

Dress Up

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky Bloom has slowly been recovering since her time in hospital. She's been taking her medication, talking to her friends again and, most of all, she's been keeping a positive outlook on her future. She's still hung up, however, with her father. She wants to love him, and forgive him, and not feel nervous and anxious and furious whenever she's in a room with him. But sometimes reaching out is just too hard.... And sometimes, its as easy as being bored.

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It had been a long, tiring day for Becky. She'd spent most of the day at home alone after skipping school. Now her friends were all busy with their after school events, while she was feeling a little too tired after such an active week to get out of bed and do anything.

The most she'd done was an hour-long session of hide-and-chase; a game Mimi loved that was a fun little combination of hide-and-seek and tag.... But with a cat toy, and a little more teeth and snarling and *mauling*.

Becky had spent about ten minutes looking for the mimic and, when she'd spotted Mimi pretending to be an extra shoe by the front door, then let herself be chased around the house for another fifty; cat toy trailing behind her for Mimi to savage.

That had been her day....

That and— After Mimi had tired itself out, Becky had done the final touches on the embroidered shirt for her dad.

She hadn't expected to finish it so quickly but— She supposed it was all she had to entertain her while in hospital. Now it sat in a shoebox on her bedside, an old ribbon keeping the lid from slipping off.

Somehow, making the shirt had made Becky feel... more like herself. And she hadn't felt like this in a *long time*. Not since she'd dated Mattel....

But now, everything was falling into place again. Things felt easier; the time she'd spent away had been refreshing. It made her appreciate being home so much more. Home with her room. Her bed. Her clothes— Isa.

She was so grateful for Isa and all the drow had done for her. In her entire life— But especially in these past few months.

Isa had always looked out for Becky; tried to toughen her up and get her confident enough to take on the world.... But she'd been gentle when she'd needed to be. And as big a mess Becky had been lately, Isa had been there for her the entire time.

Though, Becky had gotten on the bad side of the woman's temper just last week; when she'd tried (and, proudly, *succeeded*) to upset her father during breakfast. Isa had scolded Becky so firmly the girl had physically jumped and bolted out of the room to do as she'd been told.

Becky was acting more like herself— And Isa was making it clear that she wasn't going to let Becky get away with anything. No matter how hard she tried to

push her boundaries.

Isa was a good mother— *Maid!*

Becky almost kicked herself.

Maid.

She had to remind herself, quickly.

Maid.

Isa was her *maid*.

Isa had made it *very* clear to Becky, a long time ago, that she was *not* her mother.... No matter how much Becky secretly wished she was....

Becky shifted in bed, careful not to disturb Mimi as it snored in her lap, and turned on her TV.

It wasn't that she didn't like her own mother. It was just that... even *before* Barbra died, she'd never exactly *been there* for Becky. And Isa always, *always* had been.

Though, after talking with a professional, Becky did find herself admitting that she missed her mother. She was just so used to her mother's long absences that her death hadn't really felt like a loss.... At least, not at first.

*The guilt she'd felt about "not grieving" was in itself a manifestation of her grief.*

She remembered Mr Goodhuman's explanation well. It had helped everything—all those churning, confusing emotions that had eaten away at her for years—finally make sense.

She hated to admit it but she was actually looking forward to her next session with the doctor. It was nice to have someone to talk to about everything; not having to keep it all inside was helping....

It was like her friendship with Adam; easier, now it was out in the open.

No more secrets!

Well. Actually.

*One* more secret.

Strangling Romero.

She hadn't told anyone about that.... And though at first she'd been concerned to hear that the new girl (who's name she'd learnt was Portia Jackson) had told one of their classmates about the fight— It was nothing compared to the horror she'd felt when Adam had told her that *him and Romero had started talking to each other*.

She couldn't *believe* it.

She'd been so shocked that Adam could be so forgiving.... Even for *Adam*, she felt this was a lot—

But then, Malinka had expressed relief that Adam seemed to have made some sort of peace with Romero, saying that Adam had a "kind heart"... and so Becky had relented and let it be.

Malinka was the one that had gotten hurt, and if she was okay with what was happening, then.... Becky had to accept that.

She supposed it was a good thing, really. Romero had, apparently, apologised to Adam. He said he hadn't meant for anyone to get hurt, or for the fight to go as far as it did... but... the itch in the back of Becky's mind kept her suspicious of him. She still couldn't bring herself to forgive him for everything his careless

magical practices had caused.

Becky scratched at her arm, and flicked through her TV's library, looking for something to stream.

She needed to stop thinking about....

She needed to stop *thinking*.

*Can't have bad thoughts if you don't have thoughts at all*, she figured.... *She needed to pull a Marilyn and empty her head for a while.*

But there was nothing good on TV.

Comedy. Comedy. Slice of life. Romance—

Actually, she realised it was *two* secrets she still had.

But that second secret wasn't *her* secret; it was Benny's secret.

She wondered if Jareth knew about his brother's new boyfriend.... Hm... why *wouldn't* he know? If Benny had told her, *surely* he would have told Jareth, too?

Should she ask Benny if Jareth knew?

She shook her head at the thought.

Benny had said something about the walls having ears or whatever. And Orson's parents being... *mehhh*....

It was probably best to just let Benny figure it out himself. Relationships seemed to be one of his strengths, after all. And he was so happy, too; Becky didn't want to do anything that could change that.

*But....*

Speaking of Jareth....

Becky pulled out her phone, and texted him.

*hey bby u done w ur fam yet? im borrrreeed an d wanna hang*

His reply was almost immediate:

*Hey. Not done yet :( Another 2-3 hours before I can leave.*

*Do you want me to go over to yours when I can? It will be a while though.*

Becky thought for a long, long moment before finally replying:

*pick me up*

*we go to urs*

*no dad or isa*

*and no mimi*

*just u n me*

*which means we can ;) u no*

*all nite*

Becky waited another minute, before receiving the reply:

*My place it is baby girl. See you in a couple of hours!*

She sent back a smile that she thought was nowhere as big as the one she had in real life.

And then, when Jareth stopped replying, began to feel bored again.

She let out a sigh, and gently scratched Mimi's cheek. The mimic chirped and stirred, looking around to gain its bearings— And perked up when it saw a sunbeam.

Becky giggled as Mimi sleepily stumbled its way off her lap and into the bright ray of light. It snuggled down and began snoring, taking a new form as it did; Benny's left boot.

Becky quickly snapped a photo and sent it to the group chat, before climbing

out of bed and stretching.

She hadn't been able to move in almost an hour and her legs were stiff and sore.

*Hm....*

If she was going to spend the night at Jareth's she was going to need to pack her bag.

She needed her medication. And something to wear tomorrow. Her makeup. And— Oh! To let Isa know she was going to be away for the night and that Mimi needed dinner.

Becky gathered her things and then checked the time.... It had been a grand total of *ten minutes* since she'd messaged Jareth.

A heavy sigh escaped her.

A couple more hours.... How was she going to *survive* until then?!

She wanted to see Jareth *now*!

Another sigh, and Becky flopped into her chair.

She had no idea how she'd managed to isolate herself for several *months* when, now, just one *day* without seeing her friends felt like torture.

*Tap tap.*

*Tap tap tap.*

Becky tapped the arms of her chair.

And looked around the room.

It was clean. And she'd been trying really hard to *keep* it that way.

Isa had put a hamper for dirty clothes by her wardrobe and a small tub by her bed for dishes, which seemed to be working so far. Things hadn't been building up so fast and Becky had even been able to muster enough motivation to take her clothes to the laundry herself, once!

She'd had no idea how to open the washing machine door, of course, but *still*.

Her doctor had said to be proud of the little victories.

She smiled to herself— And then her attention was drawn to the shoebox on her bedside table.

The shirt she'd been making her father was.... Done.

It was actually finished. And she could give it to him.

She... *should* give it to him, shouldn't she?

The thought made her knees weak.

She'd put so, so much effort into that shirt. And she wasn't even sure if....

This was *his* language, more than it was hers. And she hoped she'd made the message clear.

All of her feelings. All of her pain. Everything she had felt growing up.

Becky hoped he understood.

*Prayed* he understood.

Because if he didn't understand she—

She had no idea what else to do....

She swallowed.

She had to do it.

Now?

Now.

Before she lost her nerve.

With a deep breath she pushed herself from the chair and stumbled to the shoebox; clutching it tight like it was a priceless treasure.

*Which it sort of was, really.*

One last look at Mimi, who had rolled over and stuck its tongue out in its sleep, and Becky stepped into the hall.

There were only a few places her dad would be in the house. He was a creature of habit. And of four rooms.

Dining room, lounge room, bedroom, or study....

Study, most likely, this time of day.

Slowly, Becky crept to the study and opened the door.

Her nerves made her slow, and the snail-paced speed caused the hinges to creak and moan as Becky slipped into the room. She stood by the door, fiddling with the box anxiously and watching her father.

He was sewing some sort of dress together. It looked colourful. And very pretty....

‘Dad?’ she tested, quietly. But got no response. ‘D... Dad?’ she tried again, louder this time.

He didn’t reply, so she approached, swallowing her nerves and.... Noticing that his work was beautiful.

Every line of fabric so well placed— Every stitch had a *purpose*.

What he was making was much more beautiful than her own work. So much more thoughtful, and well crafted and... and....

*What was she thinking?!*

She couldn’t show the shirt to her father it— It was terrible! It was a mess! There was no way—

Becky turned to retreat out of the room, but as she did her foot caught on a loose roll of fabric and she fell; dropping the box and barely managing to catch herself as she hit the ground with a loud *THUD*.

She heard Ken jump in his seat and turn. ‘Becky?!’ he exclaimed. ‘Becky I didn’t hear you come in! Are you alright?!’

Becky barely heard him as she lunged forward; the shoebox had popped open and the contents —Becky’s art— was laying in full view on the floor.

She scooped it up quickly, trying to hide it from her father as she stuffed it back in its box and tightly bound the lid back on.

‘Becky? What was that?’

‘Nothing!’ Becky lied, sounding much more panicked then she wanted to.

‘It looked like... clothes,’ Ken said slowly. ‘Are you alright—’

‘I’m fine!’ Becky interrupted, scrambling to her feet and turning to face her father. Her eyes were wide and panicked as she held the box tight; looking like she was protecting a baby from a pack of wild dogs. ‘I-I-It was just a— A gift for you but I— I think it’s— Uh—’

‘A gift. For me?’ Ken sounded like he couldn’t believe what he’d just heard. ‘From... you?’

‘Y-yeah— But um. I-I changed my mind,’ Becky stammered; ignoring the pensive look her father gave her. ‘It’s dumb— It’s *really* dumb. Don’t— Don’t worry about it!’

‘Becky,’ her father rose to his feet and carefully stepped towards her. ‘I’m sure

it's not dumb.'

'It is,' Becky muttered. 'I-It is. And— And I'm not ready to give it to you yet.'

'Not ready? Becky what do you mean— What is it?'

'It's... personal,' Becky admitted.

A look, somewhere in the middle of concern and realisation, found its way to Ken's face. '*You made it?*' he asked, almost breathlessly.

Slowly, Becky nodded.

'Becky that's—' he smiled, wide and genuine, and Becky felt herself grin awkwardly back as he reached out and put a hand on her arm. 'That's wonderful! Please, show me. I'd love to see it.'

'No,' Becky didn't mean for her voice to break as her grip on the box tightened. 'I'm— Um.... I'm sorry. I don't think I'm ready to share it.'

Ken's smile fell into a sombre, almost hurt look, and he didn't say anything as his brow furrowed and his lips tightened into a thin line.

'*I'm sorry,*' Becky repeated, quietly.

'*It's okay,*' Ken replied, his voice as soft as hers as his hand slid to her own. 'I'm sure it's beautiful.'

'It's not,' Becky answered. 'It's... really not.'

Ken's hand squeezed hers tight, before he motioned with his free hand to his spare chair. 'Sit with me?'

Becky was too flustered to argue, and let herself be guided into her seat. 'Wh... What are you making?'

'Oh? Oh, just—' Ken pushed up his glasses, and gave a small smile. 'A side project. I hit a uh. *Bump*. With my current design and thought getting my mind off it and onto something else might clear my head. It's actually— That friend of yours? Malinka? I thought it would suit that new haircut of hers.'

Becky nodded as her father held up the dress for her to examine. He was right; it would definitely look good on Malinka... though she wasn't sure the tabaxi would have the courage to wear such bright colours.

'Look— I even—' Ken motioned to a layer of fabric. 'I made a pocket. For that little bat familiar she has! It has some thick twine, at the top. And— Lined with mesh. For— For it to hang onto.'

'That's... really nice of you,' Becky said.

'Well, I know how much you care about your friends,' said Ken, putting the dress down and sitting in his own chair. 'I, um. I've got a few designs, actually. For some of your other friends. Marilyn and Jezzibeth and... Katie. Hers was a hard one; something stylish *and* practical, and also to her own... tastes.'

Becky giggled at that, knowing exactly what her father meant.

She loosened her grip on the box— And then put it aside as her father reached over his work and pulled out a very, very large shirt.

'And I've been working on something for Adam— Heaven knows that poor boy needs some new clothes that actually fit him,' Ken explained as he stood up to show off the full shirt. 'I'm not sure how much he is a fan of, uh, floral patterns. But I thought the embroidered pattern on the breast pocket looked nice.'

'He'll like it,' Becky answered, softly. 'He knows... how hard you work on stuff like this. And he'll like it because of that.'

'*Hmhm,*' Ken gave a weak, awkward chuckle, before setting the shirt aside and

sitting back down. He let out a deep sigh, before speaking slowly. 'I love you, Rebecca. I hope you know that.'

Becky felt herself tense and looked away, trying to let her gaze fall on anything—*anything*— but her father.

She couldn't find anything to focus on, though, except her own feet.... And as she stared at them she felt Ken lean forward— And was too late to bat him away as his lips met the top of her head and he pulled her into his chest for a hug.

She almost complained. But then she held back her instinctive quip and let her father run his hand up and down her back in a loving, comforting motion.

And then, slowly and stiffly, Becky forced herself to raise her own arms to return the embrace.

She knew it was awkward. She knew her dad knew it was awkward. But for a long moment neither of them let go....

But then Becky felt herself blush, and quickly pushed her father away.

'Ew,' she commented, unconvincingly. 'Ew don't— Don't be weird.'

Ken just smiled warmly and took her hands in his. 'I love you, Becky.'

'Whatever,' Becky snorted, quickly looking away in an attempt to hide her embarrassment. 'Like I care.'

The squeeze her hands received told her that her father understood *exactly* how much she cared, and she let out another heavy snort.

This seemed to entertain Ken, who let go of his daughter so he could pick up the dress he'd been working on and continue sewing.

Becky wasn't sure what to say, and it seemed Ken was the same, so instead of trying to find something to talk about she just... didn't. And just quietly scooted her chair forward until she was able to lean her head on her dad's shoulder and watch him work.

His stitching was much more confident than her own. And he was faster. And more accurate.

He knew exactly what he wanted. And exactly how to achieve it....

And, then, as fast as he'd started work— He'd suddenly finished it.

Becky checked her phone as her father carefully folded the dress to put it away and was shocked— It had been an hour and a half? It had only felt like a few minutes!

'Oh,' she breathed.

'Is everything alright?' Ken asked.

'Yeah,' Becky mumbled. Then she cleared her throat. 'Uh. Yeah. Just. Didn't realise the time. Um.... Jareth's picking me up soon. Half an hour to an hour? I'm going to spend the night with him.'

'Oh....'

For a moment, Ken looked concerned— And Becky realised he was bracing for her to rile him up again, and felt a short pang of guilt.

'Um, we'll just be at his house,' she commented, smiling at her father when she saw his shoulders relax. 'I know it's a school night and— Um. I packed everything I need for tomorrow. My medication and....'

She trailed off, her eyes scanning the room for a distraction.... Which luckily she found, in the form of her father's work.

'That's really pretty,' she commented, motioning to a nearby dress. 'Can I see

it?’

‘Hm? Oh, yes, of course,’ Ken muttered, quickly picking up the dress and showing it off. ‘It’s an older design that I only just got around to finishing recently.... I, uh, won’t bore you with the details but.... Would you like to try it on?’

Becky quietly nodded, and let her father help her into the dress.

It was a little tight around the chest... and a little loose around the waist— Like most clothes that weren’t modified specifically for her were.

‘*Hmm*,’ Ken hummed, putting a hand to his chin and quietly circling his daughter in an almost shark-like motion.

Seeing her father start his circles triggered something in Becky— And she found herself instinctively straightening her back and raising her arms to show off the dress. It was a habit she’d picked up from spending time with her mother, god-knows-when in her childhood....

*Her mother had always said she would make a wonderful model....*

But then, her father was always *very* against it.

Isa had said something about him “not wanting to see his daughter go through what his wife went through,” and though Becky had never *fully* understood what she’d meant by that, the older she got the more she thought she was glad to not have gotten involved in the fashion industry....

Ken fiddled with the hem of Becky’s dress and muttered something to himself, and Becky couldn’t help but smile at him.

Then she felt the zipper jab her and cursed, making to undo the dress and slip out of it.

Ken straightened up to help her get changed— And soon they were sitting together again, awkwardly fiddling and not knowing what to talk about.

It was unbearably awkward.... And Becky wished something would come to her rescue—

A familiar revving sounded outside and Becky felt her heart skip a beat as her phone buzzed; *Jareth was here!*

‘Oh my gosh— Oh my gosh!’ she leapt to her feet, bouncing from foot to foot and shaking her hands as she processed what she’d heard.

Bag! She needed her bag!

And her shoes— She’d taken them off to try on the dress!

She quickly slipped them on and brushed herself down, and as she did she felt Ken’s hand on her shoulder and looked to him.

‘I hope you have fun,’ he told her. ‘I love you.’

‘Yes, yes!’ she exclaimed, still trying to process the sudden rush of excitement. ‘I’ll be home tomorrow after school!’ she blurted, before pecking a kiss on her father’s cheek and rushing out of his study. ‘I love you too!’

Shoes—

She had her shoes. She needed—

Bag!

Becky rushed into her room, grabbing her bag and slinging it over her shoulder.

A chirp sound— Mimi!

Mimi was on Becky’s bed, looking up at her lazily.



'I love you, Mimi,' she said, hurrying over to give her pet a quick kiss. 'Be a good girl for Isa!'

And then she was out of her room— Down the stairs— Out the front door—  
And in Jareth's arms!

He swung her around, causing her to let out a joyful squeal, before plonking her down on the back of his bike.

'Hey baby girl,' Jareth said, leaning so close she felt his breath on her lips. 'What you been up to?'

'I was with my dad,' Becky explained. 'I finished the shirt for him and—'

The realisation hit her like a ton of bricks; she had left the box with the shirt in her father's study.

'Baby?'

She hoped her father wouldn't open it.

'Baby girl?'

Would he?

'Hey? You alright?'

She hoped not.

'You're freezing up on me.'

Maybe she should go back in and get it? Or maybe not....

'Hey, hey hey hey,' Jareth's hands gently took her cheeks; and Becky found herself back outside of her head. 'Hey. Don't panic on me, now. Right? You're alright.'

'Um. Yeah. No— I—' Becky took a breath, and quickly shook her head. 'I was just, um....'

Oh.

Oh *god!*

She cursed when she realised that— Worse than the shirt—

She'd accidentally told her dad she *loved him!*

She let out a groan and let her head drop into Jareth's chest.

She didn't *dare* go back in, now.

That was going to make an awkward conversation, tomorrow....

—END—

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