

# Fern's Room

By C. Jade Wyton

*Edmund drags Maggie into trouble and, for the first time in their many years of friendship, Maggie loses her patience with him.*

***Contains descriptions of child abuse, bullying, and mild violence. Reader discretion advised.***

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Maggie had always tried to be a good girl. Ever since she had been brought to the orphanage all those years ago, she had always done her best to behave. Sure, sometimes she slipped up, and forgot things, and made mistakes. But she never misbehaved *deliberately*.

Well.... Not when she was on her own, that was.

Maggie had always tried to be a good girl. But she was, admittedly, rather persuadable. She wanted to fit in. And being Fern's clear favourite made that difficult— So when peer pressure was pushed on her, she found herself struggling not to fold.

Especially when it came to Edmund.

That boy could convince her to do just about *anything*.

So when he'd taken her by the arm and tugged her out of the kitchen where she was chopping vegetables for dinner, she'd known putting up a fight was pointless. If she refused to go with him he'd just bully her into it; probably grab the end of her scarf and drag her around by *that* instead of her arm (he had done it before and even though that was two years ago and he'd grown up a lot since they'd been twelve, she wasn't sure he'd grown up *enough* to not parade her around the orphanage like a dog on a leash again).

'Why are you always so mean to me?' Maggie asked as she was dragged through the halls

'I've told you before,' Edmund responded. 'I'm mean to *all* my friends.'

Maggie rolled her eyes, hoping that Edmund would see it but knowing that even if he did he would just ignore her. Or make fun of her for it and call her a stupid baby.

Admittedly, she sort of... almost *liked* the attention he gave her. In a weird way.

She at least liked it when he called her his friend. Even if it was in a mean and round-about way.

Finally Edmund slowed down. He released Maggie's arm as he came to a familiar door, and Maggie felt her heart leap to her throat as Edmund dropped to his knee and pulled a pin from his hair to jam into the lock.

'Edmund! Edmund, *no!*' she squeaked as he jiggled the lock until it clicked. 'That's *Fern's room!* You're going to be in *so much* trouble if she finds out!'

'You mean *we're* going to be in trouble,' he teased, grabbing her wrist and tugging her through the now-open door. 'Come on! Let's see what the matron's

been hiding!

‘No!’ Maggie dug her talons into the floor, trying as hard as she could to get a grip on the smooth wooden boards so that Edmund couldn’t pull her into what was literally *the* most forbidden room in the *entire* orphanage!

But Edmund was bigger than her—he had been for a while now—and since his voice had started getting deeper he’d become much, *much* stronger. He could lift almost twice as much as he could just a year ago; as poor Maggie had discovered when he’d hefted her over his shoulder to carry her into the yard and throw her face-first in the mud after a storm (Fern had been *furious* at him for that, but it hadn’t deterred him from dragging her outside again just a week later to stuff her head through the garden lattice and leave her trapped for half an hour).

Maggie struggled against Edmund as he held her tight. Even after he kicked the door shut behind them, he didn’t let her go; instead dragging her to Fern’s desk and flicking open the ledger that sat on top.

‘Edmund!’ she exclaimed. ‘Let me go! You’re going to get me in trouble! Why do you *always* get me in trouble?!’

‘Getting in trouble is good for you!’ Edmund retorted. ‘Come on. Don’t be a baby! We won’t get caught.’

‘We will!’

‘If you don’t *shut up*, maybe!’ Edmund scoffed, giving Maggie a hard yank that made her stumble.

She almost lost her footing— She might have, if Edmund hadn’t kept ahold of her and pulled her up again.

‘Stop being a wimp, you’re in this with me now!’ Edmund said as he opened Fern’s top drawer. ‘No backing out, now!’

‘I didn’t *want* to be “in this” with you!’ Maggie retorted, slamming the drawer shut again. ‘Why couldn’t you have dragged *literally anyone else* into this instead of me?!’

‘Cos you’re my *favourite*,’ Edmund teased as he opened the drawer again. ‘You like being everyone’s *favourite*, right? Or is it just *Fern* who you want the special attention from, hm?’

His disingenuous tone and humoured grin made a hot feeling bubble in Maggie’s stomach. It made her feel... *something!*

Something she’d never felt before. Something not-so-good and hot and bubbly and red. It was like indigestion, but an emotion. And she didn’t like it at all!

Maggie tried to tug from Edmund’s grip but he held her tight, his impish look growing almost wicked as he abandoned the open drawer he’d been sifting through to meet her eye.

‘What?’ he mocked. ‘You scared you won’t be Fern’s special little princess anymore? That Fern’ll treat you like she treats everyone else? That she’ll stop *loving* you?’

Maggie’s ears pressed back and she scrunched up her nose and her eyes and she opened her mouth wide and lifted her lips to bare her fangs and—

‘Did you just *hiss* at me?!’ Edmund exclaimed, reeling back in shock.

Maggie paused for a moment, surprised by herself.

Had she just...?

Then she met Edmund's eye again, and found another involuntary hiss escaped her.

Edmund just stared. So she did it again; louder this time.

'I didn't realise you could *hiss*,' he laughed, giving her a shit-eating grin as he pulled her so close their noses almost touched. 'Ooh, you're so mad! So mad at me! Da kitty-witty is angry-wangy! Da wittle kitty is so mad at me—'

Maggie slapped him; batting him in the head repeatedly with half-sheathed claws that caught his hair and tugged on his curls.

'Ow! Maggie!' Edmund released her wrist as he reflexively tried to step away; lifting his arms to shield his face as he was barraged with the smack of her palm and the pinpricks of her claws. 'Stop!'

'No!' Maggie exclaimed, backing her friend into a corner and swiping at him furiously. 'No! You stop! *You* stop, for once! Do you think I *like* being Fern's favourite?! Do you think I *like* having her watch *everything* I do *all the time*?! Do you think I *like* living in the *basement*?! Not being allowed *outside*?! Or that I *like* when everyone gets mad at me because they said my name in town and Fern hit them to stop them talking about me?! Do you think I *like* knowing that there are people out there who want to take me away, but not knowing *who* or *why* or *what they'll do to me*?! No! No, I *don't* like it! I *hate* it!'

Her hand made contact again, her claws finally unsheathing themselves, and Maggie gasped and pulled away as she realised what'd done.

'Ow!' Edmund exclaimed as he pulled back his now-bleeding arm and held it tight. He grit his teeth for a moment before taking a deep, deep breath and letting it out slowly. 'Fuck, Maggie.'

'I... I'm sorry!' Maggie managed, covering her mouth as her fur stood on end and her ears shot up erect. 'I didn't mean to—'

'No, it's... it's fine,' Edmund interrupted, giving a heavy sigh. 'I deserved it.'

'You didn't—'

'Yeah I did. I was being an arse,' he said, firmly, as he examined the scratch along his arm. Then he gave a scoff through his nose and shrugged; his arms dropping to his sides. 'Honestly? I'm kind of surprised it's taken this long for you to lose your temper at my shit.... You alright?'

Maggie was the one who shrugged, this time, and Edmund responded with a sigh as he wrapped his arms around her and gave her a comforting squeeze.

'Ugh, I'm sorry. We still friends?' he mumbled. Then he gave a weak chuckle, which Maggie felt move through his chest as he looked down to her. 'I'm still *your* favourite, right?'

Maggie nodded, her tail twitching in humour as she looked up at Edmund. A small, rumbling purr escaped her as he pet her head, and she let out a long breath. 'Sorry I got mad. I didn't mean to scratch you.'

'I deserved it,' Edmund's chuckle grew stronger, then, as he broke away from Maggie and rubbed the back of his neck. 'I need to stop being such a dick.'

Maggie couldn't help but giggle.

And then she saw Edmund blush.

'What?' Maggie asked, her ears twitching curiously. 'Why are you looking at me like that?'

'You— Uh—' his blush grew deeper and he looked away. 'Your whiskers twitch

when you laugh.'

'Do they?' she asked.

'Yeah, I never noticed before but they— Oh, *shit!*'

The sound of a key *clunk!*ing in the door echoed the room, and Maggie and Edmund both jumped in a panic.

Edmund grabbed Maggie and tugged her sideways, closing the closet door just in time as Fern entered her room; another familiar figure in tow.

'Blathe—' Maggie's excited exclamation was cut off as Edmund threw his hand over her mouth to silence her.

'*Shh!*' Edmund shushed, slowly lifting his hand from Maggie's mouth and turning to look out the tiny gap by the door's hinge.

Maggie leant over to join him, her feathers brushing against him as she craned her neck to peek at the two adults that now paced Fern's room.

*Blathe! Blathe was here!* Maggie felt her tail lash back and forth in excitement. *He was a whole week early!*

'I still think you should have taken the stable-hand position I got you,' Fern sighed, shaking her head at the handsome man who stood looking down at her. 'You like horses— And it paid so well! Really, boy. I feel like your life would have been a *lot* easier if you'd just listened to my advice!'

'It just wasn't me,' Blathe gave a sheepish chuckle. 'Besides, I like my work. Helping people makes me feel good.'

'I hate seeing you put yourself in danger,' Fern told him. 'Blathe.... One of these days, you're going to end up hurt.'

'I'll be fine.'

'You're going to break my *heart*, you stupid thing!' Fern shook her head again and, with a confused frown, bumped into the drawer that Edmund had left open. But she seemed too preoccupied to realise something was wrong and simply shut it again so she could look back to Blathe. 'You've always frightened me with your big dreams. I don't want to lose you.'

'Fern, I'll be fine—'

Maggie felt her twitching tail bump something long and wooden, and as she turned she saw the panic in Edmund's eyes as a broom slipped and fell against her side.

Luckily, it landed silently against her; but the bristles pushed through her fur down to her skin and she let out a giggle as they tickled her.

'*Shh!*' Edmund hissed, trying to silently bat the broom off his friend. '*Maggie! Sh!*'

'*I can't help it!*' she whispered back, smacking the broom away with a wing. '*It tickles!*'

'*Maggie!*' Edmund leant forward and swiped at the broom before it clattered into the wall; though it slipped from his grip and fell back into Maggie again.

The bristles tickled her and she snickered— And Edmund threw his hand over her snout once more to keep her quiet.

'*Shh!*' he shushed.

Maggie leant away from the broom, pressing into Edmund as she tried to get as far away from it as possible.... And Edmund awkwardly shifted himself, turning his hips away from her in a way she thought could *not* have been

comfortable.

'Maggie!' he hissed under his breath, his hand still firmly clamped around her mouth. 'Shh! She'll hear us!'

Maggie shook her head as the broom continued to tickle her and, giggling, instinctively tried to escape it again by pushing into Edmund more.

'Stop!' he gasped as he tried to wiggle away from her. 'Maggie!'

'It tickles!' the words came out muffled. 'Edmund, the broom's tickling me!'

'Stop! Maggie!' Edmund released Maggie's mouth then, so that he could grab her by the wrists and push her backwards. 'Shush!'

Then Edmund stumbled, losing his balance, and fell into Maggie; pinning her against the opposite wall of the closet with all of his weight and smothering her face directly into the centre of his chest as he barely managed to stop the broom from clattering to the floor.

But even then it was a pointless effort for, as Maggie was squashed between Edmund and the wall, she gave an involuntary squeal.... And even though the sound was muffled by Edmund's chest, the closet door was immediately yanked open and the two teenagers froze in place as the orphanage matron glared down at them.

'What are you *doing* to her, you *lustful* boy?!'

'Matron— Wh— *No!* No, I wasn't! We weren't!' Edmund, now in a clear panic, raised his arm defensively against the matron as she smacked him loud and hard. 'I *swear* we weren't—'

He cut off with a cry as the matron raised her hand to him again; though she was stopped as Blathe grabbed her arm and pulled her back a pace.

'Fern— Fern, wait!' he exclaimed. 'I really don't think that's what's happening here!'

'It *better not* be!' Fern shouted, and Maggie felt herself instinctively ducking down as the matron pulled from Blathe's grip and turned to her. 'Maggie! What are you two doing in my room?! You *know* it's off limits!'

'I-I-I—' Maggie felt every strand of fur on her entire body standing on end as her words caught in her throat and her heart threatened to explode. 'W-W-We— I—'

'It was my fault, Matron!' Edmund admitted. 'I made her! She didn't want to but I made her come in, anyway! I was just looking around, but I didn't take anything! I just wanted to get a reaction out of Maggie by making her break the rules! Cos she always gets so weird about it! I thought it'd be funny but—'

Edmund went quiet as Fern raised her hand at him again. Though, she paused this time.

It was clear she saw the long bloody scratch down Edmund's arm— And probably all the smaller pin-pricks that Maggie's half-clawed slaps had left over his face and neck, too.

She took a deep breath as her eyes ran over him. And then let it out as her glare turned to Maggie.

'Get *out*,' she growled, her voice quiet but vicious. 'The *both* of you.'

'Yes, Matron!'

'Y-Yes M-Matron!'

—END—

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