

# Isabel's Improvement

By C. Jade Wyton

*Becky Bloom has spent the day out with her aunt Isabel, and boyfriend Jareth. She was nervous about seeing her aunt again, but the day has been going very well. And when Becky sees her friend Adam and stops to have a conversation, Isabel has the opportunity to show Becky how much she's improved.*

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Becky had been both looking forward to and *dreading* meeting her aunt all week.

After the... incident... with her meeting Bianca and the barbarian class, Becky wasn't sure she could *stomach* seeing her again....

But Jareth had gently convinced her to at least keep her promise and meet with her today— And Becky had been pleasantly surprised.

It was clear Isabel was trying really *really* hard to say the right things. And had caught herself mid-sentence several times.

Becky had actually had fun today, shopping with her aunt. And the anxiety was finally starting to fade....

Isabel's intentions were good. She was completely sure of that, now.

And she was learning.

And genuinely trying to do better and be better.

And it made Becky so happy to see!

The two women had run their mouths off over lunch, gossiping about everything that they'd been through, lately— Only pausing once when Jareth, who had so far been sitting so quietly Becky had almost forgotten he was even with them, had sneezed and scared Isabel out of her chair and onto the floor.

But, instead of it feeling awkward, it had been *funny*.

Jareth had helped her up, and she's laughed, and they'd continued their meal— This time with Jareth a little more involved in the conversation.

Then, Jareth had seen something across the food court and all but *leapt* to his feet, running through the crowd until he was able to body-slam into his friend Angelo and send him rolling across the floor and into the wall.

The sound that escaped Angelo was hilarious; but not as funny as the sound that escaped Becky when she saw that Angelo had been with *Adam*.

'Adam!' she cried, jumping to her own feet and hurrying over to her friend.

She leapt into him in much the same way Jareth had slammed into Angelo— Though Adam barely stumbled. All he did was brace himself for Becky, and then laugh as she clambered around on his back until she was sitting on his shoulders and tapping on his head like a bongo.

'Adam! *Adaaaaam ooooh my goooood!*' Becky exclaimed. 'What are you doing here?! Are you on a date?! Are you—' she leant over Adam so she could look him in the eye, and whisper, '*Gonna bone Angelo again?*'

Adam reached up and grabbed Becky, flipping her off his back and onto the

floor in a heap. 'Nah, I'm here on business.'

'Ooh, what kind of business?' Becky asked, rolling to her feet and bouncing in excitement.

'*Nunya* business,' Adam answered, playfully.

Becky retorted by punching her friend in the arm. Though he barely seemed to feel it and just chuckled and rubbed at it.

'What are *you* doing here?' he asked. 'Are *you* on a date? Cos I'm pretty sure they're about to elope without us— Oh. Yeah, there they go....'

Becky glanced behind herself, just in time to see Jareth and Angelo tear down the escalators together; threatening some sort of boyish violence.

'Heh,' Becky gave a chuckle. 'I'm not surprised Jareth's restless. He's, like, been *really* patient while I hang out with Auntie!'

'Oh, you're with your aunt?' Adam looked around. 'Does this mean I *finally* get to meet her?'

'Uhh...' Becky hesitated, feeling herself blush as she glanced to Isabel.

The woman was sitting with their things; one hand on a bag that had clearly almost fallen when Jareth had gotten up, and her eyes wide with surprise as she stared at Adam.

Becky felt her anxiety returning.

*Was Isabel ready to meet Adam?*

After how she'd reacted to Bianca, Becky wasn't sure....

She looked back up at Adam, and felt her brow furrow. He had deep bags under his eyes, and his skin was pale and faded, and he still had some bruising around his bolts....

'You look tired,' she blurted. 'Have you been getting enough sleep? Oh my god— Are your charging bolts working properly?! Did Guillmero damage them?!'

'No— No! Becky—' Adam had to peel Becky off of himself as she tried to touch his bolts. 'It's fine! I'm fine. My bolts aren't damaged, I've just... I'm fine.'

'So you haven't been *sleeping* properly?' Becky scolded. '*Adam!* You *know* how important a consistent schedule is!'

Adam raised his brow, and Becky immediately understood.

'Yeah, yeah, I'm a hypocrite,' she rolled her eyes. 'But this isn't about *me!* It's about *you!* Why haven't you been sleeping? Is it because of Angelo? Has he been sneaking in your window at night? Do I need to beat him up?'

'What, you think I'm having too much *sex?*' Adam gave a laugh. '*You* think that *I'm* having too much sex!'

'Well, *are* you?'

'I'm not answering that, Becky,' Adam shook his head, his smile pressing up the tired creases in the corners of his eyes. 'Now. Are you going to answer *my* question or not?'

Becky paused, thinking for a moment. 'Uh... what question?'

'Do I get to meet your aunt?'

'OH!' Becky exclaimed, looking back to Isabel; who waved at her nervously.

'Uh... hm.... *Okay*... I guess you can— IF! You come and stay the night at my house tomorrow!'

Adam looked hesitant, his smile vanishing into a brief moment of anxiety as he seemed to get lost in his own thoughts.... And then he gave Becky a tired smile.

‘Can I give you a “maybe”?’ he asked. ‘See how I’m feeling?’

‘Hmm... *okay*,’ Becky offered a smile back, and motioned for Adam to come with her. ‘Come on, I’ll introduce you to Auntie Isabel. She’d a little... full-on, though....’

‘Hah, yeah, Angelo told me about the *hoof thing*,’ Adam chuckled. ‘I’m ready for the comments....’

‘See, I always say that to myself, too,’ Becky sucked a hiss of air through her teeth. ‘But then she *says* something and it’s, like, *woof*.... Heeeey Auntie! Sorry I poofed! Adam’s here, too! I’ve told you about Adam, right?’

‘Yes!’ Isabel grinned wide, rising to her feet— And then pausing as Adam got closer. ‘Oh, my... you’re even bigger than the tiefling!’

‘Yeah,’ Adam laughed, *very* slowly lifting a hand for Isabel to shake. ‘It’s really nice to finally meet you! Becky’s told me a *lot* about you!’

‘Oh? She has?’ Isabel looked nervous as she examined Adam’s hand; her eyes trailing his stitches. ‘Oh, *my*....’

‘*Auntie!*’ Becky whispered.

‘Oh!’ Isabel blushed, and hurriedly took Adam’s hand to shake. ‘Oh I’m so sorry! I’ve just never seen something like you before— *Someone!* One! *Someone!* Like you before! What with the stitches and the different skin patches and— And...’ Isabel trailed off, seemingly forgetting that she was rambling as she turned Adam’s hand over and gently ran her fingers over his palm. ‘And... oooh.... Your skin’s so soft. What moisturiser do you use?’

‘Whatever Becky has on her when it gets dry,’ Adam joked.

‘*My lord your hand is big*,’ Isabel whispered, and Becky bit her lip as her aunt lifted Adam’s hand up and placed it over her head. ‘Oh, I bet you could crush me like a grape if you tried! Wow! Like a *grape!*’

‘Not the first time I’ve heard that,’ Adam chuckled, petting Isabel before letting his hand fall to his side.

‘But you’re *so gentle!*’ Isabel grinned. ‘Just like Becky said! Oh— She talks about you *all the time!* Says you’re like a brother to her!’

‘Heh, yeah,’ Adam shrugged. ‘And she’s like a sister to me....’

‘Well...’ Isabel blushed sheepishly, taking Adam’s hand again and giving it a friendly squeeze. ‘A brother of Becky’s is a nephew of mine.’

Becky let out a slow, relieved breath as Adam cast her a grin.

*This was going better than she’d thought it would.*

This was going *much* better than she’d thought it would.

She’d been *terrified* that her aunt would say something terrible to Adam— That she’d be scared of him, for being undead or so big or even being *gay*....

But....

Isabel looked back at Becky, clearly seeking her approval, and Becky offered her a smile.

It was clear that Isabel understood how important Adam was to her. And that she *desperately* didn’t want to say anything wrong or offensive—

*Maybe her dad or Isa had mentioned something about her breakup with Mattel being because of comments about Adam?*

That would make sense.

Isabel ran her hand over Adam’s again, and Becky winced as she realised she

was looking at Adam's stitches.

She wanted to ask an offensive question. That was *very* clear.

*Please don't*, Becky begged silently. *Please, Auntie, don't do it.... Don't....*

*Don't—*

'Is it true that—'

Becky stepped forward, ready to grab her aunt's arm and drag her away.

'You make toys?' Isabel finished.

Becky paused, taken aback by her aunt's *actually polite* question.

'Oh, yeah,' Adam gave a laugh, gently removing his hand from Isabel's grip.

'I'm an artificer.'

'Ooh,' Isabel hummed and nodded in a way that showed she'd *clearly* didn't know what an artificer was.

'Yeah,' Adam returned the nod, in a way that made it clear that he knew she didn't know, but wasn't going to comment and make her feel stupid about it. 'I really enjoy working with animatronic toys.'

'Animatronic... as in... robots?' Isabel tried.

'Yeah. Robotic ones,' Adam confirmed.

Isabel's face lit up in joy, and she grasp her hands together with an excited *clap!* 'Like those old Furby toys! Oh, I remember when those came out! They were just the *cutest things!* I wanted one so badly, but my mother was so *mean* about it, saying I was *too old* for children's toys— Ugh, *tsk*,' she tutted dramatically and rolled her eyes, though her smile didn't fade. 'I mean, I was barely older than Becky is now, you can't tell me that's *too old* to enjoy something so adorable!'

'No way,' Adam agreed, returning her playful eye-roll. 'You can never be too old to *enjoy* things.'

'Ah! See! Becky *said* you were smart!' Isabel pet Adam on the arm, 'And I can see why! That's such a *wonderful* way to think about it! Heh. Someone should tell that to my mother! She's such a miserable old goat—' Isabel hesitated, then, quickly casting a glance to Becky. 'Oh, no, wait— That's not offensive to say, is it? It's not some sort of tiefling slur?'

Becky shook her head, feeling herself giving a genuine smile at her aunt's effort.

'Oh, thank goodness!' Isabel chuckled, then turned back to Adam. 'She's an absolute *cow*.'

'Hah!' Adam laughed back, before something behind the group caught his eye and he waved. 'Ah, Angelo's back. So's Jareth.... We should probably go. I'll see you later, Beck?'

'Yeah!' Becky beamed, throwing her arms around Adam and giving him a tight hug. 'If you don't come for a sleepover soon, I'll come to *yours* and eat all your good snacks!'

Adam snorted at the playful threat and ruffled Becky's hair. Then he looked back to Isabel. 'It was really nice to meet you, Isabel.'

'And it was wonderful to meet you, too!' Isabel stood on the very tips of her toes, reaching as far up as she could (and gently pulling Adam down) so that she could peck a kiss on his cheek. 'I'm so glad that Becky has such good friends. You look after her for me, now!'

'I will,' Adam promised, taking several steps back before turning and hurrying over to Angelo; trading places with Jareth as he did. 'Bye!'

*'Byyyyyyyyye!'* Becky chirped back, waving to the boys. 'Tell your dads I said hi!'

Adam gave her a thumbs up, and then he and Angelo headed for the escalators.

Then, Becky felt Jareth's arm slip around her waist, and he pecked a kiss on her cheek. 'Heh, how'd it go?' he asked.

'Great!' Becky answered, leaning against him and grinning wide.

It had gone so well!

And Isabel had tried so hard!

And Becky couldn't believe how well she had done!

'It went great!'

—END—

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