

# Tattoo

By C. Jade Wyton

*A young Becky Bloom is having doubts about her relationship. She misses the friends that her girlfriend has convinced her to cut herself off from, and is ready to make up any excuse to see them— Even if it means pretending to want a tattoo.*

***Contains descriptions of abuse, and racism.***

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It had been a long, boring Saturday morning.

There hadn't been too much business, today. Just a young girl coming in to pierce her ears (which Dolly had taken care of) and a touch-up on an older tattoo from a regular.

There wasn't much excitement. Though Troy had a sinking feeling in his gut that something was coming.

He couldn't place it. But today had an *energy* about it. The same sort of energy he would feel before heading into his yard to find young Rebecca Bloom flat on her back, staring at the stars after attempting (and failing) to scale her way up to one of his son's bedrooms.

But he hadn't seen Becky in a long, long time.

Not since December and her fight with Jareth almost three months ago.

Becky Bloom; the girl who used to have to be pulled off his sons like velcro, now couldn't be convinced to walk past their house....

It was a real shame. Close to two decades of making up any and all excuses to see each other, and it seemed like the friendship might actually be... *ending*.

It felt unbelievable.

He'd heard from his sons that they still talked to Becky in a text chat together, but it was always awkward and strained. And she wouldn't even *look* at them in public, in fear that her girlfriend would see them and throw a tantrum.

*Mattel Masters.*

Troy scowled at the name.

*Masters.*

He couldn't believe such a loving, well-intentioned girl like Becky would get involved with *that* horrible family.

What was she *thinking*?!

Troy let out a heavy sigh, and began to neaten the piercings display.

Probably *nothing*.

As much as he loved that girl, her head served very little purpose. Something she'd gotten from her father... which, when combined with her mother's stubbornness, meant that she was nearly impossible to keep out of trouble.

Trouble like what had happened with the Brimstones just last month; apparently Becky had broken into the junkyard with Mattel and caused some serious property damage.

Troy's hands faltered, and he bumped several of the display items over—  
*Dammit!*

Dolly had told him that Diana had said that Jed had told Otto about it: Mattel had set a *fire*, and then left Becky behind to take the heat from it. Both the figurative, *and* literal meanings of the phrase....

*She was just lucky the crazy old coot hadn't shot her!*

Troy rubbed his brow. The thought of Jed shooting Becky was so terrible he felt his entire body tense for a moment before he shook his head and continued to rearrange the display.

*Hopefully she'd find her senses, soon.*

The bell by the shop door jingled, then, and Troy waved a hand over his shoulder as he kept at his work.

'Hey, sorry!' he called, not looking back. 'I'll just be a minute. You good to wait?'

A moment of silence followed, before a very quiet, very nervous, *very* familiar voice spoke.

'Yeah, I can wait.'

Troy whirled around when he heard her. 'Becky!'

She was *here*? In his *shop*?!

*Right in front of him!*

His arms were around her in moments, squeezing her tight in greeting.

And she squeezed him back; a good sign.

A *very* good sign!

'Oh, Becky,' he breathed as he finally broke away from her— Or tried and failed to break away, as she held him for another moment longer. 'What are you doing here? Is everything alright?'

Becky let out a long sigh before letting Troy go. For a moment, her expression faltered and Troy saw her exhaustion... but just for one moment before her lips twitched into that old, practised smile he knew *far* too well from her.

*Ah. The poor thing. She was clearly having a hard time....*

'Becky? Are you alright?' he asked again.

'I'm fine, Mr Slader,' Becky answered, her voice high in that way that it used to get when she would lie about having nightmares. 'I'm just, um....'

Troy waited as Becky trailed off; something she used to do a lot... though, this time, she didn't even *try* to find the words. She just looked too stressed. So he offered her an ending to her sentence. 'Looking... for Jareth or Benny?'

Becky shook her head.

'Hm?' that was odd. 'So are you here to see Dolly or me, then?'

She nodded.

'Third lot of ear piercings?' he guessed.

'No.'

'No? Then... ah, a naval piece like Marilyn?'

Becky looked queasy at the suggestion— And Troy suddenly remembered both her fear of needles and the horrifying belief she'd had as a child that her belly button was an open hole that could be used to access her organs (whatever had convinced her of that, he would *never* understand!).

'What is it, then?'

'I uh...' Becky couldn't meet Troy's eye; she had that look she always had before she told a ridiculous lie. 'I want a tattoo.'

He absolutely did *not* believe her.

'Do you, now?' despite his disbelief, Troy thought it might be best to play along. Try and figure out what the girl *actually* wanted. 'Hm, well. Do you have a design in mind?'

Becky shook her head again.

*Of course she didn't.*

Because this wasn't what she wanted.

'Are you sure about this, Becky?' he asked. 'I know you can be impulsive....'

'Weeeell...' Becky drawled the word as she planted herself down in a nearby seat, and Troy knew by her tone what she was *really* wanting was about to come out. 'Why don't I just, like, sit here and think about it for a while longer?'

Ah.

*That* was it.

She just wanted to sit in the store.

She clearly missed them.

She missed Troy and his family. But she needed an excuse to see them to keep Mattel from chiding her about it... and a tattoo must have been the only thing she could think of that wouldn't be over and done with in a minute.

'Good idea,' said Troy, pulling out some of his art folders to give her something to flick through and hopefully help her feel less anxious. He deliberately put the ones with the tattoos he thought she might like most on the bottom, so she had good reason to stay longer. 'Make sure you take your time. We don't close anytime soon, and this is a very big decision to be making.'

Becky nodded, settling down and flicking through the books.... One page at a time. Very, very slowly.

It was far, *far* longer than she needed to look to figure out if she wanted a tattoo of a flaming skull facing to the left... or a flaming skull facing to the right... or a flaming skull face-on.... But Troy didn't say anything about it. Instead, he sat down with her as she looked; just grateful to be able to be with her for a moment after so long.

*He'd have to handle this situation with Mattel delicately, he thought. Becky was stubborn, and if he said the wrong thing he could end up driving her away again.*

It took almost thirty minutes for Troy to think of something to say. And as Becky was finishing the first folder, and thumbing the cover of the second one anxiously, he cleared his throat.

'So,' he started, slowly. 'I hear that you and Mattel are having your anniversary next month?'

'Uh... oh, no,' Becky shook her head, and Troy raised a brow. 'Um... that was just when we started being, like, *public* about dating. But uh... we actually started dating in January....'

'Oh, I see,' Troy gave a slow nod. 'My mistake.... How did it go?'

Becky didn't answer; not with words. But the way she shifted in her seat, and tensed her jaw, and refused to meet his eye.... Troy knew it hadn't gone well.

*Poor thing....*

‘What did you two do?’ he tried; though he actually wanted to ask what *happened*.

‘We... went to dinner,’ said Becky. ‘And... um....’

Troy waited patiently, but Becky didn’t explain further before opening the second folder and focusing *far* too hard on it.

He didn’t push.

It wasn’t worth the risk.

Becky was here, trying to reach out, and if he said the wrong thing now he might lose her forever.

He had to be very, very careful....

‘Mattel doesn’t want me to get a tattoo,’ Becky blurted, working her thumb over the corner of the folder’s hard cover.

‘Doesn’t she?’ Troy asked. *And yet Becky had still come... maybe there was still some hope of her standing up for herself!*

Becky half-nodded. ‘Mm. And like. Even when I finally convinced her to let me get one, she didn’t want me to come *here* for it.’

‘Didn’t she?’ Troy had to hold back his scowl at her wording; *let* her get a tattoo? It was *her* body, wasn’t it?

A tiny shake of the head, and Becky averted her gaze again. ‘She said if I was *going* to get a tattoo I should *at least* get it from somewhere...’ she trailed off, her cheeks pink, and Troy knew Mattel had insulted him. ‘B-But, like... I told her that I’ve known you, like, *forever*. And that, like, I trust you more than anyone to, like. Do a good job.’

He wished he could be proud of the compliment, but... it stung. Not because it was said while trying to deflect an insult. But because he knew that, though she’d probably meant it, it still was only *half* the reason she’d come *at most*.

‘I’m proud of you for standing up for yourself,’ Troy said, gently, as he pet her on the back. ‘It’s not always easy....’

*Especially when your girlfriend is a controlling bitch.*

He bit back the last part of his sentence as Becky nodded in agreement.

‘I, um...’ Becky half-closed the book and twitched an ear towards Troy; a sign she was about to ask something serious. ‘Has Mrs Slader ever been mad at you, before?’

*Oh boy....*

‘That depends on what you mean by mad,’ he said, carefully.

‘Like... *I dunno*,’ Becky sighed, fully closing the book and resting her head on her arms; half-laying across the counter. ‘I know it’s, like, normal to be mad at each other sometimes and stuff, but it feels like she’s mad at me *all the time*, lately.’

Troy placed a hand on Becky’s shoulder and she lifted her head to look at him.

‘I can’t seem to do *anything* right,’ Becky confessed. ‘But, like... *she* can’t seem to do anything *wrong!*’

Troy gave an understanding nod as Becky sat up straight again, motioning widely with her hands.

‘Like! Even when she does something that upsets me, somehow *she* ends up being the one who’s upset and *I* end up having to apologise to *her!*’

‘Apologise for what?’ Troy asked, slowly.

Becky shrugged, looking exasperated. 'I don't even know anymore!'

A moment of quiet passed, before Troy sighed. 'Dolly's never been mad at me like *that* before.'

The uneasy look Becky gave him squeezed his heart, but also gave him hope—She was having doubts about Mattel.

There was a chance she could still be saved from all this mess.

But he had to be *careful*.

'Mr Slader?' Becky broke the silence before Troy was able to. 'Am I... ugly?'

'What would *ever* put *that* idea in your mind?!' Troy's hand slammed into the counter in his shock, and he stared at the girl. 'Rebecca Bloom, you are *beautiful*! Who's been making you feel *ugly*? Who's put that thought in your head?!'

The way Becky bit her lip and looked to the floor made it very clear who'd said it.

*Mattel. Fucking. Masters.*

'It was Mattel, wasn't it?'

'She doesn't mean to,' Becky muttered. 'She just worries.'

'Worries?'

'About my health and stuff. And how other people see me.'

'How *other people* see you?' Troy echoed. 'And what does she say about how *other people* see you?'

'I dunno, like.... She says that, like.... I dunno,' Becky shrugged. 'She fusses, I guess. Like, she's always fixing my hair cos its a mess. Or she says my clothes don't match. And she worries that I'm, like, gaining weight....'

Troy took a deep, trembling breath as he swallowed back his anger. Then, he placed a hand under Becky's chin and tenderly lifted her eyes to his own.

'*Becky*,' he said, softly. 'She shouldn't talk to you like that. *Nobody* should talk to you like that. You deserve better.'

Becky opened her mouth, though she didn't make a retort as she stared at Troy.

Then, she scowled, and turned away again. 'Look it's— It's nothing! I'm not explaining it right.'

*She was putting up her walls, again....*

Troy sat back, putting physical distance between himself and the girl in hopes of helping her relax.

'That's alright,' he waved a dismissive hand, and tried to sound lighthearted. 'I know you can have trouble getting out the right words. I understand.'

He was lying, of course.

There was no *better* way to explain it.

Mattel was clearly abusing her.

But if he said it, he *knew* it would just drive Becky further away.... So it was a relief when she relaxed her shoulders and gave Troy a weak smile.

'*Thanks*,' she said, so quietly he almost missed it. Then she cleared her throat and slumped back over the tattoo folders. 'I uh.... I can't really see anything I'm too into, and I have to go soon. Isa wants me to like, do a family thing. With Dad.... *Eugh*.'

Troy chuckled as Becky pulled a face —looking much more like her old self—and slid Troy's books back towards him.

Though she didn't get out of her seat.

She stayed in place for a long moment as her ears drooped, and she looked like she was looking for an excuse to stay.

*Hmm....*

Troy stood, and began to return the folders to their shelf.

*Perhaps they could drag this out as long as possible for her....*

'Well, why don't you come back in later this week?' he suggested. 'When you have more time? There's no rush for you to get this tattoo. In fact, I think it would be better if you came in a few more times just to be *sure* you find one you *really* like.... If you come in on Tuesday, I can get the boys to help you.'

*That* perked her up.

The twitch in her ear. The widening of her eyes. How she shifted in her seat to sit up straighter— It was clear to Troy that she wanted to see his sons.

'Yeah!' she beamed. 'Tuesday! That'd be *great!*'

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Benny couldn't keep his eyes off the door.

Becky was coming.

He hadn't believed his father, when he'd said Becky was coming into the store today to look at tattoos. Neither had Jareth— But the boys had messaged her and she'd confirmed it, and now they were both waiting anxiously for her to come in.

Jareth couldn't stop pacing.

Troy had told him to sit down, saying he was going to wear a hole into the floor if he kept that up.

But Jareth couldn't sit still.... And Benny couldn't blame him.

This was *Becky*.

They hadn't seen Becky in *so long*.

Not since Jareth had gotten into that fight with her over the Christmas holidays, and Becky had told him that "maybe they shouldn't talk anymore."

That had been a dark month. Jareth had been so broken up by it that Benny wasn't sure if he was *ever* going to come out of his room.

If they lived in a cartoon, Benny was sure it would be one of those scenes where the entire room was flooded with tears and the characters got washed out into the street when the door burst open.

But then they'd made up in January.

Kind of.

Jareth had waited for signs that Becky had stopped acting crazy and then messaged her.... And she'd started talking to them both again. Which Benny was grateful for— Though he missed talking to her *in person*.

It was weird to have to keep his distance from Becky.

He almost *missed* how much she'd invade his space....

Benny glanced to his brother, and immediately heard the front door bell jingle—

Both he and Jareth let out disappointed sighs when they saw it wasn't Becky. It was just *some guy* coming in to look at the piercing section....

Benny rose from his seat and went to stand by Jareth as he returned to

pacing.

‘Hey,’ he mumbled to his brother.

‘*Mmm,*’ Jareth whined back, crossing his arms in an anxious way. ‘She should be here soon, shouldn’t she? It’s almost closing time! She should *be* here.’

‘I dunno, maybe she read the clock wrong again,’ Benny suggested. *Or maybe she’d ditched them again....*

‘Maybe.... Maybe...’ Jareth said absent-mindedly, before turning to Benny with wide eyes. ‘Does my hair look alright?’

‘Yeah it’s fine,’ Benny sighed. *Though, did it even matter?*

Becky was dating Mattel now, and it wasn’t like Jareth was going to impress her.

He’d lost his chance— He should have just taken the advice Benny had offered him in junior year and asked Becky out *properly*. Instead of assuming whatever casual thing they had going on would be enough.

But there was always *some* sort of excuse for him not to tell Becky how he felt....

‘*Is that Becky’s car?*’ Jareth squeaked, hurrying over to the shop window and fixing his hair. ‘She’s here— Oh, god, she’s here! Dad, how do I look?!’

‘Fine, Jareth,’ Troy said, stepping to his son’s side and putting his hands on his shoulders. ‘Relax. Jareth— Listen. Relax. You don’t want to scare her off again, do you? We have to be careful how we handle this, okay?’

Jareth nodded. Then, waved happily through the window as Becky climbed out of her (entirely *too* pink) car.

She looked like she was fighting every muscle in her body just to *not* fling herself through the glass window into Jareth’s arms.

Benny could see that Becky was so tense as she waved back and made her way to the door.

Jareth was at her in a moment, instinctively lifting his arms for a hug— But Becky shook her head and held up her hand, muttering something about Mattel.

Benny wasn’t sure what he and Jareth had been expecting.

*Of course* Becky wasn’t going to hug him.

They didn’t have that kind of friendship, anymore....

But, somehow, Benny found he was still disappointed.

And the handshake that he greeted Becky with felt like more a punch to the gut, than a hello.

She gripped his hand so hard, like she was an alien trying to control herself and not fly into a flesh-eating frenzy.

Benny was sure he was going to get a bruise on his hand from how hard Becky squeezed it....

And as they made their way to the back room (as Troy suggested, so they could talk and have some privacy) she kept fidgeting. As if fighting her own arms for control.

The three of them sat down on some spare chairs....

And then just continued sitting.

In silence.

Awkwardly not-looking at each other.

*Someone had to say something.*

Benny cleared his throat. 'So. You want a tattoo?'  
'Yeah,' Becky nodded.  
'But you, uh... don't know what?'  
Becky shook her head.  
'Hm...' Benny slouched, crossing his arms tightly. 'So you're being weird and crazy and impulsive again, huh?'  
'*Benny!*' Jareth hissed, smacking his brother.  
'What? She is!'  
'Don't *say* that!'  
'Why not? It's true.'  
'Yeah but you don't *say* it!'  
Becky giggled, and both boys went quiet and turned to her.  
'What?' Benny asked.  
'You're acting like kids again,' Becky told them, her grin pressing up the corners of her eyes in a way that Benny hadn't seen in a *long* time.  
It made his heart squeeze tight. And by the look on Jareth's, it had squeezed his too hard and made his heart shatter into a thousand pieces.  
He could see his brother leaning forward, his wheeled chair edging slowly towards Becky as he slowly lifted his arms and—  
She couldn't fight it, either, and embraced him back. So tight that Benny could see her fingers digging in to dent his shoulders.  
They hugged for a long while; Becky's knuckles paling to an even whiter shade than usual as she squeezed Jareth....  
Then Benny let out a chuckle and she pulled away from his brother, turning to him and gripping him so hard he had trouble breathing.  
*She was trembling*, Benny thought as he lay his hands on her back. *God, what was Mattel doing to her?!*

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Mattel thought this entire situation was ridiculous.  
It had been *two weeks*, and Becky *still* hadn't picked out what tattoo she was going to get. Two whole weeks, and not a *single* one had seemed to interest her.  
It was almost like Becky didn't want to get a tattoo, at all!  
Which *couldn't* have been it, because Becky didn't lie to her. Becky *never* lied to her. About *anything*.  
So it must have been those *orcs*.  
They must have been confusing Becky.  
It was clear to Mattel that those people ("*people*") were deliberately keeping Becky from making a decision; they wanted her to come back, over and over and over. So they could get back in her head and control her again.  
It made Mattel so mad!  
Becky was a good person, but she was so misguided it was almost scary. The things she'd grown up believing —the things that *freak drow* had made her think were true— Mattel had spent a long, careful time putting Becky's mind right about it all. And now those stupid brutes were trying to take Becky away from her again!



Every time she went into that stupid store, she was risking those Slader freaks hurting her, or worse—

Undoing all of the hard work she and Becky had done together, to make Becky *civilised* and *functioning* and *normal*.

It scared Mattel. She didn't want to lose Becky. Not like this.

Those orcs were all bikies, weren't they? In that terrifying gang that always rode around town....

They'd use Becky until she was an empty shell, Mattel was sure of that. And then once they got bored of her they'd probably sell her for beer or drugs or guns.

And Mattel worried that, even after all that could happen, she might still be the one bailing Becky out. She thought, if it came down to it, she would brave a bunch of green-skinned barbarians to keep Becky safe.

*Knock knock.*

A timid, familiar knock sounded on Mattel's bedroom door, and she spun around in her chair. 'Beck! Come in! How'd it go? Did you find one you liked?'

'No,' Becky answered, her tone apologetic as Mattel sighed.

*Of course.*

That was just *typical* of her....

Was she going to have to go in with Becky to make sure this got done?

Her skin crawled at the idea; though she quickly pushed it to the back of her mind as she motioned Becky over and sat her girlfriend down in her lap, pecking a kiss onto her lips and ignoring that *awful* leathery smell that had been clinging to her lately.

Becky let out a long sigh and leant forward, burying her face into Mattel's shoulder and hugging her tight.

'Aw, Beck,' Mattel sighed into Becky's hair. 'Are you alright? Did something happen?'

Mattel felt Becky shake her head before she mumbled, 'I'm just... *tired*.'

'I'm not surprised,' Mattel ran a comforting hand along Becky's back, rubbing up and down as her girlfriend held her tight. 'You've been trying to figure this out for *weeks*! And I just don't think they're doing a very good job helping you— Perhaps you really should go somewhere else?'

'Mm...' Becky pulled back, now, and Mattel could *feel* she was going to argue. 'I don't want to go somewhere else.'

Mattel didn't mean to frown, but she felt her brow furrowing into that ugly crease as Becky averted her gaze.

Why was Becky so firm on seeing these *orcs* for her tattoo? There were good artists up in Warm Waters she could go to— Why was she so determined to see the Sladers, specifically?

Well... Mattel thought she knew why.

*Jareth.*

She was sure Becky wasn't over him.

She knew that Becky would *never* cheat on her, of course— She trusted Becky to be faithful. *Completely*.

There was *no* doubt in Mattel's mind that Becky was being loyal— But Mattel didn't trust *Jareth* to not kidnap Becky and lock her in his wardrobe and brainwash her into thinking she was his pet or something.

‘Becky...’ Mattel gave a disapproving tut and shook her head. Even though she knew Becky was going to give the same answer as last time, she asked her again; ‘Why do you want Mr Slader to do your tattoo and not someone else?’

‘Because... I... um...’ Becky shifted, and Mattel had to hold her tighter to stop her slipping off her lap. ‘I’ve known Mr Slader for so long. And he’s, like... *really* good at what he does. I like. Trust him not to mess up and to like, do good by me.’

Mattel just sighed, at that.

Becky was wrong.

That man was *not* trustworthy.

He was probably thinking of the best way to trick Becky into his basement so he could trade her to a warlock pimp for cocaine or meth or whatever other crap orcs snorted.

But, it was clear to Mattel that she couldn’t *tell* Becky that. Not without her becoming defensive; so she just pecked a kiss on her cheek and spun back around to her computer.

If the Sladers were holding Becky back from making a choice, then *she* would have to help her girlfriend choose something.

‘Well,’ Mattel said slowly, trying to sound authoritative— Like she knew what she was talking about (because she *did*). ‘If you’re still determined to get this tattoo, I think that you and I should decide on the design *together*.’

‘Mm?’ Becky gave a nervous hum.

‘Come on, turn around,’ Mattel ordered, clicking open her web browser. ‘We’ll see if we can’t find something nice for you.’

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Dolly could hear Becky’s low whines over the sound of the tattoo gun’s buzz, and it broke her heart.

She really hoped the girl wasn’t going to regret this.

Troy and the boys had tried to talk her out of it, but she’d been firm. And it seemed there was nothing that they could do besides bar her from the parlour to stop her.... But they were scared if they did that, Becky would go somewhere else—somewhere that didn’t care about her— and she’d end up with even more regrets.

So now Becky was laying backwards on the flattened tattoo chair, gripping Dolly’s hand tight as Troy carefully put ink to skin and reminded her to hold still.

‘You’re doing really well,’ Dolly told her. ‘Breathe, sweetheart. Just breathe.’

Becky whined loudly, squeezing Dolly’s hand tighter and wrapping her ankles together.

‘Do you need to stop?’ Dolly asked.

Becky shook her head.

‘Okay,’ Dolly used her free hand to pet Becky’s hair. ‘If you’re sure.... You’ve got this. Okay?’

‘I’m more than halfway through the outline,’ Troy told her. ‘You just tell me if you need a break, okay?’

‘Mhm,’ Becky whimpered.

‘Breathe, Becky,’ Dolly reminded her. ‘Just focus on breathing, breathe....’

That's good. You're doing good.'

Becky's nails dug into Dolly's hand and she winced; though she didn't pull away or say anything about it.

*Where was that stupid Masters girl?* Dolly thought, bitterly. *Becky needed comfort. Her girlfriend should have been here with her.*

But she wasn't.

Of course she wasn't.

She *always* left Becky high and dry; only stepping up when it was *convenient* for her....

Becky let out another long whine, and Dolly bent down to plant an affectionate kiss into the girl's hair.

'You're alright,' she told her.

'Almost done,' Troy comforted. 'Just a couple more minutes. Do you need me to stop?'

'No,' Becky mumbled. '*Finish it.*'

'You're being *so* brave,' Dolly praised. 'Deep breath. You've got this.'

Becky let out another whine, and squeezed Dolly's hand again as Troy continued to tattoo her.

It was only about five minutes until he finished and leant back to examine his work.

*It was such an odd tattoo*, Dolly thought, watching as her husband cleaned and bandaged it. *Completely nonsensical; an apple that's leaves made it loosely resemble butterfly.*

But its nonsensical nature was why it suited Becky so well. It was cute and charming and silly; just like she was.

'Alright, you can get up, now,' Troy said, adjusting Becky's clothes and petting her shoulder. 'You did amazing.'

'Thanks,' Becky mumbled, finally loosening her grip on Dolly's hand....

Though Dolly could bring herself to do the same.

She couldn't bear to let Becky go.

Not when she knew that letting her go would mean she would be going back to that *horrible* Masters girl.

'Mrs Slader?' Becky asked, awkwardly rolling to her feet as Dolly didn't let go of her hand. 'Um.... Are you alright?'

Dolly threw her arms around Becky, and squeezed her firmly.

*She didn't want to let her go.*

She didn't want Becky to leave.

She wanted to pull Becky close and hold her tight and keep her safe, and tell her it was all going to be alright; just like she would when Becky used to stay over and would wake in the night after a bad dream.

But... she knew the tighter she held on, the harder Becky would fight to get away....

It was best to just open her arms and let her go, and hope that when she fell she'd fall back into them.

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Becky had been impatiently waiting the two weeks she needed to, to get back into Mr Slader's chair and have this tattoo finished.

She'd been disappointed when Jareth and Benny hadn't been there for her first session—they'd had other obligations— but Mrs Slader had apparently made sure they would be here today.

It was just a matter of waiting for them; which was almost *unbearable* for Becky as Mr Slader's needle jabbed into her back over and over and over.

Becky had been much more prepared for it, today. She'd brought a plush bear to squeeze the stuffing out of, instead of poor Mrs Slader's hand, and was distracting herself with her Switch and Animal Crossing town.

She'd managed to craft the pink Acoustic Guitar item today, and finally (*finally!*) gotten ahold of the Dreamy Shelves.

Now all she had to do was find a nice-looking rug for the little fake bedroom she'd made for Mimi....

But that would come later because *Jareth and Benny* had just come in!

Becky almost dropped her Switch to the floor when she saw them.

'Jareth! Benny!' Becky exclaimed, burying her face into the chair. 'Play Pokemon with me. *Please!*'

*Literally any distraction would do....*

Becky felt Benny's hand on her head, petting her comfortingly.

'Hey, yeah, sure,' he said. 'We can double battle, huh? Me and Jareth can team up on you.'

'You...' Becky mumbled, still not looking up. 'You can D.P me.'

The room went quiet; even the sound of the tattoo gun's buzzing stopped, as Mr Slader leant back and took a deep, deep breath.

Slowly, Becky looked up.

*What had she just said?*

She barely remember—

'Oh, my god,' she realised with a jolt. 'That was *not* the right word for that. I think I'm, like— Delirious or something with the pain.'

'We can take a break if you need,' Mr Slader suggested; standing up as he did as if to imply it wasn't *actually* a suggestion. 'Ten minutes? You play a game with the boys, then I can keep going.'

'That... *yeah*,' Becky felt herself blushing as she slowly sat up and stretched. 'That sounds good. Thanks.'

'Just give us a second to set up,' Benny told her, pulling his bag off his back and putting it on the floor besides the tattoo chair. 'I need to get a drink.'

'Oh, yeah, I need to save Animal Crossing, anyway,' Becky chuckled, wincing as she tried to get comfortable in the seat.

*God her back hurt....*

Jareth sat in his father's stool and rested his elbows on the arm of the tattoo chair. He was grinning widely, and had already managed to pull his Switch out. 'I have a special Pokemon to show you,' he said, turning his console on.

Becky grinned back, and quickly switched over to her Pokemon game. *She had one to show him, too.*

Her shiny Machoke, that she'd spent *three weeks straight* trying to hatch, just so she could name it after Jareth.

Oh! And she needed to show Benny the Slaking she'd named after him, too!  
Ooh... maybe she could use the full team of her friends!

Yes! That was a brilliant idea!

Becky quickly opened her in-game storage box and began moving her team into her party.

Jareth, the shiny Machoke.

Benny, the Slaking.

Katie, the Blazekin.

Jezzibeth, the Togekiss.

Marilyn, the shiny Gardevoir....

And....

Becky paused.

*Adam.*

The last team member of this team she'd made was Adam, a shiny Bewear.

It was the *perfect* representation for Adam, she thought. A plush toy. A big cute huggable thing that had to be aware of its own strength just suited Adam perfectly. And then she'd grinded for a shiny instead of settling for the normal form because he was *special* and stood out among the crowd....

But Jareth and Benny still didn't know about her friendship with Adam.

For a long, long moment she considered sending out her Bewear and just *telling* the boys about him.... They'd understand, wouldn't they...?

But then her nerves got the better of her; she wasn't ready to risk that.

She couldn't risk losing Jareth and Benny more than she had, already.

So instead she selected Mom, her max IV Purugly, and hoped that it would give her friends a laugh.

'Alright, I'm ready,' Benny said, planting a chair beside his brother and sitting down heavily. He looked over Jareth's shoulder and— 'Man, you're gonna play *that*?'

'Yeah?'

'You don't think it's *kinda weird*?' Benny asked, his voice dropping to a whisper.

'No!' Jareth defended, smacking his brother. 'It's fine!'

Benny shrugged, and pulled out his own game. '*Ooooookay*. If you say so....'

Jareth blew a raspberry, and Becky wondered what Pokemon Jareth had selected....

But, it didn't take long to see it. They loaded their battle and sent out their Pokemon. Benny's Snorlax *Nap Cat* was the first on the field, and then—

Becky let out a high-pitch screech of joy as *Becky the shiny Lopunny* appeared on her screen.

And the sound she'd made was immediately echoed by the boys as her own Pokemon named after them were sent out.

'*AAAH!*' Becky squealed. 'It's *me!* Hah!'

'I thought you'd like that!' Jareth laughed, shouldering Benny and making a face that very clearly said; *I told you so!*

'Aww, it's so pink!' Becky cooed.

'And I'm so *green*,' Jareth chuckled back. 'And of course you got the fat, lazy one for Benny!'

‘No!’ Becky gasped. ‘Cute and round and strong!’

‘Sure, sure,’ Jareth teased.

‘Heh, why don’t you tell Becky why you chose Lopunny for her, huh? Besides the obvious pink kickboxer thing.’

‘Uh...’ Jareth blushed. ‘It... reminds me of you.’

‘Tell her *why*,’ Benny gave Jareth a shit-eating grin. ‘Tell her what you told me.’

‘Cos Buneary fucking hates everything!’ Jareth blurted, laughing loudly. ‘And you have to earn its trust. And once you do it’ll beat the shit out of anyone who *dares* come near you.... I mean. I’m just— Knowing you from childhood and all that....’

‘That’s *so* funny!’ Becky exclaimed. ‘It suits me *perfectly*!’

‘Yeah!’ Jareth beamed.

‘Pick your attack, Jareth!’ Benny nudged his brother. ‘Before it times out!’

‘Oh— Shit!’

Becky giggled as Jareth rushed to select his move, and then selected her own. It was fun, playing with the boys.

She could *tell* they were going easy on her. She was *terrible* with type matchups and had no idea what she was doing... but somehow, she still won. Even though she had literally *never* won a Pokemon battle against Benny before. *Ever*, in the entire time they’d known each other.

Usually he flattened her in seconds— But they somehow managed to drag their battle on for the full ten minutes; finishing just as Mr Slader came back into the shop with an opaque white shopping bag.

Becky shuffled awkwardly as he did.

She didn’t want to stop messing around with the boys, yet....

‘You kids keep on playing your game,’ he instructed, and Becky felt her heart leap in joy as he opened the bag and placed a container of food on the counter. ‘I need some lunch.... You don’t mind do you, Becky?’

‘Oh! No! Take your time!’

~~~~~

It had almost been a year since Becky had broken up with Mattel, and Jareth couldn’t have been happier with how it had all turned out.

Becky was back.

He had her back.

*He finally had her back!*

And he was currently running his fingers *down her back*. Tracing the exposed skin from one patch of freckles to the next as she glowed with dim white magic and held up her phone for him to look at.

‘Uh... yeah. Yeah!’ Jareth chuckled, comparing the mark on Becky’s back to the star-chart app she’d pulled up. ‘That’s the one! That’s the constellation!’

‘*Whoa*,’ Becky breathed, lowering her phone again and letting out a long, happy sigh. ‘So my freckles match the sky above Shadow Oaks... that’s *really* cool.’

‘Yeah, I *never* would have guessed!’ Jareth laughed, pecking a kiss between

Becky's shoulders. 'What druid circle did you say this was, again?'

'Uh, I think Hedgeson said I'm in the Circle of the Stars,' Becky said, switching off her phone and laying down comfortably as Jareth began to massage her.

'Ooh.... That's nice, babe. That's *really* nice. I need that.'

Jareth chuckled, massaging down Becky's back to work out the tension.... Until he reached her scarred-over tattoo, and pulled his lips tight.

It was a shame. She didn't get to have her tattoo that long before her car accident— Not even two full months, and then it was ruined.

He gingerly ran a finger over the distorted ink, and then felt Becky shifting under his hand.

'You okay?' she asked, rolling over so she could look at him.

'Oh, yeah,' Jareth gave a weak chuckle. 'It's just... a shame about your tattoo. You know?'

'Eh,' Becky shrugged and flopped back down. 'Not really. I didn't actually really, like. Want it or whatever. I just wanted to like, hang out with you again.'

'Beck,' Jareth sighed. His family had *thought* that was the case, but it still made him wince to hear it confirmed.

'It's kinda funny, actually!' Becky chirped. 'That it, like, got all messed up when Mattel and I broke up. It's almost, like. Symbolic or something!'

'Symbolic?' Jareth echoed.

'Yeah! Like. Cos we like, picked it out together and stuff, as a couple,' Becky explained. 'And then, like. The way the scar has it all cut in half and stuff? That's totally a symbolic sign from like. Us splitting up or something.'

Jareth couldn't help but laugh at that. 'Do you want to get it removed? Or just maybe... covered up?'

'Hmm...' Becky considered Jareth's question for a moment before shaking her head. 'Maybe? I dunno.... No. No. Not right now, at least. I think I'm okay with it like this. I like the story it tells.'

Jareth could tell she meant it, and grinned widely as he bent down to plant a kiss onto her scar. 'So do I.'

—END—

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