

Christmas Morning

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky wakes up on Christmas morning feeling better than she usually does at this time of year and so decides to spend the day downstairs with her family. And though she is having a good day, she feels guilty; she's secretly texting her aunt Isabel, even when she knows she's not supposed to be.

Contains depictions of domestic abuse.

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Becky woke up to a wet tongue worming its way into her ear.

At first, she didn't realise what was going on— She just lay in place, still half-asleep, as her brain slowly turned on and the tongue moved from her ear to her mouth—

'Ugh, Mimi!' Becky exclaimed, pulling her head away from the mimic. 'No!'

Mimi gave a happy chirp of greeting and danced around on the bed next to Becky on long, spidery legs.

'Good morning,' Becky said, humoured, before she heard a snuffling at her door. 'Ah, I see what you want.'

Don had been let inside again, and whoever had brought him in had shut her door to keep Mimi in her room....

Both good things, of course. It was far too cold to let Don sleep in the shed (even though he had said he *preferred* it)— And it was not smart to leave him and Mimi unattended together.

Becky swung her legs out off bed and Mimi gave an excited trill and ran to the door, scratching at it and chirping to Don.

*If only you could desex mimics*, Becky thought with a chuckle. *That would solve everything.*

Mimi's scratching grew louder and she gave an impatient yowl.

'I'm coming, I'm coming,' Becky playfully scolded, pushing herself to her feet. She made her way to her bedroom door and opened it, letting Don run in.

The two mimics began circling each other excitedly and Becky couldn't help but giggle when she noticed Don was wearing a flamingo-sized turtleneck sweater. It was a cute baby blue, with a big white heart on the front— It fit him perfectly, too. Snug and warm-looking, with the trim ending a few inches from his belly-mouth so it wouldn't get wet when he licked his lips.

'Did Dad make that for you?' Becky cooed, giving the mimic a pat on the head.

Don did an excited little dance, tapping his feet on the ground and turning in a circle, before running back out the door and into the hall.

It was clear the mimic wanted her to follow it, so she grabbed a pair of pants out of her wardrobe and threw them on, messily half-tucking Jareth's shirt into them before scooping up her phone and starting down the hall after her pets.

The sun was shining brightly through the windows and it was clear it was late morning— Unsurprising, as Isa had been letting Becky sleep in all month in

preparation for....

Becky checked her phone.

*Today.*

Today was Christmas.

Christmas.

God, Becky hated Christmas.

Even after *trying* to enjoy it, and spending time with her friends, she'd found her temper getting the better of her.... So after a party at Jezzibeth's house that almost ended in a fight, Becky had decided it best to just stay home until the season had passed.

It had been a good choice, she thought. She'd been able to handle her emotions much better without being bombarded by everything all the time. And she'd actually been able to have friends over for a day; something she'd never been able to cope with before during this time of year.

Friends and... Jareth.

Becky gave a happy sigh, and unlocked her phone to check her messages—

*Yes.*

She had her usual morning text from Jareth.

*Good morning, beautiful,* it read.

It made her heart beat faster in her chest, and she quickly responded in kind before checking the rest of her messages.

She already had twenty-four texts from her aunt Isabel. And it was only nine-fifty!

Though she was starting to get used to it; she'd given her aunt her mobile number and permission to message her last week. Something she was already half-regretting just from the sheer *quantity* of the messages she would get. Especially in the evenings....

She got the feeling Isabel was very, *very* lonely....

**Isabel:** Good morning sweaty

**Isabel:** I hope your having a good day

**Isabel:** ♥☐

**Isabel:** Its been a tough one here

**Isabel:** Burned breakfast ☹️ Dad was not happy about it and I got an absolute earful from him about wasting food

**Isabel:** What did you have for breakfast?

**Isabel:** Did you get anything good for christmas?

**Isabel:** Wish I could have gotten you something

**Isabel:** I can get you something if you want but tell me what you like so I don't mess up?

**Isabel:** Hows your father?

**Isabel:** And Isa

**Isabel:** I hope their having a good time

**Isabel:** I'm really happy for them

**Isabel:** Not looking forward to having to call my mother

**Isabel:** ☹️

**Isabel:** It always ends with her picking a fight

**Isabel:** But I have to because not calling her will make things worse you

know?

**Isabel:** I hope your having a good day

**Isabel:** Let me know if you get anything good!!!

**Isabel:** 🙄

**Isabel:** Just got off the phone with my mother

**Isabel:** Her and dad started yelling at each other through me so I just left the phone with them

**Isabel:** Hows your dad?

**Isabel:** Are you having a good day?

Becky paused in the hallway, grimacing as she got through reading the messages.

Dear god... was this how her friends felt when she mass-texted them?

She quickly replied, as best she could.

**Becky:** good morning auntie

**Becky:** i havent been down stairs yet

**Isabel:** Good morning!!!

**Becky:** just woke up

**Isabel:** Oh dear

**Isabel:** You slept in again? ☐

**Becky:** ye is holiday is fine

**Isabel:** You're dad's not mad at you about it?

**Becky:** no

**Isabel:** You lucky thing ❤️☐

**Isabel:** I remember your mother slept in once and missed the school bus once when we were kids

**Becky:** rly?

**Isabel:** It did not end well

**Becky:** o...

**Isabel:** Dad caned her

**Isabel:** Left bruises all up her arm

**Becky:** yikes

**Isabel:** None of us were ever brave enough to sleep in again after that 🙄

**Becky:** i can imagin

**Isabel:** Sorry I'm going on

**Isabel:** I'm sure you don't want to hear stories like that about your mother

**Becky:** not 1st thing lol but it ok

**Isabel:** 🙄💥

Becky bit her lip, then, and took a deep breath as she started for the stairs again.

She had a thought, but she wasn't sure if it was something she'd regret suggesting or not....

Maybe she could.... Hm....

It couldn't hurt, could it?

Slowly, Becky typed it out.

**Becky:** hey so

**Becky:** my birth day is soon

**Isabel:** Yes!!! Oh my gosh its only a week away!

**Isabel:** What do you want??

**Becky:** i was wandering if u wanted 2 meet up

**Isabel:** I will get you anything just ask

**Becky:** may b not on the day

**Isabel:** Yes!!!

**Becky:** but some time in the week

**Isabel:** Oh my god yes!!!

**Becky:** we talk a bout this later tho not now

**Isabel:** Ok!!! Just say when!!!

**Becky:** i got 2 go see dad and isa

**Isabel:** You have a wonderful day honey!

**Becky:** merr y chris miss auntie

**Isabel:** Merry christmas!

**Isabel:** I love you!

Becky didn't reply to Isabel's last text; she wasn't sure what to say back to it.

She wasn't quite sure if she *liked* her aunt, let alone *loved* her.... It had taken her nineteen years just to figure out that she didn't hate her dad....

Isabel sent another text, which Becky ignored as Mimi ran past her down the stairs. And then another text came through, as Mimi disappeared into the lounge and—

'Mimi! No!' Ken gave a panicked cry, and Becky heard him fall to the floor.

'Mimi!' Isa scolded. 'No biting! Bad girl! That's *very* bad! Let him go right now, young lady!'

'Mimi!' Becky called as she reached the foot of the stairs. 'Mimi, what are you doing? Come here, girl! Come!'

Mimi didn't come, and when Becky turned the corner into the lounge she saw the mimic was half-inside her father's pant leg, trying to break out of Isa's grip so it could run fully inside to terrorise him.

'Mimi!' Becky scolded.

'I'm sorry!' Ken exclaimed as Mimi was finally pried from his leg. 'I *had* to shut the door on you! I'm sorry!'

Mimi gave an impish cry and flailed her legs, their spider-like joints bending and contorting as Isa carried her towards the kitchen.

The sound of the fridge was heard, followed by the unmistakeable sound of Mimi dragging a heavy, meat-covered bone along the floor.

The perfect distraction; for both Mimi *and* Don, who gave an excited cry and ran off to join Mimi in the other room as Isa came out.

'That girl, I swear,' Isa chuckled, making her way over to Ken (who still lay on the floor) and pecking a kiss on his cheek. 'Are you alright?'

'Yes, I'm fine,' Ken gave a chuckle, returning Isa's kiss onto her lips, and then glanced to Becky. 'Good morning, mon bébé. Did you sleep well?'

Becky gave a shrug, ignoring her phone as it dinged again, and made her way to the couch to sit with her parents.

They'd obviously been celebrating the holidays together. There was a small pile of crumpled wrapping paper by the coffee table, and a single unopened gift left in the middle of what looked like well thought-out gifts.

*She hadn't gotten them anything.*

Ken and Isa sat down either side of Becky, and she felt Ken take her hand.

'I love you,' he said.

'I love you, too,' Becky said, feeling her phone vibrate and ding again with Isabel's text tone. She ignored it, and leant into her father's arms. 'Have you... had a good day?'

'Yes,' Ken answered softly. 'We missed you, though.'

'Hmm...' Becky gave a low hum before shrugging. 'It's fine.'

'Yes, well.... We got you this last month,' Isa said, picking up the unwrapped gift from the coffee table. 'Before we realised that you still weren't quite ready for Christmas. We think you'll like it but... we understand if you don't want it.'

'Oh,' Becky felt herself blushing as the gift was gently placed into her lap. It was a beautifully wrapped gift about the size of a shoe-box, and she couldn't help but pick sheepishly at the tape. 'I didn't get anything for either of you....'

'It's fine,' Isa reassured as she pecked a kiss on the side of Becky's head. 'Baby steps. We're just happy to have you come downstairs, today.'

'Yes,' Ken agreed, squeezing Becky tight. 'It's exciting!'

Becky felt herself smile, then. 'Thanks,' she managed.

'Open it!' Ken pushed, excitedly. 'Open it, mon chou!'

Much to her own surprise, a giggle escaped Becky. Then, she attempted to open the gift.

Was she supposed to open it slowly? Fast? Was it okay if she ripped the paper, or...?

It had been *far* too long since she had unwrapped a present; she could barely remember how! But she eventually got it, and opened the box, and felt herself gasp as she was met with a light-green bundle of mink fabric—

A backpack, shaped like a plush toy frog!

'Oh my god, it's so *cute!*' she exclaimed, pulling the bag out of the box and examining it. 'I love it!'

Ken had never looked prouder of himself. He watched his daughter, his eyes sparkling with joy, before looking up at Isa with a wide smile that pressed wrinkles into the corners of his eyes.

'She loves it!' he said. 'Isa! She *loves* it!'

'It's a bag of holding,' Isa explained.

'*Really?!*' Becky gave another gasp. She'd never had a bag of holding before! The most experience she had with them was Adam's bag; which wasn't *nearly* this cute! 'I didn't know bags of holding could look *good!*'

Her comment earned her a laugh from Ken, and another kiss from Isa.

'You haven't eaten today, have you?' she asked Becky, standing when the girl shook her head. 'I'll make you something.'

'Thanks, Ilhar!' Becky called as Isa headed for the kitchen. Then, she pulled away from her father and stood up, stretching. 'I think I'm gonna watch TV,' she said, making her way over to another couch and flopping down to lounge on it. 'Clear my head.'

'Okay,' Ken smiled, and slowly picked up one of the new sketchbooks he'd gotten from Isa. 'I'll be right here if you want to talk.'

"Kay," Becky replied, turning on the television.

Then, her phone went off again and she let out a sigh and checked on it. She'd received fourteen more texts from Isabel in less than thirty minutes.

Most of the texts were just her aunt asking for updates on her day and any gifts she got....

Becky gave a small grin, and took a photo of her bag to send to Isabel; holding it up to show it off.

**Becky:** froggy

**Isabel:** 😊

**Isabel:** She's so pretty!

**Becky:** ye

**Isabel:** Just like you! ☐

**Becky:** dad and isa got her for me :) it a bag of holding

**Becky:** aw thabk u

**Isabel:** How nice of them! Those bags are very useful

**Isabel:** Wait in the background of the photo you sent

**Isabel:** Is that a picture of Barbra??

**Becky:** o?

Becky peered closely at the photo she'd sent, and then looked up at the wall opposite where she sat.

It *was* a photo of her mother, though it was very obscured by the bag in the picture she'd sent Isabel....

Becky held up her phone again and zoomed in close before snapping another picture, which she sent to her aunt.

**Becky:** ye

For a long moment there was no reply, and Becky bit her lip.

Should she have sent that?

Was that a mistake?

She knew her mother and her aunt apparently didn't get along. What if her aunt didn't want to see a picture of her—

**Isabel:** She looks so happy

**Becky:** o?

**Isabel:** I've never saw her smiling like that before

**Becky:** o...

**Isabel:** Not once in her whole life

**Becky:** im sorry

**Isabel:** No!!

**Isabel:** This is good

**Isabel:** This is SO good

**Isabel:** She's so happy

**Isabel:** I had no idea she was so happy

**Isabel:** I didn't know she was able to smile that wide

**Isabel:** We don't have any pictures of Barbra our parents got rid of them all when she got married

**Isabel:** Are there more photos like this???

Becky felt herself chuckle, and looked around the room.

*Were there more photos of her mother?* she thought with play-sarcasm. *Only on every spare surface of the house!*

Becky took several more pictures from around the room, zooming in to try and get as clear an image as possible of the photos on the far wall. She sent all of the photos to her aunt, and then waited for the reply.

It didn't come.

Five minutes passed.

Then ten.

And Isabel said nothing.

And Becky felt her heart twist with a knot of anxiety.

Should she be sending photos like this to her aunt? It seemed harmless, but....

There was a reason that her parents had cut her off.

And now here she was, sending her photos of them all....

'Mm...' Becky shifted uncomfortably. 'D... Dad?'

'Yes, mon ange?' Ken asked, not looking up from his drawing. 'What is it?'

'Dad, if I did something you didn't like... would you still love me?'

'Becky—' Ken let out a long sigh, and paused his drawing to look up at her. 'I think we've already established that my answer to that is *yes*.... Why are you asking that.... Is something wrong?'

'No... nothing,' Becky lied. 'I was just asking.'

Ken looked doubtful, but didn't say anything as Isa came back into the room with a plate of bacon, eggs, and toast.

'Here you are,' she said, handing the plate to Becky. 'Try not to spill it.'

'Thanks,' Becky said, taking the food and stuffing an entire egg into her mouth in one go; much to her father's horror.

Then, she received another text.

'That new tone's been going off a lot, today,' Isa commented, casually, and Becky felt herself stiffen. 'Who is that?'

'Uhh... just a... new friend,' Becky lied, her tone stilted and anxious.

Isa's eyes immediately tightened, and Becky knew she'd picked up on the lie—Which only made Becky more nervous.

She was never good at lying to Isa; the drow caught her out, nine times out of ten. The few times she got away with lying to the woman she pinned down to pure *luck*.

*Narrowed eyes... she's thinking on it*, Becky thought, trying really hard to keep her cool.

'A new friend?' Isa echoed, taking on a very suspicious tone....

Becky saw her father shift nervously behind Isa, and he cast her an almost sympathetic look.

*Oh no*, he mouthed, silently. *Becky....*

'Y... yep,' Becky gave a not-too-confident nod, before clearing her throat and sitting up straight. 'Just from, like, the internet and stuff. They're not in town—You wouldn't know them.'

'Wouldn't I?' Isa asked, her tone shifting from suspicious to sure, and Becky felt herself begin to sweat as Isa asked, 'Where do they live?'

'Uh... Warm Waters?' Becky hoped using the truth for that question would satisfy Isa— But it clearly didn't.

'What's their name?' Isa asked.

*Oh, god, you can't tell them it's Isabel!* Becky thought in a panic. *Name! You*

*need a name! Think fast! Name— Name— Uhhhh—*

‘Re... becca,’ Becky said, slowly.

*No you stupid fucking bimbo that’s your own name!*

Ken let out a laugh, which he smothered when Isa turned to look at him.

‘Your name is Rebecca,’ Isa said, simply, as she turned back to Becky.

‘Yeah, well, like, there’s more than one Rebecca!’ Becky stated, trying to sound confident and sure. ‘Like, you know. I’m not the *only* Rebecca in the world! Actually that’s like, how me and Rebecca like, met and stuff? Was we had the same name and we thought it was funny and stuff and we started talking.’

‘I see,’ Isa said, crossing her arms. ‘What’s Rebecca’s last name?’

‘Wither,’ Becky said the first word that came to mind, and almost kicked herself.

‘Rebecca Wither,’ Isa said, slowly. ‘And Rebecca Bloom.’

‘Yes.’

‘Wither and Bloom.’

‘Yes.’

‘Like the spell from your homework?’

‘Yep,’ Becky could see her father looking at her from behind Isa, shaking his head and looking disappointed. ‘Irony, isn’t it?’

‘Very,’ Isa stated, flatly. ‘And how old is Miss Wither?’

‘Mrs Wither,’ Becky fake-corrected, quickly, hoping it would give her some sort of credibility. ‘And uh. She’s... fifty... seven.’

‘Fifty-seven?’ Isa echoed. ‘That’s a little old for you to making friends with, don’t you think?’

‘Don’t be agest, Ilhar!’ Becky tried to defend her lie, but it only made her feel stupider. ‘I have lots of older friends! Like the people in the Historical Society— They’re old as balls and I get along with them just fine! Why can’t Rebecca be fifty-six?’

‘I thought you said she was fifty-seven,’ Isa raised her brow.

‘Well— Yeah, she just had her birthday and stuff so I’m still getting used to it!’ Becky could *feel* the sweat forming on her back, now, and hurriedly stood up. ‘Anyway, stop *interrogating* me about my friends! I can talk to whoever I want! And if I want to talk to an old bugbear about her grandchildren, then that’s my god-given *right*!’

She went to move past Isa, but the drow put out an arm and blocked her.

‘Wait a moment,’ Isa said, firmly. Then her eyes softened. ‘You’re safe, right? You’re not talking to anyone dangerous?’

‘No, of course not!’ said Becky.

‘It’s not—’ Ken gave a gasp, cutting himself off before covering his mouth. ‘It’s not Mattel, is it?!’

‘Ew!’ Becky exclaimed. ‘No.’

Ken let out a relieved sigh, and Isa very slowly began to lower her arm.

‘You’d tell us if something was wrong?’ she asked. ‘If you were in trouble?’

‘I would,’ answered Becky. ‘I promise I would.’

‘Okay,’ Isa said, gently, and let Becky move past her. ‘I’m going to trust you.... I *shouldn’t*. But I am.’

‘You can trust me,’ Becky lied. ‘I’m not talking to anyone I shouldn’t be.’



—END—

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