

"The Big Day"

"Happy 40th, Ben!!"

Ben had just arrived home from his job at the radio station. His wife Tomara, a coeurl succubus, and his son Michael, a not-yet-mature incubus who could almost be his double, had decked the house in blue, black, and white decorations while he was away. A banner strung over the kitchen doorway where his family was standing read "HAPPY BIRTHDAY". He wasn't really surprised, but he humored them anyway.

It had been a big year for the Buran-Daryil family. Earlier that same year, Michael's clan mark—the mark of Lord Ikaarion Daryil—had appeared on his right knee on his 17th birthday.

Ben grinned from ear to ear and trotted over to his family. Tomara's Warp-Aci, Caisi, flitted happily over their heads chanting "Cake day! Cake day!" as he hugged them both and said, "Aww, you guys remembered! I'm so happy!"

Tomara smirked. "Hey, just because I'm more than seven times your age doesn't mean I would forget *your* birthday," she said, sticking out her tongue.

Ben looked at her and grinned his trademark sly grin. "Seven times, huh? And yet you still don't look a day over two hundred." Tomara just elbowed him.

Michael rolled his eyes and gestured toward the kitchen table. "Wanna open your present now, Dad?"

Ben looked to the table. In the middle of it sat a hat box wrapped in metallic blue paper. "*Present? Singular?*" he said, his expression feigning disappointment. This time both Tomara and Michael elbowed him. "*Ow, okay okay, I'll open it!*" he said and hopped over to the table. He looked the box over for a moment, then picked it up and shook it. He couldn't hear anything inside. His wife and son just rolled their eyes.

Finally, Ben set the box back down and tore off the wrapping paper. He opened the lid... and quickly jumped backward as a hand clad in an arm-length black leather glove popped out and smacked him right in the forehead with a stick. “What the...” he began, rubbing his forehead with both hands.

“*That’s* for shaking me up like that!” a voice said. Ben lowered his hands to see Lord Daryil himself climbing out of the hat box like something out of a cartoon. He was dressed in his tight black leather ensemble—the kind he only wore to... *special* occasions. The stick he had hit Ben with morphed into a riding crop.

“Wha... You... Lord **Daryil**!? What are you—I mean, I’m honored, but what are *you* doing here??” Ben sputtered. “Wait... *No*, you couldn’t be here to... My wife’s standing right there!!” he said, gesturing his hands toward Tomara.

Daryil rolled his eyes. “*No*, I’m not here to do *that*, silly! Unless, of course,” he continued, a seductive grin forming over his face, “you or your son *want* me to...”

Both Ben and Michael’s ears turned pink and Tomara just rolled her eyes. Ben breathed a brief sigh of relief and spoke, “Okay, well then why *are* you here? Did you really come all the way out here just to celebrate *my* birthday?”

Daryil’s seductive grin turned sly. “Why, I’m here for the ritual, of course! You can’t perform the ritual if I’m not present!”

Ben looked puzzled and started rubbing his forehead again. He had felt funny ever since Daryil had hit him, but he couldn’t figure out why. Oddly enough, he also felt a draft on his back. “Ritual? What...” Ben trailed off and froze, his eyes widening. Slowly, his hands moved to the back of his head. He felt feathers.

A small pair of wings had appeared on the back of his head, and a much larger pair on his back, destroying the back of his shirt.

From outside the house, a high-pitched squeal could be heard before Ben burst down the front door, howling like a maniac and sprinting down the street, pumping his fists in the air.

Back inside the house, Tomara was still reeling from the explosion of joy Ben had given off. Michael just stared dumbstruck out the front door. “Ohhh-kaayyy... Where the heck is he going?”

Daryil just smiled and pointed at the TV, which flickered on. “Happy birthday, Ben,” he said.

Meanwhile, Jakob sat on his sofa watching his TV. It was noon—the news was just starting. One of Daryil’s avatars sat next to him, staring intently at the screen with a smile on his muzzle. Jakob wondered uneasily why Daryil was suddenly so interested in the news.

“Good afternoon,” said the anchor, a moose Being. “Today’s top story: Hazpro, leading worldwide toy company based in Ha’Khun, has initiated a *massive* recall of the wildly popular new Johan Cross action figures that began shipping just last week. Hazpro management has declined to comment on why. In other news...” His voice trailed off and there was some commotion off-camera. The moose looked away from the camera and his face fell. “Ohhh, not again...” he moaned before being knocked aside by a wild-eyed blue-furred fox incubus. “**I’VE GOT WINGS!!!!**” the fox screamed before promptly being tackled by two security guards.

Daryil grinned sheepishly. “Oh dear. I guess I’d better go bail him out.”

Jakob looked from Daryil to the TV and back again. “What the hell? Do you *know* that guy, Daryil?”

Daryil turned his head toward Jakob, his grin widening. “That little blue bishonen just so happens to be the newest member of our family.”

Jakob looked back to the TV. The fox was being led away by security, seemingly oblivious to the enchanted bracers on his wrists as he continued to hop and howl. *"Great,"* Jakob thought, *"just what this clan needs: another crazy fox."*

"I *heard* that," Daryil said.

END