

Bite

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky Bloom has gone to a playdate with her friends, Jareth and Benny Slader. They play gladiators with some old toys, and then decide to play a very unconventional game of cowboys. It all goes well, until Becky's biting habit rears its ugly head again.

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Becky had been dropped off at the Slader's house a little over an hour ago. She'd shouted a goodbye to Isa as she'd hurried inside to find Jareth and Benny and promptly attempted to tackle the boys to the floor— Only to be shrugged off by Benny who proudly declared he was having a growth spurt and she couldn't push him around anymore.

For now, Becky had thought before following the boys to the backyard and collecting rocks so they could create a gladiator arena for the toys Becky had brought along.

At first the boys had said that they were too old to play with dolls and action figures, being nine. But when Becky had pointed out that these toys had already been mauled by Mimi, and they could be as rough as they wanted with them and pull them apart in the battles, they'd seemed excited to cause some sort of destruction.

In the end only one toy had survived the battle— And she'd survived it in three pieces, losing an arm and her tail in her victory battle.

The rest of the toys lay motionless, decapitated or snapped in half, on the ground around the children as the winning dragonborn doll was lifted into the air and given a loud round of applause.

Then the toy was lowered and the trio stood together for a moment, unsure what to do next.

'Hm...' Benny rubbed his chin as if in deep thought. 'What do we do now?'

'Oh! Leaf! Leaf leafs!' Becky exclaimed, bouncing up and down and clapping her hands. 'Yes? Yes.'

'No,' Jareth shook his head. 'I don't want to sort leafs by colour again.'

'Size?' Becky suggested.

'No,' Jareth repeated. 'And not by shape, either. That's boring.'

'No!' Becky shot back, stomping her foot.

Organising leafs was *not* boring! How *dare* Jareth say that it was!

'We could play with sticks—' Benny started before Jareth hurriedly motioned NO at him, and he glanced to Becky. 'Oh. *Right*,' he mumbled, discarding the stick he'd picked up. 'Becky hits.'

'Sorry,' Becky apologised, kicking at the grass. 'Don't mean to. Just happens.'

'Um... hmmm...' now Jareth was the one with a hand on his chin. 'Dad doesn't want us digging any more holes....'

'And Mum's still got our ball since we broke the window,' Benny added.

'Handstands!' Becky exclaimed, flipping over onto her hands.

‘We can’t do that,’ Jareth said. ‘We don’t do gymnastics!’

‘We can turn you into a wheelbarrow, though!’ Benny joked, grabbing Becky’s ankles.

‘AH!’ Becky let out a cry as she was thrown off balance and forced to clumsily walk around the yard on her hands. ‘Caught me! Yes did! You— Benny! Benny. Me. Caught! By the Benny!’

The words came out all mixed up like spaghetti, and Becky felt frustrated enough to let out a growl— Which Benny took as his cue to release her.

She flopped onto the ground and lay on her back, still trying to find the words but unable to put them in order. ‘Benny! Me caught Benny— No! No! Benny caught Benny— UGH! NO!’

*She couldn’t keep getting the words mixed up like this!*

She’d promised her mother she was going to talk like a normal person! If her mother saw her talking all jumbled again, she’d get really *really* upset! She had to get it right!

But the harder she pushed for the right thing to come out of her mouth, the more jumbled the words seemed to get.

‘Benny! I caught him!’ Becky tried again. ‘I was him— Him was me and caught him? Caught— Him— Me— Me!’

‘*Benny caught me,*’ Jareth chimed in; giving her the words she needed in the order they were supposed to be.

‘Benny caught me,’ Becky echoed, immediately lighting up as the sentence came out right. ‘Benny caught me! Thanks you, Jareth! Thank you. Many of them. Thank you.’

‘You’re welcome,’ Jareth grinned before offering Becky a hand up.

Becky accepted Jareth’s hand and let herself be pulled to her feet before excitedly declaring; ‘Cowboys! Be cowboys!’

‘DIBS ON THE SHERIFF!’ Benny shouted, throwing a hand in the air. ‘You have to be the outlaw!’

‘Ugh, fine!’ Jareth grumbled. ‘But what are you gonna be, Becky?’

‘Hm...’ Becky had to think about that. But then she grinned widely. ‘Girl you fight over!’

‘Ew, gross,’ Jareth sniffed. ‘Why would an outlaw want a girl when he could be rustling cows instead?’

‘Cos you tie me on the train trail to distract the sheriff so you rob the bank easier!’ Becky decided. ‘And Benny the sheriff *has* to save me, cos he’s the sheriff and sheriffs care about girls more than banks!’

‘Not me,’ Benny declared, crossing his arms and turning his nose up. ‘I’m a *bad* sheriff. And I use my power for evil things, like not paying for food at the store!’

Becky let out a loud gasp. ‘Evil sheriff! Gonna get me all got!’

‘Yeah!’ Benny agreed. ‘I’m the evil sheriff, and I’m gonna get you! Maybe *I’m* the one who tied you to the tracks!’

‘But then who’s gonna save her?’ Jareth asked. ‘Not me! I’m an outlaw! I don’t care about girls.’

‘I can *die*!’ Becky gasped again as the idea hit her. ‘Yes! I die! Good! Good idea! I am hit by our train, and I die! Perfect!’

'Yeah!' Benny agreed. 'That's a great idea! I wanna kill Becky!'

'You *sure* you wanna die?' Jareth asked with a confused frown. 'It doesn't sound like much fun to just lay on the ground and then die.'

'Yesssss!' Becky hissed happily. 'I die!'

'Okay,' Jareth shrugged. 'Weirdo.'

A raspberry from Becky, laughs from the boys, and the three children began to run around and prepare for their game.

They decided on each area of their make-believe world, using the broken toys from their gladiator game as new characters in the town, before Benny threw old clothesline rope loosely over Becky and dumped her in a heap next to the porch.

'You lay here and die,' Benny instructed. 'Because the train is coming and it's gonna hit you!'

'Train's coming!' Becky exclaimed, mocking fear. 'Oh no! I'm gonna die!'

'Now, if you excuse me, I have to go catch an outlaw and steal the money he's stolen for myself!'

Becky lay in her place on the ground, pretending to be tied to invisible train tracks, as Benny ran off to Jareth and began to mock-fight him.

It didn't take them long to grab ahold of their toy wagon and pretend they were fighting on top of the train. And Becky braced herself as they dragged it towards her, play-fighting the entire way.

'Who's that?' Jareth exclaimed, pointing at Becky.

'A girl I tied to the tracks!' Benny answered.

'Hey, that's *my* job!' Jareth said, pretending to be offended. '*I'm* the one who's meant to kidnap girls! You're an evil sheriff!'

Becky let out a grunt as she was run over by the wagon— And then another as Benny slipped off the side and landed on top of her.

'Oh, Becky! Sorry!' Benny exclaimed. 'Are you okay?'

'Yeah!' Becky nodded happily. 'I'm kay! Big okay!'

'Good,' Jareth said, tugging the wagon all the way off her and pulling it away. 'Cos the train's leaving and you're both dead and I win!'

'Why am *I* dead?!' Benny exclaimed, pushing himself up so he was sitting beside Becky instead of on top of her. 'I didn't get hit! I just fell!'

'Off a moving train!' Jareth said. 'That's deadly!'

'Oh, yeah,' Benny agreed, helping Becky sit up and starting to pull the rope off her. 'I guess it is.'

'Yeah!' Jareth gave a nod, discarding the wagon and hurrying back to the pair. 'So you're both dead and I win!'

'Alright, you won,' Benny admitted.

'Yes!' Becky let out a cheer. Then, she sunk her teeth into Benny's arm.

Benny let out a shriek— And Jareth lunged for Becky, grabbing her by her ponytail and yanking her off his brother.

'What was that for?!' Jareth shouted. 'Why did you bite him?!'

Becky let out a growl, and twisted in Jareth's grip; but the way he held her stopped her from being able to break away and bite him, too.

'That hurt!' Benny exclaimed, grabbing his arm and rubbing the round mark Becky had left. 'That really, *really* hurt, Becky! Why did you bite me?!'

'I dunno!' Becky exclaimed, clawing at Jareth's hand. 'Let me go, Jareth!'

‘No! You’ll bite Benny again!’ Jareth scolded ‘You can’t keep biting us! We don’t *like* it! Why do you keep *doing* it?!’

‘I dunno!’ Becky exclaimed.

‘I’m not letting go till you *tell me!*’ Jareth snapped. ‘Cos I’m *sick* of it! There was no reason for you to bite Benny! We were playing! We were having fun, and you bit him and ruined it! Why would you ruin it?!’

‘I dunno why I do it!’ Becky repeated. ‘I like you and Benny and it makes me wanna bite you!’

‘That’s *stupid!*’ Benny whined, tearing up.

‘Yeah! That’s not a real reason!’ Jareth told her, holding her tight as she twisted around again. ‘You don’t bite people you like!’

‘Yes it is!’ Becky growled, wiggling in Jareth’s grip. ‘Yes I do!’

‘You don’t bite Jezzibeth and Katie anymore!’ Jareth argued as Benny began to sob. ‘So why can’t you stop biting us?!’

‘I! DON’T! KNOW!’ Becky yelled.

‘Jareth! Let her go!’ Mr Slader shouted as he threw open the back door and hurried down the porch steps. ‘You’re going to hurt her!’

‘She’s hurting *us!*’ Jareth shot back as his parents rushed outside. ‘She bit Benny! For *no reason!*’

‘Let her go,’ Mr Slader repeated, firmly, as Mrs Slader picked Benny up and gave him a comforting hug. ‘Jareth. Let her go.’

‘But she’ll bite us again!’ Jareth argued as Becky twisted in his grip and let out a snarl. ‘She *always* bites us again! I’m *tired* of getting bitten, Dad!’

‘I know, I know,’ Mr Slader comforted. ‘I’ll talk with her, alright? Just let her go before you scalp her.’

Reluctantly, Jareth let Becky’s ponytail go and she crumpled to the ground in a heap.

She was scooped up then, as she tried to scramble to her feet, by Mr Slader; who carried her into the house and set her down so he could speak with her privately.

‘Now, Rebecca,’ he started, grabbing her arm as she tried to bolt. ‘Ah, no. No, no. We need to have a serious talk. Why did you bite Benny?’

‘I dunno,’ Becky mumbled, shuffling in place and stuffing her hands in her pockets. ‘Just did it.’

‘It’s not very nice of you,’ Mr Slader said.

Becky shrugged.

‘It hurts him when you do that,’ he said. ‘Both of them.... Why do you want to hurt my boys?’

‘Don’t wanna hurt them,’ Becky said. ‘No. No....’

‘Well, that’s what you’re doing,’ Mr Slader said, simply. ‘Every time you bite them, you hurt them. Which is not something good friends do.’

‘*HMNG!*’ Becky let out a loud, upset whine and stomped her foot. ‘*Not* a bad friend!’

‘No, of course you’re not a bad friend,’ Mr Slader reassured. ‘That’s why they’re so patient with you.... Aren’t they? They’ve been very patient with you, because they like being your friends.’

‘Good!’ Becky declared. ‘And I like them!’

‘Yes, but.... I want you to listen carefully, Becky,’ Mr Slader’s tone turned very, very serious. ‘If you keep hurting them like this, they’re not going to want to be your friends anymore.’

‘No!’ Becky cried. ‘No! No! No!’

‘Yes,’ Mr Slader replied, simply. ‘Would you want to be friends with someone who kept hurting you and doing things you told them not to do?’

Slowly, Becky shook her head.

‘I didn’t think so,’ Mr Slader sighed, giving Becky a pat on the shoulder. ‘You need to listen to them when they tell you no. Okay? You can’t keep pushing their boundaries.’

‘I can’t *help* it!’ Becky complained. ‘It just *happens*! Don’t choose it! No control!’

‘Hm...’ Mr Slader let out a long sigh, before scooping Becky back up and carrying her to the kitchen. He held her up to the window; where she could see into the backyard. ‘Well, look. Look out there.’

Benny was still crying, his mother rocking him back and forth gently and trying to comfort him as Jareth sat nearby and drew in the ground with a stick.

Becky felt her heart twist as she watched the boys.

She hadn’t meant to hurt them.

It had just *happened*....

‘What you did *really* upset Benny,’ Mr Slader said. ‘So next time you think it’s going to happen, I want you to think about him and how upset he is now. Okay? And then you tell yourself “no,” you’re not going to hurt him like that again.’

‘Hm...’ Becky gave a miserable groan, and flopped against Mr Slader’s shoulder. ‘Don’t want him hurt. No....’

‘No,’ Mr Slader echoed.

‘No....’

‘Alright,’ Mr Slader adjusted his grip on Becky. ‘So.... I’m going to take you back outside now, and you’re going to apologise for biting Benny, right? And then you’re not going to do it again. Okay?’

‘Mhm,’ Becky agreed, giving a nod as she was carried into the backyard.

‘Hey, Dad,’ Jareth greeted, side-eyeing him and Becky. ‘Hey... Becky.’

‘Hi,’ Becky squeaked, before being carried past him and to Mrs Slader and Benny.

‘Benny? Becky has something she’d like to say to you,’ Mr Slader said, placing Becky in the grass. ‘Don’t you, Becky?’

Benny wiped his eyes as Mrs Slader placed him beside Becky, and sniffed away the last of his tears. ‘Yeah? What is it, Becky?’

Becky stared at Benny; the urge to bite him again suddenly back and very, very strong— And Becky found herself clamping her jaw shut, just to fight off the urge to sink her teeth into his arm.

*Why did she want to bite him?*

It hurt him!

What was *wrong* with her, to make her want to hurt her friends?!

All the time!

All of the time, she wanted to bite and hit and push and fight!

Why was she like this?!

‘Becky?’ Mr Slader pushed. ‘Go on, tell him.’

‘I don’t deserve teeth!’ Becky blurted, loudly. ‘Only ever using them for evil! You don’t deserve to get got, like I keep getting you! Dunno why I do it! Trying not to anymore now. Trying really hard. But it’s hard. I keep biting, and I don’t wanna, but I do! And it’s bad! And I’m sorry!’

Mrs Slader let out a sigh. ‘*There we go....*’

For a moment Benny pivoted the toe of his shoe hard into the ground, pressing down the grass into a flat circle. Then, he looked up at Becky and shrugged. ‘It’s alright. I forgive you. But— But if you bite me again, I’m gonna *smack* you!’

‘Oh, no you’re not!’ his mother scolded, taking her son by the hand and heading inside. ‘Come on— All of you! Inside! Let’s see if some lunch can’t make you all a little less grumpy.’

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