

## Cecil & Theodore

*Note: To Marry and to Meddle takes place from September to November 1817; this bonus scene is set eleven months later, in October 1818 (a few months after the main events of To Woo and to Wed, but before the events of that book's epilogue, for those who like to keep track of timelines). Happy reading!*

“I think it’s time.” Emily injected her voice with as much resolve as she could manage—something she’d grown better at doing over the course of the past year—and lifted her chin, fixing Julian with a look of steely determination.

A look which was entirely wasted, because Julian was paying her no attention whatsoever.

This was, truthfully, a situation with which Emily had little experience. From the moment they’d met, Julian had paid her an unholy amount of attention, to an almost unsettling degree. However, at the moment, he was entirely consumed by the small, squirming bundle in his arms.

Emily cleared her throat. Julian reached a finger out to gently touch Theodore’s nose.

Emily paused, and considered her options. She was wearing a nightgown and dressing gown, seated comfortably in an armchair by the fireplace in the sitting room connected to the bedroom she and Julian shared. It was a clear October morning, and autumn sunlight poured in through the windows; a fire leapt in the grate; a fresh pot of tea steamed invitingly on a tray next to her, alongside a plate of toast and a pot of jam. Emily reached over, plucked a piece of toast from the plate, and took careful aim.

And tossed the piece of toast directly at her husband’s head.

Julian’s head jerked up as crumbs flew, and if she’d lamented the lack of attention he paid her previously, this was more than remedied now, as he fixed her with an incredulous look.

“Did you just throw *toast* at me?” he asked.

Emily folded her hands in her lap. “You weren’t listening.”

“So your solution was to lob a piece of bread at my head?”

“It was the closest thing to hand,” she said reasonably. She injected a slight quiver into her voice. “Since I didn’t feel quite up to standing, of course . . .”

This, predictably, did the trick; Julian was on his feet, baby carefully cradled against his chest, and then on his knees next to her in a trice. Emily reached out to gently extract the bundle from his arms while he curved an arm around her shoulders, his brow creasing with worry.

“Should you be out of bed?” he asked as Emily pushed back the swaddling enough to press a gentle kiss to Theodore’s forehead. He immediately stopped his half-hearted squalling and instead blinked up at her with an expression of such perplexed astonishment that she broke into laughter.

“I’m fine,” she said, glancing up at Julian, still giggling, and caught her breath at the look on his face—one of such tender awe that it made a lump rise in her throat. “It’s been five days—I don’t need to be bedridden.”

Those five days had passed in a blur—an exhausted, blissful blur, during which she’d done little beyond sleep and cradle the baby and accept whatever meals either Julian or one of the maids materialized with at regular intervals. This morning, however, she had passed Theodore to Julian as soon as he’d awoken, and taken a long, luxurious bath, dedicating a considerable amount of time to washing her hair, which had reached a state that she didn’t care to contemplate. Now, in a fresh nightgown, with heaps of well-buttered toast and her favorite blackcurrant jam within easy reach, she was ready to turn her attention to important matters.

“But my *point* was,” she said determinedly, “I think it is time.”

“Time for what?” Julian asked, a bit distractedly, as he adjusted her dressing gown on her shoulders. “Are you warm enough?”

Emily almost regretted taking the baby from him; without Theodore in his arms to fuss over, he had clearly selected Emily as the best recipient of all his mother hen tendencies. Truly, she had *not* anticipated this reaction to becoming a father—though, she mused, perhaps she should have. She was well aware, after all, that the man had a protective streak a mile long.

“I’m fine,” she said, smiling up at him. “But Julian—as I was saying, I think it’s time that we—”

As if on cue, there was a scratching at the door.

Julian and Emily both glanced at it; it remained closed. Any servant would have entered after knocking, which meant . . .

“*Meow?*” came an inquisitive warble.

Julian turned to Emily. “Emily—”

“We can’t keep them apart forever, Julian!” she said determinedly. “Cecil is a part of the family, too!”

“Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub is a flea-ridden pest who is lucky that we don’t make him sleep in the stable.”

There was another, more mournful *meow*, and then, after a moment, a little black-and-white paw slipped beneath the door, batting futilely in search of something to latch onto.

Emily turned her own mournful eyes onto her husband, who sighed heavily.

“What is he even doing here?” he asked darkly as he rose. “I thought the maids were under strict instructions to keep him away.”

“They *were*,” Emily said with an innocent smile. “Until I had a word with Henrietta this morning.” Upon Theodore’s arrival, Cecil had been set up in the greatest luxury in one of the guest bedrooms, so that Emily and Julian would not be distracted by him during their first, hazy days with the baby. But enough time had passed that she was beginning to miss her small, fluffy companion—who, admittedly, was considerably less small these days, though he still had the look about him of a gangly adolescent, with paws slightly too large for his body.

“Emily,” Julian said sternly as he approached the door like a man expecting an escaped convict to be waiting on the other side, “I think we should discuss this further.”

“There’s nothing to discuss!” Emily said brightly. “Theodore is our child, and Cecil is our . . .”

“I beg you, do not complete that sentence,” Julian said wearily as he reached the door and, with a heavy sigh, tugged it upon. “Hellion,” he said, nodding his head down

at Cecil, who offered a polite *meow* and then trotted into the room as if he owned it. At the sight of Emily, he gave a joyful chirp and bounded in her direction, only to skid to an abrupt halt at the sight of the small bundle in her arms.

“*Meow?*” he inquired indignantly, all wounded outrage.

“Cecil, darling, this is Theodore!” Emily said brightly.

“Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub does not speak English,” Julian said—for at least the hundredth time in the past year—as he closed the door and returned to her side. He gazed down at Cecil suspiciously.

Emily held out Theodore in Cecil’s direction, causing another indignant howl—from Julian, this time.

“Have you *lost your mind?*” he howled, snatching Theodore from her arms and clutching him so tightly to his chest that Theodore squawked in protest. Julian reluctantly loosened his grip, pressing a quick, tender kiss to Theodore’s head. Emily’s heart clenched at the sight, and her bottom lip began to traitorously wobble.

She would *not* cry, she thought determinedly. She *wouldn’t*. Never mind that the smallest things seemed to set her off these days; yesterday, Julian had brought her a morning cup of chocolate and she’d burst into tears, which he had taken admirably in stride.

“He wasn’t going to hurt him,” she protested, sternly (albeit silently) informing her lip to cease and desist its wobbles immediately. She reached down and scooped up Cecil, who immediately began purring. With an affectionate *meow*, he leaned up, sniffed her chin, and then licked it; she decided it was best, as ever, to not contemplate what other things he might have been licking before he decided to bestow his affections upon her.

“You don’t know that,” Julian said darkly, still cradling Theodore to his chest. “He could have intended to nibble on him. He has very sharp teeth—ask me how I know.”

“You’re being hysterical,” Emily said, snuggling the purring Cecil. She flipped him around so that he was cradled in her arms like a baby. “Have you ever noticed how adorable the spots on his belly are?” she asked Julian, smiling down at said spots.

“So long as those spots aren’t anywhere near Theodore’s face as Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub tries to smother him.”

Deciding that the best way to handle this nonsense was, quite simply, to ignore it, Emily decided to risk another fit of hysteria on Julian’s part, and she rose to her feet.

“What are you doing?” Julian asked suspiciously, tightening his grip on Theodore.

“Stretching my legs,” Emily said innocently, swaying Cecil back and forth in her arms to the sound of enthusiastic purrs.

“Emily—” Julian said warningly.

“Oh, Cecil, look! A baby!” Emily said, feigning astonishment.

“I cannot believe you even pretended for a single moment that you wanted to appear onstage. You’re a horrible actress.”

“Thank you, darling,” Emily said serenely, taking advantage of his distraction to inch forward a few more steps. By now, she was standing so close to him that Cecil seemed to become aware of the fitful, wriggling creature in Julian’s arms.

“*Meow?*” he asked, more curiously this time.

Emily lifted him higher so that he might get a better look at Theodore’s dear little face amidst all the swaddling.

“This is a baby, Cecil,” she said proudly, then paused, considering, before clarifying, “A *human* baby.”

Cecil leaned forward, sniffing; Julian let out a small, inadvertent yelp, but seemed to at least be reining in his impulse to snatch the baby away, so Emily decided not to tease him for this. Theodore chose this precise moment to scrunch his face up and let out a sudden, violent sneeze; this startled Cecil so badly that he scrambled up Emily’s chest and onto her shoulder, his suddenly bushy tail twitching, before two seconds had elapsed.

“Good job, Theodore,” Julian said approvingly to his son; Emily rolled her eyes.

“Cecil,” she said, then paused to spit out a mouthful of fluff she’d suddenly acquired, thanks to Cecil’s nervous, twitching tail. “There’s no need to be afraid. It was only a sneeze.”

“Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub has a long, unintelligent history of being frightened of sneezes,” Julian said smugly. “Don’t you recall the night we got him?”

Emily reached up and lifted Cecil off her shoulder and set him gently on the floor.

“*Meow!*” Cecil chirped, then turned, made a beeline for the doorway leading to the bedchamber, and vanished from sight.

As soon as he departed, Theodore started to cry.

“You know,” Emily said thoughtfully, sitting back down and reaching for the teapot, “I really think that went rather well.”

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It was approximately a week later that Julian experienced what had to be his worst nightmare.

The scene: late at night, tucked up in bed with his warm, soft wife, all of her enticing curves pressed against him. (Not that he could precisely express his full appreciation of said curves at the moment, given how recently she had given birth, but still: enticing.) An autumn wind blew outside the window, causing branches to scrape against the glass, but there was a banked fire in the grate, the bed was warm, and Theodore was asleep in a different room. This, itself, was an exciting development; Emily was nursing him herself and so they hadn’t hired a wet nurse, but he did have a nanny, and this was her first night with them.

With the giddy anticipation of getting a better night’s sleep than he had at any point in the previous fortnight, Julian had crawled into bed, draped his arm around Emily’s abdomen, and immediately fallen asleep.

Which was why it was so alarming now, some indeterminate number of hours later, to awaken to find Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub sitting on his chest.

“*Meow?*” asked the kitten.

“Jesus fucking Christ!”

Julian could only, in retrospect, be grateful that Emily was still so drowsy and dazed that she had not fully appreciated the spectacle he made, involving a lot of undignified limb-flailing and eventually culminating in him splayed on the floor next to

the bed. Blinking up blearily, he found two faces—one angelically lovely, albeit sleepy and a bit perplexed; the other small, black-and-white, and furry—peering down at him over the edge of the bed.

“Julian?” Emily said drowsily, clearly still half-asleep. “Whatever is wrong?”

“The *cat*—” He injected more venom in that single word than should have even been possible. “—woke me up.”

“*Meow*,” Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub confirmed smugly.

“Cecil?” Emily asked, reaching over to pull the fluffy demon into her arms as Julian scrambled to his feet. “What is wrong? I thought you were asleep in your bed.”

The bed in question was more luxurious than that which most humans slept on—Emily lived in fear that ‘darling Cecil’ would find himself without somewhere comfortable to pass the night, given his habit of wandering in and out of rooms without anyone’s knowledge, and so had ensured that a cozy nest of blankets and cushions had been arranged before the fireplace in: their bedroom; their sitting room; the library; one of the downstairs drawing rooms; and heaven only knew where else. (Julian, for the sake of his sanity, had stopped keeping track.) *Not* that it mattered—half the time he awoke in the morning to find his fetching wife snuggled up with the purring beast in her arms, regardless of how many beds there were available to the creature, and regardless of how sternly Julian had informed Emily, on multiple occasions, that he had no interest in sharing his bed with a flea-ridden mongrel.

“Then I suggest you start sleeping in *your* bed again,” Emily had informed him cheerfully on more than one occasion, with a nod of her head towards the connecting door that led to his suite of rooms, perfectly aware that he had no intention of doing any such thing.

*This*, however—being awoken from a deep slumber to find the small hellion on *his* chest—was a new, troubling development.

“*Meow*,” Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub said insistently. He blinked at Emily, then glanced over at Julian and added, even louder, “*MEOW*.”

“What’s wrong with him? Brain damage at last?” Julian asked hopefully.

Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub, with an offended *meow*, sprang from Emily's arms, and took a running leap from the bed to the floor. He stopped, looked over his shoulder at Julian and Emily, and said, a bit impatiently, "*Meow!*"

"He wants us to follow him!" Emily said, shoving back the blankets and slipping out of bed so quickly that she nearly lost her footing—Julian reached out to seize her by the waist to steady her.

"*Meow,*" Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub, sounding more pleased, as though the two-legged creatures were finally behaving as he wished. He trotted boldly in the direction of the dressing room that connected Emily's bedroom—where they always slept—with Julian's, which he only retreated to on evenings that he was at the Belfry particularly late. Julian and Emily exchanged a look of vague confusion, then—sacrificing, Julian thought darkly, all claims they might make to sanity—shrugged into their dressing gowns and followed.

Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub led them into Julian's darkened bedroom, and then, with barely a backwards glance, through the open doorway, into Julian's sitting room and out through a cracked door into the hallway.

"*Meow,*" he said, more insistently, and Julian, more mystified than ever, took Emily's hand. "Do you think the cat has gone mad?" he asked, entirely seriously. He'd rather like to ask the same question of *himself*, at the moment—it was considerably cooler out here in the hallway, and his bare feet were cold even against the thick rugs that cushioned the floors.

Emily—still looking adorably drowsy, her golden hair mussed and a bit frizzy around her face—opened her mouth to respond, but before she could do so, there was a faint but distinct cry.

"*Meow! Meow! Meow!*" Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub insisted, taking off at a sprint. Julian and Emily followed him at a faster clip this time, coming to a halt before the door leading to Theodore's nursery, where the furry demon was scratching frantically at the door. "*Meow,*" he yowled, louder than Julian had ever heard him, and there was a startled pause from within, as though Theodore, too, was a bit uncertain as to what sort of creature might be trying to gain entry.

Emily reached down to scoop up the cat, and Julian opened the door.

Within the dimly lit nursery, Mrs. McBride—a cheerful, rosy-cheeked woman in her sixties, who had been Julian’s own nanny, as well as that of both of his siblings—had Theodore in her arms, swaying slightly as she sang a lullaby.

“Lord Julian—Lady Julian,” she said, looking startled. She glanced at the clock. “I was going to come wake you in a bit, if he didn’t settle—it’s a bit early for him to eat again, but he’s terribly fretful.”

Emily passed Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub to Julian, reaching out to take Theodore from Mrs. McBride. “I’ll go ahead and nurse him now, since we’re here—no doubt it will settle him,” she said, smiling at the nanny and sinking down into the armchair closest to the fire, loosening the buttons on her nightgown at her throat.

“He didn’t wake you, did he?” Mrs. McBride asked Julian now, looking fretful. “If you could hear the crying from your room, perhaps we ought to move the nursery further—”

“Theodore did not awaken us,” Julian assured her, scowling down at the warm, purring bundle he had somehow ended up cradling. “The cat did.”

“*Meow*,” Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub said contentedly, closing his eyes and looking as pleased to be in Julian’s company as he had ever done in his brief life. If Julian didn’t know better, he’d *almost* think the cat had no intention to try to draw blood in the immediate future.

It was disconcerting.

“I think he heard the crying and it upset him,” Emily put in, from where she was seated, Theodore now eagerly nursing. She didn’t look up as she spoke, her entire attention focused on the fuzzy, impossibly small head at her breast. It did something strange to Julian’s chest to watch them there, together like that—the two people he loved more than anyone else on earth—and for a moment he had to swallow past a lump in his throat.

“If you’re going to nurse him, Lady Julian, you won’t mind if I nip briefly down to the kitchens for a cup of tea?” Mrs. McBride asked. “I won’t be more than ten minutes or so.”

“That’s fine,” Julian assured the nanny, and she was gone a moment later with a fond smile, leaving the little family of three—*four*, of course, if you had to count the flea-bitten mongrel, which Julian was beginning to fear that he did—to themselves. He walked slowly towards Emily and Theodore, barely registering the fact that Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub had nestled his face into the crook of his elbow and appeared to be licking the fabric of his dressing gown. Julian leaned down to press a soft kiss to Emily’s silky head, inhaling the familiar scent of her.

She smelled like home.

In her arms, Theodore stirred for a moment, pulling back to let out a fitful cry. And in Julian’s arms, Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub twitched an ear, opened his eyes, and asked, “*Meow?*”

And—God help him—Julian thought he sounded *worried*.

“It’s all right, darling,” Emily said soothingly, and Julian was, in all honesty, not certain whether she was speaking to the baby or the cat. Theodore subsided, beginning to suck eagerly again, and in Julian’s arms, Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub once more began to purr.

And Julian—who was clearly suffering from sleep deprivation, or some sort of new-fatherhood-induced-insanity—leaned down and, for the briefest, most glancing moment, pressed a kiss to Cecil’s fuzzy head, too.

A moment that was not brief enough, evidently, because when he glanced up, Emily was gazing at him, something radiant and joyful in her expression. He waited for her to tease him—to gloat—but she said nothing, just gazing at him in a way that made him feel more seen, more known, than he’d ever been in his life.

“I love you,” he said. Helplessly.

And she smiled. Opened her mouth to reply—

And Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub took that opportunity to come fully awake, and leap—in a feat of frankly astonishing acrobatics—from Julian’s arms onto his shoulder, and then, without missing a beat, onto his head.

It was a few minutes later, once the worst of Julian's swearing had subsided and Emily had shifted a perplexed Theodore—who clearly thought his father had gone mad—to her other breast, that she said, oh-so-tenderly:

“I love you, too, but if you call Cecil that name again, I am making you sleep in your room for the next week.”

It must be love, Julian thought darkly, as he rummaged in a drawer for one of Theodore's clean nappies to press to the bloody scratch on his neck, that made him think that this had still been a rather nice night, all things considered.

From his spot at Emily's feet, where he'd retreated after being bodily hurled from Julian's head, Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub began to purr.

And Julian—even as he checked to see if any blood had stained his dressing gown—felt the strangest desire to smile.