

Abusive Ex

By C. Jade Wyton

The past ten years have not been kind to Mattel Masters. Her parents treat her poorly, her friends keep betraying her, and she hates the fiancé she's found herself stuck with. And that's all on top of her reputation of being Becky Bloom's "abusive ex" from high school.... She's trapped in a life she hates, and can't see a way out of it. Not until now.

Contains mentions of abusive relationships & family, general bigotry, and some sexual content.

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It had been a little over ten years since Mattel Masters' breakup with Becky Bloom, and she was still absolutely miserable.

She thought that she would have been over it by now. But nothing ever seemed to go her way. Not since that stupid night that she'd been abandoned in the woods.

Everything just kept going wrong. Not a single thing would go right—

From Guillmero humiliating her, to Chanel stealing from her.

From her dog running away, to her lawn being set on fire, to her dad losing his mayoral campaign and her mother blaming it on *her*.

From failing her high school exams, to Jamie fucking *two* of her boyfriends, to the cockroach infestation in her house, to ending up in the emergency room with an *exploded ovary*.

From Stacy *falling down those fucking stairs* and breaking her damn neck; to her parents pressuring her to marry that egotistical bastard *Elliot Cox*.

It was like Becky had cursed her— And maybe she had. She was a druid, after all. And from what Mattel had heard her powers had been completely out of control for a long while.

Could druids curse people?

*Eugh.*

Perhaps it was wrong to blame *everything* on Becky. But it just felt *good* to have someone to point a finger at. And it was better than thinking about the alternative; that there was a chance *she* had been in the wrong, that night....

It was a stupid thought.

*Ludicrous*, actually!

She hadn't done anything wrong! Had she? When she'd dated Becky she'd loved her. She'd loved her with her entire heart.

And she'd tried to make sure Becky was a good, normal person. She'd tried to set Becky right and make her normal.

She'd done it because she'd wanted a future with the woman.... Was that so wrong?

Ugh.

*Apparently* it was.

Because Becky had somehow spun the story and turned Mattel into her “abusive ex.”

Which was *ridiculous!*

Mattel had never abused her— She’d never laid a hand on her. Nor had she’d never done *anything* to hurt her! At least... not *intentionally*. Of course sometimes Becky had been moody or not liked what Mattel had to say about her; that was *just how relationships were*.

Wasn’t it?

That was how her own parents were, at least.

Mattel scoffed, pulling into the parking space she’d managed to find and double-checking her purse was in her bag.

It didn’t matter.

In a few months she’d be married to Elliot and that would be that.

*Ugh.*

She wasn’t looking forward to *that*. But it was the easiest way to get her parents off her back and get her reputation back on track.

Marrying the “right” man (as her dad had told her) would improve the family’s image. And she apparently owed that to her parents....

For what? Bringing her into this stupid world?

She hadn’t *asked* them to make her! If anything, *they* owed *her!*

Mattel slammed her car door shut and made her way into the mall, scowling to herself the entire time.

It wasn’t fair.

*Nothing* was fair!

Not the way her parents treated her.

Not the way Elliot treated her.

Not the way the *town* treated her!

It was awful.

She had to come all the way up to Warm Waters to get anything *nice* for herself, because everybody in Shadow Oaks seemed to think she was a massive *joke*.

*Deep breath, she reminded herself. Deep, deep breath. Relax. You’re here for a good time, not to freak out or stress. You’re here for a good—*

‘I like your dress.’

The sudden compliment made Mattel jump, and she looked down at the child who had spoken to her.

An orc girl who couldn’t have been more than six, with bright orange hair and a rainbow dress, was staring up at her. She twitched her oversized ears as she rocked on her heels and smiled warmly, and Mattel tried not to scowl as she cast a glance around for the girl’s parents.

*Orcs....*

She’d never been a fan of *orcs....*

Though, this orc was just a child.

And though Mattel didn’t like children (like, at *all*. They were so annoying!) she bit her tongue, and forced her lips to twitch into an awkward grin.

It wouldn’t do her any good to be seen snapping at a child. She couldn’t mess up *again*. Not like that time Orson had recorded her screaming at him.... And

everyone already thought she was a racist— But it wasn't racist to base her opinions on *statistics* and *facts*, was it?

*Ugh!*

'Thanks...' she managed; trying to keep her voice from sounding strained. 'I... like... yours—'

'Barbie, baby! *Barbie!*' a familiar voice exclaimed, and Mattel tensed as the girl's grin grew wider.

Was that fucking—

'Barbie, baby, come here!'

*'Hwunk!'*

It fucking *was!*

As if stepping out from nowhere, Becky Bloom was suddenly at the orc girl's side, pulling her several paces away from Mattel and scowling viciously up at her ex. And that weird flamingo-shaped mimic on her shoulder was *staring* at her with those massive red eyes, clearly completely devoid of any thought.

'Come on, Barbie, we don't talk to strangers,' Becky's voice was soft, though the look she cast Mattel was a harsh one.

'But *why?*' the girl, Barbie, asked. 'How else am I supposed to make friends if I can't talk to people?'

*Hm.*

Mattel looked the woman up and down and... decided it wasn't worth it.

She was too tired to fight Becky today.

And she must have looked it, because Becky's scowl fell at the same time as Mattel's shoulders and she cocked her head curiously.

'*Why not?!*' Barbie repeated, stomping her foot furiously and throwing down her hands. 'Explain it to me!'

If Mattel hadn't known Becky in her youth she might have thought it was the orc side of the girl coming out— But when Barbie gave a growl Mattel recognised it as a pretty typical *Bloom Tantrum*, and so she stuffed her hands into her pockets to watch her ex deal with the kid.

'Because strangers like her are bigger than you,' Becky said, simply. 'And you don't know if they're nice or not. She could easily just pick you up and walk away with you.... Or *kick* you....'

Mattel's eyes tightened at the accusation. But only for a moment before she scoffed and rolled her eyes.

'Come on, Becca,' she grumbled. 'Cut me some slack. I'm not *evil*.'

'That's debatable,' Becky mumbled back.

'Oh... you *know* her?' Barbie asked her mother. And when Becky nodded, the girl's eyes widened. 'Oh....'

'Why don't you go find Daddy?' Becky said, her tone taking on a sweet note as she pecked a kiss into Barbie's hair. Then, Becky handed the girl a toy she was holding, plopped the flamingo-mimic on her head, and ushered her away. 'Ask him if he thinks Cassiopeia would like that for their birthday, okay?'

'Hm,' Mattel gave a tentative hum as she watched Barbie hurry away. 'So you got back together with Jareth, huh? I thought you broke up or whatever.'

'Broke up?' Becky's brow furrowed, and she cocked her head. 'When did we break up?'

‘That time you vanished or whatever,’ Mattel shrugged. ‘When Jezzibeth was dating Guillmero.’

‘Oh. No, we didn’t break up,’ Becky shook her head.

‘No?’

‘No.’

‘Hm. So Jamie was just bullshitting me, then?’ Mattel pushed back her hair. ‘Typical.’

‘Hm,’ Becky nodded.

‘Hm...’ Mattel hummed back, looking her ex up and down.

Becky looked....

*Ugh.*

She looked good.

Mattel hated to admit it; but she looked better than she had when they were dating.

She’d obviously gotten a breast reduction— Both a shame, and a necessity.

She was finally standing up with proper posture, at least. Mattel had never been able to convince her to stand properly the entire time they’d dated....

Maybe being with Jareth had somehow been good for her, as hard as it was to believe dating an orc could be good for *anyone*.... But the evidence was right there. She’d have to be an idiot to deny it.

Hm.... She wondered how he’d managed to do it....

‘Sooo...’ Becky crossed her arms and clicked her tongue, making an awkward face. ‘How are the girls? The gang? The gaggle?’

‘Chanel’s a bitch, Jamie’s a whore, and Stacy died.’

‘Stacy *died*?!’ Becky exclaimed. ‘Aw. She was the nice one.’

‘Yeah. Tell me about it,’ Mattel gave a huff. She could see Barbie had come back now, holding the hand of *Jareth Slader* (ew), who was leading four other kids— ‘You have *five* kids?! Beck! *Fuck!*’

‘In my defence; we *agreed* on four, but I ended up having twins,’ Becky gave a sheepish grin.

‘That’s still a lot to have all at once— You’re an elf, Beck! Space it out or *something*.’

Becky waved a dismissive hand. And that was when Mattel spied that one of the children definitely *didn’t* belong to Jareth.... If their skin tone hadn’t given it away, the tail it had wrapped around Jareth’s leg would have.

‘Tiefling?’ she blurted.

‘Yeah,’ Becky’s hand found the back of her head as she scratched at her ponytail. ‘That one was a bit of a surprise when he popped out.... You remember Jareth’s friend, Julius? From school?’

‘Ah,’ Mattel felt herself scowl. ‘So your taste in guys hasn’t changed at all, huh?’

Becky blushed, at that.

And Mattel took the opportunity to look over at Jareth again.

He looked apprehensive, though he kept his distance from the two women.

*Good.*

Mattel didn’t want that orc anywhere near her!

‘You look tired,’ Becky’s comment caught Mattel’s attention again, and Mattel

eyed her. 'You *never* used to look that tired in school.'

'Hmph. Well, that's adulthood for you,' Mattel snorted. Then, she looked Becky up and down again, and for a moment wondered....

Becky looked *fantastic*. And though Mattel hated to say it, so did Jareth....

They had five kids, and they still looked ready to run a mile.... So why was *she* so tired...? It wasn't like she was doing anything strenuous. She didn't even have a *job* (like she'd heard Becky did).... Her father wouldn't let her; he was too focused on pairing her off....

Mattel gave a haughty sniff to try and hide her exhaustion. 'What about you? You look well. You used to be a *mess*. What changed?'

'I stopped trying to impress the world,' Becky answered. 'Started doing things for *me*. Not some imaginary audience. That, and a *whole lot* of therapy.'

'Yeah, I heard you got admitted to the crazy house again,' Mattel quipped. 'How many times has that been, now?'

'Three stays,' Becky answered. 'But I wasn't admitted the third time; they wanted to monitor the changes in my meds when I was trying for kids. Cos some of the stuff I was on can mess with pregnancies and stuff. No biggie.'

Mattel just shrugged. She couldn't believe how casually Becky was treating it all— Her parents, when they had heard about it, had talked about it with such *shame*. Like it had been some horrible secret that had come out.

But Becky didn't seem to care at all what others thought about it.

In fact, Becky seemed completely relaxed; like she was talking to an old friend who she'd simply fallen out with— Not her ex, whose relationship had ended in a fight and cutting each other off....

It was very different from the last time she'd run into Becky and the woman had been shuffling awkwardly and avoiding her gaze.

'How's your uncle?' Becky asked. 'He was... slightly less unbearable than the rest of your family.'

Mattel shrugged again. 'Same as always, I guess. He got remarried.'

'Third wife?'

'Fourth.'

'Hah!' the tone of Becky's laughter was a little *too* cheerful for Mattel's liking. 'And what about you? I haven't heard much about you— Been laying low? Still living with your parents? Any... new job? New partner?'

Mattel felt her lip twitch, and Becky raised her brow.

'New partner?'

'Eh...' Mattel looked away. 'You know Elliot Cox?'

'Elliot....' Becky's ears flicked up. 'Oh! Yeah. I slept with him, once.'

*Of course she did....*

'He didn't believe that girls could orgasm,' Becky said. 'Like. Physically. He was *terrible* in bed!'

'Yeah,' Mattel's voice came out exasperated. 'Yeah. He is.'

'Ooh,' Becky's face scrunched up in sympathy. 'Why are you with him? You were, like. *Good* at sex. You deserve someone who's good at it, like. Back.'

Mattel raised her brow at Becky, the comment reminding her of something *very specific* the woman had said after their breakup. 'Ah. Yes. My strap game is "aces," isn't it? But of course my head's full of wet pop-tarts and mouldy bread.'

‘Ah...’ Becky gave Mattel a sheepish grin. ‘To be fair, that’s still more than what’s in mine. You look inside and there’s nothing in there but a couple of moths and a tatty old book on mimic care.’

Despite who she was talking to and how miserable she felt, Mattel felt herself give a laugh.

That was certainly something she’d missed about dating Becky; how funny she could be!

‘So why are you, like, with him?’ Becky asked. ‘He’s boring. And bad in bed.’ Mattel sighed, her smile vanishing. ‘It’s a political thing.’

‘Political?’

‘Yeah, his family’s rich and popular, and my parents think it will help build up our reputation.’

‘Ew, so like. You’re like, not even in love with him?’ Becky’s face scrunched into a look of sympathetic disgust. ‘That’s not right, Mattel! Get *out* of there!’

*I wish I could*, Mattel bit back the answer.

But if she *did*, her father would cut her off. Completely.

‘It’s not a big deal. My parents got married for the same reasons.’

‘Ah. So you really *are* turning into your mother?’ Becky gave Mattel a shit-eating grin, and Mattel couldn’t stop herself.

That was too far! *Way* too far— So she slapped Becky.

Right across that stupid smug face of hers!

She heard gasps from Becky’s kids, and saw Jareth step forward to approach.... Though he paused when Becky laughed and held up a hand to stop him.

‘There you go,’ she said, turning back to Mattel and giving her an even *smugger* look. ‘You *can* still stand up for yourself!’

‘I told you before, don’t you *ever* compare me to her!’ Mattel growled.

‘And I’ve told you before not to make it so easy,’ Becky retorted. ‘But no. For real, that sucks. You can’t marry someone you don’t love; you’re gonna go crazy!’

‘You’re one to talk about *going crazy*,’ Mattel snorted.

‘Yeah, I *am*,’ Becky said, almost forcefully. ‘Look. You look like you need, like. A good venting session or something. I recommend that you, like, go out into the woods and like. Find somewhere secluded and abandoned and stuff, and just scream. Like. Scream! Scream your head off until it’s all out and you feel better.’

‘You *would* recommend that,’ Mattel scowled. ‘And no. I don’t think so. I don’t need to go and get myself lost in the woods.’

‘Then what *do* you need?’

Mattel didn’t answer; instead she just glared at Becky.

*I don’t need anything*, she thought. *I’m fine! And even if I wasn’t there’s nothing you can do for me!*

Becky looked her up and down, seeming to size her up. Then, she tutted.

She fucking *tutted!*

‘Okay. Well... this is gonna sound crazy, and I don’t want you to make this weird—’ Becky started, casting a glance to Jareth before turning back to Mattel and stepping towards her. ‘But you clearly need *this*.’

Before Mattel could ask what Becky meant; the woman’s arms were around her.

‘What the fuck are you doing?!’ Mattel exclaimed, feeling her entire body stiffen as her voice turned shrill. ‘*Becky*— Becky! I— I....’

Mattel almost pulled away.

Almost.

But then something stopped her, and her anger waned. And her shoulders slacked. And she found her arms rising up. And suddenly, she was embracing Becky back.

*A hug.*

She hadn’t had one of those in a long time. Not one like this.

Just... being *held*....

*Hm....*

Slowly, Mattel let her chin rest on the top of Becky’s head. And even slower, her eyes began to close.

And the two of them stood there, in the Walmart toy aisle, just... *hugging*.

Not because someone was watching and it “looked good.”

Not because she was putting on a show.

And not because Becky wanted something from her—

It was for no reason, other than they simply... *could*.

And it went on for entirely too long before Mattel snapped back to her senses and shoved Becky away.

‘Get off me, you weirdo!’ she growled, feeling her cheeks burn red as she took a step back. ‘What’s *wrong* with you?!’

‘Oh. Right, you never got told— So, it turns out that I’m autistic!’ Becky joked, her wide grin pressing up the corners of her eyes. ‘Explains a lot, huh?’

Mattel didn’t know how to respond to that; so she didn’t. She just mustered up the most disgusted face that she could through her confused and exhausted mess of emotions, and stormed away.

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It had been six hours since her conversation with Becky, and Mattel couldn’t get the woman out of her head.

She’d tried to go about her day and do things as normal, but just as she thought she was starting to forget what Becky had said, she’d receive a text from someone —her father, her fiancé, her wedding planner— and Becky’s words would all come flooding back.

Especially “*Why are you with him?*” and “*Get out of there!*”

God, she wished she could.

But as she sat with her parents, staring at the dinner that lay in front of her, she realised she didn’t have any idea *how*.

The quiet clink of metal against ceramic was deafening as Mattel contemplated her fate.

Elliot Cox was going to be her husband whether she liked it or not.

Because she had no out.

No way to look after herself.

If she left Elliot her parents would cut her off. And then she’d have *nothing*.

And even if she *did* try and find a job to sustain herself and become

self-sufficient she knew that nobody would hire her; the half of the town that currently hated her would never give her that kind of chance. And the half that *didn't* currently hate her *would* hate her if she backed out of this wedding and caused *another* fuss.

Another *fuss*.

Fussy.

God, people had always said she was *fussy*!

But if they knew just how much she had to put up with, they'd change their minds....

Hm....

Mattel poked at her food, contemplating Becky again.

She.... She regretted taking Becky for granted. That was something she'd realised, today. She'd thought she'd *had* her, and not ever considered how things would go if she'd lost her....

She should have done more to keep her.

Maybe if she hadn't been an idiot when meeting Mimi for the first time, and befriended the stupid animal instead of....

Mattel put a square of carrot into her mouth, and chewed on it thoughtfully.

She wasn't sure why she'd hurt the mimic. It hadn't actually *done* anything. And she'd known it was wrong to kick it....

It was something she'd been thinking about since she'd lost Chichi.

Why had she done that?

She still couldn't think of a real reason.

She'd been annoyed at Mimi for nipping her. But it had just been looking for attention. And now, looking back... Mattel was sure if she'd actually picked up the creature at sat with it, and Becky had come home to her girlfriend and her beloved pet enjoying each other's company, she would have done literally *anything* for the woman.

But Mattel had been stupid, and hormonal, and for some reason *jealous* of her now-ex's pet. And she'd kicked it. And it had hated her since; it should have been clear *that* was where the first seed of doubt had been planted in Becky's mind.

She never should have kicked Mimi....

And then there was *Chichi*.

God, she missed Chichi so much. But looking back, she hadn't treated that poor thing right.

She'd taken down the few videos she'd posted online containing the dog— Seeing the way she held it, and how patient that thing had actually been with her...? She realised, looking back, that there were so many warning signs to the creature snapping the way it did.

Chichi had come to her when she'd needed companionship most and she'd just... treated Chichi like a toy.

Like Chichi wasn't a whole *living creature* with boundaries.

She'd treated Chichi like her parents were now treating her.

The thought sent a shiver down Mattel's spine. She still absolutely *hated* that Becky had made that comparison.

And she hated that she hadn't known any better until it had happened to her.

Oh, well... she sighed, and put another piece of carrot in her mouth. *I guess*

that's just karma, or whatever it's called....

'Mattel, don't sigh,' came the voice of Mattel's mother, Chloe-Anne, 'It's unbecoming of a woman.'

Mattel responded with another, slightly louder sigh, before pushing away her dinner.

'*Mattel*,' Chloe-Anne said, warningly. 'Don't take an attitude with me.'

'What *attitude*?' Mattel huffed, rolling her eyes. 'I wasn't giving you *attitude*! I was just *sighing*!'

'Do *not* talk back to me!' Chloe-Anne snapped. 'Carter! Say something!'

Mattel's father, Carter, sucked in a hiss of air as he was addressed; looking like he didn't want to be involved. 'Don't raise your voice at your mother.'

'Oh my god, you're both *insane*!' Mattel retorted, rising to her feet. 'I'm literally just *existing*!'

Chloe-Anne rose to her own feet, then, and leant furiously on the table. 'Do *not* talk back—'

'I wasn't! Talking! Back!' Mattel exclaimed. 'I was just *talking*! Not *everything* I do is a *personal attack against you*!'

'Mattel— Chloe— Both of you! Let's just—' Carter took a deep breath, and stood up so he could put himself between his wife and his daughter. He addressed Chloe-Anne softly. 'Okay. Let's lower our voices. Chloe, honey. It's alright. I'll talk to her.... *Mattel*,' Carter turned to his daughter, his voice growing harder. 'Upstairs. Now.'

'UGH!' Mattel stomped a furious foot before storming towards the stairs.

She loudly made her way up, stopping just outside her bedroom door, before crossing her arms and waiting for her father to join her.

It took him a minute; she could hear her mother talking furiously at him before he finally appeared at the top of the stairs.

He looked at her; a disappointed, unimpressed look on his face. And then he matched her crossed arms and shook his head.

'What has gotten into you?' he asked, tutting in a condescending way that made the hair on Mattel's arms stand on end. 'Honey. You *never* act up like this.'

'I'm not *acting up*!' Mattel retorted. 'I'm acting like I *always have*! Mum's just *insane*!'

'Don't talk that way about your mother,' Carter warned, stepping towards his daughter and pointing a finger. 'Mattel, you need to show some respect!'

'*She needs to earn some respect*,' Mattel mumbled, tightening her crossed arms and averting her gaze.

Carter's sour frown dug into his daughter like a knife. 'She's your *mother*. She brought you into this world—'

'Yeah, and I'm pretty sure she's going to be the one who takes me out, too!' Mattel snapped; running her hands down her face. 'I didn't *do* anything wrong! You *know* I didn't! I just had the *audacity* to *breathe* around her!'

'Please, Mattel, just—' Carter shook his head. 'Just— Behave yourself.'

'*I am*!'

Carter gave her a look that told her that he didn't believe that was true (which was *ridiculous*!) before shaking his head. 'What has gotten *into* you, lately? I hope you haven't been acting this way around Elliot.'

'Ugh,' Mattel audibly groaned at the name.

'Ugh?' her father echoed. 'Ugh, what?'

'Ugh, *Elliot*,' Mattel huffed. 'I don't want to marry him, Daddy.'

Carter's eyes tightened, at that. 'And why not?'

'I don't love him.'

'It's not about *love*, Mattel,' Carter gave a heavy sigh. 'There's a lot more to marrying someone than *love*.'

Mattel echoed her father's sigh, rolling her eyes dramatically. 'You really can't expect me to spend my the rest of my life with someone I don't love!'

Carter leant in close. '*I mean*,' he whispered. '*I'm still with your mother, aren't I?*'

'Oh because *that's* reassuring!' Mattel snapped, throwing her arms up before slamming them against her sides loudly. 'If we're going to end up like you two, maybe we *should* just call the whole thing off!'

'Mattel, don't even joke about that—'

'I'm *not* joking!' Mattel stomped her foot. 'I don't want to marry him!'

'*Look*, Mattel, I put up with all those little flings you've had over the years!' Carter snapped, raising his voice. 'Dating women, humans, and goths— But now it's time for you to *grow up*. Take some responsibility and do something for the *family* for once!'

'Daddy, I don't—'

'Give me your keys,' Carter sighed, holding out a hand and making an expectant, beckoning motion. 'And your phone.'

'You're fucking *kidding me!*' Mattel exclaimed. 'You're *punishing* me for not wanting to get married?!'

'Just until you're thinking *rationally*—'

'You're *insane!*' Mattel exclaimed. 'You're *actually* insane!'

'Keys and phone,' Carter said, firmly, and lifted his hand higher to push his point.

Mattel gave a loud huff, though she had no choice but to comply. She slapped her keys and phone into her father's hand and then turned on her heels to storm to her room; slamming the door loudly behind her.

She threw herself on her bed and screamed into her pillow, clutching it tight against her face to muffle her furious shouts.

Then she cried.

Big, wet sobs that shook her entire body and made her chest ache.

It wasn't fair!

It wasn't *fair!*

Her parents were both *insane!*

Like *actually insane!*

She was in her fucking *thirties*, and they were still trying to dictate every single stupid little part of her life!

How was she supposed to *live* with them looming over her?

She'd have hoped that getting married would have been an escape but— But Elliot was just another *trap*.

Another stupid fucking trap to stop her doing the things *she* wanted to do!

Gods, she hated *everything*.

She hated everything....

Mattel sniffed, feeling her painful sobbing-fit coming to an end, and pulled away from her pillow to wipe her eyes.

She saw the makeup stains she'd left; so she hurried to her en-suite to clean herself up before stumbling back to her bed and sitting down heavily.

Gods.

She had to get out of this.

But *how*?

Her friends were all useless when it came to her parents. Her uncle twice as much so.

They all wanted to be in their good graces. And Mattel was *sure* they'd throw her under the bus to get there....

She needed someone who didn't care what her parents thought about them.

She needed someone who didn't want to impress her parents.

Which meant she needed someone who *hated* her parents. But also, someone who didn't hate *her*.... At least who didn't hate her enough to not help her.

She wracked her brain trying to think of who she could go to.

Then... she remembered Becky's hug from earlier that day. And, slowly, she felt herself raising her arms so she could wrap them around herself.

Becky was just crazy enough that she might actually know what to do.

Maybe she could find somewhere that Becky hadn't blocked her and ask for help....

Arms dropping to her sides, Mattel rose to her feet and made for her computer.

She woke it out of sleep mode and then, with a sigh, began to click around on all of her social medias; looking for some way to contact her old ex....

Finally, she found a site that Becky hadn't blocked her on (a newer social media site that, honestly, wasn't very good) and took a deep breath as she clicked the little envelope-shaped private message button on Becky's profile.

Mattel: Hey. You online?

Mattel sat back, swallowing as she waited.

Five minutes.

Ten....

She sighed.

Oh well, it had been a long shot, anyway—

Becky: ye hi sory i was driving im here now

Becky: wat up? been long time since u message me

Mattel winced at Becky's spelling, but held back her sour thoughts as she responded;

Mattel: My parents are insane is what's up!

Becky: o?

Becky: they usuil insane or insane insane?

Mattel: INSANE insane!

Mattel: Like I can't EVEN!!

Becky: u can even at me

Mattel: EUGH

Becky: im listen

Becky: vent if u need

Mattel: OH my god don't even GET ME STARTED

Mattel: FIRST it was my MOTHER!!!

Mattel: Like I was literally just EATING?? And BREATHING!!! And she fucking COMES AT ME like I'm PERSONALLY INSULTING HER by making ONE NOISE!!!

Mattel: ONE FUCKING NOISE LIKE

Mattel: I SIGHED

Becky: oof

Mattel: I JUST FUCKING SIGHED AND SHE ACTS LIKE I'M TELLING HER TO GO FUCK HERSELF

Mattel: It wasn't even ABOUT HER!! It was about SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY but nooooo she has to take it PERSONALLY

Becky: o shes crazy

Mattel: SHE IS!!

Mattel: She's fucking INSANE!!!

Mattel: And then dad was no help

Mattel: like OH MY GOD

Mattel: Trying to actually have some sort of DIALOGUE with him??

Mattel: NOPE!

Becky: no

Mattel: NOPE!!!

Mattel: I get told that I'm being ✨ ✨ disrespectful ✨ 🤔 and that I've had an ATTITUDE lately

Becky: only latel y?

Mattel: And he asks WHY and I'm like

Mattel: FUCK off Becky

Becky: sorry hceap shot

Becky: go on

Mattel: He asks me why I've got an "attitude" lately and I'm like!! I don't want to marry Elliot!!

Becky: u told him? good 4 u!!

Mattel: And he gets MAD at me!!

Becky: ugh 🙄

Mattel: And I tell him I don't love Elliot

Mattel: And he basically tells me HE DOESN'T CARE??

Mattel: That love doesn't matter in marriage???

Becky: honstly that explain s a lot

Mattel: Like HELLO????

Mattel: MARRIAGE IS LITERALLY **ABOUT** LOVE???

Mattel: WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU **TALKING ABOUT** DADDY???

Becky: u rite

Mattel: EUGH

Becky: grrr!

Mattel: THEN

Mattel: And THEN

Mattel: He fucking PUNISHES me??? For not wanting to marry Elliot???

Becky: wta the fuuuuckk??

Mattel: HE TOOK MY FUCKING PHONE???? AND KEYS???

Mattel: LIKE WHAT SORT OF INSANE REACTION IS THAT??

Becky: ridilus!!!

Becky: wat the fuke!!!!!!

Mattel: And I'm sitting here like??? What the FUCK do I even DO???

Mattel: WHO the fuck do I even TALK TO about this shit??

Mattel: Like WHAT???

Becky: fucckkkk

Mattel: I literally don't have ANYONE sane to talk to about this!! They're all SO FAR UP MY DAD'S ASS LIKE!!!

Mattel: I have NOBODY to go to???

Becky: so u message me

Mattel: YEAH

Mattel: I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHAT TO DO???

Becky: well ur an adult

Becky: he cant FORCE u to marry ellot

Mattel: He LITERALLY CAN tho

Mattel: Like if I don't IDK how I'm going to LIVE

Mattel: Because I LIVE with him and he PAYS for my FOOD and my PHONE and my CAR like???

Mattel: What do I DO???

Becky: get indipendant

Mattel: I CAN'T though!!

Mattel: Like I can't just get a JOB

Becky: y not?

Mattel: Because half the people in town ALREADY HATE ME and the other half WILL HATE ME if I back out of this marriage!

Becky: ah mmm rite ur not wrong

Mattel: Nobody's going to help me!

Mattel: Maybe I should just kill myself

Becky: now hold on that is axtreme

Mattel: I have NOBODY to help me!!

Becky: u got me

Mattel: No I don't! You HATE me!!

Becky: my feelings about u r more complex then hate. u no that Mattel hesitated as she read Becky's message.

Becky... *didn't* hate her?

Becky: its just like ur feelins for me r more complex then hate

Biting her lip, Mattel thumbed at her mouse.

Becky wasn't wrong, there.... It was hard to outright hate someone she'd loved so much... even if she *wanted* to hate her....

Becky: look do u want me 2 pick u up?

Becky: u can stay at mine 4 the nite

Becky: until ur parents calm down

Becky: stop them from making u feel worse

Mattel hesitated, her eyes wide.

Becky was inviting her to stay at her house?

She really *was* crazy....

But... Mattel really wasn't in a position to be picky....

Becky: recuperate urself a bit n think a boat wat 2 do next

Mattel: Uh

Mattel: Yeah

Mattel: I think that'd be good

Becky: ok just gim me 10 mins i am at julius hose with harley so i will get u on way bak

~~~~~

Becky had announced her arrival at Mattel's house with two sharp, short beeps of her car's horn. And Mattel had looked out her window to see the *beast* of a vehicle Becky had shown up with. It was a hot pink four-wheel drive that looked big enough to knock down a building (though, with the amount of kids Becky had, Mattel supposed a big car was a necessity if she wanted to fit them all in at the same time).

Mattel's mother had immediately rushed out of the house to start screaming at Becky— Who had simply stepped out of her car to get between Chloe-Anne and the passenger seat (which, Mattel could see, had the little half-tiefling boy seated in it), and stood calmly with her arms crossed on the footpath.

'Get off my property!' Chloe-Anne shouted.

'I'm not *on* your property,' Becky argued with a smug grin. 'I'm on the footpath. Which is paid for by my taxes, so—'

Mattel didn't hear the rest of the argument as she grabbed her things and rushed downstairs.

'Mattel?' her father gasped as she slipped past him to get outside. 'Mattel?! Wait, what are you— *Stop!*' Carter's hand closed around Mattel's wrist and she felt herself tugged back. 'What are you *doing?*'

'Let me go, Daddy!' Mattel growled, trying to tug her hand free. 'I'm going to stay with Becky!'

'*What?*'

'You're being *insane!*' Mattel exclaimed. 'And I'm going to stay with Becky until you *stop* being insane!'

'*Insane?*' Carter echoed. 'We're not the ones being insane—'

'You *are!*' Mattel snapped, yanking her arm from her father's grip and hurrying for Becky's car. 'You're both *crazy people!*'

'Now, you stop right there!' Chloe-Anne exclaimed, stepping in her daughter's way. 'You can't just walk out on us, Mattel! You *owe* us!'

'For *what?*'

'We've looked after you for over thirty years—'

'Oh! My god!' Mattel shouted over Chloe-Anne. 'That was *your* choice! I didn't ask to be born! Looking after me is *literally* the minimum requirement to having kids, you *stupid fucking whore*—'

Mattel was cut off as her mother's palm made contact with her cheek so hard

it made her stumble.

‘You disrespectful little— OH MY GOD!’

Mattel turned just in time to see a bright orange-and-white horse rear up at her mother and knock her into the decorative fish pond.

‘HEY!’ Carter shouted, rushing past Mattel and at the horse— Who swiped him aside easily with its head and shoved him into the pond on top of Chloe-Anne.

Then, the horse turned to Mattel and motioned with its head to the car.

‘*Becky...*?’ Mattel realised as the horse snorted loudly. Her eyes widened as the horse made for the driver’s seat, and she hurried into the back of the car after it; flinching when she realised there were four more children in the car besides the tiefling boy. ‘Fucking hell, Becky! I’d heard you could be a deer, but I didn’t know you could be a *horse!*’

‘Honestly, horses are one of the easier animals to turn into,’ Becky said, suddenly herself as she locked the car and tugged on her seatbelt. ‘Ever tried to be a bird, before? It’s not easy! Anyway, let’s get out of here.... Mattel, safety matters! Get that seatbelt on!’

Mattel hurriedly did as she was told; still feeling stunned from watching Becky shove her parents around like they weighed nothing.

‘Thank *you!*’ Becky chirped as she started down the road. ‘So... how’d it feel to call your mother a whore?’

Mattel felt herself let out a small chuckle. ‘Honestly... amazing.’

‘HAH! Kinda wishing I got it on video,’ Becky chuckled.

‘Eugh, no,’ Mattel groaned, sinking back into her seat breathlessly. ‘I’ve had enough people record the fights I’ve been in to last a *lifetime.*’

‘True,’ Becky chuckled. ‘Alright so, introductions! Kids, this is Mattel. Me and her used to be friends until we got in a *really* big fight and stopped talking. Mattel, this is Harley—’ she motioned to the tiefling in the front, then to each of her other children in turn. ‘Barbra, Rousseau, Alvara, and Cannelle. Nicknames; Barbie, Russ, Allie, and Cinnamon.’

Mattel tried to follow what Becky was saying. ‘No... nickname for Harley?’ she asked.

‘Nah. He doesn’t like, like nicknames,’ Becky chuckled. ‘Just Harley is fine for him.’

‘*Yeah...*’ Harley squeaked, quietly.

‘Uhuh...’ Mattel nodded. Then, she jumped as Barbie jabbed her in the side.

‘You were in the mall, today!’ she exclaimed.

‘Uh, yeah. I was.’

‘Daddy really hates you!’ Barbie chirped, joyfully. ‘You should have *heard* him in the car after we saw you! He was so mad about you!’

‘Barbie, baby, be polite,’ Becky reminded her daughter. ‘We don’t tell on people when Mama and Daddy gossip, okay?’

‘But Daddy was *so* angry about her!’ Barbie argued, poking at Mattel again. ‘Like I’ve never— Never seen him so mad before!’

‘Jareth got mad at you because of me?’ Mattel winced. *Of course... what else was to be expected from an orc?*

‘HAH! No,’ Becky laughed. ‘Why would he get mad at *me*? He was mad at *you*.

You know. For still existing.'

'Hm....'

Well, it seemed only fair; she felt much the same about the man. So could she really judge him for feeling that way about her?

'Is Daddy gonna be mad about you bringing her home?' Harley asked.

'Daddy will understand,' Becky reassured, ruffling the tiefling's hair. 'He's used to me bringing wild animals home.'

Mattel gave an offended gasp at Becky's comment. And then another when the children laughed.

'I'm not an *animal*!' Mattel defended.

'I am!' Barbie exclaimed, wiggling in her seat and turning into a small foal— Her horse-limbs flailing all over the place as she wiggled to get comfortable.

'Barbie! No Wildshaping in the car!' Becky scolded. 'You know the rules! Wildshaping is only for outside, and for reaching the high cupboards when cleaning!'

A whinny escaped the foal before she turned back into a girl and crossed her arms... though the pouting session didn't last long before she grinned widely. 'Is Jeremy gonna babysit tomorrow?'

'Yeah—'

'The Shedskin kid babysits for you?' Mattel blurted.

'Yeah! He's good at it,' Becky said. 'The only babysitter I've ever found who'll put up with Barbie's biting.'

'Biting?'

'Yeah!' Barbie clapped her hands happily. 'Biting! Like this!'

Mattel didn't have time to react before the child's teeth were in her arm.

All she could do was scream.

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Harley had been right; Jareth had been *considerably* upset upon seeing Mattel walk into his house. And though he'd cast Becky a confused and frustrated look, he hadn't said anything to her as he'd taken the kids to their rooms and Becky had shown Mattel to the guest room; setting her up with some fresh bedding and showing her how to control the air-conditioner.

It was only as Becky was leaving the room that Jareth had taken her aside and Mattel had (out of concern) crept to the door to peak through the gap at them as they argued in the hall.

'You brought her into our *house*, Becky!' Jareth exclaimed, and Mattel saw him take Becky by the shoulders. 'What about the kids— What about *you*?!'

Mattel tensed as Jareth held Becky tight and braced for the worst... but Becky stayed calm; simply cupping Jareth's face in her hands.

'Jareth, baby, I'm sorry I didn't call,' she apologised. 'This wasn't planned. I promise. But, like... she needs my help. I can't just not help her.'

'She doesn't deserve your help,' Jareth argued, his brow furrowing with a very solemn kind of concern— A concern that was, to Mattel's surprise, very gentle.

'Becky, after all she did to you....'

'I know,' Becky said, softly. 'But there was a time in my life where she meant

as much to me as you do now.... And I... I can't just forget that.'

Jareth sighed, his grip on Becky slowly loosening as he let her go and shook his head. 'You really worry me, babe,' he said, gently. 'You do.... Just for tonight, alright? I *really* don't want her around the kids—'

'HWONK!' a loud, animalistic honk sounded over Jareth's words and Mattel backed up as a bright pink creature leapt up at her door.

The animal honked again, pushing on the door to open it, and Mattel hurried back to sit on the bed so she could pretend she hadn't been eavesdropping.

'Oh, Don!' Becky exclaimed. 'Ah. Sorry, Mattel! He just likes to see who's visiting! Be nice to him!'

'Oh— Uh, yeah!' Mattel managed, staring wide-eyed as the weird-looking mimic trot into her room and craned its very long neck to look around.

This was that second mimic that Becky had picked up in high school, wasn't it? The one she had trained as a service animal or whatever....

'*Hwunk!*' it gave a honk when it spied Mattel, and began to wiggle excitedly as it made its way over. '*Hwunk whonk! Snft!*'

Do not screw this up, Mattel! Mattel told herself, swallowing as the flamingo-shaped mimic clambered up the bed and sniffed at her. *Becky will actually kill you if you upset this thing!*

'*Hunk!*' Don gave another honk before leaping up onto Mattel and scrabbling to get a grip against her chest.

'Ah! Okay, okay!' Mattel put a hand under the animal's rump to help it balance. 'Alright. Don't fall....'

She expected, once the animal had its balance, that it would continue climbing up her to sit on her shoulder. But it didn't.

Instead it took two steps and then snuggled down right between her breasts; snuffling lovingly as it got comfortable with its soaking wet underbelly-mouth combination pressing against her skin.

'Uh... *hmp,*' Mattel hummed, unable to stop herself from pulling face as Don stretched out its neck and began to peck affectionately at her mouth. 'Mm-mh!'

She couldn't even open her mouth to tell it to stop, as she was too scared it would stuff its entire head in the moment her lips parted!

'*Mrrp!*' a trill sounded from the door and Mattel let out a breath as Don turned to honk at the second mimic that had come into the room.

This one was a dark blue in colour, and took the form of a pillow.

'Oh... hello?' Mattel squint at the critter.

That wasn't Mimi, was it?

Hm... no. It didn't look like Mimi— Mimi could never make herself dark blue like that. And her eyes weren't that red colour....

Mattel swallowed. *She wondered if Mimi remembered her.*

'*Mrip!*' another mimic skittered in behind the blue mimic.

Then another.

Then a fourth.

'*Murp!*' one gave a gurgle as it examined Mattel from the door.

'*Mrip!*' another chirped in response.

'*Brrp!*' came a reply.

'*Trerp!*' trilled the blue one, before hurriedly skittering towards the bed.

'TRRP!'

'Oh— No!' Mattel exclaimed as the other three followed. 'Stop! Wait! Heel—'
The mimics did not obey, and all clambered up the bed and onto her person.

They climbed up her shirt, and nipped at her curls, and licked in her ears, and there was *nothing* Mattel could do to stop them.

There was too many! She would get ahold of one to put down on the bed, and then another would take its place— And just as she'd get it removed the first one would be back on her!

'Stop! Wait! Don't—' she was cut off as Don's head found its way into her mouth, and she gagged loudly as she pulled him away. *'Excuse me?!'*

'Hwunk!' Don honked proudly. *'Hwunk wonk! Wunk hwank!'*

'Mrep!' the other mimics replied. *'Trrp trup!'*

'Brrp! Berp!'

'Krr! Trr!'

'Chrrp! Trup chrrp!'

'My god, you are all so *rude!*' Mattel exclaimed, finally managing to scoop all five mimics into her arms. 'You're like a bunch of toddlers! How does Becky *handle* you?! On top of five *actual* toddlers?'

'Hwonk,' Don honked, sounding suspiciously like he was attempting to correct Mattel about something. *'Hwunk!'*

'Yeah, yeah, whatever,' Mattel huffed, depositing all the mimics on the floor.

She hoped they'd leave, but instead they all started sprinting around and playing together.... Well, all except Don, who instead climbed back up the bed to sit in Mattel's lap.

She allowed it, though she didn't really want to. And when the mimic pecked at her hand she sighed and gave him a gentle scratch down his body.

The way he arched his neck into her like a cat arching its back was only a *little* bit disturbing. But the heavy panting-purr he gave as he closed his eyes and drooled on her leg was surprisingly charming.

He was a little bit like one of those pug dogs, Mattel realised as he snuffled into her. Cute in a really pathetic kind of way.

She was so focused on petting Don she didn't notice the sixth mimic that had come into the room until it had scaled the bed and nipped her arm.

'Ow!' she exclaimed, looking over to the familiar blue-eyed mimic as it sniffed at her curiously.

Mimi.

It nipped her again, though not hard, and Mattel quickly pulled away.

'Hey!' she grumbled as it skittered closer. 'None of that....'

Slowly, Mimi leant forward and sniffed at her again.

'You don't remember me, do you?' Mattel realised out loud.

'Brrp?'

'Huh... hm. That's probably a good thing,' Mattel sighed as Mimi gave her a little lick— And then a nervous growl. And then another lick. 'It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you.'

'Brrp...? Grr.... Brrp.... Trrp?'

Carefully, Mattel reached out to scratch Mimi between the eyes; something she'd seen Becky do a billion times while they had been dating.

Mimi flinched, at first, but then leant into the pat with a purr.

'There we are,' Mattel gave an anxious chuckle. 'We can be friends this time around. What do you think?'

The mimic chirped and rolled onto its back, clearly asking for its belly to be rubbed....

And Mattel, though she felt disgust at its wiggling spider-like legs, complied with its request.

'Good girl,' she told it; giving a half-laugh when Don's head pushed under her other hand. 'Oh, and you too? Good boy.'

Hm....

Mattel had never considered herself a fan of mimics, but this... this wasn't actually that bad. Though it was most certainly *not* what she had expected to be doing today.

'I see you've learnt how to not be a piece of shit to small animals,' Jareth's scathing voice floated into the room, and Mattel winced as she turned to see him standing in the door. He was holding a bowl of something, though Mattel couldn't tell what. 'Have you eaten?' he asked, curtly.

Mattel shook her head, and Jareth made his way over to her.

He deposited, with no grace, a bowl of rice on her bedside table.

'Eat,' he told her in a flat, loathly voice, before motioning to the mimics. His tone changed entirely as he addressed them; becoming high and sugary. 'C'mon! C'mon! Dinner time! Dinner time!'

Five out of six mimics all gave loud cries of joy and bolted out the door. Only Don stayed put.

'Don, buddy,' Jareth cooed as he paused at the door. 'It's time for dinner.'

'*Hwunk!*' Don replied, snuggling closer into Mattel and stretching out his neck to try and peck at her face. '*Hwunk!*'

'You don't have to look after her, buddy, she's fine,' Jareth said. 'Come eat.'

'*Hwornk,*' Don gave a low half-honk, half-gurgle, and pulled his neck down so he could lay his head on Mattel's knee. '*Brorp.*'

Jareth just sighed. 'Alright, then.... *Mattel*, you better be good to him. Or *else!*'

Mattel opened her mouth to respond but wasn't given the chance as Jareth stormed out, closing the door in a way that was almost (though not *quite*) a slam.

Mattel huffed out a sigh as Jareth's footsteps disappeared down the hall.

She... *might* have deserved the cold attitude he was giving her. She still didn't appreciate it, though.

'Eugh!' Mattel exclaimed, flinching away as Don scaled her to sit on her shoulder and lick at her cheek. 'Why are you so *wet?!*'

'*Hwunk!*' Don gave a playful honk as he was scooped up and held at arm's length, and began wiggling his legs.

Mattel watched him for a moment, frowning at the creature, before she gave a haughty sniff and placed him in her lap.

'Hmp... well,' Mattel huffed, picking up the food Jareth had left for her and poking at it with her fork. 'You could be worse, couldn't you?'

'*Hwunk!*' Don stumbled to his feet and sniffed the air; his little eyes going wide as he slowly leant his head closer and closer to Mattel's food. '*Brrorp....*'

'Hmp... are you allowed this?' Mattel asked, pulling her bowl away

protectively. 'I don't want to make Becky mad....'

'*Glmng*,' Don groaned, licking his lips.

'Hm...' Mattel's eyes tightened, and she poked through the rice. 'Mm... ah. Here; you can have *one* shrimp, okay?'

'*HWUNK!*' Don cried in joy, leaping around excitedly as Mattel deposited a single shrimp on the bed in front of him.

He proceeded to dance around it instead of eating it; batting at it with his feet like a kitten playing with a toy.

And, despite herself, Mattel gave a chuckle. 'Well. At least *one* of us is having a good time.'

~~~~~

It had been a long, restless night for Mattel.

She'd not been able to get comfortable in the different bed; especially since Don had decided to curl up smack-bang in the middle of it so she had to wrap herself around him. And then, when she *was* finally drifting off, one of Becky's children had started shouting; apparently having been trying to sneak out to run around in the woods, only for Mimi to have found out and screamed for Becky.

Then somehow, in the earliest hours of the morning, Mattel had been tricked into helping Becky get her kids ready for school while Jareth made breakfast.

She'd brushed little Barbie's hair, tying it in a pair of pigtails, before helping Russ tie his shoes.

The whole thing had honestly made Mattel's heart hurt.

*It should have been her*, she found herself thinking as she'd helped Becky wrangle Cannelle into a pair of pants. *These should have been her children.*

Not Jareth's.

She was disgusted with herself for thinking it, of course.

She wasn't supposed to be in love with Becky anymore— She was supposed to have been *over* the woman by now!

It had been ten years, for god's sake! It was *stupid* to be jealous that she'd moved on!

So Mattel hadn't said anything as she'd sat down with the family to eat.

Well— She'd mumbled out a monotonous thank you when Jareth had carelessly thrown down her food in front of her.

But that was it, really. She'd stayed silent the rest of breakfast; watching as Jareth gently served the rest of his family and lovingly kissed Becky on the cheek.

She hadn't helped get the kids in the car; though Becky had ushered her into the front seat and made her come for the drive (she had the suspicion Becky didn't trust her to be alone in the house).

Then, once they had dropped off the kids at school, Becky had kept driving in a direction that Mattel knew was most certainly *not* towards her work or house.

Apparently Becky had the day off. And she'd also apparently been completely serious about thinking Mattel needed to go into the woods and scream her lungs out.

It was *surprisingly* cathartic. Especially when she started picking up sticks and rocks and throwing them around the clearing Becky had brought her to.

It was good to just let it *out*!

Not worrying about being seen or heard, and just letting herself *go* for a minute.

Or ten.

By the end of it, Mattel was sweating head to toe and so exhausted she had to sit down.

‘Any better?’ Becky asked, looking up from the magazine she had brought with her and peaking over the top of her reading glasses.

Mattel nodded, too tired to answer with her words.

Becky discarded her magazine onto her car’s dashboard and clambered out to sit next to Mattel; not bothering to close the door behind her.

Mattel panted as Becky plopped herself down, cross-legged.

‘I fucking *hate* my mother,’ was all she could bring herself to say.

‘Mm,’ Becky hummed, nodding. ‘I hate your mother, too.’

‘She’s such a *bitch*!’ Mattel huffed, flopping over onto her back. ‘Like. Oh my *god*! You know?!’

‘Yeah,’ Becky agreed, flopping down next to Mattel.

‘I mean, what did I ever do to her?’ Mattel huffed. ‘What did I ever do to *anybody*?’

The laugh that Becky tried to smother was more than a little bit insulting, and Mattel felt herself scowling.

‘*What* are you laughing about?’ she hissed, her voice dripping with venom.

‘Oh, you were asking that *seriously*?’ Becky teased, shifting closer so she could nudge Mattel with her elbow. ‘Look, Mattel. When *everyone* keeps leaving you, every single time, you really have to stop and wonder... is it *me*?’

Mattel just glowered at her.

‘You’ve done a lot of shit, Mattel,’ Becky said simply. ‘You can’t act like you haven’t.’

Mattel just sighed and turned her gaze to the sky instead of replying.

Becky didn’t press for a response. Instead the half-elf simply stretched and rolled over to pick mindlessly at the grass.... And Mattel winced as she saw the woman put a flower in her mouth.

She didn’t like how familiar this felt.

She could still remember the dates they would go on in the woods; laying together and talking for hours on end.

‘Have we been here before?’ she asked, swallowing down how uncomfortable she felt. ‘I think I’m having some sort of *déjà vu*.’

‘Oh, yeah, this is where we broke up,’ Becky said nonchalantly.

‘Wh—’

‘I thought it’d be nice, you know?’ Becky continued. ‘To maybe start to care about each other a little bit again, in the same place we stopped caring.’

‘You’re insane,’ Mattel snorted; though she couldn’t help but chuckle as she did. ‘You uh.... You really care about me again?’

‘Little bit,’ Becky said with a shrug. ‘I forgive you, at least.’

‘You... *forgive* me?’ Mattel asked, slowly.

‘Kind of. Yeah. I mean, if you’re willing to change I will,’ said Becky. ‘Like. You’ve done some shitty things but like, you’ve never tried to *kill* me before!’

Unlike Guillmero, and Zombi, and Romero— Oh and Helena! You remember that time Helena tried to kill us?’

‘Hm.’

‘Haha, that was *wild!*’ Becky chuckled. ‘But yeah. No. Like. If I can like, still talk to all of them and stuff, when they wanted to hurt me and stuff.... I can talk to you a little bit, too. Cos like, I know that you never *wanted* to hurt me. You know? Like, you thought you were doing the right thing! Like. You wanted to look after me and stuff. And even though you hurt me it’s just not worth being mad over anymore, you know?’

Mattel bit her tongue.

*She thought she was doing the right thing? She had done the right thing! She was making Becky normal! So that she could live like a normal person and do normal things! Like she was supposed to!*

But there was no point in arguing that. Not now. Not ten years later.

So instead Mattel just let out a long breath. ‘Well. I’m glad you at least understand that I cared.... I...’ she hesitated, then gave an apologetic hum. ‘You know that I never meant to hurt you, right? I am sorry that I did.... Really. I genuinely am.’

‘I know,’ Becky replied. ‘Nobody ever thinks of themselves as the bad guy in their own life. Even if they end up being the bad guy in others lives. You know?’

‘Mm....’

‘So... speaking of lives,’ Becky gave sniff and rolled to face Mattel. ‘If you could do any job —any job in the world— what would you do?’

Mattel pursed her lips and furrowed her brow. ‘Anything?’

‘Yeah. Even if you, like, obviously can’t do it for whatever reasons.’

‘Well, I’d...’ she hesitated. ‘Ugh. No. My parents would disown me.’

‘Let’s be real; they’re probably going to disown you, anyway.’

‘*Eugh,*’ Mattel groaned. ‘You’re not wrong.... Maybe I’ll *actually* have to get a job. Like, for *real*.’

‘Oh, yeah, probably,’ Becky laughed, shrugging at her ex. ‘So then, like, what would your dream job be?’

‘My dream job?’ Mattel echoed. ‘Well.... I think if I could do *any* job, without like, my parents freaking out or whatever.... I think... I think I’d make porn.’

The noise Becky made was atrocious.

‘*What?*’ Mattel huffed. ‘You said *anything!*’

‘Yeah, no— No— I mean, it makes sense for you,’ Becky snickered; clearly not taking Mattel seriously. ‘I mean. You always loved making your thirst traps. It’s not much more of a step to take off a layer or two.’

‘Pft. *Yeah,*’ Mattel gave a sigh. ‘Can you imagine what it would be like, though? Selling photos? Having people *drooling* over me? Making rent just by painting my toes and setting up some nice lighting?’

‘Hah, feet pics,’ Becky chuckled.

‘Tell me they wouldn’t sell!’

‘Oh, they’d go like *hotcakes!*’ Becky chuckled. ‘But uh, you sure it’d be enough? What if you, like. Couldn’t earn enough to make a living?’

‘Then I’d call you,’ Mattel said; a playful grin appearing on her face as she leant over and mockingly played with her ex’s hair. ‘You’re kind and gullible. I’m

sure you'd help me get back on my feet.'

Becky slapped her hand away. 'Not by buying pictures of them, I wouldn't!'

Despite herself, Mattel laughed. 'More seriously, though. I think at this point I'll take any job I can get. *Anything* to get away from my parents and Elliot.'

'I know McDonalds is always hiring.'

'Eugh.... *Yeah*,' Mattel heaved a sigh. 'That's probably a good starting point. I'm fucking *dreading* it but... I'm dreading having to go home, more.'

'Yeah, well...' Becky trailed off, then; sitting up with a frown.

'What?' Mattel's expression matched Becky's own as she also sat up. 'What is it?'

'Someone's here,' Becky said slowly. She sniffed at the air then, in a very animalistic way, before grinning widely. 'Alyssa! Hey! Stop spying on us, you weirdo, and come out and say hi!'

Slowly, a deer crept out of the woods. It looked nervous as it approached; its ears pinned back and its head low as its eyes locked tightly onto Mattel....

Then, it turned into a familiar form; the satyr Alyssa. One of their old classmates from school.

'Becky, what are you *doing* out here with—' Alyssa cut off at Mattel's name, instead gesturing wildly at the woman. '*With!*'

Becky just shrugged. 'Just talking.'

'*About?*'

'My parents being *insane*,' Mattel told her, flopping back down.

'Oh?'

'They got into a fight,' Becky clarified.

'Ah.'

'And Becky threw them both in the fish pond.'

'Hah!' Alyssa sat down by Becky's side—opposite to Mattel—and nudged her fellow druid. 'I would have paid to see that!'

'It was *great!*' Becky exclaimed. 'An absolute *rush!* And what are they gonna do about it, honestly? They know kicking up a stink with me will just get them in more shit!'

'Being friends with the local tourist attraction has its perks, huh?' Alyssa giggled. 'How is Mauly doing, anyway?'

Mattel felt herself frown. 'Mauly?'

'You know? The mall mimic,' Becky clarified. 'Mauly. Sweetest thing! But yeah, they're doing well. They've got a vet appointment on Thursday so that's gonna be a busy one for me! I had to reschedule my grooming appointments so I can be there to help keep them calm.'

'Aw, so big and yet *still* scared of the vet?'

'Yeah, it's a little silly....'

Mattel didn't bother to keep listening as the pair of druids chattered on; she didn't like mimics. And she had no interest in the gigantic mall-shaped mimic that had somehow become a local tourist attraction.

She'd heard enough about that thing from her parents.

So Mattel gave a sniff and looked to the sky; making out shapes in the clouds to keep herself busy as she thought about her situation.

She couldn't go home.

She really couldn't.  
She didn't want to marry Elliot, and if she went home her parents wouldn't give her the choice.  
She needed to get out.  
But she had no out.  
She couldn't get a job. Everyone in this whole stupid state hated her!  
And without a job she was at the mercy of her parents....  
She had to get *out!*  
Out of her parents house— Out of this entire stupid town!  
'You know,' Alyssa's voice caught Mattel's attention as the satyr leant towards her. 'If we killed her out here, we could bury her and nobody would ever know. We could be each other's alibis.'  
Mattel huffed and simply crossed her arms, rolling her eyes. 'You'd be doing me a favour, honestly.'  
'Hah! Well, in that case, never mind,' Alyssa joked. She pushed herself to her feet, then, and brushed herself down. 'Anyway. I'm off. Good luck being disowned.'  
Mattel didn't humour her with an answer, and simply let her walk away.  
Then, she rolled over to Becky. 'Hey.'  
'Hm?'  
'How charitable are you feeling?'  
'So-so, why?'  
'You wouldn't consider buying me a plane ticket, would you?'  
Becky laughed. 'A *plane ticket?*'  
'Yeah,' Mattel drawled, seriously. 'Out of state or something. Somewhere nobody knows me. Somewhere I can get a job and an apartment or whatever.'  
'Hm... where were you thinking?'  
'I dunno, New Chicago?' Mattel shrugged. 'Los Diablos? New York? Wherever you can get me.'  
'You sure that's a good idea?' Becky asked.  
'It's a better idea than staying in this shit-hole,' Mattel scoffed. 'And it's better than marrying *Elliot*.'  
'Hm... alright!' Becky gave a shrug, and sat up. 'I'll get you a plane ticket. And like. One of those gas station phones or whatever, you know? Ah. And like. Enough for a few nights in a hotel.'  
'Hm,' Mattel hummed. 'That'd be great.... I'd really owe you.'  
'I mean. If it gets you out of town!'  
'Very funny...'  
'No, though,' Becky waved a hand. 'I'll do it for you, on *one* condition.'  
Mattel's eyes tightened.  
She didn't like the sound of that.  
But she had no choice.  
'Alright. What's the condition?'

~~~~~

The sound of Orson's laughter was like nails on a chalkboard.

Becky's condition couldn't have been more torturous if she'd broken the Geneva convention.... She'd gotten that fucking drow Orson to come with them to the airport; laughing and joking and switching who was driving every hour or so.

Apparently they were *family* now. Orson had married Jareth's brother; meaning he and Becky saw each other more than must be healthy.

Ugh, she let out a groan. *They were even more annoying together than individually.*

Mattel gave a heavy sigh, and leant forward to rest her arms on Orson's seat.

'So... fortune teller. When I get there, do you think I'm going to make it, or get murdered in the street?'

'Eh. I'd give you... fifty-fifty,' he answered. 'Well. Fifty you'll make it. Twenty you'll be murdered. And another thirty you'll come crawling back here with your tail between your legs!'

'I'll take those odds,' Mattel snorted, flopping back in her seat and fiddling with her nails.

They were coming up on the airport now. And though she couldn't wait to get out of the car and never see Orson and Becky again, she still couldn't help but feel nervous.

She didn't want to come "crawling back" to Shadow Oaks! She *refused* to do so! She *was* going to make her own way, away from her parents— Or she would die trying.

The car pulled to a stop, and Becky turned in her seat to grin at Mattel.

'I hope your plane crashes,' she joked.

Orson gave a laugh. 'The chances of that are *very* low.... BUT THEY'RE NOT ZERO!'

Becky cackled in response, and Mattel just rolled her eyes and climbed out of the car.

'I hate you both,' she said, slamming the door and turning for the terminal.

'Hey! Hey!' Becky called out the window. 'Mattel! Hold up!'

'*What?*' Mattel sighed, turning back.

'Look. I know I'm, like, ribbing you and stuff, but that's just how it *is* when you've done the sort of stuff we've done to people,' Becky said. 'Everyone still teases me about how I used to like. Snap at them all the time and pick fights— Romero still makes fun of me for, and I quote him on this, "*lapping at Masters' heels like a deranged puppy*"!'

Mattel snorted in disgust, at that. Though Becky ignored her and continued;

'It's just, like. A part of how karma gets you or whatever,' she explained. 'It'll feel less awful after a while, so don't let it stop you from doing what's right for yourself, 'kay?'

'Mm.'

'You're taking a big step! And it's *never* too late to become a better person. So like, keep changing!'

Mattel scoffed loudly and turned away.

'Mattel!' Becky called again.

'*What?!*'

'Be safe, okay?' the words were softer and more genuine than Mattel was expecting. 'Call me when you touch down?'

‘Yeah, sure,’ Mattel gave a wide shrug. ‘But I *really* do doubt the plane will crash!’

‘Five per day worldwide!’ Orson shouted out the window. ‘Maybe we’ll get lucky!’

‘Fuck off, Orson!’

—END—

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