## Your Friendly Neighborhood Mimic

by Stray Bubble

#  Chapter 1

 Everything is dark. I'm able to hear everything just fine, but it's... different. Every sound makes these white lines appear in my vision, like ripples of water after dropping in a stone. The white lines travel across the area, giving me a rough approximation of my surroundings. Figuring out what's making the sounds is simple enough; the squeak of a mouse, the fluttering wings of a bat. There's shuffling coming from what I think is another room to the right, but I can't tell for sure. It's going to take some time getting used to this echolocation. At least that's what I'm assuming this is.

One thing I know for certain, I'm definitely in a dungeon. And I'm definitely alone.

How did I get here, though? It's not like I did anything illegal. At least I don't think I did. I'm just a simple office worker. With the hours I work, I don't even have time for any so called nefarious activities. And why a dungeon? I thought those only existed in fantasy books or video games. If this really is a dungeon, that means there's got to be a way out of here and I need to figure out how.
 I try to walk around, but something is preventing me from moving. I can't feel my arms or legs, so I "look" around the room for some way to escape. The white lines coming from a mouse squeak revealed a pile of bones in the room's left corner.

Ok, that's only slightly disconcerting. There has to be something else in here.

The shuffling coming from the other room is getting louder. It's sounding more like shuffling footsteps, like someone isn't fully picking up their feet while they walk. The white lines coming from the sound appear to be coming underneath what looks like some semblance of a door.
 Then I hear it. The metal tumbling of a door being unlatched, sending the white lines shooting out in every direction, thick with detail. The door swings open with reckless disregard of what could've been on the other side. The door slams against the stone wall, sending out even more white lines. These lines, however, make it clear who made their way into this room.

Standing in the doorway was a solitary man who looked a little worse for wear. From the white lines, I could tell he had a torch in his hand, but to me, it didn't emit any light.

"Finally! A chest!" the man exclaimed, "I'll get some good loot for sure!"

Did he just say a chest? There's no chest in this room. Just an old pile of bones the mice have been hiding out in. I try to look around the room from my fixed position to see if I can figure out what he's referring to. Before I even get the chance, the man walks directly towards me, reaching out his hands as he approaches.

Oh good! He noticed me. Now I can hopefully get out of this place and find out where exactly I am. As soon as the thought came out, the man's hands touch my head as the top half of my body opens up.

No! Don't tell me I'M the chest!

"What?! It's empty?! Just my luck! The one chest I find in this gods-forsaken place and it's empty! What good is a dungeon if you can't find any loot?" The man let out an exasperated sigh. "Oh well, guess I'll just cut my losses and head back to the surface."

As he attempted to leave, his hands were stuck to my head. I guess you could call it my lid since apparently I'm a chest.

The man looked terrified. "A MIMIC!" he screamed in fear. "How could I have been so careless?!"

Did he just say a Mimic? No, no, no, no, no! How could I be a mimic? Those things don't actually exist, right? No, this can't be happening! Sure enough, I felt teeth protrude from where his hands are, lining the edge of the opening. A long, spindly tongue snapped out and quickly wrapped itself around the man's throat.

No, I can't stop what's happening. I don't want to eat this guy! I'm not a cannibal! But I can't stop myself. Some other instinctual force is taking over my body as the tongue forcibly pulls the man inside of my mouth, snapping his bones as he attempted to prevent his inevitable demise. The lid slams shut and I'm once again left here all alone. Nothing to keep me company, save the faint white lines from the squeaks of mice.

# Chapter 2

 I ate someone today. I try to tell myself it wasn't my fault, but it was. I never even got to talk to him. Whatever came over me was so strong and so powerful, I was completely helpless. My body... my mimic body... just moved on its own. I still can't believe I'm actually a mimic.

In the moments that followed, I tried to convince myself otherwise, but was unsuccessful. There's no denying what's going on. I'm a mimic, and there's nothing I can do about it.

Something strange has happened to me. It's hard for me to tell how long it's been since that moment, but in the time that followed, I believe I grew a pair of eyes. I could actually see the room I'm in, even though everything is in black and white with lots of grey shading. I watched as the mouse hiding in the pile of bones came up to me and nuzzled against one of my chest corners. I guess that man scared the little guy half to death, and this was his way of showing his appreciation. I wish I had hands so I could pet the little guy.

I'm trying to figure out how I got a pair of eyes, though. Was it from eating that man? My curiosity got the better of me and I noticed the torch he had been holding was still laying on the ground next to me. I might as well try getting used to this new body, since I won't be leaving it anytime soon. I felt around inside of myself for that tongue that wrapped around that guy's throat. I could definitely feel it moving around in there. It felt like some kind of snake that was thrashing around. I know there has to be some semblance of muscle for me to control it. I tried to imagine how to move the muscle, and the tongue stopped thrashing. I imagined it moving from left to right and the tongue followed my mental image. I tried doing the same thing for my head, or my lid rather, and tried imagining some kind of muscle in the hinges that could open it. Sure enough, the lid opened, and I saw my tongue as I reached out and grabbed the torch with it.

I brought the torch inside and ate it. The room instantly became pitch black. The only source of light was a bleeding flicker of yellow coming from underneath the door.

Ok, so that worked, I guess. Does this mean I can see color? Let me see if I can switch it back to black and white.

My vision instantly returned to what it was. That's good. This is way better than those white lines from earlier.

"Looks like you're getting the hang of things!" said a voice from behind. I can't move around to see who's speaking.

Another chest, much smaller than me, came hopping around to face me. "You must be the new guy! The name's Chester! What's your name, big fellow?"

I try to speak, but nothing comes out. Just a low gurgling sound.

"Ah, still fairly new, then. That's alright, you just need to eat one more adventurer and you'll be able to speak. Typical for mimics to get their sight after one adventurer. Two gives you speech, and anything after that will give you random results based on the adventurer's skills. No idea why you ate the torch, though. That was kinda weird."

Chester looked over at the mouse sitting next to me. "You gonna eat that? I can see your eyes, so just blink once for yes and twice for no."

What do I do? The little guy was so grateful after I ate the adventurer, I can't just let Chester eat him. All I'm able to muster is another gurgling sound.

"Alright, alright. I'll leave it alone. Just wanted a little snack is all. Come on, follow me. There's something I wanna show you."

Chester started moving his little chest body in a heel-toe hopping fashion, having his back end hit the ground as his front end crashed forward. It seemed second nature to him. I tried doing the same, imagining muscles being in the general area of where I would imagine feet being. I fell flat on my face.

"Oh, right! First time moving." He hopped back over to me and propped me up. "Try to imagine yourself rocking back and forth."

I do as he says and I immediately start rocking back and forth.

"There you go! Now, imagine moving forward while rocking, and you should start moving around just like me."

Just like he said, I move forward while rocking. This is incredible! I didn't know I could move around like this.

"Alright, you're a natural! Way faster than the other mimics that first start out. I can tell you're gonna be a powerful mimic one day. Now c'mon, there's something cool I wanna show you."

The two of us hop around for a little while, moving from room to room. We passed things you would typically see in dungeons; random pots in the corners, torches in the hallways, piles of bones, mice, and other small creatures. We passed some monsters as well. Nothing too big, just some oversized bats, and I think we passed a slime, too.

We finally reached a point where we stopped at a completely empty bookshelf, save some cobwebs and an unlit candle. Chester reached on the bottom shelf with his tongue and tried to grab something, but came up empty.

"Hmm, I could've sworn I put a firestarter here. Oh well. You have anything we can use?"

I felt around inside and found the torch. I opened my lid and held it aloft with my tongue, somehow still lit.

"Never seen that before!" Chester said. "Quick, light the candle."

I reached over to the candle and lit it with the torch. The sound of something mechanical activated, and the bookshelf started moving away from the wall it was laying against. Behind where the bookshelf stood was an open doorway with a set of stairs leading somewhere further down.

"Alright, let's go," said Chester as he started hopping down the stairwell.

The two of us have been hopping down these stairs for a few minutes. For Chester, it seemed very easy for him in his compact frame. For me, not so much. I'm much larger than he is, so I scraped against the edges of the stairway more than a few times.

"There's something I need to tell you before we reach the bottom," said Chester as we continued. "You'll be meeting with the rest of the mimics that live in the dungeon. They're a... well, let's say they all have varying personalities. Just be respectful and listen carefully to what the Elder tells you." We stopped at a large ornate door with silver accents and a large metal handle.

"This will be an initiation for you to see where and how you'll fit in with us. From what I've seen, though, you're extremely capable, so you'll be just fine." Chester hopped closer to the door. "Whatever you do, don't disrespect Eldritch."

With a flick of his tongue, he latched onto the door handle and pulled, releasing the locks, slowly opening the large ornate door.

What the other side of the doors revealed was a large cavernous room with small pathways carved into the stone. Natural stone bridges stretched out from a large flat area where 3 mimics sat in chairs. The stone bridges forked in multiple directions, which led to various areas of the room. Other mimics either sat on the carved stone pathways or on notches that were cut into the stone like bleachers that stretched all the way around the room.

There's all manner of mimics varying in shape and size here. Many mimics took the shape of chests like myself and Chester. Others took the form of pots and boxes. I think I even saw a bookshelf or two.

Chester started leading me through the crowd of mimics, who were all talking amongst themselves. I overheard some comments about my size and how large of a mimic I am compared to many of the others. Some snickered over the sight of me while I could've sworn I saw a couple smaller jewelry boxes blushing. Maybe they were female mimics? Do female mimics even exist? How would that even work, exactly? No, I need to keep my mind focused on the task at hand.

Chester and I stopped at one of the stone bridges. "Ok, this is where I stop. Just continue over this bridge and listen to what the elders have to say. I'll be right here cheering you on."

He hops out of the way, making the path to the bridge clear. I steel myself and start hopping over the bridge. Every impact on the stone surface making me more and more nervous as I approached the elders waiting for me on the other side. This is all completely foreign to me. This shouldn't even be happening. I just came to terms with that fact that I'm a mimic. Now there's somehow a secret mimic society? No, this can't be real. I must be dreaming or something. This is all too much to handle. I think I may pass out from the stress of it all.

I find myself standing directly in front of the elders, and they look very intimidating. That is until I saw that the elder front and center looked silly. The two on either side of him seemed normal, from what I could tell. They were basic chests, but they looked weathered, with their boards a little warped from time as the color appeared drained and dull. The one in between them had the same look. However, he also had a comically large white mustache and cape. I assume it's to signify the status of high elder or something, but I just couldn't take it seriously. I remember what Chester said about not disrespecting them, but this is going to be difficult. Good thing I can't talk.

"We're all gathered here today," began the mustached mimic, his voice echoing through the cavernous room, "to welcome our newest member to our ranks! I, Eldritch, shall assess him of his capabilities to see where and how he shall best fit into our society!"

His voice sounds like the stereotypical old man in the cartoons I used to watch that would yell at the kids to keep off his property. This is the guy Chester told me not to disrespect. There's no way I can take this guy seriously.

"First, let's test your abilities. Nothing too strenuous, sonny, just a simple question. Can you speak?

Oh no, he even said "sonny" just like an old man would. I tried to say something, but like the last time I tried talking to Chester, nothing but a low gurgle came out.

"Just as suspected, you've only eaten one adventurer. Eat one more, and you'll be able to speak just fine. Next test will be your eyesight. You got here just fine, so we know your eyes are working properly. The question is, can you see color?

Eldritch opened his lid and held out a single card with his tongue. "What color is this card?"

My vision is still in grey-scale, so I switch it back to color. The room is very well lit for being a cavern. A stream of sunlight is shining through a crack in the ceiling, making it very easy to see all areas. I look at the card Eldritch is holding up and I realize it's a blue card. I try to say the color, but once again, just a low gurgle.

"Ah, sorry sonny. Forgot you can't speak. Blink once for red and twice for blue."

I blink twice.

"Wonderful! You can see color! Now all we have to do is asses how capable you are. Since you can't talk, I'll ask if Chester would speak on your behalf. Chester? Please come forward."

Chester approached the 3 elders and stood right next to me. He didn't appear to be any less anxious than I am. I saw a slight shiver as he tried to steel himself.

"Chester! You've helped many of our dear mimic friends come into their own in our society. You've aided them in their abilities and making them the best mimics they can be. With this newcomer here, what is your assessment as to his abilities?"

"Well," Chester began, his voice creaky with anxiety, "he appears to be doing things his own way."

"Explain." Said Eldritch.

"For starters, he's friendly. Perhaps a little too friendly. He still has that mouse with him that he wouldn't let me snack on."

I heard murmuring coming from the other mimics in the audience. Apparently, they all love eating mice. I also didn't realize I still had my little mouse friend with me. He's sitting on top of my lid, very content with where he's staying. I should probably name him too. I think I'll call him... Nibbles.

"Second," Chester continued, "He ate an adventurer on his first day of being here, which is an impressive feat! It takes most mimics a week before they're able to accomplish that. Then... he ate his torch, which was still lit, by the way. But here's the interesting part. I misplaced my firestarter, then he pulled out that same torch and it was still on fire! I've seen nothing like that before. It's as if he has pockets inside of himself that keep items in the same condition he puts them in."

"That is peculiar," Eldritch said.

"What's even more peculiar is that, despite not being able to talk, he still tries," said Chester.

"Mimics always give up on trying to talk after realizing they can't yet." Eldritch gave a glance around the other mimics in the audience. "Has anyone else tried talking despite not being able to?" He asked the crowd, to which none of the other mimics responded. His gaze returned to me. "Very peculiar indeed. Thank you Chester. Your words have been very enlightening. From hence forth, your name shall be Pockets for your strange ability to store things and retrieve them in the same condition." The crowd began chanting the name "Pockets."

"Now that we have accepted you in our family, there are 3 rules all of us live by. Rule number one is Secrecy. Never reveal your true nature to non-mimics. This will ensure our survival and secrecy of this society. Rule two is Territory. Each mimic is assigned a specific territory within the dungeon and must not encroach on another mimic's territory without permission. This maintains order and helps prevent infighting. Rule three is Contribution. Every mimic must contribute to this society in some meaningful way, whether by sharing knowledge, resources, or helping to maintain the dungeon. This fosters a sense of community and ensures the society's wellbeing. Failure to abide by any of these three rules could lead to losing one's territory, excommunication, or even execution. Do you understand, Pockets? Blink once for yes and twice for no."

That was a lot of information to take in, but it all seemed fairly straightforward. I blink once to signify my understanding.

"Good. You will be granted your own territory once you've eaten your second adventurer and gain speech."

What?! That means I'm forced to eat another person! I can't do that. I won't do that. I refuse! But I can't speak up. I need to say something. Think! How can I talk? I make gurgling noises whenever I've tried before. Maybe I can use that somehow. I try to say something but again, nothing but the gurgling.

"Chester," Eldritch continued, "if you would be so kind as to bring him back to his quarters until he can speak. Then we will reconvene once he's able to communicate his preferences."

Chester gave a gesture that looked like a semblance of a nod in his chest body, then turned to look at me. The expression of shock in his eyes was clear. To him, I probably looked very "peculiar" as he would put it, as I tried to maneuver my tongue and lid in such a way where I could force a word out. Just a single word is all I need, and I think I'm almost there.

"Chester, please take him back to his quarters," said Eldritch, sounding a little perturbed that we hadn't started moving yet.

"Pockets? Are you alright?" Chester asked, concern clear in his eyes. "We really need to get moving. Eldritch is getting angry."

I think I just need a visual. I recall some birds being able to mimic human speech very well. How do they do it? Something with their beak and tongues, maybe? I don't have a choice; I NEED to get this out.

Eldritch had enough. "If you don't start moving this instant, I'll see that you'll both recieve punishment. Leave now and wait for the next adventurer to be eaten."

I figured it out! I coil my tongue near the roof of my mouth and open my lid ever so slightly. I send vibrations through the opening and I'm able to eek out a solitary word. Garbled and alien, yet powerful...

***"... NO ..."***

# Chapter 3

 The room that was once full of happy mimics and ecstatic cheering was now quiet with an eerie silence. The two mimics that were sitting on either side of Eldritch are now restraining me in place with their prehensile tongues. Eldritch slowly got out of his chair and approached me.

"Did you just say 'no' to the High Elder of the mimic society?" His tone was stern and serious as an aura of intensity radiated from him.

Ok, I should've stayed quiet and just talked to Chester. He would've been more understanding, I'm sure, and we could've figured something out together. Too late for that now. Chester was standing off to the side a couple of steps back to get out of the way for the mimics restraining me. He's panicked, I can tell, but unable to do anything in the current situation. Just helplessly watching, eyes frozen on what's occurring. Nibbles had moved from his perch, but I don't know where he scurried off to.

"I don't care if you're new here. You will discover what happens when you disrespect the High Elder!" A single tendril appeared behind Eldritch, glowing with a strange purple fire. It lashed out and struck me across the front of my chest body, cutting into me like a knife. Searing pain erupted as the purple flames burned into the wound. It sizzled and smoked as the flames quickly petered out, leaving a jagged scar with a pulsating purple glow.

Well that hurt a lot more than I ever expected it to. Who knew an old chest like him could contain that much power?

"I'm not done with you yet, sonny. Rune! Cypher! Fetch me the book."

The two mimics that were pinning me down let go of their grip. They hopped away into a room hidden behind the platform and returned with a large book that was covered in runes and intricate markings.

The other mimics in the crowd are a cavalcade of booing and cheering. It feels like they don't even know who to support with everything that's happening.

"I know that may have seemed harsh," Eldritch said, "but no other mimic has ever responded with such insolence. Tell me, if you can, why did you say 'no'?"

I repeat the same actions as before and I'm able to mimic a few more words. "... ***ONCE... HU... MAN... DO NOT... WANT... EAT... MY... KIND***..."

"Human?! No, that shouldn't be possible. But it would explain the peculiarity of the situation." He hopped over to the book both Rune and Cypher were carrying and picked it up with his purple flame tendril, the flames extinguished so as not to burn the book.

"This book is the Mimic Codex. It has been in that room for the last 500 years and contains all the knowledge of the First Mimic." He hopped back over to me and looked me directly in the eyes. "In all my years of being High Elder, I never thought we would actually see the day." He placed the book in front of me.

"Eat it."

What? Did he seriously just say to *eat* the book? And why me? I'm no chosen one destined to save the world or anything like that. I mean, I work in an office, for goodness’ sake. No, he must have it wrong. I eek out two more words.

"... ***WHY... ME?***..."

Eldritch gave me what looks like a discerning smile. "Because you learned to speak on your own, bypassing a crucial step in mimic development. The First Mimic was the only other one to do that."

I look over at Chester, hoping he could offer guidance from a distance. He's still frozen with fear.

"That," Eldritch continued, "and the fact that you survived my tendril. That shows a resilience the likes of which I've never seen. You have a gift. Eat this book and don't squander it. You deserve the power it will give you."

I look down at the book. It feels like it's radiating power, the runes and etching glowing, signifying as much. I draw a deep breath and eat the book, the crowd silent with anticipation. As I bit into the Mimic Codex, a rich, earthy flavor filled my mouth, like the taste of ancient parchment and leather, mingled with the faint tang of old ink. As I chewed, the initial bitterness gave way to a surprising sweetness, with a smokey undertone that coated the inside of my mouth, lingering long after I swallowed.

Nothing happened immediately afterward. Then suddenly, it hit me. Light started radiating out of my body from all directions. What was once a fairly well lit cavern now became filled with blinding light. All the other mimics had to shield their eyes from it. The light eventually died down, but didn't dissipate entirely. I suddenly realized I'm floating in the air, energy coursing through my body. I felt my form shifting, bones and muscles realigning in a way that was both painful and exhilarating. My mimic exterior softened, taking on more human-like features, while still maintaining the essence of my mimic self. I watched as my skin became a blend of flesh and the texture of wood. I looked at my hands, now looking like my old hands, but tipped with vicious claws. The scar left by Eldritch's purple flame tendril is still there across my chest, much larger now, but still pulsating with an otherworldly purple glow.

I slowly fall back to the ground as the light slowly faded away. I feel a sense of completeness I've never known before. I am neither human nor mimic. I am something else entirely, something new.

I am now a human/mimic hybrid. I am reborn. I am Pockets.