

Introducing Gishey (excerpt)

Gishey Donmaru travels on both sides of the mountain. Her family travels from the lake to the desert. They trade things from one end for things from the other end. They trade everything and everywhere between the two ends.

Gishey's family has homes in all three Regions, not counting the new Region people are talking about. Gishey has never been there, and she doesn't care to go.

The line of carts stops along the road for a midday food break. After eating, Gishey goes looking around in the trees along the road. Her father lets her run around whenever they stop. Gishey knows not to go very far.

Her mother acts like she doesn't like it, but Gishey thinks that her mother secretly does like when Gishey goes out exploring.

Sometimes Gishey finds things to bring back and talk about.

Gishey hears a whimpering sound further into the trees. She quietly sneaks up to see what it is.

It's a tiny baby icenna!

Icennas are hairy, four-legged predators.

The fuzzy little baby is trying to nurse from its dead mother. The mother icenna had been injured, probably while hunting.

Gishey knows that the baby will not survive for long without its mother.

They're calling her. The food stop is over. They're ready to go.

Gishey's heart breaks for the little icenna. She slides over, scoops up the crying baby and cradles it in the pocket along the bottom of her shirt.

The tiny, fuzzy animal blinks its squinty eyes at her. It gets quiet and looks like it's going to go to sleep.

Her father calls her name again.

Gishey swiftly and carefully hurries back to the carts. She waves to several people, including her father and the assistant who pushes the cart she rides in. Her father watches as she climbs inside and closes the door.

Gishey settles into her spot, with the sleeping baby icenna hidden in her shirt.

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Gishey is weary of all the traveling that they do. She thinks her family visits too many places. She wishes that they could just live in one place.

Sometimes traveling is fun, though. The people are generally nice everywhere they go. Her family is respected. Most of her group has the family “patch.” It’s a birthmark of slightly darker skin above the right eye.

When people see their Donma patch, they usually become even friendlier.

When Gishey tries to talk with her father about not on traveling so much, he always says something like, “If we didn’t travel, we wouldn’t be eating as good as we do,” or “If we didn’t travel, you wouldn’t have those nice clothes,” or “If we didn’t travel, we wouldn’t have so many good friends,” or “If we didn’t travel, we wouldn’t see so many wonderful places.”

There’s one of her father’s sayings that Gishey can’t argue with.

“If we didn’t travel, you would not have found Nicena.”

Nicena is her faithful and best friend, her pet icenna. Icennas are a little over knee-high to an adult. The animals walk on four legs and are covered with hair.

Icennas are predators in the wild. Nicena is not like that, though. Gishey has cared for, and raised her ever since she rescued Nicena as a baby.

At first, many people did not like that Gishey was keeping an icenna as a pet. It’s well known that icennas can be dangerous. However, the baby Nicena was accepted by most and generally considered to be something unique.

Also, Nicena is so friendly and nice that nobody should *not* like her, really. That’s how Gishey thought of Nicena’s name. She’s a *nice* icenna. She’s “Nice — eena!”

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Lately, the talk has been about a large piece of dolg that was found in the new Region. It has a lot of people excited, specially in Gishey’s family. Two other large pieces of dolg are kept in the family storage building, right next to the house.

As soon as they got to this town, her father rushed over to check on the dolg.

Her father has been working with their two pieces of dolg ever since. He’s almost always at the storage building.

On most days, Gishey makes lunches to share with her father. Gishey is bringing lunch today. As always, Nicena is happily trotting along at Gishey's side.

As they like to do, Gishey sits at one end of the pile of dolg, and her father sits at the other. They look across the pile of weird shapes as they eat and talk.

Today is what Gishey calls a "start over" day. The pile of dolg has been taken apart and the pieces are re-arranged, again.

Her father's mood changes. Gishey recognizes the look of concern on his face. He looks her in the eye.

He speaks with a serious and worried voice. "Gishey, have you heard about all the terropad attacks, recently?"

Gishey squirms in her chair, uncomfortable with the thought of people getting hurt by those wild animals.

Her father is always concerned about Gishey getting hurt, but with Nicena always nearby, Gishey doesn't think that *she* would be attacked.

He continues in the same tone. "It's been happening more frequently. You have to be careful, Gishey!"

Gishey answers in her most serious tone. "We *are* careful, Nicena and me."

Her father looks over at Nicena and smiles. Nicena smiles back and wags her tail.

Terropads are just a little smaller than icennas.

The terropads come in from the unclaimed Region to the west. The wild predators lived in this area before people started the town.

The first settlers got the terropads under control as they Claimed the Region. Now, it seems the terropads are coming back.

Her father keeps staring at the dolg. He gets that "faraway" look on his face. He subconsciously reaches for something until he glances at Gishey.

She is giving him the "not during lunch" look.

He puts his hand down, looking guilty.

Gishey giggles.

Gishey teases him. "Are you *sure* about what you're trying to do?"

Her father chuckles. “Like I said many times, Gishey, I am *not* sure about what I’m trying to do. It just seems like there’s something special, something important about this *dolg*. It’s fascinating.”

Gishey doesn’t see what’s so fascinating about the *dolg*. It’s just a bunch of weird stuff—and it’s heavy. Although, if you look at it for long enough, it sort-of . . . draws you in.

Her father whispers, “What are you thinking, Gishey?”

Gishey feels disturbed somehow. “I don’t know. I was just looking at the strange way it’s shaped, the little curves and twists and . . .”

Her father sits back slowly, studying what Gishey says.

Gishey continues, unsure of herself. “Have you ever seen it, sort-of . . . glow?”

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The longer they’re here, the more Gishey likes this house. They’ve stayed in this town for much longer than they usually stay anywhere. There isn’t even talk about traveling again. Gishey thinks it’s because of the *dolg*.

Her father still spends most of his time trying to do something with the two large pieces of *dolg*. That’s fine with her. Gishey likes how so many things have settled into routines. This house and this town are starting to feel like a home.

The people of the town are mostly nice and friendly. Gishey is well known around town because of Nicena. Many people are curious about the *icenna*. They want to see the *icenna*. When they are comfortable enough, they want to touch the *icenna*.

Nicena happily lets anyone touch her. If someone is unsure, she will sidestep over to them or lean her head forward, making it easier for people to touch her long fur.

For a Species with no hair (except for the rare occasion), Nicena is something of a novelty. People are amused by such a friendly animal, covered in soft hair, and walking on four legs.

When they first meet Nicena, the people of the town are usually surprised and thrilled that she is so friendly. Then it’s like they are all part of a club, “Friends of Nicena.”

Most people find her large mouth with dangerous teeth to be an irony.

Nicena thrives on the attention, and she genuinely wants to make people happy. Nicena greets everybody as if she’s saying, “Hi, I know you. You’re a member of the club.”

Not everybody likes Nicena, though. Some people are afraid of her. They don't give her a chance. They just hate that she's an icenna.

Some people even act like they're deathly afraid of her or something, getting all excited and waving their arms in the air. On rare occasions, somebody will get angry and call Nicena "that dangerous, wild animal in our town."

Nicena mostly ignores anybody who doesn't appear to be interested in liking her. Nicena doesn't act aggressive or snobbish. It's more like, "Oh, I'm just looking for another member of the club."

Gishey is happy to know that there are many members of the club, and not many of those panicky, angry people.

Gishey has made regular friends for the first time, too. She spends a lot of time with her neighbor down the hill, his girlfriend, and Yergis. Yergis was one of her first friends here.

Of course, they are all members of the club.

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There has been a lot of excitement lately. They're bringing in that third large piece of dolg from the fourth Region. Her father gets a little crazy every time he talks about it.

Gishey Donmaru doesn't care about dolg. She's more interested in Yergis.

Yergis is a Donmahu. The Donmahu family patch, above the right eye, is the darkest of all the "Donmas."

There are other "Donma-somethings" and variations of "Donma-somethings." The various families of "Donmas" branched off from each other long ago.

It is interesting what they say, that if you go back far enough, all the different "Donmas" came from a common ancestor.

Whoever that was.

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Something's happened!

There's a lot of shouting and wailing coming from down the mountain. It's not good. You can feel the pain in their voices.

Yergis goes to see what's happened. He's gone a long time before he finally gets back. He runs up to Gishey and the small group of friends.

Yergis is almost out of breath. “A baby’s been taken. There’s some blood and muddy animal tracks. Some people are going after the baby. That’s all I was able to find out.”

At the mention of animal tracks, Gishey wonders about Nicena. When Gishey is with Yergis, Nicena roams farther away.

Nicena usually isn’t very far away, though. She’s been absent long enough that Gishey thinks Nicena is probably taking a nap in Gishey’s room.

There’s a scream from down the mountain, then many loud voices. Everyone looks around at each other.

Gishey’s neighbor begins to drift down the mountain. His girlfriend takes a few steps down the mountain. Gishey leans in that direction while she and Yergis look at each other. Then they all break into a trot to go and see what’s happening.

Gishey glances back at the home to see if Nicena is following, but she’s not there. Gishey is concerned about Nicena’s absence. She considers going back home to look for Nicena. Instead, Gishey follows her friends toward the commotion.