

# The New Olivia Returns Home

By C. Jade Wyton

*After waking up in the wrong universe, a near-identical one to her own where she died and her husband survived, a widowed Olivia suffers the grief of having to leave that world's Daimon behind.*

***Contains depictions of grief.***

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The feeling of Daimon's fur against Olivia's own faded, slowly, and was replaced by the cold, damp air of her Thistlebond bedroom.

Strands of Daimon's beautiful auburn mane caught between her fingers as she gripped him tight as possible and tried, desperately, to will him back with her. But all that returned with her was four lines of shed mane; stuck in zigzag patterns within her hands' own short fur.

She stared at her hands, the long lines of dark reddish-brown within her pale white fur shining out at her.

Daimon was gone.

Again.

She'd lost him *again*.

Falling to her knees, Olivia felt a shaky breath catch in her throat.

*It was too much.*

It was all just too much.

She couldn't hold it in any longer and let out a desperate wail; everything leaving her body in a single loud, long sob that echoed through the house and rattled the glass of her locked window.

Volante —*her* Volante— immediately burst through her door and fell to her own knees so she could grab Olivia tight by the shoulders.

'Liv! What's wrong? Where have you been?! We've been looking *everywhere* for you!'

Olivia couldn't seem to find the words to explain it all, as snot and spit and tears rolled down her face, and instead she found all she could do was hold out her hands to show the strands of fur to her friend.

Volante took her hands, checking them over as if to make sure she hadn't cut herself, before looking back up with a confused furrow of her brow.

'Liv, are you alright? What *happened* to you?!' Volante examined one of the wounds left on her arms by the hag with deep concern.

It was an act that was quickly repeated by Bertram —her own Bertram, and not the strange druidic one she'd met before— as he rushed into the room and gave his own distressed cry.

'Spitfire, who hurt ya?!' he cried, wrapping his arms tight around his daughter and squeezing her tight.

Olivia didn't hug back; she didn't want to wrap her arms around him and lose those few precious strands of fur that clung to her....

Veruca had entered the room behind Bertram and, seemingly noticing the awkward way that Olivia held out her hands, peered down and plucked one of the strands of Daimon's mane.

'What is...' she paused, her eyes going wide. '*Vhat...?*'

'Is that Jamie's fur?' Volante asked— And a clear bubble of panic rose within her. 'Is Jamie okay?!'

'I'm fine,' Jamie's voice came from the door, and Liv saw him peering in curiously. 'Mum? What's wrong?'

Dorothy quickly took the boy's hand and ushered him away, whispering soft and comfortingly to him as they headed towards his own room.

'Veruca? Is that Jamie's fur?' Volante repeated.

'No,' Veruca said, carefully. 'It is not *Jamie's* fur. It is being too long for Jamie's mane. It is looking more like.... Does it not look like—'

Veruca held out the strand, and Volante's own eyes went wide as she stared at it.

'Liv?' she asked with a trembling breath. 'Where have you been?'

'*He was in my arms,*' was all she could manage, her voice scarcely a whisper. '*He was holding me. Just like he used to.*'

Bertram squeezed her tighter, and as Veruca removed the last of Daimon's fur from her hands she finally hugged him back; burying her face into his shoulder and letting out another loud wail that broke into sobs as she smeared tears over her father's shirt.

'*I had him back,*' she sniffled. '*I had him.... It was just for a minute, but he was really there....*'

Hoof-steps clopped over Olivia's sobbing as Veruca and Volante gave each other a concerned glance, and Sheshalan hurried into the room and joined Olivia and Bertram on the floor.

'What's happened to you?' she asked as she began cleaning Olivia's wounds. 'Where have you been? We were all so worried....'

'I...' Olivia couldn't answer. 'I was.... *Daimon....*'

She burst into tears again, and all of her friends sat down with her, holding her close as she sobbed loud and wet into Bertram's shoulder.

She wasn't sure how long she cried, but it felt like hours.

By the end of it, she was so worn out and numb that all she could manage was to sit, her hands placed in Bertram's own, and breathe heavy and shaky breaths as Sheshalan finished tending to her wounds.

Then, her pocket vibrated, and she fumbled to pull out the sending stone that strange demon (Baron?) had given her.

She dropped it, too flustered to make sense of her own movements, and allowed Volante to pick it up and answer it for her.

'Hello...?' Volante muttered into the receiver. Then, she paled as a familiar voice replied:

'Is Liv safe?'

A moment passed as everyone in the room stared at the magical sending stone in Volante's hand.

The silence was only broken by a soft *thump!* as Bertram collapsed, unconscious, onto his side.

'I-I'm just worried about her,' Daimon's voice stammered. 'I wanted to make sure she got back safe.'

Another moment of quiet.

And then a chorus of screams and shouts and squawks of surprise echoed throughout the room as the Dawn Runners all but fell over each other in their clamouring to crowd around the magical stone.

'She's safe,' Volante managed.

'Yes, she—' Veruca began, then let out a confused bleat and shook Bertram as he groggily sat up. 'Daimon! It is Daimon?! No! No, Daimon! I signed your death certificate! Is that you? That cannot be you?'

'Uh...' the confused mumbling that followed seemed to reassure the Dawn Runners that, yes, this was indeed Daimon, and Olivia felt Sheshalan taking her hand to squeeze it tightly.

'Olivia?' Daimon started. Then cut off. 'I... she's okay?'

'I'm okay,' Olivia managed.

'I was worried,' Daimon replied. 'I wanted to make sure you got home safe. Are you home... safe?'

'Yes,' Olivia's voice broke. 'I'm home. I'm safe.'

'What is going on?!' Sheshalan exclaimed. 'What?! *What?!*'

'Check her pockets,' the voice of Volante—the other Volante— instructed through the stone, and Volante Volante's eyes went wide and she took a step back at the sound of her own voice. 'There should be a—'

'Be checking pockets, other Veruca!' Other Veruca cut Other Volante off; and, much like Volante looked shocked at her own voice, Veruca gave a confused squawk as she heard her own. 'I am leaving note for you! Be reading!'

'Don't interrupt me!' Other Volante snapped.

'I am having important things to say!' Veruca exclaimed. 'What, you want me to shout "objection" first?!'

'I want you to not fucking interrupt me!'

As the pair argued, their voices echoing hollowly over the inter-dimensional stone, Olivia reached into her pockets with trembling hands and pulled out all the things she had been given.

The screwdriver from Other Volante. The note from Other Veruca. The knife from Other Bertram. And the prayer book from Other Sheshalan.

All of her Dawn Runners immediately leant in, taking their counterparts' things and examining them.

'This is... *almost* my screwdriver,' Volante mumbled as she turned it over. 'But the scratches are in all the wrong places....'

Sheshalan's brow furrowed as she flicked through the prayer book, and her eyes trailed over the words. 'The cover's the wrong colour, but... this is mine.'

Bertram stared at the knife he held, a solemn look on his face as Veruca finished reading her note and immediately rushed out of the room. Olivia heard the sound of her fumbling in the kitchen before the bitter smell of burning paper filled the house.

'Olivia, what— Where did you get these?!'

'I... I can't—' Olivia's voice broke, and she placed a hand over her mouth. 'I can't explain it. I woke up in the wrong world, and I....'

'The wrong *world*?!'

'Liv, what do you mean?'

'What are you talking about?!'

'Perhaps,' another familiar voice came from over the stone, and Sheshalan's ears lifted as she heard herself talking. 'It would be best if I explained everything.'

—END—

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