

# The Tabaxi with the Diamond Marking

By C. Jade Wyton

*Edmund has been mourning the disappearance of his childhood friend and teenage crush, Maggie Gryphon, for ten years. He's tried to move on; but nothing can quell his feelings of love and loneliness. So when he hears a rumour that Maggie might still be out there, roaming the streets of Waterdeep, he abandons everything for the chance to find her.*

~~~~~

It had been ten years since Maggie Gryphon had vanished, and Edmund still missed her.

He had been in and out of relationships (of course he had; he couldn't spend his whole life waiting for a girl who might never return) but nobody else ever felt as right as she had.

None of them ever felt as strong, and beautiful, and perfect, and *right* as the bond he'd had with Maggie.

It always felt more like he was scratching an itch than anything. Fulfilling a biological need of companionship....

*Solving a problem with the second-best solution.*

The people he dated seemed to understand. It had been no secret that he had loved a girl, once. And it was no secret that he'd lost her— Though, most people seemed to think that meant she was *dead*, when it was actually quite a bit more literal....

Or, maybe she *was* dead.

There was no way for him to know.

He slammed his empty cup down on the bar, and motioned for the barmaid, Malysa, to pour him another drink.

'Are you sure?' she asked. 'That's your third, tonight.'

Edmund nodded. 'It's one of those days.'

He didn't need to elaborate; Malysa had been an orphan in Fern's care, too. And while she'd maybe been a little young to know Maggie as anything more than an impersonal authority, Edmund could recall a time when Maggie would hook the girl on her hip and carry her around as she collected dirty clothes; piling shirts into the child's arms and playfully calling her a "big helper."

'Mm,' Malysa hummed sadly as she refilled Edmund's cup. 'Matron Fern is worried about her, too.'

Edmund let out a sigh.

*Fern.*

Fern hadn't changed a bit.

Not even a single new wrinkle on her face, in Edmund's entire life....

'*Human, my arse,*' he mumbled.

It earned a chuckle from Malysa, who leant in close and tried to sound encouraging. '*Edmund,*' she said, dropping her voice low. 'I don't want to get your hopes up, but you see that old bard over there, in the corner?'

Edmund turned to eye the old, well-dressed tabaxi man. He looked like he would have been a handsome jet black a long time ago. Though now he was a paling colour, with grey streaks around his muzzle and eyes.

‘He’s a traveller. Just got into town yesterday. He was talking about something that happened to him about... eight? Years ago,’ she told him. ‘He was caught in a raid on a bar in Waterdeep. He said he was saved by “a strange group of hybrids.” Quote.’

‘Right...?’

‘A half man, half goat—’

‘A satyr?’

‘Yeah, I think so. And a gnome-goblin,’ she continued. ‘And... a tabaxi with wings.’

Edmund choked on his drink. ‘Are you serious?!’

‘Yeah! Yeah, but— Edmund, listen,’ Malysa motioned for Edmund to keep calm. ‘It might not be her. I know she’s unusual, but she can’t be the *only* tabaxi with wings out there— *Edmund!*’

Edmund was on his feet, already making his way over to the bard to talk.

He cleared his throat as he reached the table to draw the man’s attention as he slowly pulled out the chair opposite.

The bard gave a smile and nodded, though it was clear he was surprised by Edmund’s sudden want to join him.

‘Here to request a song from an old man?’ he guessed with a chuckle. ‘I know all the classics. All I ask is you buy me a drink for it.’

‘No music, but I’ll pay for your meal if you humour me with conversation,’ Edmund offered.

‘More pay for less work,’ the bard joked. ‘I’d be a fool to deny you! The name’s Midnight. Yours?’

‘Edmund. And thank you,’ Edmund settled down and pulled out his coin purse, taking out a handful of gold and putting it in the centre of the table, where it was quickly collected by Malysa. ‘My uh, friend here said that you were telling her about something that happened to you in Waterdeep.’

‘Oh, the tavern raid?’ he asked. ‘Yes, yes. *Dreadful* business, that was! A group of cultists from a foreign country were hunting down some poor girl, and they set the place ablaze! Stabbed me right through my chest, they did! Would have killed me if it wasn’t for that tabaxi girl and her healing spells.’

Edmund’s breath caught in his throat.

*A winged tabaxi girl with healing magic.*

The man’s eyes narrowed as he spied Edmund’s expression; though his smile remained friendly. ‘*Aah...*’ he leant back in his seat. ‘I see. Not a lot of winged tabaxi around, is there?’

Edmund shook his head. ‘It’s almost unheard of.’

‘It is,’ Midnight agreed. ‘I’ve only ever met two of them in my life!’

‘Two?’ Edmund blinked. *The old man had seen two winged tabaxi...?*

‘Mm, surprised by the idea of two of them, but not the idea of one?’ Midnight raised a brow and gave Edmund a sly look. ‘I’ll wager a guess that you know a tabaxi with wings, then?’

‘Y... Yeah,’ Edmund confirmed, hesitantly. His instincts told him to deny it

(after *years* of Fern making it clear Maggie was a secret, it was almost second nature to lie about her) but he forced himself to be honest. ‘Black and white fur. Uh, short fur. She’s about my age....’

‘She have a little diamond on her forehead?’ Midnight asked, his ear twitching curiously.

Malysa dropped the tray of dirty dishes she was carrying, and Edmund cast her a glance as she scrambled to clean up.

‘So that’s a yes,’ laughed the tabaxi. ‘Ah, is she in town? I never got the chance to properly thank her for saving my life.’

‘No, she’s not in town,’ Edmund shook his head. ‘She grew up here. But she vanished about ten years ago. I’ve been trying to figure out where she went....’

‘Ah. Well, I don’t know how much help I’ll be. It was eight years ago I met her, and last I heard she was setting off overseas— Shipping off on some mercenary escort job.’

Edmund’s heart sunk. ‘She left the country?’

‘Mm,’ he nodded. ‘And I’m not sure if she had plans on returning. I asked around about her, and I heard that she’d lost her house just a few months before and was staying with some friends... a place called Trollskull Manor I believe.’

‘Trollskull Manor?’ Edmund echoed.

‘Mhm,’ Midnight confirmed. ‘Didn’t like that family that lived there, much. Met ‘em, and they certainly weren’t normal folk.... Friendly enough on the surface. But definitely keeping secrets.... If you go looking for your friend, they might know where she’s ended up.’

Edmund bit his lip, and drummed his nails on the table anxiously.

*If he went looking....*

‘Edmund?’ Malysa said, softly. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Hm,’ Edmund gave a low grunt, and licked his lips.... Then, he looked up to the bard and let out his breath. ‘Are you heading that way?’

The man raised a brow and sniffed. ‘Do you need me to be?’

It certainly was a *question*....

Edmund met the bard’s eyes with a determined look as he thought about it.

He’d always lived here. In this town— Or, more, just outside of it. He’d never known anything but the orphanage, the woods, and then... the forge he’d trained at. That had been his entire life. And it had been comfortable, but....

Was it worth the comfort, if he had to live it without *her*?

Edmund closed his eyes, then, letting out a deep breath.

He’d continued saving his gold, even after Maggie had vanished. Always hoping —praying— that she would come home one day and they could then run away together.

It was a strange dream; for her to come back, just to leave again.... Perhaps that was why it never happened. Because he was putting it off. He’d always put it off....

Maybe that was why she’d left without him.

And perhaps he needed to step up, and go out and *find* her.

‘Edmund, I can see what you’re thinking, and you *can’t!*’ Malysa’s hands found his shoulder, and she gave him a little shake. ‘You can’t just leave!’

‘Why not?’ asked Midnight, his tail tip twitching. ‘You have a family?’

‘N... No,’ Edmund answered, putting his hand on Malysa’s. ‘I don’t have anything here. Not really. I’ve been... *waiting*... for an opportunity to leave. So I’ve never made anything I wouldn’t be able to leave behind.’

Malysa let out a sigh, ‘Edmund....’

The tabaxi watched the two humans for a long moment before he gave a shrug and went back to his food. ‘Well, you think on it. If you decide you want to come with me, my daughters and I are leaving at first light.’

~~~~~

It hadn’t been a hard choice.

Edmund had been holding out for news of Maggie for years— Even the slimmest chance of finding her was still better than waiting around here one more day.

So he’d packed up the few things he owned into a bag and paid the local newsboy twenty gold to take a note and the deed to his property to Fern (no point in leaving an empty house when there were were so many people in need of homes, he figured).

The hardest thing to carry was the chest of gold he’d saved; and even that wasn’t too much. Not on his strong shoulders. It wasn’t like it was a *big* chest or anything....

‘Woo, look at you!’ Midnight exclaimed, waving Edmund down from the top of a run-down old caravan covered in scratches and graffiti. ‘Already packed and everything! Looks like you’re going to be a good travelling partner.... Put your stuff in the back and then come join me up front.’

‘Thanks,’ Edmund chuckled, stepping around to the back of the caravan and throwing aside the curtain so he could put his bag and chest down. ‘I hope I am, though I’ve never actually travelled before—’

‘*This* is him, Dad?’ a sudden voice from the back of the caravan made Edmund jump, and he looked up to see a pair of tabaxi girls staring down at him.

They looked almost identical except for their clothes— Orange and white with tabby stripes and young, fluffy faces.

‘Wow, Daddy, he looks so handsome!’ the second tabaxi chirped.

‘So handsome!’ the first tabaxi agreed, leaning down to examine Edmund. ‘I *love* your hair!’

‘You look so strong! How’d you get so strong?’

‘Uh— I’m a blacksmith?’ Edmund answered, feeling a little awkward.

‘Whoa!’

‘Wow!’

‘Girls, let him put his stuff down!’ Midnight called through the back opening of the caravan. ‘Sorry, lad. These are my daughters. Girls, introduce yourselves!’

‘Oh! Yes, Daddy!’ one of the girls bounced happily in place, before holding out her hand. ‘I’m Eve! And this is Dawn. We’re twins, and I’m the *fun* one!’

Dawn smacked Eve in the back of the head before shouldering her out of the way and taking Edmund’s hand instead. ‘She means she’s the *stupid* one!’

‘Ah, well—’ Edmund cut off as Eve’s hand replaced Dawn’s again, and he had to bite back a laugh as the two young women began to shove each other around.

‘Hah! Edmund, you’re best coming up to sit with me,’ Midnight chuckled. ‘Leave the girls to their squabbling! They don’t mean any harm but, well, they don’t get to make new friends often. Especially not friends their own age!’

‘Well... I don’t know if I’d call myself *their age*,’ Edmund gave a chuckle as he made his way to the front of the caravan and joined Midnight on the driver’s seat. He could still hear the girls squabbling as their father pet him on the shoulder. ‘I’m in my thirties—’

‘Early thirties, though?’

‘Well, yes. Thirty-one,’ Edmund shrugged. ‘But your daughters are *clearly* younger than me.’

‘No younger than that friend of yours at the bar!’

‘What, eighteen?’ Edmund asked. *They didn’t look that young!*

‘Oh, lord— Okay, they’re a bit older than *that!*’ Midnight laughed. ‘They’re twenty-five. That’s only six or so apart from you! Though, maybe that feels like a lot longer when you’re not as old as me.’

Edmund echoed Midnight’s laugh, and rubbed the back of his neck. ‘Yeah, probably.’

‘So. You have everything in order?’ Midnight asked, lifting up his horses’ reins and giving Edmund a wink.

‘Yes,’ Edmund confirmed. ‘I sent letters to everyone who needed to know I’d be leaving. So nobody will be in the dark about what’s happened to me.’

‘Ah! And with letters nobody can try and talk you out of it, either,’ Midnight pointed out. ‘Clever.’

‘Hm,’ Edmund responded with a low grunt of acknowledgment, before settling down comfortably and sighing. ‘So we go?’

‘So we go!’ Midnight confirmed, flicking the reins and starting his caravan rolling.

Slowly, they made their way through the quiet town.

Most people were still asleep this early in the day; which suited Edmund just fine.

He was perfectly content to slip silently out of town.... Out of the lives of the people he knew.

*No ill will*, he thought as they passed house after house, growing closer and closer to the northern exit of town. *Live all of your lives well, and I’ll live mine the same.*

He hoped that it would be true.

The people of this town were good people who had always been kind to him. And they deserved full lives, even if he was moving on.

As they reached the edge of town Edmund let out a breath and let himself relax.

He was doing this.

He was *really* doing this....

‘Still time to change your mind,’ as if he’d read Edmund’s thoughts, Midnight spoke up. ‘I can pull over and let you off if you want to stay.’

But Edmund shook his head. ‘I’ll never forgive myself if I do.’

‘Right then,’ Midnight nodded, clicking his tongue at his horses and giving another flick of the reins so they sped into a comfortable trot.

Edmund had never come out this side of town before. The orphanage was in the woods just to the south, so that had always been the exit he used....

The farmland was beautiful. Large pastures of animals broken here and there by trees or fields of crops. Very different to the woods on the opposite side of town.

*THUMP!*

Edmund flinched at the sound of something in the caravan landing heavily. Then Dawn (Dawn? Yes, that was Dawn; she was the one with the hat) poked her head through the cloth window and twitched her whiskers at the two men up front.

‘So,’ she started, before being yanked backwards and vanishing.

‘So!’ Eve echoed, taking Dawn’s place at the window. ‘Dad said you were looking for a tabaxi girl?’

‘Uh....’

‘Because I would like to point out that *I’m* a tabaxi girl—‘

Eve was shoved out of the way by her sister, who squeezed into the window beside her and batted at her face.

‘*Noooo* Eve! You *idiot!*’ Dawn hissed. ‘He’s looking for a *specific* tabaxi girl!’

Edmund couldn’t help but chuckle as the sisters bickered. He took some comfort knowing that, if this trip was to be long, at least it wouldn’t be lonely.

‘Ah, yes. So who *is* this young lass to you, anyway?’ Midnight asked, drawing the attention of both Edmund and the girls. ‘Old friend?’

‘Or is she your long lost *lover?*’ Eve asked, her eyes sparkling. ‘How romantic—‘

Dawn shoved her sister. ‘No! I bet she owes you money.’

That one got a laugh from Edmund, who shook his head and sniffed.

‘Maggie—‘

‘Her name is *Maggie?*!’

‘*Shut up, Eve!*’

‘Maggie is... or more... Maggie *was*.... She’s...’ Edmund paused, looking out across the farmland that slowly passed them. ‘She’s... *my everything.*’

‘*Awww— OW!*’ Eve’s coo cut off as Dawn hit her.

‘Continue,’ Dawn said, simply.

Edmund chuckled, glancing to the girls and lifting his hand to the scar along his forehead. ‘I used to bully her. You know. The way kids do when they like you, but don’t like that they like you?’

‘Mhm!’ Eve nodded, and wrapped an arm around her sister. ‘Like Dawn!’

‘*Get off me!*’

‘Heh.... She was my friend, but I was jealous of her because she was Fern’s—the orphanage matron’s— favourite,’ he continued. ‘But then she saved my life. Maggie, I mean. And I... We became inseparable after that. At least, until we got older and Fern made *sure* to separate us.’

Edmund’s laugh was echoed by Eve’s giggling, and he realised he was blushing.

‘You fell in love with her?’ Eve guessed.

‘I did,’ Edmund confirmed. ‘We used to always talk about running away. Escaping the orphanage together and becoming adventurers.... Then one day

she... *she*....’

Edmund felt his voice break as he cut off, tears coming to his eyes as he looked to the sky.

‘She left?’ Dawn asked, her brow furrowing. ‘Without you? Why would she do that?’

‘Something happened,’ Edmund said. ‘I don’t know what, but I remember Fern and her fighting. Which was unbelievable. Because she *never* fought with Fern. And when she came out of Fern’s office she was crying. I tried to ask what happened but she just locked herself in her room and refused to come out.... In the morning she was gone. I couldn’t believe it. Nobody could. And Fern was *inconsolable*. Maggie was like a daughter to her, you know?’

Midnight cast Edmund a sympathetic look. ‘Aye. I can’t imagine losing my girls. My heart goes out to your matron.’

‘Mm,’ Edmund hummed in response. ‘I’m... worried. *Really* worried. About looking for Maggie. I’m scared that she.... Maggie... had a bad memory. And not just a normal bad memory. Fern used to say there was something wrong with her head.... I’m scared that... even if I *do* find her she won’t remember me.’

‘Ah...’ Midnight gave a nod. ‘But then— What if she *does*?’

The thought sent a thrilling shiver up Edmund’s spine.

What if she *does*?

~~~~~

Waterdeep.

Finally, after three long months on the road, they were in Waterdeep.

Edmund’s stomach felt like it was doing flips.

He worried he’d made a huge mistake. That Maggie wasn’t even going to *be here*, and that it would all be for nothing.... But then, there was still a chance (a small chance, but a chance nonetheless) that she *was* here in the city. And it made his heart pound, and his hands sweaty, and his breath catch in his throat.

After more than a decade, he might finally be seeing his closest friend again.

His closest friend and the love of his life.... If only she felt the same about him....

If she didn’t, though. That would be okay. Just being by her side again, whether as a lover or as a friend, would be enough for him.

Just to see her alive and happy— Just to hear her *laugh*—

That was all he needed.

‘Well, here we are, lad,’ Midnight’s voice broke Edmund from his thoughts, and the tabaxi ruffled the man’s hair. ‘I suppose this is where we part?’

‘I... suppose so,’ Edmund gave a weak chuckle as he felt another set of hands rest on his shoulders. The hands gently massaged him until a warm breath found its way onto his neck and he recoiled with an awkward laugh. ‘Ahah, Eve— *Please*.’

Eve didn’t pull away; instead, she gave an affectionate sniff at Edmund’s ear. ‘What happens if Maggie’s not in Waterdeep?’ she asked.

‘Then I... keep looking, I guess,’ Edmund sighed.

‘Or your could come with us,’ Dawn’s voice floated from the back, before

Edmund felt her shove Eve out of the way so she could lean over the the cart to run a finger over Edmund's cheek. 'We're fun, aren't we?'

Edmund couldn't help but laugh. 'Tell you what, girls. If I don't hear anything about her, I'll consider it.'

'Ooh!' Eve leant over the back of the cart so she could poke at Edmund's other side, just like her sister. 'I don't know what I want more! For you to find your true love, or you to keep hanging out with us!'

Dawn leant over Edmund to smack Eve in the back of the head. 'C'mon, Eve! True love, for sure!'

Eve smacked back. 'I was *joking!*' she whined, before giving Edmund a tight hug. 'I'm gonna really miss you, Edmund. You be safe, okay?'

'I will,' Edmund promised.

'Go on, boy,' Midnight clapped a hand on Edmund's shoulder, giving him an affectionate shove that almost knocked him off the cart. 'Go find that girl of yours!'

'Alright, I will!' Edmund chuckled, clambering down off Midnight's cart and waving to the three tabaxi. 'Bye, Midnight! Stay safe, girls!'

'Byeeee!' Eve chirped, waving back.

'See you!' Dawn giggled.

Edmund gave one last goodbye, before taking a deep breath and turning to the crowd.

*Here he was.*

*Waterdeep.*

*His first hope in over ten years of seeing Maggie again....*

*Okay.... No point in waiting around.*

Edmund swallowed, and stepped into the mass of people, feeling himself taken into the city.

He weaved through the crowd with expertise —just like he would weave through the orphans who were sent to his home town— until he had made his way to a small, squat building labelled *KODDLE'S CURIOSITIES*.

A strange shop filled with mystical items from all the realms, from what he could see in the window... it seemed as good as anywhere else to start his search.

The bell on the door jingled, echoed by a bird's squawking from somewhere amongst the crowded shelves.

'Ahhh, hello!' beamed an old, raggedy-looking turtle that sat behind the counter. Edmund could only assume that this was Koddle. 'Welcome. How can I help you, today?'

'I'm looking for a friend of mine,' Edmund answered, leaning against the counter. 'A tabaxi. With wings. Black and white fur. Goes by "Maggie"?'

'Hmmm...' the turtle slowly raised a hand to his chin, and began to rap his fingers against it. 'Maggie.... I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the name.... With wings, you say?'

'Yes. Black and white fur.'

'Mmm... perhaps...' Koddle's eyes tightened, and he raised his fingers to his forehead. 'Diamond marking?'

Edmund's heart leapt. 'Yes! Yes, that's her!'

'Ah, yes, I remember her...' Koddle's lips turned up in a grin, and he placed his



hands crossed lightly on his counter. ‘Excitable young girl. I believe she used to work at the docks. Brought me a few deliveries from my partners overseas... though that was almost a decade ago,’ the turtle gave an apologetic shrug. ‘And that was before Big Belchy destroyed half the harbour, of course. I don’t recall seeing her after that— Though I heard she got out of all that unharmed.... I do sometimes still see her old housemate around the artificer workshops. Perhaps you might ask around there? I’m sure someone will know about where she’s gotten herself to.’

‘Yes! Yes— Thank you!’ Edmund grasp Koddle’s hand and squeezed it gratefully. ‘You have no idea how helpful you’ve been! Thank you!’

Koddle laughed, and motioned to the door. ‘You go left from here, until you get to the end of the street. Go right from there and head up towards the North Ward. Should be pretty easy to find, once you’ve gotten yourself into the right ward.’

‘*Thank you!*’ Edmund beamed, stepping backwards towards the door. ‘Thank you *so much!*’

‘Best of luck, boy.’

Edmund wasted no time in following Koddle’s instruction.

Maggie had been here— Midnight hadn’t been mistaken! Other people knew her— She had worked here!

She had *lived* here!

There was hope!

He hustled through the city as fast as the crowd would let him until he found himself in a street full of magical workshops....

‘Excuse me! Excuse me,’ he stopped a woman as she exited a shop, clasping his hands together apologetically before asking; ‘I’m looking for a friend of mine. A tabaxi who goes by Maggie? She’s—’

‘Aah, you mean Gayle’s old housemate?’ the woman asked. ‘The girl with wings?’

‘Yes!’ Edmund’s voice broke in his excitement. ‘Please, do you know where she is? I’m an old friend, I’ve been looking for her!’

‘Ah, well... I’m not sure where she is now, I’m afraid,’ she admitted, pulling out a notebook. ‘But Gayle might know. I don’t think they talk so much anymore, with Gayle being so busy with her children... but if anyone can point you in her direction, it’s her. Here—’ the woman finished scribbling down her notes, and ripped the page from her book to give to Edmund. ‘That’s Gayle’s address. Trollskull Manor. Be careful if you go, though. Her husband is... something.’

‘*Something?*’ Edmund echoed, quizzically.

‘Harmless, *mostly,*’ the woman made a face. ‘But he once filled a catapult with *beans* and launched it at a councillor’s house because he disagreed with the passing of a new law.’

‘Oh, I uh. I see,’ Edmund blinked. Then, he looked down at the paper and felt his heart beating faster.

*Maggie was so close....*

He could feel it!

‘Well, good luck with your search,’ the woman pet Edmund on the shoulder before she turned to finish locking up her shop. ‘Remember; Gayle. Gayle Mann.’

She's an orc woman.... I really do hope she can help you.'

So did he.

~~~~~

*Knock, knock, knock.*

Edmund knocked thrice on the door of Trollskull Manor.

His heart was pounding harder than his fist had. And he was sweaty. And he was having trouble swallowing the lump in her throat.

He really hoped he would find this "Gayle" woman here.

He'd tried the tavern attached to Trollskull's bottom floor first and met the warforged bartender, who had told Edmund to go around to the side; up the stairs and to the first floor door.

When there was no answer, he knocked again— Which was followed by the sound of a crying child.

Edmund cringed, feeling guilty as he heard shuffling around inside, and someone calling out that they'd be with him in a minute.

A woman's voice. Deep and rich. Very orcish....

Edmund *really* hoped it was Gayle's. And that she could show him the way to Maggie.

Then the door opened and Edmund felt himself standing up straighter as a blue-skinned orc woman greeted him, a very young half-elf boy resting on her hip.

'Hello? Can I help you?' she queried, adjusting the child as he shifted and made a *very* unhappy face.

Edmund bit his lip as the boy's look was directed at him, before clearing his throat and rubbing the back of his head anxiously. 'Uh— Yes. My name is Edmund and I—'

'Maggie's friend?' Gayle interrupted, her eyes going wide as Edmund nodded.

'Maggie talks about me?' Edmund asked; hope fluttering in his chest.

*So she hadn't forgotten him!*

'Yes, she misses you,' Gayle explained as she stepped aside and motioned into her home. 'Come in! I have to make dinner, but we can talk while I do?'

'Oh— Yes, of course,' Edmund hurried inside and, after Gayle shut the door behind him, let himself be led to the kitchen.

'You have some good timing,' Gayle said, pulling out a chair for Edmund at the dining table as she passed it and headed for the kettle. 'I believe Maggie's just gotten back from some work in the Southern Pass. About... *two* days ago? Maybe three? She came by to let me know she was safe, but was too tired to stay long. I think she went off to stay with that Eulogy man again.'

*That Eulogy man?*

'She *much* prefers staying at his apartment than here,' Gayle chuckled, filling the kettle with water and putting it on to boil. 'Can't say I blame her, though. He seems like a very nice person.'

Edmund's heart sunk, hearing that.

Maggie moving on and finding someone was something he should have expected— But it still wrenched at his gut to hear it.

'I'm afraid that I don't know Eulogy's address,' Gayle tutted, taking the pot off its boil and filling four cups with water and various teabags. 'Though my housemate, Diethre, knows one of their mutual friends. Cirrus, I think his name is? I'm fairly sure *he* knows where Eulogy lives. I can get Diethre to take you to Cirrus after dinner, if you'd like?'

'I'd appreciate that,' Edmund said. 'He won't mind taking me?'

'Oh, he'll mind. He'll *hate* it. But he can suck it up.'

'*Yeah,*' the boy on her hip whispered under his breath. '*Uncle Diethre can suck it up, or you'll sic Dad on him like last time.*'

'Hugh, I did *not* "sic" your father on him,' Gayle gave a chuckle, and pet the boy's hair. 'I just asked him to talk to Diethre *as a friend.*'

'But they're *not* friends!' the boy, Hugh, raised his voice. 'Uncle Diethre *hates* Dad!'

'No he doesn't,' Gayle said simply. 'You know who *does* hate your father, though? Uncle Vik—'

'*Me,*' spoke a voice from the kitchen door, and Edmund turned to see a *very* heavily pregnant human enter the room. '*I hate him.*'

'I know you do, Viktor,' Gayle grinned, picking up one of the cups of tea and holding it out to the man. 'Smelt the tea?'

Viktor didn't reply as he took the cup and sipped at its contents. Then, he eyed Edmund, and glared. 'Who's this?'

'Edmund,' Gayle said, simply.

'Maggie's friend?' Viktor clarified. Then, he offered Edmund his hand.

'Hmp.... Viktor Vallakovich.'

'Oh— Edmund,' Edmund replied.

'Edmund...? Who?'

'Just... *Edmund.*'

Viktor raised his brow, at that. 'You don't have a surname?'

'N.... No. I'm an orphan.'

'*I wish I was an orphan,*' Viktor mumbled. Then, without giving Edmund any time to respond, he retreated back out of the room.

'Hah, don't mind him. He's like that,' Gayle waved a dismissive hand, and placed one of the other cups of tea in front of Edmund. She then deposited Hugh in the chair opposite before stepping away to pick up the other two cups.

'Mum!' Hugh cried, reaching out after his mother. '*No!*'

'I'm still here,' Gayle comforted, turning back and putting down the two drinks on the table. Then, she sat beside him and sighed as he wrapped his arms around her and held on tight. 'I didn't leave.'

Edmund watched the woman comfort her son for a moment before he picked up the cup of tea he had been given and sipped at it.

He wondered who the fourth cup was for— It clearly wasn't for this poor boy. He had shown *no* interest in it. And even turned his nose up in disgust when his mother offered him a sip of her own....

'That smells good!' another new voice exclaimed, and Edmund watched as a triton woman strut into the room and grabbed the extra cup.

'It's still hot,' Gayle warned, leaning forward as the triton gave the cup a sniff. 'Sorry, Riptide.'

The triton, Riptide, made a disgusted face and replaced the cup on the table. Then he pointed at Edmund. ‘Who’s this?’

‘Edmund,’ Gayle answered.

‘That guy Maggie’s always going on about?’

Gayle nodded, and Edmund felt his heart fluttering.

‘She talks about me?’ he asked, hearing as his voice cracked.

Riptide laughed at him, poking a clawed finger into the side of his head as she grinned. ‘The trick is getting her to *stop*. I don’t know who I’ve heard more about; you or Blathe!’

‘Oh, yes, Blathe,’ Gayle chuckled, teasingly. ‘The *hero!*’

Edmund gave a weak smile.

*Blathe.*

Edmund remembered Blathe— He’d stopped visiting the orphanage shortly before Maggie had left.... He couldn’t recall ever hearing what had happened to the man....

‘Anyway, Edmund— I hope you don’t think me rude, but I do have to get dinner started,’ Gayle gave a chuckle. ‘You’re welcome to join us, and I can introduce you to Diethre when he comes down?’

‘That’d be nice, thank you.’

‘It’ll get real loud, though,’ Riptide warned, leaning over Edmund with a wide, shark-tooth grin. ‘There’s eleven kids, here. And *none* of them have table manners!’

‘That’s fine,’ Edmund returned Riptide’s smile. ‘I’m used to kids.’

~~~~~

Edmund was not prepared for the children.

He’d offered his help to Gayle and Riptide in the kitchen, only to be shooed out to sit down in the other room.... Where he had met Gayle’s other *seven* children. All of them were changelings, and all of them were *very* inclined towards fey mischief.

They had kept him occupied until a satyr named Marj had come in and deliberately sat on the youngest of the changelings; an act that they took with the seriousness of a declaration of war.

Edmund was glad all of their attention had turned to the woman, and he was able to take a moment to recover from the children’s bombardment.

Then when dinner was ready they had all rushed over to the table and sat down with excitement.

Riptide’s young daughter, Rosemary, had helped set the food out on the table— And then not even five minutes later, pushed down poor little Hugh face-first into his mash potatoes.

There had been a tantrum, after that. Which Gayle’s husband had certainly not helped with— He’d tried to lighten the mood, but only caused the boy to cry and scream louder.

Eventually, Gayle had scolded her husband outside and told him that, until he learnt to behave himself, he could eat on the stairs.

Overall it was an awkward thing to witness. Even if nobody else seemed

phased by it all, it made Edmund's palms sweaty....

Edmund felt a tug on his sleeve and glanced down to find a yuan-ti toddler staring up at him with her big, red eyes.

'Oh, hello. Uh...' Edmund fell quiet as the girl lifted up a dead rat; holding it out to him by its tail. 'Um, that's... very....'

'Victoria, my precious little darling,' an adult's hand found its way around the rat, and Edmund looked up to see what was clearly the girl's father pocket the dead creature. 'Not at the table.'

'Oh, Diethre! Perfect,' Gayle exclaimed as the man hefted his daughter up and into one of the chairs. 'I have to speak to you.'

'Go on,' Diethre mumbled, not bothering to look at his housemate as he sat beside his daughter. He scooped a plateful of dinner towards himself and began to cut it into small, bite-sized pieces; which he then gently offered the girl. '*That's my good girl,*' he cooed as she ate.

'I need you to take Edmund with you to Cloud... whatever it currently is,' said Gayle. 'To talk to Cirrus.'

Diethre finally looked up from his daughter, a suspicious scowl now planted firmly on his face. 'Why?'

'Because you need your medication, and he needs to talk to the satyr.'

Diethre let out an annoyed huff. 'Yes, clearly. But *why* does he need to talk to Cirrus?'

'He's Maggie's friend,' Gayle said. 'You know. *Ed. Mund.*'

'Oh? Ah, no. No offence to your friend, but I don't usually pay too close an attention to what she says.'

'You mean you ignore her,' Gayle said, simply.

'I don't *ignore* her,' Diethre defended. 'She just tends to repeat herself, and it's much less annoying to be around her if I don't put too much effort into remembering our conversations.'

'You're unbelievable.'

'Nah!' Riptide chimed in. 'You know what's unbelievable? That a tight-arse like you married *Hugh Mann.*'

'Yeah! We love you, Gayle, but you got shit taste,' Marj teased.

Gayle rolled her eyes dramatically, and tried to hide her grin. 'Like I haven't heard *that* a hundred times.... Anyway. Diethre? You'll take Edmund after dinner, won't you?'

Diethre huffed again and returned to feeding his daughter. 'Yes, yes. Fine. I suppose I *do* owe you a favour.'

~~~~~

Edmund trailed behind Diethre wordlessly.

His time at dinner with the family had made it clear to him that Diethre was not a talkative man... and Edmund thought it would be best to give him the grace of silence as they made their way through the city.

From what Edmund could tell, Diethre seemed to appreciate this. Especially considering that, after several minutes of quietly trying to keep up with the man as he hustled through the streets at high speed, Edmund noticed Diethre slowing

down and letting him catch up to walk in pace.

Eventually the pair made it to a store with a sign that had been edited so many times Edmund could barely read it.

Cloud... whatever that word was supposed to be....

‘Hmp. Hey, you know,’ Diethre started, pausing with his hand on the store’s front door. ‘When I heard you were Maggie’s friend I was worried you were going to be as talkative as her... but I suppose it makes sense for someone who talks so much to have a friend who likes to listen.’

Edmund gave a sheepish chuckle, rubbing the back of his neck as Diethre made his way into the store. He followed the yuan-ti into the store just in time to see him poke awake a satyr who was sleeping on the floor.

Or, on a pile of cushions on the floor.

‘Diethre!’ the satyr greeted warmly, stumbling to his hooves and clearing his throat as he made his way to the front counter. ‘Were you s’posed to be here today? I’m sorry, man. I think I forgot.’

‘No, no, I’m not here by appointment,’ Diethre reassured. ‘Gayle made me come. She thought I could get my medication while bringing *him* here as a favour for her.’

‘Mhm... oh. Well, I have your medication here,’ the satyr mumbled, pulling out a package and handing it to the yuan-ti. ‘Now... who is this you’ve brought to me? A friend of Gayle’s?’

‘A friend of Maggie’s,’ Diethre responded, taking the package and giving the satyr his pay. ‘Ed... Edmund, was it?’

Edmund nodded as Diethre glanced to him. ‘Yes. Edmund. Uh— I knew Maggie growing up.’

‘Aaaaaah...’ the satyr rested his head on a hand, and gazed at Edmund with a tired (but not unhappy) expression. ‘Edmund.... Yes. Maggie talks about you all the time.’

‘Yeah, there we go,’ Diethre pulled a face and motioned with his thumb to the satyr. ‘You know she never shuts up about you when *Cirrus* recognises your name!’

Edmund didn’t get it and simply stared at the two men, waiting for a polite moment to speak up, as Cirrus laughed absently and Diethre waved a dismissive hand.

‘Well, I have to get home. Viktor isn’t feeling well and Victoria has been restless all day,’ Diethre said, making for the door. ‘And I don’t trust Hugh not to bother either of them.... I have to be there to bite him if he does.’

‘Heheh...’ Cirrus gave another chuckle. ‘You have fun with that. Tell Viktor I said hi.’

‘I will,’ Diethre replied, giving a wave before heading outside.

Edmund swallowed as Cirrus ducked under his counter and began rearranging things; he wasn’t sure if he should say something....

‘Oh! Hello there,’ Cirrus stood up, hookah in hand, and gave a grin when he saw Edmund; acting like he had forgotten the man was there. ‘Welcome. How can I help you?’

‘Oh— Uh... Maggie?’ Edmund mumbled.

‘Maggie!’ Cirrus beamed, stuffing something into the hookah and lighting it. ‘I

know Maggie.'

'Yes, um. So do I?' Edmund cleared his throat. 'I'm looking for her.'

Cirrus took a puff of the hookah, and looked deep in thought. 'Looking for who?'

'Maggie,' Edmund clarified.

'Oh! Right, yes, you just said that,' Cirrus grinned. 'I apologise. I don't know where my head is today.'

'Have you checked your shoulders?' Edmund joked, giving Cirrus a friendly-but-nervous laugh.

'Hah! That would be the place for it, wouldn't it?' Cirrus reached up and tapped himself on the cheek with a humoured look. 'Yes, there it is.... Now, how can I help you?'

*This man clearly had a memory like Maggie did, Edmund realised with a chuckle. No wonder they were friends.... They could probably have the same conversation a hundred times and not get bored.*

'I'm looking for Maggie Gryphon,' he said, as clearly as possible. 'Do you know where she is?'

'Ah now. That's a tough one,' Cirrus sniffed and took another puff from his hookah. He looked thoughtful as he let out the puff and scratched at his shaggy hair. 'Have you tried Gayle's house?'

'Yes, she wasn't there,' Edmund explained.

'Ah. Maybe... sometimes she stays in the den,' Cirrus gave another sniff and stumbled out from behind his counter. 'Let me check; she might have come in while I was asleep.'

'The den?' Edmund echoed, following Cirrus into a back room that was *very clearly* an opium den.

*Oh, Maggie. If Fern knew about this....*

'Yeah, she usually drops by when Eulogy's busy,' Cirrus explained, gently kicking a pile of pillows apart to search underneath them. 'But it looks like she isn't here.... You tried Gayle's?'

'Yes, I have,' Edmund confirmed again. 'She wasn't there.'

'Hm.... Most days she's in the city bouncing from couch to couch,' Cirrus explained, leading Edmund back into the front of his store.

Edmund felt his heart sink. '*Most* days? She... isn't *always* in the city?'

'Nah, nah. She's been picking up mercenary work, here and there,' Cirrus shrugged. 'Sometimes spends a week or two away.... It's never more than a month at a time, though, before she comes back and heads over to Eulogy's place!'

'Who— Who this "Eulogy" man?' Edmund blurted, feeling a bubble of anxiety rise in his chest. 'I've uh— Gayle mentioned him, too.'

'Aw, Maggie loves him!' Cirrus gave a laugh and took a seat at the shop's table. 'We met *way* back in the day, and they just clicked, right? I mean. We *all* clicked, of course. Plume and me and Maggie and Eulogy! But those twos's auras have something special between 'em.'

'Ah...'  
Edmund felt the bubble grow heavy, like his heart was sinking to his feet. *He shouldn't be surprised.... He knew it wasn't going to be the same....*

'Maggie has a lot on her mind,' Cirrus said absentmindedly, taking another long puff of his hookah. 'She doesn't know it, though.'

Edmund felt the corners of his lips twitch into a weak smile.  
An apt description of his childhood friend.  
*Deep breath; it will still be nice to see Maggie again, even if she's moved on.*  
Edmund cleared his throat and wrung his hands. 'I appreciate your time, Cirrus,' he started. 'Would I be able to get Eulogy's address? Even if Maggie's not there now... it sounds like he'd have a good idea of where to find her.'  
'Aw, yeah! Sure man.'

~~~~~

It took Edmund over five minutes to muster up enough courage to enter the apartment building; and it took him other five to get himself up to the correct floor.  
Then, when he found the door, another ten minutes to knock.  
It felt like his legs were full of stones weighing him down. But also, somehow, it felt like they were also made of jelly. At the same time....  
He was knocking on the door of someone who was clearly *more than a friend* to Maggie, and it made him feel sick and sweaty.  
But he *had* to find Maggie....  
He just hoped this Eulogy person was nice and wouldn't turn him away.  
*Cirrus and Gayle were both nice*, Edmund reassured himself. *Maggie has good tastes in people... she wouldn't be close to someone who treated her poorly.*  
Well... Fern didn't count.  
Footsteps made their way towards the door and Edmund stood up taller as the door was yanked open by a small half-goblin man with a black eye and a gun on his hip.  
'Uh...' Edmund wondered if he had the wrong room. 'I'm uh— I'm looking for a Eulogy Jones?'  
'*Mhm*,' the man grunted, the hand that rested by his gun twitching slightly.  
'What's your business with Eulogy?'  
'I... need to ask him about Maggie?' Edmund tried.  
He placed his hand over his gun now, his eyes turning into suspicious slits and his ears folding down as he growled; 'What's your business with *Maggie*?'  
'We, uh—' Edmund was sweating now. 'We— We're friends. We grew up together. M-My name is Edmund?'  
'Edmund?' the man's ears flicked up curiously.  
Edmund nodded, swallowing the lump in his throat.  
'Hm.... I expected you to look different,' the half-goblin said casually, letting his hand fall into a relaxed position as he turned and made his way back into his apartment. 'I'm Eulogy. Shut the door behind you.'  
He motioned for Edmund to follow and, after a moment of hesitation, Edmund did.  
'You're Eulogy!' Edmund exclaimed, hurrying after the man and closing the apartment door. 'Please— Do you know where Maggie is—'  
'Wipe your feet!' Eulogy interrupted, turning to point at Edmund. 'Or... actually. There's no cleaning *those*. Take your boots off.'  
Edmund did as he was told. 'Please, Maggie—'



'Baby! Baby, come here!' Eulogy interrupted again, calling through the house. Edmund followed, wondering with a heavy heart who Eulogy was calling "baby" before freezing in place and staring as they turned into the lounge where a displacer beast was resting on the couch.

'Ah, Baby! I was calling you,' Eulogy huffed, climbing up next to the beast. He pet the massive creature behind the ears before motioning for Edmund to sit. 'Don't worry. She won't hurt you... not unless I tell her to.'

'But you... wouldn't, right?' Edmund gave a nervous laugh.

Eulogy simply looked him up and down instead of answering, before returning to petting Baby.

'*Good girl,*' he whispered. Then, he side-eyed Edmund. 'So. You're here to see Maggie, are you?'

'Y... yes,' Edmund nodded.

'*Hmph!*' Eulogy gave Edmund a disapproving look; scratching under his chin as he scowled. 'I suppose it was only a matter of time before you showed up, wasn't it?'

'Uh, I mean—'

'Eulogy?' a voice called from another room, and Edmund's heart leapt.

'Eulogy!'

That was her— That was *Maggie's voice!*

Edmund instinctively stepped towards it; but was immediately cut off by the displacer beast as it leapt from the couch and gave him a warning growl.

Eulogy glared at Edmund, giving a haughty sniff as Maggie called out again.

'Eulogy?'

'Yes, Margret?'

*Margret? That wasn't her name....*

'I forgot a towel!'

Eulogy heaved a long sigh. 'Of *course* you did.... You. Boy. *Stay.*'

Edmund couldn't tell if Eulogy's expression was smug or suspicious as he vanished into the hall.

Either way; Edmund didn't like it.

Eulogy was *clearly* unhappy to see him....

'Thank you, Eulogy!' Maggie's voice chirped, and Edmund found himself swallowing as he heard a door open. 'I *always* seem to forget it!'

'Yes.... Did you remember to wash under your wings this time?'

'Yeah, and behind my ears!' Maggie giggled.

'That's my girl.'

*His girl.*

Edmund felt his heart twist.

There was no point in waiting around here; Eulogy clearly wasn't going to let him see Maggie. And even if he did....

Edmund heaved a sigh and made for the front door— Only to be cut off by Baby circling him.

'Hey! Come on. I'm trying to *leave!*' Edmund whined.

'Why would you be doing that?' Eulogy's scoff caught Edmund by surprise and he turned to see the man tutting at him. 'I thought you wanted to see Maggie.'

Edmund gave a wide shrug, knowing he looked tired. 'It... sounds like she

doesn't need me anymore.'

'Pfft! What, are you stupid or something?' Eulogy growled. 'Why would you say that?'

'Well... she has you,' Edmund sighed. 'Everyone I met today said that you and her are close and.... And....'

'Ah, so you *are* stupid!' Eulogy's eyes narrowed as his ears pressed back in disgust. 'Sit down, you idiot. I'm too old for her.'

'But you called her your girl—'

'Because she *is*,' Eulogy stated, adjusting his thick, gold-chain glasses. 'She's essentially my *daughter*, at this point— But don't you tell her I said that or I'll *never* hear the end of it!'

'Your— Your daughter?' Edmund echoed. All the weight that had been baring down on him felt like it had suddenly been lifted as he stared, wide-eyed, at Eulogy.

'Yes,' Eulogy said, slow and firm. 'And like any father, I won't hesitate to *shoot your dick off* if you do anything to hurt her!'

Edmund shrank down as Eulogy drew his gun and waved it widely in warning.

'Am I being clear?' Eulogy growled, replacing his gun in its holster.

'Uh—'

'You harm Margret and I'll kill you.'

'Her... name's not Margret?' was all Edmund could manage.

'*What?*' Eulogy's furious expression turned to confusion.

'It's Magpie,' Edmund blurted. 'Magpie Gryphon.'

'*Magpie?*'

'B.... Blathe called her Magpie,' Edmund stammered. 'Because of her feathers. Fern didn't uh— Fern thought she needed a proper person name so she made everyone call her Magpie. B-But her legal name's... Magpie.'

Eulogy looked like he'd been smacked over the head with a fish. 'She never corrected me,' he said, simply.

'I think she forgot,' Edmund swallowed.

'Hm...' Eulogy looked away, now, his brow furrowing as he muttered under his breath. '*Magpie....*'

Edmund wasn't sure if he should say anything as Eulogy continued to mutter Maggie's name over and over....

'In your defence,' Edmund tried. 'Margret is a very good guess?'

The look Eulogy gave him very well might have killed him, if Maggie didn't choose that exact moment to step into the room wearing nothing but a goblin-size towel around her shoulders.

'Eulogy? You wanted me to come out and talk?'

'*Maggie!*' Eulogy exclaimed, almost falling over himself when he saw the woman. 'I told you to get *dressed* first!'

'You did? I must have forgot...' Maggie's eyes met Edmund's and she trailed off.

Her eyes widened and her ears flicked up as her freshly-washed pelt fluffed out.

'Uh... hey, Maggie,' Edmund swallowed and gave her an awkward smile.

And she responded with a loud, long note of sound —something halfway

between a cry and a shriek— before she ran at him; her towel falling to the floor as she stumbled forward and wrapped her arms and wings tight around him.

*'Edmund!' she squeaked, and Edmund felt her entire body rumbling in a purr. 'Edmund! It's you! It's really really you!'*

*'And it's you!' Edmund replied, wrapping his arms around her in turn. 'I can't believe it! I can't believe you're actually here!'*

She was here!

Maggie was here!

It was really her!

She was damp. And she was naked. And she was rubbing her head under his chin so aggressively she was almost knocking him down— But she was *here!*

He had her back!

—END—

If you enjoyed reading, please consider supporting me and my work at  
[cjadewyton.com](http://cjadewyton.com)