

“Enter Cubi Kitsune”

Tomara arrived home from android-conversion therapy, and as usual her Warp-Aci, Caisi, was there to greet her. Unlike usual, Ben was not. She sighed. Ever since she had been murdered and converted to an android, Ben had been uncharacteristically moody and quiet. He would deny it, but she knew deep down he still blamed himself for what happened.

“Caisi, where is Ben?”

The ethereal cat’s long whiskers drooped a bit. “He’s outside. I think he’s mad at me. He asked me to leave him alone for a while.”

Tomara gave her a head rub. “I doubt that, Caisi. I’ll go talk to him.”

Tomara made her way through the house and out the back. If Ben was outside at night, it probably meant he was up on the roof stargazing. Sure enough, he was laying in the middle of the roof with his legs crossed, staring at the sky.

She leapt up to the roof in a single bound. Before she became an android, she would often have to use her wings a little to make it up. But now, she almost overdid it without much effort. She stepped over and sat down beside him.

He smiled weakly and gave her a quick glance, but averted his gaze. A sure sign he was feeling guilty. “Hey Kitty,” he said, “how are you feeling?”

“It’s going well. Today I started re-learning basic shapeshifting.”

Ben smiled weakly again, but said nothing. Tomara sighed and turned her eyes to the stars.

After a few moments of stargazing together, Ben spoke: "So, I've been thinking..."

Tomara looked back at him again. "Careful, dear. You don't want to get lost again," she said and stuck her tongue out at him with a coy grin.

Ben chuckled. "Good one. But yeah, I've been thinking... He was wrong."

Tomara cocked an eyebrow at him.

"That Being who killed you, I mean," Ben continued. "He was wrong about you. About us. Heck, a lot of the *world* is still wrong about us."

Tomara brushed a strand of hair back. "Yeah, the 'Cubi race still has a long way to go. Why? What are you getting at, Ben?" she replied. She could tell he was about to make some sort of announcement. He always got thoughtful before making a big decision.

"We are Clan Daryil. Our Clan has been all about improving 'Cubi-Being relationships for a long time." He paused for a moment. "And I think it's time I helped."

"Oh? How are you going to do that, Ben?"

"The same way I used to—by playing the hero." He finally turned to look at her. "I want to return to being an adventurer."

Tomara was unsurprised. Ben had only stopped being an adventurer because he wanted to build a relationship with her. If they had never met, he would probably have always been one. She laid down and nuzzled his face. "But if you go, who's going to satisfy that 'appetite' of yours?" she purred.

Ben snickered. "Oh, don't worry. I'll come home at every opportunity. I managed to get through all those semesters at ISIS without losing it *too* many times, remember?"

Tomara held his face and looked into his eyes. "Just promise me you'll be careful, okay?"

Ben smiled smugly and said, "Hey—it's me!"

Tomara rolled her eyes.

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Ben trotted down the hall to Daryil's room in Jayhawk's arctic base. He was hoping he could get the drop on his Leader before he had the chance to prepare an elaborate seduction... again.

To his dismay, Daryil's room looked dark and empty, but he wandered on in anyway. "Daryil? Milord?" he called. As he went further in, he could swear the room was becoming even darker. Finally, as the room became pitch-dark, he heard a faint voice.

"Fe, fi, fo, fum... I see..."

Ben yelped and suddenly found himself being carried into the air.

"...Tiny bishonen!"

Ben found himself nearly being smothered in long, silvery fur. Somehow he had been transported to the large sub-dimension that contained Jayhawk's hydroelectric dam and also housed Daryil's main body. Daryil was big enough to pick him up and was now nuzzling his entire body against his cheek.

Daryil held Ben up to his eye level. Ben just fell back into his palm, looking more than a little stunned. "Why, Ben!" Daryil said in a voice that Ben found surprisingly gentle considering Daryil's size, "You weren't trying to surprise 'little' ol' me, were you?"

Ben just stared for a moment. Finally, he shook himself. "Uhhh... Yeah, I was looking for you, Daryil. I wanted to..."

"Get my blessing?" Daryil interrupted.

Ben blinked. "Uh... That's right. See, I've decided to..."

"Become an adventurer again?"

Ben blinked again, then scratched his chin and squinted, as he often did when he was pondering. Then he tweaked his mind-shield and said, "The sun is shining."

"But the ice is slippery," Daryil replied.

"Ah dangit, you can *still* see through my mind-shield? And I've been working on it, too..."

Daryil chuckled. "It's not that. 'Mind-meld,' remember?"

Ben slapped his forehead. "Oh, right. I always forget about that. I guess that explains these, uh, 'feelings'..."

"Oh, that's not because of *me*," Daryil said, fixing Ben with a sultry gaze.

“Um... uh...” Ben stammered, desperate to change to subject. “Anyway!” he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. “Yes, that’s right. I’m returning to the adventuring business. Because I believe the world needs more ‘Cubi heroes.’”

Daryil sighed. “Yes, I know. But Ben, you already know you would have my approval. You don’t need to consult me *every* time you make a big decision.”

“I know, but...” Ben trailed off and began to twiddle his fingers. He continued sheepishly, “You’re like, one of my best friends, Daryil. It’s more that I wanted to tell you ‘goodbye’ before I go, y’know?”

Daryil smiled sweetly, and Ben suddenly found himself back in Daryil’s room, standing before one of his avatars. The avatar planted a kiss on Ben’s forehead and said, “Thank you, Ben. I wish you luck.”

Ben stepped back and bowed before Daryil. “I’ll make you proud, sir,” he said and started to turn and leave.

“Wait!”

Ben stopped and turned back, cocking an eyebrow.

“I just thought of something,” Daryil said as he put his hands on Ben’s shoulders. “I want you to have this.”

Ben’s tail and wings puffed out as Daryil held his head and kissed him. For a moment, Ben was a torrent of embarrassment and confusion. But then, he closed his eyes as a literal aura of magical power infused his body to the very core, lifting him off the ground.

Daryil broke the kiss and Ben looked more stunned than he ever had in his life. “Wh-What the heck was *that?!’*” he said in a daze.

“The remainder of Tomara’s power,” Daryil replied. “I figured it was only fitting that you should receive it. Congratulations, Ben! You’re now a full-fledged ‘Cubi.”

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On the other side of the base, Jakob suddenly cringed, causing Daxxon to flinch. “Nnng!” he grunted, “Joy spike!”

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