

Selfish

By C. Jade Wyton

After the death of his wife, Ken Bloom can't bear to be apart from his daughter, Becky. He takes her with him while he works instead of leaving her home with the maid as he used to; the thought of being apart from her is too painful. But, eventually, he has to come to terms with the fact he can't care for her on his own.

Contains mentions of suicide, grief, self-harm, and child neglect.

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It had been the worst year of Ken's life.

After Barbra's suicide Ken had felt empty. His heart was a void that nothing could ever, ever fill again.

Not the way *she* had filled it.

Desperately, he had clung to what little he had left— His work, and his daughter.

*Becky.*

She was all he had, now. And he was terrified to let her go.

She hadn't wanted to travel with him. She'd made it clear she'd wanted to stay in Shadow Oaks with her friends.

Her pet mimic.

And *Isa*.

Ken knew it was wrong to make her come with him. But he couldn't— He couldn't leave her behind. Not again.

The thought of it made him sick.

He'd missed *twelve years* of her life! And there just.... There wasn't enough time anymore.

He thought he had time, but Barbra's death was sobering.

It could all end in a night.

Just one night apart and he could lose her, too.

He knew it was wrong to make her come with him. He knew he was smothering her. But he couldn't stop himself.

*He could lose her, just like he'd lost her mother....*

It was wrong to have forced her to come here.

She was grieving, just like he was.

And now she was away from home. Away from her friends. Away from everything she found comforting and safe.

Ken closed his eyes, and leant his head against the bathroom door as Becky let out another wail.

*He was so incredibly selfish.... But he just couldn't help himself.*

'Becky, please,' Ken begged, trying the handle again even though he knew it was still locked. 'Let me in.'

'No!'

‘Becky—‘

‘NO!’

He’d just wanted her to be clean for dinner. But at the suggestion of washing her hoodie—that *damn* purple hoodie, that she’d worn day and night since her mother died— she’d had a complete meltdown and locked herself in the bathroom.

And could he blame her?

This was the worst year of Ken’s life. But it had been a hundred times worse for Becky.

He had never trusted his coworkers integrity. Not really.

But she had been *twelve* at the time.

They *knew* she had been twelve.

But that hadn’t stopped them from treating her like shit.

She’d experienced the worst of Ken’s work; from a group of queens screaming and throwing things at her, to his piece of shit boss making that *fucking comment* about the age of consent....

He’d never seen her so scared before. And he’d never been so *furious*.... Nor had he ever felt so out of control, before.

If Becky hadn’t started crying he was sure he would have beat that man to death like he deserved....

But he didn’t want Becky to see that.

He was so ashamed she’d seen that part of him. That horrible, violent, angry side of himself he kept pushed down.

He wished, with all his heart, that she hadn’t had to see him lose his temper.

*But at least it meant the people he worked with had finally left his daughter alone....*

Ken sighed.

After all Becky had been through because of him, could he blame her for being scared of being apart from the *one* thing that reminded her of home?

‘Becky, sweetheart, please let me in,’ Ken said, gently. ‘I’m worried.’

‘No!’ Becky cried again. ‘You’ll make me take it off!’

‘You need to bathe, Becky.’

‘I don’t want to!’

‘You *need* to bathe.’

‘*I don’t want to!*’ her words were barely audible over her own sobs. ‘If I do, you’ll take it away! And you’ll put it in the wash! And— And— It’ll go missing! It’ll go missing like my shirts did!’

‘No,’ Ken reassured gently. ‘It won’t.’

‘It will! Someone will take it! And I’ll never have it again!’

‘It won’t.’

‘It will!’

‘I promise it won’t.’

‘*It will!*’ Becky sobbed. ‘It will! And I don’t want to lose it!’

‘I promise you, I won’t let it go missing,’ Ken sighed. ‘And if it does, I’ll... I’ll get you another—‘

‘*I DON’T WANT ANOTHER!*’ Becky shrieked, causing her father to flinch away from the door. ‘IT WON’T BE THE SAME IF I GET ANOTHER!’

‘Becky— Please don’t yell—‘

‘JARETH GAVE ME THIS ONE!’ Becky sobbed. ‘JARETH GAVE ME THIS ONE! I CAN’T GET ANOTHER! IT WON’T BE THE SAME! IT WON’T BE THE SAME—‘

‘*TAIS-TOI!*’ a voice yelled from a neighbouring room.

‘CONNARD!’ Ken shouted back. ‘OCCUPE-TOI DE TES OIGNONS!’

Becky let out a wail at her father’s angry shout, and Ken quickly composed himself.

‘Okay! Okay. *Okay...*’ Ken said, gently lowering his voice to try and calm Becky. ‘I understand. I understand.’

‘You don’t!’

‘I do.’

‘You don’t!’

‘I promise I do.’

More loud sobbing, which Ken echoed with a sigh.

‘Becky— Listen—‘ Ken swallowed, and leant back against the door. ‘Listen to me. Okay? I won’t let it get lost. I promise. I’ll... I’ll wash it right here. In the sink. Not the laundry room. The sink. You can watch me the whole time. Okay? It won’t leave the hotel room.’

Becky gave an audible sniff, and Ken heard her shuffling towards the door....

Then it unlocked. And she opened it a crack and peeked out.

‘*Promise?*’ she whispered.

‘I promise,’ Ken replied, softly. ‘May I come in?’

Slowly, the door opened and Ken was finally allowed to enter the bathroom.

He threw his arms around his daughter, who stiffened and didn’t hug him back.

‘Thank you, Rebecca,’ he said softly, breaking away and looking his daughter over.

She’d scratched at her face again while she’d cried. Luckily she hadn’t broken the skin, but even so there were long red welts along her cheeks and neck. *No—*

The marks on her neck weren’t all scratches, Ken noticed. Some were sores; irritated patches of skin caused by the crusted dirt caught in the fold of her neck.

Instinctively, Ken placed a hand under his daughter’s chin and tried to tilt her head to get a better look. But before he could she pulled away and lifted her hood’s collar to hide herself from him.

*God, when had that happened?*

He hadn’t realised she wasn’t washing herself properly. She was thirteen, he would have thought that she—

He cursed himself; it was *his* fault. He was responsible for her. He should have paid more attention....

*Barbra would never have let it get this bad.*

The thought made him sick to his stomach.

Barbra would never have let Becky go even a *day* without bathing— But Ken... Ken couldn’t remember the last time he’d heard her have a shower.

He’d just *assumed* she’d been doing it while he was at work....

Oh, god.

*God.*

He was a terrible father.

He had no clue what he was doing. No idea how look after his own daughter....

'Becky, let me see your neck,' Ken said, reaching for his daughter again. 'Let me see....'

He pulled her hoodie back and the collar of her shirt down to reveal her neck and shoulders.

It was even worse than he first thought.

'Becky, you need to shower,' he said, as gently as he could.

Becky shook her head.

'Becky—' a sigh, and Ken rubbed the bridge of his nose. 'Please. You can do it while I'm washing your clothes.'

Becky shuffled from foot-to-foot before she pulled her hoodie back tight around herself. 'I don't want you to wash it,' she said.

'I know, but I have to,' Ken told her, taking one of the sleeves and pointing to a dark mark on it. 'It's dirty, see? What... what would *Jareth* say if he saw how dirty it was?'

'Mm...' Becky looked to the floor, her ears drooping— And Ken knew he'd hit the right nerve. 'He'd... be sad.'

'Oui, he would,' Ken agreed; trying not to let Becky's miserable expression get to him. 'So please let me wash it. Just... here....'

Slowly, Ken slipped the hoodie off his daughter. He placed it gently in the sink, pushing in the plug and turning on the water to fill it, before turning back to her.

She was trembling, and staring up at him with tired eyes. She looked smaller than she did before as she shrunk into herself— And Ken was very careful as he reached for her and helped her remove the rest of her clothes.

*More scabs.*

Becky was covered in scabs. And acne. And scratches.

When had she gotten this bad?

Ken hadn't even noticed; he'd been too busy....

Too busy for his own daughter.

He turned off the sink.

And then leant on it, staring at himself in the mirror.

He looked as tired as his daughter did.

*He couldn't do this.*

He needed Becky. But he couldn't care for her. Not on his own.

And it wasn't fair on her.

It wasn't fair that she suffered because of his failings....

'Becky, bébé,' he addressed his daughter softly; watching her through the mirror. 'Please get in the shower.'

Quietly, Becky turned away and started adjusting the water— And Ken had to resist the urge to go back to staring at his own reflection.

Instead he began washing the hoodie.

He was very careful; some of the teeth decorating the hood were starting to come loose, and one of the embroidered eyes was fraying, and... he didn't want to think of his daughter's reaction if he damaged it further....

He would have to fix it.

It wouldn't be hard; he'd fixed it before. The hardest part of the process would be getting Becky to trust him with it long enough to make the repairs....

*God, how dirty was this thing?!*

The water in the sink was already discoloured and stunk like an old fridge.

He hadn't even used washing liquid to loosen the dirt.

He emptied the sink and refilled it— And then again. And again.

It took over six washes before the water started coming out clear.

The hoodie was a much brighter purple afterwards, too.

Ken let out a long, heavy sigh as he heard Becky turn off the shower. He watched her through the mirror as she stepped out and began to dry herself off; the red sores on her body irritated by her attempts to wash them.

*God....*

How had he let it get this bad?

How had he let his daughter suffer like this?

*Barbra would be ashamed of him.*

Ken felt his hands trembling as he wrung out the hoodie.

He was being selfish, keeping Becky here when he couldn't care for her properly.

But he couldn't bare the thought of sending her home. Of doing his awful job, surrounded by awful people, only to come back to an empty hotel room.

He couldn't bare the thought of being so completely alone....

*Barbra would be so, so ashamed of him.*

Ken let out his breath as he hung the jacket up on the towel rack.... And had to grab his daughter's hands to stop her taking it off and putting it back on.

'Let it dry,' he told her; petting her hair softly when she shuffled anxiously. 'It's okay. It's right here. Nothing is going to happen to it.... Come on. Let's get you into some clean clothes.'

'Mm,' Becky gave a nervous hum as she was led out of the bathroom. She didn't take her eyes off her jacket for as long as possible; craning her neck and trying to dig in her heels as she was pulled out of the bathroom.

And then, as soon as it was out of her sight, she burst into tears again.

'Becky— Becky. *Shh...*' Ken pulled his daughter close and gave her a tight hug. 'It's okay. It's okay....'

He led his daughter to her bed and sat her down; drying her face as best he could as she sniffed and sobbed.

'It's okay,' he said again, planting a kiss on her cheek when she shook her head at him. 'It is. I promise it is.'

Becky gave a loud sniff and flopped over heavily, burying herself into her pillow to cry.

All Ken could do was watch as her entire body shook with sobs.

*When had he let it get this bad?*

He was supposed to be responsible for her.

He was her father, for *god's sake*.

He was supposed to look after her.

And care for her.

And keep her safe.

But instead, he'd been selfish. He'd dragged her away from everything and

everyone she loved. He'd brought her to a country where she didn't even speak the language— And he'd been so busy he hadn't even made sure she was *bathing*.

Barbra would be ashamed of him.

*He was ashamed of himself.*

Ken sat on his own bed, opposite his daughter's, and watched as she wailed into her pillow.

He knew it. Even if he didn't want to face it.

He needed her... but it didn't matter what *he* needed.

This was his daughter.

And the only thing that should have ever mattered to him was what *she* needed.

And she needed to go home.

—END—

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