

Barbra's Daughter

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky Bloom is both excited and anxious to be meeting her aunt Isabel in person. Her family still doesn't know she's doing it, after all. But her boyfriend, Jareth, is more than happy to drive her to her aunt's house. And, even when her aunt makes some misplaced comments, Jareth is patient with her.... However, when Isabel tries to introduce Becky to her grandfather, everything goes wrong very fast.

Contains depictions of racism, violence, and domestic abuse.

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Tomorrow was Becky's birthday, and it was the first birthday in a *long* time she was excited for.

She'd made plans with her friends to come over and spend some time at her house. She'd asked for them not to bring any gifts (the thought of receiving gifts *still* made her uneasy) and was hoping to just relax and watch movies with them all— Them, and the plus ones she'd given them permission to bring.... Or, in Portia's case, plus *two*....

Then Becky had surprised herself, and Isa, by spending most of the morning today preparing food for the party. By the time Jareth had come to pick her up she was so focused on icing the cake she'd made that she didn't notice him until his arms were around her waist and she was lifted off the ground and spun around.

He'd given her another minute to finish the cake and then clean up, and then they'd headed out for Warm Waters together.

But, despite the initial fun of Jareth's greeting, the entire ride to Warm Waters Becky had a horrible knot in her stomach.

Her dad and Isa knew where she was going, of course— But if they knew *why* she was going....Who she was going to see....

Becky swallowed, and buried her face into Jareth's back.

She was going to meet her aunt Isabel in person for the first time, only a few days after promising her parents she hadn't been talking to anyone she wasn't supposed to.

She felt so *incredibly* guilty about lying, but she couldn't bring herself to stop talking to her aunt.

Isabel had problems. But she also had good intentions. And she seemed so, so lonely.... And Becky just wanted to get to know her. Just a little bit. At least give her a *chance*.

Jareth pulled the bike to a stop out the front of a well-kept house and quickly checked his phone.

'Yeah, this is the address,' he said, climbing off his bike and then offering Becky his hand. 'You feeling ready to meet—'

The words weren't even out of Jareth's mouth before the door to the house

was thrown open and a tall human woman hurried out. She was older—at least in her mid-forties— and had long, reddish-brown hair that reminded Becky of her mother.

‘Rebecca!’ the woman cried in a very familiar voice, laughing as she tripped over the ramp leading down off the front porch and barely kept her balance. ‘Sweetie! I can’t believe it’s really you!’

‘Auntie?’ Becky guessed, lighting up when Isabel threw open her arms. ‘Auntie Isabel! Hi!’

Becky started towards Isabel, meeting her aunt halfway across the yard, and the woman threw her arms around Becky.

Becky felt herself being squeezed so tightly her feet were lifted off the ground— And she could hear Jareth laughing at her as she squirmed uncomfortably against the woman’s thin, boney form.

*It was like hugging a bag of wooden spoons*, Becky thought, forcing a kind smile onto her face. ‘Hi, Auntie.’

‘Oh my god, just *look* at you!’ Isabel chirped, pulling away from the hug long enough to grab Becky by the face and squish her cheeks. ‘You’re so beautiful!’

Becky then found herself bombarded with facial kisses that she couldn’t seem to bring herself to pull away from— Until a kiss found its way to the bridge of Becky’s nose, and she flinched away with a sharp hiss of pain.

‘Oh!’

‘Ow.’

‘Oh my goodness, I’m so sorry, are you alright?’ Isabel asked, gingerly reaching a hand out to Becky’s face and seemingly only just noticing the bandage across her nose. ‘What’s happened to you?’

‘Got bitten by a goose,’ Becky answered, recalling the events of Jezzibeth’s party.

‘A goose?!’ Isabel echoed.

‘Yeah,’ Becky chuckled. ‘It was pretty funny, actually. My friend’s brother got a new pet, and it’s not very fond of strangers.... I didn’t know that and got a little too into its personal space. Completely my fault!’

‘Aw, you poor thing,’ Isabel cooed, tenderly stroking Becky’s cheek. ‘It must have hurt so much....’

Becky could see, now, as Isabel looked at her, the sparkle of tears forming in the woman’s eyes. So, not sure what else to do, Becky leant forward and wrapped her arms around her aunt.

Isabel wiped the corners of her eyes and sniffed before throwing her own arms back around Becky.

*‘I can’t believe I can finally hold you,’* she whispered, burying her face into Becky’s shoulder. *‘Twenty years... I never thought I’d get the chance.... Thank you, God. Thank you.’*

Becky’s grip on her aunt tightened, and she let out a long breath.

Then, Jareth laughed again, and Becky felt Isabel tense before she pulled away from Becky and looked up at the man as he walked his bike into the driveway.

‘You must be Jareth,’ she said, slowly, folding her arms into herself as she did. ‘Becky’s told me a lot about you.’

Becky’s heart picked up in speed, and she swallowed as she glanced between

her boyfriend and her aunt.

*Please don't say anything stupid, she willed Isabel. For the love of god, don't—*

'You're a lot greener than I was expecting,' Isabel said, and Becky felt like her entire body was going to melt into a pile of goo on the ground. 'And so tall, too. Leather jacket and bike.... Are those scars on your arm? They look very... painful.'

'Uh...' Jareth blushed and kicked out the stand for his bike. It was clear Isabel's comments had made him uncomfortable— And he only became *more* uncomfortable as she stepped over to him and took his arm, examining the intricate scarification tattoos in his skin. 'Mm....'

'Oh! These scars were made deliberately!' Isabel realised, aloud. 'They're pictures!'

'Yeah,' Jareth gave her an awkward nod. 'It's a type of tattoo. Scarification? You uh, cut the skin to create patterns instead of injecting it with ink.'

'That's...' Isabel hesitated.

*Don't say barbaric, Becky begged. Please, for the love of all the gods and patrons in the entire universe, do not say barbaric!*

'Diff...erent,' she managed, in a very stilted way. 'I've never heard of that before.'

Becky let out her breath.

*Oh thank god.*

'It's a cultural thing,' Jareth offered.

'I see...' Isabel cast Becky a look, as if hoping for a sign of approval for what she'd said, before biting her lip and turning back to Jareth. 'Was it painful? I don't think I could bare to do something like that— N-No offence, of course. It's just that, uh, I could barely even handle having my ears pierced when I was younger. I think if I tried to get a, uh... a *tattoo* like yours I wouldn't be able to handle it! But that's quite a big one. *Did* it hurt? Or is it true that orcs don't feel pain in the same way humans do—'

'Auntie! *Um...*' Becky's lips pursed into a thin line as she quickly hurried over and took her aunt's hands. 'No— Auntie, don't, uh.... That's... that's rude.'

It was *more* than just rude, but Becky wasn't sure how to explain it.

'Oh, I-I'm sorry!' Isabel gasped, and stammered. 'I-I didn't mean to be— I— Oh, dear. Oh, no. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry,' she put her face in her hands, and began to pace anxiously. 'Oh, it hasn't even been ten minutes and I'm already blabbing out something offensive!'

'Hey, no, it's alright,' Jareth reassured, reaching out a hand for Isabel's shoulder in a way that Becky recognised well. That gentle, loving touch that would pull her close and comfort her—

'No!' Isabel raised her arm over her face and flinched away, clearly terrified she was about to be struck.

Becky felt her stomach twist.

*Jareth would never....*

After a long, quiet moment, Isabel lowered her arm. 'S-Sorry,' she muttered. 'Sorry. I, uh... I....'

Becky heart sunk, and she regretted coming out here— All this way, for this... *disaster.*

Jareth met Becky's eye and his ears gave a twitch, drooping ever-so-slightly as he caught her look.

Then he cleared his throat and straightened up.

'Alright, deep breaths,' he said, calmly. 'Let's all just take a moment and relax.... Take a deep breath.... *In... out...*'

Becky saw Isabel doing as instructed; her shoulders relaxing as she breathed along with Jareth.

'Nobody's mad at anyone,' said Jareth, glancing to Becky again. 'We're all calm, and happy to meet each other. *In... out.....*'

*Thank you*, Becky mouthed.

Jareth gave her a smile. Then he pet Isabel on the shoulder. 'Better?'

Isabel nodded, and placed her hand on Jareth's. 'You're such a sweet boy,' she said, softly, before turning to Becky. 'You're very lucky to have a such a kind man in your life.'

'I am,' Becky agreed, letting the anxiety in her chest unknot itself.

*It was going to be alright.*

It wasn't *all* terrible.

Isabel was *trying*. And willing to learn. And that was what mattered....

'Oh, you should come in and meet Dad— Your grandfather!' Isabel exclaimed. 'I told him you were coming. He... I'm *sure* he's more excited than he's letting on.'

Her wording didn't inspire confidence, but Becky nodded anyway.

'Sure,' she agreed, letting Isabel take her by the arm and lead her towards the house. 'I'd like to meet him.'

'Perfect!' Isabel grinned. 'Come on, come— Oh... uh... Jareth? Honey.... Perhaps you should, uh... wait outside?'

Becky winced as her aunt paused by the door to address Jareth.

*Oh, no....*

'Uh...' Jareth looked confused. 'I... why?'

'Dad's a little...' Isabel visibly grimaced, and Becky saw the woman's entire body tense as she tried to find the words. '*Old fashioned....*'

'Ah,' Jareth returned the grimace. 'Okay. I'll... wait out here.'

'We'll only be a minute,' Isabel promised. 'Then we'll be right out, and we can go for lunch! Would you like lunch, Rebecca?'

'Yeah, lunch sounds good,' Becky nodded, before casting Jareth one more anxious look and following her aunt inside.

'Dad?' Isabel called, walking Becky through the house. 'Dad!'

It wasn't a comfortable house, Becky thought. It was all very bare-bones. With white walls and pale wooden flooring that was illuminated in a sickly yellow light.

It reminded Becky of Jezzibeth's house; if the entire thing had been soaked in bleach and all the signs of someone actually *living* there had been dragged out into the street and shot.

'Don't uh... touch anything,' Isabel warned, folding her arms against her chest as she hurried through the hall. 'Dad! Rebecca's here!'

*I don't think I'd want to touch things, even if I was allowed*, Becky thought, eyeing the sparsely-placed furniture.

It was all just so *unhomely*.

There weren't many decorations around. And what little decorations there

were, were either religious, or... *yikes*.

Becky cringed as she passed an antique painting of a very white, very human man on a ship with a flag; a clear depiction of colonisation....

'That's Dad's,' Isabel said, hurriedly, and Becky saw her blush.

*At least she had enough sense to be embarrassed by it.*

Becky heaved a sigh and gave a short, understanding nod.

She wasn't sure she was making the right choice meeting her grandfather. Or even just talking to Isabel.... It all felt like a big mistake.

'Dad!' Isabel raised her voice, and Becky twitched an ear at the sharp tone.

'DAD!'

'WHAT?!' was the furious reply from the room at the end of the hall.

'Rebecca's here!' Isabel answered, ushering Becky down the hall. 'Come meet her!'

'Who?' was the heart-sinking reply.

'Rebecca!'

'Who?!'

'REBECCA!' Isabel shouted, finally pulling Becky into the lounge.

It was an awful room. With an uncomfortable-looking couch, an old box television, and mostly-empty shelves. In the middle of the room sat an elderly man in a wheelchair, and Becky felt herself instinctively shrinking away from him as he furiously motioned with a cane.

'Who's Rebecca?!'

'Your granddaughter!'

'My what?'

'Granddaughter!'

'What?!'

'GRAND! DAUGHTER!' Isabel yelled.

'Granddaughter? *No*,' he grumbled, putting his cane over his lap and scowling as he wheeled around to face away from the girls and turn back to the TV. 'I don't have a granddaughter.'

Becky bit her lip.

This was *definitely* a mistake.

She should leave.

She should really, *really* leave....

'Yes you do!' Isabel huffed, taking Becky by the arm and pulling her over to stand in front of her grandfather and obscure his view. 'She's finally come home to us! After all this time! Dad! *Look* at her!'

'I don't have a granddaughter!' the man repeated, and Becky's heart did a flip and landed in her stomach as he picked up his cane again and pointed it at Isabel. 'Now *move*, girl!'

Isabel flinched, but didn't move.

'Isabel!' her father snapped. 'Get out of my way, I'm *trying* to watch the news!'

Becky cast a glance back, and cringed— It was Coyote News, the most *bigoted* local news channel she knew of.... Mattel's parents had always had it on when she'd gone over, and some of the things they'd said in their programs made her skin *crawl*.

*Becky really didn't belong here.*

‘I won’t move,’ Isabel crossed her arms, and spoke slow and firm. ‘Not until you acknowledge Rebecca.’

Becky grimaced. Acknowledgement from this man was the *last* thing she wanted, right now.

‘Who?’

‘REBECCA!’ Isabel snapped, stomping a foot. ‘Stop being difficult!’

‘Don’t you *dare* raise your voice at me!’ the man growled, swinging his cane at the women and catching Isabel in the arm.

Isabel let out a sharp cry and retreated out of her father’s way, dragging Becky with her as she did.

‘I *don’t* know who you’re talking about!’

‘Dad, *please*, listen to me! It’s Rebecca! She’s your *granddaughter*—’

‘No! That is an *elf*!’ he interrupted. ‘I do *not* have an *elf* granddaughter!’

‘Dad, she’s Barbra’s girl!’

‘Who?!’

‘Barbra!’ Isabel cried, desperately. ‘I *know* you remember Barbra! Don’t pretend you don’t!’

‘*Barbra?*’ he growled, spitting in disgust. ‘I don’t have a daughter called *Barbra*.’

‘Dad, *please*—’

‘ENOUGH!’ the man shouted, spinning himself around and aiming another blow with his cane. It was a high blow, aimed at Isabel’s face— But she ducked away from it fearfully and instead of hitting Isabel it caught Becky in the side of the jaw and she stumbled sideways, surprised by the sudden unexpected blow.

‘Rebecca!’ Isabel exclaimed, hurrying to Becky’s side and checking her face. ‘Oh, honey are you—’

She cut off as her father swung again, catching her in the side, and she quickly shoved Becky towards the hall.

‘You stupid, ungrateful girl!’ the man yelled after them. ‘Unappreciative *whore*! I’ve told you before not to talk back to me! You best remember that I *let* you come home, out of the goodness of my heart, when you had nowhere else to go! So you can either listen to me or you can go *crawling back* to your mother—’

Becky didn’t hear the rest of what her grandfather shouted, as she was hurriedly ushered back out the front door.

‘Becky!’ Jareth exclaimed, leaping up from the edge of the porch where he’d been sitting. ‘What the hell’s going on in there— Are you alright?!’

He was at Becky’s side in moments, his hand on her face where she’d been hit— She could only guess that the bruise was already forming.

‘Becky, what happened?’ he asked.

‘I...’ Becky hesitated, too stunned to fully process what *had* just happened. ‘He....’

*He’d hit her.*

Becky felt tears welling in her eyes, and took a shaky breath. ‘He... hit me.’

Anger flashed in Jareth’s eyes as he looked up at Isabel. ‘He *hit* her?!’

Isabel flinched away from Jareth’s rage, stumbling back into the house and letting out a fearful whimper.

‘Jareth, no—’ Becky sniffed, grabbing Jareth’s arm. ‘It wasn’t her fault!’

Becky's words surprised herself; but she realised that she'd meant them, and looked to her aunt with a trembling lip and brow furrowed in sympathy.

'She didn't know he'd do it,' Becky said, leaning into Jareth and taking another deep, shaky breath. 'He hit her, too.'

A heavy sigh, and Becky felt as Jareth's shoulders slumped, and his grip on her loosened, and he lowered himself off his toes.

'Are you okay?' he asked, seemingly addressing both Becky and Isabel.

'Uh, y-yes, I think so,' Isabel echoed Jareth's sigh, and she slowly unpeeled herself from the wall of the house and dared to approach the orc. 'I uh... I'll give him some time to cool off before I go back inside.... Maybe half an hour? Forty minutes? He'll have forgotten the whole thing, by then....'

'Hm,' Jareth let out a concerned hum and began to run his hand through Becky's hair. 'You okay, baby?'

'Yeah,' Becky managed as she sniffed back her tears. 'I'm fine. I'm tough. This is *nothing*....'

It was a lie. And it was clear Jareth knew it was a lie, as he bit his lip and took a moment to chew it before letting out another deep breath.

'Why don't we all go for a walk?' he suggested. 'Get something to eat? Do what we came here to do, and not let some old fart ruin our fun.'

The comment earned a timid chuckle from Isabel, who gave a nod and looked to Becky with hopeful eyes.

'Please?' she asked. 'I-I don't want to lose you. Not now. Not because of....'

Isabel trailed off, and glanced back at the house, motioning vaguely as she did.

Becky wiped her eyes, and offered her aunt the best smile she could muster.

'Yeah,' she said. 'I'd like that.'

—END—

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