

Keep It Up

By C. Jade Wyton

Becky Bloom is in a sour mood after her humiliation at the Masters' party; and the sudden behavioural changes of her beloved pet mimic has her stressed out even more than ever. She takes out her anger on one of her classmates and finds herself encouraged by her girlfriend to turn her angry outburst into malicious bullying.

Contains descriptions of violence, bullying, and implied abuse.

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The cafeteria was crowded today, and Becky found herself standing in line for longer than she would have liked.

She wished that the line would hurry up and *move*, so she could get her lunch and go sit down with someone and talk instead of think.

She was tired of thinking— Because all she could think about was the incident at the party the Masters had hosted. The scene Isa had caused picking her up....

It had been about a month since Becky had met Mattel's parents, and she was wracked with guilt about how she had handled it.

Mattel had, after being sure Becky was feeling better, taken her aside to talk with her about her behaviour.

It had been clear that she was hiding in the bathroom, avoiding the Masters. And Mattel had felt hurt that Becky would leave her all alone to take the brunt of her parents' questions and criticisms.

She'd accepted Becky's apology, of course (Mattel was wonderful like that!) but Becky still couldn't help but feel guilty about it.

She had to make it up to Mattel somehow. She wasn't sure *how exactly*. But still *somehow*.

But nothing she was able to do seemed like good enough of an apology.

All of the stress had begun to eat at Becky and she was finding it hard to keep up with things that she had never thought of as difficult before.... Simple things, like taking the dirty dishes out of her bedroom or washing her makeup off before bed, felt as painful as pulling teeth....

And to top it all off, Mimi's behaviour had taken a sudden turn for the worse, and Becky couldn't figure out why!

The usually energetic, playful creature had become nervous and shy. And it broke Becky's heart that she couldn't fix whatever was wrong.

Two trips to the vet and *hours* of research online had come up with nothing.

Becky had even gone so far as approaching one of the year thirteen druid students to ask if they —being magically inclined to animal needs— could do anything to help... but she had been informed that mimics were considered monstrosities, not beasts, and it just wasn't within their ability.

*Try talking to a ranger*, they had suggested. *They know about monstrosities.*

But the ranger student she'd asked had then told her that they didn't know

how to care for such creatures; they were only trained to hunt and trap them. Which was the opposite of what she needed—

*Ah, finally!*

It was Becky's turn to get her food.

She hurriedly collected her lunch and turned, scanning the room until she saw Mattel and her friends sitting at their usual table and began towards them.

She weaved through students, shouldering aside the younger kids who were too stupid to get out of her way.

*Mimi*, Becky thought, her brow furrowing in a frown. *What could have possibly been upsetting Mimi like this?*

She had to figure it out.

It made her feel like a terrible owner— It shouldn't have been so hard to know what was going on with her mimic!

Mimi never left the house without supervision. So....

Becky felt her chest tighten in a twist of anger as the realisation pushed into her mind:

It had to be something that *she'd* done that had hurt Mimi.

*But what?!*

She *had* to figure it out....

As she approached Mattel's table Becky went to step around one of her classmates, a half-elf she recognised from her own year level— But then he turned at the last moment, crashing straight into her and sending both their lunches to the floor.

'Oh, jeez I'm sorry I didn't see you— Becky?!' the half-elf's apologetic look turned panicked as he realised who he was talking to. 'Oh— God— Becky I'm sorry I didn't mean to— Uh— I-I uh—'

'-Why don't you *watch* where you're *going*?!' Becky felt her anger boil over, and the crowd around them to fell quiet and she snapped at him. 'You *clumsy* piece of *shit*! Joe, I swear to *god* I am going to beat you so hard your *grandchildren* will feel it!'

Joe flinched as Becky stepped towards him, and he hurriedly backed away. 'I-I'm sorry, I— Uh—'

Becky gave a snort, and raised a threatening fist at Joe— Who slipped over in the spilled food and landed on the floor with with a *THUMP!*

Mattel's laugh sounded from just a few meters away, and Becky saw her girlfriend giggling into her hands.

*Mattel thought it was funny?*

Becky felt her anger wane, replaced by surprise, as she looked over at the woman.

*Should she... keep going?*

Becky hesitated for a moment as Joe got to his feet.

'I'm sorry, Becky,' he apologised. 'Look I— I'm *really* sorry!'

Mattel rolled her eyes dramatically before mouthing mockery to Joe, and Becky knew immediately that she *had* to keep going.

*She mightn't get another opportunity to make Mattel laugh.*

'Oh *well*,' Becky gave an exaggerated sigh and turned back to Joe. She pushed away the last of her anger, trying instead to make herself seem *cool* for Mattel as

she sniffed and straightened up to her full height. 'It's not like you needed it anyway.... Maybe it'll help you lose some weight, and you won't be such a *fat virgin*. Maybe girls will even start to actually *like* you!'

Becky didn't mean it. She didn't *actually* think being fat or a virgin was a bad thing. Not *really*.... But Mattel laughed again, and Becky felt the knot in her chest unravelling with the woman's approval— So she took Joe's chin in her hand, and gave him a fake-affectionate kiss on the nose.

'*Mwah*,' she joked. 'You're looking more attractive already. Keep it up.'

She gave his cheek a playful pat before hurrying over to join Mattel and her friends.

Becky sat down next to her girlfriend, who was still giggling.

'You're *too* funny!' Mattel declared, wrapping her arm around Becky and pulling her close. Then, she gave a sympathetic click of her tongue. '*Naw*, though. You shouldn't go hungry because of him— Here, honey. You can have some of mine.'

Mattel offered Becky half a sandwich from her own tray, and Becky couldn't help but grin widely.

'Thanks,' she said, sitting up straight so she could eat.

As she ate she looked around the cafeteria.

The incident had almost immediately been forgotten, it seemed. Everything had already gone back to normal... except, maybe, that the younger students had finally realised they should be keeping a few steps away from Mattel and Becky's lunch table.

—END—

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