

Favourite Family

By C. Jade Wyton

After winning back Thistlebond from the supernatural wolves that took the town over, Daimon celebrates with his friends and family. Things take a turn, however, when he gets in a fight with his drunken elder brother.

Contains some depictions of violence.

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The celebration party had gone on for several hours, with the inhabitants of Thistlebond leaving one-by-one to return home throughout the night.

Now it was just a few stragglers; those most used to the late nights and active lifestyles.

Daimon looked out over the party, barely hearing his father's words as he tried to locate all of his friends.

Sheshalan had already left with Madam Sapphire to do only they knew what—Something he wished Veruca would do with that weird Tamaro man, instead of... doing whatever weird courtship ritual that was... in public....

Volante and Ornest, though they were much drunker than the satyr, were a lot more bearable to witness. They hugged close as they danced to the slow violin tune; whispering loudly to each other not to tell anyone they had danced together, as it was “a secret.” Daimon wondered if they, perhaps, were starting to develop feelings for each other... though he didn't want to disturb them to ask.

‘Daimon? You alright, son?’ Cohen's hand met his son's shoulder, squeezing it in a comforting way. ‘You seem distracted.’

‘I uh. I think I am,’ Daimon admitted; the taste of the powerful moonshine he'd drunk still strong on his breath. ‘I'm just.... My friends and me? We talked. And... everyone agrees that it's best if I leave Robin behind but... I'm worried about it.’

‘It'll be good, kiddo,’ Cohen reassured. ‘We'll look after her just fine.’

‘Oh... uh...’ Daimon felt the fur of his cheeks rise in a blush, and he gave his father a sheepish look. ‘I wasn't.... Um.... I was thinking of leaving her here, actually. With the Bluebells? I just....’

‘I understand,’ Cohen said softly before, as if just to prove his point, Saba gave a cackle that was followed by a loud *thump* as he tackled Cayden to the ground. ‘It will be good for her too, I think. Staying with friends might make her feel more like she's on holiday, rather than feeling like you've left her behind at home with family.’

Daimon opened his mouth, then, almost ready to insist that the Bluebells *were* his family— But then he thought twice of it and changed his mind, instead sighing and shrugging as his ears pressed back.

‘It'll be alright,’ Cohen pressed, giving Daimon's shoulder a friendly pat. ‘I'll tell your mother for you, if that makes it easier?’

‘Yeah I'd... appreciate it,’ Daimon gave a weak chuckle, then, before glancing

around again and spotting his daughter just a little ways off.

She was with Jory and Bertram; both who looked exhausted. Bertram was sitting, seemingly asleep with Meth's head rested in his lap, as Jory was helping pick flowers from his poncho to make into flower crowns.

'Heh,' another pat on the shoulder from Cohen. 'Go on, boy. You'll want as much time with her as you can before you go; who knows when you'll see her next?'

*Don't say it like that...* Daimon bit his tongue, simply nodding and leaving his father behind as he made his way over to his daughter.

Uneasily, still feeling the effects of the alcohol on his balance, Daimon lowered himself to the ground beside his daughter and smiled warmly. 'You're so good at that,' he complimented, motioning to the pile of flower rings she'd made.

'Uh-huh! I'm teaching Jory!' she said.

Daimon cast a glance up at the boy, knowing he already knew how to make flower crowns, and received a chuckle in response.

'Is he any good at it?' he asked.

'He's getting better,' answered Robin; much to Jory's amusement.

'How d'ya tie the ends together, again?' Jory asked; though Daimon knew he already knew how. 'I can't seem t'get it.'

'It's easy! Just like this,' Robin answered, leaning over to show him.

As she did Daimon heard a weak laugh and glanced over to see Bertram, eyes almost completely closed, looking at his son with a proud grin. Then he met Daimon's eye and gave a half-nod. '*They're good kids,*' he said, almost in a whisper.

Daimon purred in agreement; growing louder as he felt his daughter press into his side and give her own happy purr.

'Jory is so cool,' she said. 'And he's the sheriff, now! Which makes him *even cooler!*'

'Yeah,' Daimon agreed. Then, he felt his ears press back nervously... though he kept his loving smile on his lips as he pet his daughter's ears. 'Robin? There's something *very* important I'd like to talk to you about.'

'Yes, Dad?'

'I...' Daimon cast an anxious glance to Bertram, who gave him an encouraging smile. 'Robin, you know you're my entire world. You are the most important person I have ever had in my life.'

Robin beamed proudly, her chest puffing out as her purrs got so loud Daimon could feel them rumble through the fur on his arms.

'And I want to keep you safe,' Daimon continued. 'If something happened to you, I don't know what I'd do. I mean, when your mother died I punched down a whole tree! If you got hurt I think I might... flatten a town.'

Robin's purrs turned into a nervous laugh as she shifted, uncomfortably. 'Dad? What are you talking about?'

'I, uh...' Daimon cast another glance to Bertram, this one pleading, before taking a deep breath and wringing his hands. 'Robin, you mean so much to me. And I'm scared that if I keep bringing you with me, something worse than the wolves is going to happen, and there might not be a safe place for you to hide like there was yesterday. I don't *want* to leave you behind, but....'

Robin's ears folded back, and she picked up a stick so she could trace lines in the dirt at her feet. 'Yeah.... Yesterday *was* pretty scary. I didn't like it.'

'Yeah...' Daimon gave a sigh through his nose.

'Is that why Grandma is here?' Robin asked. 'To take me home?'

Daimon shook his head. 'Uncle Birdie's asked his family, and they said that... if you want to... you can stay here with them.'

The look on his daughter's face as she lit up in a wide, excited smile was so priceless that Daimon wished he could have taken a photo.

'Yes!' she exclaimed, her tail lashing in joy. 'I *love* Gam and Gamp! I can really stay with them? *Really?!* And—' she turned to Jory, then, and pointed at him.

'And Jory, too! I can stay with Jory?!'

'Yeah, Robin!' Jory beamed, leaning over to ruffle her ears. 'Yer *always* welcome t'stay with us! Yer family, after all.'

Robin leant into Jory's hands, purring again. 'Yeah! You're my *favourite* family! I mean...' she looked to Bertram, now. 'Even if you're not Dad's brother, like Saba and Cayden are, and you're just just his friend, you're still my favourite uncle.'

Daimon's purrs rumbled so loud he almost couldn't hear his daughter's own as he joined in the ruffling. 'You know, Robin,' he chuckled. 'Bertram was almost your grandfather.'

'He was?' Robin batted her cousin and father away so she could cock her head. 'How did that... "*almost*" happen?'

'You know your Grandpa Farren?' Daimon asked, waiting for her to nod in confirmation before continuing. 'They were in love.'

'*Really?!*' Robin gave a surprised squeak and turned to Bertram. 'You were *really* almost my Grandpa?!'

Daimon chuckled as Bertram blushed, and saw flowers blooming around him as he averted his gaze.

'It's a lot to explain,' Daimon told her. 'And it can really hurt to talk about, sometimes. But your mother said she thought of Bertram like a dad.'

'That's cool,' Robin said, her ears twitching curiously. 'Is that why you and him always stayed so close, even when you both stopped talking to everyone else?'

'Yeah, mostly,' Daimon confirmed. 'It's not an easy situation to explain, especially after... everything. And none of us knew all of it, either, until recently. We all only had little bits of information, that we've been putting together to figure things out.... We were never really sure about *all* of it, until everyone met back up. That's why we always called him your Uncle Birdie, instead of your Grandpa Birdie.'

Robin nodded attentively. 'I don't mind if Birdie is my uncle *or* my grandpa! I love him no matter what! And— And if he *is* my grandpa, he's my favourite one! Oh! If— If you become my grandpa—' she turned to Jory. 'Then *Jory* can be my favourite uncle!'

Jory went pink, rubbing the back of his neck as he cleared his throat and looked away.

'Yeah, yeah! You could be my *favourite* uncle and—' Robin cut off with a shriek as she was suddenly hefted into the air by her uncle Cayden.

‘What’s this about *favourite* uncles, huh?’ Cayden laughed, lifting Robin high above his head as she squealed in protest. ‘You shouldn’t be picking *favourite* people, you little rascal!’

As the man swayed, barely keeping his balance, Daimon could immediately tell he wasn’t sober and hurriedly scrambled to his own feet. ‘Put her down Cayden!’ he snarled. ‘Put her down! *NOW!*’

‘Aw, c’mon, she loves it!’ Cayden argued. ‘Don’t you, Robby?’

‘*No!*’ Robin squealed; a sentiment that was echoed by the voices of all the nearby Dawn Runners. ‘I don’t! Put me down!’

‘Yeah you do!’ Cayden laughed, before mock-dropping her and catching her mid air. ‘Oops! Haha! Gotcha!’

Before Daimon even knew what he was doing, his teeth were in Cayden’s arm and he was tackling his brother to the ground with the force of all his weight.

He saw from the corner of his eye as Saba, moving so quick he seemed to appear from nowhere, caught Robin mid-air and then stumbled, landing heavily on top of Bertram.

‘*Robby!*’ Saba’s voice broke. ‘Robby, oh my gods are you alright?! CAYDEN WHAT IS *WRONG* WITH YOU?!’

Daimon didn’t hear the rest of the shouts and screams that took over what had previously been quiet music; instead, all he could hear was the pounding of his own heart in his ears as he tore into his brother— And as his brother tore right back into him.

Claws and teeth sunk into whatever they could find as both men saw red. Fur flew in all directions as Daimon and his brother tumbled over the ground, yowling and shrieking like animals. Blood trailed the dirt in their wake —though less than one might think, with how vicious the fight was— and tables and chairs were knocked to the ground.

Daimon’s claws raked across his brother’s face, ripping through his protective mane and catching him in the snout where it finally met the skin of his nose and drew another spatter of blood.

‘*GET HIS ARSE, DAIMON!*’ Volante’s voice shrieked over the chaos.

And then Cayden lunged forward; his teeth gripping nothing but fur as his bite missed Daimon’s shoulder. Daimon could *smell* the alcohol on him, and wrinkled his nose in disgust before sinking his own teeth into Cayden’s mane and *shake-shake-SHAKING* him as violently as he could.

Then, suddenly, their mother was between them.

Rueben let out a roar so loud that both boys puffed up like scared kittens as he turned from one to the other and drove them apart.

Daimon had barely been able to register the interruption before he’d been grabbed by the ear and dragged away; his brother whining from his mother’s other side as the same was done to him. They were pulled around a corner away from the crowd that had witnessed the fight before being released.

Rueben rounded on them, roaring down at Cayden with a fury Daimon hadn’t seen in many, *many* years. ‘*CAYDEN YOU FUCKING BRICK!*’ he shrieked, loud enough that Daimon knew the rest of the party could *definitely* hear what was being said. ‘*DON’T YOU EVER, EVER DO THAT TO HER AGAIN! THAT IS YOUR NIECE! SHE IS SICK! YOU CAN’T JUST MAN-HANDLE ANYONE YOU*

FEEL LIKE! SHE TOLD YOU TO PUT HER DOWN! SO YOU PUT HER DOWN! THIS IS NOT A *HOLIDAY*! THIS IS *WORK*! WE ARE HERE TO *HELP THESE PEOPLE*! GET YOUR *FUCKING* ACT TOGETHER OR I'LL—'

The following expletives that escaped his mother made Daimon cringe, and even through his anger he couldn't help but feel sorry for his brother as the man cowered backwards and tripped onto the ground with a *thump* that was silent under the swearing.

'YOU TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY OR I WILL SEND YOU HOME, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!' Rueben roared, snarling loudly as Cayden nodded. 'Now get. Up.'

Cayden struggled to stand and, instinctively, Daimon offered him his hand and helped to pull him up.

'Go back to the tavern, Cayden,' Rueben ordered. 'Go back to the room, and sleep off whatever the hell you've drunk to make you *this* cocksure. Now!'

'But, I—'

'*NOW!*' Rueben let out a roar that rattled the nearby windows, and Daimon felt all of his fur standing on end as his brother stumbled away in the direction of the town's tavern.

A moment passed, feeling like an hour but only truly being a few seconds, before Rueben slowly turned back to Daimon. His face softened as he watched his youngest son, and Daimon fidgeted with his hands, unable to look up from the ground.

'You okay, munchkin?' Rueben's voice was soft and sympathetic, now, and he put a gentle arm around Daimon.

Daimon just sighed, still not looking up at his mother as he rubbed a patch of bloody fur on his chest.

'I don't know what's got into him, tonight,' Rueben huffed, and Daimon felt him give a squeeze. 'Good on you for sticking up for the little one. You did right.'

Daimon just shrugged, now focusing on his mother's clawed feet as he swallowed down the last of the bloody taste on his tongue.

Rueben pet Daimon's shoulder encouragingly. 'Your father told me you're leaving Robin with the Bluebells. I think that's a wise choice,' he said. 'I don't have time to keep watch on her constantly, and gods know your brothers—as much as they love her—are barely fit for their *own* children, let alone such a fragile little thing like her.'

*Thank the gods Cayden didn't have kids*, Daimon thought, his snout wrinkling in rage as he remembered how he'd not listened to Robin's cry.

Another heavy pat on his shoulder as his mother gave a chuckle. 'You'll be right, son.'

'*Where is he?!*' a voice yelled around the corner, and Daimon turned in time to see Volante stumble into view; poor Jory holding her by an arm as he dug his hooves into the dirt and tried desperately to keep her back. 'I'm going to *kill* that stupid frat-boy!'

'I believe there's a line,' Rueben joked, a low purr escaping him as he gave Daimon's mane an affectionate ruffle. 'Don't worry... Volante, was it? I'm dealing with him.'

'*You should have dealt with him when he was born,*' Volante muttered,

swaying a little as she planted her feet down and gave a drunken sniff.

Rueben laughed, and then gave Daimon a small push. 'Alright. You go check your little one's not too shaken up, and I'll go make sure your brother's gotten back to the room without falling in a puddle and drowning himself.'

'I hope he *does!*' Volante growled.

Daimon just sighed as he stepped up to his friend. 'Thanks, Volante,' he said, giving her a gentle pat on the back as he passed.

He made his way back to Robin; who was being fussed over by the rest of the Dawn Runners and Bluebells.

'You okay, honey?' Daimon asked, softly, kneeling so he could open an arm for a hug.

'Yeah, I'm fine,' Robin huffed, standing so she could embrace her father.

'Cayden's just *really* annoying....'

'Tell me about it,' Daimon sighed.

'I, uh...' Saba gave a cough. 'Dad and I are gonna go check on Mum.'

'Yeah,' Daimon sighed, giving an ear-flick of acknowledgement. 'Just be careful. He's *really* mad.'

'I'd think so!' Cohen scoffed. 'I swear, if Cayden even *looks* at another drink before we're back in Copperpit, I'll send him to the grave myself!'

'Nuh-uh!' Volante exclaimed, stumbling over and pointing at the leonin.

'There's a *line!* And you're behind *me!*'

Ornest quickly stepped in, whisking Volante out of the way so Daimon's family could leave.

Daimon just sighed, and finished petting Robin's hair so he could reach down and make sure nothing on her breathing machine had been damaged.

'I checked her lungs for ya,' Bertram piped up, awkwardly pushing himself up from where he sat... and then immediately falling back with a groan. 'Nothing broken or loose.'

'Thank you, Bertram,' Daimon gave a sigh of relief. 'I appreciate it.'

Daimon put his hand on his daughter's back, holding her close as he caught his breath and soothed his rage and swirling emotions.

He felt a hand pet his back and, glancing up to see Veruca give him a short and comforting nod, let out a long breath.

'*That's* why I brought her with me,' was all he could manage.

'*Yeah,*' River breathed from somewhere behind him. 'How did *you* come from *that* family?'

He had no idea how to answer that question. So he didn't. Instead he simply let himself fall from a kneel into a sit, and held Robin closer.

'We need a tighter hug,' Robin said, glancing around the adults. 'Someone else help.'

And immediately, Daimon felt many arms around him. He wasn't sure *who* was hugging him, exactly, and who wasn't. It could have been two people hugging him, or it could have been everyone— But the feeling of his friends holding him close helped him breathe. And think.

*Gods, he was mad at Cayden.*

He didn't hate the idiot. The man had just been drunk and stupider than usual. But he was still *fuming* at him and wished he'd been able to get in a couple

more hits....

The hug tightened, and Daimon felt his anger fading.

It wasn't that he disliked his family. No; he loved them. He loved them a *lot*. But... there was something *different* here in Thistlebond. In this town. With these people.

When he was here he felt *right*. Like he *fit in* and *belonged*.

He felt more at home than he ever had, before.

'This is my favourite family,' he said aloud, his shoulders relaxing as his voice dropped to a whisper. '*I love you all so much....*'

—END—

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