook his head.

Maybe if it was *just* Mrs Grimalkin, or *just* Mrs Shedskin talking with Isa he could consider it— But *Mrs Slader* was there! And she was liable to greet him with a hug. And if she did that he may end up unconscious on the ground!

And he didn't want to ruin the wedding with something so stupid.

Isa rolled her eyes at Ken, though her smile didn't fade, before she mumbled something to Mrs Grimalkin— Who laughed and motioned to Mr Grimalkin to talk to Ken at the same time Isa motioned for Ken to talk with him.

Mr Grimalkin and Ken glanced to each other with horrified looks, before both turning back to the women and shaking their heads.

The women motioned harder at their partners, and Ken felt himself curling into himself as he looked back to Mr Grimalkin.

Then, he took a deep breath and stood up.

Mr Grimalkin's fur stood on end as Ken slowly approached him, and Ken swore he could hear the man letting out a low growl as he took the seat beside him and gave a weak cough.

'Uh... Mr Grimalkin,' Ken started. 'It's, uh.... Hello.'

Mr Grimalkin was *definitely* growling, now. But a quick glance to Isa told Ken to keep at it, so he swallowed down his anxiety and continued.

'So I, uh.... I never got to thank you properly for bringing Becky home,' Ken tried. 'You remember when she had that uh... episode. And ran away?'

'Da,' Mr Grimalkin growled his affirmation. 'She was living as deer in woods.'

'Oui,' Ken nodded. 'Well. Um. She's doing much better now. She's on uh... new medications. These ones seem to be working much better for her.'

'Hmp,' Mr Grimalkin gave a grunt; which Ken took as an acknowledgement.

'I really do appreciate that you brought her home,' Ken said. 'I don't know what I would have done if she didn't come back. I.... I don't think I could have bared if she didn't....'

Grimalkin's bright yellow eyes dug into Ken in an unbearable glare that made his skin crawl. Though after another glance at Isa, Ken found he couldn't stop himself from continuing.

'I mean, when she went missing I-I was worried that she might have...' Ken's breath came out in a tremble, and he felt his words escape as a whisper; '*She'd already almost killed herself, once.*'

Grimalkin's eyes softened, then. And Ken thought that, for a moment, he saw a glimmer of understanding in the man's eyes— But then his gaze hardened again and he looked away with a scowl.

Ken just swallowed. 'I don't think I could have bared losing her.'

A scoff from Grimalkin, and Ken saw him press back his ears. 'Nyet,' he said, slowly. 'Losing child is....'

Grimalkin didn't finish his sentence; but Ken didn't need him to.

Those three words had said everything.

A long, long moment of silence yawned between the two men, before Grimalkin let out a heavy sigh and sat up straight. 'Hmp... Isa is looking nice.'

The corners of Ken's mouth turned in a weak smile. 'Yes.... Mrs Grimalkin looks wonderful, too. Is that a home-made dress?'

'Da,' said Grimalkin.

'It's nice,' said Ken.

‘Da.’

‘Oui....’

More silence.

‘So...’ Ken took a long, deep breath. ‘Malinka.’

‘What about Malinka?’ Grimalkin’s defensive growl came back as he eyed Ken.

‘She’s a very smart woman,’ said Ken. ‘Wonderful seamstress— Becky showed me some of her work. I love the style she uses in her embroidery. She’s as skilled as some of my old coworkers— More skilled than some others.’

Ken saw a hint of pride sparkle in Grimalkin’s eye and the man relaxed, if not just a little, before slowly nodding. ‘Da.’

Again, the pair went quiet; awkwardly sitting together while not-quite-looking at each other.

‘*Hwuank!*’ Don’s upset honk caught Ken’s attention, and he felt the mimic run into his leg. ‘*Hornk! Wunk! Hwunk!*’

‘Hm? Don? What is it? What has happened—’ Ken cut off as he turned to the mimic, and let out a sympathetic chuckle as he saw the creature’s bow-tie had been knocked askew. ‘Aw, my friend. Let me fix that for you. Hold still.’

Don gave a whine as Ken reached down and adjusted the mimic’s outfit.

‘There you are!’ Ken declared. ‘All better!’

‘*Huwunk huwunk!*’ Don honked, examining himself happily. ‘*Hwunk!*’

The animal then sprinted away to join Mimi in the pen they had set up for the chirplings, and Ken couldn’t help but grin.

Don was a very good animal!

Ken cast his smile to Mr Grimalkin (who scowled in response) before turning back to watch Isa talk with her friends.

Both Isa and Mrs Grimalkin seemed satisfied by the men’s attempts at socialising, and now had their backs turned away from their partners to address Mrs Slader as she explained something in great detail; miming with her hands alongside her explanation.

Ken let out a sigh. ‘What do you think they’re talking about?’

‘*Vhat?*’

‘What do you think they’re talking about?’ Ken repeated.

‘I do not be knowing!’ Grimalkin growled. ‘How would I be knowing?! Be shutting up mouth, stupid veenie man!’

Ken raised his hands, defensively. ‘Whoa, whoa—’

‘Baran, darling!’ Mrs Grimalkin’s voice called, and Mr Grimalkin’s growl cut short. ‘Being nice!’

‘*Grrrhmm...*’ Mr Grimalkin made a low, not-quite-growl, not-quite-grumble, in his throat before turning away from Ken again.

Ken could only click his tongue awkwardly as he wondered if he should perhaps get up and walk away....

But then, a man that Ken recognised as Malinka’s adoptive brother approached and complained loudly to Mr Grimalkin.

‘Baran, why did we even *come here*,’ he whined; in a tone much too childish for how old he was. ‘It’s a wedding for *animals!*’

‘Do not be vhinig, Bojangles,’ Grimalkin scolded. ‘Ve are here because it is being important to Malinka.’

‘Well, why couldn’t *Malinka* come on her own!’

‘Because Tanya is deserving time with friends!’ Grimalkin snapped— And Ken decided, as the tabaxi man started loudly arguing with his son, that perhaps maybe he *should* go and sit somewhere else.

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Part 16: Isa

It wasn’t often that Isa got to speak with the other mothers of Shadow Oaks— Though, she had no idea why she didn’t set aside the time. These women were lovely people who she got along with well! And especially now that their children were all spending so much more time together, it just seemed a little bit ludicrous that they didn’t see each other more.

At least Carolina Shedskin had suggested they get together in another week or two for a barbecue— Something Dolly Slader had heartily agreed to. She said that her husband, Troy, would jump at the chance to cook ribs with someone. And Tanya Grimalkin had agreed that her husband Baran needed to get out and socialise more.... So the date was set; not this Thursday, but the next, and they’d drag their children and spouses to the Shedskin house for a cook-out.

‘*Be shutting up mouth, stupid veenie man!*’ Baran’s voice hissed from not-too-far away, and Tanya rolled her eyes as she turned around and called out to him.

‘Baran, darling! Being nice!’

Baran turned away from a stunned-looking Ken and pouted like a child; much to the amusement of all the women.

‘He is being handful, sometimes,’ Tanya gave a humoured sigh, and shook her head. ‘Always causing dramas! Anyway! Is there being anyone else who should be coming?’

‘Hm.... Perhaps we should invite Igor?’ Isa suggested. ‘I’ve heard that he’s been having trouble getting out of the house, lately.’

‘Oh, and that Stephen Jackson man!’ Dolly beamed. ‘I’ve heard from my boys that he is a *lovely* person! I’d like to get to know him better.’

‘What about, uh...’ Carolina paused, as if considering something for a moment. ‘My neighbour, Polly? Do you think we could invite her?’

‘Romero’s mother?’ Isa recalled. She’d heard about Polly from Ken— Apparently, before he had met Barbra the two of them had been neighbours, and Ken had been terrified of Romero’s father, Jason.

‘Y-Yes,’ Carolina nodded. ‘It’s just. After the drama with Kevin she could use a friend—’

‘*Well, why couldn’t Malinka come on her own!*’ cried another voice; and Tanya let out another sigh as her son and her husband began to loudly argue.

‘I should be stopping them, shouldn’t I?’ Tanya asked; not waiting for an answer before she turned around and marched over to her boys.

Isa watched as she grabbed them both by the ear and began to scold them for

their poor manners, and couldn't help but chuckle as she saw Ken skitter away to talk to Adam.

Then there was a low whine from her other side and she turned to see Howl (the young werewolf man who was dating Carolina's eldest daughter) was shuffling from foot-to-foot looking at the kobold woman.

'What is it, cariño?' Carolina asked him affectionately.

Howl gave another whine and looked at the main entrance of the hall.

'Ah, do you want to go outside?' she asked, smiling as Howl began nodding frantically. 'Mhm.... Well. Perhaps we should head off.... We don't want to be late to let the poor babysitter go home... Howl, can you go find Wendy and Beef?'

'Yes! Yes! Yes!' Howl exclaimed before sprinting away across the hall. 'I will! I will! I will!'

'It was good talking to you again, Carolina,' Dolly offered a smile to the woman.

'Yes,' Isa agreed. 'I can't wait for the barbecue.'

'It was lovely talking to you both, as well!' Carolina beamed. 'Thank you for keeping me company! I'll see you then! Adiós, amigas!'

'Ta, Carol!' Dolly gave a wave. And then her eyes darted across the room and she let out a loud bark of a laugh. 'Oh, Benny— *No, Benny!*'

Isa spun around to follow Dolly's gaze and saw the woman's son standing in a circle of his friends with a decorative vase seemingly stuck on the top half of his head; covering just over his eyes so he couldn't see where he was walking.

'*Oh my lord,*' Isa breathed. 'It's always all at once, isn't it?'

'Yep,' Dolly chuckled, putting her hands on her hips and shaking her head. 'Well. I better go save my idiot son before he blinds himself.... If you see Jareth, let him know we're heading home soon.'

'I'll let him know,' promised Isa. 'It's about time Becky had her medication, anyway. And if I find her, I find Jareth.'

'Hah! Yeah,' Dolly chuckled. 'See you, Isa. Have a good week!'

'You too,' Isa said, warmly. Then she waved a quick goodbye to Tanya before heading off to search for her daughter.

A quick glance around the hall didn't show any signs of the boisterous girl.... But after a few minutes of searching she spied Jareth retreating towards the back rooms with a tray of food, and hurried after him.

She missed seeing which room he went into— But she didn't need to see. She could *hear* Becky going on. And on. And *on*.

Oh, no....

She was going on one of her rambles about Mimi....

Isa had heard far too many of *those* over the years, and had to fight the urge to turn around and head in the opposite direction.

But... she couldn't. She had to give Becky her medication....

So Isa looked down at the floor, making her way over to the door with flower petals spilling out from underneath it, and slowly opened it to peek inside.

Ah, there was Becky.... Pacing the room with a feverish energy radiating from her as she explained about *Mimi's third birthday* and the party she'd thrown for the creature; all of the gifts, and the meatloaf they'd made in place of a cake....

Poor Tebyrn had given up taken notes, and was instead staring at Becky with

a raised brow— Clearly, they were both entertained *and* exhausted as they listened to Becky's excited recounting of Mimi sprinting around the kitchen in excitement as she sung happy birthday....

Jareth, on the other hand, was watching Becky with a look of *absolute adoration* as he sipped his drink. Like he could listen to her forever....

Isa edged close to him and tapped him on the shoulder. 'So this is where she's been hiding, hm?'

'Yep,' Jareth nodded, not taking his eyes off Becky.

'How long's it been? An hour? Hour an a half?'

'Three hours,' Jareth answered, breathlessly.

'*Three?*' Isa responded in disbelief.

'Mhm...' Jareth gave a wistful sigh. 'She's so beautiful when she's passionate, isn't she?'

Isa looked to her daughter, and couldn't find herself agreeing. The girl looked like she was going to approach someone on the street waving a sign and talking about the end of days.

Her hair was a mess, one of her dress straps had fallen off her shoulder, and she was flapping her arms like she was trying to take off into orbit; each flap sending a flurry of flower petals from her fingertips as her druidic magic burst from her uncontrollably.

And yet, despite all that, Jareth was looking at her like she was flawless.

His love for Becky was a beautiful thing to see.

'Becky, honey— Becky!' Isa interrupted her daughter as she paused to take a breath; quickly taking her by the arm and breaking her focus. 'It's time for your medicine, Becky. We have to start packing up, soon; a few people have already headed home.'

'Oh, is it that late already?' Becky blinked at Isa, who nodded. 'Oh. Wow. I didn't realise.'

'Ah! Oh, man,' Tebyrn stood up as they checked their watch. 'I have to go! I completely lost track of the time! Becky, it was *lovely* talking to you— Here—' they quickly scribbled out something on a page from their notebook, and tore the page out to give to Becky. 'Email me when you can, okay? Finish your story and send me some good photos to use!'

'I will!' Becky promised, waving to Tebyrn as they hurried out the door. 'Byeeee!'

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## **Part 17:** **Mimi**

Today was one of the best days of Mimi's life; tied only with three other days.

The day Becky had become her mama.

The day she had met Don.

And the day she had her babies.

Almost all the other days of her life had been good of course— But they just

didn't compare to how good *today* had been.

Today had had everything.

It had Mimi's Mama. And Mimi's Flamingo. And Mimi's brood. And Mimi's friends.

And it had also had toys and food and music and new smells and things to transform into! Though those weren't as important as the other things.

Things like Mimi's Flamingo, who was cuddling up beside her—

*'Lick lick!'*

And things like Mimi's brood, who were snuggled into her belly—

*'Lick lick lick lick!'*

*'Lick!'* cried a happy voice. *'Lick lick!'*

Mimi trilled and turned so she could look at her friend, Fuzzy.

Fuzzy was a strange little creature; Mama Becky had said that he was a "robot." Though Mimi wasn't completely sure what a robot was— Mimi had, when she'd first met Fuzzy, mistaken him for a mimic! Because he looked like one of Mama's plush toys, but been alive and moved! And even, sometimes, transformed into a different version of himself!

But, after some explaining, Mimi now knew better.... Fuzzy was *not* a mimic. But he was still Mimi's friend. A very good friend, indeed!

*'Lick!'* Fuzzy cried again, throwing up his arms and bouncing in excitement. *'Lick lick! Lick!'*

*'Lick lick!'* Mimi leant over so she could lick Fuzzy's cheek. *'Lick lick! Lick Mimi's friend. Lick lick!'*

*'Lick!'* Fuzzy gave a happy *wrrring* sound before pressing his little metal beak against Mimi in an attempt to lick her back. Though, without a tongue, it was more of an affectionate peck. *'MMMMMMMMWAH!'* Happy! Friend! Bounce bounce!

*'Bounce bounce!'* Mimi echoed, bouncing alongside Fuzzy playfully. *'Bounce bounce!'*

*'Bounce?'* trilled Mimi's brood. *'Bounce!'*

*'Bounce!'*

*'Bounce bounce!'*

*'Bounce!'*

*'Bounce!'*

*'Aw, look at all of you! Aren't you just precious?'*

*'Muffins!'* Mimi let out an excited cry and leapt around to face the man who had cooed at her and her family.

It was a very short tabaxi man —the shortest tabaxi Mimi had ever known!— whose name was Mr Muffins.... He was one of Mimi's oldest and most smartest friends. He ran the local pet shop and was always putting things aside for Mama Becky to spoil Mimi with!

He had also been the man who had, a very very long time ago when Mimi was first given to Mama Becky, helped her and Mamé Barbra learn how young it was (because the Other People had lied to Mamé!) and helped to feed it. He had been very helpful, then. Teaching Mimi's Mama how to look after Mimi properly. How to keep her warm, and how to make sure she drank her milk....

Things that Mimi now knew how to do for her own babies!

‘Ahah, purring up a storm, are we?’ Mr Muffins asked, reaching a hand down over the barrier of the pen Mimi and her family sat in so that he could stroke her over the back. ‘Have you had a good day?’

‘*Very good!*’ Mimi chirped. ‘*Mimi has had a very good day!*’

‘Wonderful, wonderful...’ Mr Muffins scratched that perfect itchy spot, and Mimi let out a long sigh. ‘Such a pretty girl, aren’t you?’

‘*Pretty pink!*’ Don honked his agreeance. ‘*Prettiest pink!*’

‘*Prettiest pink!*’ Fuzzy echoed.

‘*Handsome Flamingle!*’ Mimi complimented back. ‘*Soft Fuzzy!*’

‘Soft Fuzzy!’

Mimi gave a purr and slowly extended out her legs.... She was stiff from sitting with her babies for so long, and needed to stretch....

Big... *BIG* stretch!

She arched her back right up; letting her body shift and contort as she let herself turn fluid and changed her form from a pillow into a pink jewellery chest. Then she shook herself out and licked her brood again (four big licks, one on each of their heads) before nuzzling into her Flamingle and cooing; ‘*Flamingle care for brood? Mimi needs to run!*’

‘*Yes! Yes! I am a good mate!*’ Don exclaimed, stepping around Mimi so he was standing over his babies. Then, he lowered himself down on top of them; nestling his body down to keep them warm as they chirped and trilled and purred with happiness. ‘*And I am a good papa!*’

‘*Mimi is thankful!*’ Mimi trilled, before leaping over the small barrier and sprinting past Mr Muffins and across the hall.

Many of the guests had left, now, so there was more room for Mimi to run around and stretch her legs.

*Run! Run!*

*Jump!*

*Bounce!*

*Turn!*

*Run!*

Mimi ran around and around the hall, weaving through the legs of people guests, and leaping over the top of animal guests.

She ran and ran, and ran some more; the tension in her muscles fading as she used them, until she had worn herself out and slowed to a stop by the music-person that Mama Becky had hired....

The... uh....

*DJ!*

That’s right!

Mimi slowed to a stop by the DJ and their table of music, and sniffed around at it a moment before her attention was drawn to the DJ’s annoyed voice.

‘Look, I told you earlier— *No!*’ they snapped, and Mimi looked around to figure out who they were talking to....

*Ah!*

It was Portia. One of Mama Becky’s good friends— A triton who smelt like fish and the outdoors, and who always snuck Mimi treats when she was over! She was the sort of friend to be naughty and cause problems; which it looked like she was

doing now, as she argued with the DJ.

‘Oi, yeah, nah!’ she exclaimed, throwing out her arms and narrowly missing hitting her boyfriend (a goblin named Toast) in the head. ‘C’mon! Half the party’s gone home already! It won’t be no harm! Just one song!’

‘No,’ said the DJ, firmly.

‘Aw, why not?!’ Portia asked, her hands slamming onto her hips.

‘Because I have instructions, and those instructions explicitly say, *quote*, “Do not let Portia DJ!”’ snapped the DJ, holding up a piece of paper with bold writing and a photo of Portia printed on it.

‘That could be anyone!’ Portia scoffed, waving a dismissive hand. ‘C’mon! One song won’t hurt!’

‘No.’

‘Please?’

‘Porsh?’ Toast tried. ‘I think maybe we should just—’

‘I’m on my knees, DeeJ!’ Portia exclaimed, dropping to her knees and clasping her hands together. ‘Just *one* song, mate! Just one!’

‘I said *no*,’ the DJ huffed. ‘*Christ on a fucking bike....*’

Hm.

Mimi didn’t like that Portia was bothering the DJ. Mama Becky had spent a *long long* time picking the *best* DJ to play at the wedding! And Portia was being naughty and bothering them, and making it hard for them to do what Becky had asked them to!

That was very naughty, and not allowed!

‘*Bad!*’ Mimi growled, nipping Portia on the ankle. ‘*Naughty! Naughty girl! Naughty Portia!*’

‘Ow! What the—’ Portia leapt up and whirled around when Mimi bit her, but when she saw who it was she grinned. ‘Aw! Look! It’s the bride herself, here to tell me I’m allowed to play music!’

‘*No!*’ Mimi growled, aiming another nip at Portia’s foot and making the woman leap away.

‘Ah! Hey!’

‘*Naughty! Naughty naughty! Stop it!*’

‘Alright! Alright! I can take a hint!’ Portia chuckled, scooping Mimi up into her arms and flipping her over so she could scratch her belly.

‘*No you can’t...*’ mumbled the DJ.

‘Aw how’s the little cutie! How’s the little— Moist... milky... right, I forgot about that!’ Portia withdrew her hand from Mimi’s underside, flicking off the few droplets of milk that her playful petting had encouraged out of Mimi’s skin. ‘Heh. You’re just like a platypus, ain’t cha?’

Mimi wiggled, giving a loud purr as Portia teased her.

Portia had understood what Mimi was telling her, and stopped being naughty! So now Mimi didn’t have to tell her off anymore!

What a smart girl Portia was!

‘C’mon, Mimi! Let’s go chat with Dad, aye?’

Oh! Oh!

Mimi loved Portia’s papa!

He was a very funny man! Mimi had overheard he was friends with Mr



‘Aw, he jumps on *you!*’ came a playfully jealous scoff, and Don honked and reached out his neck to peck at Alyssa (another ex-classmate, this one a saytr) in order to say hello.

Oh! Oh! And Fennick the very-quiet human was here too!

Don was so happy! He couldn’t believe that Alpha Becky’s druid classmates had come! He hadn’t realised— If he had known, he would have said hello to them much much sooner!

Don loved all of Becky’s druid classmates! Because, just like him, they were all betas! And they spoke to him very politely and respectfully!

‘I think it’s the boobs,’ another voice commented, and Don honked as Alpha Portia’s friend, Alpha Leeway, twitched one of his long tabaxi ears and grinned. ‘All his favourite people seem to have *massive tits!* Becky, Marilyn, Benny—And he was *always* in Oshara’s business!’

‘Oh, shush!’ Betty snorted, shouldering Leeway with enough force to knock him off his feet.

‘Yeah, that’s not even *right!*’ Alyssa scolded, putting her hands on her hips and her nose in the air. ‘Like. Have you *seen* how he is with Mr Bloom?’

*Ken! Alyssa was talking about Ken!*

Oh! Oh! Don loved Ken!

He loved Ken so much!

‘See? Even *mentioning* him makes Don all wiggly!’ said Alyssa.

‘There are exceptions to every rule!’ Leeway argued. ‘If he doesn’t like tits, why doesn’t he ever come to *me* for attention?’

‘It’s probably your loud mouth,’ Betty grinned, adjusting Don in her grip so she could hold him like a newborn and tickle his neck. ‘He likes people who speak to him *softly.*’

Betty was right!

Yes, yes!

Don liked it when people spoke to him with soft and friendly voices!

‘Eh,’ Alpha Leeway waved a dismissive hand. ‘I still think its the tits.’

‘Oh, you *would!*’ Alyssa scoffed, taking Don from Betty and holding him up happily. ‘But *I* know what it is you *really* like!’

Don paused, curiously cocking his head and slowly bringing his tongue back into his mouth.

*Alyssa knew what he liked...?*

What did she think he liked...?

‘You like *Mimi!*’

‘*OH! OH! YES!*’ Don honked, loudly. ‘*You are right! You are right! I love my Mimi! I love my pretty pink Mimi! Yes I do! Yes! Yes! I love my Mimi! I love my Mimi so so so much! Yes! Yes!*’

‘I mean that was a little obvious,’ Leeway gave a humoured snort, and crossed his arms. ‘It is their *wedding* after all—’

The druids (and Leeway) began to playfully argue amongst themselves about things Don didn’t completely understand... though he was happy they were including them in the conversation!

Especially when Alyssa had held him up and flown him around, making little *nyooming* noises as he wiggled his feet and trilled in joy.

But then it was over all too soon; one by one, all of Don's druid friends had to go home, and he found himself sitting on Leeway's shoulder as the tabaxi hunted down his own friend, Toast (a goblin and a beta) and started making hangout plans for the rest of the week.

And even then... soon, the two of *them* had to leave, and Don was deposited on the floor with cheerful goodbye and a scratch under the chin.

Don was sad that everyone had to go... but also very happy! Because his wedding had let them all have so much fun! Which was a very good thing!

Shaking himself down, Don scanned the room to see who was still around.

There was Alpha Becky and her friends, Alpha Jezzibeth, Alpha Katie, and Marilyn! And Alpha Jezzibeth's miniature owlbear, Applesauce, was having a nap under the table. And there was also a tall pig-man that Don didn't know, who was standing with his arm around Marilyn.... They looked like they had enough people to talk to, so Don continued to look around—

Oh! Malinka and her family were at the door— *Aw...* They were now *out* the door....

And Omega Benny and Alpha Jareth were also very busy with their friends; packing everything away....

Oh! Oh! It was Don's very good friend, Tex! Tex and his owners! Alpha Zombi and Omega Romero!

They were standing in a corner, talking to each other!

Oh, he could go over and say hello to them!

He *would* go over and say hello to them!

The little mimic hustled over to the two men who stood together talking, coming to a stop just by their feet and looking up at them with a happy smile.

Omega Romero had Tex in his arms, holding him tight, while Alpha Zombi held the bouquet that Mimi had thrown. He was picking at the flowers absent-mindedly as he and Romero talked.

'Can't believe Bloom's letting me take all the leftovers!' Romero said, pulling out a tissue and wiping Tex's nose clean. 'There's *so much!*'

'Yeah, it's pretty cool of her,' Alpha Zombi replied, not taking his eyes off the flowers as he plucked a petal and began to rub it between his fingers; gently crushing it. 'I didn't expect to be invited to this, honestly.'

'I didn't expect it to actually be *fun*,' Romero added. 'But hey.... Free food, lots of chairs, and watching other people run around like idiots? I can get behind that—'

'*Hello!*' Don wasn't able to wait any longer for a lull in the conversation to greet the men, and hurriedly jumped up at Zombi and attempted to scale him. '*Hello!*'

'Oh, hey there, little fella,' Alpha Zombi greeted as Don made his way up to his shoulder and settled down with a happy purr. 'Aw, look, Ro-Ro! I made a friend!'

'Hmp,' Romero gave a humoured scoff. Then, he pulled out another tissue and wiped Don's mouth. 'I can see why Tex likes you.... You're *moist!*'

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Part 19:

Becky

The medication was starting to kick in, but Becky didn't want to go home, yet. She'd managed to track down three of her closest friends— Katie Mossward, Jezzibeth Courtland, and Marilyn Berger (and, well, Marilyn's boyfriend, Snorgles the pig-orc, but Becky was too excited to pay attention to him).

Her "clique" as people called them in high school. Though she always just thought of them as her besties.

She knew that if they knew she'd taken her medication they'd make her go home. Because they were good friends like that. Good friends who wanted her to look after herself....

But she didn't *want* to look after herself, right now! She *wanted* to talk to her besties!

She wanted to hang out with her crew and talk and gossip and laugh, just like they always used to!

So she blinked away the heaviness in her eyes, and swallowed back her yawns, and did her best to act as normal as she possibly could.

She'd said to herself; what would a normal Becky do? What would an everyday Becky do?

What would a Becky *not* on a large amount of slow-acting sedatives do?

And she'd realised the answer was *obvious!*

Becky would talk about mimics, of course.

'And that's only what happened when they, like, *found* the Iron Maiden!'

Becky explained, trying not to flap her arms with excitement as she recounted her favourite documentary. 'After they put her in the zoo, there was *so much more* drama and stuff! She's actually the reason that it's standard to put heat-sensing cameras in mimic enclosures, now! Old world mimics are just unpredictable, you know?'

'Yes, Becky, we know!' Katie mock-groaned, rolling her eyes in a humoured way as she batted at one of the many flowers that were spinning out of Becky's hands. 'You've only told us this *fifty-billion* times!'

Becky bit her lip, bouncing in place for a moment.

She'd told them this already?

God, okay. So she had to find something else to talk about!

Something else....

Some *else*—

'Like, I'd *love* to go to Europe one day to see her!' Becky blurted, unable to control herself. 'I bet she has, like. Some really interesting stories to tell!'

'*Ouagh,*' Katie groaned as Becky continued, dramatically throwing her hands up.

'Katie, you be nice!' Jezzibeth scolded, wagging a finger in Katie's face.

'I *am* being nice!' Katie huffed. Then she looked to Becky and grinned. 'I haven't told her to shut up yet, have I?'

Jezzibeth just sighed, shaking her head.

Then, Marilyn turned her attention away from her boyfriend and giggled. 'Aw. Girls! Look. Isn't that *so* sweet?'

Katie, Jezzibeth, and Becky all followed Marilyn's gaze to the other side of the

room— And Becky had to cover her mouth to stop herself from squealing when she saw it.

The DJ had left a song running while they packed away the rest of their equipment; a slower song that suited the time of day. And by the booth, face buried in his boyfriend's neck as they slowly moved in a way that was more a hug than a dance, was Adam.

'Aw, looks like Adam's finally done with the photos and is taking some time for himself,' Jezzibeth acknowledged. 'I'm glad of that. He's been working hard all day!'

'Hasn't he?' Katie chuckled. 'Dude was serious about getting some good shots.'

'Ooooooh!' Becky gave a high-pitch whine, and felt herself beginning to bounce in place.

Adam was so nice!

He'd done so much for her, today!

He was such a good friend! And a great person! And— And—

She turned in a circle, tapping her face with her hands and sending out a *whoosh* of flowers from herself.

Adam was so cute!

'Hey— Hey, watch it!' Katie snapped, holding up her arms to protect her face from the sudden burst of petals that flew towards her. 'Fuck, Beck! Be careful— Ack! Ugh! It got it my mouth! Eugh!'

'Oh! Oh!' Becky began bouncing again as an idea that she couldn't explain hit her. 'Oh, he's— I gotta— I have to— OH!'

Becky hurried away from her friends and towards Adam; at the last moment veering towards the wall where the man had left his bag. She swiped up his camera, carefully popping off the lens cap, and then snapped a few shots of her friend and his partner as they danced together.

Then she moved to a different angle, and took some more, before sneaking Adam's camera back to his bag and hustling back to her friends.

That would be a nice surprise for him, when he went through the photos later!

'Beck!' Katie chuckled, punching Becky in the shoulder as she returned. 'You big goof. Those are going to look *terrible!* You're meant to *hold the camera still* when you take a photo, not bounce around like an idiot!'

'I can't *help* it!' Becky exclaimed, flapping her arms out again.

Katie grabbed her hands, then, holding her still and giving her a playful glare. 'You're gonna take someone out doing that, Beck!'

'Sorry, sorry!' Becky exclaimed, pulling her arms close. 'I just! I can't help it!'

'Mm,' Jezzibeth acknowledged with a hum. 'Becky, dear, are you alright? You seem very tired.'

'No, I'm fine,' Becky lied. 'I took like, a nap before! So like. You know I'm not tired!'

'*Mhm,*' Jezzibeth gave another hum, this one apprehensive, and cast Katie and Marilyn a knowing look. 'You haven't had your sleeping medication, then?'

'No,' Becky lied, crossing her arms childishly and turning around so Jezzibeth couldn't see her blush. 'Why would I take my medicine? I'm still out!'

'Because I know Isa brought it with her,' Jezzibeth said, simply. 'And that you

take it at nine every night.'

'So?'

'It's nine-thirty, honey.'

'Weeeh,' Becky made a whiny noise, and scrunched up her face, before turning back to her friends. 'I'm *fine*!'

'I think you might need to lay down,' Jezzibeth said.

'No!'

'You shouldn't fight your medication, Becky—'

'You shouldn't fight *your* medication!' Becky argued, knowing full well that Jezzibeth didn't take any medication.

Her attitude amused Katie, who snickered into her fist as Jezzibeth sighed and shook her head.

'I... *mmm*...' Becky let out an apologetic whine; which Jezzibeth seemed to understand as she pet her friend on the shoulder.

'I'm going to go put Applesauce in the car,' Jezzibeth said; pecking a kiss onto the side of Becky's head. 'Don't you cause any trouble while I do!'

'Mmm! Okay,' Becky agreed, rocking on her heels as Jezzibeth carefully bundled up her sleeping owlbear and carried it away. Then, Becky sighed and turned back to her other friends. 'It was, like. So good that you came!'

'Yeah, well. I wanted to see just *how* extra you were going to be,' Katie teased, ruffling Becky's hair. 'I shouldn't have been surprised you'd go this far for Mimi.'

'She wanted a big wedding,' Becky argued, slowly lowering herself off her toes as a wave of exhaustion hit her.

Hm....

Maybe Jezzibeth *was* right.

She was feeling... tired.

Really tired.

Like she couldn't keep her eyes open, sort of tired....

Even when Katie snorted a laugh and made a cheeky comment, Becky felt her eyes drooping....

Then, suddenly, a hand wrapped around her shoulder and Becky gave a jolt and a snort and opened her eyes wide to find Jezzibeth had returned; Isa at her side.

'You were right,' Isa commented to Jezzibeth. Then, she brushed Becky's hair from her eyes. 'Come on, Becky. Let's get you in the car.'

Becky stared at her mother for a long, long moment as she processed what had been said.... Then she frowned at Jezzibeth. 'You *told on me*?'

'You'll thank me tomorrow,' Jezzibeth chuckled.

Becky blew a loud raspberry in response, before Isa's embrace around her tightened and she felt herself being guided towards the door.

~~~~~

## **Part 20: Isabel**

Isabel watched as Becky was guided to the car; whining loudly the whole time that she *wasn't tired* and wanted *just a little longer* with her friends.

She was clearly exhausted, though. And almost as soon as Isa had buckled her in and shut the car door, the girl's head was resting against the window and her eyes were slowly drooping closed.

So, while Isa said her goodbye's to Becky's friends and helped Jareth with the last of the event's clean-up, Isabel figured she'd do something useful and gathered up Mimi and her brood into their carrier. She'd just closed the door when she heard Don honk at her from across the room, and she let him into the carrier to snuggle up with his family.

She held the carrier up for Isa to see, getting a confirming thumbs up, before heading to the car to set them in besides Becky. She pulled the seatbelt across them and buckled them in (just so they were *extra* safe) and then shut the door and headed back inside to say her goodbyes to Moon.

She found the woman talking with Ken and Cheeto, and quietly walked over to take her by the arm and lay her head lightly on top of Moon's own.

They were talking about Isa, and how hard she had worked making sure the wedding went smoothly— And how exhausted she looked....

'I could drive the car back,' Isabel offered. 'I'm not tired at all! Actually, I'm feeling a little bit buzzed.'

'Yeah, I know, right?' Cheeto laughed. 'I'm half tempted to head to the club after this!'

'You extroverts terrify me,' Ken muttered in a joking tone. 'Hm... perhaps it would be best if I drove the girls home. Will you be alright by yourself? It's a long drive.'

'I'll be fine!' Isabel reassured. 'I always used to go driving on my own! It's not a problem.'

'I could always go with you,' Moon suggested, and Isabel felt herself light up. 'We could get dinner on the way back.'

'Oh that would be wonderful!' Isabel beamed. 'Oh— But, oh. Moon, what about *your* car?'

'Ayyyy,' Cheeto gave an impish grin, and motioned to himself proudly. 'Who's got two thumbs, and got their license back last week? This guy!'

Moon looked a little apprehensive, at that.... Though it was clear that her want to spend time with Isabel was stronger than her misgivings about her cousin's driving skills as she pulled her keys from her pocket and held them out to him.

'Aw, *yeah* cus! Perfect—'

Moon yanked the keys back as Cheeto made a grab for them.

'Ah! Ah!' she scolded, pointing an accusing finger at him. 'Do not crash my car again.'

Cheeto gave a dismissive chuckle. 'I won't crash your—'

'Do *not* crash my car again,' Moon repeated, firmer this time.

'Moon, I've been clean for three years,' Cheeto said; raising his hands submissively and taking on a serious tone. 'I won't crash your car.... Can I have some friends in it, though?'

Moon's ears folded back and her eyes tightened.

'Sober friends?'

Her ears flicked back up. 'Alright. But you be *safe*, you hear me? Or I'll never hear the end of it from Auntie.'

Cheeto was already halfway to the door; his hand held high in a thumbs-up as hurried away.

'God, that idiot better not hurt himself,' Moon huffed. Then she chuckled and held out her hand to Ken. 'I believe I saw Isa putting Becky in her car.... Wouldn't want the girl to wake up while we're getting dinner and freak out, so perhaps we should take yours.'

'Ah, yes! Good idea. Very good idea,' Ken agreed, pulling out his keys and giving them to Moon. 'And if you scratch my car, it will not be such a big deal as with Isa's!'

'She *does* love her car,' Isabel observed.

'She is very proud of it,' Ken agreed. 'Well. I shall go and make sure she doesn't leave without me! You two have a good time.'

'We will, thank you,' Moon nodded to Ken, and stepped away so he could pass her. 'See you at home, Ken.'

'Yes. See you,' Ken passed the girls, heading off to Isa, and Isabel watched from a distance as the couple embraced and began to talk.

She couldn't help but grin.

And then, Moon took her hand and squeezed it. 'Shall we?' she asked.

'Sure!' Isabel giggled, following Moon to Ken's car and settling herself in the passenger seat. 'Where do you want to go?'

'Well... there's this nice little place on the other side of town,' Moon said. 'Tabaxi's Tacos? It's not romantic or anything, but it's good food. And the owner is lovely.'

'Oh, tacos?' Isabel leant towards Moon in excitement. 'So, Spanish?'

Moon shook her head, twitching her whiskers and giving Isabel a very patient look that let her know she had been wrong in a rude way. 'Mexican,' the tabaxi corrected.

'Those are... *different*?' Isabel grimaced as quite a few arguments she had been in during her youth suddenly made sense. 'Oh, my.'

~~~~~

Part 21:

Ken

It wasn't often that Ken was trusted to drive Isa's car, and when the drow hadn't hesitated to give him her keys, he *knew* she was exhausted.

So he wasn't surprised when she'd fallen asleep in the passenger seat on the way home; her head tilted forward and down, and her breathing coming out soft and even....

A stark contrast to his daughter, who's intermittent snoring drowned out the radio as she lay limply against the window. She spoke a little in her sleep, mumbling nonsense.

Shortly after getting back to town Ken had bounced over a pothole and heard

her head *thump* heavily against the glass.

She hadn't woken up (Ken wasn't sure that *anything* could wake her, with this new medication she was trialling) but regardless, he had still slowed down and taken a different, longer-but-less bumpy route home.

He didn't mind that it added an extra ten minutes to the drive; he didn't want *either* of his girls being woken up until they had to be. Plus, after such a long day he was enjoying the quiet company of the two people he'd *actually* wanted to spend the day with.

He glanced in his rear view mirror at his daughter again and felt himself smiling.

He still couldn't believe that she had trusted him to help with the wedding when, just two years ago, she'd *hated* him.

Or, at least, he'd *thought* she hated him. She certainly hadn't *trusted* him, at least.

And it wasn't undeserved distrust, either; he'd hurt her so many times before.... He'd always had good intentions, but he just always seemed to do the wrong thing....

Who would have known that it was losing his patience at her that would have brought her back to him?

It was funny, really.

It was the one thing he'd always told himself he would never do was yell at his daughter; never take his temper out on her or raise his voice. He never wanted her to fear him. Not like he feared his father. Or like her mother feared hers.

But it had been the thing she'd wanted him to do more than anything else. To show her that he saw her. Really saw *her*, and not just some idealised version of her he'd created for himself in his head....

He was glad that they could talk about these things, now.

That doctor Goodhuman was a lifesaver!

Ken let out a breath as he pulled into his driveway, and he dug through the car's glove box for the garage door opener.

Ugh, that terrible squeak— He'd need to ask one of the Sladers for help fixing it sometime.

At least it didn't wake anybody. Person or mimic.

Ken climbed out of his seat and made his way to his daughter's door... but then realised that she was leaning on the window, and if he opened the door she would fall out.

So, he headed to the other side of the car —the side that her mimics were carefully strapped into— and removed the carrier. He made sure not to jostle them as he pulled them out of the car and peered inside....

They were all fast asleep; curled up together in the toys and blankets that had been put in with them.

Hm.... He might as well take them upstairs, now, so that he wouldn't forget and leave them in the garage overnight.

The temperature was so extreme in this small room, exposed to all of the elements— It would be worse than just leaving the creatures outside! And he knew if he did *that* Becky would have his head.... He couldn't imagine what she would say if he left Mimi and her babies *here*.

So he took the carrier upstairs and cleared some space in their widow-side pen so he could set them down and open the door.

None of the mimics stirred, thankfully, and Ken returned downstairs to retrieve his daughter.

He crawled in through the open door and shuffled over to Becky so he could pull her off the door.

He had intended to go back around to the other side of the car once he'd moved her; but with the way she flopped limply over when Ken backed out of the car... there wasn't any point. She was now splayed over the entirety of the backseat, so it wasn't too difficult to drag her out and heft her up into his arms—

God, she was heavier than she looked!

Ken stumbled, but *refused* to fall or drop his daughter.

If Isa could carry the girl over her shoulder while she was kicking and screaming, he could get her into bed without waking her....

Ken adjusted his grip, summoning all of his strength and will, and managed to get ahold of Becky bridal-style.

He made sure not to bump her on doorways as he made his way through the house and made the difficult climb up the stairs.... Then he lay her softly in bed, adjusting her bedding to the most comfortable he knew how, and pecked a kiss on her forehead.

She let out a sigh and mumbled something about “*the sheep*,” which in itself was humorous enough before she let out a quiet bark.

At least it wasn't another nightmare....

Ken rose to his feet and stumbled to the door where he paused, waiting a moment to watch his daughter with a smile, before heading back down to the car to retrieve Isa.

He wasn't sure if he'd be able to carry *Isa*, if he could barely handle carrying Becky... though luckily he saw that he wouldn't need to try, as she was already out of her seat and sleepily closing the car doors Ken had left open.

‘Mon amoureuse,’ he hugged his girlfriend from behind; wrapping his arms around her middle and pressing a kiss into her neck. ‘I have just taken Becky to bed.... Would you like me to run you a bath?’

‘Mmm,’ Isa let out a long, contented sigh and leant back into Ken's embrace. ‘I would love that.’

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## **Part 22:**

### **Isa**

For the past hour, Isa had been receiving one of the best pamperings of her entire life.

When Ken had offered to run her a bath she hadn't expected bath salts and candles. Nor had she expected him to join her; resting behind her so that he could rub her shoulders and massage conditioner through her hair.

She'd almost fallen asleep again as he'd spoilt her. And then when he'd walked

her to bed and lay her down and kissed her neck and chest and settled against her with her head in the nook of his arm, she'd felt so loved it almost brought her to tears.

Ken's embrace was warm. And his heartbeat was strong. Perhaps it was beating a little fast, as he not-so-subtly sniffed her hair and kissed her cheek. But it made Isa feel secure. Like she could be soft and let her guard down.

Slowly, Isa ran her hand over Ken's bare chest. She trailed her fingers over the freckles in his skin, each familiar dot leading her around his body.

His chest.... His stomach.... His arm.... His neck....

Isa let out a long, happy sigh, and wrapped her arm over Ken so she could press tighter into him.

The feeling of his skin against hers was bliss.

She wished they could just lay here together forever....

Another sigh escaped Isa, and she shuffled up so she could peck a kiss on Ken's lips.

He was such a wonderful man.

Strange, perhaps.

And sometimes a little bit misguided.

But so full of love.

And endlessly patient.

She loved him so much, and wanted to just *be* with him.

*It was time to bring it up....*

'Ken?' she asked, softly.

'Yes, ma choupette?'

'I've been thinking.... Uh....'

'You have been thinking...?' Ken echoed, slowly. 'What about, ma chérie?'

'When was the last time we didn't share a bed?'

'Oh— Um...' Ken bit his lip, clearly deep in thought. Then, he went pink in a sheepish blush. 'About six months ago, when I uh... lied to you about... Becky fighting the, uh....'

'The calamity,' Isa recalled. 'Hm... but, uh. *After* that, I don't think we've spent a night apart, have we?'

'Non,' Ken agreed. 'I don't believe we have.'

'Hm.. well... I was thinking maybe we uh...' Isa swallowed, feeling....

Was she nervous?

God, she hadn't felt nervous like this in *years*.

'Perhaps, um.... Perhaps we don't... uh.... Mm.... Maybe we would do well... *sharing* a bed. Room. Sharing... a bedroom?'

She felt Ken's heart beat faster at her suggestion. And his entire body tensed as he rolled to look at Isa with wide eyes.

'Share a bedroom?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'How intimate.'

'Inti—' Isa had to bite back her laugh.

They were currently laying together naked. After spending almost an hour in the bath together. And he was surprised by the idea of being *intimate*....

For a moment, Ken stared at Isa in shock. Then, he smiled. 'Would I move in

here, or you into mine?’

‘You have the on-suite,’ Isa stated with a humoured chuckle. ‘Plus I was thinking I could maybe... turn this room into a little office for myself. Like you have your study, and Becky has her workout room.’

‘Would you like to keep your mattress?’

‘It’d be nice. You wouldn’t mind?’

‘I find yours more comfortable,’ Ken admitted, his blush growing darker. ‘We could plan where we want to move the furniture tomorrow, and—’

A loud *thump* sounded from just down the hall, and Isa heard Isabel curse loudly.

‘Oh my god, honey? Are you alright?’

‘I tripped on the rug!’ Isabel exclaimed, giggling. Then she gave a pain groan. ‘Ow! Ow.... Aw, jeez. That hurt...!’

‘I forgot you can’t see in the dark!’ Moon cooed. ‘Aw, honey.... I’ll turn on the light—’

‘No, no, it’s been broken for weeks,’ Isabel told her girlfriend. ‘Don’t bother with it. Just help me up.’

*Has it?* Isa thought. *Isabel never mentioned, that....*

And she supposed nobody else noticed; they all had darkvision, after all. All except for Isabel.

It was so easy to forget she was fully human and didn’t have the same eyesight as the rest of the family.

‘Three, two, one— *On your feet!*’ Moon said with a playful giggle.

Isa heard another thump that she could only imagine was Isabel being hefted up and dropped onto her feet.

‘There we go!’ teased Moon.

‘There we go!’ echoed Isabel.

‘There they go,’ mumbled Ken, dropping his head back down onto his pillow as the girls started down the hall towards Isabel’s room.

‘Hey, Moon!’ Isabel exclaimed. ‘Should I get a tattoo?’

‘Do you *want* a tattoo?’

‘I dunno. I don’t *not* want one!’ Isabel said, her voice fading into near-silence as Isa heard her door shut.

‘They are *very* loud,’ Ken commented.

‘Aren’t they?’ Isa chuckled. ‘I think it’s safe to say which side of the family Becky gets it from.’

Ken echoed Isa’s laugh, wrapping his arm over her and pulling her close into his side. ‘Oh, l’amour de ma vie. I love you so much. With all my heart.’

Isa felt herself blush as a kiss was pressed into the curve of her neck, and she closed her eyes. ‘You romantic....’

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Part 23: **Mimi**

Mimi awoke to a loud *thump* and swearing in the hallway.

‘Oh my god, honey? Are you alright?’

‘I tripped on the rug!’

Ah, it was just Isabel and Moon....

‘*Loud!*’ chirped a small voice from beside Mimi.

‘*Loud noise!*’

‘*What was that?*’

‘*Big noise!*’

‘*Isabel fell over,*’ Mimi comforted, licking each of her babies in turn. ‘*Nothing scary outside! No, no! Just Mama Becky’s auntie! Listen....*’

‘Three, two, one— On your feet!’

‘*Oh!*’

‘*Oh!*’

‘*Oh!*’

‘*Oh!*’

Mimi licked all of her babies again. ‘*Come eat, babies.*’

‘*Eat?*’

‘*Eat!*’

‘*Milk?*’

‘*Yum!*’

Mimi’s babies enthusiastically allowed their mother to pull them close into her underbelly, and began to feed.

Mimi stretched out, letting out a long sigh as she relaxed with her babies.

She could hear her Mama Becky snoring in her bed, her breathing broken by mumbles and whispers as she dreamed.

Good dreams, by the sound of it. Which Mimi was very happy about. She hated when her Mama Becky had nightmares. Especially now that she had to look after her babies and she couldn’t always just jump up and comfort her without hesitation.... But that was why her Flamingle was such a good boyfriend—

Husband!

Mimi remembered with a happy chirp.

Don wasn’t just Mimi’s boyfriend anymore! Don was Mimi’s *husband!*

An extra-special kind of boyfriend that meant their love would be forever and ever!

Mimi liked that thought. Her Flamingle was so special, and she wanted to be with him for even longer than forever and ever!

Today had been a *very* good day.

‘*Done!*’

‘*All done!*’

‘*Finished!*’

‘*Full!*’

All of Mimi’s babies gave happy trills and chirps and began to bounce around the carrier. And then, they bounced out of the carrier and into the main part of their pen where they had more room to play.

Blue jumped on the top of Don’s head on its way out, and the mimic woke with a surprised *honk!* and lifted himself up to watch his babies run around.

‘*My brood!*’ he trilled, following his babies into the pen. Then he paused,

jumping around and hurrying back into the carrier to nuzzle Mimi. *'My pretty pink!'*

'Flamingle!' Mimi cooed back, licking her Flamingle's head. *'Mimi loves Flamingle.'*

'I love my pretty pink!' Don purred, and tapped his feet in joy before ducking back out of the carrier to play with his babies.

Mimi took the opportunity to splay out on her side and stretch her legs. She stretched them *aaaaaaall* the way out, tapping the other side of the carrier with her little spider toes, and then rolled onto her back and stretched them up to the roof of the carrier.

Big stretch!

Big, *big* stretch!

Being a mama was hard work!

It was very very hard work!

Wow, it was!

Much harder work than Mimi had thought it was going to be. Mama Becky had always made it look so easy, even when Mimi was being a naughty little stinker and making problems on purpose, Mama Becky always knew the right thing to do.

Mimi was glad that she had so much help with her babies; without her handsome Flamingle and Mama Becky and Pépé Ken and Auntie Isabel and Mémé Isa and Papa Jareth, she wasn't sure how she would have managed to look after all four of her brood!

Mimi was very glad Becky had been her mama. And very glad to have her Flamingle. She was very glad to have *all* of her family....

Mimi stopped stretching, and licked her lips.

She was thirsty.

Mimi rolled to her feet and trot out of the carrier, playfully nipping at her babies as she passed them.

The water bowl in the pen was empty; a plush toy had been dropped into it and soaked it all up! So Mimi gave a chirp to Don to get his attention so he would see where she went as she leapt up over the barrier and headed for the kitchen.

The running water fountain that Mama Becky had gotten was still very full, so Mimi had a big drink before skittering into the lounge room and sniffing about.

She leapt onto one of the leather couches and rubbed against it, enjoying the texture, before leaping up her scratching post and gnawing on one of its carpet panels.

'Bite! Bite! Chew!' Mimi growled playfully, pulling on a loose group of threads so she could hear that satisfying *rr-rrr-rrrRRIP* sound. *'Rip! Tear! Kill! Take that, post! Growl! Rip! Bite!'*

Mimi bit and pulled and tore at the scratching post until the piece she was playing with came loose and she stumbled backwards; almost falling off the end but catching the edge so she could lower herself back down to the couch again.

She rubbed her face on it again before picking up the remote and giving it a gentle chew until the television turned on.

The channel was boring, though, so Mimi ignored it and instead sniffed between the couch's cushions; licking her long tongue down as deep as it could go

to see if her pépé had lost more yummy treats inside....

She found a goldfish cracker (which she ate) and the spare car keys that Ken had lost last month (which she dropped on the floor by the coffee table) before deciding that the couch was as boring as the TV and heading back upstairs to her babies and Don.

Her Flamingle was on his back, his legs flailing in the air as the babies climbed around on top of him.

'Good hunters!' he honked, pretending that he couldn't get up, even though it was very clear that he could. 'You caught me! Yes you have! My very smart brood has hunted me! Oh! Oh! I am caught!'

'Growl!' teased the brood.

'Nip!'

'Hunt!'

'Capture!'

Mimi felt herself purring as she watched her family play.

What a good family she had!

She jumped over the barrier into the pen, and her babies all immediately perked up at her presence.

'Mama!'

'Mama's back!'

'Hello Mama!'

'Mama! Mama! Mama!'

'Hello babies!' Mimi greeted; licking each of her babies on the face. 'Hello! Good babies! Very good babies!'

After licking her babies, Mimi skittered over to her bed and settled down, nestling in the warm fluffy fabric as her brood bounced around her, playfully growling and nipping each other.

Then she felt the weight of her Flamingle stepping clumsily on her back as he attempted to climb in the bed next to her.

He gave Mimi a lick as he stood over her, and then reached down his little head to look her in the eyes.

'It is very late,' he snuffled. 'I want to check on the family.'

'Mimi doesn't mind,' purred Mimi, nuzzling her Flamingle. 'Mimi will look after brood! Flamingle can leave.'

Mimi's Flamingle thanked her with another big, very moist lick, before stumbling off her and over the barrier into the main part of the bedroom.

And Mimi watched as he leapt up for Becky's bed and missed; landing on his back with a breathless *SNUFFK!*

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## **Part 24:**

### **Don**

Don had sat with his Alpha Becky for about ten minutes while she slept, making sure that she was definitely having good dreams and not bad ones before

he went out to check on everyone else.

He'd sat in the curve of her neck and purred comforting words to her every time her snoring lulled and she twitched and mumbled, calling her *Good Girl* and *Pretty Becky*, hoping that doing so would put his compliments into the mouths of people in her dreams.

Then, when he'd been completely satisfied that his Alpha Becky was okay, he'd stumbled to his feet and jumped (or more...*flopped*) off the bed.

He chuffed another goodbye to his Mimi before heading into the hall to patrol the house.

It was a very important thing to do. He had to watch over his territory; now that he had a brood he had to make *extra* sure that they would be safe. And that meant making sure everyone and everything was where it was supposed to be—And that nothing and nobody that wasn't meant to be there had somehow gotten there.

Don started with the corners of the hall either side of Becky's door. He sniffed at the bottom corners, one at a time, to make sure they smelt how they were supposed to (they did), and then looked up, craning his neck, to make sure that the big brown house spider was still in the corner to the left of the door.

It was. And it had caught a moth; so it was doing its job like it was supposed to and he didn't have to honk scoldings at it again.

Instead he could move onto the next room; Ken's study.

Don leapt up at the door handle and twisted it open, dropping to the floor after he heard that quiet and familiar *click* and pushing with all his tiny might so that the door creaked and pivoted and let him in.

He was immediately hit with a chill breeze and realised with a huff that Ken had left the window open again.

*Oh, that wouldn't do!*

Alpha Isa said that Ken was supposed to shut that, when he was done in his study!

Ken would get in a lot of trouble if Alpha Isa saw that!

So, with a honk, Don scurried over to the window; leaping up onto its sill and sniffing around its edges before jumping at it and pulling it closed with a *thud!*

*There!*

Now the window was closed like it was supposed to be, and Ken wouldn't get in trouble for being naughty.

What a good boy Don had been!

Now, just to check that nothing had come in through the window while it was open!

*Sniff snuffle.*

*Sniff sniff snuffle sniff.*

*Snort!*

Nothing out of place!

Now it was time to move on to the next room!

Don stumbled into the hall, gazing around, before heading for the spare room opposite Ken's study.

Finding nothing amiss in that room, either, Don continued his patrol; slowly making his way down the hall and through each and every room, until....

*Ah!*

Omega Isabel's room!

And her lamp light was on; Don could see it creeping out under the door! Not as bright as her main bedroom light, but still enough to let him know that she was awake.

*Sniff snorf!*

He sniffed just under the door and caught a second familiar scent.

Omega Isabel's mate, Alpha Moon, was in the room with her.

How great! How great!

Alpha Moon was a wonderful alpha!

So soft, and so sweet, and she always skritch-and-scratched Don in all the best places with her well-kept claws!

Excited that he might be able to get a good scratch while doing his check of Isabel's room, Don leapt up and took ahold of her door handle, twisting it skilfully and pressing his head against the doorframe to help push the door open.

Then, he looked across the room to Omega Isabel and Alpha Moon, who were lying together in bed and....

OH! What a strange place to kiss! Don had never seen people kiss *that* spot, before!

How new! How different!

Oh!

He wanted kisses, too!

Don dropped off the door and ran to the bed; leaping up to join the women with a loud honk of greeting that made both of them jump in fright.

'Don!' Isabel's voice came out as a cry as her head shot up and she rolled off Moon. She seemed to misjudge how close she was to the edge, as she tumbled off the other side of the bed and landed on the floor with a heavy *THUMP!*

'Oops!' Don squawked, hurrying over the top of a very stunned-looking Moon and jumping down to check that Omega Isabel hadn't gotten hurt. 'You okay? You okay? Not hurt?'

Isabel rolled to sit up, wiping her mouth on her arm, and gave Don a playful glare; scrunching up her nose so it pressed wrinkles under her eyes.

'Isabel? Honey?' Moon leant over the bed, a concerned look on her own face.

'Ken was *right*,' Isabel said, drawling slowly. 'You really are a little cockblock, aren't you?'

Don didn't know what that word meant, but Isabel was smiling; which meant she couldn't be *too* hurt!

'Sorry! I am sorry!' Don apologised, jumping up to give Isabel an apologetic lick— And honking in surprise when she quickly grabbed him and held him at arm's length.

'Trust me, little buddy,' she said with a giggle. 'You don't want to be licking my face right now.'

*Huh? Why not?*

Don cocked his head, and drew his tongue back into his mouth.

But he *always* wanted to lick people's faces!

'Should we put him out?' Moon asked. 'Or will he just break back in?'

'Nah, he's fine,' Isabel chuckled, placing Don on the floor and gently pushing

on his rump so he stumbled forward into the nook by her dresser. 'He just likes to say goodnight and check for monsters under the bed.'

'Yes! Yes, I do!' Don honked his agreeance as he approached the dresser and checked it all over. *'I must look after my family! Yes, I must! And keep my family safe and happy! Just like they keep me safe and happy! Yes, yes! I am a good beta!'*

Don kept honking and huffing and snuffling the entire time he surveyed the room from floor to ceiling before, satisfied, he climbed back on the bed to peck a kiss on Omega Isabel and Alpha Moon's cheeks.

'Good boy,' Isabel cooed, giving Don a vigorous rub down his side. 'Why don't you go check on Ken?'

Oh! What a good idea!

Don *loved* checking on Ken!

Don gave a wiggle at the mention of his good friend, then jumped off the bed and hurried to the hall. He turned back to give Isabel one last goodbye snuffle as she shut her door, before holding his head high and trotting down the hall to the end room. This one was the most opposite of Becky's room; it was Ken's room!

The door was already ajar, so Don pushed it open and politely surveyed the floor. He quickly checked under the bed for anything amiss (finding nothing but the surprise birthday present that Ken had bought for Alpha Isa) and then leapt up onto the bed to find....

Nothing.

Ken wasn't in bed.

That was okay.

Often Ken wouldn't be in his bed at night— He would be somewhere else in the house! Sometimes he would be in his office, or downstairs on the couch with the television... but most nights lately he had been curled up with his Alpha Isa in her room.

It was nice to see Alpha Isa make Ken so happy, because Don liked it when his friends were happy.

Don finished checking Ken's room and then headed for Alpha Isa's room.

He opened her door with a quiet *creeeee*....

And then heard Ken's soft voice call to him.

'*Shh...*' whispered the man. 'Careful. Don't wake her....'

Don carefully —quietly— slid down the door to the floor and hurried over to join Ken and Alpha Isa on the bed.

He didn't honk in greeting; quietly snuffling and wiggling his neck instead so that he didn't wake Alpha Isa.

'Good boy,' Ken said softly, reaching out to scratch at Don's neck. 'We are fine, tonight. Everything is in place.'

Don trusted Ken, but still wanted to be absolutely sure; so he quickly gave his friend a lick on the cheek and then jumped off to check the room corner to corner.

Ken was correct; nothing was out of place!

So Don leapt up to join Ken on the bed again and pecked playfully at his face.

Ken snickered, clearly trying to laugh quietly, and pet Don again. 'I heard you terrorising Isabel.'

*'Protecting,'* Don huffed his quiet correction. *'I was protecting Isabel!'*  
Another snicker escaped Ken before he shuffled down the bed and wrapped his arms around Isa with a sigh. 'You are a good boy, Don. You go get some rest.' Rest?  
Oh, no! Don couldn't rest! Not yet!  
He still had many more places in the house to check tonight!  
So, after a quick wiggle to say goodbye, Don headed out and made for the stairs.

—END—

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