

Katie Is My Friend

By C. Jade Wyton

Barbra Bloom is worried that her daughter doesn't seem to be able to make any friends; she's too aggressive, and keeps pushing the other children away. So when another girl around her age finally stands up to Becky and matches her energy, Barbra can't help but sit back and watch on.

Contains depictions of mental illness.

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It was a beautiful early-spring afternoon.

The cold and wet of winter was finally fading away as leafy buds sprouted on trees and tiny flowers began to speckle the grasses.

Barbra was glad that it was getting warmer. The harsh cold of winter had made it hard to bring her daughter outside to play; something the girl craved so much she would work herself into tantrums when it rained.

Barbra tried not to scold her for it. She was only three. She didn't understand why it rained, yet. Or that the rain would make her sick.

Barbra's eyes drifted to where her daughter sat in the grass directly besides the bench, poking a stick into the ground repeatedly, and she sighed.

She'd hoped that with as many other children in the park as there was today, Becky would have been making friends.... But instead she was shooing away any of the kids who got too close with a firm *whack* of her stick, and there was nothing Barbra had been able to do to convince her not to hit the other children. Even taking the stick away didn't work, as Becky just found a larger one....

'Becky, keep your shoes on!' Barbra scolded her daughter, petting her on the head as she began to kick off her slip-ons. 'If you take your shoes off we *will* go home.'

'Mm! Mm! Mm!' Becky gave several short, frustrated grunts that made Barbra sigh again. 'Dad!'

'I know Dad takes his shoes off outside, too, but he's not supposed to either,' Barbra explained. 'Dad's very naughty sometimes, isn't he? And he breaks the rules.'

Becky gave a growl of frustration as she pulled her shoes back on, and began aggressively poking her stick into the ground again.

'Becky be care—'

'Love you!' Becky hissed.

'I love you too,' Barbra replied, reaching down and taking her daughter's hand to stop her from stabbing the dirt. 'But be careful with that, okay?'

'Hmph!'

Barbra just shook her head and let her daughter go again. She was content that Becky stabbed slower and less aggressively, and so sat back again and... held her breath as another girl, about Becky's age, wandered over.

'Hi,' the girl said as she reached Becky's side. 'I'm Katie, what's your name?'

‘Leave!’ Becky exclaimed, aiming a blow at Katie with her stick.

‘Becky—’ Barbra exclaimed; though she paused when Katie grabbed the stick with lightning-fast reflexes.

In just a second the girl had yanked it out of Becky’s hands and smacked her on the top of the head several times.

‘What! Is! Your! Name!’ she yelled each word with a smack to the head that Becky didn’t even *try* to duck away from.

‘Katie, no hitting!’ called another parent, and Barbra turned to them as they approached. ‘I’m so sorry—’

‘She tried to hit me first!’ Katie defended as her mother took the stick from her.

‘That is true,’ Barbra sighed, scooping up a *very* stunned Becky and sitting her on her knee. ‘Not used to people fighting back, are you?’ she chuckled. ‘You okay?’

Becky turned to her mother with wide eyes and nodded, still seemingly in shock that someone had hit her back.

‘Ugh, I’m so sorry about her,’ the other mother sighed as she sat beside Barbra.

‘It’s fine,’ Barbra reassured, hooking Becky under the arms and replacing her in the grass. ‘Becky’s sturdier than she looks.’

It got a laugh. ‘I’m glad to hear that.... I’m Katherine,’ the other mother offered Barbra her hand.

‘Barbra,’ Barbra replied, taking Katherine’s hand.

‘*What’s! Your! Name!*’ Katie’s voice yelled, and Barbra glanced down to see that she was nose-to-nose with Becky. ‘What’s your name! Tell me! Tell me *now!*’

‘Katie! Be nice!’

‘She’s not *talking* to me!’ Katie exclaimed, stomping a foot.

‘She doesn’t talk,’ Barbra explained, and Katie’s posture immediately changed. ‘She’s still learning.’

‘Oh,’ Katie looked back to Becky. ‘Okay, then.’

‘She doesn’t talk yet?’ Katherine asked, surprised. ‘She’s a bit old to not talk, isn’t she?’

‘The doctor said it’s fine,’ Barbra shook her head and sighed. ‘She says a few words, here and there. And she *understands* us. But she just doesn’t... *talk.*’

‘Sounds lovely,’ Katherine joked as Katie shouted an invitation to play *very* loudly in Becky’s face. ‘Katie! Be nice.’

‘Worrying, more than anything,’ Barbra replied, watching as Katie grabbed Becky by the arm and dragged her several feet away. ‘But there’s not much we can do.’

‘Katie—’ Katherine gave a sigh and made to stand up. ‘Ugh, sorry. I’ll go get them.’

‘No, it’s fine,’ Barbra put a hand on Katherine’s arm and offered her a smile. ‘If Becky minded, she’d make it known. *Trust me....*’

Katherine returned Barbra’s smile and sat back down. The pair didn’t say much as they watched their daughters sit together in a patch of flowers and make flower crowns.

It was nice to see Becky getting along with another of her peers, Barbra

thought as Katie showed Becky how to weave the ends of the flowers together so they held tight.... Becky was no good at it, though, and instead just sort of smooshed them all together in a mess.

*If flowers had horror movies, Becky would have been the monster featured on the cover....*

Katie asked Becky something that Barbra couldn't quite make out and Becky nodded, pulling up another handful of flowers and—

'Becky! Spit those out!' Barbra scolded.

Becky did as she was told, and Barbra rolled her eyes as Katherine smothered a laugh.

Then Katie rose to her feet, and gave Becky a shove. 'Wanna fight?!'

'Oh no—' Katherine rose to her feet at the same time as Barbra, but neither were quick enough to stop Becky from leaping up and sinking her teeth into Katie's arm.

'Becky!'

Katie punched Becky in the nose.

'Katie!'

Both mothers yanked their children apart, scooping them up and taking several steps back so they couldn't swipe their hands at each other.

'I can't take you *anywhere*, can I?' Barbra sighed. 'What do you have to say for yourself?!'

'Like her!' Becky exclaimed. 'Me. Yes! Friend. Katie is my friend.'

Barbra was taken aback; it was rare Becky used her words— And— What she'd said—

'A— Your *friend*?' Barbra asked, her voice full of surprise. 'You like her?'

'Mhm!' Becky nodded. 'Best friends. She said so! Play again? Yes? Play again next time! Yes! Yes! Please, Mum? Please?'

Barbra let out a surprised laugh before turning to Katherine. 'Uh— Yes. Yes. Katherine, could I... get your number?'

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