

Maggie's Manipulation

By C. Jade Wyton

Maggie manipulates her lich mother into allowing her to leave and return to Waterdeep to rescue a member of their family, pick up a supplies, and secretly administer a counter-curse to one of Fourteen's spies.

Contains depictions of manipulations, and mentions of child abuse and kidnapping.

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Two deep breaths. Two deep, slow breaths. And Maggie knocked on her mother's door.

'Just one second, Maggie!'

Maggie shivered at the recognition. Less than a month knowing her mother (or, at least, less than a month's worth of days of her mother being *conscious* while she was stuck in this miserable place) and the woman had already begun to recognise her knock.... *Just as she recognised everyone else's knock*, Maggie reminded herself in an attempt to shake the uncomfortable feel. *It wasn't special treatment, it was simply the woman's way. She recognised everyone in the family. Knew them all by name. Knew their knocks. Their footsteps. Their voices— Even their common habits.*

It was supposedly how the woman loved; by remembering. But it still gave Maggie the creeps.

*Deep breath, just say what Fourteen said to say*, she reminded herself. *And everything will be fine.*

Light footsteps, followed by heavier scurrying, made their way to the door, and Maggie was soon faced by the lich and her... companion.

'Maggie,' her mother smiled at her, warmly; clearly feeling honoured that her daughter had sought her out, rather than avoided her as she had been so far. It made Maggie prickly with both fear and guilt. 'I wasn't expecting you so late. Crouch down, so I can address you properly.'

Maggie didn't want to. But, still, she did. She crouched down so her mother could tidy up the short, messy locks of hair that barely grew from her head. 'Eulogy says this is rude,' she commented.

'Perhaps it's old fashioned,' the lich admitted, finishing with Maggie's hair and pecking a kiss on her nose. 'But, then, so am I.'

Maggie tried not to shiver at the feeling of her mother's dry, unnatural skin.

That was when Fungus gave a loud *slurp*, and sucked up a dribble of coloured fluid from his lips; causing the lich to chuckle and rub at her chest. The same strange green fluid soaked into the shirt of her dress as she put pressure down, and Maggie flicked her ears forward curiously. Though, she didn't ask.

She was here for a reason, and couldn't get distracted.

So she cleared her throat, getting her mother's attention back, and respectfully bowed her head.

'I... wanted to talk to you about the Astrid issue,' she stated, softly, echoing Fourteen as closely as she could.

'Mm!' her mother's hand moved from her chest to her brow. 'I don't know what Fourteen was thinking, sending that poor thing out on her own. She has no experience on the outside. And Oobleck was already doing a supply run. If she needed something, she should have sent Ragtheim.'

'Ragtheim's been tired,' Maggie pointed out, not mentioning the *real* reason Fourteen had kept the man at home. 'Um.... Mother, I.... I wanted to ask.... Uh....'

'You can speak freely, Maggie, I promise I won't be mad.'

Maggie hesitated. She wasn't sure she believed her mother. The memories of her early childhood had been coming back, during her stay in Weltaron, like a horrible trickle of trauma, and with them came the memories of her mother's temper.

The lich watched Maggie's face closely. And with a sigh, her shoulders dropped. 'I'm sorry, Maggie. I know what you're thinking.... I wasn't the best to you, when you were new in the world. I wasn't the best to *anyone*. I... admit that. I was suffering without relief, and it affected my judgement,' she placed her hand back to her chest. 'But please know, despite how I was, that I have *always* loved you. I've done my best to keep my temper in check. The family has done me well. Though I understand that doesn't make up for the harm I caused you.'

Her fur wanted to bristle, but she forced it to lay flat.

"*Harm*" was barely the word for it! She had *killed* whoever she and Fourteen had used to be, and used the poor things' parts like broken toys to create something new. And while Maggie was glad to be alive, there was *no* justification that the lich could give that would ever excuse the horrible and excessive murders she had committed.

'What is it you wanted to ask me, Maggie?'

Maggie let out her breath; she needed to get through this. 'I was wondering if I could be a part of the party that picks Astrid up....'

Several emotions passed over her mother's face, before she fought them back and settled to a calm, neutral look. 'Maggie,' she stated. '*Maggie*....'

'Please, hear me out?' Maggie felt her fur lifting with her anxiety. And though she was relieved when her mother nodded, she couldn't lay it down again. She put her hands in her pockets, thumbing the small vial of counter-curse that Fourteen had given her to administer to Astrid, and used it to force herself to have courage. 'Waterdeep is my home. I know it and the people well, and they know me. I can lead a small party there to pick up Astrid, without causing conflict with the authorities. And— I can reassure everyone, my friends and the law, that I'm safe and happy. Here. At home? Which, you know that now after what Blathe did, they think I've been kidnapped. You don't want them to come looking for us, and disrupt the family, do you?'

The lich looked like she was *almost* catching on to the manipulation, and Maggie tried her best to put on an honest face. She wasn't used to lying; she very rarely ever did it.

'I've spoken to Doll and Edmund about it, already. Edmund would like to come with me, to sort out our things.... We have pets that were left behind, and I'm worried about them. And Edmund has clients whose orders he will have to

cancel. And... I miss my things. All my treasures from my adventures. I'm scared if I'm gone too long, all my memories will be thrown away.'

Her mother's brow furrowed, and her arms slowly crossed... but she didn't look angry. Just concerned. 'Maggie, I'm not sure.... I've just gotten you back. I don't want to lose you again.'

'I'll come back!' Maggie promised. 'I had all that time to leave, while you were resting! And I chose to stay! Because *this* is my home. You see that, right? That I stayed? That I'm not going to run away?'

It was only half the truth. She *would* return; she needed to make her mother trust her, so they could carry out Fourteen's plan. But this horrible place of sorrow was *not* her home.

When her mother hesitated, she pushed:

'And I'll be safe— I was an adventurer, before Blathe brought me back. It was my job to travel and fight. Nobody on the road messes with me! They all know better— Which means if I go, the people who go with me to pick up Astrid will be all the more safe. You want them to be safe, right?'

She felt bad manipulating the woman; but enough was enough. She couldn't be allowed to hurt anyone else. Even *one* more dead child would be too many.

'Yes, I do, but—'

'And Doll said they're staying behind!' she didn't elaborate that Doll was staying behind *to torment Mori*. 'You know I would never abandon Doll! And besides, even if I *wanted* to run away, you'll always know where I am,' she touched her wrist, where the tracking spell held tight like an invisible bracelet.

The lich heaved a sigh. 'Maggie, *don't* interrupt me.'

'I.... Sorry, Mother.'

'That's alright,' the lich uncrossed her arms so she could pet her daughter's cheek. 'You worry me, Maggie. Since the day you were born, you've always wanted *more*. It scares me.'

'I promise I'll be alright,' Maggie pressed. 'But I can't just sit around doing nothing when one of our own is in trouble. I just can't! I need to know that every single one of our family is as safe as they can be.'

*That was the one.*

The lich's eyes softened, and Maggie knew she'd said the right thing.

'You'll be safe, if I say yes?' she asked, slowly.

'I will,' Maggie reassured. 'I've travelled more than Ragtheim. I've been across the ocean, even! If the kraken couldn't take me down, *nothing* can!'

It earned a laugh, though it seemed melancholy. 'Okay. But just to Waterdeep and back. You reassure your friends you're safe, pick up the things you need to bring home, and then come straight back here, you understand?'

*Oh, thank the gods!*

'Yes, of course!' Maggie promised. 'And! I'll pick up more supplies! I'm in good with the markets, you know. I often help move the shipments from their wholesalers. I can get *anything* we need!'

'Alright, that would be good,' her mother acknowledged. 'Strilleburg has been desperate for something to go with the garlic and butter that Cirrus brought in...' she paused, her lip drawing tight as she gave a low hum. 'I'm still worried about Franch. You're *sure* the people he's with won't hurt him? He's not a sociable

man.'

'I'm sure, Mother,' Maggie confirmed. 'When Fourteen scryed, she said he was with Eulogy. Eulogy is.... *Everything*.'

An almost jealous look passed over the lich, though she suppressed it as she took her daughter's hands and squeezed them. Maggie tried not to wince at the pain of her trimmed claws.

'I'm very grateful for how Eulogy's looked after you,' she settled on. 'I'm... sorry for my outburst at him. I'd say I have no excuse, but, considering the situation? I think I had a rather valid excuse to panic.'

Maggie nodded in false-acknowledgement, trying to placate her mother. Then, with her *best* acting, she flicked up her ears and pretended to remember: 'Oh! There's... one more thing. But I'm not sure you're going to like it.'

'Oh?'

'Wonda asked to come,' Maggie fake-wincing, making out like she didn't think it a good idea.

'Absolutely not!' the lich exclaimed.

It was exactly the response Maggie was hoping for, and she had to keep her tail from flicking in relief.

'I'm barely comfortable with the idea of *you* leaving! The world is *far* too dangerous for a unicorn to walk the streets! And in her current mental state? No! No, I won't allow her to put herself at risk like that!'

'I agree, I don't think she's ready to be out in the world,' Maggie lied. 'But she's going to be *so* disappointed when I tell her....'

'I'd rather deal with a disappointed daughter, than a dead one,' the lich said firmly.

And Maggie had to bite back the retort: *Oh, you have no idea....*

—END—

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