

# Afterparty

By C. Jade Wyton

*It's been a long day for Becky. A lot happened. Nothing bad, really; she helped Adam set up for the music festival, and then had a... long talk with her father. And though it was a much needed talk, it was still stressful— So Becky spent the rest of the day at a party with friends. Now, she's come home with Jareth, and is settling down for the night with him.*

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The party had been just what Becky had needed after such a long, stressful day.

That morning had started out hard enough, with Becky somehow getting roped into volunteering at the music festival setup with Adam. She'd had no idea what she was doing and it had been humiliating.... And it had only gotten worse as she'd been bombarded with more and more stimuli.

Adam knew about what she'd done to Helena. God knows *where* he'd heard about it, but he had. And she hadn't been able to deny it when he'd cast doubts that she would be so awful— All she'd been able to do was look away in shame.

And then she'd seen that Zeke guy who'd apparently been threatening Portia. He was was still hanging around like he *belonged* in town.

Becky had snapped a photo of him to send to the girls, to give them the heads up.... And while doing so had gotten a dreadful text from Isa.

*When will you be home? Your father wants to talk with you.*

It had made Becky sick to her stomach.

She would have given anything to avoid going home, then.... But she was already in enough trouble as it was and didn't want to push Isa's patience. She was *lucky* that the drow had let her spend the previous night out with the girls and Adam, with how she'd been behaving lately.

Though... Isa had seemed more concerned, than angry, when setting Becky up with her overnight medication.

Becky was glad Malinka had been there with her when she'd asked to go out. And doubly glad she hadn't been judgemental.... She seemed to get it. Malinka really seemed to genuinely understand the trouble Becky was having with her family in a way none of her other friends ever seemed to.

*You can say you're not fine.*

Malinka's words hit her again, and she felt her eyes well up; though she quickly blinked her tears away and squeezed Jareth tight around his middle, leaning with him and his bike as they turned a corner.

She hadn't been fine in a long time.

She wasn't sure she'd *ever* been fine, really.

Though. After today she thought she had more hope that she might eventually manage to be okay.... One day. Even if the talk with her dad had been *a lot*.

At the time it was overwhelming. She hadn't known what to say, though that seemed just as well as Ken had poured his heart out to her.

She still had trouble wrapping her head around it all.

But....

*He loved her.*

That was all she needed to remember.

*He loved her.*

He loved her, even when he had trouble showing it. Or when he made mistakes.

*And apparently he hated Mattel.*

As quickly as the thought came to her, she shoved it away.

She didn't want to think about that.

Though it was hard to forget her father's anger as he'd stood up and began pacing and ranting about her ex.

It was only the second time she'd ever seen him get angry.... And both times were for her; anger at people who'd hurt her....

'Becky?' Jareth's hand met the top of Becky's head, and she was pulled back to reality. 'We're here.'

'Oh!' Becky quickly released Jareth and clambered off his bike, almost tripping on a roll of fabric that had somehow found its way into the garage. 'Sorry I— I was in my own world!'

'Heh, yeah, I could tell,' Jareth chuckled. 'You feeling alright?'

'Yeah,' Becky nodded. 'Just thinking.'

'Bout what?'

'My dad, mostly,' she admitted. 'We had a *big talk* today. It was... a lot.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah.'

'Ah...' Jareth offered a sympathetic smile. 'Anything I can help with?'

'No, not really. Well—' Becky raised a finger as she thought. 'Actually, he mentioned.... He likes you. But. He doesn't like that you track mud in the house.'

'Hah!' Jareth gave a laugh, and quickly kicked off his boots. 'Easy fix! Just get these bad boys off and— Oh, hey Miss Isa!'

'Jareth,' Isa's voice floated from the direction of the house, and Becky jumped around to see her standing at the door. 'It's good to see you.... Rebecca? Do you have any idea what time it is?'

'Y.... No?' Becky lied. Then, when Isa placed her hands firmly on her hips and stared, Becky shrunk away. 'Yes.'

'You have class in the morning,' Isa said. 'And I told you to be back in time for your medication.'

'I lost track of time,' Becky admitted, rubbing her arm. 'I came home as soon as I realised how late it was.... I'm sorry.'

*'Hmm....'*

For a moment Isa stared down at Becky; but then her features softened behind her thick sunglasses, and Becky let out her trembling breath.

'Okay,' Isa said, gently. 'I believe you.'

'You're not mad?'

'I am. But only a little bit,' she said, motioning for Becky to follow her into the house. 'Come on. Medicine, then bed. Okay?'

'Okay,' Becky mumbled, quickly hurrying after Isa into the house. She stopped

at the kitchen door as Isa went into the medicine cabinet, and found herself shuffling from foot to foot as she cast a glance back to Jareth. 'Um— Isa? Jareth is going to stay the night. That's okay, right?'

Isa gave Becky another long look, which Becky couldn't decipher. She looked... confused? Sympathetic? Worried?

'Um....'

'It's not like you to ask permission,' Isa said, softly. 'Are you alright?'

'Uh... yeah,' Becky gave a short nod as Jareth's arm slowly found its way around her. 'Yeah. It's just been a long day.... Or, week.... Month.... Months....'

Isa returned Becky's nod as she effortlessly unscrewed the lid to Becky's medication. 'Yes... yes,' she sighed, and filled a cup with water. 'Your father told me about your talk.... What you said about... *that night*.'

'He did?' Becky felt her skin prickle as she was handed the small tablet.

She'd almost forgotten she'd told her father about what had happened with Romero. About how she'd almost....

She shivered.

'He was worried,' Isa said, slowly lifting Becky's hands to her mouth to remind her about her tablet. 'We talked about it. And we think you need to tell Goodhuman what happened.'

Becky almost choked on the last of her water. 'I-I don't want to—'

'He can't help you if he doesn't know what's wrong,' Isa told her, firmly. Then, she took Becky's cup and kissed the girl on the top of her head. 'It's alright, Becky. You're safe now, okay?'

Becky nodded, letting out a deep breath, and leant against Jareth. 'Right. Right.... *Hm*,' she let out another breath as Jareth gave her a comforting squeeze. 'I uh... I'm going to... shower, and then head to bed.'

'Alright, you sleep well,' Isa told her. 'Don't hesitate to come to me if you need anything.'

'I won't,' Becky promised. Then she turned and, taking Jareth by the hand, headed out of the kitchen and towards the stairs.

It was a tough climb.

She was so exhausted from the day that, for a moment, she thought she wasn't going to make it up to the second floor.... If it hadn't been for Jareth being there, she might have just given up and laid down where she was. But she didn't want him to think she was weak. Or worse— Lazy!

So she forced herself up, and took a deep breath as she made it to the top.

'You alright?' Jareth asked.

'Yeah. Stairs are easy,' Becky lied. 'I could do that again!'

'Let's not,' Jareth chuckled, turning towards Becky's room.

'Oh— Uh,' Becky stepped in the other direction, and pointed to the door opposite her own. 'Just, um, give me a minute. I need to talk to my dad quickly.'

Jareth gave a nod and a smile as Becky hurried to her father's room.

She raised her hand to knock on the door and... froze.

She wanted to knock. But there was a lump in her throat. And rocks in her stomach. And butterflies in her chest. And her hands were trembling. And she just couldn't seem to bring herself to do it.

Her father was in there. She could see the light under the door. All she had to

do was knock to get his attention.

But... It seemed like such an impossible task.

Becky sighed as Jareth's hand found her hip and he leant forward to knock for her.

Two gentle taps.

*Why couldn't she do that?*

Then, she heard her father getting up and swallowed.

'Yes— Hello?' he pulled the door open, and then broke into a wide smile. 'Ah! Becky! How was the party?'

'F.... Fine,' Becky managed, gripping the hem of her shirt to try and stave off her nerves. 'It was fun. I saw Benny. He's doing well.'

'Good, good,' Ken gave a distracted nod before slowly stepping towards Becky and, in a very, *very* awkward motion, wrapping his arms around her.

She accepted his embrace, though she felt herself tense as he kissed her cheek. 'I uh—' she swallowed and pulled away. 'I was... wondering. Um— There's a, uh... a uh.... The music festival. It's happening. Next weekend. And I was wondering, uh....'

'You can go,' Ken said, gently.

'Yeah— No, yes! But— *You*,' Becky managed, clearing her throat when her father just looked confused. 'You and me. Maybe Isa? We could go together. As a... family? Thing?'

It took Ken a moment to process Becky's invitation; but when he did he smiled wide, and pulled her back into another tight hug. 'I'd love to,' he told her. 'I'll try and clear my schedule. I can't promise— But I'll try.'

'Okay,' Becky squeaked back. 'Thanks.'

Another kiss, and a mumbled *goodnight*, and Ken retreated back into his room.

Becky stood still for a moment before Jareth's hand met her shoulder and she glanced to him.

He was smiling proudly at Becky, and she couldn't help but return it.

'Come on,' he chuckled. 'You wanted to shower? Should do that before your meds kick in.'

Becky gave a nod and let Jareth lead her into her room. She greeted Mimi warmly, cooing to the mimic lovingly as it skittered around her feet all the way to the bathroom.

'Mama's gotta shower now, 'kay baby?' she sung. 'I'll be done in a minute. Wait for me in your bed. Okay? Go to bed! *Go bed!* Aw! That's my good girl!'

Becky watched as Mimi skittered to its pillow under the window and settled down with an obedient chirp.

'Mrrp?'

'Good girl!'

'Mrrp!'

'Yeah! Okay! Bye bye Mimi!' Becky clicked her tongue affectionately and began to close the bathroom door. 'Bye bye!'

She turned around to find Jareth leaning against her sink, holding back his laughter.

'What?'

‘*Nothing*,’ he managed. ‘You’re just... adorable. I love you.’

Becky blushed, and rubbed the back of her neck. ‘I love you, too.’

A kiss, and the two slipped out of their clothes and into the shower.

It was snug. Becky enjoyed the feeling of Jareth’s body pressing against hers as the hot water ran over them. And she especially enjoyed the feeling of Jareth’s hands massaging her shoulders as he helped her wash her back.... But it was all over far too soon.

Ten minutes was not long enough. And when they were pushing fifteen Becky knew that it had been too long.

She turned off the water, and shivered as she felt Jareth’s lips gently meet her neck before he stepped out.

Becky raised her brow as he immediately soaked her bathmat through.

‘What?’ Jareth asked.

‘You don’t... wait a second before getting out?’ it came out of Becky as a chuckle. ‘So the water can... drip off you?’

‘No,’ Jareth said, simply, and pointed to a drain on Becky’s floor. ‘That’s what that’s for, isn’t it?’

Becky bit her lip, scrunching her face up and taking in a hiss of air. ‘*I guess.*’

For a moment, Jareth hesitated. Then he let out a long breath and grabbed a towel. ‘It bothers you?’

‘Oh, no,’ Becky waved a dismissive hand. ‘It’s fine!’

‘Not if it bothers you, it’s not,’ Jareth stated. ‘Does it?’

‘No...’ Becky answered, hesitantly. ‘Well.... Kind of. A *little*. It’s fine, though! I don’t want to be— Uh....’

Jareth leant towards her as she trailed off. ‘Don’t want to be what?’ he asked, softly.

‘Um.... *Demanding*,’ Becky finished.

‘It’s not demanding,’ Jareth told her as he hung his towel back up. Then, he grabbed another and turned back to Becky, affectionately throwing it around her and drying her off. ‘It’s *your* bathroom. You can make whatever rules for it you want.’

‘*Hmm*,’ Becky simply hummed in response; though it was accompanied by a smile.

Jareth was so nice. And sweet. And kind. She couldn’t imagine Mattel ever having said something like....

She almost flinched at the thought of Mattel.

*Was she ever going to get that woman out of her head?!*

‘You okay?’ Jareth asked, running a finger under her chin. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘I...’ Becky let out a trembling breath. ‘I keep thinking about Mattel. I’m sorry, I just.... I don’t know....’

A dark look passed over Jareth; and Becky couldn’t tell if he was angry or hurt as his brow furrowed— She didn’t have any time to guess what he was feeling before she was pulled into a hug.

‘I will never, *ever* treat you like Mattel did,’ he promised, his voice firm but gentle as he squeezed her tight. ‘You’re so important to me. And I love you so much. Please don’t forget that.’

‘I won’t,’ Becky promised back, returning his embrace. ‘I love you, too.’

Jareth gave her another squeeze before planting a kiss on her neck pulling away. 'Come on. Let's go lie down. Watch TV or something until you get tired.'

'Yeah, okay— Oh! Oh— Wait!' Becky gasped as she was hit with a sudden realisation. 'Oh! I didn't tell you! The book! I brought a book!'

'You brought a *book*?' Jareth echoed as Becky bolted out of the bathroom. 'I thought you didn't read.'

'I thought so too!' Becky exclaimed, hurrying to her bedside table and dodging Mimi as it bolted under her feet. 'But this one! This one is— Look at it!'

She held up the book to him as he approached her, and he scanned it slowly.

'Copy Cat... ooh, I see. It's about a mimic!' he chuckled. 'Ah! And it's a comic, too? Cool.'

'Yeah!' Becky gave a nod as she began to flick through the pages. 'It's a "manga"! I brought it yesterday with Malinka and— And look! The words don't move!'

'Move?' Jareth looked confused. 'What?'

'Yeah like— They don't move around like they usually do!' Becky explained. 'Like with normal books and homework and stuff! The words stay still. Malinka said it was because of the font, and that she thinks I have something called "dyslexia" but like... I don't know what that is. Just that— Look at it! They're so still!'

Realisation dawned on Jareth's face as he took the book from Becky and sat on her bed. 'Oooh. *Dyslexia*.... My dad has dyslexia.'

'Really?'

'Yeah. It's hard for him, sometimes. That's why he doesn't do tattoos with writing on them a lot,' Jareth shrugged. Then he hefted himself backwards onto the bed until he was laying down comfortably, and pet the space beside him. 'I... feel like I should have made that connection myself. Sorry I didn't.... It explains a lot, though.'

'It's fine, I— *Mimi*!' Becky gasped as she almost sat on the mimic. 'Girl! Come on. Up. Up!'

Mimi gave a loud chirp and scaled Becky's arm, coming to rest around her neck as a scarf.

'Good girl,' Becky mumbled, petting Mimi and settling down into Jareth's side. 'So... you know what dyslexia is? Is it like, an eye thing?'

'It's a brain thing,' Jareth corrected, putting his arm around Becky and pulling the blanket over the two of them. 'Something about the language part of the brain being weird and not processing things properly.'

'Oh....'

'Yeah,' Jareth shrugged, and fiddled with the book he held. 'So... you can read this?'

'Yeah!' Becky exclaimed. 'Way easier than other stuff! It— It's like, *wow*! You know?'

'Heh. That's cool. You wanna read it to me?' Jareth asked, placing the book into Becky's lap. 'I'd love if you did.'

'You— Oh? Yeah?' Becky felt herself blush as she picked up the book and began to skim through the pages. 'You would?'

'*Absolutely*,' Jareth answered. 'If it's important to you, it's important to me.'

Becky's blush grew deeper, at that. 'Um.... Okay. I'll do my best. But I'm... I'm still not used to....'

'That's okay,' Jareth pecked a kiss on her cheek. 'I still want to see you try.'

'Um. Okay,' Becky took a deep breath, and turned to the front of the book.

She read slowly, and clumsily. But to her relief Jareth didn't seem to mind when she misread things. He didn't correct her, either. Instead he sat close to her, his eyes moving from the book to her and back as he smiled warmly and listened. It was a wonderful moment.... Though, Becky was only six pages in when the words began to run together.

Her head drooped as her eyes grew heavy and she struggled to keep them open enough to read. She mumbled quietly as grip on the book faltered, and it slipped out of her hands.

'Oop,' Jareth breathed as he caught it. 'Ah. There's the meds....'

Becky took a deep breath as Jareth leant over her and placed the book back in its place on her bedside table. Then, she felt him hook his arms underneath her and he moved her down into a more comfortable position.

Mimi gave a chirp as he did, and wiggled out from under Becky's neck; instead finding its way under her arm and purring loudly.

'Ah, sorry girl,' Jareth chuckled, gently patting the mimic. 'Let's get some sleep, huh?'

'*Mrprrrp!*' Mimi replied with excitement as it turned into a plush toy and snuggled into Becky.

'*Mhm,*' Becky sleepily echoed as she felt Jareth settle down behind her.

His arms wrapped around her, pulling her close so their bare skin pressed together and his warmth seeped into her.

The last thing she felt as she drifted off was a kiss pressed into her cheek.

—END—

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