

Resurfacing Grief

By C. Jade Wyton

After the unexpected discovery that his missing father-in-law is alive, some of Daimon's unaddressed feelings about his deceased wife bubble up to the surface, and he struggles to process them.

Contains depictions of grief and drinking/drunkenness.

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It was a beautiful, perfect night, and yet Daimon couldn't sleep.

It probably shouldn't have been surprising, considering that he had slept for most of the day, but as he lay under the stars on the hammock that rocked him slowly back and forth, with his hand dangling to brush the sand and score short lines and patterns with his claws, he found himself unable to do the one thing he had always been able to do.

He tapped on his stomach with his other hand, drumming out a beat with his fingers. He thought he recalled it being played, earlier, but he couldn't remember the exact tune.

He was glad he had been able to see Robin, yesterday. He had been worried about her. And seeing how well she was thriving had eased his anxieties that she wouldn't cope without him—

But, in easing those anxieties, he had found several new ones rearing their heads at him. Clawing at him with sharp hands and hissing voices that whispered at him over and over:

*Who are you?*

It had been gnawing at him, every time he was alone.

*Who are you, when you're not with others?*

Everyone else seemed to know *exactly* who they were.

Volante was a strong, capable woman. She knew what she liked, and she knew what she didn't like— She made things. She was creative. She thrived on innovation. Everything she did embodied a part of her; her pranks, her books, her machines. They all had that *feeling* to them, like they were a piece of her soul.

Bertram was a man who achieved his goals— He strove to better the world, and do the right thing. And sure, even though his identity was changing now he was becoming a druid, he still had a strong sense of self throughout it and could embrace the changes without losing who he knew himself to be.

And Veruca was.... Well, she was *Veruca*. She was unforgettable, leaving a mark wherever she went and pulling the attention of all who knew her. She had her collections. And her games. And she had that weird little squint she did, right before she said something that she thought was funny.

They were all complex, and messy, and wonderful.

Daimon let out a sigh.

But what was *he*?

He was Robin's father.

Olivia's husband.

Rueben's son.

Everything he was, was just an extension of someone else. And now as he sat alone with no wife, daughter, or mother to shadow; he felt *pointless*.

Yes, he loved helping people. And in a crisis, sure, he was great! He could be strong and calm and defend those that needed defending— But, then, that wasn't really *him*. That was just *Rueben's son*. One of the Stoneclaw boys. How he was raised. How everyone in his family was expected to be. It wasn't something he had discovered for himself, like Ornest had discovered his love of triton culture. It was something that he had been born with; like Veruca had been born with hooves.

And, even with being born so like his family, he was still so *different* from them in a way he could never articulate. To the point that he felt more at home in Thistlebond, than in Copperpit.

He was glad that Bertram had invited him to live there. He had never seen Robin thriving, like this before! And....

And....

And it was one of the few places where he didn't feel lost and stupid. Where, if he wasn't able to follow along, he wouldn't be judged for it.

Back when he was young, that place had been the Dawn Runners. They had always given him some leeway, being the youngest of the group— But now he was an adult, and an equal with them, and he barely ever understood a thing they said anymore.

A long, loud sigh escaped him and, despite his heavy heart, he couldn't help but smile as he recalled how Veruca and Volante had woken him the previous day. They had talked too fast and argued with each other to the point of stunning him, but they had come to him to share something exciting and he could at least know for sure he was *loved* by them.

They loved him. And he loved them.

But it didn't help how out of place he felt, tonight.

He was so different from them all. So much bigger, and stupider— He was the only one who'd never used magic. And he was so different in age, too.

Even though he wasn't the youngest anymore, there was still nobody else *his* age. They were all either young enough to almost still be children, or old enough to be his parents.

He only person he'd ever really known who was his own age was....

*Olivia.*

He felt his jaw tremble at her memory.

She had been his best friend. And his soulmate. And now he had nothing.

It seemed like everyone else in the Dawn Runners had *someone*. They had their partners, and their best friends. But he... he'd lost both. He'd lost both, and now there was a gigantic hole in his heart where Liv was supposed to be.

It wasn't fair.

*He should have been there for her.*

*Even if he couldn't have saved her, he should have been there for her; just to hold her hand and tell her that he loved her.*

A deep breath, and he swallowed down the lump in his throat.

He'd been doing so well— Why was this all surfacing now?

*He knew why.*

Farren.

Farren was back.

Farren was alive.

After ten years, the man they thought was dead was back; alive and... well, not *well*. But *alive*....

He was alive.

If Farren could come back from the dead... could Olivia?

He pushed the thought away, rising to his feet and pacing to shake it from his mind.

It was different.

Olivia was gone. She was *gone!* There was no way to bring her home, and he knew that.

*He knew that.*

He let out a long shudder of a breath before sniffing loudly and wiping his eyes.

It wasn't fair.

Nobody else understood him, not like *she* had.

He just felt so lost without her.

What was he supposed to feel, when everyone was coming home but her?

A light turned on in one of the rooms above him, and he flinched; turning to see the silhouette of an elvish man in the window before the light went back out and the man's shadow disappeared.

Daimon gave a groan, and rubbed the bridge of his snout between his eyes.

'I need a fucking drink.'

He had twelve.

Slouching on the bar, the stool he sat on bending under his weight, Daimon finished his last drink and let out a long, miserable sigh as he ran his claw along the glass rim of his cup.

The bartender had told him no more, after that one, so after a long moment of feeling sorry for himself he rose to his feet and began to wander the hotel grounds, letting his feet carry him wherever they felt he needed to go.

He followed no particular path, but eventually found himself at the edge of the jungle— And as he took his first step into it, he heard his name being called.

'Daimon? Daimon, where are you going?'

Daimon turned and, to his surprise, found River looking up at him with an anxious expression.

A long pause yawned between the two men, before Daimon sniffed loudly and let out a long sigh.

'Are you alright?' River asked.

'I don't know who I am anymore,' Daimon blurted. 'Have you ever had someone that you loved, so, so wholly, that losing them feels like losing yourself?'

River didn't reply, simply looking awkward and uncomfortable.

'I miss her so much, River. I don't know what to do without her.'

'R... Robin?'

'Olivia.'

‘Oh. *Oh...*’ River looked even more uncomfortable, now. ‘Hey, uh... maybe you should come inside? Get some sleep?’

‘No, I... I need a walk,’ Daimon said, shaking his head.

‘I, uh... are you sure that’s a good idea?’ River asked. ‘I don’t think the jungle’s very safe....’

‘Hey, I’m a lion!’ Daimon joked, feeling himself stumble as he smacked his hands against his own chest. ‘*King* of the jungle!’

And then he was gone into the trees; River calling out behind him but not following.

He wasn’t sure, exactly, *how* long he walked for. But it must have been a while, because he passed the same tree at least four times before finally finding his way into a small clearing and becoming distracted by the clear, starry sky above.

‘Oh, that’s beautiful,’ he mumbled to himself. ‘That’s—’

He walked into a tree, stunning himself as he stumbled back a pace.

‘Ah. Tree,’ he acknowledged aloud.

He remembered climbing trees with Olivia; hefting himself clumsily into the thickest of the branches and sitting with her at his side, talking for hours on end about nothing in particular.

He missed that feeling.

He missed it so, so much.

Daimon gripped the tree with his claws, bent his knees in preparation to leap up, and then... kept bending his knees, until he had slid all the way to the ground and laid down on his back.

And then he rolled to his side, tracing a finger into the grassy dirt and quietly remembering Olivia and how perfect she had been.

Then he rolled even further, until his snout was pressed into the earth and he could smell the fresh, lively dirt in his nostrils.

He took a big sniff of it and let the scent of the jungle fill his senses.

It was fantastic.

So beautiful.

So wonderful.

But still not as wonderful as she had been.

‘I miss you, Liv,’ he mumbled into the dirt. ‘I wish there was a way to bring you back.... Can you hear me, down there? If you can... give me a sign.’

Nothing happened, so he rolled onto his back.

He stared at the stars, letting himself breathe in the night air.

As he looked to the sky above, he thought about how everything in the world was changing.

His friends. The empire. Even the very fabric of the universe, itself, was changing....

‘Y’know, Liv, I think.... I think I’m gonna need a bigger axe.’

—END—

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