

Trade

By C. Jade Wyton

Isabel Parker makes a very surprising and unexpected trade with a stranger in the street.

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Isabel was grateful that her niece Becky had given her a job.

It had been well over ten years since she'd last worked (not since her sister had died and she'd moved in with her father) so finding work had been... difficult to say the least. And it had really been a knock to her confidence when, for almost four years looking, she hadn't been able to find a job.

So when Becky had mentioned to her that her business was growing and she was thinking of hiring a cleaner, Isabel had offered to do it all.

Isabel didn't want hand outs, of course. And she knew that Becky hadn't hired her out of pity; her niece was *very* serious about her work. And she wouldn't have let Isabel help if she didn't think she would do a good job.

So Isabel did her best; cleaning and maintaining the boutique while Becky handled her clients, and being grateful that Becky paid her enough that she was able to finally rebuild a house on the property she'd inherited and move in with her fiancée, Moon.

It made her feel good to be so self-reliant.

Even if she had to drive an hour to work and back every day!

Life was finally good.

'Ooooh! Hey!'

Isabel flinched at the cooing masculine voice and, against her better judgement, turned to eye the man who'd call to her.

It was a halfling. With sandy blonde hair and a dog so big it could probably swallow him whole!

Isabel blinked at the dog.

It was *humongous*. An absolutely *ludicrous* size! Especially for a man so small to be walking on a leash.

'I love your hat!' he exclaimed, hurrying over to point at Isabel's sun hat. 'Want to trade it for my dog?'

'What?'

'I'll give you my dog for your hat!' he told her, holding up the leash for his very-large dog.

'Uh...' for a long moment, Isabel was stunned. 'Are you sure?'

'Yeah!'

Another pause.

'C'mon! He's a good boy! It's a winning trade!'

Isabel just blinked, staring at the man and his dog in shocked silence.

Then the dog approached her, snuffling at her hand and giving it a sloppy-but-affectionate lick.

And, slowly, Isabel removed her hat.

She handed it to the halfling, who slapped the dog's lead into her hand and hustled away in excitement.

And Isabel was left standing in the street, holding the lead of a dog that was apparently now hers.

'What in the *world*?' she breathed.

'*Hhhwuff*,' answered the dog.

'Hm...' Isabel looked down at the dog, who looked back up at her.

He was *massive*.

He stood at half her height. And was three times as thick as she was— And all of that looked like *muscle*.

Could dogs be body builders? Because it looked like this one was....

'*Snfk*,' the dog pressed its massive head into Isabel's middle, almost knocking her down as it gently sniffed at her. Then it snorted, and its tail began to wag.

'*Bwoof!*'

It was a surprisingly controlled and quiet bark, for a creature of its size.

Slowly, Isabel offered the dog her hand; petting it on the top of its head when it gave her a lick.

He seemed friendly, at least.

Isabel had been introduced to enough dogs in her past year working with Becky to have learnt a good amount of their body language. And she could recognise that this animal wasn't being aggressive; not in any way! He was completely relaxed and calm.

'What a good boy you are. Do you have a name...?' she asked it, carefully crouching down and finding herself at the perfect height for the animal to lick her face. 'Oh! Good boy, good boy.'

She leant her head down to avoid the dog's tongue and grabbed for his collar tag.

"*Wrinkle*" was the only thing written on it.

No phone number. No address. Just *Wrinkle*.

'*Wrinkle*?' Isabel said aloud, and the dog's ears twitched forward. 'Is that your name? *Wrinkle*?'

'*Brwoof!*'

'I'll take that as a yes....'

So. His name was *Wrinkle*.

What a fitting name.

Isabel gave the animal a tentative pet on the neck; rubbing more vigorously as his tail began to wag.

'Oh you like that, I bet!' she said, getting it under the ears and around the cheeks. 'You're such a floppy boy! *Yes you are!* Wrinkly and floppy and strong! Moon is gonna love you!'

Uh-oh.... *Moon*.

How was Isabel going to explain this to Moon?!

She couldn't just say she was going out for bread and come home with a *whole dog!*

Well... maybe she could.

Moon liked dogs— But *ugh!* Getting one was supposed to be something fiancées did *together!*

Not just in trade for a hat!

Isabel bit her lip as she rose back to her feet and tapped a hand into her hip as she paced; the dog following her curiously back and fourth as she did.

*Hmm....*

She paused, pulling out her phone, and held the side button for a second.

*'What can I help you with?'* spoke the assistant.

*'Call. Moon.'*

*'Calling Moon.'*

The phone rung.

And rung.

And rung....

*'Hey honey,'* Moon's voice purred into Isabel's ear, and Isabel felt herself blushing at the woman's tone. *'You've been out a while. Is everything alright?'*

*'Uh... yes?'* Isabel answered, her voice squeaking as she did. *'Um. So... the strangest thing just happened....'*

—END—

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