

Gloomy Aura

By C. Jade Wyton

Maggie is having a poor night. She's getting lost in the thoughts in her head, and so seeks out a close friend to talk to about her worries.

Contains descriptions of drug use, mental illness, implied childhood abuse.

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It was late. Probably close to one or two in the morning. But Maggie couldn't sleep.

Eulogy had asked her not to be in the apartment, tonight, so that he could spend time with Doll. So Maggie had asked Gayle if she could stay over and in return had helped make dinner and care for the children of the house.

It was always fun to stay at Gayle's— Her family was fun. And her friends were fun. And it reminded Maggie of when the two women had been housemates and coworkers.... Before their house had been destroyed. And Gayle had gotten married. And Maggie had *technically* become homeless.

Even though Maggie was spending four out of seven days a week on Eulogy's couch, the Waterdeep government still had her marked as “without permanent residency” and were constantly offering her “help” that she didn't need— If she needed her own place, she could afford one. But she *preferred* bouncing around between friends; it was a great excuse to spend time with them.

Plus, it made it easier when she went out for mercenary work. She didn't have to find anyone to housesit for her; something that would be difficult, considering she never knew if she was leaving for a week or a month!

*And her friends helped her keep all of her thoughts in order!*

Maggie knew she had lived alone, once. She'd spent at least a year travelling before moving in with Gayle.... But she couldn't remember it. A whole year had almost completely blanked itself from her memories, and she didn't want that to happen again— So she *couldn't* live alone. Not with the problems she had with her brain; it just wasn't safe or smart!

So she would bounce from friend to friend, staying on their couches and helping out around the house where she could.

That was how she *enjoyed* living. And her friends seemed to understand it, even if nobody else did.

Though.... If she could change *one* thing....

She wished she could visit Edmund and stay with him a while.

*Edmund.*

Oh, how she missed Edmund.

It had been so long since she'd seen him— Four years? Maybe five.

Too long.

She'd been thinking about him all night, as she'd lay on her friend's couch.

She'd thought of Edmund and how he used to talk to her, his voice gentle and

kind and patient. And then she'd thought of how he'd used to play with her; his teasing and his poking and his encouraging for her to try new things.... And then she'd remembered how he'd *touched* her, once, as they'd lay together. She remembered his hand trailing her body and felt herself grow hot as her fur prickled, and she'd had to get up to get a drink of water.

She hadn't understood what he had been trying to communicate, all those years ago. But now she *did*, and the thoughts about what she had missed out on would often keep her up at night.

*She hoped he might touch her like that again, one day....*

Maggie had taken to washing the dishes to try and rid her thoughts of what *exactly* might be found underneath Edmund's garbs, and instead tried to think about other things.

And, eventually, thoughts of Edmund had slowly drifted into thoughts of the orphanage. And thoughts of Fern.

And then, of course... thoughts of Blathe.

He and his party had stopped visiting just before she'd left on her adventure. But she couldn't for the life of her remember why!

She knew she'd been told, and she'd tried to remember it, but then... something had told her she didn't *want* to know the reason.

So instead of continuing to think about it, she'd abandoned the dishes and gone for a walk to clear her head.

Her feet had instinctively carried her to the street outside Eulogy's apartment— But she'd realised, as she stared up at the dim light in the window she knew was his, that she couldn't go in to him for comfort.

No. Doll was there; taking all of Eulogy's time for themselves and not sharing him. Which meant that Maggie had to leave and couldn't spend time with him.

Maggie's ears pressed down as she saw the shadow of Eulogy's partner against the window, and she hurriedly looked away when she felt the fur on the back of her neck rising.

Was this jealousy?

She'd never been a jealous person. Not in her whole life— Back when she was in the orphanage she always had to share *everything*.

So why was this heavy feeling in her chest so hot?

Well... she supposed it was because Doll wasn't *sharing* Eulogy; if they were *sharing* Eulogy, Maggie would be up there with them both now!

But she wasn't up there. And she was jealous.

She didn't *want* to be jealous of Doll. They were a lovely person! One of Maggie's *favourite* people!

But when they spent so much time with Eulogy, it made Maggie so unreasonably sad....

Sad?

*Mad.*

Which was stupid.

It was a stupid thing to be mad about. Stupid and childish. Two of her favourite friends making each other happy shouldn't make her feel this way!

But she just couldn't help it.

She wanted to storm up the apartment steps and throw open the door and

push her way between Eulogy and his partner and then hiss very loudly at Doll so that Doll would *have* to share Eulogy with her.

Maggie knew she couldn't, though.

So instead, she turned around and walked away; heading instead for one of the many market districts that could be found in the city.

She walked the district until she came to a familiar shopfront; Cloud Heands.

It had once been called Cloud Hands. And then, it had been called Cloud Head.... And then it had been Cloud Hands again.

And then it had switched back and forth and back and forth until the two words had merged into "Heands" and stuck.

Maggie paused at the door to this store.

It was owned by another good friend of hers; Cirrus the satyr.

She liked Cirrus.

He was a very nice man; sometimes, perhaps, a little forgetful. But she could relate to him about that— Her memory wasn't as bad as his, but there were some things that just didn't seem to stick....

Fern had always told Maggie that, if she shook her head around, she could hear all the loose thoughts jingling around like a half-empty coin purse.

*Maggie didn't want to think about Fern, right now.*

She didn't want to think about *anything*.

And Cirrus was a good friend for when you didn't want to think.

The door was unlocked, so Maggie let herself in.

She knew Cirrus wouldn't mind. He had told Maggie that his door was always open for her (something that, at the time, she hadn't thought would be quite so literal) and this wouldn't be the first time she'd crept in during the night looking for a place to sleep.

The room was beautiful; the back wall was lined by a shelf which housed jars full of herbs, and beaded curtains hung in all the doorways.... The smell was another matter altogether.

Maggie's nose twitched at the earthy, bitter smell of the room and she felt her tail lash twice.

The smell was why she didn't stay here often. It was too strong for her liking.

But then; this was Cirrus' space and he was allowed to keep it however he liked, so Maggie couldn't complain. She knew she was just lucky that he let her come to stay when she needed. And, of course, she wasn't unappreciative of that.

She just simply didn't like the smell of the drugs Cirrus took. Which she thought was reasonable, with her nose being so sensitive.

Shaking herself out, Maggie made for the back of the store and pushed past the curtains into the dream den.

She didn't go into Cirrus' room; she didn't want to wake him. But then as she passed the short hall into the den, she found him sitting in the corner with his hookah.

He let out a long breath of smoke, eyeing Maggie as she walked in, before smiling wide and patting the pillow beside him.

Maggie didn't need a second invite. She clambered onto the cushions beside Cirrus and nuzzled into her friend's side; purring half-heartedly as he took another long puff of his hookah.

They sat in quiet for a long while, Maggie rubbing her cheek against Cirrus' elbow and purring as he smoked, until Cirrus put down his hookah and pet Maggie tenderly on the head.

'Your aura's real gloomy, Mags,' he said, simply. 'You doing alright?'

'Yeah,' Maggie lied; though she could tell immediately that Cirrus knew she was lying, and so shuffled uncomfortably. 'Eulogy kicked me out so he could spend time with Doll.'

'Oh, yeah?'

'Yeah. I was going to stay with Gayle, but...' Maggie folded down her ears. 'I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about....'

What *had* she been thinking about?

That stupid wall had come up again, blocking her from her thoughts, and she didn't know why.

Something about... Edmund? Fern? The orphanage?

*Leaving* the orphanage?

That seemed about right.

Any time she tried to think about leaving the orphanage, she hit a wall.

It was annoying.... Especially when that wall would show up for all different things.

How she left the orphanage. How she *got to* the orphanage— And any time she went to a hospital, she would get a weird *deja vu* that the wall would stop her from understanding....

'Hm.... Cirrus?'

'Yeah?'

'Where do you think our memories go, when we forget them?'

Cirrus' brow furrowed, and he took a long puff of his hookah as he stared ahead.

A long moment passed, before he looked back to Maggie.

'Sorry. What was the question again?'

'Where do you think our memories go when we forget them?'

'Not a clue,' Cirrus answered. 'I think if we knew that, we wouldn't be forgetting them.'

'Hm...' Maggie thought that made sense; though she wished he had a better answer.

Cirrus took another puff from his hookah, and Maggie's nose twitched as the sweet smell hit her.

'Cirrus?' she asked.

'Mm?'

'Could I try that?'

For a moment Cirrus stared ahead in quiet thought. He let out a long breath of smoke through his nose before sniffing and, slowly, offering her the pipe to the hookah.

'It's strong stuff,' he warned. 'Just a small puff, yeah? You don't want too much on your first go.'

'Alright,' Maggie agreed, taking a small breath— And immediately coughing out a spattering of smoke. She flicked her tongue in and out, scrunching up her nose as the taste of the drugs stuck to her textured tongue and refused to let go.

Cirrus pet Maggie on the back as she coughed again, her lungs trying to clear themselves of the bittersweet concoction she'd tried.

'You alright?' he asked.

Maggie nodded, taking a deep breath and wiping her mouth on her sleeve. 'I don't feel any different.'

'Give it a minute,' Cirrus told her, taking his hookah back and taking another long puff. 'Too many people make the mistake of taking a second hit before the first has kicked in. Just gotta wait for it to work.'

Maggie gave another nod— And immediately felt her eyes go wide as her brain sloshed forward and punched her in the back of her forehead.

An old putrid smell fell from her memories and flooded her senses, and she gripped her nose tight in her hands and doubled over as if in pain.

'Oh! Oh, alright, yep,' Cirrus' arms wrapped around Maggie. 'Okay. You alright?'

Maggie squeezed her eyes shut, and immediately regretted it.

Images flashed through her mind that she couldn't explain or understand.

A hospital. Blood. Fire.

Fire.

'Fourteen!' she exclaimed, leaping to her feet.

'What?' Cirrus stood with her; keeping his arms safely around her in case she stumbled or fell.

'She picked Fourteen,' Maggie mumbled, not quite understanding what she was saying or why. 'To keep forever.'

Cirrus' brow furrowed as Maggie sat back down, tugging on her ears and curling into herself.

'*Terrible child,*' Maggie breathed. '*Disobedient daughter.*'

'Who?'

Maggie paused, trying to remember who she was talking about. 'I... don't remember.'

Cirrus pursed his lips as he sat beside his friend. 'Mags? You okay?'

'*Why can't I listen?*' she whispered. '*There's a reason I don't go outside. There's a reason I stay inside. Stupid child. Stupid, stupid child.*'

'Okay. I can see you aren't reacting well.... I'm going to call Eulogy,' Cirrus decided, rising to his feet. 'You stay here.'

'*Here,*' Maggie echoed. '*Here. I promise. Here. Here. I stay here.*'

—END—

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