

# Playdate

By C. Jade Wyton

*Ken Bloom is a socially awkward, nervous man who loves his wife Barbra and daughter Becky with all his heart. Which is a good thing, considering how ill-behaved Becky can be. There is something wrong with her, Ken knows. Probably the same thing that is wrong with himself.... But, unlike himself, his daughter can at least seem to make some friends. And even if some of her friends are loud, and strange, and aggressive, Ken will put up with them. For Becky.*

## ***Contains some mentions of ableism***

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Becky's playdates were always a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, it was fantastic to see her socialise. She loved her friends—though it was in her own *strange* way—and she was always happiest after seeing them....

On the other hand, however... her friends had parents. And while those parents weren't bad people, they always wanted to *talk*....

And Ken rarely wanted to talk.

Barbra would always say: *it's no wonder where Becky gets it from!*

She was right, of course.

It was unfortunate, Ken thought, that his daughter took so much after him.

His *strange* behaviour had made his childhood... *difficult*. His father, especially, had despised his oddities—Thinking of the beatings he'd received in an attempt to correct his behaviour *still* made Ken feel ill....

But he wasn't going to let that happen to Becky. He would be a gentle father. A loving father. And she wouldn't suffer like he did. She would be *happy*.

He had been so scared when Becky had started to show signs of... *whatever it was* that was wrong in his own head.

But, now, seeing her do better than he did? He could finally relax.

She was going to be fine.

She was already one step ahead of him at her age; she had friends.

Even if she was picky with who she let be her friends; she *had friends!*

She was able to make them.

Ken had been so worried that she would grow up alone like he had—But after seeing her determined pursuit of the Slader brothers after she had decided that they *would* be her friends, *whether they wanted to be or not*, he knew she would be able to handle herself just fine.

She had inherited her mother's confidence and drive and wasn't going to let anyone walk over her.

*She'd beaten up an orc boy who was in the sixth grade, for god's sake! Just because he "looked at her funny"!*

Nothing was going to take his daughter down.

And, though she had a tendency to be a little rough, once she decided she loved someone she would put her whole heart into them.

She had seemed to decide that she was the *guardian* of her friends— Announcing loudly that she was a *whole year above them* and so obviously *she was in charge*. And she had determined that being in charge of her friends meant she had to protect them and solve all of their problems. And that she had to know everything about them.

She would always remember the strangest details, too.

*Jareth has two freckles under his eye.*

*Benny has four.*

*Katie is the fastest on the monkey bars; even faster than the older kids.*

*Jezzibeth's hands are warmer than everyone else's—* That was an especially unusual thing to know.

But then, she only bothered to know these things about people she deemed *worthy* of her time.

And like Becky was picky with her friends, Barbra was one of the very, *very* few people Ken enjoyed speaking with. And he also felt the tug to her; that uncontrolled urge to devote his entire *being* to her. Every single one of his thoughts, no matter what it was about, always had his wife entwined into it.

A sunny day? Perfect for sitting outside with his wife.

Flowers? She loved flowers and floral patterns!

A new fabric? He could make Barbra a dress!

And just like all his heart went to his wife; any time Ken was able to coax his daughter into conversation, Becky would relate things to her friends.

That woman has tattoos? Jareth and Benny's parents give people tattoos.

A dog at the park? Katie didn't like dogs.

Even hearing about their elderly neighbour being sent to hospital; all Becky had talked about was how Jezzibeth's aunt was a doctor.

Ken had never liked Jezzibeth's aunt. He had heard horror stories about her practice, and knew she was one of the people terrorising that poor Frankenstein family.

But he had to bite his tongue; at least right now, while Jezzibeth's mother was standing in his entrance hall, speaking to his wife....

He watched the two women gossip and—

The front door bumped into his back and jolted him into reality.

'Oh— Isa, I'm so sorry!' he apologised as he stepped away.

'It's alright, Ken,' Isa gave a warm smile and adjusted her thick sunglasses. Even past her cover-alls, Ken could see Isa glance to Mrs Courtland before her snort escaped her. 'Ah. I see why you're back here....'

'Oui,' Ken blushed as Isa gave him a pat on the back. 'Barbra wants to see everyone before we leave again.'

'Ah, yes, your flight is tomorrow, isn't it?' Isa asked.

Ken nodded.

'I can't believe you'll be gone for *six months*,' Isa tutted. 'Becky is going to miss you, you know.'

'Mm,' Ken sighed. 'I wish we didn't have to, but... it's such an important opportunity for Barb.'

Isa gave a knowing nod but didn't say anything else as she let Ken be. She adjusted the heavy-looking grocery bags on her arms and, giving a curt greeting to Barbra and Mrs Courtland, made straight for the kitchen.

*Isa.*

She was another person whose company Ken didn't mind.

And the only person besides Barbra who ever seemed able to get Becky to behave.

He would never dare say it out loud to his wife (she was *far* too jealous of Isa for him to *dare* say it out loud) but he could tell that Becky viewed Isa as some sort of second mother....

Or, perhaps, it was *Barbra* that Becky viewed as her second mother....

Ken sighed.

Barbra had never admitted she was jealous of the drow's bond with their daughter— But Ken could tell. It hurt her, deep down, that she didn't have enough time to spoil her daughter like she deserved.

It hurt Ken, too.

But, even through their jealousy, Isa's deep and genuine love for their daughter was enough to win the couple over.

Ken appreciated Isa.

In the past eight years since Becky was born, Isa had gone from the quiet-and-bearable maid who respected his privacy and left him alone to work, to a very close and personal friend— His only friend besides his wife, if he was being honest.... And even if Barbra's relationship with the drow was a little more *tense* than his own, she obviously liked her. Enough to trust her to be alone with Becky; a privilege that very few people had never experienced.

He was glad Barbra liked Isa as much as she did— He wouldn't know what they'd do if they ever had to fire her. He wasn't sure Becky would survive.

He wasn't sure *he* would survive. Not if he lost his only friend.

Ken let out a sigh and looked to the two young girls at Mrs Courtland's side.

He was glad Becky had more friends than he did.

Even if they were....

*Coming towards him?!*

'Uh— Hmm—' Ken backed into the doorframe and glanced around hurriedly. Neither Mrs Courtland or Barbra had seemed to notice Katie and Jezzibeth approaching him as they talked; and he found himself trapped between them and the front door. 'Hello... girls...' he mumbled, nervously. 'How are you?'

The pair gazed up at him, Jezzibeth's face breaking into a warm smile while Katie's eyes narrowed into slits.

*Uh-oh....*

'Katie... n-no...' Ken pressed harder back against the door before glancing back up at his wife. 'B-B-Barbra? *Barbra?*'

'Ken? What's wrong—'

Katie kicked Ken in the shin, hard, and then ran off towards the lounge.

Jezzibeth gasped and covered her mouth; taking a step back and tripping on the rug as a giggling Katie bolted past her. Ken wasn't quick enough to catch Jezzibeth as she fell and she landed on her back, but luckily she seemed unphased as Ken picked her up.

‘KATIE MOSSWARD!’ Barbra snapped as she followed Katie into the lounge.  
‘That is *not* funny, young lady!’

‘Jezzibeth, honey, are you alright?’ Mrs Courtland gasped, taking her daughter from Ken and cradling her gently. ‘Oh, dear. That was quiet a fall....’

‘I’m okay!’ Jezzibeth said in a surprisingly cheerful tone.

Ken heard Katie laughing at his wife’s scolding in the other room and took a deep, deep breath to stave off his temper.

She was a child.

A tiny, small child.

He would *not* get angry at the tiny small child.

No matter how much of a little *shit* she was.

And no matter how *petty* he wanted to be— Katie was just a child and he would treat her like one and just... let it go.

Let it go.

*Do not treat her like one of your coworkers!*

*Do not scream at the small child!*

*She is a child.*

*She is small.*

*She doesn’t know better— Unlike Bella....*

Ken remembered the model he’d attempted to work with, just a month prior, and scowled to himself.

He’d brought her to tears after she’d thrown a tantrum over a dress being a material she didn’t like— And Barbra had screamed at her that same week, calling her a various amount of names, and then Bella had *quit*. Like the *weak bitch* she was....

*Deep breath.*

Katie was not a thirty year old woman with uneven breast implants.

She was an eight year old girl who was prone to running face-first into street lamps.

‘Are you alright, Ken?’ Mrs Courtland’s voice brought him back from his simmering. ‘Holding it in?’

‘Mhm,’ Ken agreed, quietly, and finished rubbing his leg.

‘Yes she’s... a troubled child,’ Mrs Courtland sighed. ‘You know her parents use corporal punishment on her? I could never *dream* of doing that!’

‘Mm,’ Ken gave a nod. *He couldn’t imagine ever hitting Becky, no matter how disobedient she was.*

‘Ken, sweetheart?’ Barbra stepped back into the hall and made for her husband. ‘Are you alright?’

‘I’m fine,’ Ken answered. ‘Just.... That girl has got a good kick in her.’

‘Yes,’ Mrs Courtland agreed, giving a pained look. ‘She *certainly* does.’

‘Yes....’

‘Ah, Debbie,’ Barbra turned back to her friend. ‘Is Jezzibeth okay?’

‘She’s fine, Barb. Aren’t you?’ Mrs Courtland looked to her daughter and, once she received a happy nod, she placed the girl on the ground and ushered her towards the lounge. ‘Go say hello to Becky.’

‘Okay!’ Jezzibeth chirped, disappearing out of the room.

‘Hm,’ Barbra shook her head and grinned; moving to the door (but not going

through it) so she could keep an eye on the kids as she and Mrs Courtland began to gossip.

Ken simply stayed by the front door, out of the way. He wasn't sure what else to do as the two women spoke.

He wasn't very interested in anything Mrs Courtland had to say— Church seemed to be her main topic, and Ken was.... Not interested in anything the Blessed had to say.

'Oh, yes, Becky is...' Barbra trailed off with a sigh. 'She's going through a bit of a *phase* with biting right now... its a real problem and— REBECCA BLOOM! YOU SPIT THAT OUT RIGHT NOW!'

Ken hurried after Barbra into the lounge and was met with the sight of his daughter hunkered down over the vacuum cleaner; her mouth and hands full of lint and dust from its collection bag.

'*Rebecca!*' he echoed with a squeak.

'Rebecca!' Barbra snapped again, lunging for her daughter— Who stuffed more lint into her mouth and bolted. 'Rebecca! Get back here *right now!*'

Becky made to run into the hall— But was scooped up effortlessly by Isa, who turned the corner at the exact right moment to catch her. She hefted Becky up and hooked the girl onto her hip in a very natural motion; something she had obviously done a hundred times before.

'*Spit,*' Isa ordered, holding out her hand.

Becky immediately obeyed.

And Ken saw Barbra's lip twitch in jealousy, before she let out a long sigh and took her daughter from the drow.

'Thank you, Isa,' she said. 'Becky! When I tell you to do something, you listen to me. Do you understand?'

Becky stared at her mother for a long moment before shaking her head. 'No?'

Another sigh from Barbra, and she put the girl down next to Jezzibeth and Katie, who were laying down and colouring print outs together. Becky was quick to join them; though she decided her seat was Katie's back, and that she was happier to just watch her friends than she was to colour, herself.

Katie didn't seem to care. From the quick, casual glance she cast Becky before continuing, it was clear this was not Becky's first time using her as a chair.

Barbra just shook her head and then, at the sound of a knock on the door, headed back to the hall.

It was Mrs Slader, with her boys Jareth and Benny.

She shooed the boys out of the hall as she greeted Barbra and Mrs Courtland; herding them past Ken and towards the girls.

The boys hurried over— And Benny immediately shoved Becky to the floor.

'Benny!' Mrs Slader scolded. 'Don't push!'

'What? She does it to me!' Benny retorted.

'We're not 'sposed to fight girls!' Jareth hissed to his brother.

'But *she* fights *me!*' Benny whined. 'How's that fair?!'

'Benny,' Mrs Slader's tone was warning— Though she was grinning widely. 'Behave yourself.'

'*Hmp. No fair,*' Benny muttered, before sitting down with the girls and taking a colouring page for himself.

‘Ah, I should head off,’ Mrs Courtland said with a chuckle. ‘I have shopping to do.... It was nice to see you again, Barb. I hope your trip goes well.’

‘Thank you, Debbie. We’ll talk when I get back?’

‘Of course!’ Mrs Courtland gave each woman a light hug, and then headed for the door. ‘Barb. Dolly.... Ken.’

Ken gave an awkward, hurried wave— And then retreated into the lounge to avoid the orcish woman who now stood, cackling, in his hallway.

As uncomfortable as Mrs Courtland made Ken, she at least refrained from touching him. Mrs Slader was much louder, and more boisterous, and she was likely to greet him with (*and Ken shuddered at the thought*) a pat on the back.

Ken sat on the couch and settled down with a sigh; watching the children from the corner of his eye as they played together.

Katie and Jezabeth sat close together showing Benny the pictures they had finished colouring before he had arrived— And poor Jareth was trying to edge away from Becky, who had decided she wanted to be as close as possible to him while he sat on the rug.

He shuffled sideways, only for Becky to do the same.

Then he gave her an awkward push away from himself; which she ignored as she ducked under his arm and gave him a hug.

‘Ew!’ Jareth grunted, before accepting defeat and letting Becky cling to him as he picked up the crayons. ‘You better have had your cootie shots!’

It made Ken chuckle; though he made a mental note to talk to Becky about respecting the boy’s boundaries, when he got the opportunity.

‘Hmp!’ Becky gave a loud grunt, then, to get Jareth’s attention.

‘What?’

‘What’s the day?’ she asked.

‘Sunday,’ Jareth told her, picking out a colouring page and trying to give it to her.

‘School tomorrow,’ Becky muttered, ignoring the page she was offered and instead squeezing Jareth tighter.

‘Mhm, yeah. It is.’

‘Hate school. Not fun. Sucks. Stupid.’

‘Yeah, school is stupid,’ Jareth agreed. ‘But at least we can see each other during lunch!’

‘*Stupid*,’ Becky repeated. ‘I wanna see you *in* class!’

‘But you’re in grade three!’ Jareth argued. ‘I’m just grade two.’

‘Stupid!’

‘No I’m not—’

‘*School’s* stupid. Not you. You’re smart,’ Becky declared. ‘Smart enough for fourth grade, I bet! Yep. That smart.’

‘Really? You think?’

‘Yep!’ Becky replied; then, immediately sunk her teeth into Jareth’s arm.

‘OW! BECKY!’ Jareth shrieked. ‘I didn’t even *do* anything!’

Becky let out a snarl as she was shoved firmly across the rug. She then scampered onto all fours and arched her back like an angry cat, and hissed.

‘BABY! YOU’RE A BABY! DIDN’T EVEN BITE YOU HARD!’

‘That doesn’t *matter*!’ Jareth retorted. ‘You don’t *bite people*! If you weren’t a

girl I'd beat you up!'

Another snarl from Becky, and Ken leapt to his feet to pick her up. He struggled to keep his grip on her as she wiggled and growled— He was all the way in the dining room when he finally managed to heft her up into a proper hold.

'Why did you bite Jareth?' he asked.

'I dunno,' Becky replied with a frustrated snort.

'You don't know?' Ken repeated, letting out a heavy sigh. 'Did he make you mad?'

'No. We were having fun.'

'So *why* did you—'

'I DUNNO!' Becky repeated, loudly. 'I just had to!'

'You can't just—' Ken cut off as he made it to the kitchen, and simply sighed as he set Becky down at Isa's feet. 'She bit Jareth.'

'Oh, Becky, *why*?' Isa asked, putting down the knife she was using and lifting Becky up onto her hip. 'I thought you liked Jareth!'

'I do,' Becky mumbled, resting her head on Isa's shoulder.

'So why did you bite him?'

'I dunno...' Becky mumbled. Then, after a pause, she growled. 'Tasted bad.'

'I would *think* so,' Isa responded; motioning with a hand for Ken to leave.

'Have you ever bitten someone and thought they tasted *good*?'

'No....'

'Well, then, maybe you shouldn't keep—'

Ken didn't hear the last of the conversation as he turned out of the room and the blender was turned on.

Ken hurried back into the lounge, just in time to see Jareth's mother examining the boy's arm.

'You're alright,' she said. 'She didn't even leave a mark.'

'She's not meant to bite, though!' Jareth huffed. 'Why does she always try and bite me? We weren't even fighting!'

Mrs Slader let out a sigh. 'Sometimes, when someone like Becky is feeling a lot of feelings —any kind of feelings— they get confused on how to express them. And then they feel overwhelmed, and do things like bite.'

'*Hmp...*' Jareth pouted. 'That's dumb.'

'That's just how it is,' Mrs Slader sighed. 'Are you alright? Do you want to go home?'

Jareth shook his head. 'No. I'm having fun, even if Becky's being weird again.'

Mrs Slader kissed her son, and then joined Barbra and headed back to the hall to talk.

Ken sighed as he was left alone with the children again.

Katie hadn't seemed to care about the little fight; she was too distracted with her art— And she quickly pulled a nervous-looking Jezzibeth back down to colour the picture with her.

*At least the girls were okay....*

The Slader boys, however, were both staring at Jareth's arm.

'She did *too* leave a mark,' Jareth pouted.

'Where?' Benny asked.

'There!'

'I can't see it!'

'*There!*' Jareth complained. Then rolled his eyes and looked to Ken.

Ken flinched, backing up and tripping into the couch as the Slader brothers approached him. 'H-Hey, boys.... Are you alright? She didn't bite you too hard?'

Jareth shook his head before climbing onto the couch beside Ken and examining his arm again. Benny climbed up beside him and stared at Jareth's arm again, as well.

Then, after a moment, Benny looked up at Ken.

'Dad says we have to be nice to Becky!' the boy said. 'Even when she does stuff like this.'

'Yeah,' Jareth agreed. 'Cos she's different.'

'Yeah! She's weird and slow!'

'Benny!' Jareth smacked his brother. 'We're not meant to call her slow, Mum said that's rude!'

'But Mr Miller says—'

'Dad said Mr Miller's a *dick!*' Jareth declared, loudly.

'Jareth!' Mrs Slader called. 'Mind your language!'

'Oh— Sorry, Mum!' Jareth called back.

Then, the two boys climbed off the chair and made for the colouring pages again.

'Wait,' Ken put a hand on Benny's shoulder to stop him running off. 'Mr Miller, as in... your *teacher?*'

'Uh-huh!' Benny nodded. 'I overheard him say it to Mr Crane when they were in the teacher's room because they were talking really loudly and the door was— The door was—' Benny took a deep breath so that he could continue his run-on sentence. 'And the door wasn't shut properly! And Mr Miller and Mr Crane were talking because Becky failed her test and—' Benny took another deep breath. 'And Mr Miller said that Becky was *slow!*'

'And what did Mr Crane say?'

'That if Mr Miller said it again, he was gonna make him get fired.'

'I might have to make him get fired...' Ken mumbled. *At least Mr Crane was on Becky's side....*

'Oh, yeah? That'd be good! He sucks!'

'Uh— What? No, um... just... go play?' realising that Benny was far too young to hear what he was thinking, Ken motioned to Jareth and the girls.

'Okay!' Benny said obediently, and hurried off to join them.

Ken let out a deep sigh and leant back in his chair.

He was *fuming*.

How *dare* Mr Miller talk about Rebecca that way!

He would have to talk to Barbra, about that....

And she was not going to be happy....

'Mr Bloom?'

A small hand tugged on his pant leg, and he had to quickly bury his rage as he looked down at Jezabeth.

'Jezabeth, hi, sweetheart. Are you having fun? What's wrong?'

'I'm thirsty.'

'Ah, yes, of course. Wait here, sweetheart,' Ken rose to his feet, and started



towards the kitchen.

‘Ken?’ Barbra’s voice called after him, and he was quickly joined by his wife and her friend.

He received a kiss on the cheek from his wife, which he happily leant into and returned— And then a pat on the shoulder from Mrs Slader, which made him flinch.

‘So, uh— I’m getting Jezzibeth a drink,’ Ken explained.

‘Ah, yes,’ Barbra chuckled. ‘I just wanted to check on Becky....’

‘Hm,’ Ken gave a nod, and then waved to Isa. ‘Isa, hello! Jezzibeth is thirsty. What is there to give her?’

‘Oh— I’ll take some drinks out for the kids,’ Isa offered; giving a sigh of relief as Barbra took Becky from her hip.

‘Oh, I was going to—’

‘Nonsense! It’s my job,’ Isa reassured, waving a hand and making for the fridge. ‘I should have brought some out ages ago— It completely slipped my mind!’

‘Well, it’s been a long day,’ Barbra reassured, warmly. ‘After lunch is done you should take a break.’

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ Isa gave a polite nod as she pulled out two pitchers from the fridge; one of juice, and one of water. She put them on a tray and made for the lounge. ‘I think I will take you up on that offer.’

‘Please do, you look like you need it. I don’t want you overworking yourself.’

‘Thank you, ma’am—’

‘Isa!’ Becky cried, trying to grab at the drow’s sleeve as she walked past. ‘Come back!’

‘Oh, Becky. I’m just giving your friends something to drink,’ Isa comforted.

‘Don’t you want to come and play with them?’

‘*Mmmm!*’ Becky pouted, burying her face into her mother’s shoulder as Isa left the room. ‘Don’t wanna. *No.*’

‘Oh, *hush,*’ Barbra chuckled, stroking the girl’s hair. ‘You *should* go and play. Jezzibeth’s here.’

‘*HMP,*’ Becky gave a grunt of displeasure (much to the amusement of all the adults).

‘Don’t grunt at me! You *like* Jezzibeth,’ Barbra scolded. ‘I know you do.’

‘No,’ Becky lied.

‘Yes, you do.’

‘No.’

‘Ah, so I should send her home, then?’

Becky gasped, and shook her head. ‘*NOOOOOO!*’

‘Ahah. So you *do* like her?’

Becky looked defeated; she obviously knew she couldn’t win the argument. ‘Yeah....’

‘Well, go play, then,’ Barbra told her, putting her on the ground.

Becky pouted and kicked at the floor before leaving the room in a huff.

Ken let out his breath as she did, and looked to see the humoured face his wife was making.

‘She’s impossible, sometimes, I swear!’ Barbra said.

‘She reminds me of you,’ Ken commented. Then took a sharp breath as he realised what he’d said. ‘I mean— She’s strong-willed, like you.’

Barbra laughed, and pecked a kiss onto her husband’s lips. ‘I know what you mean, honey, don’t worry.’

‘Good, good,’ Ken sighed, and tried to ignore Mrs Slader’s laughter.

*Hm....*

Barbra was so beautiful....

Ken had never felt more blessed then when he was looking into her deep, hazel eyes....

‘Ken?’ Isa’s voice called from the lounge. ‘Could you please come here a moment?’

Ken sighed and accepted another quick kiss from his wife before heading back into the crowded lounge room.

‘Isa?’ he asked, seeing the drow was holding his pouting daughter on her hip again. ‘Is everything alright?’

‘Hm...’ Isa gave Ken a look that clearly said *no*. ‘Becky? Do you want to tell your father what you just said to me?’

Becky shook her head.

‘I think you should.’

Becky then turned in Isa’s arms and reached out for her father, making a grabbing motion at him.

‘Oop, okay—’ Ken took his daughter, letting her wrap her arms tightly around him as she buried her face in his shoulder. ‘What is it, sweetheart?’

‘*Sad*,’ Becky mumbled.

‘Hmm?’

‘She says she’s feeling upset,’ Isa told Ken. ‘And that she wants you.’

‘Ah, well... I’m here,’ said Ken. ‘I’m right here for you.’

‘No you’re not,’ Becky mumbled.

‘I am.’

‘No. You’re not here.’

‘Yes I am, I’m holding you right now....’

Becky let out a long, mournful whine before squeezing her father painfully tight. ‘*Don’t go....*’

‘Hm...?’

‘Don’t go,’ Becky repeated. ‘Plane tomorrow. Don’t....’

‘Oh, sweetie, I *have* to go—’

‘*No!*’

‘Becky I—’

‘No! No! NO!’

‘Becky—’

Becky let out a shriek; a loud, ear-piercing one that dug into Ken’s ears and made his eyes water.

Worse, it was immediately echoed by Mimi upstairs, who began to shriek and wail and— Something shattered audibly to the floor, and Ken could only imagine the damage the creature was doing to Becky’s bedroom.

‘*Uh-oh*,’ Benny whispered loudly from his place on the floor; and Ken glanced at the group of nervous-looking children. ‘*She’s getting mad again....*’

Ken gave a sigh. 'Becky, please—'  
'NO!'

'Is everything alright?' Barbra's voice called out; followed by her appearance in the doorway. She made to grab her daughter, but only caused her to shriek again. 'What's wrong—'

'DON'T!' Becky cried, squeezing her father tight and refusing to let go.  
'HOME! DON'T HOME! NO HOME AND THE GO TO THERE!'

'What is she talking about—'

'*HURTING!*' Becky cried. 'STAY! HURTING! ME! ME! HURTING ME! STAY! NO!'

All Ken could do was sigh. 'She doesn't want us to leave tomorrow.'

'Becky...' Barbra echoed Ken's sigh, and gently ran a finger over her daughter's face to brush the hair from her eyes. 'Oh, Becky. Come here....'

Becky gave a sniff and released Ken; almost tumbling to the floor as she reached out for her mother. '*Stay!*'

'We can't, honey,' Barbra said, squeezing her daughter as another shriek escaped her. 'We have to go.'

'No you don't!'

'Yes, we do,' said Barbra, softly. 'If we didn't *have* to go we *wouldn't*.'

'Lying!'

'I'm not lying—'

'LYING!'

'I'm not.'

'*LYING!*'

Ken heard another cry, this one not from his daughter or her pet upstairs, and glanced over to see Jezzibeth had now teared up as well. Jareth was patting her on the back, but it didn't seem to be helping.

'Oh, no—' he scooped Jezzibeth up and held her close; trying to bounce her comfortingly as she clung to him. 'It's okay, Jezzibeth. It's okay.'

Jezzibeth sniffed, burying her face into Ken's shoulder, and began to sob.

He had no idea what to do with her.

'Oh— Jezzibeth— No—'

Another wail from Becky, a screech from Mimi, and Jezzibeth's sobbing grew louder.

Ken had no idea what to do— He could clearly see the other children starting to shuffle and grow restless, and both Barbra and Isa were already busy trying to calm Becky.

If they all started crying what was he going to do?!

'Aw, no, poor things,' Mrs Slader's voice cut through the crying as she hurried over to take Jezzibeth from Ken. 'Here, give her to me— Boys? C'mon, boys! Let's head out the back, yeah? Give Becky some privacy. Katie! You too, young lady, come on.'

'*Thank you,*' Ken managed as he was relinquished of the small, crying girl.  
'*Thank you!*'

'It's fine— You go deal with yours, right?'

'Y-Y-Yes, thank you.'

Ken looked over to his daughter, now wailing loudly in her mother's arms, and

wished that there was something —*anything*— that he could do so that he could stay with her.

But they had to leave tomorrow.

They *had* to....

—END—

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