

Visiting Becky

By C. Jade Wyton

Barbra Bloom finally finds some time off work to visit her daughter, Becky. She is a strange girl, but Barbra longs to understand her.

Contains some depictions of ableism and implied chronic illness.

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It was a beautiful summer day, and Barbra was determined to soak up as much of the warm sun as she could from the swinging seat on the back porch.

She'd have loved to have done some gardening— But the doctor had recommended she take things easy for a while. At least until her tests came back.

They still weren't sure what was wrong with her. They'd thought it was a cold or a flu, at first. What with her fevers and muscle aches.... But six months later and it hadn't cleared up. So, the day before she'd returned home to Shadow Oaks to visit her daughter, she'd had some bloodworks taken.

All she had to do for now was sit and wait for a phone call.... And stop her daughter from giving herself heatstroke.

'Becky, dear, aren't you warm in that jacket?'

'No!' Becky called back. 'I'm fine!'

'Are you *sure*?' Barbra asked, motioning Becky over. 'Hm.... Come here a minute.'

'*Grrr!*' Becky gave a playful growl and pulled the mimic-shaped hood over her face before rushing over to her mother. She raised her arms and clawed at the air, the too-long sleeves flapping around limply as she did. '*GRR!*'

'Becky, what did I say about growling?'

'Girls don't growl,' Becky answered, cheerfully. 'But I'm not a girl! I'm a mimic! See? *See?*'

'Yes, I see,' Barbra chuckled, pushing her daughter's hood back. 'Come on, now. Take it off. Your cheeks are red; you're overheating.'

'But I don't wanna take it off!' Becky whined; though she didn't fight her mother as the oversized hoodie was slipped off her. 'Jareth gave it to me!'

'And that was very nice of him, but it's a winter jacket, not a summer jacket,' said Barbra, hanging the jacket over the back of her chair. 'You're getting too warm. You'll make yourself sick.'

'No I won't,' Becky argued, kicking at the ground. 'I don't get warm or cold!'

'You're just like your father,' Barbra chuckled, pulling her daughter forward so she could plant a kiss on her cheek. 'Always that same vest, no matter the weather....'

Barbra trailed off as, just as she mentioned her husband, he wandered outside and looked around; seemingly lost.

'Ken, honey?' she called to him. 'Are you alright?'

Ken turned to his wife and daughter and his face lit up— In only a second he went from looking like a lost child, to looking like he owned the whole world.

‘Barbra!’ he chirped, hurrying over and giving her a kiss. Then, he tried to step away from Becky as she began climb his side. ‘Becky— Béb , you’re getting too heavy to— AH!’

Ken stumbled and fell to the ground in a heap— And Becky clambered to sit on his chest, bouncing happily and looking down at her father with a grin before raising a hand to smack him.

‘Rebecca!’ Barbra snapped, shooing her daughter off her husband. ‘Stop that, you’re going to hurt him!’

‘I can beat up anyone!’ Becky declared as she began flapping her arms and running around the backyard. ‘I can beat up *anyone*! Even grown-ups!’

‘You better *not* be beating anyone up!’ Barbra retorted as she helped Ken up. Then, when Becky let out a howl, she stomped a foot loudly on the wooden porch and pointed at the space in front of her. ‘Becky! Here! *Now*!’

Becky immediately flinched down, her hyperactive energy changing into submission as she slowly, head down in shame, approached her mother.

‘We’ve talked about this,’ Barbra scolded. ‘No hitting. No howling. No growling, snarling, or biting! You behave like a normal girl!’

‘Yes, Mum,’ Becky said meekly. ‘Sorry, Mum. I understand.’

‘*Barbra*,’ Ken spoke softly, and Barbra felt his hand on her shoulder. ‘It’s alright. I’m not hurt.’

‘That’s not the point,’ Barbra replied; though her tone was gentler as she addressed her husband. ‘She mightn’t have hurt you, but if she keeps doing things like this she’ll hurt *someone*. And if she does that again they might come and....’

Barbra caught herself before she finished the sentence; side-eyeing Becky as she looked up curiously.

‘Becky, honey,’ Barbra sighed, and crouched down so she was at eye-level with her daughter. ‘It is really important you behave. Okay? Promise me you’ll try a little harder to behave?’

‘I’m already trying my hardest!’ Becky whined, rocking on her heels and looking to the ground. ‘I promise I’m trying.’

Another sigh from Barbra, before she stood back up and handed Becky’s jacket to Ken. ‘Can you give this to Isa? It needs a wash.’

Ken took the hoodie with a nod, and cast a glance to Becky before speaking in an unsure tone that Barbra was sure was his attempt at being uplifting.

‘Well, isn’t this hood cute?’ he chuckled. ‘A little bit big, though, don’t you think? Did Isa get this for you?’

‘Nuh-uh!’ Becky exclaimed, throwing up her arms and grinning widely. ‘Jareth did! He saved up *three whole months* of his allowance and got it for my birthday! So now I have to get him something *extra* extra good for his birthday, like those pointy shells that make ocean noises at you!’

Barbra felt her lip twitch.

‘A conch shell?’ Ken asked.

Becky got this for her birthday? In Winter?

‘*Kunk* shell, yes!’

It was mid-Summer, now.

‘*Conch*. With a *ch*, sweetheart.’

Had it really been that long since they'd been home?

'I wanna get Jareth a kunk shell!'

Barbra rubbed her forehead, and let out a short sigh.

'Conch shell.'

It couldn't have been that long, could it?

'Cunch shell.'

But it must have been. She hadn't seen this jacket before....

'*Conch.*'

Which meant she hadn't been home since Christmas—

'Cunt shell!

'Okay, that's enough!' Barbra cut in, grabbing her daughter by the shoulders and turning her towards the house. 'It's a hot day. Come inside and drink some water.'

'No! Juice!' Becky demanded. 'I want juice! And chocolate!'

'You're getting water,' Barbra told her. 'And you can have a sandwich if you're hungry.'

'No fair,' Becky snorted. 'You get to eat whatever you want! Why can't I eat what I want?'

'Because I said so,' Barbra retorted.

'That's not a real reason!' Becky huffed. 'When I tell Isa "because I said so" she makes me give her a *real* reason!'

*Fucking—*

'Because you're not capable of making that decision on your own!' Barbra snapped back. 'And I love you and worry about your health. Is *that* a good enough reason?'

'No—'

'Don't give me that! Yes it *is*,' Barbra let out a frustrated sigh. 'Stop talking back. I'm not in the mood for it!'

Barbra regretting snapping; but she couldn't help it. Her temper had been so much shorter since she'd started feeling ill....

*No. Not an excuse.*

She needed to take a breath. And not get angry at her daughter.

*Deep... deep breath....*

'*Mmm!*' Becky gave an annoyed hum and kicked at the ground before hurrying towards the kitchen. 'Fine! But I'm going to be mad the whole time I'm drinking! ISA! MUM SAID I HAVE TO DRINK WATER! I NEED A CUP!'

'Rebecca!' Barbra snapped. 'Do *not* talk to Isa like that!'

'But I'm *mad!*' Becky whined.

'That's not an excuse to yell at Isa!' Barbra snapped. 'She looks after you, you should respect her!'

'I *do* respect her!' Becky scoffed. 'ISA! *IIIISSSSSAAAA!*'

'*Rebecca!*' Barbra snapped again, grabbing her daughter by the arm. 'That is *enough!*'

'Is everything alright?'

Barbra heaved a sigh as Isa's voice floated into the room. 'Yes, Isa, everything is—'

'NO!' Becky interrupted. 'Everything is *not* fine! It's the end of the world!'

Mum said I have to drink *water!* And that I'm not allowed juice!

'Did she?' Isa asked, her voice slow and patient. 'And what did you tell her?'

'I said it was no fair and that she can eat what *she* wants!' Becky grumbled. 'And she said that I'm not *cuppable* to make that decision myself and to stop talking back because she's worried about my health. Then she said I didn't respect you, which is a lie!'

Barbra let out a breath, and eyed Isa. 'I'm sorry. I don't know what's come over her.'

'No, it's fine,' Isa waved a hand, and stepped towards Becky. 'Becky. You're raising your voice at me again, which isn't a nice thing to do, remember? It hurts my feelings. That's what your mother meant by respecting me. Because when you do things that hurt my feelings, that's not very respectful.'

'Oh. Sorry.'

'And it doesn't sound like you told her about what water does to your tongue,' Isa continued. 'Did you tell her what water does to your tongue?'

Becky shook her head, and Barbra frowned.

'What? What do you mean "what water does" to her tongue?'

'Water makes her tongue scared,' Isa explained, gently; acting more like she was addressing Becky than Barbra. 'So we add a little bit of juice to her water to make it taste better, so her tongue doesn't get so scared.'

'Yeah!' Becky chirped, trailing Isa as the drow retrieved a cup and filled it. 'Exactly! That's what I've been trying to say! Water makes my tongue scared so we turn it into juice instead!'

Isa paused by the fridge. 'Barbra? May we add some juice?' she asked. 'I don't want to undermine you, but it really does make it easier for Becky.'

'Uh— Sure,' Barbra knew she looked confused as Isa topped off her daughters drink with orange juice. Both at the strange phrase, and how quickly Isa had been able to diffuse that situation. 'If it... makes it easier....'

She watched as Becky sculled her drink and then bolted out of the kitchen.

*Maybe her temper was even shorter than she thought....*

'Isa?' Barbra let out another sigh. 'Can you explain what it means for Becky's tongue to be "scared"?'

'Oh, yes,' Isa cleared her throat. 'Room temperature water triggers her gag reflex.'

'What? Since when?'

'Since Benny thought it was funny to give her a drink with a slug in the bottom of it,' Isa sighed, taking Becky's abandoned cup and rinsing it. 'Now she *has* to drink out of clear cups so she can check for bugs. And she needs juice added into it or the taste reminds her of the slug.'

'Bloody Benny,' Barbra groaned, shaking her head. 'That boy is going to catch something, one day!'

'And not just Becky's hands,' Isa joked, placing the cup on the drying rack. 'Becky wasn't happy about the slug. I don't think I've ever seen Benny so scared before; I had to pry Becky off him before she did any actual damage to the poor boy.'

Barbra let out a heavy sigh. 'Ah.... Is there anything else I should know about?'

'Oh, well, now that you mention it, I was talking to the school and they said

Mr Crane isn't going to be teaching there anymore,' Isa told her. 'It's worrying. He's really the only reason Becky was able to get a passing grade this year—'

Barbra tried to listen as Isa began updating her on everything that had happened to Becky since December; though it was hard, as her thoughts began to escape her.

She hated needing Isa to explain these things to her; she was Becky's *mother*, for god's sake! *She* should be the one telling people about her daughter's life....

Isa had been a fantastic help while she'd been pregnant, taking so much of the burden of the house off Barbra's shoulders. But Barbra hadn't expected Isa to stay with the family *after* Becky had been born. It was only supposed to be temporary. Isa had only been kept on after Becky's birth because Ken couldn't handle the sound of Becky's crying (something about the pitch of her wails left him a mess, and he'd almost fainted one night whilst trying to feed her).... And then, because Becky's early developmental issues meant she needed a stricter routine than Barbra could provide while under contract— And then again Isa stayed, when Barbra had gotten her *new* contract, and the doctor had recommended Becky didn't travel with them when they left the country.

Isa had stayed *nine years* longer than she had intended— And there was no way she was leaving now.

Becky adored her. The way she looked at Isa it was like her entire world revolved around the drow....

More so, Ken actually got along with her! He didn't just *tolerate* her; he considered her a *friend*! And Barbra knew from when she'd met him that making any sort of connection was something he struggled *deeply* with.

Which meant that, no matter how jealous Barbra felt, Isa was family. And she could never force her to leave....

Even if she'd threatened it before, in anger; it was something she was sure she could have never actually have gone through with. Not without hurting both her daughter *and* her husband.... Besides; it would be impossible for Barbra to find someone she could trust as much as she did Isa.

Isa was almost like a sister to her— It was just a shame that Barbra never got along with her sisters.

Honestly, though, no matter how jealous she was, Barbra was grateful to have someone she could trust to look after her family when she wasn't around. She felt a strange sense of relief knowing that, if anything was to ever happen to her, the people that she loved would be well taken care of—

Barbra's thoughts were interrupted by the force of her daughter running directly into the back of her legs and almost knocking her down; if it weren't for Isa catching her and shoving her upright.

'REBECCA!' Barbra snapped. 'What was that for?!'

Becky flinched away from her mother, ducking her head and running instead to hide behind Isa.

'Rebecca—' Isa sighed as Becky took cover behind her. 'Answer your mother! Why did you do that?'

'*I dunno*,' Becky mumbled, wrapping her arms around Isa's middle and peeking out from behind her. 'I wanted you to look at me.'

Barbra felt her anger waver, at that.

Becky just wanted her attention.... How could she be mad about that? After she'd been away so long... she was just relieved to know Becky still liked her.

'Come here,' Barbra said, trying to keep her voice even and soft as she opened her arm for Becky. When her daughter slowly trot to her side, Barbra pulled her close and ran a hand through her hair. 'If you want my attention you can just ask for it, honey. But you have to ask for things with your words, remember?'

'Mhm,' Becky hummed, wrapping her arms around her mother. 'Come upstairs.'

'Pardon?'

'Please come upstairs?' Becky corrected herself, and pulled away from her mother so she could look up at her properly. 'I wanna show you something.'

'Yeah?' Barbra asked. 'What do you want to show me?'

Becky puffed out her chest proudly, and then announced *very* loudly, 'Isa got me pads with *dinosaurs* on them!'

'She... did, did she?' Barbra tried not to cringe— Or laugh. She knew either would have been a *terrible* reaction, but she was so caught off guard she found herself almost doing both.

'Uh-huh!' Becky nodded loudly, grabbing her mother by the hand and starting to drag her towards the stairs. 'Come look at them!'

'Okay, okay, I'm coming,' the laugh escaped Barbra, now, as she trailed her daughter across the house. She found herself being pulled into her daughter's on-suite bathroom, and flipped down the toilet's lid so she could sit on it comfortably. 'Alright. Show me these dinosaurs.'

'Here! Here!' Becky exclaimed, opening the cupboard under the sink and pulling out a wicker basket. She fumbled around inside it before pulling out a handful of reusable fabric sanitary products, which she began to show off to her mother. 'Isa got them for me, because the ones from the store made me itchy! She said they were really hard to find though, so I have to look after them and not lose them, because they'll be really hard to get again! This one's my favourite!'

Barbra found a pad thrust at her, and had to accept it to stop it from making contact with her face. 'Is it, now?' she asked, trying to keep her voice even. She didn't want to laugh and accidentally plant any sort of doubt or shame in her daughter's mind about menstruation, but... she couldn't help be humoured by her daughters energy.

'Uh-huh!' Becky nodded, and pointed to a seam. 'It's because they cut the pattern funny here, on the seam, and sewed two different dinosaurs together so that they look like one weird dinosaur! See?'

Barbra followed her daughter's finger to where the front half of a green brachiosaurus was haphazardly attached to the back half of a pink pterodactyl. 'Oh, yes, I see. That's very silly, isn't it?'

'Yeah!' Becky chirped, taking the pad as Barbra handed it back and packing it away. 'I don't like getting my period, though. It makes my stomach hurt.'

'Yeah, it does, doesn't it?' Barbra sighed, petting her daughter on the back.

'Isa said it's just a part of growing up,' Becky said. 'Mrs Thompson said it means I'm becoming a *woman*, but Isa reminded her that I'm nine and won't be a woman until I'm at least twice as big as I am now.'

'Isa's right,' Barbra agreed. 'You're still very little.'

‘Nuh-uh!’ Becky argued, sticking her nose in the air with a stubborn-but-proud expression. ‘I’m *not* little. I’m getting too big to carry!’

‘True,’ Barbra swallowed back her giggles as Becky stuck out her chest and put her hands on her hips. ‘You’re right. You’re a big girl.... But still a girl.’

‘Yeah!’ Becky agreed. Then, she sighed. ‘But also it’s not fair, cos nobody else in my class has it yet, so they don’t understand what it’s like. Isa said I’m getting it really young.’

‘Yeah...’ Barbra echoed Becky’s sigh. ‘Our family does start young. I was young, too, when I got mine. I was eleven.’

‘Wow! That’s a whole...’ Becky counted on her fingers. ‘Two years older than I am!’

Barbra chuckled, and pet Becky on the back again.

‘Do you think it’s gonna take two years for Jareth and Benny to get their periods?’ Becky asked. ‘Cos if they do they can borrow my pads!’

Barbra couldn’t contain her laughter any longer, and it burst out of her— So hard and loud tears formed in the corners of her eyes.

‘What?!’ Becky snapped. ‘What’s so funny!’

‘Boys don’t get periods,’ Barbra told her daughter.

‘WHAT!’ Becky gasped loudly and stomped her foot. ‘Then what happens to boys?!’

‘They get stinky,’ said Barbra.

‘Is that all?!’ Becky growled, throwing up her arms in frustration and beginning to pace the bathroom. ‘That’s not fair! That’s not fair at *all*! Why do I have to get stomach-aches and all they get is stinky?! I can get stinky right now if I don’t shower!’

‘Not as stinky as Jareth and Benny are gonna get, I promise,’ Barbra laughed. ‘They’re gonna smell bad even *when* they shower.’

‘It’s not fair!’ Becky declared. ‘Boys should have to get periods, too!’

Barbra was too busy giggling to respond as her daughter stormed out of the bathroom and flopped furiously onto her bedroom’s rug.

She didn’t think Becky was quite ready to hear about all the other things that the boys were going to go through— Heaven knows, if she told her about it, she’d probably go to school the next day and loudly explain it to them.

Barbra could imagine it now:

*You’re going to get hairy and smelly and gross!*

Yeah.

It was probably best if she didn’t explain it further until she had to....

‘IT’S NOT FAIR!’ Becky wailed into her floor. ‘WHY AM I ALWAYS THE ONE WHO SUFFERS!’

Barbra bit her lip, trying to fight back her laughter as her daughter tantrumed loudly on the floor. Then, she stood up and made her way over to Becky. ‘Come on, Becky, it’s not so bad.’

‘Yes it is!’ Becky argued loudly. ‘It’s the end of the world!’

‘Oh, honey, don’t be so dramatic,’ Barbra knelt down and pet Becky on the back; ignoring her daughter’s pet mimic as it bolted over and playfully nipped at her hand. ‘It’ll get easier as you get older.’

‘It *better*,’ Becky gave a snort and let herself be helped to her feet. ‘Cos if it

doesn't I'm going to be *very* angry! Right, Mimi? I'll be *very* angry!

Mimi gave an agreeable growl and, taking the form of a scarf, slithered up Becky's arm and wrapped loosely around her neck.

'It will, I promise,' Barbra chuckled. 'Now, do you want to come downstairs with me?'

'Mhm!' Becky gave a nod and took her mother by the hand. 'Will Dad be downstairs?'

'Well, that *is* where we left him,' Barbra joked. 'Let's go see if we can find him, hm?'

'Yeah! I wanna bite him!' Becky blurted— Then, she gasped and covered her mouth. 'I mean. Not bite. No biting. Not allowed to bite!'

Barbra gave a sigh. 'Now why would you *want* to bite your father? Don't you like him?'

'I like him!'

'So why bite him?'

'I dunno!'

Another sigh, and Barbra let Becky's hand go as they reached the bottom of the stairs so that she could stop and catch her breath.

*She was out of breath just from the stairs?*

And her head was spinning, too.

Gods, she wasn't well....

'Mum? Are you okay?' Becky asked. 'You look really tired and white.'

'I just need to sit down,' said Barbra. 'Can you go make sure there's a spot clear on the couch for me?'

'Okay!' Becky gave a nod and hurried into the family room.

There was a quiet *thwump* of what sounded like a basket of clothes being thrown to the floor, followed by Isa giving an offended cry.

'Becky I *just* folded those! What are you—'

'Mum's gotta sit down!' Becky exclaimed. 'MUM! THERE'S A SPOT!'

Barbra let out another heavy sigh and started towards the lounge; only to be met by a worried-looking Isa at the door.

'Barbra, you look exhausted!' she fussed, helping the woman into her seat. 'Are you alright?'

'I'm fine,' Barbra reassured. 'The stairs just... took the breath out of me. That's all.'

She took a deep, deep breath and slowly let it out; feeling the spinning in her head come to a stop.

Then, Becky's elbow dug into her stomach and winded her again as the girl clambered into her mother's lap.

'Becky— Becky stop that!' Isa snapped. 'Leave your mother alone! She needs to rest!'

'It's fine, Isa. It's...' Barbra hefted Becky up into a more comfortable position and held her close. 'It's fine....'

'Do you need anything?' Isa asked. 'I can get you a drink—'

'I'll get her a drink!' Becky declared, leaping off her mother and hurrying out of the room.

Barbra grunted at the force of her daughter's knees against her as she



launched herself up, but said nothing else as Becky rushed away.

For a moment she sat, catching her breath, before glass shattered in the kitchen.

‘*Oops!*’ Becky cried. ‘Glass on the floor!’

‘Stay still!’ Isa called, immediately hurrying out of the room. ‘I’m coming!’

‘Staying still!’ Becky echoed obediently.

Barbra shook her head, and laid back with a sigh.

‘Barbra?’ Ken’s meek voice spoke from the hall by the front door, and he poked his head in. ‘Are you alright? You don’t look well. Avez-vous besoin d’aller au lit?’

‘Je vais bien mon amour,’ Barbra smiled warmly at her husband, and shuffled over to make room for him to sit beside her. As he did, she noticed he was holding a large envelope. ‘Qu’est-ce que tu as?’

‘Ah! It is from Camille!’ Ken exclaimed, lighting up. ‘I think it is the magazines!’

‘The ones with your designs?’ Barbra grinned, motioning for Ken to open the envelope. ‘Show me, honey! Show me!’

‘Oui! Oui!’ Ken laughed, fumbling the envelope open and pulling out three plastic-wrapped magazines. ‘Ah! Look, it’s Jeanne! Elle a fait la couverture cette fois!’

‘Lucky her,’ Barbra chuckled, sliding an arm around her husband and pulling him close. ‘Do you know what page your work is on?’

‘I believe page eighteen...’ Ken muttered, turning the page. ‘Ah! Yes! Here it is! Oh, Sylvie wears it so well.’

‘Shame her attitude is répugnante,’ Barbra joked.

‘*Mum!*’ Becky called suddenly and, before Barbra had time to respond, the girl had leapt heavily into her lap. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Your father is showing me his work,’ Barbra told her as Isa offered her a glass of water. ‘He —oh, thank you Isa— he’s gotten his work put in a magazine, with a pretty model wearing it. See? I’m very proud of him. Are you proud of him?’

‘*Uhhh...*’ for a moment, Becky stared at her mother. Then she looked at her father. It was clear she was processing what she had been told. ‘Is this a big deal?’

‘A very big deal,’ said Barbra.

‘Then *yes!*’ Becky beamed. ‘We should *always* be proud of big deals! Isa said so.’

Barbra caught a glance of her husband’s grin.

‘Would you like to see it?’ he asked, holding out the magazine to his daughter.

Becky snatched it with a firm excitement, and stared down at the page. Then, slowly, her determined brow unfurrowed, and she looked confused.

‘What do you think, Becky?’ Ken asked.

‘*Girl,*’ she replied simply, pointing a finger onto the page.

‘Yes,’ Barbra chuckled. ‘Her name is Syl—’

She didn’t have time to finish her sentence before her daughter grabbed the page; scrunching it into a messy wad as she yanked it out of the book and, in a motion so quick it left the three adults stunned, stuffed it into her mouth and swallowed it.

For a moment, there was silence.

Then, Isa laughed. 'Oh, no— Oh, Ken. That's— It's a compliment,' she reassured. 'She's been eating things she likes.'

'Really?' Ken's smile returned, and he looked to his daughter as she continued to flick through the magazine. 'Did you eat my work because you liked it?'

'Yup,' Becky answered, nodding and continuing to look through the rest of the models. 'Pretty girl. Pretty dress. Pink! I like pink. Did you make any more of these dresses?'

'No, just that one,' Ken answered.

'*Hmmp!*' Becky gave a frustrated grumble and threw the magazine across the room. 'Then I don't wanna see the rest!'

Barbra had to hold back her laughter as Ken put a hand to his chest. He looked like he was so happy he might burst into tears— Which she thought was just as strange a reaction to their daughter eating pictures of his work as the actual act of eating a magazine.

'I love you,' she said aloud, pecking a kiss on her husband's cheek, and then moving to do the same to her daughter. 'And you.... What have you been up to, lately?'

'Uhhh... I dunno!' Becky answered. 'Isa? What have I been up to?'

'Well, you went to the lake with Katie and the boys the other day,' Isa chuckled, starting to gather up the clothes Becky had thrown on the floor earlier. 'Why don't you tell your mum about that?'

'Yes!' Becky gasped loudly and pulled on her mother's sleeve. 'Katie and Jareth and Benny and I went to the lake! Mr Slader took us, and let us play in the mud!'

'Did he?' Barbra grinned. 'And what did you do in the mud?'

'Katie buried Jareth, and Benny caught tadpoles in a jar,' Becky said. Then, she sat up straight and puffed out her chest proudly. 'And I took Benny's tadpoles and *ate them!*'

Isa choked, and dropped her armfuls of clothes. 'She didn't tell me about *that part!*'

—END—

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