

Becky's Birthday

By C. Jade Wyton

For the first time since her mother died, Becky Bloom is celebrating her birthday. It's hard, and she has a lot of conflicted feelings about the party.... Though with some love from her friends she finds that she's actually able to enjoy herself. That is, until she walks in on her father and her boyfriend arguing about her, and is taken aside to have a very serious conversation.

Contains mentions of racism and abuse.

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It was Becky's birthday and she was feeling *very* overwhelmed.

She'd retreated into the bathroom about ten minutes ago to wash her face and just... hadn't come out yet.

'Breathe,' she told herself. 'Just breathe. You're okay. It's just your friends. It's just a get-together. Just a regular get together that... happens to be on one of the worst days of the whole year— *Ooh....*'

She felt sick in her stomach.

*This was a bad idea.*

She'd read the documents Goodhuman had given her, and googled some of the terms, and was trying one of the listed methods of therapy she'd found... "exposure" therapy.... It had worked okay for Christmas, but today was just *harder*.

Maybe she'd just done too much of it, too soon?

Or maybe it was seeing her grandfather that had brought her crashing down.

That seemed just as likely.

She could *sort of* recall feeling some excitement for her party just yesterday morning. But after the incident with Isabel she felt like she'd had weights tied around her ankles, pulling her down to the floor and making her have to drag herself around, inch-by-inch instead of simply walking like everyone else was.

*The bruising was worse than she first thought.*

Becky craned her neck so she could examine where her grandfather had hit her.

Her neck, jaw, and cheek had a thick line of deep purple where the cane had made contact. And there was a larger, round bruise by her eye from the device's rubber foot. That part was swollen and ached every time she blinked.

It wasn't the worst bruise she'd ever seen on herself, but....

It made her worry. Did Isabel have to live with that every day? It was no wonder the woman was such a mess....

*It was no wonder Mum was such a mess.*

The thought squeezed Becky's heart, and she had to splash more water on her face to chase it away.

'Becky?' Jareth's voice called through the door, followed by a light knock. 'Babe, you alright in there?'

‘Hm? Y-Yeah!’ Becky called back, hurrying over to open the door. ‘Just... taking a breather.’

‘Fair,’ Jareth gave a nervous chuckle and pecked a kiss on Becky’s cheek. The one without the bruise. ‘Sorry to disturb you. But I was voted to come and check that you weren’t dead.’

‘Voted?’

‘Yeah. Everyone’s worried, but we figured you probably didn’t want us all busting down the door at once. So I’m here on behalf of the group.’

Becky couldn’t help but giggle.

*Her friends were so good to her....*

She stepped out of the bathroom and hugged Jareth tight.

‘You ready to come back to the party?’ he asked, playfully.

‘Yeah, I think so,’ Becky said.

‘Awesome, cos Adam got here about five minutes ago and wants to say hi,’ Jareth chuckled, wrapping an arm around Becky and leading her through the house towards the lounge. ‘He’s here to see *you*, after all.’

Becky didn’t complain, and simply smiled up at her boyfriend as she was taken to meet with her friends.

Jareth was so perfect.

So sweet, and kind, and loving.

He was everything she ever needed, all rolled up into one man.

‘*Heeeey Becky!*’ a playfully mocking voice called, and Becky turned to the room to see Katie splayed out on a couch. She was taking up the entire thing and forcing the rest of their friends onto the other couches or floor; not that they seemed to mind. All of the snacks had been piled onto the coffee table, and being on the floor only made it easier for them to reach the food.

Becky glanced at all her friends and counted thirteen of them, not including the animals or Jareth.

It was a lot, and Becky wondered if *maybe* she should have invited less people... but she didn’t want to have to choose between them. Even if it meant she might have trouble entertaining them all....

‘Longest shit ever, huh?’ Katie asked, cheekily.

‘Actually I was crying,’ Becky corrected, realising only *after* the words came out of her mouth that being honest probably wasn’t the *best* choice right now. So she gave a cough and tried to play it off. ‘But just, like. A little bit, you know? Like a *normal* amount.’

‘Oh. How much is a normal amount of crying?’ Marilyn asked, genuinely.

‘I don’t think there *is* a normal amount of crying,’ answered Benny, earning a nod of agreement from Orson.

‘Sure there is!’ Portia laughed. ‘At least for Beck, there is!’

‘No,’ Jezabeth tutted, and stood up so she could approach Becky and take her hand. ‘Are you alright, Becky?’

‘Yeah, I’m coping,’ Becky answered, only half-honestly. Then she looked past Jezabeth to Adam and Angelo, grinning at the couple who had arrived while she was out of the room. ‘Hi Adam!’

‘Hey, Becky,’ Adam gave a wave. Then, his brow furrowed, and Becky realised he’d seen the bruise on her face. ‘What happened there?’

‘Oh, I—‘

‘She ran into a tree!’ Katie interrupted with a loud cackle. ‘Fucking dumb-arse clotheslined herself on a branch while running around in the woods yesterday!’

‘Yep,’ Becky gave an awkward, stilted laugh, and shrugged. ‘Hah! You know me. Always running into things and hurting myself!’

Adam looked like he didn’t believe it, but he didn’t push for an answer. Becky was grateful for that. Though, she knew she was going to have to tell him about it later. Him... and Malinka; who was giving Becky a look that said she *absolutely* knew Becky was lying.

Nobody else seemed to notice, however. Not even Orson who, besides Malinka and Adam, Becky thought was probably the smartest person in the room.

Becky pushed the thought away, though, and after a quick hug with Jezzibeth she joined her friends on the floor. She planted herself down next to Wendy and Howl; leaving her right side clear for Jareth to sit with her. Once he sat, she lay down with her head in his lap and let out a long, deep sigh as she watched her friends laugh and talk.

They’d sort of... gathered themselves into little groups together. And it was interesting to watch them all.

Katie, Marilyn, and Jezzibeth were together, of course. Grazing on the food and catching up on what they’d done on Christmas. She noticed, then, that Marilyn had Don in her arms; the mimic was asleep, his long neck twisted around so he could rest his head on his rump.

It was cute, Becky thought. Though, it made her wonder where Mimi was....

*Ah, there.*

Mimi was next to Adam, playing with Fuzzy by nipping on his tail and skittering around him to make him spin in circles.

Adam himself had his arm around Angelo; though he was half-turned the other way so he could talk to Wendy and Howl. And Angelo was listening intently to Portia as she told some sort of dramatic story to him, Benny, and Toast.

The story was about some wild fight Portia had been in while still living in her home town, though it was clearly embellished greatly. To an almost unbelievable level. But it had the boys enraptured in her. Especially when she summoned her familiar, a goanna named Sheila, and held her up victoriously.

Becky giggled, and looked to the last of her friends.... Malinka and Orson were talking, with Bianca chiming in every now and then with something that made both magic-users frown in confusion.

It was nice.

Becky closed her eyes, the feeling of Jareth’s fingers in her hair making her entire body relax.

Maybe she *hadn’t* invited too many people. They all seemed to be getting along well, and were keeping each other company while she felt so tired and drained.

A laugh came from the next room over and Becky recognised the sound of Adam’s father. Igor. Followed by Malinka’s mother, Tanya.

She thought it was funny that her friends’ parents had decided to have their own little party in the dining room. It made sense, really, to stay and talk with each other. Instead of having to come back later.

Becky let out a sigh and felt herself smiling.

Jareth had started braiding her hair, and it was the most relaxing thing she'd felt in a long while. So she leant into it, burying her face into her boyfriend's leg and letting herself be lost in the gentle touch of his hands.

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Becky awoke to the whooping and cheering of her friends as Portia threw her phone across the room and screamed.

'I WIN! I FUCKING WIN! EAT SHIT, ADAM!' Portia shouted as her phone bounced along the floor and skidded to a stop by the hall. 'I AM THE FUNNIEST MOTHER FUCKER IN THIS ENTIRE GODDAMN HOUSE! SUCK. MY. DICKS.'

'Oh, heavens,' Jezzibeth visibly cringed as Portia swore and made an exaggerated thrusting motion, slamming her hands either side of her crotch.

'Oi! That better not have been ya phone again!' Porita's father called from the kitchen. 'Cos I ain't buying you another one!'

'I'll just ask Jackie to, aye! Won't I?!' Portia called back, whirling around and yelling at her father.

'Portia, calm down,' Wendy said. 'You won by *one* point.'

'Still a win!' Portia exclaimed, pointing her finger at Wendy. 'Still a fucking *win!*'

Becky couldn't help but laugh as she watched the chaos of her friends.

They were playing some party game on the TV, and Portia had won; barely having beat Adam— Who was being a very graceful loser and simply laughing and shaking his head at Portia as she began to dance around the room and cheer herself on.

'Portia! Portia! Woo! Portia!' Portia chanted, pumping her fist.

'Poooortia!' Bianca cheered, joining in. 'Portia! Portia!'

'Yeah! Portia!' Benny cried, hurry over to Portia and hefting her onto one of his shoulders. 'All hail Portia! Queen of Quiplash!'

'FUCK YEAH, MATE!'

Slowly, Becky sat up and rubbed her eyes.

She'd been moved onto the couch. With a throw blanket over her legs and one of the cushions under her head....

'Hey, Becky!' Katie exclaimed, giving a wave. 'You're finally up!'

'Heh, yeah,' Becky gave a chuckle, and stretched. 'I didn't even realise I fell asleep.'

'Oh, well, of course you didn't,' Marilyn said, sitting next to Becky and giving her a friendly pat on the back. 'You were asleep. It's hard to know what's going on when you're asleep, you know.'

'True,' Becky gave a nod, and grinned as she saw Don had happily perched himself on her friend's shoulder. 'What's going on?'

'Jackbox!' Orson answered from across the room. 'Portia suggested it! Apparently it's really big in Australia.'

'Jezzibeth *hates* it,' Katie laughed.

'It's *so* rude!' Jezzibeth exclaimed. 'Everyone's answers are just, *penis this*, and *penis that*! Even when they don't *need* to be!'

‘Don’t forget all the cum jokes!’ Bianca shouted.

‘Oh, goodness,’ Jezzibeth bowed her head, and traced the symbol of the blessed across her heart.

Becky gave Jezzibeth an apologetic look. She hadn’t expected the party to devolve into *this*.

Not that it was a *bad* thing, really. It seemed like everyone was having a *lot* of fun. But she hadn’t expected it to get so rude....

Becky went to run a hand through her hair and paused when she felt the braid Jareth had made in it.

Jareth...?

‘Where’s Jareth?’ Becky asked, suddenly realising her boyfriend wasn’t there.

‘He took Mimi upstairs,’ Adam answered loudly, calling over the top of the cheering and chanting that was still going on. ‘She got a little bit... excited.’

‘She tried to eat Grigori,’ Malinka explained, holding up her (luckily unharmed) bat familiar. ‘She was behaving really well. But then Grigori landed on her face and she almost swallowed him whole.’

‘Yeah,’ Adam gave a nervous laugh, and rubbed the back of his neck. ‘She wasn’t *trying* to be naughty or anything. We think it was just that her instincts kicked in.’

‘Ah,’ Becky gave a slow nod. ‘And... Jareth hasn’t come back down?’

‘He’s probably just keeping her company,’ Benny suggested as he turned and swung Portia around dangerously. ‘He thinks if Mimi’s sad, *you’ll* be sad.... You know how he is.’

Becky *did* know how he was, and it made her heart flutter with joy as she let out a wistful sigh and leant back against the couch.

‘Jeez, get a room,’ Katie mock-gagged. ‘If you’re gonna be that lovey-dovey why don’t you just go up there and bone him, already?’

Oooh.

Becky knew it was just Katie teasing her, but it was actually very, *very* tempting....

‘Ew, *Beck!*’ Katie reeled back playfully. ‘Don’t *actually* consider it, you slut!’

‘Ah, no, no—’ Becky waved a dismissive hand. ‘No, I wouldn’t. Not with all of you over. Well, maybe— I mean *no!*’

‘You’re *nasty!*’ Katie teased, grappling Becky into a headlock. ‘Dumb slut! I’m gonna give you a *different* kind of wet willy!’

Becky let out a shriek as Katie’s spit-covered finger found its way into her ear, and she threw her friend to the floor and ran out of the room to avoid being grabbed again.

She looked back, expecting Katie to have followed her, but instead saw the woman had been dog-piled by Portia and Bianca.

Hah!

It was the perfect distraction for her to get away!

Becky let out a victorious laugh and slowed down as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

Should she go up and look for Jareth?

Becky cocked her head, angling an ear up the stairs to try and listen for any sounds, but the noise from the lounge was too much and she couldn’t hear

anything except her friends' thumping and screeching.

Hm....

It was odd that Jareth wasn't coming down after Becky had screamed. She'd have thought it would have gotten his attention (she was a *very* loud screamer), and he would have come downstairs once he knew she was awake....

Yeah.

She *should* go look for him. To make sure everything was alright.

And if everything was alright, maybe they could have a little bit of fun before coming back down.... Just to spite Katie.

Becky felt herself giggling as she made her way up the stairs.

Then, she froze near the top, falling silent.

She could hear... her father.

And he sounded *furios*.

Slowly, Becky took the last few steps up the stairs and peered into the hall.

It was empty. But her father's study door was open, and she could hear that his voice was coming from inside....

'I just think that it's *odd*,' her father growled, his voice dripping with sarcasm. 'That she went out on a date with you, and came home bruised.'

Oh, no....

Becky felt her skin crawl, and crept closer to her father's door until she could peek inside.

'She uh.... I thought she told you what happened,' Jareth blushed, rubbing the back of his neck. 'With the tree and—'

'Becky comes home with bruises from trees *all the time*!' Ken interrupted, and Becky flinched, freezing in fear as her father rounded on Jareth. 'And I have never seen her with a bruise from a branch so *straight* before!'

Jareth tensed visibly, and Becky saw him start edging towards the door. He looked absolutely desperate to escape the situation....

But Ken stepped in front of him, cutting him off and blocking his exit. 'You think that I don't recognise a mark left by a *cane*?' he growled.

'Uh....'

'Who did you take her to meet, yesterday?!'

'N-Nobody, it was a date—'

'Don't *lie* to me, Jareth!' Ken snapped, his voice breaking as he grabbed Jareth by the shoulders and shook him desperately. 'Someone hurt her! Someone hurt my little girl! Who was it, Jareth?! *Who did she meet?!*'

'I— Uh— I— I'm sorry! I-I can't—' Jareth stammered, his eyes wide as he was buffeted with furious questions. 'I can't tell you, I— I promised Becky I wouldn't say anything and— And she *trusts* me! I-I-I can't just— I couldn't forgive myself if I— Stop *shaking me*!'

Ken stumbled as Jareth shoved him away, barely managing to keep his balance as his foot caught the edge a roll of fabric.

'Dammit, Jareth!' Ken exclaimed, turning and kicking his chair with enough force to send it rolling to the other side of the room. 'Tell me!'

'I *can't*!' Jareth gave an exasperated groan, and threw his hands up in frustration. 'Becky *trusts* me! If I break my promise, she might never speak to me again! And I'm *not* losing her! Not after I *just* got her back!'

‘You’re—’ Ken rounded on Jareth, raising his finger furiously— But then he bit his lip. ‘*Valid*,’ he growled, before turning away and beginning to pace. ‘That’s fair. That’s... *fair*.’

Jareth motioned again in another angry shrug before dropping his hands to his sides, letting them make an audible *thump* as he scoffed.

Ken paced a moment more before going quiet; putting his face in a hand and sniffing. ‘*She promised me she was staying safe*.’

‘*She is staying safe*,’ Jareth sighed, stepping to Ken and putting a hand on his shoulder. ‘I know that you’re worried but she.... She’s not stupid. And I promise that she’s doing the right thing.’

‘She’s a *little* stupid,’ Ken let out a long, defeated sigh. Then, he turned back to Jareth. ‘I’m sorry. It’s not your fault, I just—’ Ken cut off, his face turning a sickly white as his eyes locked with Becky’s own. ‘Honey...? *Ooh*....’

Jareth whirled around to look at Becky; his own cheeks going pale as he did. ‘Babe, uh— I thought you were asleep! What are you... doing up here?’

Becky felt too frozen to answer.

She could barely process what she’d just seen.

Her dad, and her boyfriend... fighting....

Her dad and her boyfriend were just *fighting*!

She felt like she was going to be sick.

‘Babe?’ Jareth’s hand took her own. ‘You alright?’

‘I... uh....’

‘You saw that, huh?’

Becky nodded, and Jareth put a hand on her cheek.

‘I’m so sorry, baby....’

‘I....’

‘Jareth?’ Ken’s voice spoke, soft-but-firm from behind the couple. ‘Could you give us a moment. I need to speak with Becky. *Privately*.’

‘Uh—’ Jareth cast an anxious glance to Ken, then back down to Becky. ‘Um, should I...?’

Becky gave another nod.

‘Alright. Just... yell if you need me. Okay, babe?’

Another nod. And Jareth slowly let her hand go and retreated out of the room. He paused at the door, giving Becky one final glance, before he made his way downstairs; his heavy boots *thumping* as he went.

And then Becky and her father were alone.

Neither of them spoke, at first, and simply listened to the cheering and playful shouts from downstairs as they avoided each other’s gaze.

Then, Ken stepped forward and wrapped his arms around his daughter.

‘It was your grandfather who hit you, wasn’t it?’ he asked, softly.

Slowly, wordlessly, Becky returned her father’s embrace.

‘I should have known,’ he sighed. ‘I should have realised, before any of this happened, and warned you about him. It should have been obvious from the moment I heard you’d contacted the Bluhenders that you were going to reach out— But I was just *hoping* I was wrong.... *Praying* that it was *anyone* else....’

Becky swallowed back the lump in her throat, pushing it down and down to the pit of her stomach as her father buried his face in her hair.

'I'm so sorry,' he whispered. 'I'm supposed to protect you....'

'Dad....'

Ken pulled away, and gently brushed several loose strands of hair from Becky's face. 'I just didn't want to put the thought of him into your mind if it wasn't already there,' he admitted. 'He's such a horrid man.'

'Yeah,' Becky agreed. 'Like.... I didn't even know you *could* be racist to elves. I didn't think that was, like, a *thing*?'

'It's not that you're an elf, it's that you're a *half*-elf,' Ken explained, his voice dripping with anger and sarcasm. 'He's a racial purist; which is *exactly* what it sounds like.... Think the Masters, but cranked up to eleven. He thinks that even the —quote, unquote— *good* and *pure* races should stay separated,' Ken gave a disgusted sniff. Then, his voice grew dark, and quiet, and he muttered under his breath, *'I'm not even fully convinced that he and your grandmother weren't secretly cousins....'*

'Ew,' Becky reeled back. 'Are you like, serious?'

'Ugh. No. I'm not serious,' Ken sighed. 'Well... *hm*.... No— No. I'm not. But even if it *was* true, it wouldn't even be the worst of it.'

Becky felt her stomach churn. 'What's the worst of it?'

Ken closed his eyes tight, looking so tired Becky was worried he might collapse, before he let out a long breath. 'When your mother got sick...' he paused for a moment, before turning away. 'You don't want to know.'

'Yes, I do,' Becky argued, grabbing her father by the arm. 'I *need* to know what they did.'

'I... *okay*,' Ken let out a heavy sigh. 'But you're not going to like it, Becky.'

'I know,' Becky answered, firmly. 'Tell me anyway.'

'When your mother got sick, he—' Ken hesitated. 'He said... he said the cancer was a punishment. From god. For marrying me.'

Becky was too stunned to speak.

He said that....

'I told you you wouldn't like it,' Ken sighed, pulling Becky close again and squeezing her tight. 'He's an awful, evil man. And your grandmother's twice as terrible.'

'Hm....'

'You—' Ken hesitated. Then he pulled away from Becky, his eyes widening in worry. 'You haven't been talking to *her*, have you? Please say that you haven't!'

'Uh— No, no,' Becky confirmed. 'I couldn't find Grandma. But I did, uh....'

'Did *what*?'

'I met Auntie Isabel—'

'*Auntie*?' Ken pressed his ears back in disgust, and Becky felt her heart start to pound in her chest.

'Y... Yeah,' Becky confirmed, fiddling with the hem of her shirt. 'She's.... She's not so bad. Not really.'

Ken simply sighed, and shook his head. 'Becky....'

'She's *not*,' Becky defended, her voice breaking. 'She's been really nice to me. I don't think she's a bad person, I think she's just... lonely.'

For a moment, Ken was quiet. Then his eyes softened. 'You know, your mother use to tell me that Isabel was too stupid to be malicious.... Is she who

you've been texting all week?'

'Mhm,' Becky nodded. 'She said that she's sorry. For not sticking up for Mum. That she really regrets it and wants to be a better person.'

'I...' Ken's face turned into an unsure grimace, and he slowly shook his head. 'I can't believe that. I'm sorry. I just can't bring myself to think that anyone coming from that family could have any sort of good in them. They're all just too rotten.'

'Mum wasn't rotten,' Becky mumbled.

'Your mother was different.'

'Only because she was given the *chance*,' Becky said. 'Isabel's *trying*, Dad. She really is.'

'Hm,' Ken gave a low grunt of acknowledgement, before pulling his daughter close again. 'I just... I don't trust her.'

'Don't you trust *me*?' Becky asked.

'Are you wanting my honest answer?' Ken asked, a weak hint of humour in his voice. 'Considering the reason we're having this conversation is because you've been lying to me?'

'No,' Becky admitted. 'I want you to lie to me. And pretend you trust me, and say you're not mad at me so that everything will be okay again.'

A kiss met the top of Becky's head and she pressed tighter against her father's chest.

'I'm *not* mad at you,' Ken said genuinely. 'I'm just scared for you.'

'You.... You don't hate me?' Becky asked.

'No,' Ken answered, softly. 'Never.'

'And you don't hate Jareth?'

'No.'

Becky let herself relax. 'Good.... I love you, Dad.'

'I love you too—'

'OI! Becky!' Portia's voice shouted from downstairs; so loud and sudden it made Ken jump in fright. 'Get down here!'

'Yeah!' Katie agreed loudly. 'We'll have the cake without you if you don't!'

'Yeah! C'mon!' Bianca chimed in. 'Get your pretty little butt down here!'

'Come on!'

'C'mooooon!'

'Come oooooon!'

'C'mon!'

'You're being summoned,' Ken said, his eyes wide as Becky pulled away from him.

'I'm being *bullied*,' Becky responded, giving a weak chuckle. 'I should go back down there. Before they come up here.'

'Mm...' Ken let out a sigh, before planting another kiss on the top of his daughter's head. 'I'm so sorry— Let's just forget about all of this for now. Okay? Continue the conversation later?'

'Yeah,' Becky agreed. 'Later sounds good.'

'I... hope I didn't ruin your party for you. I know today's been hard enough without me being... *me*.'

'Uh, no,' Becky shook her head, ignoring the chanting and hooting that sounded from the direction of the lounge. 'It's fine. *Although....*'

‘Although?’

‘It’d mean a lot if you’d come downstairs,’ Becky held out her hand for her father, and offered him a tired grin. ‘Just for the song and cake?’

‘Go downstairs?’ Ken looked queasy at the suggestion. ‘With Katie *and* the Australians over?’

‘You *really* don’t want to, do you?’

‘Oh, no— I *want* to be there,’ Ken reassured. ‘I’m just not sure I’m going to *survive* it.’

‘Consider it revenge,’ Becky offered, giving her father a cheeky grin. ‘For calling me stupid.’

‘*Ooooh*, you heard that?’ Ken gave a long, deep groan when Becky nodded, before taking her hand and letting himself be led out of the study. ‘Okay. Uh. Tell you what.... I’ll pretend you didn’t lie about talking to Isabel, if you don’t *ever* tell Isa I said that.’

‘Deal.’

—END—

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