



Beyond Fate (Midnight Falls #22)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: When Damon is put into an ancient sleep by a malevolent vampire, he is awakened by the Ultionem using a key made from their combined blood. But after being infused with the blood of seven mighty beings, everything inside Damon goes horribly wrong. To make matters worse, his mate shows up to help battle the swarm of undead vampires, and contributes his powerful Unseelie blood, which ends up costing Damon dearly.

Once a noble commander of the king's elite guardians, Casimir is branded a traitor and sentenced to death. He escapes the Unseelie realm by force, but spends the next two millenniums living in solitude, constantly on the move to avoid capture and execution. When a spell summons him to help fight an attack, he discovers his mate. Now, he must face the most difficult battle yet, because everything he cherishes most is at stake.

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Damon drifted in a hazy state between slumber and consciousness as voices murmured around him. The last thing he remembered was fighting against an ancient vampire with his family by his side. The creature had used its powers and blown all four of them off of it.

But then the vampire had locked eyes with Damon, malicious glee etched on its face, and whispered a single word: sleep.

Now, he was in a state of weightlessness, uncertain where he was or what was happening. His wolf within him howled for him to wake up, but he felt trapped in this dreamlike state.

“Did it work?” a voice asked.

“We must give it time,” another voice replied. “He’s just been infused with powerful blood. His body needs to circulate it and absorb it.”

“You’d think it would give him a surge of adrenaline,” a third voice chimed in. “He should’ve jumped to his feet, ready to take on anything.”

“But we don’t know how this will affect him,” the second voice admonished. “I gave a very small portion of my power to his twin, and even then, he needed assistance in defeating Vicino.”

The vampire may have been defeated, but what about Damon’s family? Had they survived? He desperately wanted to know. He strained to open his eyes, but they refused to cooperate.

Suddenly, he felt a pulsating energy coursing through his veins. It started off as a gentle thump, but it was growing stronger.

His wolf was no longer howling. It was now growling and snapping its jaws, twisting around as if possessed.

Then, an overwhelming thirst clawed at his throat. A burning rush that caused his stomach to seize up and spasm. Damon screamed in agony, yet no sound escaped his lips.

At the same time, a strange sensation began to tingle in his back, spreading until it felt like a million ants were crawling over it.

What was happening to him? Why couldn't he wake up, and who were these people around him?

"Son, come back to us," his dad's gentle voice pleaded. "Wake up, Damon."

I'm trying, Dad!

"Fight," Jaytee urged with a fierce growl. "Claw your fucking way out of there."

His twin had survived. But what about Jax? Damon's heart ached at the thought of losing his older brother. They may not always have gotten along over the centuries, but Damon would lay down his life for him.

"Wake up so Elvine can give you hell," Jax said with a smile in his voice, but it also sounded as if he was holding back tears. "She's been all weepy since we found you unconscious. It's kind of scary not seeing her all fired up and giving us hell."

Damon laughed through his tears. Jax was alive. His entire family had made it

through the battle alive. They hadn't been slaughtered by the horde of undead vampires.

But how?

A sharp, electrifying pain ripped through Damon's body, causing him to scream and arch his back in agony. But still, no sound came out.

"Holy shit!" shouted Jaytee in astonishment. "He has feathery wings!"

"You gave him your wings, Nazaryth," the second voice stated.

"I just hope he doesn't accidentally fall off a cliff trying to use them," someone, presumably Nazaryth, replied. "Flying comes naturally to me, but it may not be as easy for him."

"It's second nature to me, as well," Elvine stated.

Damon had found the dark fairy entertaining before, but now he found her annoying for some reason. He assumed she'd protected Jaytee's mate, or his twin wouldn't be at Damon's side.

Jaytee would be consumed with despair over losing his mate.

Damon needed to get out of this limbo so he could be with his family and figure out what in the hell was wrong with him.

Power whipped through him, helping him to break through the invisible surface and finally open his eyes. Damon immediately flipped to all fours and crouched, baring fangs instead of canines. Wings he'd never had until now shot out behind him.

Except for the tall, muscular, and shirtless fae, Damon recognized everyone around him, yet his wolf perceived them all as a threat, even his family.

Panahasi held his arm out to stop Jaytee when he tried to step forward. “His wolf is in control now. At the moment, your twin cannot be reasoned with.”

“Because he is a newborn and he thirsts.” Prince Christian studied Damon closely. “I can see a strong hunger in your eyes, young one.”

“I’ll feed him,” Jaytee offered without hesitation.

Damon scented the air then slowly turned his head toward the six-foot-seven warrior fae.

“He has chosen,” Prince Christian stated.

“My twin chose a stranger over family?” Jaytee sounded hurt and angry, but Damon couldn’t think about that right now. His thirst was overpowering everything else, and he just knew he needed the warrior’s blood.

“No insult to you, wolf,” Christian said. “But you cannot feed a newborn. They require more than you can give.” He gestured toward the fae. “He can withstand the feeding your twin requires.”

The fae’s large gossamer wings fluttered softly as he moved forward, and then he lowered to one knee. “Yato, nékah.” Feed, most cherished.

“What did he just say?” Jax asked.

Damon had no idea, either.

“We’ll meet you inside the house, Casimir,” Panahasi said then turned toward everyone else. “Allow Damon to feed for the first time in privacy.”

Cautiously, Damon moved a little closer, still sniffing as he focused on Casimir’s cerulean-blue eyes.

“Do not fear me, nékah. Come closer.” Casimir held out his hand. “Allow me to nourish you.”

Damon attacked, lunging toward the warrior and taking him to the ground. Casimir gripped him tightly and flipped them over, forcing Damon onto his back. “You will feed from only me, but you will not force me to submit to you!”

Too hungry to think rationally, Damon growled and bucked, his thirst clawing at his throat. He wanted Casimir’s jugular vein. He could see it pulsing in his neck, could smell the sweet, magical blood coursing through his veins.

Casimir brushed his long, dark hair to one side, exposing his neck.

Damon whimpered.

“You may feed from my vein, but if you become aggressive, I will be forced to put you on your back again.” Casimir’s expression was firm as he stared at Damon. “Do not make me hurt your gorgeous wings, nékah .”

His wolf still snarled, but Damon gently cupped the back of Casimir’s neck, drawing the fae down to him. He sniffed the warm skin, and the scent of the forest, the thrill of the hunt, and pure joy raced through him before he sank his fangs into soft skin.

Casimir gasped, his fingers flexing on Damon’s shoulders. The fae’s hard cock pressed into his stomach as Damon fed, the blood so sweet he softly snarled. As his

lips crushed against the warrior's flesh, Damon pulled the fae's cock free and curled his fist around the hard flesh, then began to stroke it.

“Ceutya nétya,” Casimir groaned, thrusting into Damon's fist. “I'm already close, wolf.” The warrior's body writhed as Damon swallowed the delicious taste flowing from the man's neck.

“Nékah!” Most cherished.

The fae's cum erupted in Damon's fist, Casimir's cock pulsing. He breathed heavily then gripped Damon's shoulders harder.

Damon became lost in the taste, lost in the scent surrounding him, falling into an abyss as he quenched his hunger.

“Enough,” Casimir gently commanded.

Not yet. Damon was too thirsty to stop. He gripped Casimir's upper arms, restraining the fae so he couldn't pull away. The fae's blood was calling to Damon, tempting him to drain the warrior dry.

“Enough!” Casimir gripped Damon's jaw in a strong hold. “Remove your fangs, nékah .”

His jaw felt as if it was about to crack, forcing Damon to retract his fangs with a snarl. Gradually, the blood began to ease his thirst. But the smell was still making his head fuzzy. Breathing heavily, he stared up into the fae's eyes. “Who are you?”

“I am Casimir Shadowlace.” He tried to push away, but Damon kept a firm hold on his arms. “I don't want to leave you, nékah . But I must accompany the demon warrior and your twin into Unseelie territory to reclaim my nephew Raidh's soul.”

It took a moment for Damon to understand what he was talking about. Then dread sank into the pit of his stomach. “Why doesn’t Raidh have his soul?”

Sadness filled Casimir’s eyes as he brushed his knuckles over Damon’s cheek. “The curse has claimed his life.”

“Raidh died?” Damon released Casimir then shoved the fae off of him and got to his feet. Shit! Jaytee had tried to pull Damon out of the sleep Vicino had put him in, when he should have already left to get his mate’s soul back. “I’m coming too.”

Damon stumbled backward when his wings began to flutter energetically. “What in the hell did they do to me?”

“In order to pull you from the ancient sleep, the Ultionem and I infused you with our blood. You now have some of their traits.”

The Ultionem were powerful beings, and they’d shared their blood with him, had turned him into... What in the hell was he now? He damn sure wasn’t just a wolf shifter anymore. There were feathery wings on his fucking back, the sheer weight making him stumble around.

There was also a sizzling power inside of him like his body was being nonstop electrocuted.

They’d turned him into a freak.

“You can’t go with us,” Casimir stated. “Your powers are too unstable at the moment.”

To add icing to his shit cake, the fae standing in front of him was his mate, yet the bastard had yet to acknowledge their connection.

This was just too much to deal with. “Go help my brother,” Damon snarled as he walked away.

Casimir grabbed his arm, but Damon shook off his grip and kept going, cursing when he couldn’t figure out how to get through the back door with his wings extended.

“Do you need me to—”

“I don’t need a damn thing from anyone,” Damon snapped. He no longer felt like a part of his family. He wasn’t a Frost any longer. Not when he had a circus circulating inside of him.

“I’ll return, nékah .” Casimir walked around the side of the house, leaving Damon standing there seething and miserable. They might have won the battle with Vicino, but they’d also lost, too.

Damon was a mutant, and Raidh was dead.

“Just concentrate on your wings. Imagine them tucking into your back.”

Nazaryth stood in the kitchen, watching him.

“You couldn’t have given me another winged-beast trait?” Damon was not in a good mood but watched his tone with the Ultionem member.

“The second one might be debatable.” Nazaryth smirked, the tips of his fangs showing. “Me or Christian?”

“I wasn’t even aware winged beasts had fangs.”

When Nazaryth walked toward him, Damon moved back to give him room so he

could exit the house. “We are a race of vampires created by the gods, given wings to make us more palatable for our king.”

Somebody detested their king. Nazaryth had pretty much spat the word. “So if you’re a vampire with wings, and now I’m one...”

“You will be recognized as a winged beast among us.” He gave a single nod. “Though I’m not expecting you to help us battle the infernus incolae .”

Damon was getting sick and tired of not understanding what people were saying. “English.”

“Hell dwellers. Hounds of hell. Hellhounds. Take your pick,” Nazaryth replied. “They go by all those names.”

“Yeah, hard pass.” Damon had never come across a hellhound, but he’d heard some pretty nasty stuff about them.

“Your zaterio is a Méityah Béskym,” Nazaryth commented, seeming impressed. “Sorry. Your mate is a guardian .” He smirked. “You lucked out with mates. Casimir is an elite warrior.”

Damon growled. “He’s not my mate.”

Nazaryth shrugged. “I’ve already fought that battle, so I’m staying out of yours. For now, concentrate on your wings.”

The mounting aggression inside Damon was really starting to wear thin. He was normally a chill guy, but now all he wanted to do was drive his fist through Nazaryth’s face.

Suddenly, Nazaryth flew backward then up, his wings flapping as he smirked down at Damon. “If you want to swing at me, you have to reach me, pup.”

“Do I look like a pup to you?” Damon snarled, trying to figure out how to work the damn things. The right wing flapped, but the left one sort of drooped.

“Concentrate.” Nazaryth spun flawlessly in a circle.

“I can’t do it!”

“Your whining might give your wings some lift.” He winked.

Damon closed his eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath, trying to purge the hostility right out of him. “You’re the experienced one, not me,” he gritted out.

Nazaryth flew close to the ground, as if daring Damon to come after him. “Fine, lesson over.” He touched down. “If you decide to try on your own, do yourself a favor and make sure it’s on level ground.”

Then he took off, soaring through the air and over the forest, disappearing from sight.

“Pull yourself together. You can’t act this way around your family,” he grumbled to himself. “They probably look at you as a monster now.”

Closing his eyes, he concentrated on tucking in his wings. Nothing happened.

“To hell with it. I’ll just sleep outside.” Damon’s family would probably sleep better without a freak under the same roof anyway.

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Damon rolled over and curled into a ball, breathing out slowly as he fought against the thirst burning in his throat and causing his stomach to cramp with pain. He wasn't even sure how long he'd been lying in bed, but the intense pain had him sweating like crazy.

What was so messed up about this was the fact that, when Raidh had been attacked by vampires, Damon had prayed his mate was anyone but a bloodsucker. The universe had said "Hold my beer" and made Damon one instead.

On the bright side, his mate hadn't been a vampire.

He was Unseelie, a dark fae. Nice sense of humor, fate. By the way, fuck you.

Damon should have just kept his mouth shut.

But things just kept piling up. His wolf was still acting like a psycho and felt bigger inside of him, stronger, snarlier, causing Damon to snap at everyone.

It wasn't as if he was being an asshole on purpose. His heightened aggression wasn't something he could control, but it did make him feel like a ticking time bomb.

It wasn't a feeling he welcomed either. In fact, Damon desperately wanted to give Maverick and Zeus their blood back. If only it worked that way.

"Damon," Jaytee called out from the stairs. "Dad sent me up here to tell you breakfast is ready."

Thankfully, he hadn't come to the bedroom door. Damon didn't want his twin seeing him like this. He didn't want any of his family to see how bad it was getting. They'd only force him to feed.

Which presented other issues.

A growl ripped from his parched throat when he heard the sound of fluttering wings growing closer. Damon knew who it was before the oversized pesky fly flew into his room.

"How're you feeling, Mr. Grumpy Socks?" Elvine asked as Damon opened his eyes and glared at her. She was hovering just inside his bedroom, her colorful delicate wings fluttering rapidly behind her back as she snooped through his things on a top shelf.

Speaking of one of the issues.

Fae blood was magical and gave off an irresistible, alluring aroma. The first time Damon had felt its effect was when he'd met Raidh, but it had only happened once and never again with Jaytee's mate.

However, with Casimir, the temptation was constant. But even after Damon's initial feeding from Casimir, the underlying scent wasn't as potent as it had been with Raidh.

Which was strange considering anyone with fangs who drank blood couldn't resist the scent. Maybe the powers he'd gained diluted his craving for fae blood.

Fortunately, with Elvine, the scent was even less potent.

But it was still there.

“First of all, it’s grumpy pants, not socks. Second, I’d be doing even better if you’d stopped checking on me every five seconds.” He flipped to his back, forcing himself not to concentrate on the pulse in her small neck or how he could hear her blood rushing through her veins.

His thirst was getting worse, his focus on Elvine a little too intent. Damon felt his fangs threatening to lengthen, ready to—

“Goddamn it!” His wings shot out, sending objects flying in every direction. The mirror above his dresser shattered, and the blinds on the nearest window were ripped down.

It had been a full week, and Damon had gotten diddlysquat under control. Just two days ago he’d discovered he could create dense fog. He’d had to keep his bedroom windows open, because for hours the power kept turning on and off, filling his room until it looked as if he lived in a lowland or valley.

If he had to have demon powers, why couldn’t they have been something cool, like laser eyes or the ability to make Casimir go away?

Elvine squeaked. “Those things could be used as deadly weapons, Mr. Grumpy Socks!”

“Don’t you have someone else to pester?” Damon tried to stand up with his wings still extended, but all he managed to do was grunt and roll back and forth on his bed. He was ready to rip them off.

“As amusing as it is to watch you struggle like a flipped turtle, breakfast will get cold before you figure out how to get up.” She chanted something in her native language, and Damon’s wings immediately tucked behind his back.

“You’re not supposed to use dark magic,” he bit out, frustrated that he’d needed help. “House rules.” Finally on his feet, Damon headed for the door.

“I think what you meant to say was thank you.” Elvine pressed her tiny fists against her hips as she glared at him.

Damon actually cracked a smile and shook his head. Maybe that was a sign his aggression was finally chilling out. He’d never had a problem with Elvine in the past. It was her and Jax who were always snarling at each other.

“Use some of that magic to clean up this mess,” he whispered as he walked by her, grateful his thirst had momentarily subsided.

When he heard a weird snapping sound, Damon turned around to find his room perfectly tidy again. “You couldn’t have fixed the blind too?” It was back on the window, but most of the slats were torn and floppy.

“Incentive to practice getting your wings under control.” She zipped past him and flew downstairs.

Damon took his time, trying to calm his racing heart. Since the Ultionem had converted him, he felt like everyone was watching him, waiting for him to lose control of his powers.

Thank goodness that hadn’t happened so far.

But the day was still young.

He trotted down the stairs then groaned when he saw a bare-chested Casimir leaning against the wall, his muscular arms crossed. Damon really needed to learn how to keep his mouth shut, even in his thoughts.

This was not the morning to deal with his mate.

“Don’t.” Casimir gently grabbed his arm and pulled Damon to a stop when he tried to breeze past him. “You can’t keep avoiding this, Damon.”

“Are you seriously trying to discuss this out in the open?” Damon glanced toward the kitchen. He wasn’t even sure why. Everyone in the house had heightened hearing. They’d probably even heard his conversation upstairs with Elvine.

“I wouldn’t have to if you stopped avoiding me.” Casimir let his arm go but still appeared ready to grab it again if necessary. “They’re fully aware of your need for blood, nékah . There’s no shame in it.”

Gritting his teeth, Damon got in his face and hissed, “You don’t get to tell me how to feel. Did someone put a circus inside of you without an instruction manual? No, they didn’t. So back off!”

To be fair, Nazaryth had tried to show Damon how to use his wings, but it had been right after Damon received infused blood from seven powerful beings. That was the wrong time to try and show him how to use them.

Casimir gripped his arms and swung him around, pinning him against the wall.

This was not good.

The dark fae’s magical blood was like a sweet nectar to Damon, and the closer he got to him, the stronger his craving became.

The only time he’d fed from Casimir, it had taken almost breaking Damon’s jaw to get him to release the vein.

And now the small reprieve from his hunger was over. The thirst began to crawl up his throat once more.

“Why do you keep manhandling me?” Damon asked between clenched teeth, trying hard not to breathe in Casimir’s scent, which was impossible, but he was determined to resist it.

“Because it seems to be the only thing that works right now,” Casimir snarled. “Your aggression won’t allow you to respond to my concern in a civil way.”

Another need started to fill Damon with their bodies so close. There was a much deeper reason Damon was so angry with Casimir. A reason that kept him so pissed-off at the guy.

But it was impossible to deny how gorgeous Casimir was. Even though Damon was angry and heartbroken, he still felt the pull, the draw to be near his mate.

“I’m not feeding from you.” Damon spoke as softly as he could so no one else could hear him.

“And if the thirst becomes too much and you attack your family?” There was genuine worry and fear in his cerulean-blue eyes. “Could you live with yourself if you drained Raidh or Elvine?”

No, he couldn’t. But Casimir didn’t get it. No one did. Vampires had tried to kill Raidh the night they’d ridden toward town. A powerful vampire had just tried to kill everyone Damon cared about. And that same vampire had put Damon in that ancient sleep, causing him to transform into a freak in order to escape it.

And now he’d become one of the creatures he despised. You didn’t just accept that as your new reality and move on with your life like everything was okay. It wasn’t.

“I need to clear my head.” Damon nudged his arms. “Can you release me?”

Casimir looked warily at him. “Give me your word you won’t feed from anyone or anything besides me.” He spoke deliberately, his fingers tightening slightly on Damon’s arms.

“I give you my word I won’t feed from anyone or anything.” He spoke just as low and slow.

Casimir’s nostrils flared as he took a step back. “You are unnecessarily putting yourself and your loved ones at risk, stubborn wolf.”

“Don’t you mean stubborn mutant ?” Damon gnashed his teeth before he stormed out of the house.

* * * *

This was more difficult than Casimir had anticipated. He scrubbed a hand over his beard as his mate walked out of the house, leaving him unsure of what to do. He’d been prepared for Damon to struggle with what he’d become, but it seemed he wasn’t even trying to adjust, as if his mate had given up before he even tried.

Casimir could handle aggression, uncertainty, fear, and any other emotion Damon was going through. But what was deeply frustrating was how his mate constantly pushed him away, shutting him out of his life.

That, Casimir didn’t understand.

“How’s he doing?” Jaytee’s concerned voice broke the silence as he approached from the kitchen.

He was Damon's twin, and every time Casimir looked at him, it pained him. They were identical in appearance, yet Jaytee was so calm and easy to talk to—everything Casimir wished his mate would be.

"I'm surprised no one heard our conversation," Casimir replied, gazing at the door and wondering if he should go after his mate. Why? He would only push you further away.

"We weren't trying to listen," Jaytee said, leaning against the staircase. "We didn't hear everything, though. Since Damon was pulled out of that sleep, we haven't really talked much."

The sadness and longing in Jaytee's blue eyes spoke volumes about how difficult this was for their family. Casimir had observed the Frost men since he had been there and found them to be a family that cared deeply for one another.

They had stuck together as a pack instead of the offspring venturing out to form their own paths in life.

"What was he like before the sleep?" Casimir desperately wanted to know who his mate was deep down inside.

Jaytee's smile turned wistful. "A big goofball. No matter the situation, he always finds a way to inject some humor. There's this childlike innocence about him that I don't think he's aware of. He's loyal to those he cares deeply about and compassionate, and he isn't afraid to share his feelings." A soft chuckle escaped him. "Thinks he's charismatic, and he is, in his own way." Jaytee's jaw tightened, his voice filled with pain. "Was. That's who he was...before."

Casimir longed to meet that version of Damon. His own life was nothing but internal battle scars, so much loneliness and despair. But even if Damon was no longer that

person, all Casimir wanted was a chance to get to know any version of his mate.

“Your twin sounds like an amazing man, but we have to remember he’s facing difficulties right now,” he gently reminded Jaytee.

“Difficulties he doesn’t have to face alone,” Jaytee argued, his anger and pain evident. “We’re a close-knit family who support each other. We don’t push everyone away when things get tough.” He slammed his fist against his chest. “I’m his twin. We can feel each other’s pain, and right now...” His voice broke. “Right now, Damon’s pain is unbearable.”

Casimir also felt Damon’s pain, but it was more than unbearable. It was tearing Casimir apart. They were both suffering, but if Casimir didn’t find a way to break through the walls Damon had erected between them, they may never find happiness with each other.

* * * *

“This isn’t how our family works,” Jax said as he listened to Jaytee head upstairs. He agreed with what his brother had said. They were a close-knit family who supported each other.

“No, it isn’t,” Kalen agreed. “Our attempts to talk to Damon have only pushed him further away from us. I think it’s time to let our animal instincts take over.”

Jax agreed. There were times when physical confrontation was the only solution to a problem. It might be viewed as primitive to some, but they were wolves, and it was not only a part of who they were but ingrained in their nature.

It was unfortunate the situation had come to that point. Jax couldn’t begin to imagine what his little brother was going through, but damn if he would let Damon freeze him

out. His heart was too big to become incased in ice.

“Remember when Raidh was attacked by those vampires and almost died? Damon went apeshit.”

Kalen nodded. “We were all worried.”

“But it was Damon who behaved the most frantic,” Jax continued. “He shouted we had to do something, because he wasn’t going to just stand by and watch Raidh die.”

In the end, they had watched him die. Jax had felt agonizing pain when Raidh had taken his last breath. Though he couldn’t feel his siblings’ pain the way the twins could feel each other’s, that night he’d felt Jaytee’s deeply.

His dad smirked. “I’m picking up what you’re putting down. We have to do something, because we’re not going to stand here and watch Damon suffer.”

“Exactly,” Jax said.

“About time,” Elvine interjected from where she was hovering close to the ceiling.

Jax had completely forgotten she was there. Annoying as she might be, truthfully, he found her breathtakingly beautiful. She was short with gorgeous green eyes, and he absolutely loved her unicorn-blue hair. But since he didn’t feel the pull toward her, Jax felt it best to keep his feelings to himself. She seemed too innocent, and he didn’t want to make it awkward between them if things didn’t work out, especially since his family adored her so much.

“Feet on the floor, young lady,” Kalen said in a firm, but gentle tone. Jax had a feeling his dad saw her as a daughter figure.

Luckily, Kalen hadn't killed her the night she'd boldly walked into the house looking for Raidh. As tiny as Elvine was, she hadn't shown any fear in the face of four deadly wolf shifters, displaying a fiery and determined attitude. Jax admired that about her.

Elvine descended and tucked her diaphanous wings into her back, blending them seamlessly into her olive-colored skin. It always amazed Jaytee how they just seem to completely vanish when she did that.

"So, what's the plan?" she asked excitedly. "I'm tired of Mr. Grouchy Socks. I want Mr. Scratchy Crotch back." She rubbed her hands together mischievously. "Do we get out the frying pan and knock some sense into him?"

Jax covered his grin with a scowl. "We want him to confront his problems, not give him brain damage."

"You're a little too eager to use that frying pan." Kalen chuckled.

She shrugged. "I want my playful wolf back. Do you think we should involve his mate? Damon seems to take out his anger on Casimir more than anyone else."

Jax had also noticed that. After Damon escaped the ancient sleep, it was Casimir who'd fed him, yet he'd been treating the fae warrior as an enemy ever since. Jax wasn't sure why, either. Preternatural looked for their mates their entire lives and didn't feel complete without them.

So why was Damon taking out his aggression on Casimir the most?

"No," Kalen answered firmly. "They have to work through their personal issues with each other. We stay out of it." He gave Elvine a stern look. "Do you understand, young lady?"

She pouted. “Yes, Dad .”

Kalen’s gaze softened with affection and pride when she addressed him with that term.

Their family was growing, and Jax couldn’t have been happier. He just wished he could find his mate too. His dad, as well. Kalen deserved happiness just as much as anyone else, if not more so.

Though their mom hadn’t been Kalen’s mate, he’d still loved her deeply. Her death at the hands of hunters nearly 150 years ago had left a profound mark on all of them.

In Jax’s opinion, his dad had done an amazing job raising three wild wolf pups, turning them into exceptional men like himself.

And now they had to help guide Damon back to being the remarkable man he truly was.

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Damon had been running for miles through the dense forest in his wolf form. He finally reached a ridge then shifted and sat on a large rock. The rough, uneven surface beneath him dug into his palms as he leaned back, but he enjoyed how his bare skin prickled under the warm rays of the midday sun.

The town of Midnight Falls was sprawled out below him, its quaint buildings and winding roads blended seamlessly with the wild forest surrounding it.

In the distance, Damon could see the shimmering waters of a river and imagined how good the cold water would feel on his heated skin.

The view was breathtaking, but the quietness surrounding him only amplified his feelings of isolation. For the first time in his life, Damon felt truly alone.

He resented his family for forcing this kind of fate on him.

He resented the Ultionem for turning him into something he never wanted to be.

He resented Casimir for...a few reasons.

But most of all, Damon hated himself for becoming an aggressive, self-loathing mutant. If given the choice between the ancient sleep or becoming a freak, Damon would have chosen the sleep.

Being a Frost had always been a source of pride for Damon. He came from a lineage of fierce and respected wolf shifters, but now he no longer felt like a true member of his own family.

With a sniff, he pressed his thumb and middle finger into his eyelids, trying his best to hold the tears back.

“Fuck, since when did you become a crier?” he murmured.

All he wanted was to be his old self again, but now he didn't even know who that was anymore. He didn't even know where he belonged in his strange new reality or even what to call himself.

A wolf shifter hybrid? A wolf shifter/vampire/winged beast/demon/shadow elf/dark fae amalgamation with unknown powers surging inside of him?

Okay, maybe that one was a bit too wordy.

But he hadn't just lost his sense of identity. Damon no longer felt like Jaytee's twin. His brother didn't have five-foot feathery wings or a set of fangs. And he definitely didn't thirst for blood.

Honestly, it was Casimir who he agonized over the most. Damon felt like an emotional train wreck where the warrior was concerned.

Despite his conflicting feelings toward Casimir, Damon still felt their deep connection. Yet every time they were near each other, Damon's aggression magnified, and he lashed out at him.

“Oh my god.” Damon laughed through a few fallen tears. “You are a goddamn mess, you pity-party-throwing asshole.”

He sniffed and wiped at his eyes. Then froze as a seductive aroma drifted toward him, causing his throat to tighten with a powerful thirst. Sweat. Human. Most likely a hiker.

Then came the sound of a rapid heartbeat. The rhythmic flow of blood through their veins beckoned to him like a siren's song, mesmerizing and impossible to resist.

Give me your word you will not feed from anyone or anything besides me.

Casimir had been right, and now the hunger consumed him entirely.

Slowly rising to his feet, Damon breathed in deeply, pulling the delicious fragrance farther into his lungs. His fangs lengthened as he craved the taste of warm, pulsing blood.

No! Clenching his fists, Damon squeezed his eyes shut and released a long exhale, fighting the internal struggle raging inside of him. His shifter conscience pleaded with him not to harm the innocent, but his vampire impulses screamed for him to give in and feed.

Damon's eyes snapped open when the heartbeat grew closer. His stomach twisted with hunger as his throat squeezed tighter.

In that moment, nothing else mattered except sinking his fangs into soft, giving flesh and satiating his need for blood. With a steady, glowing hand held out in front of him, Damon created a thick fog that spread outward, cloaking his approach and disorienting the hiker.

Her sweat mixed with the dampness of the fog created a sickly-sweet smell that made his mouth water.

Damon's breath quickened, and his heart beat faster as he reached a shaky hand toward her. She was so close he could practically taste her fear as she spun in confusion.

Just as he was about to grab her, something large and powerful slammed into him with a deep, menacing snarl. With a bone-crunching thud, he collided into a nearby tree.

Springing off the tree and crouching defensively, he scanned his surroundings.

Through the thick fog emerged three massive wolves, their honed muscles rippling with power and aggression as they advanced steadily toward him.

Their heads were lowered in a menacing stance, their sharp canines bared for attack and their ears pinned back in anticipation of bloodshed. His father and brothers circled him like a pack of savage predators, their threatening growls rolling like thunder through the air.

With his humanity pushed aside by his vampire instincts, Damon was willing to do whatever it took to get past the wolves and feed on the human.

No one would stand in his way, even if it meant killing all three of them.

Kalen shifted into his human form, his muscles bulging with tension. “This isn’t you, son. Since when do you attack those weaker than you?”

“Step aside or I’ll feast on your blood instead.” His tongue flicked over his razor-sharp fangs.

Kalen’s face collapsed in devastation, clear heartbreak in his blue eyes. “Don’t force my hand, son. Please...fight this.”

Jaytee and Jax snarled, the fur along their spines bristling.

Dropping to one hand, Damon curled an arm over his stomach. His insides felt like

they were on fire. He just wanted to fucking die. “I can’t!” he cried out in agony.

“Yes, you can!” Kalen’s voice was thick with tears.

Power flowed along Damon’s skin as his wings shot out. He arched his back, lifted his head toward the sky, and released a gut-wrenching scream.

Then he launched himself at Kalen, his mind consumed in a red haze. Kalen rolled with Damon on impact, both sliding across the forest floor. They bounded to their feet and exchanged fierce blows, but somewhere in the haze, Damon knew his dad was only defending himself. Kalen wasn’t delivering lethal strikes.

Jaytee and Jax rushed forward, shifting mid-run to tackle Damon. They tried to pin him to the moss-covered ground, but his adrenaline-fueled aggression gave him immense strength as he struck back with deadly force.

This had become less about feeding and more about survival, but Damon would feed if he found an opening. He struck back relentlessly, slamming his fist across Jaytee’s jaw before flipping over and releasing a forceful kick to Jax’s sternum.

When he saw Jaytee’s exposed neck, Damon tried to sink his fangs deep. With a sickening crack, his twin landed a powerful uppercut that sent Damon flying into a nearby boulder.

A battle cry ripped through the forest as Casimir stalked toward Damon with rage burning in his piercing eyes. Every muscle in his body was taut and chiseled, the guy closing in on him like a fierce warrior ready for battle.

Damon lunged at him, claws and fangs at the ready. Mid-air Casimir caught him around the throat and drove him to the ground, his neck muscles corded, his features dark. “You will not force me to submit to you!”

“If you let him feed from you right now, he’ll rip your throat out,” Jax shouted from behind them. “He’s in bloodlust.”

“Leave us!” Casimir bellowed at them while glaring at Damon. “Did I not warn you this would happen, stubborn wolf?”

“Mutant,” Damon shrieked. “A fucking bloodsucker! I hate all of you for what you did to me! I wish I had never been pulled from that sleep!”

Damon heard the quick intake of breaths and knew his family was still there.

“Leave us,” Casimir said more solemnly to the men behind them.

With a swift flip and roll, Damon managed to break free from Casimir’s loosened grip. Power surged through his veins, forcing back his thirst as his pain and rage took over. “I hate you, Casimir! I wish you’d never come into my life!”

“Tell me why you are always so angry with me!” Casimir bellowed. “Why do you hate me so much?”

“Because you sealed our bond when you combined your blood with theirs. I felt it even before I opened my eyes! You deprived me of the most intimate aspect of our mating!” His voice caught as he continued in a hoarse whisper. “And now I will never experience the joy of merging our souls as one.”

A flicker of shock flashed across Casimir’s face before it gave way to agony, his blue eyes filling with tears. “The ancient vampire placed you in a deep slumber, nékah . If it weren’t for the powerful leaders using their blood to awaken you, you would have been lost forever.”

“But why did you have to volunteer?” Damon choked out through his tears.

“You’re my mate, Damon. I knew this the moment I arrived for the battle and saw your wolf lying unconscious. It was my greatest honor to help bring my mate back from the darkness.” Casimir’s throat tightened. “I’m deeply sorry for depriving us of intertwining our sacred bond during our intimacy.”

“Do you know what hurts the most?” Damon angrily brushed away his tears. “It may have been an honor for you, but for me...it feels like a betrayal.”

He shot into the sky, unsure how he suddenly knew how to use his wings, but he didn’t care. He screamed out his torment and anguish until it felt like it fractured his very foundation.

A dark portal suddenly appeared right in front of him. Before Damon could figure out how to stop, he was pulled into the darkness and disappeared into the void.

* * * *

The keeper stood in the dimly lit chamber with one arm crossed over his chest. His eyes were closed as he rested his fingers on the bridge of his nose, as if trying to quell a headache. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly before addressing Panahasi.

“You performed...the mayotenz ...on a shifter.” His voice was low, his tone heavy with incredulousness and anger.

Panahasi stood calmly next to the keeper, unfazed by his simmering rage. “He needed a key to get out of Vicino’s sleep, so we provided one,” he stated matter-of-factly.

“For...a shifter.” The keeper’s jaw visibly tensed, and a faint tick started in his temple. “And then”—he blew out a frustrated breath— “you had to rescue him from Jaden...because the wolf’s pain...called Death to him. Do I have that right?”

“Nailed it,” Panahasi said solemnly, looking down at Damon’s sleeping form lying on the dusty couch. As soon as he’d yanked Damon through the portal, he’d had to render the wolf shifter unconscious.

His pain had been broadcasting so intensely it had started a frenzy among the lost souls in the underworld.

The underworld was a desolate wasteland inhabited by souls who had not earned their way into paradise. They would roam the wastelands for all eternity.

And they had a particular fondness for tortured souls like Damon’s. If Panahasi hadn’t knocked him out, they would have descended on the keeper’s chamber in swarms. But even though Damon slumbered, his anguish still pulsed from him, just not as strongly.

He’d also had to dress Damon. Most shifters stripped before they shifted, so Panahasi had just summoned the wolf’s clothes to his body.

The keeper dropped his hand and glared at Panahasi, an ancient fire blazing in his eyes. “Did you forget the crucial detail that only those who already possess powers can withstand the mayotenz without going insane?”

“It’s been a few millennia since it was last performed,” Panahasi argued in frustration. “His twin’s mate had just died, Vicino had unleashed an army of resurrected vampires, and Damon’s”—he gestured toward the couch—“own mate had just arrived on-scene to help kill the horde of zombie vampires.”

The keeper narrowed his eyes as he stabbed a finger in Panahasi’s direction. “You created the damn vampire race.”

Panahasi arched a brow. “And you created the entire universe.”

“Does that mean everything that goes wrong is my fault then?” The keeper smirked sarcastically. “Nice try. Should we just destroy everything and start over?”

There were days when Panahasi was sorely tempted to do just that. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d taken his mates on a vacation or had any time for himself. His responsibilities filled his life twenty-four-seven.

Not only did he command twelve powerful demon warriors but he also held a seat on the Ultionem council—a fulltime job itself. He also ran around putting out fires while trying to balance time for his mates.

“Tell me there’s an undo button.” He wished one of them had remembered the vital detail about the mayotenz before they’d unleashed hell upon the poor wolf. And then they had simply walked away, thinking their job was done.

He was honestly shocked Damon hadn’t already gone completely insane.

The keeper walked over to one of the gazillion bookshelves that lined the walls of the cobweb-infested chamber.

Panahasi glanced toward the shelves filled with various jars and containers holding all kinds of bizarre items—from hissing smoke that slithered like serpents to jars of what looked like troll snot.

There were also skulls and candles dripping with wax placed haphazardly on top of tomes, scrolls, and piles of yellowed, dried parchment that seemed to be waiting for a spark to ignite.

But then again, who would the fire even harm in this place? Everyone here was already dead. Except for those sentenced to the underworld as punishment for some heinous crime.

Still, no matter how many times he traveled there, Panahasi always thought it a creepy-ass room.

“What has been done cannot be completely reversed,” the keeper intoned solemnly, his voice echoing off the stone walls of the cavernous chamber. He returned to Panahasi’s side with a tome the size of Manhattan.

With a thud, he dropped the massive book onto the table in front of him, sending an avalanche of dust into the air as papers and scrolls drifted or rolled away.

Panahasi coughed and waved his hand in front of his face to clear the haze.

“You really need to hire a cleaning service, Aldrin.” He looked down at his clothes and gritted his teeth in annoyance when he saw he was covered in a layer of dust.

The keeper looked up at him, unbothered by the dust storm. “Do you want to assist the wolf, or should I fetch some dusters and glass cleaner?”

Panahasi resisted the urge to point out there was no glass in the underworld. Just endless amounts of dust and dark souls.

As the keeper opened the book with a flourish, the one side of the heavy tome slammed down on the table, causing even more dust to rise up and choke them. He had done that on purpose, the devilish bastard.

“You know I can read your thoughts,” the keeper said while casually skimming through pages.

“We agreed over ten thousand years ago that you would stay out of my head.”

“Here we go.” He tapped his finger on a particular page. “I can bring his aggression

level back down to normal level...for a dominant wolf shifter, remove the power surge you so lovingly plugged into him, then impart upon him instant knowledge on how to control the mess you men have unleashed inside him.”

Panahasi knew he was never going to hear the end of his mistake.

“No, you’re not,” the keeper stated firmly, giving him a piercing glare. “You are Life itself, imbued with immense powers. Of all the Ultionem members, you must be the most careful in how you wield your powers... or misuse them.”

Glancing at the couch, he watched as Damon stirred slightly. “His bond with his mate was sealed with the mayotenz . A great deal of his anguish stems from being denied the experience of sealing it himself with Casimir.” The weight of his mistake hung heavily on Panahasi’s shoulders. “Is there any way to reverse the bond so they have to perform it themselves?”

That was what crushed him the most when he’d found out what they’d accidentally done to Damon. It was a sacred moment between mates, a bonding performed only once to seal their souls, and they’d been denied the chance to experience it together.

And there was nothing the Ultionem members could do to ever make up for taking that away from Damon.

“If we attempt to separate their souls, we’ll permanently sever their bond completely,” the keeper replied regretfully, sorrow evident in his eyes.

Panahasi rubbed at his chest, feeling a tightness that mirrored the heaviness in his heart. He couldn’t fathom severing his bond with Casey or Drake. His mates were essential to him, grounding him and keeping his heart beating.

Walking to the couch, Panahasi hunkered down and rested his elbows on his knees

and his chin on his folded hands as he watched Damon sleep. “I am truly sorry to the depths of my soul, wolf.”

Damon would know the truth. Panahasi closed his eyes as the wolf’s pain pulsed against him. It wasn’t Casimir who had deprived his mate of the bonding experience. As soon as the magic had touched Life’s blood, the mayotenz had sealed their souls.

It was the addition of his blood that had stolen their most precious moment from them. Panahasi was the unwitting villain, not Casimir.

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With each step, Casimir's feet crunched the fallen leaves and twigs of the dark forest, his mate's heartbreaking departure still fresh in his mind. The sun had long ago set, but the darkness offered no solace to him, only a constant reminder of his broken heart and the irreversible damage he had caused.

It was baffling how he could feel so much anguish and yet feel completely numb inside. The guilt weighed on him so heavily that Casimir found every breath a struggle.

How could he have unknowingly caused so much harm? His connection to the wolf was strong, but he had no idea it was because they were already bonded.

And now, because of his mistake, he had lost his mate. His nékah's scream still rang in Casimir's ears, filled with hate and regret for ever meeting him.

"You deserve it for what you have done," he murmured to himself as he continued to walk, the moon casting shadows on the path he made his way down. A chipmunk ran past him as he heard the hoot of an owl. "But I swear to you, Damon, there was never any betrayal in my heart toward you."

It was a crushing blow for Casimir, who had spent over two thousand years constantly watching his back, surviving brutal attacks and going to bed alone every night. And now he was cursed to walk a lonely road once again.

He had thought that finding his mate would change everything and bring him the companionship and love he had so desperately craved.

“I just wanted to protect you,” Casimir whispered into the darkness. “To help guide you through your new abilities.” But all those intentions meant nothing now.

“You destroyed any chance you had with your mate within the first hour of meeting him.” Casimir laughed bitterly. “So pathetic. At least now you know why he hates you. You are just a lifetime purveyor of betrayal.”

There was nothing Casimir could ever do to make up for unknowingly shattering the most precious bond he could ever have hoped for.

A tingle ran through Casimir’s béskym mark, signaling that someone was watching him.

Today was not the day to test his patience. His emotions were raw and volatile, and anyone who dared to challenge him would feel the full force of his wrath.

Casimir slowed to a stop. “It’s rude to interrupt someone mid-conversation with themselves. Reveal yourself,” he stated calmly but with a clear intent.

The sound of footsteps grew louder and more deliberate as someone made their way toward him on the forest floor. Twigs snapped underfoot and leaves rustled on bushes as a short, gaunt male stepped onto the path. He wore jeans, a faded black shirt over a long-sleeved one, and scuffed sneakers.

If Casimir hadn’t been lost in thought, he would have caught the unmistakable scent of vampire before now.

“Come to steal some fae blood?” Casimir raised an eyebrow. The male appeared young, no more than 120 years old, maybe a decade or two older than that, but considered an adult among their kind.

The vampire's tongue slid over his bottom lip nervously as his gaze darted all over Casimir's body, as if searching for the best way to take down a six-foot-seven-inch Méityah.

Casimir took a deep breath, allowing his muscles to relax as he focused on the vampire's every move. Despite his thin frame, he was still a predator.

"As delicious as your blood smells, g-guess again." He attempted to smile, but it was more of a timid grimace that revealed his sharp fangs.

As Casimir studied the guy, he was more than a little surprised the vampire displayed this much self-control. Vampires were notorious for being unable to resist the temptation of fae blood, especially younger ones like this male.

There was also a scar peeking out from under the collar of his shirt. Vampires usually healed when they consumed blood, causing any scarring to disappear.

Slowly tilting his head, Casimir grinned knowingly. "Ah, I see. You're after a different kind of blood."

The vampire's strained, half-smile faded as his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "I don't get it."

"Traitor's blood," Casimir clarified for the naive vampire.

The vampire's amber eyes dulled as he nodded. "Yes, p-please. That one."

There was no possible way this scrawny, timid vampire would be foolish enough to take on Casimir alone. Which meant help was nearby.

Without moving a muscle, Casimir scanned his surroundings with razor-sharp focus,

searching for any hidden threats.

Whoever it was, they were masking their scent with expert skill. Even Casimir couldn't detect them.

But he could feel their presence—someone was watching him closely, like a predator stalking its prey.

Just as the thought crossed his mind, his swords materialized in his grasp, summoned by his béskym mark. The weight of the blades felt as natural as his own hands.

The guardian's attack came fast and fierce. The clash of metal on metal echoed through the forest, sparks igniting with each strike, illuminating the darkness around them.

Casimir had trained as a guardian since childhood, and few could match his elite skill, but Elouan was one of few who came remotely close.

And he wanted Casimir's death for betraying their king.

"I knew sooner or later you would crawl out of whatever hole you've been hiding in, coward," Elouan sneered, his blade coming dangerously close to Casimir's throat.

With lightning-fast reflexes, Casimir used a nearby tree to launch himself into the air, flipping over Elouan's head and slicing off a chunk of his long, black hair. Elouan let out an enraged scream and retaliated with deadly force.

Similar to the shadow elves, the length of a warrior's hair represented their mastery in the art of war. But for the Méityah, like Casimir and Elouan, hair was also a symbol of prestige that surpassed the need to prove themselves through combat.

By slicing off a portion of Elouan's hair, Casimir had just stripped him of all honor and respect among warriors.

The son of a bitch shouldn't have come after him.

"Cywatén !" Elouan snarled as he spun and tried to use momentum to thrust his sword toward Casimir's chest.

"I am not the son of a whore!" Casimir hadn't seen his family since he'd been torn away from them, but he remembered his mother's caring nature. She had openly wept when the mark appeared on her son, and for that memory alone, Casimir would defend her honor vehemently.

He crashed his elbow into Elouan's jaw when he saw the fae beginning to chant. "What's wrong, can't fight without resorting to magic, nyzant ?"

"We are no longer brothers," Elouan gritted out between bloody teeth from Casimir's strike. "That bond was broken the day you betrayed our king."

They circled each other, swords at the ready. "King Emrys betrayed us! He ordered the deaths of the entire council because he was nothing but a paranoid narcissist who went into a meltdown when they voted against that dumb fucking law he wanted to pass."

"You were raised and trained to obey our king's every command."

Elouan swirled his sword in front of his body, an expert display of skills. Casimir matched him step for deadly step.

He was tired of constantly running and fighting off loyalists who tracked him down.

He'd wanted only two things in the last past two thousand years. One was to rest his weary head and not have to worry about someone trying to kill him. And the second was a connection with someone, even if it was only friendship, but that hadn't been possible since he never stayed in one place for too long.

That was why he cherished staying at the Frost home. He may not have known the men well and still felt a bit out of place, but at least he felt a warmth and sense of family he had been missing.

Casimir and Elouan continued to battle, blade striking blade, metal clanking as the swords slid against each other. Casimir fought fiercely to save... Save what? What exactly was he fighting for? To continue living a solitary existence for eternity?

That was all he'd been doing his entire life, just existing and surviving. Casimir wanted more than to simply exist. He wanted to truly live. But how could he when his nékah hated him and cursed the night they'd met?

"Keep blindly following, Elouan. The current king is no better. One day you'll wake up and discover it's the guardians he wants slaughtered."

Elouan smiled maliciously. "Oh, there will be a slaughter."

Casimir really didn't like that grin. And he liked the overwhelming scent of vampires even less. It was suffocating, causing him to wonder just how many were nearby.

That had been Elouan's plan all along. Knowing he could lose to Casimir in a fair fight, he'd made a backup plan.

"You always were a coward," Casimir spat as they shoved away from each other. Then Casimir lunged again, only this time he changed direction at the last second and drove his sword into Elouan's side, slicing through flesh and tissue. Blood erupted

from the wound.

The scent of Elouan's blood filled the air, accompanied by hissing and gnashing of teeth from all directions. "You want a slaughter, then you shall be the main course," Casimir growled. "You are the betrayer, Elouan. You turned your back on your brothers for that worthless piece of shit."

Casimir quickly tucked his wings in half a second before someone leapt onto his back. Fangs tore at his neck and sank into his wrist.

Damn it. Once a vampire tasted fae blood, they wouldn't stop drinking until their victim was fully drained. Casimir roared and flung the attacker off, only to see at least thirty more descending on them like vultures.

"Never trust a—" Casimir cut himself off before finishing the sentence.

Damon might have abandoned him, but Casimir refused to disrespect his nékah by using the derogatory term "bloodsucker" ever again.

"Guess I shouldn't have," Elouan said nonchalantly. "Seems I have a bad habit of trusting the wrong people."

"Like the kings you serve," Casimir muttered.

He didn't want to live without Damon, but this was not how Casimir wanted to go out. Looking to his left, he saw the vampire he'd spoken with earlier, only the guy wasn't smiling. He was hiding behind a tree with a look of pure terror in his amber eyes.

They locked gazes for a moment, and the guy mouthed, "Sorry."

It was a little too late for apologies. Casimir flipped him off then focused on fighting off the horde of vampires who wanted to make him their next meal. Trying to keep them off of him wasn't easy.

Casimir might be an elite warrior, but when faced with this many vampires, even he was sweating this. "Just how many did you pay to be here?" Casimir asked between grunts and swings of his sword.

"Five," Elouan admitted with a painful grunt, fighting back the vampires who were after the bloody injury Casimir had given him. "I'm starting to think they sent out flyers for this party."

"With door prizes." Casimir continued fighting, cutting through the vampires coming at him, but he felt as if he wasn't making headway.

"Who were these five vampires you paid?" he asked Elouan.

"What does it matter?" he snarled. "You just turned me into a buffet for these bloodsuckers."

Casimir was not going to make it out of this battle alive. "Because more vampires keep showing up. That's why I asked, asshole." If, by some miracle, he survived this, he wanted to personally thank those five.

Elouan's head shot around, following Casimir's stare to the vampires running down the grassy incline toward them.

His swords were slippery with blood, making it difficult to keep a grip on them as he fought. "What did you really do? This isn't just five vampires. It's a swarm." He glared at Elouan while fending off the attackers.

It was obvious Elouan was lying to him. He had to have used some kind of dark spell or... Hell, Casimir didn't know what to think. Unfortunately, he couldn't use magic to get out of this since he'd been stripped of his magical abilities before escaping the realm.

That left only Casimir's wings as a means to escape. But if he untucked them with so many vampires around, they would be torn, which was instant death for any fae.

It was a risk Casimir couldn't take, but his chances on the ground weren't any better with the swarm of vampires. He felt their painful bites all over his body. Casimir wouldn't have to worry about one vampire draining him when each one who came near him took a huge sample of blood for themselves.

He was running out of time and options.

"I want the truth. What did you really do, Elouan?" Casimir snarled as he turned to face him, only to see four vampires attacking the guy. Not a chance in hell was he going to save Elouan after the bastard had just tried to kill him. Elouan was the one who'd caused this chaos to begin with. Besides, Casimir had his own vampires to deal with.

The ones closest to him hissed as they gazed up at the sky. Casimir didn't want to look up. That would divert his attention from the vampires attacking him.

As he fought, he noticed a thick fog rolling toward them from the very hillside the vampires had raced down. The entire area filled quickly, making it difficult for Casimir to get his bearings.

This had not been his day. He could still sense everyone around him. He just couldn't see his enemies coming at him. Someone grabbed his arm. Casimir snarled, gripped the wrist, and yanked it forward, ready to embed his blade.

“Watch that goddamn thing. It looks sharp!”

“Damon?”

Arms wrapped around his waist as a solid wall of warmth pressed into his back. “Get ready to fly. Second to the right, and straight on till morning,” Damon whispered in his ear.

He had no idea what Damon was talking about and honestly didn’t care. He could only concentrate on the fact that his mate was there and he had his arms wrapped around him. For a brief moment, Casimir had even forgotten about the surrounding chaos.

It just felt too good to have his mate envelop him for the first time.

Then they shot into the air.

Casimir laughed as they rose above the fog until he saw the twinkling lights of Midnight Falls in the distance. Whatever problems he and Damon still had, Casimir let them melt away for the moment and simply soaked in his mate’s warmth.

They touched down a good ten miles from the battle on a large cliff.

Casimir hated the moment Damon pulled his arms from around him. Even if his mate was a good five inches shorter than him, it still felt good to have those powerful arms around his muscular frame.

As Casimir turned and looked down at his mate, Damon tucked in his wings and took a step back. “Welcome to Neverland,” he said with a smirk.

It was as if Casimir was looking at a stranger. This was not his snarly, aggressive,

bloodlust mate who had declared his hate for him. This person was...nice. And simply gorgeous when he smiled. Casimir wasn't sure what to say or do.

"I leave you alone for a second and you end up in another battle with vampires." Damon shook his head with a smirk.

Casimir frowned. Maybe he'd been killed, and this was his paradise? This was not the Damon Frost he'd known for the past week. This person was calm and jovial.

"Long story." Damon sat on a small rock shelf, pulled one leg up, and rested his forearms on his bent knee.

Casimir sat close to him, not daring to touch the wolf shifter until he had some answers. "Your aggression?"

His nékah drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly, appearing as if he were simply enjoying the peaceful night.

"I owe you a tremendous apology," Damon said as they stared at the vast forest below. Casimir could see a scattering of lights from residential homes and headlights traveling different roads.

"I don't understand né —Damon." Casimir no longer had the right to say the word "mate" out loud. Not after he'd... He didn't even want to think of his betrayal right now. It still hurt too badly.

"You and me both," Damon snorted. "I flew out of the forest in a rage. Don't even know how I flew since I've sucked at figuring my wings out, but when I got far enough away, this huge portal opened up and I got yanked inside of it." He leaned back on his hands and crossed his legs.

Casimir swept his gaze down Damon's body, yearning to touch any part of his mate. At the moment, it wasn't even a sexual yearning. He just wanted some kind of physical contact from someone—preferably his mate. Two thousand years of solitude was a hell of a long time to be so alone.

He also wanted to ask what the apology was for but felt as if he was walking on fragile glass that would break at any second.

“Where did you end up?” Casimir sat forward and rested his forearms on his knees. He stared at the ground because it was too painful to look at a man he couldn't touch.

Damon chuckled. The sound filled so many empty spaces inside Casimir's hollowness. “I can officially say I've visited the underworld. Sorry I didn't bring you back a souvenir. The gift shop has been closed since... Actually they need to build one first.

Casimir smiled. This was the man Jaytee had described. This was the man before the ancient sleep. Even if it was only a glimpse of Damon's former self, he would take it.

“I wouldn't have anywhere to put a memento, anyway,” Casimir answered honestly.

“You don't have a home?” Damon sounded confused.

Taking a deep breath, Casimir looked at his mate, stunned to see the soft look in his eyes. “It's hard to have one when you're being hunted and have to constantly keep moving.”

Which made him wonder how Elouan knew where to find him. Casimir had stayed at the Frost home since being in Midnight Falls. Aside from those who lived there, he'd kept his presence hidden.

“Jesus.” Damon ran a hand over his long, thick beard. “We really do need to get to know each other.”

“What happened in the underworld. You seem...” Casimir was too afraid to say anything for fear Damon’s hostility would return. He liked being with this version of his mate much better.

“I was on a lift getting my engine rearranged.” Damon seemed to have turned melancholy, but Casimir could also sense rage simmering just below the surface. His arms ached to pull his mate to him and offer him comfort. It had killed him to see Damon struggling over the past week knowing there was nothing he could do, because his mate wanted nothing to do with him.

“You were at a mechanic shop?” Casimir frowned. “I thought you said you were in the underworld.”

He startled when Damon burst into laughter, and he wasn’t someone easily frightened. He’d just never heard the wolf’s boisterous laugh before.

“Sorry.” Damon held up a hand. “It just feels good to laugh again.”

“Don’t apologize.” Casimir tore his gaze away from his mate. “It’s a beautiful sound.”

“I can’t wait to hear yours,” Damon said softly. “I bet it’s rich and deep, just like your voice.”

Despite his despair, Casimir smiled. “Are you going to clear up my confusion?”

“Mechanic shop.” Damon rolled his eyes with a grin. “The keeper put a lot of Humpty Dumpty back together again, but I still have huge cracks.”

“Damon.” Casimir pressed his fingers over his eyelids. “I don’t... Please tell me what the keeper did to you.”

“He fixed most of me.” Damon’s jaw turned granite. “But it was Panahasi who broke me in the first place.” He shot off the rock shelf and walked to the edge, gazing at the forest below. “He’s the one who sealed our fucking bond,” he snarled.

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Damon was still trying to process everything the keeper had explained to him when he'd woken in that eerie room. For a brief moment after his eyes opened, Damon actually thought he'd died and was in hell, though he was pretty sure he hadn't done anything in his life to deserve eternal damnation.

But he had felt all those trapped souls trying to get to him so they could possess him. The sensation had been like a constant tremor against his skin, like a dark energy tapping along the exterior chambers walls trying to find a weak spot to enter.

It had been the strangest and worst feeling he'd ever experienced. Although the keeper had assured him the souls couldn't get into the room, Damon still spent the entire time praying it was true.

Then the keeper had conjured a cold drink for Damon's parched throat before he sat there on the couch next to him to explain why he'd been so aggressive and what exactly was done to him.

During their conversation, Damon had been a little bewildered about something called the mayotenz but was able to understand the gist of what the keeper was saying. The Ultionem had been trying to get him out of that sleep Vicino had placed him in.

Damon remembered that single chilling word the vampire creature had whispered to him. Sleep. The word sleep should not send chills down anyone's spine. Never in his life did he want to hear anyone say it to him again.

It was hard to wig Damon out, but he was wigged.

Then Panahasi had left the underworld, confusing Damon at his abrupt departure.

“Your mate’s blood had no bearing on your sealed bond,” the keeper explained. A stone settled in Damon’s stomach. He knew he wasn’t going to like what was coming next. “Panahasi is Life, embodying all living beings. Because your mate was present at the time, and you were unclaimed, when he contributed his blood to the spell, the mayotenz sealed your bond with your fae.”

“Did he know this would happen?” Damon asked angrily.

“Yes and no,” the keeper replied with sorrow in his eyes. “It has been over a few millennia since he’s performed the spell, and some things slipped his mind.”

Damon shot off the couch. “Slipped his mind? It wasn’t like I was dying. He could have brushed up on the spell before he rained hell down on me! Before he ripped away something I’ve been waiting my entire life to share with my mate when I found him!”

Damon shook himself out of his thoughts as he stood on the cliff, wishing to god he’d known everything when he’d been pulled out of Vicino’s sleep.

“Are you saying it wasn’t me who deprived you of experiencing...” Casimir’s voice trailed off as he glanced away but not before Damon caught a glimpse of shame in his eyes.

Most of Damon’s rage toward Panahasi was for stealing the experience of bonding as a couple from him and Casimir. But deep down, a part of Damon was also furious at himself for how he’d treated his mate for thinking Casimir was the culprit.

Because he’d felt their bond sealing as he was pulled from the sleep, he’d assumed it was Casimir’s fault. That his mate’s blood had completed the claiming between them.

Damon shouldn't have assumed. He should have gotten answers first.

"I don't know how I'll ever make it up to you," he said, guilt weighing heavily in his voice. "I said some horrific shit to you." I hate you, Casimir! I wish you'd never come into my life! How could he ever come back from that? He felt like a monster for saying those things to his own mate.

Casimir held up a hand, palm out. "Just tell me yes or no. Did I betray you? Was it my fault our bond sealed?"

"No. You didn't betray me or seal our bond," Damon answered, his voice strained with remorse. He wouldn't blame Casimir if he never wanted to speak to him again. Damon had been terrible to his mate this past week and he hadn't deserved any of it.

Casimir flew at him on his fairy wings, making Damon brace himself. He thought his mate was about to kick his ass. Instead, Casimir pulled Damon into his muscled arms and hugged him hard against his solid chest.

"I was a nightmare toward you," Damon choked out.

When Casimir gently tilted his chin, Damon gazed into those amazing cerulean-blue eyes. "You had an uncontrollable power inside of you while dealing with so many changes. You thought I had betrayed you. All that matters to me is your wellbeing. What happened while you were struggling is behind us now, *nékah*."

"But I'm still struggling," Damon pulled away from his embrace. "The keeper gave me instant knowledge on how everything works inside of me, but I'm still all those things. I no longer feel the aggression, but I still have wings, can still produce fog...and I still crave blood."

"Do you think that matters to me?" Casimir frowned.

“It should.” Damon glanced at him. “I can smell the intoxicating scent of fae, and I want to drain every last drop of blood from your veins.” He wrapped his arms around his stomach. “The part of me that craves it doesn’t care that you’re my mate.”

Casimir chuckled, a sound that both surprised and confused Damon.

“You know, it’s funny how you can say that, and yet I still find you irresistible,” his mate said with a grin.

Okay, Damon would definitely address the irresistible part later.

“How is that funny?” He furrowed his brow. “I just admitted to wanting to drain you.”

“You could try, nétya . But all that will happen is you on your back, getting fucked,” Casimir replied with a smirk, his blue eyes filled with promise. “So be very careful. If you try to attack me while others are around, they will see quite the show.”

Damon’s eyebrows shot up. “Not in this lifetime.”

Still, he couldn’t forget how quickly Casimir had taken him down when his hunger became uncontrollable. The warrior’s strength was enough to overpower a frenzied vampire and keep him pinned down with ease. If Casimir hadn’t loosened his grip, Damon would never have been able to break free.

He pointed at Casimir with a circular motion of his finger. “We’ll get back to your Rick Blaine. For now, tell me what that word was you just called me.”

Although he felt a primal pull toward his mate and wanted Casimir in the worst way, Damon still felt like a freak.

“Nétya,” Casimir replied, a small smile playing on his lips. “It means wolf.”

“And the other one? I’m assuming it means mate.”

“In a sense, yes.” Casimir nodded as he settled back onto the rock shelf. “Nékah roughly translates to ‘most cherished.’”

“Why doesn’t Raidh call Jaytee...that word?” Damon couldn’t recall ever hearing Raidh speak in fae language around him.

“I was isolated from the Unseelie and raised in another part of the realm,” Casimir replied. “Nékah is the word used among the Méityah, but it’s never spoken out loud.”

“I heard Nazaryth call you that Méit...however you say it. What is it, and why don’t you use the mate word?” Damon sat next to him, relieved he almost felt like his old self again. He was still dealing with some of the crap over the past week, but he finally had a better handle on the circus inside of him.

“Méityah means guardian.” Casimir gazed off into the distance as if lost in thought. “When we were created as a fae race, guardians were born to protect the king. At that time, it was King Vesela. He was truly a great man among dark fae. A strong leader who took his duties seriously and ruled with fairness.”

Damon liked hearing about Casimir’s race. It expanded on what he’d learned so far from Raidh and Elvine. He also liked hearing his mate talk. Casimir had a slight accent, causing him to pronounce some words with a lilt.

“Then why don’t you use...that word for mate?” Damon shook his head. He wasn’t going to remember the words his mate used, let alone how to pronounce them correctly.

“Nétya,” Casimir pronounced slowly, emphasizing each syllable.

“I’m not dimwitted.” Damon grinned. “That one is easy to pronounce. It’s all the other words you use that trip me up.”

“You’ll grasp the language in time.” Casimir winked.

Damon’s gaze traveled down his mate’s body, his eyes feasting on all those honed muscles, which were even bigger than his own. He was dying to wrap his fists in that long hair as he fucked the warrior into exhaustion.

Casimir looked Damon over in the same needy way. “Méityah are born, but no one knows if their child will be a guardian until the mark appears.”

Giving Damon his back, his mate pulled his long hair aside. It was more than just a mark. Covering his entire left shoulder blade was a tattoo of beautiful fairy wings with intersecting swords piercing them.

Well, it looked like a tattoo, but Casimir had said it just appeared when he was a child. It wasn’t something he had chosen to have permanently etched onto his skin.

“That’s how you know you’re a guardian?” Damon couldn’t stop himself from reaching out and touching the tattoo-looking mark, and then he jerked his hand back when the tiny wings of the mark fluttered. “Is that supposed to happen?”

Casimir smiled. “If my mate touches them, then yes. They are a part of me, like my larger wings are.”

With a wide grin, Damon touched them again, and once more they fluttered. “Am I crazy, or can I really feel them moving under my fingers?”

It wasn't just a sensation of skin moving but of wings fluttering under the pads of his fingers. Freaky, but cool as hell.

"They're moving," Casimir confirmed. "And to answer your earlier question, if you've spent your entire existence in training and then at the king's side, you can't call your mate *nékah* if you've never been given the opportunity to search for them."

"Nazaryth called you another name too, but I can't remember what it was. I swear it sounded like *bestie*."

"*Béskym* ." Sadness filled Casimir's eyes. "It means commander. I was born the commander of the *Méityah*. The wings on my back are green, while those of all other guardians are blue."

Damon dropped his hand. "If you're a guardian, why are you here and why are you being hunted?"

No one was going to touch a hair on Casimir's handsome head.

"We are taught to obey the king's every command and protect him with our lives," Casimir explained. "Over two thousand years ago, King Emrys instructed his guardians to kill the entire council over a disagreement. Eight of the guardians defied him, refusing to slaughter innocent people. When we did, the king condemned us to death. We fought our way out of the realm and have been in hiding ever since."

His mate had been in hiding for two thousand years? Jesus. Casimir had said he'd stayed on the move because he was being hunted. But for two thousand years? That had to be a lonely-ass existence.

"Elouan is a guardian, a loyalist, and he just found me and tried to execute me." Casimir gritted his teeth. "But as a backup plan, he paid vampires to drain me dry.

That's the battle you just found me in. He said he only paid five, but there was a swarm of them."

Rage boiled in Damon. The keeper had created a portal for him to leave the underworld, and Damon emerged just above the raging battle below. It was the intoxicating scent of fae that had caught his attention and alerted him that his mate was somewhere in the chaos. "I stumbled on the battle from above, but I had no idea what was happening. I just saw you surrounded and acted on instinct."

Casimir sighed, closing his eyes briefly. "I honestly didn't think I'd make it out alive. As you can see, I have bite marks all over me."

"Where?" Damon slid his eyes over his mate's body but for a different reason this time. Casimir's skin was flawless and beautiful, but Damon couldn't see any fang marks or any kind of fang hole anywhere.

With a perplexed scowl, Casimir examined his left arm and then his right. "I felt my skin being pierced repeatedly. I even felt my flesh being torn at my neck." He pressed a hand at his neck, pulled it away, and frowned. "I don't understand."

"Let me check." Damon scooted a little closer, brushing his mate's soft hair aside to examine his neck. Then he drifted his fingers over smooth skin. "Nope, don't see any tears." He slid his hand over his mate's shoulder before he pulled it away. "We're already bonded, but it's my saliva that gives my mate healing properties. I'm just as stumped as you are."

Casimir looked down at Damon's knees as he said, "I don't have any magic that might explain why the marks have disappeared. Before we escaped the realm, the king yanked out our magical abilities, leaving us as powerless as humans."

If Damon could get his hands on King Emrys, he would beat the living shit out of him

before ending him. It already sounded as if Casimir had gotten a raw deal in life. Then the king had to go and strip away his magic? That only made Damon want to protect him even more.

“Maybe one of the abilities inside of me passed something on to you when I fed from you right after I woke up.”

“Possibly.” Casimir nodded.

“Wait.” Damon frowned. “I wasn’t aware dark fae could use magic to heal. When Raidh was attacked by those vampires, he was down for three days healing.”

The entire family had been worried. The fairy was so small that Damon had just wanted to wrap him in cotton.

Now he wanted to wrap Casimir in an even bigger ball of cotton. Maybe some bubble wrap, secured by duct tape, and then attach lasers to him so anyone who wanted to do the warrior harm would be cut down.

He really needed to let go of his obsession with lasers.

“I keep telling you, nékah .” Casimir looked down at Damon from where he was sitting. “I am different. I am a...” He grinned playfully. “Can you remember the word for guardian?”

“Can you remember I just rescued your ass so I don’t have to take any pop quizzes?” Damon winked at him.

He yelped when Casimir lunged at him, taking him down to the ground. Damon landed on his back, laughing and twisting when his mate started tickling him.

“Uncle!” Damon hooted as Casimir tucked him halfway under his large frame.

Casimir’s smile was dazzling, his blue eyes alight with laughter. “Who is this uncle you call for?”

“Oh my god.” Damon laughed even harder. “You say uncle to stop someone from tickling or hurting you. My brothers and I have said it a million times.”

It honestly felt fantastic to be so cheerful and teasing after what he’d been through, like his outburst of laughter had purged a ton of demons that had been gnawing at his insides.

Casimir’s smile faded. “Your brothers hurt you?”

There was no way to explain sibling rivalry to someone who had no siblings. “You and the other guards didn’t goof around?”

“There were shared chuckles once in a while when we found ourselves with extremely rare downtime,” Casimir replied. “Training was harsh, leaving no room for lightheartedness, and when guarding the king, you remained steadfast and professional.”

Damon brushed his mate’s hair over his shoulder, studying him. “Have you ever had a good time where you just cut loose and had fun?”

That was Damon in a nutshell. He took his responsibilities seriously but grabbed every opportunity to enjoy life. It was his family who’d given him so much joy, teaching him to appreciate every moment.

“I’m having fun with you,” Casimir replied with a tender smile. Then he cupped Damon’s face, his hands warm and strong against his skin. “For the first time in four

thousand years, my heart feels so light.”

A sarcastic reply came to mind about his mate’s age, but Damon bit it back. He didn’t want to ruin this moment. There was so much longing in Casimir’s eyes, so much pain and loneliness. Damon wanted to wipe that look away.

“I’m just sorry I put you through hell first.” It would be a very long time before Damon got over the pain and heartache he’d caused his mate.

Casimir narrowed his eyes. “Didn’t I already tell you the past week is behind us?”

“I won’t bring it up again...for now, as long as you don’t give me another pop quiz.” Damon chuckled and tugged gently on his mate’s beard. “We’re two hairy-ass men.” He caressed his fingers through the strands, astonished it was even softer and longer than his own.

Damon pulled his hand away as Casimir lowered his head.

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“Are you about to kiss me?” Damon grinned, his pulse skyrocketing as he lay on his back, his mate draped half over him. He became lost in Casimir’s touch, his closeness, and the possibility that he was going to finally know how his mate’s lips tasted. He wanted that kiss more than anything.

“I was trying to be smooth about it.” Casimir gave him a playful growl. “Now I guess—”

To hell with trying to be smooth. Damon grabbed Casimir’s shoulders and yanked him down, their lips touching for the very first time.

“This will do, my love,” the warrior groaned.

Casimir’s tongue slid over Damon’s bottom lip so slowly Damon felt dizzy. He wanted to keep his eyes open, but they fluttered closed. The first thing he registered about the kiss, beyond warm and wet and soft, was the taste. Masculine and spicy and purely Casimir. A warrior’s taste.

Casimir pulled him closer, plunging his tongue deep into Damon’s mouth. He sucked it with fervor as Damon writhed in his mate’s arms. So good.

Damon moaned and parted his lips even wider while his tongue chased the taste in Casimir’s mouth. Casimir chuckled into the kiss even as his hands slid from Damon’s face into his hair, feathering it between his fingers.

Another hunger started beating at Damon’s chest. A deeper darker need. He’d never had the chance to feed once he’d flown away and was pulled through that portal.

But it wasn't just that. The fae's intoxicating aroma drove Damon's hunger deeper, like an accelerant to the thirst already clutching his throat.

"Casimir." Damon panted against his mate's lips.

"I feel your need, nétya ." His fingers tightened in Damon's hair.

So why wasn't he escaping? Why was he so calm? Unless Casimir thought Damon's "need" was sexual instead of his dark thirst. He was struggling to get enough air into his lungs as the succulent fragrance wrapped around his head.

Casimir slid his hand around Damon's neck, cupping his head gently. Yáto , nékah ."

He exposed his neck.

Damon's fangs elongated as he hissed, as he watched the pulse in his mate's neck beat in a steady rhythm. He salivated at the sound of Casimir's blood rushing through his veins.

"Don't do this," Damon begged as the darkness in him tried to take over. "I won't be able to stop. I'll kill you."

Casimir smirked. "You could try."

Losing the fight, Damon sank his fangs deep, groaning as the sweet blood coated his mouth and throat. He snarled, tugging at the hair gripped in his fists to prevent his mate from escaping. The blood was too delicious to let the fae go.

Damon growled when he felt Casimir jerking around. He was so far-gone he barely registered something wet bathing his entrance. The blood was too good to concentrate on anything else.

“I will fuck the urge right out of you,” Casimir snarled right before he drove his cock into Damon’s ass. “Release my neck, wolf.”

The sharp command only made Damon drink deeper, drawing as much blood as he could from Casimir’s vein.

Casimir delivered a powerful thrust, his cock driving deep into Damon’s ass. A delicious burn scorched his hole, causing Damon to whimper with another kind of need. It felt as if he was being stretched to the limit, yet a thrill surged through him.

“I will give you all the pleasure you yearn for, nétya .” Casimir delivered another intense thrust, causing Damon’s eyes to roll back. “But you have to release me. If you don’t, I will force your incisors out of me. Which experience do you desire most, pain or pleasure, my beautiful wolf?”

Casimir pistoned into him. Their bodies clashed, then his mate stilled, his cock trapped inside Damon’s ass, throbbing and teasing.

“Last chance,” Casimir warned. “Release me or I’ll pull my cock from your amazing ass.” He eased back until only the head remained.

A snarl ripped from Damon’s throat. He wanted both, but Casimir was making him choose. Damon already knew which one he wanted. He battled back his thirst, the part of him that wanted to drain the fae.

Finally, he extracted his teeth and licked the pinpricks closed. “Now fuck me,” he snarled, untangling his fists from his mate’s hair.

Casimir lifted his head, the side of his mouth curled into a confident smile. “Be careful what you wish for.” His inflection was rich and smoky, his eyes heavy-lidded. “Your ring of muscle is squeezing my dick so hard. I am about to wreck your ass.”

He leaned back inhumanly fast, threw Damon's legs over his arms and spread them wide. Then he tilted Damon's ass upward and fucked him hard and deep.

Damon arched his back, digging his fingers into the rocky cliff beneath him. Casimir looked so gorgeous above him, his muscles flexing and straining, a savage and focused look in his eyes.

And that cock... Jesus. It was rock-hard as it slammed into Damon's ass. So long and thick, hitting his kill zone every time, making him want to cry out with every thrust. Casimir leaned in and kissed Damon, never breaking his rhythm.

Everything felt so intense, especially since Damon rarely bottomed, but he relished the idea with his mate.

Placing his palm on Casimir's chest, he felt his mate's heart beating furiously as his hips punched forward, wrecking Damon just as he'd promised. Because of the spell, they were already bonded, but Damon still wanted to feel Casimir's heart, still feel that deep connection to his mate.

Casimir broke the kiss and placed his palm on the hand Damon had over his heart.

"If we were not already bound, I would walk away," he whispered against Damon's lips. "I would spare you the anguish of being mated to a hunted man. You deserve more than what I am, ceutya nétya ." Beautiful wolf.

When he lifted his head, Damon saw the sincerity in his eyes. Casimir meant what he said. "Then I guess we're meant to be together," he replied. "A hunted warrior and a wolf who no longer has an identity."

Damon tilted his head to the side and moaned. Casimir had slowed, now grinding his cock into Damon's hole, pushing his shaft as deep as he could. So deep Damon felt

the base of Casimir's cock at his entrance, felt his mate's balls pressed against his ass.

"You are Damon Frost," Casimir snarled. "What was done to you has not changed the foundation of who you are. A proud, stubborn wolf who is now capable of so much more."

Casimir yanked out of Damon's ass. "Turn over, sweetheart. I need to get deeper inside of your tight body."

Damon frowned. "Where did my pants and underwear go?" How in the hell had Casimir stripped him and Damon hadn't felt it, and why was he just now noticing it?

"Turn. Over." Casimir's eyes filled with need, his cock jutting out, bouncing slightly with every throb. Damon's mouth watered to have that cock in his mouth. It was so damn beautiful.

Instead, he lunged, tackling Casimir to his back. He straddled his mate's lean hips and pressed his palms against the warrior's hard chest. "I didn't hear somebody say please."

If he thought Casimir was gorgeous before, seeing his mate spread out beneath him, his hair fanned out around him, those breathtaking pointed ears...motherfuck.

"Tell me how I took your massive dick without any lube." He rocked on Casimir's stomach, felt his mate's cock sliding up and down his crease. He was dying to impale himself but couldn't pass up the opportunity to tease Casimir a little. This was their first time together, and Damon didn't want to rush through the experience.

Not after they'd been robbed of another aspect of their mating.

Casimir smirked as he looked up at Damon, his hands coming to rest on Damon's

hips. “It is a natural lubricant, which not only wets your hole for me but relaxes your ring of muscle for penetration.”

Damon stared wide-eyed at him. “We’ll definitely work on your sexy talk, my mountainous fairy.” He knew how much Raidh and Elvine hated to be called fairies and wanted to get a rise out of Casimir.

“Is hole not a sexy word?”

The rise didn’t work.

“Please tell me you’re joking.” Damon groaned. Shit. The guy was messing with him. He could see his mate fighting a smile. Damon slapped his chest. “You had me going.”

Casimir cupped the back of Damon’s head and pulled him down to whisper in his ear. “I want you to ride my cock, pretty wolf. Let me feel my shaft stretching you wide.”

A shiver ran through him as his mate licked the shell of his ear. His cock grew even harder, and precum was now pooling on Casimir’s stomach.

“Lean forward, baby,” Casimir snarled seductively in Damon’s ear, causing small quakes to erupt in him. He wanted his mate so damn badly. It was like he couldn’t even think straight with Casimir’s strong body beneath him, his mate’s hand cupping the back of his head. If heaven was real, this was it, in this exact moment, high up on this cliff with nothing but the clouds watching them.

Damon planted his hands on either side of Casimir’s head then raised his ass, expecting his mate to slide back inside his hole. He wanted him to do just that.

Instead, Casimir pressed the head of his cock at Damon’s entrance but held him tight

to Casimir's chest. Damon's heart was beating like crazy, like he had no idea what was going on, but he knew something spectacular was coming.

"Kiss me," Casimir said softly against Damon's cheek. "Kiss me, beautiful. You have the softest lips."

Damon was panting now, so turned on he was afraid he would come any second. Casimir's voice in his ear was like a seductive purr, causing Damon's cock to pulse against the guy's stomach. Now all he could think about while they kissed was Casimir's lips wrapped around the head of his dick, sucking him off slowly. The image made Damon's cock jerk violently, almost begging him to slide his shaft between those lips pressed against his.

Then he felt it. A warm spurt erupting, tiny tingles rippling across his puckered hole. He could honestly feel the muscle relaxing further.

"You feel that?" Casimir smiled against his lips.

Damon grinned against his. "Kind of hard not to."

"You like how it feels?"

"Yes." It wasn't time for teasing or jokes. Not when Damon was so aroused he was dying to hear what else Casimir wanted to say to him. "Feels incredible."

The tip of his mate's tongue glided across Damon's lips. "It only happens for my nékah ."

"So, this is your first time feeling it, too?" He took Casimir's mouth in a hungry kiss before the man had a chance to answer him. Answers could wait. Damon's hunger for his mate couldn't. He'd waited too long for this moment. Even when he was angry

and hurt by what he thought Casimir had done, Damon had still wanted him, still felt their connection, still craved his mate's touch.

“Yes,” Casimir said with a groan. “It's the first time I've felt it. So astonishing.”

Damon nipped his lip.

“Are you ready for me, nékah ?” Casimir pressed the head of his cock harder against Damon's entrance.

“My whole life,” he admitted.

Though, honestly, Damon thought his mate would be more like Raidh—short, slim, and with a lot of sass. Instead, he'd hit the jackpot and gotten a breathtaking warrior.

Damon groaned when the head popped past his ring of muscle. Holy shit. His mate's cock felt amazing buried inside of him. He tried to push up from Casimir's chest so he could descend onto his cock, but his mate kept an iron grip on him.

“Don't...don't move just...” Casimir hissed. “Not yet.”

Grinning, Damon squeezed his ring of muscle, watching as his mate rocked his head back, his eyelids fluttering closed. “You devilish wolf.” He groaned. “If you don't hold still, it'll be over before I sink my cock all the way into your tight heat.”

“You need better stamina, gorgeous.” Damon pushed down slightly, causing Casimir's dick to sink deeper. “I need a hard fuck right this second,” he growled.

When Casimir rocked his head back down, Damon gasped. His mate's eyes were glowing, the cerulean irises swirling like blue smoke in an upward draft. “Do not fear me, céutya nétya . Legend tells that Méit yah guardians burn like the brightest stars

when they mate.”

“I’m not afraid,” Damon panted. “They’re mesmerizingly beautiful. Why is it only legend?” The blue swirls of smoke were almost hypnotic. Damon leaned in closer and sucked in a sharp breath. In the middle of the updraft were sparkles, almost like stars.

“Because only a handful of Méityah have been fortunate enough to find their mate. It hasn’t happened since I’ve been a guardian.”

That was heartbreaking. His mate said he was four thousand years old, which was a head trip in and of itself, but no guardian had found their mate in all that time? That had to be devastating on a level Damon couldn’t even fathom.

He tried to push down on Casimir’s cock once more. “I still need to be fucked,” he growled again.

“Be careful what you wish for.” With his arms still wrapped around Damon, Casimir slammed his cock into Damon’s body.

“Harder!” Damon bellowed. He was elated. If they couldn’t seal their bond during their mating, those otherworldly eyes were the next best thing.

Casimir took him at his word, pistoning fast and hard into Damon’s ass. Damon had to steady himself with his hands on the ground, trying to hold on as Casimir moved quickly and forcefully.

The sound of their skin colliding was carried on the breeze as Damon’s canines extended in response to the intense pleasure. His sharp canines pierced Casimir shoulder, a feral growl escaping his lips before he pulled them free.

His wolf hadn’t been able to join the bond, as if it were completely locked out of it.

Even though Casimir's eyes were beyond amazing, Damon's wolf howled mournfully that it had missed out on the soul-binding moment they were meant to experience together, a precious moment stolen from them forever.

The loss hit him so profoundly it felt like his very heart had been ripped from his chest. Damon choked on a sob, unable to hold back the pain.

"I know," Casimir whispered, slowing his movements and gently cradling Damon's face in his hands. Unshed tears were brimming in his mate's eyes, reflecting an anguish that mirrored Damon's. "I share your pain, nékah . It cries out inside of me just as strongly, resonating within me like a thousand daggers piercing my heart."

* * * *

"We need to find out what is going on," Christian said from the head of their meeting table.

Panahasi agreed. "I've been trying to—" He suddenly erupted from his seat, sending the chair behind him flying with a crash as the heavy oak meeting table overturned violently.

"What's going on?" Zeus asked as everyone jumped out of the way.

Throwing his head back, Panahasi unleashed a ferocious roar from a pain so excruciating it pulsed outward in a steady rhythm, the pain beating against everyone around him. The members shouted and staggered backward as the building shook.

In the next instant, Panahasi's back arched and his true form burst free. He was lifted off his feet and began to ascend into the air, spread-eagled and powerless to stop this.

Damon.

His wolf had tried to seal its bond with Casimir, only to discover it had been locked out. Now it howled for vengeance against the betrayal.

I can't stop it from taking you! the primal source shouted in Panahasi's head.

He had interfered with fate, and now fate wanted retribution.

Panahasi vanished.

* * * *

As they lay on the cliff, Casimir kept his arms tightly around Damon, his face buried in his mate's hair. The pain behind that single sob had brought Casimir to tears, and it was the first time in his existence he had ever shed them.

The lovemaking had come to an abrupt halt, and now Casimir held Damon protectively from behind as they lay together. Time seemed to stand still as they cuddled on the rocky cliff, with only the rising sun to mark the passing hours. Occasionally, the faint sound of cars could be heard driving along the roads below, but their gentle rumble was overpowered by the sound of the breeze.

The pain of feeling Damon's wolf fail to join their bond was unbearable for Casimir, and he never wanted to feel, or have Damon experience, that level of anguish again. His nékah had already been through too much.

Damon slightly stirred in his arms, but Casimir refused to let him go. After watching his mate suffer since being pulled from the sleep, Casimir finally had the chance to comfort him. Damon would not be leaving his arms anytime soon.

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Although Damon would never be the same again, it was time to get back to the real world. Maybe. “I have a problem,” he said to his mate.

Casimir’s arms tightened around him. “Name it and I’ll destroy it.”

Despite the pain Damon still felt resonating inside of him, he grinned. “That easy?”

“For you. Hell yes, nékah .” Casimir placed a soft kiss on his shoulder. “ Miákahy, ceutya nétya .”

“Are we doing more pop quizzes?” Damon chuckled.

Casimir groaned behind him. “You’re telling me you don’t recognize at least one of those words? I’ve said it in reference to you a few times already.”

“Hole?” Damon smirked. “I told you we have to work on your sexy talk.”

“You are a troublemaker.” Casimir tightened his arms. “Roughly translated, it means my sword is at your command, beautiful wolf.”

“What if my problem is my family?”

His mate sighed heavily. “I really did like them.”

Eyes wide, Damon sat up. “You’d kill my family if they were the problem?”

Casimir rose up so fluidly it appeared as if he’d floated up from the ground. He really

was a weapon himself. Damon still couldn't believe fate had given him a warrior. Maybe it knew the battles that were coming Damon's way and decided to provide him with a life raft.

Or, in Casimir's case, fate had given him a battleship.

Locking gazes, Casimir said, "The moment my mark appeared, I was ripped away from my family to endure a thousand years of brutal training. Afterward, I spent a millennium serving a despicable king, followed by two thousand years of being hunted. Throughout all that time, I have never had any ties or relationships. But now, I have finally found my mate, and I will do whatever it takes to protect you. I will eliminate anyone or anything that dares to make you shed even a single tear." His jaw tightened. "If Panahasi was not Life itself, he would already be lying dead at my feet."

Damon was blown away by what Casimir had just revealed about himself. He was aware his mate never stayed in one place too long because he was being hunted, but Damon couldn't imagine living four millennia and not making at least one connection.

Damn. That was... He was at a complete loss on how to even begin to process that.

"In that case, my family are saints," Damon said slowly.

"Tell me." Casimir ran his hand over Damon's arm and down his side. "What troubles you?"

Damon had always been close with his family, able to talk to them about anything. Although the keeper had fixed a lot of what was wrong under his hood, Damon couldn't bring himself to talk to them about any of this.

He still felt like a freak who no longer deserved to be a Frost. “The things I said to them before I flew off.” He closed his eyes. “I adore my dad, look up to him, see him as our family’s solid foundation, and...” Damon cleared his throat as guilt ate its way into his gut. “I attacked him. I threatened to drink from his vein.” His throat tightened.

“And you don’t believe he knew what you were going through, that he wouldn’t understand or be forgiving?” Casimir brushed aside Damon’s hair and kissed his temple. “From what I have observed, parents are reasonably forgiving.”

“I’m pretty sure the parents you’ve observed didn’t have their offspring trying to sink fangs into them.” He pushed to his feet. “Where exactly did you put my jeans and underwear?”

He was still stumped on how his mate had gotten his clothes off, not to mention his boots. Damon felt damn silly standing there in his shirt and socks. But at least he saw where his shoes were. Well, one of them.

This could not be his life right now.

Casimir glanced over the edge of the cliff with a frown.

“Dude, my wallet, cell phone, and keys were all in my jeans.” Damon groaned.

Looking back at him, Casimir asked, “You want me to go look for them?”

It was so ridiculous Damon burst out laughing. “I guess I’m flying home in my shirt and socks. I just hope I don’t run into a flock of birds and get a beak in my dick.”

Brows furrowed, Casimir still stood at the edge peering over. “I can go down and search.”

Storming over to the edge, Damon gestured toward the forest down below. “We’re at least a mile above the forest floor. The wind is stronger up here. There’s no telling where they landed.” He narrowed his eyes. “If a squirrel finds my wallet and charges one damn cent to my credit cards, you’ll be paying the bill.”

Damon’s brows shot up when his mate dove off the edge. “Are you insane!” He quickly followed after Casimir in a panic until he remembered his mate had wings.

Casimir flew over the treetops with ease, his delicate wings vibrant and beautiful. Damon laughed in pure delight as he watched his mate spin in a graceful roll then shoot up higher, clearly enjoying the sensation of flying.

Watching as Casimir’s long hair billowed out behind him and his muscular body glistened in the sunlight, Damon felt a surge of tenderness for his mate. His warrior looked so happy.

Hovering with his wings simply flapping, Damon shot after Casimir, rolling with him, then they glided over the treetops together.

Damon just hoped no one saw them flying. Even though the forest was dense, there was still a chance, but there was so much joy on Casimir’s face that Damon never wanted this moment to end. Unfortunately, it had to. The longer they stayed in the air, the greater the risk of a human seeing them.

Or someone seeing Damon’s nudity.

They finally descended to the forest floor. Damon felt exhilarated, especially because he’d flown with his mate. Casimir’s cheeks were flushed, and he had a sparkle of happiness in his eyes.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve flown,” Casimir admitted. “Felt damn good.”

Damon gave his mate a quick kiss. “Finding my wallet before a squirrel does will feel even better.” He wasn’t holding out hope. As high up as they’d been, his jeans could be anywhere.

“Can’t you use some magic to find them?” Damon asked. If not, he had a snowball’s chance in hell of getting them back. Everything could have fallen out of his pants on their way down.

He turned when Casimir didn’t answer him and saw his mate wasn’t looking at him.

Damon closed his eyes. Fuck. How had he forgotten his mate had had his magic stripped from him? “I’m sorry,” Damon said. He’d just made it seem as if he hadn’t been paying attention to Casimir when his mate had opened up to him. “I wasn’t thinking.”

Casimir cleared his throat as he turned to face Damon. “After our magical abilities were stripped, it was one of the council members who opened a pathway to the human realm for us. I honestly can’t even remember her name, but it was her way of thanking us for not blindly following that lunatic’s orders.”

The more Damon learned about his mate, the more pissed he became at how Casimir was treated. Then something dawned on him. “So you’ve been in hiding with no magic to help out even a little?”

Casimir spread his arms and laughed bitterly. “Like I told you, baby. Except for my wings, I’m basically human.”

“Wait.” Damon frowned. “If you can’t wield magic, how did you end up at my house?”

“When Elvine summoned me, she provided a pathway as well,” Casimir said.

Another thought struck Damon. “How do you even know her?”

Elvine was a little over a millennium. By the time she was born, Casimir would have already been in hiding.

“I don’t know her,” Casimir said. “While I was staying at your house, she told me she’d cast a spell for the strongest warrior to help battle Vicino’s undead vampires.” He shrugged. “Crazy it was me, considering my mate and nephew happened to be there.”

Damon was struggling with what was forced on him, but his mate had had so much taken away. That made him wonder if what he’d become was really so bad. He could definitely do without the vampire crap, but he was really starting to love the wings. The ability to create fog was kind of cool, though he still wished he’d gotten laser eyes, but that was the kid in him wishing for it.

He started to say he would ask Elvine to help find his things, but it would crush Casimir that it wasn’t him helping his mate.

“I can’t avoid my family forever,” Damon said, changing the subject. He gestured to his groin. “I also feel ridiculous with just a shirt and pair of socks on.”

Casimir smirked as he gave a soft growl. “I don’t know. I think it’s a sexy look.”

“That’s because you’re my mate.” Damon rolled his eyes. “Between us we have a full outfit. I have the shirt, and you have the pants.” He frowned. “Why don’t you have a shirt on?”

Come to think of it, Damon had yet to see him wearing one.

“I was summoned at night,” Casimir said. “I’d just taken my shirt off heading to the

bathroom for a shower in my motel room. I'm just grateful I still had my shoes on, but I would really love a fresh pair of jeans. Thankfully, Jax has been laundering them for me every day."

Something Damon should have been doing for his mate. When he got home, he was going to beat the squirrel to spending his money and order his mate a ton of clothes and everything else he needed.

"You're telling me my brother has seen your underwear?" Damon was messing with his mate. He really appreciated Jax looking out for Casimir while Damon had been dealing with all his craziness.

"Did you see me put any underwear on?" Casimir ran his finger along the waistband of his jeans, like he was about to perform a striptease. "Commando."

Sweet hell. That turned Damon on.

His mate's grin widened as his gaze dropped to Damon's groin. Shit, with no pants, he couldn't hide the proof of his arousal. "Not a chance until we've both had a long, hot shower." And Damon wasn't ready to experience the anguish again. He glanced around. "I don't have a clue how far we are from the house."

"You don't know where we are?" Casimir frowned.

"It's a huge forest," Damon argued. "It's not like I know every inch of this place." He threw his arm out. "We could be a mile away or twenty."

"Damon!" Casimir shot forward and yanked him away from the portal that had suddenly appeared ten feet away. The same kind of black swirly portal Panahasi had used to yank Damon into the underworld.

Casimir pushed Damon behind his large body just as swords manifested in his hands. “I thought you said you didn’t have any magic,” Damon whispered, waiting to see who would exit the portal.

“They are a part of me and rest on my béskym mark when not needed,” Casimir whispered back.

“Your what?”

“The wings on my shoulder.” Still watching the portal, Casimir said, “I told you béskym means commander.”

“Now is not the time for the answers to a pop quiz.” Frowning, Damon looked at his mate’s fairy wings tattoo-looking mark. His brows shot up when he saw the wings were still there, but the swords were missing.

“Your weapons live on your body?” He would kill to have a tattoo of his cell phone, wallet, and keys, so he could summon them when he needed them instead of having to search for them all the time. Like he was doing now.

“I already told you they’re a part of me. Why has no one exited the portal?” Casimir asked.

“I was listening to you,” Damon argued. “It’s just hard for me to remember a language I’ve just been introduced to.” Why wasn’t anyone coming out? As far as Damon knew, only Panahasi had that power, and the demon leader was the last person he wanted to see. “No way !”

“What is it, nékah ?” Casimir spun and scanned the area around them. “Do you see someone? I don’t feel another’s presence.”

No freaking way! Damon stepped from behind his mate—he'd felt ridiculous hiding there anyway since he was a formidable predator—and walked toward the portal.

"Damon," Casimir growled. "What are you doing? You have no idea who could be on the other side of it."

Scratching his beard, Damon turned to his mate. "I'm pretty sure I just did that."

The swords in Casimir's hands vanished. "Are you saying you made this appear? How?"

"It has to be another ability from him," Damon replied, refusing to speak Panahasi's name out loud.

"I kind of figured that," Casimir replied. "I'm asking how you made it appear. I thought the keeper unlocked a manual in your head."

Damon gestured to the portal. "I didn't get knowledge for this. So either he doesn't know I have it or it was a bad download of knowledge." He frowned. "As a matter of fact, what ability did Ahm give me? Do you know what abilities shadow elves have?"

Casimir was staring warily at the portal. "When they did the spell, they said you would absorb their essences."

Damon gagged. "That sounds so dirty."

"That's exactly what your twin said." Casimir chuckled. "Ahm and I thought you could probably get our ears. You now have Unseelie blood, but since my magical abilities were stripped away, you won't possess any magic."

"So that means I created the portal," Damon replied. "I was just bitching about not

knowing where we were, and this thing appeared.” He chuckled a thumb over his shoulder. “Wanna take it for a test drive?”

Casimir’s eyes bulged. “And you asked me if I was insane for diving off that cliff, yet you want to walk right into a portal that just appeared out of nowhere?” Casimir growled some words in his own language, but Damon understood the word for wolf.

“If you’re gonna talk shit about me, at least let me understand what you’re saying,” Damon argued.

“I will put my wolf over my knee if he dares to go anywhere near that portal. Why is he willfully putting himself in danger?” Casimir snarled after translating.

Cocking his head, Damon asked, “On what planet do you think you’re gonna spank me?” He began to walk backward. “I made the damn thing, so I’m heading home.” Just as he reached the entrance, he flipped Casimir off.

“Get your naked ass back here,” Casimir bellowed as he charged after him.

Damon’s brows shot up at the sight of the six-seven tall warrior bearing down on him. Despite knowing Casimir would never harm him, it was still scary.

Damon shot into the portal just as Casimir grabbed his arm. Nausea rolled through him before he slammed onto a hardwood floor, his mate landing on top of him. “Son of a bitch! You weigh a ton. I think you just broke my back.”

As soon as Casimir rolled off of him, Damon looked up to the sight of his dad and brothers staring slack-jawed at him. Their canines were extended and their claws were out. Elvine was hovering above their heads with a wide grin on her face, and Raidh had clearly been shoved behind Jaytee.

Pushing from the floor, Damon grunted.

“Son, you might want to put some pants on since you’re naked in front of Jaytee’s mate and the young lady,” his dad said.

Casimir’s hand shot out and yanked Damon behind him so fast he almost crashed into the wall beside him.

“Did Panahasi open that for you?” Jax asked.

A vicious snarl rumbled through Casimir.

His mate didn’t like hearing the demon leader’s name either. “Apparently I’ve just discovered a new ability,” Damon said through Casimir’s huge back. “Though I think I need to work on the landing...and how I did it in the first place.”

“You went through a portal without knowing if you conjured it?” Kalen sounded pissed.

“Exactly!” Casimir agreed loudly. “That was the same argument I made, but my mate flipped me off and went through it anyway.”

Damon slapped Casimir’s back. “You’re supposed to be on my side.”

“You put yourself in danger,” Casimir gritted out.

“If you two are getting along, does that mean...?” Elvine’s voice was closer, so she must have come down from the ceiling where she loved to hover.

“It means he saw a mechanic,” Casimir replied.

A burst of laughter escaped Damon. His mate had said it so seriously.

“Did you just laugh?” Jaytee asked, shock clear in his voice, reminding Damon of the turmoil he still felt about how he’d treated his family and the awful things he’d said to them.

“I’m gonna head upstairs.” Damon tried to make a dash toward the stairs, but a strong grip kept him behind Casimir. “Let me go,” he growled.

Casimir turned and faced him, staring down at Damon. “Nékah , they are your kéfyte . They love you no matter what.” His eyes softened as he rubbed a hand down Damon’s arm. Your méallan does not think any less of you, nor your nyzants .”

“Bless you,” Damon said. “I think you might have allergies.”

Casimir chuckled softly. “That word wasn’t a sneeze. It means brothers. kéfyte is family, and meallán is father.”

“Son, why would I think less of you?” Kalen asked, sounding genuinely confused.

Damon looked toward the ceiling as a hard lump formed in his throat. He was too ashamed to even say it out loud. Casimir caressed his cheek. Damon was taken aback at just how much tenderness was in his mate’s eyes, as if Casimir worshipped the very ground he walked on.

“Is it because you threatened to drain dad?” Jaytee asked, “or because you attacked him?”

Moment killed. “You always were an asshole,” Damon argued.

“We’re identical twins. It’s understandable you would get that backward,” Jaytee

countered.

“If you think I would hold any of that against you, then maybe I need to take you out back and remind you how this family works,” his dad said.

“No!” Damon tried to jump on his mate when Casimir’s swords appeared in his hands, his face a mask of rage. “I swear to god you better not lay a finger on my dad!”

Jaytee and Jax instantly shifted into their wolves, positioning themselves in front of Kalen, while Elvine and Raidh flew toward the corner of the room.

Kalen simply stood there with his arms crossed, his expression inscrutable. Damon knew that look. His dad was trying to decide whether to defuse or destroy.

“Back off,” Damon warned Casimir, jabbing a finger into his mate’s muscled chest as his canines lengthened. “Or I swear to god, you’re going over my knee.”

How would Damon accomplish that? He had no flipping idea, but this was getting out of control. He did not need his mate and father to become enemies. Their home was chaotic at times, but the good kind of chaotic. Damon wasn’t going to live with stress, and his mate had been through too much to live with it, as well.

“You would threaten your own child?” Fury blazed in Casimir’s eyes, but he had stopped advancing.

“I’m not a whelp,” Damon growled. He was 235 years old, far surpassing his juvenile years.

“If he needs an ass-kicking, then yes,” Kalen replied coolly. “Since you’re family, I’ll kick yours, too, if you need it.”

Damon shook his head and muttered, “Oh great, my dad is going to die.”

Casimir’s swords vanished. “I’m...family?”

The wolves stood down and sat on their haunches next to Kalen, their protective stance easing.

“You’re my son’s mate.” Kalen nodded, still speaking calmly and slowly. “In our kéfyte , we do not hold grudges. We fight, we move past it.” His gaze landed on Damon. “A fact my son seems to have forgotten.”

“I attacked you!” Damon protested.

His dad smirked. “But your britches weren’t big enough to defeat your old man.”

“Kalen threw a cast-iron skillet at me, and now I adore him,” Elvine chimed in, her wings fluttering. She turned to Damon. “Mr. Scratchy Crotch or Mr. Grouchy Socks?”

Fuck, Damon loved this family. “For you, both.”

Her eyes lit up, tears sparkling in them as she grinned widely at him. “Welcome back, Mr. Scratchy Crotch.”

He chuckled, his affection for her growing.

“Welcome back, Rick Blaine.” Raidh’s smile matched Elvine’s in size, deep affection in his lavender-gray eyes. Then his brows creased. “What’s a mechanic?”

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Lying motionless with his eyes shut, Panahasi tried to figure out where he was. The unimaginable pain he'd felt in Christian's office was now only a low hum, and he knew he was back in his human form.

But as he lay there, the guilt of what he'd done was still a crushing weight. The keeper had been right. Panahasi was imbued with great power. Greater than all the Ultionem members combined. He should have taken a step back and thought about the consequences of adding his blood to the mayotenz spell.

That night had been hell on everyone. A chaotic mess filled with loss and suffering. Raidh had died from the curse, Jaytee wanted to die because he couldn't live without his mate, and his father was begging his son not to seek death. All while the family stood over Jaytee's twin's body, thinking Damon was dead.

Panahasi had felt their pain and only wanted to ease it in some way. He hadn't meant to seal Damon and Casimir's bond, robbing them of experiencing it together.

You're a little too fucking generous for your own good. You need to be more careful with your generosity before you do something you can't undo. Jaden's words echoed in Panahasi's mind.

Death had called it.

If it was possible to undo the tragic disaster Panahasi had caused, he would do it in a heartbeat.

But there wasn't, and now Fate wanted retribution.

As he lay there with his eyes closed, Panahasi felt the softness of grass underneath him as the sweet smell of nature filled his nostrils. Somewhere in the distance, animals were scurrying, and there was a symphony of insects all around him.

But something was very wrong.

As Life itself, Panahasi was deeply connected to all living beings. He constantly felt every life force like a quiet vibration. He could hear the sounds of life around him, yet he couldn't sense a single life force.

Unsure where he was, Panahasi released a faint pulse of energy. His powers spread out in all directions, searching for any hint of his surroundings. But as he delved deeper, a sharp sting glided along the tendrils of his power, as if the very air itself was riddled with razor-sharp teeth.

He yanked his powers back to him then opened his eyes. Within that sharp sting he'd felt a presence watching him. Pushing to his feet, he glanced at the tall and twisted trees, their gnarled roots snaking through the earth.

As he turned, he saw a castle on a sloping hillside. Its weathered turrets stretched toward the darkened sky. The full moon hung low behind the structure, casting an eerie glow over the ancient stone walls.

A lone wolf's mournful howl pierced the silence.

Everything around Panahasi appeared tangible, but this place was not what it seemed. It was nothing more than an illusion crafted to deceive him.

The air became thick and heavy, as if it was pressing down on him, turning the once-sweet smell of nature into a foul odor that brushed against his skin like icy fingers.

As the wolf continued to howl, a swirling mist slowly weaved through the trees, heading in his direction. The mist was the reason for the change in the air.

Fate was coming for him.

Panahasi's gaze flashed toward the castle. The wolf was Damon's. The castle represented Casimir—a king's guardian. It was howling because it couldn't find a way inside the castle. Inside the bond.

Panahasi's heart was heavy with pain and guilt as he listened to the desperate howls of the wolf. He had never intended for things to go so horribly wrong, and now the innocent creature was suffering because of his mistake.

A hard, burning lump formed in his throat. "I never meant for any of this to happen, sweet wolf," he whispered, but it was too late for apologies.

Regardless of how unintentional his actions were, Fate would show no mercy.

It was about to strike back at him in full force.

The thick, swirling mist gradually slowed and began to rise, transforming into a tall, dark-haired man with sharp features and a trimmed beard. As Fate strode forward, a trail of cobblestones materialized beneath his feet before each step. The stones were perfectly smooth, glistening like jewels adorning the ground. The remaining mist seemed to part in reverence, as if it recognized the power this figure wielded.

There weren't many things that made Panahasi nervous, but right now, he was definitely wary. Fate had the power to alter someone's course in life. Before Panahasi was mated, if Fate had wanted to mess with him, so be it.

Now that he had two mates that he cherished more than his own life, Fate could fuck

him sideways.

No lube.

No kiss.

Fate stopped a few feet away from Panahasi. He wasn't sure what to expect, so he braced for the worst.

With a deep exhale, Fate closed his eyes and shook his head, his silky black hair falling around his face. "You and your brother are the banes of my existence." His jaw clenched tightly before he continued. "I've lost track of how many times you two have interfered with my decrees."

His eyes snapped open, revealing an ominous glint in their green depths. "This wolf belongs to Damon, as I'm sure you've already figured out." He took a step closer, his presence radiating pure power and authority. "It has been howling incessantly because you took it upon yourself to seal their bond prematurely. Damon and Casimir's souls may be intertwined, but because of your recklessness, the wolf has been locked out of its rightful place in that sacred connection!"

Fate's handsome features contorted into something twisted and demonic, revealing the true nature of his power. His entire being seemed to morph into a dark force, radiating pure fury. "You have truly crossed a line this time."

He let out a deafening shriek, and Panahasi was yanked off his feet and thrown through the air like a rag doll, his body contorting in unnatural ways. Panahasi's true form tried to break free in a desperate attempt to protect him, but Fate kept it trapped inside him.

Every living creature inside of Panahasi coalesced then detonated into a roar. He

threw his head back as the unearthly sound erupted from him, shattering trees and sending shockwaves through the ground. And still Panahasi screamed, feeling a sensation like a Band-Aid slowly being peeled off.

Only, the pain was far worse.

Fate was severing Panahasi's bond with his mates. The pain was unbearable, mind-bending, like his very soul was being ripped from his body. Please no!

Suddenly, Panahasi dropped to the ground. He sobbed violently as he clutched his chest, rocking back and forth while praying the pain would kill him. He couldn't do it. Panahasi couldn't live without his connection to his wolves. He wheezed heavily, digging his fingers into his chest, wishing to god he could slide his claws free so he could rip out his own heart.

Jaden! Hear my pain and reap my soul!

"That was just a taste of what the wolf is feeling," Fate snarled, dripping with venom.

"Enough!" The Primal Source flashed in next to them, rage burning in his eyes. "You know damn well Panahasi unintentionally sealed their bond."

"Do you hear Damon's wolf howling in pain?" Fate jabbed a finger at Panahasi. "He is the cause, Aldrin! Should Life be given a free pass because it was an oopsie?"

"Brother, you need to get laid more often," Aldrin said. "You're wound too damn tight."

Fate shot him a deadly glare. "And you need to stop being so soft on Panahasi. Coddling him is what made him careless."

“Like you always get it right,” Aldrin argued. “Not every couple you destined to be mates is perfect for each other. Not every path you set is the right path.”

Fate balled his hands into fists. “So what am I supposed to do, just let him off the hook?” He narrowed his eyes. “And how will that teach your pet a lesson? He and Jaden have been interfering with my decrees since man first walked this planet.”

“And you’re just as flawed as the rest of us, dickhead. So get off your high horse before you fall off and break your neck,” Aldrin countered.

“One day your pet is going to kill us all.”

Aldrin grinned. “We all gotta die sometime.”

Fate curled his lip and shook his head. “I like you better as the keeper. At least then your twisted outward appearance matches your personality. This handsome version is a jackass.”

“Stop flirting. I’m mated, you moron.” Aldrin chuckled.

Fate arched a brow. “Gee, I wonder how that happened.”

“My mates.” Panahasi snarled as he rolled to his feet, breathing heavily. “Give me back my bond with my mates, or I will kill Death and end us all!”

Because his existence without his bond with Casey and Drake was unimaginable.

“I never severed your bond,” Fate spat. “As much as I detest you and your fucktard brother, I would never put your wolves through that kind of suffering. I just buried your connection to them deep inside of you so you would know the pain Damon’s wolf feels.”

Panahasi choked on a sob when he felt his bond with Casey and Drake pulse strongly inside of him once again. Several breaths shuddered out of him, nearly bringing him to his knees as he clutched his chest, thankful he felt it again.

Fate stabbed a finger at him. “Heed the Primal Source’s warning, Life. You need to be more careful how you wield your powers before you really do end us all.”

Panahasi growled at him. “Get me the fuck out of this place, or I might do it just to end you .”

“Will you two stop measuring your dicks?” Aldrin glared at them. “Life and Fate should not be enemies.”

Fate jerked his chin toward Panahasi. “He started it by interfering in my decrees.”

Aldrin sighed. “Just fix this. Destiny isn’t my department. It’s yours. Stop having a hissy fit and unlock the goddamn bond so the wolf can get in.”

Panahasi slowly tilted his head, tears still clinging to his eyes. “This was about some petty grudge you have with me?” His voice thundered, unleashing his powers in an explosive burst of rage. His fists clenched so tightly his claws cut into his palms, causing him to bleed. As the drops hit the grass, small flowers blossomed.

With a loud whoosh, his massive leathery wings unfurled behind him, at the same time his fangs extended to razor-sharp points, resting against his chin.

Closing the distance between them, Panahasi was consumed with pure hatred toward the petty bitch who had caused so much torment.

Aldrin held up a hand, locking Panahasi’s body in place. “You don’t have the juice,” he warned.

“Release. Me.” Panahasi snarled. “This tantrum-throwing toddler could have fixed everything from the start, but instead, he’s allowed Damon and Casimir to suffer this entire time! Unlock the goddamn bond right now, or I will end this entire fucking world!”

Aldrin shrugged and turned to Fate. “Man’s got a point.”

“There you go coddling him like a child again!” Fate’s jaw clenched as he glared at Aldrin.

Panahasi dug his feet in, shoving against the barrier as his wings flapped behind him, determined to break free from Aldrin’s hold. He had never hated anyone more than he hated Fate right now.

“And there you go shoving that branch up your ass again,” Aldrin countered coolly before he turned to Panahasi. “Trust me, I understand the urge to play with his entrails, but first, you have to eat your veggies. Second, killing Fate means no more mated couples, because dickhead wouldn’t be around to pick who should be together based off of their cutesy smile or how tortured their soul is.”

Panahasi was too enraged to care. Even if Casimir and Damon continued to hate him for the rest of their lives, he was going to make this right.

“One snap of my fingers...” Fate narrowed his eyes at Aldrin.

The darkness shattered with a relentless barrage of blinding lightning strikes, filling the sky with a million electric veins. The eerie moon seemed to pulsate in response.

Panahasi swayed unsteadily as the ground quaked violently beneath their feet, sending shockwaves through his body as the distant castle crumbled into a heap of jagged rocks.

Fate was a dumbass. Even Panahasi was careful not to piss off the Primal Source. He'd never seen the keeper this angry before.

Aldrin took a step toward Fate, his face twisted in a terrifying display of fury, his eyes transforming into swirling galaxies. "You dare threaten me?" he snarled menacingly. "I brought you into existence, and I will wipe you from it, boy. Now unlock their bond. They have a purpose, and I will not allow you or anyone else to stand in their way."

As he continued to glare at Aldrin, Fate snapped his fingers. But Panahasi had seen a flash of fear in Fate's green eyes, as well as pain and humiliation. Fuck him. He'd allowed Damon, Casimir, and the innocent wolf to unnecessarily suffer. Fate could go to hell.

The lightning ceased and the moon stilled as Panahasi growled, "Release me from this illusion."

Fate looked at him with utter contempt. "Have Daddy Aldrin take you home, pet." He transformed back into mist then shot into the sky, spiraling around the clouds before disappearing completely.

"He's a pain in the ass, but you have to admit, he exits with style." Aldrin chuckled.

"Wait." Panahasi held up a hand. "Did you know all along that Fate could fix this?"

If Aldrin had known, Panahasi would feel the greatest level of betrayal. He'd known the Primal Source for billions of years, and although they hadn't always seen eye-to-eye, he'd never once screwed Panahasi over.

"No." Aldrin shook his head. "I saw the truth in Fate's eyes. He was out to teach you a lesson, but he knew how to let the wolf in."

“He better pray we never cross paths again,” Panahasi snarled.

Aldrin grinned and patted his arm. “Let’s go home, junior.”

He scowled. “Call me that again and I’ll hunt Jaden down and gut him.”

Because Life could not exist without Death. If one died, so did the other. Balance always had to be maintained.

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Casimir walked to the kitchen, his gaze sweeping over Damon as his mate stood at the stove cooking something that smelled delicious. He leaned his shoulder against the wall at the entrance, taking a moment to appreciate the sight before him.

Damn if the wolf didn't make a pair of boxer briefs and a simple T-shirt look sexier than any lingerie Casimir had ever seen. He even found the hair on his mate's muscular legs arousing.

"I can feel your perverted eyes all over my body," Damon said with a smirk in his voice. "Unless my culinary skills drew you into my lair."

A grin spread across Casimir's face. After the life he'd lived, he never thought he would find himself in a domestic situation. His heart squeezed with warmth as he watched his mate stir whatever was in the cast-iron skillet.

"Depends on whether that delicious smell is coming from you or the food." Pushing off the wall, he crossed the kitchen to stand behind Damon, loving the fact he was taller than his mate. He also loved getting to know the softer side of Damon. The side of him that existed before the sleep.

Casimir slid his arms around Damon's waist and glanced over his shoulder. "Let me guess." He inhaled the fragrances filling the kitchen. "Potatoes."

"You're cheating since you can see them." Damon chuckled, leaning back against Casimir's chest. "Now impress me."

"What if someone walks into the kitchen?" Casimir grunted when his mate playfully

elbowed him.

“You know exactly what I mean, horndog.”

“Okay.” Casimir grinned. “Let me try again.” He closed his eyes and drew in a breath. “Sundried tomatoes.”

He loved adding them to his dishes, when he’d been able to cook and not have to rely on processed food. Staying on the constant move was not a great way to live.

“I’m yawning already. Wake me up when you can do better,” Damon teased, continuing to stir the potatoes with a wooden spoon.

Feeling mischievous, Casimir gently nipped his mate’s ear. “I can definitely wake you up, nékah .” He pressed his growing erection against Damon’s flared backside, groaning at the memory of how tight it had felt when he’d been buried inside his mate. He swayed his hips in a gentle rhythm, purposely rocking Damon with him.

Another low moan escaped him as Damon pressed his firm ass against his groin. If they’d had the house to themselves, Casimir would have taken his mate right there in the kitchen.

“In about five seconds, I’m not going to care who walks in.” He gripped Damon’s hips and pressed his cock harder against his mate’s ass. They hadn’t had sex since the cliff, and although Casimir had been more concerned with comforting his mate at the time, he’d yet to spill his seed inside his nékah .

When Damon turned, his lips parted as if to say something, Casimir reached over and cut the burner off then grabbed Damon and trapped him against the counter. He captured his mate’s lips with his own, pouring his desperate need into the kiss.

Damon clutched Casimir's shoulders and clung to him, moaning as he devoured Casimir's mouth and sucked at his tongue. Fuck. He wanted to feel those lips sucking his cock.

With a low snarl, Casimir yanked his head back and spun Damon, bending his upper body over the counter, desperate to bury his cock in that tight heat.

"Whoa!" Jax said before he spun around and walked out of the kitchen. Then he hollered, "We put food on that damn counter. Take it to your bedroom, guys."

"What?" Elvine said.

"Don't go—"

But Jax didn't get to finish his warning. Elvine flew into the kitchen then shrieked. She flew out of there so fast Casimir thought she would smack her head on the top of the doorframe.

Damon still lay across the counter after Casimir begrudgingly pulled away. His mate's body shook with quiet laughter.

"What's so funny?" Casimir frowned, his cock still hard and throbbing.

"I can't believe I got busted bending over in the kitchen." Damon wiped the tears from his eyes. "Now Elvine is scarred for life."

"So is your nyzant ." Casimir grinned.

"Nah." Damon grabbed two plates from the cupboard. "They've seen me having sex before." He divided the potatoes before setting the skillet down.

“They’ve walked in on you before?” Casimir chuckled. He hadn’t expected his mate to be a virgin. Not when Damon was over two hundred years old. As long as he didn’t go into any details, he didn’t mind hearing his mate talk about past lovers.

“They were there.” Damon grabbed two forks from a drawer.

Casimir stopped his mate from moving. “What do you mean they were there? Are you saying they like watching you having sex?”

As much as he liked Jaytee and Jax, Casimir couldn’t fathom the idea of them in the same bedroom as he made love to his mate.

Damon’s smile faded. “We’ve shared men before.” His tone was guarded with a bite of anger. “If you even think about judging us, you’re—”

“I’m not judging you, Damon.” Casimir gazed down at his mate. “I was just caught off guard and trying to get a better understanding of what you were saying.” He shook his head. “Your past doesn’t bother me, hon.”

Damon looked skeptically at him.

“I’ve tasted the pleasure of sharing a partner myself,” he whispered into Damon’s ear. “I know the allure, nékah .” Casimir traced his tongue along the curve of Damon’s ear. “Even though we will never share our bed with anyone else, I am more than willing to fulfill any carnal desire you may have.”

Damon shuddered, his breathing coming out in short pants as he gazed up at Casimir. “Grab our drinks so we can get upstairs.”

They grabbed their food and drinks and the rest of what they needed then headed to their bedroom. Casimir ignored Jax’s knowing smirk when they passed him.

As soon as they entered, Damon kicked the door closed with the heel of his foot. “You better eat what I cooked first. I didn’t take my tired butt downstairs for nothing.”

Casimir stared at the plates his mate placed on the small table on the other side of the room. “You did this for me?”

Damon was setting down the bottle of hot sauce and forks, his back to Casimir. “My dad does a lot of the cooking, but we have to fend for ourselves in the morning.” Damon shrugged. “I didn’t want you to starve.”

This was their first morning together, aside from the cliff. While his mate had been struggling, Casimir had stayed in the guest bedroom and eaten whatever was offered to him each morning by one of the Frost men, Raidh, or Elvine.

Damon’s family was kind and caring, but Casimir still felt out of place around them. After being alone for so long, he wasn’t used to family dynamics and often found himself at odds with how to fit into their household.

The only pleasure Casimir had truly enjoyed during that week was getting to know his nephew. While Casimir’s brother, Galamir, possessed a rotten heart, his son was truly a treasure.

But Casimir was overwhelmed that his mate had gone downstairs specifically to cook and provide him with breakfast. To some, it may seem like a simple act, but Casimir was honored and deeply touched his mate had taken the time and effort to prepare him a meal.

“Are you okay?” Damon frowned. He gestured at Casimir’s face. “You look like your allergies are acting up. Your eyes are watery, and you have this weird look on your face.”

“You have a very dusty room.” Casimir cleared his throat.

Damon crossed his arms and scowled. “So, you’re gonna cover up an emotional moment by insulting me? I’ll have you know Elvine cleans this room very thoroughly.” He crossed the room and pulled Casimir into his arms. But instead of a warm embrace, it was more like his mate was holding him like a child while patting his back. “Tell Papa Damon what’s wrong.”

Casimir’s brows shot up. “ N ékah , if you’re my méallan , I’m going to need some serious therapy.”

His mate’s shoulders began to shake before he threw his head back and laughed. Never in a million years would Casimir tire of hearing that sound. “It’s what my dad would say when we were juveniles and were upset.” Damon wiped at his eyes. “Except it was simply Papa.”

“I don’t believe I have to actually point this out, but I am neither a child nor related to you.”

“I was just trying to comfort you.” Damon shrugged with a lingering smile. “You’re the first person I’ve ever had to comfort, other than my brothers, and they would knock me out cold if I did that to them.”

With an arched brow, Casimir walked to the table. “I’m just going to forget you said it and hope I really don’t need therapy.” And not get upset that your brothers would harm you.

“Okay,” Damon said after he sat. “Take a bite and tell me what’s in the potatoes.”

“As I recall, pop quizzes are forbidden.” Casimir took a bite of the potatoes and groaned. He was still getting used to eating homecooked meals on a regular basis, but

hands down, Damon's cooking was the best food he'd eaten so far since being here.

"I'm awesome, right?" Damon wiggled his brows. "Do you know why they taste so good?"

Casimir smirked as he chewed then swallowed. "Because you're awesome?"

His mate chuckled. "That, and the fact I added some special love to it."

Slowly, Casimir looked down at his plate. "Are you saying, uh, that you added..." He glanced at his mate.

Damon stared incredulously at him. "Dude, the shit that goes through your mind. No. I meant my secret spices. What's the word for gross in your language?"

"The closest thing I can think of is kien , but—"

"You are downright kien ," Damon growled.

Casimir palmed his face. "Please don't ever say that again."

He wasn't sure why that word had popped into his head, but Kalen would kill him if the guy ever found out Casimir had taught it to his son.

"That you have a potty brain?" Damon chuckled.

Dropping his hand, he looked at his mate. "You didn't let me finish. The closest word is kien , but it means..." He palmed his face once more. "Just don't ever say it again. Your dad really would take me out back and beat my ass."

"Oh no, no, no ." Damon smirked devilishly at him. "You're definitely going to tell

me what it means now.”

“Food’s getting cold.” Casimir began to eat in earnest, hoping he choked on his food so he wouldn’t have to tell his mate what it meant. He knew he was in trouble when Damon stood and walked to him.

“Tell me what it means if you want these boxers to drop, buddy.” He crossed his arms. “You made me say it, so now you have to tell me what it means.”

Casimir narrowed his eyes. “You would use our lovemaking as a bargaining tool?”

Damon poked him in the chest. “Don’t you dare try to guilt-trip me, nékah . I want to know—” He yelped when Casimir jolted from his chair and grabbed him around the upper thighs, lifting him off his feet before dropping him onto the bed.

“Do you know how goddamn aroused you just made me by calling me your most cherished in Méityah language?” Casimir pinned Damon’s wrists on either side of his head before taking possession of his lips.

He expected Damon would want fast and hard like he had on the cliff. But instead, he kissed Casimir just as tenderly in return.

A playful spark lit in Damon’s eyes. “You think it’ll be that easy?” He smirked.

Before Casimir understood what his mate meant, Damon bucked and rolled, placing Casimir on his back with lightning speed. He tried to grab Damon’s hips, but his mate jumped up and raced around the bed.

Flipping to his hands and knees, Casimir narrowed his eyes as his muscles coiled. “I would not advise running, nékah . There is nowhere for you to go. So accept the fact that you are going to get fucked.”

With a grin, Damon flicked his gaze to the window as he yanked his shirt over his head and tossed it aside.

“Really?” Casimir asked challengingly as he pushed to his feet. “You don’t think I can reach you before you even open it?” He sauntered around the bed, his heart beating faster knowing they were about to play chase. He jerked his jeans down his legs and left them on the floor, his cock jutting out in front of him, precum dripping from the slit.

He palmed his cock, giving the hard flesh a few strokes, watching as Damon’s eyes locked onto what Casimir’s hand was doing. “Get your gorgeous ass on the bed, nékah . I promise to be gentle. I’ll fuck you nice and slow with this big cock.”

Damon gave him a daft look. “Gentle is the opposite of what I want, nékah .”

Goddamn. Casimir had to grip his dick to stop from coming. “Every time you call me that, I want to fuck you hard and deep,” he growled.

“If you can catch me, you can fuck me.” Damon was out the window before Casimir was halfway across the room.

“Cheater,” Casimir said to the open window, chuckling. “You’re using your inhuman speed, naughty boy.”

He took off out his mate’s extra-wide window, thankful there weren’t any close neighbors.

As soon as he was out, Casimir expanded his wings, hovering just outside the window.

Damon hovered near the forest, wearing a wide grin as he winked. “Out of breath, old

man?" he taunted.

A smile curved Casimir's lips. "Age is meaningless to an immortal." He shot across the yard, his wings fluttering furiously as he gave chase. Damon's eyes widened then he spun and took off. But his hesitancy, plus Casimir's training, had cost him.

Casimir caught his mate around the waist then they spiraled toward the ground. Right before they hit the forest floor, Damon tucked in his wings, and Casimir placed him gently on his back then straddled him. Damon's chest was rising and falling rapidly as he smiled up at him.

"I guess you're not as old as you look." He chuckled, his eyes sparkling, causing Casimir's heart to squeeze at the gorgeous sight.

Dropping so his hands pressed on either side of his mate's head, Casimir leaned in close enough for their noses to nearly touch. "I caught you"—he slid his tongue over Damon's bottom lip—"so now I'm claiming my prize."

Damon shivered slightly. "Guess I shouldn't have stopped to taunt you."

"Don't. Move. A muscle." Casimir pressed his lips against Damon's, giving him a quick kiss before he scooted down his mate's legs. Locking eyes with Damon, Casimir slid his fingers into the waistband of Damon's underwear then slowly pulled them down, groaning when Damon's hard cock sprung free and slapped against his rigid abdomen.

His mate's cock was thick, and appeared to be around seven inches. The head was swollen, precum sliding down the side of the slightly curved shaft. Casimir ran his fingers over the hard flesh, causing Damon's erection to jerk.

"Such a beautiful cock," he murmured.

Damon gritted his teeth as he watched Casimir admire it. He cupped his mate's heavy sac, giving the wrinkled skin a gentle pull.

"You're torturing me," Damon gritted out. "Do something or get your hand away."

"My nékah is so hard and ready for me," Casimir crooned.

"I won't be hard in a second if you don't stop touching me." Damon closed his eyes, his jaw tight. "I'm too close."

With a grin, Casimir tugged softly on Damon's beard. "I believe it was you who told me that I needed to learn stamina."

Damon lifted his head and glared at him. "I'll learn it next time. Right now, put me out of my misery, or I'll do it myself."

Pressing his hand on his mate's chest, Casimir shook his head. "If you touch yourself, I will shackle your wrists. Take a deep breath, love. Try to calm your raging body." He leaned down, pressing his lips to Damon's ear. "Riding the edge makes your orgasm much more powerful when you finally let go."

He was also going to learn that Casimir gave far more pleasure than he asked for.

Damon's breath hitched. "What are we going to do, just stare at each other?"

"No, sweetheart." Casimir softly chuckled then nipped Damon's earlobe as their hard shafts skimmed against one another. "I'm going to slide your impressive cock between my lips."

"Oh shit," Damon groaned.

Holding back wasn't easy for Casimir either. He was just as hard and needy, but he wanted to take Damon to great heights. There was also fear in the pit of Casimir's stomach. They hadn't touched each other since the cliff, and he was afraid Damon's wolf would once again fail to claim him.

And then Damon would suffer all over again. But their bond was strong, and Casimir would never deny his mate what he needed.

Moving lower, he captured one of Damon's nipples between his lips, teasing the peeked flesh with his teeth. He suckled the skin as he breathed in the masculine scent. Damon bucked, his fingers curling into the grass as he tilted his head back and his lips parted.

"Feels so good," Damon whispered in ragged need.

Casimir wanted to bathe in Damon's scent as he rubbed his cheek over his mate's hard chest, nuzzling his skin before he drew the other nipple into his mouth.

As he lapped and nibbled, he glided his fingers down Damon's arms. His mate's body flexed under his touch. So responsive. Casimir loved touching his mate. Everything about the wolf turned him on. His smell. His touch. His lips. His body. And that gorgeous smile. He was drowning in Damon.

Slowly moving down his mate's body, Casimir kissed and nipped, teasing the skin with his teeth. He wanted to lick every single honed muscle his mate possessed.

Damon arched his back as his mouth dropped open slightly, exhaling a long and breathy moan. "Please...need your lips wrapped around my cock."

"Ride the edge, nékah. " Casimir stopped his descent when he reached Damon's rigid stomach. He lashed his tongue over and around Damon's navel, his mate's hard cock

trapped under his chin. Then Casimir kissed his navel before giving his hip a little nip.

Damon's body jerked, his breathing shallow.

When Casimir glanced up, his breath caught at the famished look in Damon's eyes. He'd known the wolf shifter less than two weeks, but already Casimir was in love with him.

He didn't want to imagine a world without Damon in it. That would be too unbearable. Damon meant so much to him.

Casimir finally reached his prize. Damon's cock was so full that the head was a blushing purple, bobbing slightly with the man's pulse. He could already smell the pre-cum beaded at the slit and Damon's musky scent.

His lungs filled with the fragrance, making his mouth water as a deep need began to build inside of him. Flicking his tongue out, he lightly bathed the skin, lapping at the clear liquid.

"Gods," Damon said with a growl. "Suck it, Casimir."

"Patience, ceutya nétya ." Beautiful wolf. Casimir teased his fingers up and down Damon's cock and watched as his mate shuddered.

"I said to suck my dick, not stroke it." Damon panted.

"Keep complaining and I won't do either." That was a damn lie.

His mate groaned as Casimir cupped and squeezed his balls with his hand. He spread Damon's legs wider then nipped his mate's inner thighs, nuzzled his balls, and licked

his wrinkled sac.

Using his thumbs, Casimir spread his mate's crease, opening Damon even farther. He groaned at the sight of his mate's puckered hole.

"Do it," Damon hissed.

Damon's legs jerked restlessly as Casimir licked and sucked at his mate's hole, breaching the ring of muscle with his tongue. Then he wet a finger before inching it into Damon's ass.

"Oh...I know...I know I love your mouth so much." Damon fisted Casimir's hair, tugging on the long strands while pressing down hard, driving Casimir's finger deeper. The man wasn't a quiet lover in the least.

With a smirk, he leaned forward and licked a long path up Damon's hard shaft then sucked the head into his mouth. He loved the taste of Damon, loved the saltiness.

Relaxing his throat, he took him all the way down until his nose touched curly hairs before pulling back, using the flat of his tongue to trace the thick vein on the side of Damon's cock.

"Jesus!" Damon thrust in short bursts, fucking Casimir's mouth. "I'm already close, baby."

Casimir grinned around the hard flesh before doubling his efforts.

"Casimir!" Damon writhed as he came, pulling Casimir's hair as his mate's body jerked. His cum splashed down Casimir's throat, and he drank every last drop.

His mate collapsed back down as Casimir pulled away, smiling up at Damon. "How

was that for an old man?"

Damon grinned, showing off a set of bright, beautiful teeth. "Perfect."

"Glad you approve, nékah ." Casimir slowly climbed back up Damon's body, his cock trailing over his mate's stomach, leaving behind a clear line of pre-cum.

He stared down into his mate's captivating eyes, fascinated that this magnificent wolf had managed to shatter the chains of loneliness Casimir had carried inside of him for eons. The shifter ignited a spark within him to truly live instead of just surviving, to mold himself into everything Damon needed him to be, and, in turn, help Casimir finally feel whole.

" Metkíen kuynté, ceutya netya ."

Damon frowned. "What did you just say?"

Casimir grinned. "Maybe this old man will tell you later."

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A burst of laughter escaped Casimir when Damon rolled them, placing the warrior on his back. Gazing at Casimir lying under him, all Damon could think was how gorgeous the fae was.

“If you wanted to be on top, all you had to do was say so,” Casimir teased.

“Want to ride your fat dick,” he murmured before lowering his head and capturing Casimir’s lips in a soul-stirring kiss. His mate arched his back, greedily opening his mouth to suck in Damon’s tongue.

Casimir ran his hands up Damon’s arms and settled them on his shoulders as Damon slanted his head and took the kiss deeper. He shuddered when he tasted himself on Casimir’s lips and tongue. It had been the most intense orgasm Damon could remember ever experiencing.

When they broke apart, Damon growled softly. “Your eyes are doing it again.” Once again Damon was mesmerized by the glow of his mate’s eyes, the cerulean irises swirling like blue smoke in an upward draft, with those sparkling stars in the center.

“They’ll continue to do so until your wolf claims me, nékah . Our souls are already intertwined, but my soul knows it doesn’t have all of you yet, that there is a part missing.”

Damon’s heart ached at the reminder his wolf still wasn’t a part of their mating, and although he knew he would feel the need to bite Casimir during sex, that the shattering disappointment would come, he still desired Casimir and wanted to feel his mate inside of him.

“I love looking into them.” Damon ran his fingers over the points of Casimir’s ears, causing them to wiggle. He frowned. “Your ears are wiggling.”

“They are very sensitive,” Casimir admitted.

“How sensitive?” Damon grinned wickedly as he continued to brush his fingers over the soft skin.

Casimir grabbed his wrists and pulled them away. “If you don’t stop, I will come before I’m even inside of you.”

“That sensitive?” Damon growled playfully. He hadn’t known that and loved discovering new things about his warrior.

“Do you feel how hard I am under your ass?” He ground his cock against Damon’s backside. “You keep playing with my ears and I’ll shoot off. As good as it feels, I want to spill my seed inside your body, not against it.” He gripped the base then playfully tapped his cock against Damon’s ass. “Lift for me, beautiful.”

“Spill your seed inside of me?” Damon chuckled. “I would say we still needed to work on your sexy talk, but that sounds hot as fuck.” Something stupid raced through his mind. “Big bad-ass Méityah warrior. He can fight. He can fuck. And he even comes with his own natural lube and weapons that rest right on his skin. Adult supervision required.”

Casimir softly laughed. “Dark magic sold separately.”

Damon’s smile faltered.

“It’s okay, nékah .” Casimir brushed his knuckles over Damon’s cheek. “We’re just enjoying each other, and you have to learn to poke fun at yourself.”

If Casimir had clumsily lost his magic, maybe they could poke fun, but he'd had it viciously ripped away. Damon didn't find anything humorous about that. Casimir had had to survive for two millennia without them.

"Okay, fine. Great sense of humor sold separately," Casimir amended.

With a low growl, Damon touched the tip of his nose against Casimir's. "Amazing sense of humor also included."

"Does that Méityah warrior also come with the chance to fuck his mate?" Casimir panted, still gripping his hard cock.

Damon cupped his mate's jaw, tilting the man's head back. "Any time my warrior wants this ass, it's all his."

Casimir's lips were warm, gentle, and set Damon's heart to racing. Damon swiped his tongue over his mate's mouth, and Casimir opened to let him in.

Damon felt his warrior's body tighten under him. He brushed his hand through Casimir's hair, curling his fingers around the wayward strands. Then he gave a small tug, growling as Casimir gasped in pleasure. Damon smirked and did it again. A second discovery today. His fae liked getting his hair pulled.

As he deepened the kiss, Damon lifted his hips then felt the head of Casimir's cock press against his entrance. He jerked and grinned against his mate's lips when he felt the first spurt of pre-cum bathe his hole.

Damon loved that ability. It saved them from having to carry lube with them when they had sex somewhere other than the house. After the third spurt, he eased down onto Casimir's cock. He gritted when he felt his ring of muscle give way, pulling the head inside his body.

Casimir panted heavily in Damon's ear. "Hard or slow, beautiful? Tell me which one you need."

Closing his eyes, Damon fought the urge to sink his fangs into Casimir's neck and drain his mate. He was sick of feeling that way, so damn tired of that need rising up inside of him. But it was there, beating at him, and growing stronger by the second.

"I feel it, nékah ." Casimir crushed Damon to his chest. "Feed, céutya nétya ."

"I'm-I'm tired of it." Damon breathed heavily. "Tired of fighting not to kill my own damn mate."

Casimir cupped the back of his head. "It's a part of who you are now. Don't be ashamed of it. Instead, embrace every new facet of yourself." He kissed Damon's cheek. "You know I won't let you go too far." He thrust his hips upward, impaling Damon further, causing him to moan. "Feed while I fuck you, wolf."

Damon struck, drawing in Casimir's blood, the warm, intoxicating liquid filling his mouth as Casimir fucked Damon at lightning speed, driving his dick deep inside his ass. With every draw of blood, Casimir's embrace grew stronger.

His mate's thick, hard cock punished Damon's ass, slamming against him hard.

"Release me," Casimir snarled.

Damon whimpered but kept drawing his mate's blood into his mouth. It just tasted so good that he kept wanting even more.

A growl rumbled in Damon's chest when Casimir pinched his nose. "Release me or suffocate," he said without slowing his thrusts.

With no other choice, Damon extracted his fangs then arched his back, gasping as his mate pounded into his ass. “Harder,” he begged. “Need harder.”

As he took Casimir’s hot, thick cock into his ass, his wings shot out, the fluttering causing fine particles to fall onto them like fresh, new snow. It was light, as light as fine dust, and Damon somehow knew it was a part of the winged beast ritual that would bind them for all eternity. They were already bound, but Damon could feel it strengthen. As beautiful as it was, it still wasn’t the same as his wolf claiming their mate.

“Whatever my céutya nétya needs. Tuck your wings in.” As soon as Damon tucked them in, Casimir flipped them, shoved to his knees, then he spread Damon’s legs wider before drilling into his ass. Damon’s cock flared to life at the sight of his warrior’s muscled body kneeling between his legs.

Casimir was absolute male perfection. Sweat glistened over his body, his muscles flexed, his head thrown back in the throes of passion. And he was all Damon’s.

“Casimir,” Damon whimpered when his canines lengthened. “Come before I give in to the need to bite you.” He wanted his mate to find his release before that soul-shattering anguish once again engulfed him.

“We do this together or not at all.” He released Damon’s legs and dropped over him, their faces inches apart. “Either we both share pleasure or we comfort each other with the loss.” His voice became rough. “I will never take pleasure from your body while you lay beneath me suffering, nékah .”

Casimir wrapped his hand around Damon’s cock and stroked him to the rhythm of his thrusts. Damon threw his legs around Casimir’s waist, punching his hips upward to fuck his mate’s fist. He could tell his warrior was fighting his orgasm, determined to make Damon fall over the edge first.

“I can’t...I can’t hold out.” He yanked Casimir down to him, brushed his beautiful hair aside, then sank his sharp canines into his warrior’s shoulder.

Casimir shouted Damon’s name, his mate’s cock throbbing forcefully in his ass.

Then Damon felt it.

His wolf shattered the barrier and howled triumphantly as he was swept into the bond. Tears fell from Damon’s eyes as he hugged his mate tight to his chest, sobbing joyfully around Casimir’s shoulder.

Their combined ribbons shot out of them, rose above them, swirling like the blue mist in Casimir’s eyes. A second ribbon raced after the first, spiraling around the combined one. Then it merged flawlessly, before the new, stronger ribbon split apart and crashed into Damon’s and Casimir’s chests.

Damon yanked his canines free, threw his head back, and allowed his wolf to use his throat to howl as his orgasm shattered him. Casimir swept Damon up into his arms, crushing him in a tight embrace. “ Mynté , nékah . I love you, mate,” he said through his tears.

Damon chuckled through his own tears as he rolled them twice before his wings shot out and he flew from the ground, taking Casimir with him. They hovered for a few moments then descended and lay on the grass, Damon once again on his back as his mate grinned widely at him.

“He is with us now. Your wolf has joined our bond.”

No words could describe how Damon felt in that moment. He wasn’t sure how it happened, but their bond finally felt complete. He reached up and cupped Casimir’s cheek. “I love you too, my amazing warrior.”

Damon quickly yanked his hand away when Casimir's touch sent a jolt of electricity through him. Casimir's wings shot out. Then he flew backward before crashing to his knees. The earth around them shook, and the trees swayed in response.

Flipping to his feet, Damon hurried to his mate, but Casimir held up a hand to stop him. An energy blast shot out in all directions, knocking Damon to his ass. "Casimir, what's wrong? What's happening to you?"

His only instinct was to protect his mate. Damon shifted into his wolf and let out a loud, piercing howl. Moments later, three large wolves charged into the forest.

Now all four surrounded Casimir.

Black veins crackled all around Casimir's body, like he was trapped inside an electrical ball. He panted heavily on all fours, and Damon had never been so terrified in his life. His father cautiously approached, only to be zapped back by the powerful energy emanating from Casimir.

Elvine and Raidh flew into the clearing, hovering near Casimir. Raidh closed his eyes and began to chant, although no audible words could be heard. Damon could see the flow of magic from Raidh to Casimir.

What in the hell was going on?

Elvine landed next to Damon and curled her small hand into his fur. "Casimir's dark magic has been restored. He's been without it for so long he's having a difficult time adjusting to its return. Raidh is helping by slowly reintroducing the magic into his body, so it doesn't overwhelm Casimir. Isn't this exciting!"

Casimir winced in pain, holding on to his stomach tightly.

Damon hated feeling so helpless. He couldn't just stand there and do nothing. He shifted, unconcerned with his nudity as he moved a little closer and lowered to one knee. "Just breathe slowly," he said soothingly. "Relax, sweetheart, and let Raidh help you." Damon wanted to move even closer, but the black electricity was still crackling around Casimir.

Raidh continued his silent chant, using his hand to guide the flow of electricity in a clockwise motion. Damon watched as the black veins began to move in the same way, pulling outward then retracting into Casimir at a much slower rate. Even so, Casimir panted heavily, his face still a mask of pain.

Kalen shifted back into his human form. "Turn your head, young lady."

"I've seen male genitalia before," she huffed.

Jax shifted and spun her around. "Keep your eyes off of him," he said with a low growl.

She stomped her foot. "I want to watch this. Raidh is my best friend, but I've never seen him use magic this powerful before."

"What do you mean powerful?" Damon asked. "He's just controlling electricity."

Elvine let out an exasperated breath. "Casimir is a Méityah Bésnym , a guardian commander, Mr. Scratchy Crotch. Only one bésnym is born among the guardians. Your mate was born a commander, making him the leader over all the other guardians. His magic is even more powerful than our king's. If Raidh doesn't help stabilize his abilities, they will destroy everything in a hundred-mile radius."

Damon had already known his mate was born a commander. He just hadn't known Casimir's magic had been that powerful and prayed Raidh could keep a handle on it.

Kalen moved closer to Casimir again. “You’re a Frost, which means you don’t let anything or anyone gain the upper hand over you. Frosts fight like hell with their kéfyte standing strongly by their side. We’re right here, Casimir. Fight to control your powers, son.”

A hard, burning lump formed in Damon’s throat. He never thought he could love his dad any more than he already did, but his heart swelled even larger at the display of strength and support from Kalen.

“How’re we doing, hon?” Damon asked.

The dark electricity vanished. Casimir looked up at Damon with a soft, but proud smile. “I’m a Frost, nékah . Piece of cake,” he said before his eyes rolled back and he hit the ground.

“Casimir!” Damon closed the distance as Raidh fluttered to the ground, his eyes closed.

“He just needs time to rest,” Elvine said quickly. “Both of them.”

Jaytee shifted and carefully picked Raidh up and curled his mate into his arms.

“Thank you,” Damon said to his twin. “Thank you for allowing your mate to help mine.”

Jaytee gave him a lopsided grin. “That’s what twins are for.”

“Turn around,” Jax snarled as he spun Elvine again. “Swear to god I’m going to spank you if you keep looking at our...you know.”

She crossed her arms with a scowl. “You do realize you can’t punish me. I’m nearly

700 years older than you.” A wide smile spread across her face as her eyes sparkled. “I can’t believe it took me this long to realize it.”

Jax tilted his head slightly. “Realize what?”

Her lips curled in. “Nothing, Mr. Nippy Nose.”

Damon thought for sure Jax was going to have a fit. He had been teased in the past about his name. Jax Frost. But Jax didn’t look upset. There was actually a smile in his eyes. “You’re still not going to look at anyone, brat.”

“Fly to your room so we can get to the house without you seeing our manhoods,” Kalen interjected.

“Manhoods?” Elvine’s laugh was light and jovial. “You don’t have to use such names for your cocks, Papa Frost.”

Jax snarled. “Stop talking to my dad about...them.”

“Cock, penis, boner, chub, willy, wiener—”

“Elvine!” Jax and Kalen said at the same time, both seeming flustered with her.

“Prunes,” Elvine said before she flew off.

“It’s rude!” Jax shifted and took off toward the house.

Damon brushed aside Casimir’s hair then kissed his temple. “I’ve got you, nékah .” He scooped Casimir into his arms. Crap, the guy weighed a ton.

“Need help?” Kalen smirked. “You look like you’re about to throw out your back.”

If Casimir hadn't been completely naked, Damon might have taken his dad up on his offer. Technically, they were all naked, but Casimir was his mate, and Damon's wolf snarled at anyone holding their nude warrior. "Thanks, but I got it. And, I appreciate what you said to him."

Kalen smiled warmly. "It's the truth, son. Now get your mate home before you blow your back out."

Damon grunted. "Hopefully I don't drop his heavy ass."

Kalen chuckled as he shook his head.

With a smirk, Damon expanded his wings and flew toward the house, thankful his mate would be okay. Now that his dark magic had been restored, if any more guardians tried hunting Casimir down, his mate could obliterate them.

* * * *

Kalen watched as Damon took off with Casimir, thankful the fae would be all right. He'd given everyone a scare. "I can feel your presence," he said as he watched his son land and walk into the house with Casimir still clutched in his arms.

"You're one of the few who can," Aldrin said as he materialized right next to Kalen. "I felt the moment Casimir's powers were restored."

"Does my family have anything to worry about?" Kalen had to be cautious. Despite growing very fond of Raidh, Elvine, and Casimir, his boys would always come first if there was a threat living under his roof.

Their family now had two Unseelie mates. Kalen had even given Elvine a bedroom since she was underfoot so often and, honestly, had started looking at her as a

daughter figure, but the fact still remained that all three were dark fae.

Kalen wasn't going to lie to himself. That made him a little more than nervous. Elvine and Raidh were sweet, and Casimir was honorable, but one fit of rage or accidental mishap could destroy what Kalen loved more than his own life.

His boys.

That was why he'd implemented a strict rule about no magic use in the house. He was only erring on the side of caution.

"Within your family, no," Aldrin said. "All three Unseelie adore and respect you, Kalen. They would defend you and your sons with their last breaths."

Which only reminded him of when Raidh had actually taken his last breath. Kalen had been terrified Jaytee would become reckless and seek out a way to die in order to join Raidh. At the time, Kalen had thought Damon dead and couldn't bear to lose another son.

That night still haunted his dreams. So did Damon's conversion. Kalen loved his sons fiercely, no matter if they were now different, but to see the way Damon had come out of that ancient sleep, appearing like a monster... Kalen closed his eyes for a brief second. His family was having too many close ones lately.

"What's heading our way, Aldrin?" Kalen wanted to be prepared.

"I may have created the universe, but that doesn't mean I always have foresight," Aldrin replied, turning to face Kalen. "Casimir is much stronger now that his dark magic has been restored, but two thousand years of solitude can damage anyone's sense of self-worth. He deeply respects you, Kalen. I've already shown you what he's been through, so remember that he still needs guidance and reassurance from a father

figure.”

Aldrin had appeared the night Jaytee had left with Casimir and Panahasi to enter the Unseelie realm to get back Raidh’s soul. With a single touch to his temple, Kalen had seen Casimir’s life in a flash. He’d thought Casimir’s training was horrific, but serving a deranged king had seemed even worse.

But then he’d witnessed the loneliness and heartache Casimir had endured after escaping the realm. How his own brother had rejected him, how Casimir had wandered the earth without ever making a single friend. Kalen had actually felt the despair that had consumed Casimir as if it had been his own.

That night, Kalen had shed more than a few tears for the warrior. It was why he made sure Casimir knew he had family now. That he was a Frost.

But that still didn’t stop Kalen from being cautious with all three.

“I would tell you there is no need to be cautious, but you’re a father, and fathers worry.” Aldrin smiled.

Kalen narrowed his eyes. “I’ve asked you once before to stay out of my thoughts. A man’s got a right to his privacy.”

Aldrin snapped his fingers. “I have taken away my ability to read your mind.”

“Really?”

“No.”

“You’re an ass.” Kalen looked back toward the house and saw Jax and Elvine arguing. “Are you sure those two aren’t mates?” he asked. “They bicker like an old

married couple.”

“You would have to ask Fate.” Aldrin chuckled. “Though he’s in a pretty pissed-off mood right now.”

With furrowed brows, Kalen turned back to him. “He?”

Aldrin gestured to an area next to him, and an image—like the holographic ones Kalen had seen in movies—appeared. He had to admit the guy was gorgeous. Tall, svelte, with long black hair and piercing green eyes, but those eyes were haunted. Kalen sensed a lot of pain in them. “That’s Fate?”

The image vanished. “Yes, and besides Panahasi, you’re the only other person who’s ever seen him. Do me a favor and keep the fact that fate is an actual person to yourself.”

“Why?”

“Would you rather believe fate is a whisper through the cosmos or an actual person directing life’s traffic, capable of causing plenty of accidents over the course of his existence?”

“When you put it like that...” He shook his head. “Sometimes you make conversations depressing as hell.”

Smirking, Aldrin wiggled his fingers close to Kalen’s head. “I could erase that memory for you.”

Kalen growled. “Tinker with my brain and I’ll kick your ass.”

Aldrin quietly laughed. “I truly enjoy your company, Kalen Frost.” He sobered. “I

have to go, but be careful. When Casimir defied King Emrys, he was condemned to death. Now there's a guardian on Casimir's trail, determined to carry out that sentence. Despite making a shady deal that backfired, Elouan is not to be underestimated. As long as Casimir lives, Elouan can never truly be the new commander."

"Hell of a motivation." Kalen ran his hand through his beard.

"Envy always is." Aldrin vanished.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

Damon rubbed his stomach as he headed downstairs. Getting sick at seven in the morning was no way to start his day. It must have been those burritos he'd eaten for dinner. Damon needed to stop being so greedy when his dad cooked.

Now he needed something to settle his stomach because he still felt lightweight nauseous. He was surprised he hadn't woken his mate with all that retching in their bathroom.

Casimir slept like a rock.

Halfway down the stairs Damon paused, waiting to see if he had to make a run for the nearest trashcan. He breathed out slowly, determined not to get sick again, then went to the kitchen.

"Great, the brats are awake," he teased when he saw Elvine and Raidh sitting at the table, both with a glass of juice and a bagel. "What're you two troublemakers doing up so early?"

Damon stopped and gripped the edge of the counter, waiting for another wave of nausea to pass. It couldn't be food poisoning. The poison would have burned through his system too quickly. He really shouldn't have eaten six large burritos, but they'd never made him sick in the past.

"Are you okay?" Raidh asked. "You look...weird."

"Do you mean aside from his bedhead and unkempt beard?" Elvine asked. "Or the fact he's walking around in just his underwear?"

“Why are you looking, nosy?” Damon grabbed a sleeve of crackers from the pantry, wishing they had some ginger ale in the house. “No one was supposed to be awake this early.”

“Next time we’ll send you a memo that we’re in the kitchen,” Raidh said cheekily. “Just spending some time with my best friend. Why are you up so early?”

Damon rested his arm on the wall, pressing his head into his forearm. “I seem to have the cooties. You might want to bail before you catch it.”

“What’s a cootie?” Elvine asked. “Do you mean fleas? That’s a total hummer.”

Even though Damon felt like he was going to vomit, he grinned as he stared at the floor. Leave it to Elvine to screw up the phrase. “Bummer,” he corrected. “That’s a bummer, and, no, I don’t have fleas, smarty pants.”

Taking a few deep breaths, Damon closed the pantry, hugging the crackers to his chest. Hopefully this passed soon and wasn’t an all-day thing. This afternoon, he had plans to ride motorcycles with his dad and brothers, and it would totally suck to have to cancel on them.

The four of them just wanted to get out and spend some quality time together to help strengthen their bond after everything they’d been through lately. Damon was especially looking forward to eating at Wild Tiger Barbeque.

His head snapped up when he heard a gasp. Elvine and Raidh were staring slack-jawed at him.

“It’s just crackers,” he said. “Why do you two look as if you’ve never seen them before?”

Sometimes fairies confused him.

Elvine flew from her chair and landed in front of him. When she reached out to touch him, Damon pushed her hand away. “Just because I’m only wearing boxers doesn’t give you permission to get all touchy with my great body. I know I’m irresistible, but keep your tiny hands to yourself, young lady.”

Great, now he was sounding like Kalen.

“You have the mytc?niz ,” she whispered.

Damon growled as he looked down at her. “If you’re still trying to say I have fleas, I’m gonna get really upset. Cooties is a kids’ word for germs, and I was just joking.”

“I’ll go get Casimir.” Raidh flew from the room.

Now Damon was really confused. “What’s going on, brat?”

Elvine pressed her fists against her hips. “Stop calling me brat, Mr. Scratchy Crotch. And I’m not saying a word. This is something Casimir needs to talk to you about.” She grinned and clapped her hands excitedly. “Kalen will be so proud of me. I minded my own flywax.”

Damon chuckled. “Beeswax. I’m starting to think correcting you is hopeless.”

Honestly, he liked hearing her screw-ups. That was what made Elvine so unique. That and her unicorn-blue hair. Damon looked toward the kitchen entrance. “Tell me something,” he whispered as he pointed at his head. “Are all fae ears that sensitive?”

She squeaked as a blush raced over her beautiful olive-colored skin. “That’s a private matter, Mr. Scratchy Crotch!” Then she grinned while wiggling her brows. “Did you

play with Casimir's?"

"You're right. It's a private matter," Damon growled.

She snickered, drew closer, and whispered, "It's what humans call a G-spot."

Damon adored her blush. He was starting to look at her like a little sister. "You shouldn't know about that kind of stuff, young lady."

Dammit. He sounded like Kalen again.

She said in the same secretive tone, "You're the one who brought it up, and I'm a freaking adult, toadstool."

"Mushroom face," Damon countered.

"Moss breath." She grinned.

"Lilypad toes." He hoped they didn't keep this up because he was running out of fairy stuff to call her. Nature stuff... Whatever it was.

"I'll have you know I have the prettiest feet," she huffed. Then lifted her leg and stuck her foot in his face.

"Kien !" He shoved her foot away, surprised he'd remembered the word Casimir had taught him. "You walk around barefooted all the time. Don't stick your toes in my face."

Her jaw dropped. "Why on earth would Casimir teach you such a vile word?" she demanded.

“It means gross, right?” Though Damon recalled his mate warning him to never say it again.

“I’m too much of a lady to tell you what it really means,” she snarled. “Do yourself a favor and never say it again, Mr. Icky Mouth.”

Since he’d just highly insulted Elvine, now Damon really had to find out what it meant, mostly so he could kick Casimir’s ass. “Sorry, squirt. I didn’t know it was that offensive. I’m going to beat—” He stopped midsentence when Casimir walked into the kitchen, his gaze zeroed in on Damon’s chest.

“Come on, snoop.” Raidh grabbed Elvine’s hand. “It’s a private matter.”

She tugged on his hand and whined, “But it’s gonna be a sweet moment, and I want to see it!”

With a growl, Raidh forced her out of the kitchen, but not before she looked at Damon with a huge grin on her face.

“Will someone tell me what’s going on?” Damon demanded. “Fine, I won’t come down to the kitchen in my underwear anymore.” He eased back when Casimir reached out to touch him. “Why does everyone want to touch me this morning?”

“You have the mytc?niz ,” Casimir said in astonishment, as if Damon would understand the word the second time around.

“Is it something like a rash? I swear to god I’m never touching a burrito again,” he grumbled.

“ Nékah ...how?” Casimir ran his fingers across Damon’s neck, causing him to shiver. “How is this possible?”

Damon had no idea what Casimir was talking about, but he was getting hard from his mate's touch. "If you tell me what it is, I might be able to explain the 'how.'"

Casimir's gaze lowered to Damon's stomach before he glanced into his eyes. "You are with child."

The crackers hit the floor as Damon's heart stopped. "Come again?"

Placing his spread hand on Damon's stomach, Casimir looked confused. "Your neck bares the mytc?niz . It is a pale pink mark that circles your neck. When the two ends meet, you will be ready to give birth."

Ducking from between Casimir and the counter, Damon jabbed a finger at his mate. "I know I didn't just hear you right. There's no fucking way you just said I'm pregnant, Casimir. You got me fucking bent!"

His hand began to glow, causing fog to start filling the kitchen. Pregnant? His mate had lost his goddamn mind.

"Calm down, nékah ." Casimir reached for him, but Damon took a few steps back.

"Calm down?" He gestured at his body. "I'm 300 pounds of solid hairy muscle."

Casimir swept a heated gaze over him. "I'm well aware you're gorgeous."

"Don't you dare give me a look like you want to fuck me," he growled. "Not when you just knocked me up. You better tell me that you didn't know this could happen, or I swear I'm cutting your goddamn balls off."

Casimir had looked shocked when he'd seen...whatever it was called, but Damon was too freaked out for logic right now. Pregnant? He looked like a rough biker with

a long beard. How in the hell...

Just then his brothers and dad entered the kitchen. "Everything okay in here, son? We heard shouting."

Damon jabbed a finger at Casimir once again. "Tell this crackpot I'm not pregnant!"

At the same time, three pairs of eyebrows shot up as their jaws fell.

"Did you just say pregnant?" Jax asked as his gaze dropped to Damon's stomach.

Casimir pressed his hands against his hips as he looked toward the ceiling as if Damon was being unreasonable.

Goddamn right he was. He wasn't born with a freaking uterus. He had a cock between his legs, not a vagina. Casimir's restored powers must have short-circuited his brain.

"Christian's blood," Kalen said, his gaze glued to Damon's gut. "Male vampires can only become pregnant if they are a direct descendant. But if he added his own powerful blood for that spell..."

"It's a gift that keeps on giving," Damon snarled.

"Can you stop making it so foggy in here?" Jaytee waved a hand in front of him as if he could dispel the fog. "I'm starting to go blind."

"It's just like you," Damon griped. "I just found out I got a bun with no oven and you're complaining about fog."

Jax cracked up. "This is going to be interesting. You're one day pregnant, and already

your hormones are out of whack. So glad I don't have to put up with it like Casimir does."

Kalen popped Jax on the back of his head. "Be a little more sensitive to your pregnant brother before you have him crying into a pint of ice cream."

Damon stared incredulously at his dad.

"Listen to Dad, dipshit," Jaytee said to Jax. "Damon is in a delicate state right now. Casimir will kick your ass if you make him bawl his eyes out."

What the hell?

"I'm sorry I was insensitive, Damon," Jax said, clearly fighting a smile. "Do you want me to make a store run for some ice cream?"

Kalen and Jaytee were also trying to hide their laughter.

"All of you are jackasses," Damon snarled. He whipped around to make sure Casimir wasn't grinning.

His mate held up his hands, palms out. "I'm not an idiot."

Elvine flew into the room clasping her hands. "Congratulations, Mr. Baby Belly!" Her smile was so wide her face should have split in half. "I'm gonna be an aunt!"

Jax playfully elbowed Kalen. "Grandpa."

Why did Kalen's eyes have to mist over?

"You're all insane," Damon argued loudly. A horrified thought struck him. "I don't

even have the right parts to birth a pup.”

Where in Jesus’s name would he even deliver the... Damon looked down at his crotch and became dizzy.

“Hold on,” Jax said in a serious tone. “I’m not trying to bring the mood down.”

“Bring it down?” Damon stared at his brother like he was the most moronic person on the planet. “It was never up . I’m not pregnant. There is no oven. I’m a big, hairy, deadly wolf shifter who kicks ass and...” This could not be his life right now.

“Like I was saying,” Jax continued, “you’re no longer just a wolf, Damon. You now carry the genetics of seven powerful men.”

Damon felt his chest cave in. His child was going to be a freak, just like him. With a vicious snarl, he swung around and slammed his fist into the refrigerator, smashing in the freezer door.

His son or daughter would be a hybrid mutant!

Damon threw his hand out then walked right into the portal before anyone could stop him. He was too enraged and didn’t need Casimir or his family to stop him from killing the Ultionem .

* * * *

Casimir cursed when he was unable to reach his mate in time to stop him from entering the portal. Damon had fire in his eyes. Why was he so livid? While Casimir was overjoyed he was going to be a father, his mate had acted as if it was a death sentence. Should it matter how it happened? They had created a child together out of the love they felt toward one another. That was all that should matter.

“You might want to find him,” Kalen said. “I’ve never seen my son that enraged, and there’s no telling what he might do.”

“How?” Casimir asked, heartbroken at Damon’s reaction. “I have no idea where he just went in that portal.” Just when he thought he and Damon were on a good path, a happy one, things had gone to shit once again. Was his mate ever going to be truly happy?

“You got your magic back. Use it to find my twin,” Jaytee said, panic in his eyes.

Casimir had been without his powers for so long, he’d forgotten they had been restored. Closing his eyes, he prayed he could remember how to use them. As soon as he began to chant, it all started coming back to him, like whispering a single spell had unlocked his memory.

A mist grew in his mind as Casimir searched for his mate’s location. “It’s dark.” He pushed further, forcing the mist to expand. “A building. An empty bar, a dance floor, and a second floor above.”

Jaytee cursed. “He has to be at The Manacle. Christian’s club. We need to get to him now! I can feel his rage, but I also feel a dark hunger.”

“He’s gone there to kill Prince Christian,” Jax whispered. “What have I done?”

His heart in his throat, Casimir moved quickly, chanting the teleportation spell. Raidh gripped his right hand, Elvine his left, chanting it with him, feeding Casimir’s powers.

He could only pray he made it in time before a coven of vampires descended on his mate and killed him.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

Damon emerged from the portal in the center of Prince Christian's empty nightclub, his muscles tensed, ready for a fight. His mind was reeling, screaming at him to turn around and leave, that this was not the right way to handle the situation, but his rage and fear consumed him.

Initially he'd panicked, like any normal male would have when finding out they were pregnant, but this was a time to be with his mate instead of going on a suicide mission.

Damon knew this, but as he stood there, all he could think about was passing his mutation to his unborn child, and that terrified him, his fear overtaking any rational thought.

How would they ever know the pride of being a true Frost when Damon no longer felt it himself? And what would the babe even look like with so many different species inside of them? That became Damon's worst fear. That his son or daughter would be a mixed bag of freakishness.

Damon couldn't bear the thought of his innocent pup growing up in a world where they would never belong, constantly ridiculed and rejected by others. It was a fate that broke his heart.

A low growl escaped him as Christian appeared from a back hallway, an air of calculated danger surrounding him. The prince's hands were clasped behind his back, his steps graceful and calm despite his burning scarlet-red eyes.

"You dare enter my club with murderous intent?" His tone was icy and dangerous as

he slowly stalked toward Damon. Each measured step resonated with an ominous click of his dress shoes on the polished floor.

Damon's muscles tightened as his wolf growled at the threat.

“Did you truly believe I would not see you coming?” Christian tapped his temple with a manicured finger. “I am the firstborn vampire. No one truly knows the full extent of powers that I possess.”

But Christian was not alone.

From the second-floor balcony, Ceridian and Rhysdan gracefully landed on their feet, their predatory gazes fixed on Damon. They were Christian's deadly brothers, but Ceridian was the one to watch out for, known to be the most unpredictable of the three.

He was the one who held all of Damon's attention. Rumor had it he'd been buried for eons because Ceri couldn't control his curse to crave flesh. He'd also heard the guy had been cured when he'd found his mate.

If you asked Damon, the vampire looked like he wanted to fall back on old habits.

“Tell me, young wolf,” Christian said with a lethal calmness, his fangs glinting in the dim light. “Why have you just foolishly given me your life to take after I helped to save yours?”

There were times when hindsight struck just a little too late. For the most part, Damon was a chill guy. However, when he lost his temper, things tended to go downhill fast. This situation wasn't just going downhill. It had hit rock bottom as soon as Damon had walked through that portal.

Sooner or later he was going to learn to think before he acted when pissed off—that was assuming he survived this.

But Damon was still furious about what they'd done to him, still terrified what he would pass on to his child. "The Ultionem put a goddamn circus inside of me."

"Do you know how many would kill for what we've given you?" Christian's eyes flashed dangerously as he continued to close in on Damon. "It is rare for me to spill my blood, especially for someone who means absolutely nothing to me. And now we share a bond because of my generous gift. But trust me, pup. I am about to sever it."

Ceri and Rhys began to advance toward him.

Damon breathed heavily, his canines extended, watching them both while trying to figure out how to survive this. It was as if the three of them were moving slowly on purpose, like they were building the anticipation before a kill. Then Damon noticed how the prince's skin began to change to a purplish hue.

"Once I sensed you were coming for my throat, my brothers sensed it as well." Christian continued to close in on Damon, each step filled with menace.

The other two vampires flanked the prince, their eyes twin blazes of fury.

"You can have your blood back," Damon argued.

"Oh, I intend to take it back," Christian growled. "Every last drop in your body will be mine, wolf."

"Stop!" Casimir suddenly "popped" in next to Damon, growling fiercely as he stood protectively beside him. "He's just afraid."

Damon couldn't believe his mate was there, especially with the way he'd acted before using the portal to leave.

"Do you think that matters to me?" Christian's lips twisted into a snarl, and that was when Damon noticed the vampire's fangs had grown a hell of a lot longer. "He entered my sanctuary uninvited with vengeance in his heart."

Casimir's swords materialized in his hands as he took up a battle stance. "I do not wish to engage in combat with you, prince. But I will use any means necessary to protect my pregnant mate."

Christian raised two fingers, and his brothers stopped advancing. "I do not harm mates, especially those with child. We protect and defend all mates, even if they are not our own." Christian glared at Damon.

"But make no mistake, I will eliminate any and all threats to myself and my coven." Christian turned his menacing gaze toward Casimir. "Your wolf entered my club through a portal while my own mates are present."

As angry as Damon was, he hadn't thought about the possibility that Christian's mates would be there. He lived by the same code. Protect and defend any mate, whether yours or not.

Damon felt Casimir tense beside him. Now, because of his reckless actions, Casimir stood ready to battle the prince of vampires and his brothers, in order to protect him.

If he thought it would do any good, Damon would honestly apologize.

"I cannot let this slide," Christian said, as if he'd read Damon's thoughts. "My mates are as precious to me as yours is to you, Casimir."

Damon's claws slid free as Ceri and Rhys came at them, nothing but the promise of death in their eyes. He glanced up at Casimir, but his mate refused to look at him. Nobody in the room had a clue just how sorry Damon truly was.

That being said, if they were going to die, then Damon would embrace the dark monster that lurked within him—the very one Christian had helped create.

Right before the ancient vampires reached them, all of their bodies became stiff and motionless except Damon's. He furrowed his brows as he wondered if he'd caused this. The vampires and Casimir stood frozen in mid-action, trapped like statues.

Now that he could study Christian and his brothers, Damon realized just how truly terrifying they were. Their razor-sharp fangs were bared, and Christian's deadly claws had extended. Jeez. He really did have a purplish hue to his skin. What exactly was he?

And god, the red in the prince's eyes gave Damon chills. Christian was the embodiment of what nightmares were made of when he looked like this.

“Consider yourself lucky you have a greater purpose in life.”

“Jesus!” Damon grabbed his chest as Aldrin popped into the empty club. What was with everyone popping in?

“Otherwise, not even my friendship with your father would have convinced me to save your dumb ass,” he continued as if he hadn't just scared the living daylights out of Damon. “Care to explain to me what your master plan was, besides dying? Why did you do it, pup?”

As Damon turned to face the vampires, he could feel Aldrin's immense power pulsing in the room. He walked toward Casimir and gazed up at his mate. He was so

tall, breathtakingly handsome, and looked every bit the warrior—from his honed muscles to the fierce expression on his face. His swords were crossed in front of him, ready to strike.

So much love radiated inside of him for Casimir. Even though Damon had made a mess of things, had crushed his mate's feelings, his warrior had come for him, ready to kill to protect him.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered to his mate.

Damon had screwed this up every which way he could. From his initial reaction to finding out he was pregnant, to storming into Christian's club and putting the lives of the prince's mates in danger, to dragging his own mate into this deadly situation.

All of it was Damon's fault, and he felt deep guilt and regret for what he'd done. So many lives could have been lost tonight, including Ceri and Rhys who had their own families to care for. What was wrong with him? He pressed a hand over his rigid stomach, feeling sick at what he'd just done.

"First, tell me if any of them are in pain right now.

"They're not in pain," Aldrin assured him. "Their minds are sleeping right now, unaware of what's going on around them."

Damon shoved a hand through his hair and sighed. "It just feels like I can't seem to get this right," he admitted. "I have a good life, a loving family, and a wonderful mate. So why am I still consumed with so much anger?"

"Because you are still holding on to your hatred for what they did to you," Aldrin replied calmly. "Mainly Panahasi."

His words rang true in the silent room. Just hearing the demon leader's name pissed Damon off to no end.

"We all make mistakes, Damon," Aldrin continued. "Especially those of us with great responsibilities."

Damon glanced over at Christian.

"He has given you the greatest gift of all. One that will bring you immeasurable joy," Aldrin said. "Embrace it. Your child carries within them the essence of seven powerful beings." He gestured toward Casimir. "You have a mate who loves you more than anything in this world. But instead of being happy about creating a new life together, you're upset. Why is that, Damon?"

"I'm afraid," Damon confessed. "I'm afraid the pup will be..."

"The most precious gift this world has ever seen," Aldrin finished for him. "They will possess incredible abilities. Do you want your child to grow up with a resentful and bitter father or in a nurturing family that will help them embrace their powers and teach them how to be a proud, fierce, and loving Frost? You need to let go of your anger, especially toward Panahasi. He's the reason why your wolf was able to claim Casimir."

Damon glanced at Aldrin, his brows furrowed.

"He was ready to end the world if Fate didn't unlock your bond so your wolf could become a part of it," Aldrin said with a smirk. "Never been prouder of him. He went up against Fate, who would have easily wiped the floor with him." His smile faded as he shook his head. "I swear I'm surrounded by stubborn males who are trying to give me ulcers."

Wow. Damon was at a loss for words. Panahasi had been willing to sacrifice everything for him and Casimir? It was hard for him to even comprehend it, but he could feel the intense anger slowly dissipating.

“Hold on. Fate is a guy?”

Aldrin rolled his eyes. “You sound just like your dad. And please keep that knowledge to yourself.” He shared the same reason he’d given Kalen.

“Naw. Remove that info from my head.” Damon scratched his beard. “It’s kind of wiggling me out. I’d prefer to stay in the dark about it and just think of it as the cosmos. Makes it seem more like ‘fate’ that way.”

Damon glanced at Christian. The only thing the vampire had been trying to do was protect his mates against a threat.

Just like any preternatural would have done.

“I’d really like to know if there’s any way to fix this. He’s about to end me, and I don’t blame him. But I’d much rather celebrate the happy news of a child with my mate.” He wrinkled his nose. “Though I still think it’s weird as hell I have a bun in a missing oven. I’m also not looking forward to a big belly.”

“Afraid of losing those abs?” Aldrin smirked.

“You have to admit I have a sick-ass body.” Damon waved a hand toward his stomach. He was just teasing. For his and Casimir’s child, he would wreck it in a heartbeat.

“You have a really nice sense of humor, wolf.” Aldrin gestured to Damon’s body. “Your oven is only temporary. That’s what I love so much about the preternatural

world. Mother Nature always looks out for you.”

Damon held up a hand. “I don’t want to know if she’s a real person. Keep that to yourself.” When he’d been in the underworld with Aldrin, Damon had been going through a lot. But he had to admit he liked talking to the guy. The keeper was a chill person and had a really nice smile.

“Fair enough, but I’m taking away the keys to your portal ability. Your privileges have been revoked since you keep trying to drive yourself off a cliff.”

“They’re all yours.” He rubbed his stomach. “I always get nauseous traveling through them anyway. Besides, I’m gonna have enough nausea now that a baby bun is inside of me. I don’t understand how Panahasi makes portal travel look so cool.”

Casimir would be relieved to know Damon could no longer use a portal. Plus, it would prevent him from making any more boneheaded moves again, like this one.

“He’s the cool kid everyone wishes they could be.” He gave Damon a smile with a hint of pride in it. “But trust me, you don’t want to walk in his shoes. They weigh a ton.”

Damon couldn’t imagine the immense responsibilities Panahasi had, as not only the leader of the demon warriors but as Life.

As if Aldrin had read his thoughts, he touched Damon’s temple and showed him in a mere second the difficult duties Panahasi endured.

“Holy shit,” Damon muttered in awe, finally understanding for the first time what it truly meant to bear the weight of the world.

“I only gave you that knowledge so you can see why we sometimes screw up,” Aldrin

said solemnly. “It’s a heavy burden to bear, Damon.”

Colossal understatement. “I think I’ll stick with my modest responsibilities.” Like raising a child. He glanced up at Casimir and marveled at just how deeply he loved the man. And even more astounding was the fact that Casimir loved him, even after the way Damon had treated his warrior. He vowed to spend the rest of their lives showing his mate just how much he meant to him.

“Is this child going to be our only one?”

Aldrin squeezed his shoulder, as if relieved Damon was finally letting go and moving forward. “Have a brood of Frosts, wolf.”

“How?” He gestured toward Christian and his brothers, feeling guilty that the prince’s mates were there. Damon would never do anything to hurt a mate. Ever. It was engrained in him as a Frost.

And Damon was a goddamn Frost.

Too bad he couldn’t turn back time and start over in the kitchen so he could make things right with Casimir—and never step foot in Christian’s club to begin with. The entire morning had been a major disaster.

“Close your eyes and blow out the candles.”

“What candles?” Damon didn’t see any.

“Go through the motions,” Aldrin argued. “You just had to ruin the magical moment.”

Feeling ridiculous, he did as Aldrin instructed. When he blew out a breath, he opened

his eyes to find he was back in his own kitchen with his family and his mate.

Elvine flew into the room clasping her hands. “Congratulations, Mr. Baby Belly!” Once again, she was wearing a smile so wide her face should have split in half. “I’m gonna be an aunt!”

Jax elbowed Kalen. “Grandpa.”

Damon’s throat grew tight when his dad’s eyes misted over. God, he loved the man so much. He grinned when his dad winked at him. The timeline was changing now that Damon wasn’t a raving lunatic or storming angrily through a portal.

The room erupted with laughter, and Damon was grateful for his loving family and the new addition to come. This was a beautiful moment he would remember forever. Never again would he take his family through hell.

Damon felt overwhelmed with emotion as he looked up at Casimir, his beautiful mate who was staring down at him with hurt shining in his blue eyes. “We’re going to be parents,” Damon said with a smile.

Casimir appeared hesitant. “Why have you suddenly softened to the idea, Damon? Just moments ago you were very hostile toward it.”

Casimir hadn’t called him *nékah*. That small detail showed Damon just how deeply hurt his warrior was. He couldn’t bear to see Casimir like this and pulled him into a tight embrace. Aldrin had given him a second chance, and Damon wasn’t going to waste it.

Gripping Casimir’s head firmly, he pulled his mate’s ear to his lips and whispered, “I was thinking maybe we could have a few more babies and drive everyone crazy.”

Casimir gasped. “Are you sure you’re okay with it?”

“I’m more than okay with it. I’ll just be a hairy pregnant guy.” Damon playfully nipped at his mate’s ear. “But since you’re the one who got me pregnant, you have diaper duty.”

Casimir threw his head back and laughed, hugging Damon even tighter. “I don’t mind, nékah .”

“You better not, ceutya méallan .” Beautiful father. Damon hoped he’d pieced the words together correctly.

Tears shimmered in his mate’s eyes. “I’m going to be a father.” Looking so proud, Casimir kissed his forehead. “I guess those pop quizzes paid off.”

Score points that Damon had gotten it right, ’cause he sucked at remembering most of what Casimir had tried to teach him. “I’m smarter than the average bear.”

“But you’re a wolf,” Casimir pointed out with a hint of confusion.

“Come on,” Damon playfully huffed. “How old are you and you don’t know about Yogi Bear?”

“Is he a friend of the family?” Casimir asked in earnest.

“I’m taking you upstairs right this instant to educate you on how to steal picnic baskets.” Damon snorted as he grabbed his mate’s hand. “After that, you’re going to learn how to put our children on a dinosaur’s head so they can watch movies. I’m about to introduce you to some amazing cartoons, gorgeous.”

“Hold on,” Jax said in a serious tone. “I’m not trying to bring the mood down, but

you're no longer just a wolf, Damon. You now carry the genetics of seven powerful men."

It looked as if that observation hadn't been erased from the timeline. Crap. Damon had forgotten to ask Aldrin how he was even going to deliver the babe.

"Will that affect the pup?" His dad looked worried.

So did everyone else as they stared at Damon. Even Casimir's brows were knitted in concern. Honestly, they also looked as if they were waiting for him to explode.

A wide grin spread across Damon's face. "He or she will be the best goddamn Frost the world has ever seen."

Casimir hugged Damon tightly. "You're right about that."

His brothers and dad whooped with happiness as Elvine and Raidh hugged each other, wearing even bigger smiles than Damon.

After what could have happened, and the sacrifice Panahasi had been willing to make, he was done freaking out.

Now it was time to get back to being Damon Frost.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

That afternoon, Casimir entered their bathroom and saw Damon standing in front of the mirror after his shower, wearing only a towel around his lean waist. His mate had his head tilted to one side while running his finger along the pink line on his neck.

Stepping behind him, Casimir gently ran his own finger over the same spot. It was only an eighth of the way around his mate's neck and wasn't really a line. If someone looked closer, they would see there were eight tiny wings in various stages of opening. The first wing was closed completely, and it was the smallest, the second just barely open and was just a fraction of an inch bigger, and the third slightly more extended, and so on. As they continued to appear around his neck, the final set of wings would be fully fanned out and the largest ones, signaling the pup was ready to be born.

"Can I really feel this last one moving?" Damon frowned as he continued to touch the small wings. "Just like I can feel your mark moving under my fingers?"

Casimir placed his hands on Damon's hips and kissed his neck. "Yes. The more of them that form, the more you will feel them flutter."

"This is so weird." Damon glanced at Casimir in the mirror. "In a good way," he added, as if afraid he would offend him.

"I bet it has to be. I'd probably be freaked out if this was happening to me," he said, trying to let Damon know it was normal to feel that way. He wrapped his arms around his mate and rested his chin on Damon's shoulder. "I'm going to get a tattoo of tiny wings on my left pec, right over my heart, to display proudly that my mate has given me a nyliché. I'll circle them around my pec in various colors for every one we

have.”

“You have got to stop dropping new words on me without telling me what they are,” Damon huffed. “I’m guessing that means baby?”

“Child.” He wiggled his brows. “Or nylichés. Children.”

“Slow down.” Damon patted Casimir’s hip. “Let’s get this one out of the way before we start talking about more.”

Casimir grinned. “Nope. You promised me more so we could drive everyone crazy.” Though he was looking forward to having as many children as his nékah wanted to give him, Casimir would respect any decision Damon made.

After all, he wouldn’t be the one carrying the babes.

“I still don’t like the idea of my mate riding a motorcycle while he’s pregnant. It’s dangerous.” Casimir placed a small kiss on Damon’s shoulder then rested his chin back on his soft skin.

“I’ve been riding since they were invented,” Damon reasoned. “Until my gut is distended with our pup, I’m going to get out as often as possible.”

Casimir didn’t like the idea but knew his wolf would only dig his feet in. He had to trust his mate to keep their babe safe.

“At least let me give you something to think about while you’re out riding.” Casimir slid his palms up his mate’s chest then tweaked his nipples, curling the side of his mouth in a knowing smile when his mate moaned.

“I have to meet my family downstairs in twenty minutes.” Damon panted softly but

leaned back into Casimir.

The man was so sensual, so damn beautiful when he gazed at Casimir in the mirror with that needy expression in his eyes.

“Will they wait for you?” Casimir ran his fingers along the edge of the towel, slowly pulling the material apart, like he was unwrapping a gift he desperately craved. “Would they wait while I pleasure my nékah ?” He licked the curve of Damon’s ear. “Look how hard you are for me.”

He curled his fingers around his mate’s erection when the towel dropped to the floor and gave the silky flesh a gentle squeeze. Damon sucked in a sharp breath then thrust his hips forward, fucking Casimir’s fist.

“Answer me, ceutya nétya .” He loosened his grip. “Should I step away from you and let you get ready or lower to my knees and take your throbbing dick into my mouth?” He slid his tongue over Damon’s bare shoulder, their gazes locked in the mirror.

“They’ll wait...I’m positive...probably.” Damon thrust his hips again but whimpered because Casimir’s fist was no longer tight.

Reaching past him, Casimir grabbed the small bottle of lube from the cabinet over the sink then set it on the counter.

“Don’t move,” he growled into Damon’s ear, his palms gripping his mate’s tight ass. Casimir smiled when his mate pressed into his hands, a needy little noise trapped in his throat. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. I’m about to take care of you.”

Slowly, one kiss at a time, he worked his way down Damon’s body. His tongue traced along his mate’s spine, nipping and teasing his skin, grinning when Damon shivered. With the way Casimir felt right now, his mate might have to make his

family wait for a while. Last night they'd made love twice and once this morning. It was as if Casimir couldn't get enough of his nékah .

Whenever his mate's body brushed against his in the slightest way, Casimir had to have him. Had to fuck him, had to possess every inch of Damon. He ran his fingers up Damon's inner thighs and palmed his balls, giving the wrinkled sac a light tug.

"Oh god," his mate groaned, arching his back as his legs spread wider, giving Casimir more room to play. Sweet hell. Damon was spread-eagled, and Casimir wanted to do so many pleasurable things to his body.

He released Damon's balls, spread his crease, and...damn. Casimir brushed a finger over the starburst, causing Damon to moan. He leaned in and swiped his tongue over his mate's puckered hole, swirling and suckling on the sensitive skin as Damon's legs quivered.

Pushing his tongue past his mate's ring of muscle, Casimir reached up and retrieved the lube. As he lapped at his mate's pink bud, he poured the clear liquid onto his fingers. After one final suck, Casimir pulled back then circled the muscle with the pad of his index finger before pushing with a steady shove.

Anticipation heightened arousal. Casimir was drawing this out, taking his time, trying to make Damon ride the edge.

Finally, he pushed his finger inside the tight heat. Damon whimpered and stuck out his ass. Casimir nipped one of his perfect globes, inserting a second finger before scissoring them.

"Turn around for me, sweetheart." Casimir had to pull his fingers free, but he reached between Damon's legs when he turned and pushed them back inside his mate's entrance.

Damon's pretty cock was jutting, and there was so much pre-cum that some dripped to the floor. Casimir licked at the slit, drew the salty taste into his mouth, moaning as he suckled the head between his lips. Damon's body jerked as he fisted Casimir's hair.

"So good," his mate said with a hiss. "So incredible."

As Casimir took the cock deeper, he thrust his fingers deep inside Damon's ass, adding a third as his mate fucked them like they were Casimir's dick. He thrust his fingers faster, but when he felt his mate getting closer, he yanked his fingers free and pulled off Damon's cock.

"No!" Damon gripped his hair tighter.

Casimir grabbed his mate's wrist and squeezed gently. Finally, Damon let the strands go, breathing heavily as Casimir rose to his feet.

"Why did you stop?" his mate whined.

With a smirk, Casimir spun Damon around and placed his hand between the man's shoulder blades. "Bend over for me, nékah . Be careful of your stomach against the edge of the counter."

As soon as Damon leaned over, Casimir used his thigh to spread his mate's legs apart. "I stopped because I need to sink into your ass," he groaned. "Because I need to fuck my beautiful wolf."

Casimir slid his underwear off, and his cock sprang free. He lubed his hand, fisted his cock, and stroked the hard flesh a few times. Damon raised his head and stared at Casimir through the mirror. Damn, Casimir loved him so much, would kill anyone who thought to harm him.

As they gazed at one another, Casimir pressed the tip of his cock against heaven. He pressed a hand over Damon's left shoulder, held him in place, then drove inside his ass.

Damon cried out. Casimir had never seen a more breathtaking sight than the look of raw passion transforming Damon's face.

"Let me know if you become uncomfortable on the counter." Casimir gripped both of Damon's shoulders and pulled his cock back slightly. "Understood?"

Breathing heavily, Damon closed his eyes then nodded. "Just...just stop standing there and fuck me already."

Casimir smirked at his mate's needy plea. "Feel it, nékah . Take just a moment and feel how intense my cock throbs inside your body."

Damon pushed back slightly on Casimir's dick. "Feels amazing." He opened his eyes as his canines extended.

Sliding a hand down his mate's side, Casimir studied him in the mirror. He was savagely bewitching. His wild beast.

Placing his other hand on Damon's hips, Casimir asked, "Fast or slow, my love?"

Damon gripped the edge of the long counter and pushed his ass out a little farther like he was getting ready for a wild ride. "Fast."

Casimir gave a single nod, braced his feet, then pounded into his mate's ass, driving Damon onto his cock with every forward thrust. Then Casimir's gaze lowered, watching as his dick drove in and out of his mate's ass.

“Your body clenches my cock so firmly, gives me so much pleasure.” He glanced up.

“So much pleasure,” Damon said with a pant. “Make me come. I’m so close.”

“Stroke your dick, nékah .” Casimir tilted his head back slightly, his lips parting. “I want to see you bring yourself off. Want to feel your ring of muscle clamp down on my cock.”

Damon reached between his legs and stroked his cock to Casimir’s fast thrusting. His mate gasped a few times, his head thrown back, his mouth dropped open slightly.

“Casimir!” Damon’s body convulsed, his hole gripping Casimir’s cock, making it almost impossible to thrust. The scent of his mate’s cum filled the bathroom, triggering Casimir’s orgasm.

He grunted and buried his cock deep, his release pulsing inside his mate. Casimir curled his arms around Damon and pulled him to his chest, riding the tiny aftershocks. Then he slid his hand down and splayed it over Damon’s stomach.

“Are you as amazed as I am that we created a child together?” He kissed his mate’s neck.

Damon stared at Casimir’s hand through the mirror. “It still doesn’t feel real. I don’t think it will until my gut starts popping out.”

Casimir laughed. He never thought he could feel this happy. “Go for your ride, nékah . Just promise me you’ll be careful.” He kissed his mate’s neck again. “And bring me back some barbeque.”

“You can clean up the room while I’m gone.” Damon grinned.

An hour ago a ton of boxes had been delivered, all for Casimir. He'd been shocked when he'd learned his mate had gone online and put an expedited delivery on clothes, shoes, and toiletries for him. It touched his heart Damon would do that for him.

"Has a squirrel made any purchases yet?" Casimir winked. Maybe while his mate was gone Casimir would perform a location spell and find his mate's keys, wallet, and cell phone. It was the least he could do after Damon had been so generous.

Plus, he felt bad, because Casimir had been the one who'd tossed Damon's jeans aside on that cliff and more than likely tossed them too close to the edge, making it easier for the wind to blow them away.

"Not yet." Damon hissed when Casimir's softening cock slipped from his body. "So much for my shower."

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

Despite getting a later start than planned, Damon was thoroughly enjoying his time with his family. They just cruised along, Damon and Jaytee sometimes playfully trying to get ahead of one another while Jax and their dad chuckled at their rivalry.

It felt like old times, nostalgic, like it had before mates started showing up. Not that Damon would ever give up Casimir, but it felt good to strengthen his bond with his family. Now they were at Wild Tiger Barbeque, a restaurant Damon thoroughly loved.

“That’s all you’re ordering?” Jaytee smirked then whispered, “You’re eating for two now. You should have ordered the entire menu.”

Damon elbowed his twin as he drew in the delicious aromas wafting through the restaurant. “You’re having too much fun with this.”

It still didn’t seem real to him. Maybe it would once his stomach started poking out. But right now he still had his six-pack of muscles. If Damon were being completely honest, he was looking forward to watching his belly grow bigger. In his opinion, he was going to make being pregnant look sexy as hell. For a guy.

Jaytee squeezed his shoulder. “I’m really happy for you and Casimir.” His eyes sparkled as he smiled. “I’m gonna be an uncle. How cool is that?”

But Jaytee’s smile conveyed more than just joy. His twin was glad to have Damon back, relieved he was no longer suffering, and that touched him on a deep level.

“You’re not about to make me order more food.” Damon pointed at his rigid abs. “I

have to watch my waistline. Casimir might not find me sexy anymore if I look like a beachball.”

So not true. The guy couldn't keep his hand off of Damon's stomach. It was as if his pregnancy had triggered his mate's hormones, because he wanted to fuck Damon all the time now.

Jaytee cracked up at the counter. “I hate to break it to you, but your waistline is about to expand whether you watch what you eat or not.”

Jax threw an arm around Damon's shoulders. “And your feet are going to swell, bro. Already plan to stock the freezer with ice cream for you.”

“You guys are jerks.” Damon chuckled.

“Have you two started baby shopping yet?” Kalen asked as he looked over the menu, purposely avoiding eye contact with Damon. It was extremely rare to see his dad look nervous.

“I can lend a hand if you need me to. Though the last crib I had to build by hand was for a set of twins.” He finally looked at Damon and winked.

“Are you offering to build this one?” He saw how much Kalen wanted to be a part of this in any capacity, and Damon would be honored for his pup to sleep in a crib his grandfather had crafted with his bare hands.

“If you don't mind,” Kalen answered as their trays of food were placed on the counter. “Thanks.” He nodded to Mason.

“Couldn't help but overhear,” Mason said in a low tone to Damon. “Congratulations.” He looked at Kalen. “Same to you, grandpa.”

Damon wasn't sure if Mason thought they were adopting or if he was aware of the fact men could get pregnant. He was a Bengal Tiger shifter, so his hearing was heightened.

Kalen swelled with pride. "Thanks. It's gonna be my first grandchild."

Damon saw now that his dad would boast like crazy over the pup. "Thanks, Mason."

The guy nodded and walked back to the kitchen as Damon turned to his dad. "No, we haven't started shopping yet." He gave his dad a hug, uncaring who was watching. "I would love for you to build the pup's crib, grandpa."

Kalen patted his back. "Stop before you have me blubbering in the middle of a barbeque joint."

Wow. Damon had been raised by a caring, but firm hand, but the last time he'd seen his dad cry was when their mom had been killed. His dad might have cried since then, but Damon hadn't witnessed it.

They carried their trays to a booth and sat down to eat. Damon glanced out of the large glass window and noticed that the sun was already setting. Even though they'd only been riding for an hour, he was anxious to get home to his mate. He missed Casimir like crazy and saw the same expression in Jaytee's eyes. His twin missed Raidh.

But Damon didn't want to cut his time short with his family. Some might not consider simply riding on the open road as bonding, but for Damon and his family, riding side by side, the loud rumble of their engines, just cruising along, was everything to them. Especially when they stopped as a family to sit down and enjoy a meal together like they were doing now.

“I’ve been dreaming about Mason’s barbeque.” Damon bit into a rib bone and moaned at the taste, loving how the meat just fell off the ribs.

“Is it a craving?” Jaytee bounced his brows. “Should I go back up there and order you an entire tray of desserts?”

“You’ve had your fun, boy,” Kalen said sternly to Jaytee. “Let your brother eat in peace.”

Jaytee scrunched his face at Damon. “Fine, but I was only offering to get him some dessert. I hear pregos crave sweets.”

“You’re gonna crave my hand on the back of your head if you don’t quit it,” their dad warned.

His twin smirked before he focused on his food.

After Damon had taken three bites, his nausea returned. “You’ve got to be kidding me.” He didn’t care if his nausea hit him full-on. He’d been looking forward to ribs and macaroni and cheese. Nothing was going to stop him from eating it.

“What?” Jaytee furrowed his brows. Then they shot up as he scrambled from beside Damon. “Don’t you dare get sick! You’re just trying to get back at me.”

Damon breathed in a few times and finally settled his stomach. “Like I can help it,” he grumbled. He glanced at his dad and Jax then smirked when he saw they had their trays lifted off the table. “Very funny.”

“Who’s being funny?” Jax asked. “Love you, bro, but not that much. I paid good money for this food.”

Damon winced when his stomach slightly cramped. He rubbed his abdomen, wondering if he really was going to be sick, until he felt a hunger starting to grow inside of him, only... He focused on the sensation, but noticed it wasn't gripping his throat. It was more like a gentle gnawing at his gut.

"What's wrong?" Kalen asked as Jaytee slowly sat back down. "Get to the bathroom if you're going to be sick, son."

"It's not that." Damon shook his head then lowered his voice. "I got a different kind of hunger going on."

"Do you need to feed?" Jaytee whispered, running his hand over his beard. "Why didn't you take care of that before we left the house?"

"Should we take you home to Casimir?" Kalen asked in a low tone. "Sorry to say this, but Jaytee is right. Why didn't you feed before we left?"

Damon didn't want to discuss his feedings with his family. The subject felt too intimate, considering it was always followed by sex...or during sex...or triggered sex. But he wasn't going to sit there and be chastised. "I did."

It had been early this morning, but he shouldn't need to feed for another week.

"Is it the baby?" Jax looked around, clearly making sure no one was sitting close by. The restaurant was lightweight packed, but the booth behind theirs was empty.

"We seriously need to get a baby doctor who specializes in male pregnancies and a shifter with all those different traits inside of him."

Damon stared daftly at his twin. "Since that spell hasn't been performed in a few thousand years, let me know how your search goes."

He could call Christian and ask about male pregnancy in vampires, but after what almost happened, Damon wanted to steer clear of the prince. He didn't think Christian would remember the incident, but Damon was not going to tempt fate.

"You don't have to get hormonal with me," Jaytee murmured, seeming genuinely offended. "I was only trying to help."

"Thanks." Damon squeezed his twin's shoulder. After the hell he'd put his family through, Damon didn't want any of them to think he was ungrateful. He appreciated his family more now than he ever had before. Besides Casimir, they were his solid rocks to lean on.

"Just tell us what you want us to do," Kalen said. "We can always grab some to-go containers. Your health and the pup's are more important."

"But I was looking forward to this ride." Damon grunted when another small wave of hunger constricted his stomach. He had no clue what was going on. He'd fed, and there weren't any fae around, nothing to warrant what was happening to him. Damon was completely clueless.

"Rides aren't going anywhere." His dad nodded at Jaytee. "Besides, I can tell he wants to get back to Raidh."

Jaytee rolled his eyes. "I can spend a few hours away from my mate, Dad."

"Tell that to someone who'll believe you," Jax countered. "I can see the weepiness in your eyes. You're mooning over your Moonbeam." He snickered, as if he found himself funny.

Damon smirked. "Good one, bro." They tapped knuckles across the table.

Even Kalen was grinning.

Jaytee exhaled and shook his head like they were a pain in his ass.

Damon poked him in his arm. “Admit it. You miss your little boo.”

The hunger grew a little more, and now Damon was zeroed in on Jaytee’s neck. The sound of blood rushing through the veins of every person in the restaurant filled his ears, along with their loud heartbeats.

Yet, the hunger still wasn’t coming from the dark need inside of him. It was more like a hunger in his stomach, but not for food. “We have a problem,” Damon whispered urgently.

All three turned to him, concern in their eyes.

“I’m a little too preoccupied with Jaytee’s neck, and I can hear the pulse of every person in this place.” He lifted his hand slightly to gesture toward everyone sitting around them.

“You can hear all that?” Jax tilted his head in fascination at Damon. “That’s pretty cool.”

“Now is not the time to be impressed,” Damon growled. He quickly covered his mouth when his fangs involuntarily lengthened. This was not good.

“Let’s roll, boys.” His dad stood up just as Mason arrived at their table carrying takeout boxes. He quickly packed their food as Jaytee got up and let Damon scoot out of the booth.

“Thanks.” Kalen shook Mason’s hand.

“Just take care of him,” Mason said to Kalen before he glanced at Damon. “No offense if I don’t shake your hand. Hope you figure this out.”

Whatever hunger was gnawing at him was triggering Damon’s own thirst now. His gaze scanned hungrily over the customers, searching for the strongest heartbeat.

“Get moving.” Kalen grabbed Damon’s arm and pulled him toward the door. “We can’t have you feeding on an innocent person, son. If it’s that desperate, you can feed on one of us.”

“I can’t,” Damon whispered.

“Why not?” Kalen pushed open the door as they exited.

“It’s an intimate thing,” Jaytee chimed in from behind them. “I can pour some blood into a cup if you need it that badly.”

Damon nodded quickly, his hand still covering his mouth, his mind becoming hazy, the desire for blood overpowering his thoughts. He didn’t want to drink blood from a cup. That sounded disgusting, but the hunger was growing too strong to be picky.

“I’ll go grab a cup,” Jax offered. “I’ll meet you guys behind the building.”

“Call Casimir,” Damon said from behind his hand. He had also gotten his mate a cell phone with his delivery of clothing and had programmed Casimir’s number into his family’s phones and vice versa.

“On it.” Jaytee pulled out his phone as Kalen helped Damon walk toward the back of the building. Now that they were outside and away from the crowd, his father’s pulse was the most prominent sound he could hear.

“Sink them into me and we’re going to have real problems,” Kalen warned without looking at Damon. His father was much taller than him, an inch shorter than Casimir, with large muscles and quiet authority.

“Casimir is on his way with Raidh and Elvine,” Jaytee said, sliding his phone into his back pocket.

“Why is he bringing them?” Kalen asked.

Jaytee shot Damon a glare. “Because my twin told his mate to keep a close eye on the brats . Now Casimir refuses to take his eyes off of them.”

Damon dropped his hand but tried his best not to breathe in their scents. His fangs were fully exposed now.

“Those are kind of cool,” Jaytee commented with a small smile. “Pointy too.”

“Do you want to find out just how sharp they are?” Damon growled.

“Not really,” Jaytee replied with a frown just as Jax joined them, holding a comically large cup in his hand. It was one of those super-sized ones.

“Son, are you trying to drain us?” Kalen looked incredulously at the cup then at Jax. “I’m sure a smaller one would have done just fine.”

“How was I supposed to know what size we needed?” Jax thrust the cup at Jaytee. “You go first. That way, if Damon attacks when he smells your blood, we can pin him against the building.”

Damon could not believe he was going through this. He’d started taking precautions ever since the day he’d tried to attack that hiker. Casimir also made sure Damon fed

when he was supposed to.

He needed his mate, not a freaking cup of blood. But it would have to do in a pinch.

Jaytee extended a claw and sliced his arm, causing blood to instantly surface. As soon as the mouthwatering scent filled the air, Damon hissed.

Jax and Kalen pinned Damon against the building, preventing him from reaching Jaytee's wound. Damon struggled to break free and get to the source of the blood.

Jaytee shoved the rim of the cup against Damon's lips. "Drink or I'll make you drink it."

Panting, Damon sucked down the small amount but was still thirsty.

"Give me the cup." Kalen snatched it from Jaytee.

Damon breathed heavily as his dad used his claw to slice his arm open. He held it over the cup longer than he should have, but Damon was too thirsty to yell at him to close his damn wound.

"That's enough," Jax argued as he and Jaytee held Damon in place. "Are you trying to go into hypovolemic shock?"

Kalen blinked his eyes a few times while handing the cup to Jax. "I'm okay."

"The hell you are," Jaytee snarled. "Sit down, Dad. I don't need you falling and cracking your skull. You've already lost too much blood."

There was worry in his twin's voice, but when it came to their father being hurt, they were all concerned.

Jax shoved the cup at Damon's lips, and he drank greedily until his thirst was finally quenched. His breathing slowed as his fangs receded.

"You good?" Jaytee asked, still holding on to Damon.

"Yes." Damon closed his eyes. "Check on Dad."

"I got Damon," Jax said to Jaytee as he jerked his chin at Kalen. "Help Dad." He looked Damon in his eyes. "Are you sure you're good, bro? If you need more, I can give you some."

He cupped Jax around his neck and rested his forehead against his brother's. "I'm good. I just don't know what happened. I swear I fed this morning."

"I believe you, Damon." Jax rested his hands on Damon's shoulders. "I'm willing to bet this has something to do with my niece or nephew."

Damon closed his eyes when Jax used the term, making his pregnancy feel more real. "How's Dad? Please don't tell me he donated too much. I already feel shitty for cutting our time short."

As badly as Damon wanted to go to Kalen, he was dizzy and hung on to Jax just to stay upright. He felt horrible about needing his family's blood but even worse that his dad had given more than he should have.

"He just needs to shift to replace the blood," Jaytee said from where he knelt next to Kalen. He gripped their dad's shoulder. "Don't you dare do anything like that again."

"My boy needed to feed." Kalen rubbed the heel of his hand against his eye. "Don't ever stop me from taking care of any of you."

Jax cursed under his breath, his frustration evident in the way he clenched his jaw. “I swear he’s the most stubborn man I have ever met.”

Damon gave a weak smile. “We’ll take him in the backyard if he does it again.” He took a deep inhale and released it slowly, trying to steady himself.

“Dude, no offense, but your breath stinks like blood.” Jax lifted his forehead away from Damon’s, wrinkling his nose. “You might want to start carrying some gum or breath mints in your pocket.”

As soon as Jax released him, Damon collapsed to the ground. His head was spinning uncontrollably, and he could no longer focus on anything else.

“Damon!” Jax knelt next to him. “What’s going on, hon?”

“I-I don’t know.” Damon clenched his eyes shut, trying to regain control of his senses. “I feel like I took one too many shots of Red Spanking.” A potent preternatural drink that knocked them on their asses.

“What do we do?” Jax asked Jaytee. “We need Dad to shift, but I don’t know what’s going on with Damon.”

“T-Threat,” Damon gasped out, struggling to form coherent words.

“Excuse me,” an unfamiliar voice interrupted, causing Jax to snarl in response as Jaytee moved protectively over their dad.

Forcing his head to turn despite the dizziness and disorientation, Damon caught sight of the looming threat at their back.

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This...was not a threat. Damon frowned when he saw a short, scrawny male wearing tattered jeans, a faded black shirt over a long-sleeved one, and scuffed-up tennis shoes. No, he most certainly wasn't a threat. He seemed more malnourished than menacing. His sunken features made his already large green eyes look even bigger, and his arms were as thin as spaghetti noodles.

The stranger held up his hands in a peaceful gesture. "I can help him." He pointed to Damon. "Or rather, I can tell you what he needs." He tapped his ear. "I couldn't help but overhear your conversation. But I promise I wasn't trying to be nosy!" His already large eyes widened even more. "I swear."

Now he sounded like Mason. Not the squeaky voice. The nosy and overhearing part. The guy seemed twitchy and kept glancing over his shoulder, scanning the surrounding woods.

"Who are you?" Jaytee demanded as he sniffed the air. "Other than a vampire."

The stranger hesitated before stammering out his name. "A-Arion."

Damon's eyes widened in disbelief as Casimir flew right at Arion, driving the small vampire into the wall with such force bricks crumbled and dust filled the air. "You set me up to be slaughtered. I'm going to kill you!"

Jax snarled ferociously as he sprang up from beside Damon, leaping onto Casimir's back with all the force of an enraged predator. But Casimir was too strong and refused to let go of the vampire, squeezing tightly around his neck.

Was it possible for a vampire to die of asphyxiation?

“What the hell are you doing?” Damon shouted as he struggled to get up from the ground, his body still weak and uncooperative. “Why are you attacking my mate, Jax?”

Raidh and Elvine landed, staring wide-eyed at Casimir. Raidh quickly shoved Elvine behind him, positioning himself protectively in front of her before both of them took a cautious step back.

Jaytee cursed under his breath and leaped to his feet, trying to pry the vampire out of Casimir’s tight grip. “You’re attacking his mate!”

Who was Jaytee talking about? If he was referring to Damon, then his twin would have said his name. Oh God! Was the emaciated vampire Jax’s mate? This was a huge problem if Casimir was accusing the small vampire of setting him up for a slaughter.

Worse, if Casimir hurt Jax’s mate... Panic rose in Damon’s chest as he realized the magnitude of the situation.

“Casimir,” Damon groaned. “Help.” It was the only way he could think to get his warrior off of Jax’s mate, but he wasn’t totally using a tactic. He really did need his fae.

In an instant, Casimir let go of Arion and charged toward Damon. “Did he hurt you, nékah ?” His words were laced with concern and possessiveness as he splayed his hand over Damon’s stomach.

Damon had never seen him look so panicked. “No, he didn’t touch me.”

“He was only trying to help.” Jax’s lip curled into a snarl, his canines and claws bared in a defensive stance as he stood protectively in front of Arion. His blue eyes blazed with fury as he glared at Casimir. “Keep your goddamn hands off of him!”

“I was just going to tell you, the guy on the ground needs to feed from his mate. The baby is hungry and needs its father’s blood. It won’t be satisfied with anyone else’s.” He looked over his shoulder but turned back around and stared directly at Casimir with fear in his green eyes. “Get your wounded out of here. They’re coming. I came to warn you, but I was pancaked into the wall before I could get more than my name out of my mouth.”

Casimir’s lip curled as his gaze swept over Arion.

Jax snarled as if daring Casimir to come any closer.

“Things are not always what they seem, fae,” Arion stated, glancing between Jax and Elvine before he took off at inhuman speed, too fast for Jax to follow.

Jax spun around, scanning the woods, then cursed when he must have come to the same realization.

“Elouan is approaching.” Casimir’s gaze darted around cautiously. “We need to leave.”

Damon knew the only reason his mate would abandon a fight with his enemy closing in was because he didn’t want any of them to get hurt.

“My dad needs to shift,” Jaytee argued. “He’s too weak to ride out of here.”

Damon noticed Elvine staring strangely at Jax, as if she had never seen him before, and then she furrowed her brows. Could it be possible Jax had two mates? Both Arion

and Elvine? That was a dangerous combination. Like you have room to talk.

“We need somewhere safe, but I smell humans inside this building. Last time Elouan attacked, we were ambushed by a swarm of vampires.” Damon saw the worry in Casimir’s eyes as he carefully lifted him into his arms. “How was your ride, ceutyá nétya ?” he asked.

Damon gave him a thumbs-up. “As you can see, totally uneventful. Nothing but a chill time. Now if we could just get my dad out of here, everything would be peachy.” He scowled. “He gave too much blood when I needed to feed.”

“Oh no!” Elvine rushed over to Kalen, her concern evident on her face. Jax’s intense gaze followed her every move, as if worried she might trip and fall in her haste. “We have to move him if there’s going to be an attack!” She grabbed his muscled arm with both hands and tried to yank him up, but even in his weakened state, Kalen easily pulled her close, nearly causing her to lose her footing.

Damon watched as Jax jerked forward slightly, as if he could catch her from ten feet away if she fell.

“Fly home with Raidh, young lady.” Kalen breathed heavily, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. “You both need to protect your beautiful wings, sweetheart.”

“Then who will protect your handsome butt?” Her meadow-green eyes shimmered as she placed a trembling hand against his bearded jaw.

Jax growled softly, but Damon knew that sound was because she cared about their dad and not from Elvine having a tender moment with Kalen.

“We all leave, or we all fight.” She patted Kalen’s chest affectionately. “Well, except for you and Mr. Baby Belly. But don’t underestimate my tiny stature.” She leaned in

closer and whispered, “Am I allowed to use my magic, Dad ?”

She was being cheeky, but pride shone in Kalen’s blue eyes as he weakly smiled at her. His dad truly adored her. “Help defend our family, young lady.”

Then his eyes rolled back and he passed out, landing on the ground with a loud thump.

“Dad!” Damon tried to wiggle from Casimir’s arms, desperate to check on his father, but his mate refused to let him go. “Put me down,” he snarled. “I need to make sure he’s okay.”

Kalen shifted into his wolf, causing Elvine to stumbled backward. Jax shot across the small distance and caught her, his arms wrapping around her so she could regain her footing. “Can’t have you hurting your tush, brat.”

His hands lingered on Elvine before he abruptly pulled away.

“I’ll go get Mason,” Jaytee said. “We need to find a safe place for Dad.” He looked at Raidh. “Stay by my side, Moonbeam.” He surveyed their surroundings warily. “I can sense something dark in the air.”

Just this morning Damon had prayed all the bullshit was behind them. Swear, one day he was going to learn to keep his thoughts and words to himself. They always seemed to come back to bite him in the end.

But there was one thing Damon didn’t think would ever happen—regret giving up a power. But right about now he wished Aldrin hadn’t taken away his power to create a portal. It would have been incredibly useful in this dire situation.

“Feed me.” A growl rumbled deep in his chest as he tried but failed to turn in

Casimir's arms. "I need to get back to full strength so we can take down this bastard."

Casimir glared at him. "You're not fighting, nékah ," he stated firmly. "You're carrying our pup. You'll stay with Kalen and the small fae and watch over them." His tone made it clear the conversation was over and Damon had better not try to argue.

Gnashing his teeth in frustration, Damon retorted, "He's coming to kill you, and we don't know who he'll have with him. You'll need all the help you can get, or have you forgotten the chaos I pulled you out of the last time he attacked?"

Damon was torn. He knew his warrior was right, but he also didn't want to leave his mate to fight on his own. Damon could hold his own against vampires or anyone else Elouan brought with him. He didn't want to be stuck on the sidelines while his mate fought for his life.

"If you fight, my attention will be divided," Casimir reasoned, placing a gentle kiss on Damon's forehead.

The soft brush of his mate's lips sent shivers through him.

"Please, stay with your father and let me handle Elouan."

The pain in Damon's stomach intensified. "I need to feed." He clutched his stomach. "Our little one is hungry."

Jaytee returned with Mason, who effortlessly lifted Kalen into his arms. "I called for backup and closed down the restaurant. I'll take him inside." He looked at Casimir. "Bring your mate as well."

Unable to wait any longer, Damon turned his head and sank his fangs into Casimir's chest, right over his heart. His mate grunted but kept walking as Damon drank. He

would have preferred privacy, but that was in short supply at the moment.

As they entered the restaurant, Damon licked the pinpricks closed. It seemed since their mating, when Damon's wolf had joined them, Casimir's blood no longer drove him insane. He could now feed from his warrior without trying to drain him.

Mason gently placed the huge wolf on the floor behind the counter. "Sorry I don't have anything more comfortable for him to lie on."

"We appreciate any help you can give us," Jaytee said, shaking Mason's hand.

"We stick together," Mason replied. "The Frosts have always been valuable members of our community. You helped me get this place ready when I bought it, without expecting anything in return. Now I can finally repay you."

"That's not why we help when it's needed," Jaytee replied.

"But thank you," Damon added weakly.

"Thank you for sheltering my family," Casimir added before he looked down at Damon. "Can you stand, nékah?" He rubbed Damon's back in comforting circles.

"Not yet," Damon admitted. "Your blood needs time to circulate through my body. Just set me down next to my dad."

As Casimir gently lowered him, Damon heard Jax yelling.

"You are not fighting!" Jax shouted at Elvine. "You're staying in here with my dad, Raidh, and Damon!"

"Don't tell me what to do, Mr. Nippy Nose!" Elvine shot back. "You heard Papa

Frost. He said to help protect our family.”

“He was delirious,” Jax countered angrily. “He wouldn’t have wanted you to fight, young lady.”

“Don’t call me that!” Elvine huffed. “I will fight until my last breath!”

Jax’s choke was audible. “It’s breath , not... Jesus, get it right.”

Damon couldn’t see them from his position on the other side of the counter, but he could picture them glaring at each other. “They need to get a room.” He chuckled then winced.

“Why would they—” Casimir’s brows shot up. “Why haven’t they acknowledged their bond yet?”

“I don’t think they knew until Arion showed up,” Damon replied. “That’s when everything started happening.” Which was very strange. Elvine had been buzzing around for roughly two weeks. Sometimes preternatural didn’t feel the pull of their mate right away, but Damon had never heard of a two-week delay.

It should have been obvious from the way Jax and Elvine constantly bickered.

“Who is Arion?” Casimir looked genuinely confused.

“The vampire you tried to turn into a part of this building.” Damon was starting to feel better, the dizziness subsiding.

Casimir’s expression darkened, his jaw clenched. “He set me up to be killed. If I see him again, I will erase him.”

Jax growled, and Elvine let out a snarl. Damon looked up at his mate. “I wouldn’t advise doing that.”

Casimir’s eyes began to glow that cerulean blue that always captivated Damon. “They’re almost here. Promise me you’ll stay inside, ceutya nétya .”

“Why are your eyes glowing?” Damon asked. “I thought you said that would stop once my wolf claimed you.” Not that he minded the sight of Casimir’s glowing eyes. In fact, Damon found it breathtaking, just like his warrior.

“The swirling mist won’t return, but the glowing is part of my commander status.” Casimir stood tall over Damon. “I’m going to intercept Elouan before he reaches this building. I also want to see who else is with him.”

“I’m coming too,” Elvine said firmly from over the counter.

“No way in hell,” Jax growled.

Casimir glanced down at Damon. “This should be interesting.”

Damon completely agreed.

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“Keep it together,” Casimir said as they walked out of the building. “I don’t need you two going at each other’s throats. We need to stay focused.”

“I’ve been in my fair share of brawls,” Jax retorted. “I don’t need you to tell me to keep my head in the game.”

Casimir stopped walking when they reached the edge of the parking lot, causing Jax, Elvine, Jaytee, and Mason to stop as well. “You can be as upset with me as you want, Jax. Up until now we’ve been cool, but your mate set me up to be butchered by a horde of vampires. If it wasn’t for your brother flying me out of there, I would have gotten an eviction notice on life.”

Jax bared his canines. “I get what you’re saying, but did you hear Arion when he said things aren’t always what they seem? How would you feel if you watched someone slam Damon into a building and then try to choke him out?”

Casimir felt his eyes glowing fiercely at the thought of anyone touching his pregnant nékah . He wanted to snap Jax’s neck for even putting that image in his head.

“Exactly,” Jax ground out. “We’ll get to the bottom of why he was even there to begin with.” He drew closer to Casimir, his canines lengthening as the shifter looked up at him. “But lay another hand on him and I will forget we’re family.”

At the moment, Casimir couldn’t think of a good enough excuse for what Arion had done.

“You two can settle this another time,” Elvine said then looked at Casimir. “Who

exactly is coming after you, and what abilities do they possess?”

It spoke volumes that the question had just now been asked. They had blindly followed him out of the building without hesitation, ready to fight at his side, despite having no knowledge of who they were up against.

Until he'd met the Frosts, no one had shown him this kind of loyalty. Not even when he was a commander had his guardians followed him so willingly. His own brother had turned his back on Casimir. But here was a fae who stood at no more than five feet tall and had argued with her mate to join Casimir, displaying her immense courage and fierce determination.

He cleared his throat. “His name is Elouan. He was one of my subordinates.”

“We're about to fight an elite guardian?” Elvine squeaked.

“This is why I told you to stay with Damon,” Jax growled. “March your tush back inside now.”

Elvine flew up to meet Jax's glare, giving him one of her own. “You might as well hump the brakes on your attitude. I'm not going back inside, so shut it and stay focused like Casimir said. He's a béskym , while you're just a wolf with a stick in his paw!”

Casimir frowned. Wasn't it supposed to be pump the brakes and thorn in his paw?

Jax snarled then burst out laughing. “I'm not even going to correct you, Elvine. You keep doing you.” His smile faded. “Keep your wings safe. Do you understand me?”

Because one tear and she would die.

She gave him an aggressive salute. “Bye, bye, Captain.”

Mason grinned. “You don’t happen to know Gage, do you? He’s one of my employees. A Seelie, like the two of you, and just as quirky.”

“No.” Casimir shook his head. “Elvine and I are—”

“New to Midnight Falls,” she cut him off and quickly finished for him. “Haven’t gotten out much.” She beamed, but Casimir saw the nervousness in her eyes.

He studied her for a second before turning to everyone. “Elouan possesses magic, just like I do. He’s undergone a thousand years of training as well.”

“So this is a suicide mission,” Mason muttered, shaking his head.

“I will handle Elouan,” Casimir stated. “But he’s not alone. That’s where you guys come in. I have no idea if it’ll be vampires or something else.”

“Is that Arion?” Jaytee asked as someone emerged from the side of the restaurant.

Jax spun and watched as the vampire walked their way.

“He’s a scrawny little thing,” Mason commented. He sniffed the air. “Never knew a vampire could be that skinny. Don’t they suffer from bloodlust if they go too long without feeding?”

But Arion was different. Casimir knew this because the vampire hadn’t reacted to the scent of fae when they’d first met. He remembered thinking the vampire had displayed surprising self-control. He also hadn’t tried to attack Casimir behind the building tonight.

Yet, something seemed off about Arion in this moment.

Jax started forward, but Casimir grabbed his arm.

“If you’re thinking about attacking him—”

“Something isn’t right, wolf.” Casimir tilted his head. “When I first met him, and even behind the restaurant, Arion displayed timidity.”

“I wonder why.” Jax shoved Casimir’s hand off his arm. “I would be frightened if I looked like him and had some gorilla pounding on me.”

“Set your hatred aside for a moment,” Casimir ground out. “It wasn’t because he was frightened. It seems to be his nature.” He jutted his chin at Arion. “But his walk is too confident, too...”

“Seductive,” Elvine said. “Guy has swagger.” She frowned. “You’re right. Something is wrong. The entire time we were near each other, I sensed shyness and fear. What do you think is wrong with him?”

When Arion was ten feet away, Elvine landed and tucked in her wings, blending them seamlessly into her olive skin. “Arion?”

“Why did you tuck away your beautiful wings?” He smiled confidently. “Did you think I would do anything to hurt them?”

Casimir slipped in front of Elvine. “Who are you?”

He looked like Arion. The vampire even possessed the same scar peeking out from under his shirt collar. But now that Casimir had an even closer view of him, he noticed more scars on him, like the ones nearly hidden under the sleeves of his long-

sleeved shirt.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He glared at Casimir. “Step away from my mate, fae.” The vampire moved at inhuman speed and snatched Elvine from behind him.

She shrieked as Arion yanked her roughly, and he would have taken off with her if not for Casimir’s lightning-fast reflexes. He gripped a handful of hair and hauled the vampire back. Jax snarled and swiped at Casimir with his claws.

“Get Elvine!” Casimir dodged those deadly claws without losing his hold on the vampire, who twisted and turned to get free. “This is not your mate, wolf.”

“Shit!” Jax jerked his hand back then drove his claws into Arion’s wrist before he snatched Elvine away, cradling her to his chest. “Touching his skin made my own feel like a thousand ants were crawling all over it.”

The vampire screamed as blood poured from his wrist.

The wound produced a foul odor that made Casimir want to gag. “This is not Arion. It’s a lamia .”

“A what?” Jax and Elvine asked at the same time.

“A ghoul,” Casimir replied softly, closing his eyes briefly. If Jax was livid with him before, he was going to downright hate Casimir now. “In order for the ghoul to take on Arion’s form, it had to eat him first.”

“No!” Elvine shouted.

“You’re lying,” Jax bellowed.

“Let me go and I’ll tell you where I left him,” the ghoul panted.

“You son of a bitch!” Jax attacked, driving his claws into Arion’s chest, snarling continuously as he unleashed his rage.

“You two, grab Jax,” Casimir shouted at Jaytee and Mason. “If he kills the ghoul, we may never find the real Arion’s body.”

Before they could take a step, Elvine slammed into Jax and took him down to the ground. Casimir’s brows hiked, while Jaytee’s and Mason’s jaws dropped. Jax was a large man, around six-five and pure muscle.

She rose to her feet, closed her eyes, and started chanting. Suddenly, Raidh walked out of the restaurant and crossed the parking lot. He grabbed Elvine’s hand and started chanting with her. She latched onto Casimir’s hand, and the words flowed from him.

They were performing a location spell. Even though the vampire in his grip wasn’t the real Arion, he possessed Arion’s memories, which meant he would have the memory of where he’d attacked Jax and Elvine’s mate.

As the dark magic flowed between them, black veins of electricity snapped all around them. Casimir released the ghoul when Elvine began to chant an even darker spell, one to make the ghoul suffer greatly before he would die. She raised her free hand, ready to cut herself to seal the chant with blood.

“Elvine, no!” Raidh shouted. Casimir felt Raidh using his powers to leash hers. “I know you’re in pain, but I can’t allow you to go down that road. Back off, tulip. We saw where Arion was. Take your wolf and get to him before it’s too late.”

“He’s alive?” Jax stared incredulously at Raidh, hope shining in his eyes. “Where is

he?” He grabbed Elvine then jerked his hand back with a yelp.”

“Never touch a fae when they are chanting a spell,” Casimir warned. “Consider yourself lucky Raidh dampened her magic, or you would have shot across the parking lot.”

“You’re Unseelie,” Mason said. “Gage told me about your kind. You use dark magic.”

“Not all Unseelie are evil,” Casimir bit out, now understanding why Elvine didn’t want the Bengal tiger to know the truth.

Mason held out his hands, palms up. “I didn’t say you three were evil. I was merely making an observation.”

Casimir snapped his head around when he heard loud hissing noises. “They’re here.” He turned to Jax. “Take Elvine and find Arion. Go, now!”

Jax shifted into his wolf form before he and Elvine took off in the opposite direction from the arriving vampires. She flew above the wolf as they entered the forest and disappeared from sight.

“Moonbeam, get back inside the restaurant and lock the door,” Jaytee said with pure panic in his voice. “I don’t want you attacked again, sweetheart. Tell Damon what’s going on and see if my dad is awake yet.”

“Tell Damon not to come out!” Casimir yelled as Raidh flew toward the glass door.

Jaytee shifted and raced toward the building when a vampire nearly grabbed his mate.

“Guess it’s just you and me.” Mason rolled his shoulders. “Sure wish that backup

would get here.”

Casimir narrowed his eyes when Elouan stepped from the shadows on the side of the building wearing a malicious smile, his arms spread. “Can’t trust those nasty grave robbers,” he said with a tsk. “They’re not very intelligent, but I was hoping the wolf could watch as his little vampire plucked the fairy’s wings off.”

So Jax would go insane, causing him to blindly attack, which would have made it easier to kill him.

“I guess my guys are smarter than yours.” Casimir’s swords materialized in his hands. “But I have to confess I was dumb enough to assume the last horde of vampires finished you off.” He smirked. “After all, I did leave you as a buffet for them.”

“I have to confess I was smart enough to control the swarm this time instead of relying on the men I paid to do it for me. But you know how the saying goes. If you want something done right, you kill the ones who fucked things up in the first place and then do it yourself.”

“Love what you’ve done with your hair.” Casimir winked. “The half-shorn look suits you, since you never had any honor to begin with.”

“At least I didn’t run away like a coward,” Elouan spat, clearly enraged at the reminder of what Casimir had done to him. “But all will be restored as soon as I kill you and take my rightful place as the new bésnym .”

“That’s what this is all about?” Casimir scowled. “You tracked me down for a position you’ll never get?” He scoffed. “First, your hair has been cut, so not a single guardian will respect you. Second, commander is not a title you earn. You have to be born with the mark, moron.”

And a new one would not be born until Casimir died, which he didn't plan on doing anytime soon.

Elouan snarled as his swords appeared in his hands. As soon as they did, the vampires raced forward.

Mason shifted into a huge Bengal tiger just as cars and trucks screeched to a stop and men jumped out, shifting into various animals. Casimir was looking at a polar bear, a cheetah, a brown bear, a black panther, numerous wolves, and even a lion. An entire zoo had just exploded onto the scene.

Satisfied Mason wouldn't be the only one fighting the vampires, Casimir turned his full attention on Elouan.

* * * *

"Did you just say ghoul?" Damon stared disbelievingly at Raidh. He must have misunderstood his brother-in-law. Was there even such a thing?

"And you say Jax's mate was..." Kalen scratched at his long beard, sitting there with nothing but a hand towel to cover his groin. "I don't understand." He looked at Damon. "How is Elvine his mate? They've been under each other's feet for two weeks, bickering and scowling at one another. And you say Jax has a second mate?" He ran a hand through his hair. "Remind me not to pass out the next time there's a crisis."

"Speaking of..." Damon narrowed his eyes. "Why in the hell would you give me so much of your blood, Dad? It wasn't as if you were the only person around. You could have let Jax give some too. You didn't have to give me the lion's share."

"Now is not the time." Kalen closed his eyes.

“When is the time?” Damon stood. “You’re my goddamn father! Do you know what it would have done to me, to my brothers, if—”

“Nothing happened.” Kalen growled. “Raidh, turn your head, son.” His dad rose to his feet, a deep scowl on his face, and then he gritted out, “You’ll understand when you have your pup, Damon. And that’s one of the reasons. You’re pregnant. My grandchild needed to feed. My son was suffering. I’ll be dead in my grave before I allow any of my boys to go through unnecessary pain.”

That was when he saw the anguish in his dad’s gentle blue eyes. Damon knew why. “Dad, you know I didn’t mean those awful things I said to you, right?” His chest felt heavy as his breathing became shallow. Did Kalen really think Damon meant those horrific words? “You know I-I don’t hate you...”

Kalen glanced at the floor and shook his head. “I couldn’t leave you trapped in that sleep, Damon. But...” He chewed the side of his mouth.

“But it wasn’t your son who came out of it,” he whispered. “Because I’ll never be the old Damon Frost, a simple wolf shifter. Now I’m a hybrid, a monster.”

“No.” Kalen’s head shot up. “Don’t you dare call yourself that. I would love you even if you had a hundred different species inside of you, son.”

“Then what? Tell me the truth,” he demanded, and his voice caught. Maybe his dad was having a difficult time telling him that he didn’t want him there. What else could it be? “If you don’t want me living under your roof, then let me know. Casimir and I will get our own place and you don’t have to worry about me living there.”

“May I help?” Raidh bit his bottom lip as he stood and looked between them. “You’re both aware how my father treated me. I don’t want either of you to suffer because you’re having a hard time expressing yourselves.” He looked toward the counter. “A

father and son should have a strong relationship, and you've made me feel like your son more than my own father ever had."

Damon sniffed and cleared his throat. "What do you have in mind?"

He didn't want to be separated from his family, but more importantly, Damon didn't want to take that from Casimir or their child. The pup deserved to grow up in the Frost home, to experience the bond their family shared. It would kill him to deprive his mate and child of that experience.

Raidh held out his hands. Damon hesitated then placed his hand in the fae's smaller one. So did Kalen. Then Jaytee's mate closed his eyes and began to chant. Raidh's hand squeezed Damon's tighter.

He sucked in deeply when he felt Kalen's emotions, felt the pain of watching Damon hurt, helpless to do anything to take away his son's suffering. His torment when he'd had to fight Damon in the forest when his thirst had become too much. How his dad had cried some nights while he lay in bed, praying that Damon would find peace.

But he also felt how strongly his dad loved him. It radiated like a hundred blinding suns. How happy he was that he was going to be a grandfather, though frightened about the birth.

He wasn't the only one. Damon still didn't know how he was going to deliver his pup.

Raidh released their hands. "Sometimes words aren't needed."

Kalen gazed at Damon. "You're really at peace with who you are now?" His eyes narrowed slightly. "Pull a stunt like that again and you won't have to worry about Christian ending you. I'll take you out back and beat some sense into you, boy."

Damon glanced at Raidh. "Did you have to let him see that?"

Raidh shrugged. "I can't control the flow. I can only open the channel."

He was straight-up lying. The little fairy had wanted Kalen to find out the bone-headed move Damon had made.

Raidh smiled sweetly at him. "Don't be upset, Rick Blaine."

"Yes," Damon said to his dad while still glaring at Raidh. "I'm at peace with what I've become. I'm getting a beautiful pup out of it."

"And you love those wings." Kalen chuckled before he sobered. "I have to get out there and help. You two stay behind the counter and out of sight. I don't need your wings ripped," he said to Raidh then turned to Damon, "or my grandchild to be in danger."

Damon watched as his dad walked around the counter, and then he got to his knees and peeked at the glass window.

Jesus. There was a war zone in the parking lot. Kalen unlocked the door then furrowed his brows. Damon already knew what the problem was. He pushed to his feet and crossed the dining area. "I'll lock it as soon as you leave."

With a single nod, Kalen shifted into his wolf, and then Damon let him out before he closed and locked the door.

Damon stood rooted to the spot, his eyes transfixed on the fierce battle between Casimir and Elouan. For a moment, all else faded away as Casimir gracefully dodged and struck, swords clashing and sparking. It was almost as if he was performing a delicate dance. Each move was calculated and executed with the skill of a seasoned

warrior.

Damon couldn't help but feel a swell of pride and admiration. Casimir was truly a force to be reckoned with.

* * * *

As Kalen trotted out the door, he knew he owed Raidh a debt of gratitude.

When Damon had first come out of that sleep, Kalen had viewed his son as a monster. It was in the way Damon had looked after he'd opened his eyes, the way he'd gone after Casimir for blood, and the aggression that had possessed him.

Kalen had just been in shock.

Thank god Raidh had shielded Damon from finding this out, because if his son knew his father had briefly felt that way, it would have destroyed their relationship.

He wasn't trying to be deceitful. Kalen believed in honesty, but some things were better left dead and buried. What good could come from Damon knowing the truth? It wasn't how Kalen felt now.

All three of his sons were his entire world, and Raidh had just spared him from losing Damon forever.

* * * *

Elvine came to a sudden stop, causing Jax to shift and frantically scan their surroundings, searching for any sign of their missing mate. "Where is he? I don't see him, sprite."

She gracefully landed on her feet and sprinted toward a large, sturdy tree. Then she dropped to her knees in front of a pile of leaves that seemed to have been purposely gathered.

The sight caused Jax's heart to drop into his stomach.

Elvine didn't try to clear away the leaves. Instead she just knelt there with her arms wrapped tightly around herself, trembling uncontrollably.

With fearful steps, Jax approached her. "Is he buried under these leaves, Elvine?"

She nodded quickly but had yet to remove the leaves. As Jax looked her over, he found himself still reeling from the revelation earlier.

The moment Arion had appeared, he'd instantly known the emaciated vampire was his mate. The pull toward him was intense and undeniable.

But then something unexpected happened. The pull had suddenly shifted sideways and enveloped Elvine as well. It was as if all three of their fates were connected and nothing else mattered.

The realization that she was also his mate left Jax shocked and bewildered.

He had already been secretly attracted to her since he'd caught her peeping into their windows, but it wasn't until tonight that he felt the intense pull toward the beautiful fairy.

Now all he could feel was the magnetic pull toward both of them consuming every part of him.

Jax knelt down in the soft grass beside her and placed a comforting hand against her

small back, feeling the tremors racking her body.

His eyes closed briefly as he took a deep breath, preparing himself for what they might find while trying to calm his own racing heart. “I want you to turn around, sprite,” he said softly, rubbing her back. “Let me look first, okay?”

The situation was urgent, but Jax refused to manically knock away the leaves and traumatize her if they found Arion... He couldn't do that to her.

She nodded quickly, her vibrant meadow-green eyes filled with gratefulness and fear as she gazed up at him.

Jax leaned in to press a tender kiss to her forehead before he helped her turn around, bracing himself for what he had to do next.

“Don't you dare go soft on me, ma petite . I love your fiery spirit. It keeps me on my toes, brat.” He was trying to lessen the tension, though he knew it wouldn't do any good. Still, he hated to see how badly she was shaking.

A sniff escaped her. “I'm not going soft, Mr. Nippy Nose,” she said, her voice quivering slightly. “I just need you to slice me some slack right now.”

Gazing at her back, he smiled softly and said, “I'll slice you some slack, sprite.”

Jax took a deep breath to steady his trembling hands before he began brushing the thick layer of leaves aside. His heart clenched when he uncovered a thin, pale arm, the skin marred with fresh bite marks running up and down its length. With increasing urgency, he dug until Arion was fully revealed.

The vampire's shirt was torn and stained with blood. Jax gasped in horror at the jigsaw puzzle of scars crisscrossing his torso. He traced his fingers over the multitude

of old and faded scars, but others looked fresh and raw, most likely inflicted within the past hour, though they showed no signs of healing.

What kind of torture had Arion endured?

More importantly, how had he survived?

Confusion and worry filled Jax's mind as he tried to make sense of it all. Vampires healed when they drank blood. So why hadn't his mate's wounds healed? What could have caused them to become permanent? Having only met Arion less than an hour ago, Jax and Elvine knew nothing about their mate.

"Is it bad?" she asked on a quivering breath. "Is Arion...?"

Ignoring the bile rising in his throat, Jax pressed his fingers against Arion's neck, searching for a pulse and panicking when he couldn't find one. He moved his fingers around, unsure if he was even checking on the correct side since he'd never had to look for a pulse before.

"I don't—" A surge of relief flooded him when he finally located a weak and struggling beat. "We need to feed him."

Elvine spun around, her eyes widening in horror as she took in the full extent of their mate's injuries. "I'm going to kill whoever did this to him," she snarled.

"Let's focus on getting Arion fed first," Jax said as he turned back to Arion. "Then we'll end whoever did this to our mate."

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

Damon could no longer sit on the sidelines. Not when he saw the shifters were starting to become outnumbered.

“I would tell you that you’re supposed to stay put, but I can see the determination in your eyes,” Raidh said, glancing toward the counter from where he was seated on the floor. “I would love to help, but...”

Damon squatted to face him, resting his forearms on his knees. He could still remember that night so vividly. “I get it. A vampire nearly killed you. There’s nothing wrong with having a healthy dose of fear of them, Raidh.” Damon gave him a warm, understanding smile. “Besides, I’m not facing my twin’s wrath if he spots you outside. I actually have a few reasons to live now.”

“Aww.” Raidh grinned. “I don’t mind being your number-one reason.”

“We’re family, and I would protect you with my life, but you are not on the very top of that list.” Damon chuckled. “The little pumpkin seed inside of me has claimed that spot.” He chuckled a thumb over his shoulder. “Plus the gorilla outside who fights like a wet dre—” He held a hand up. “Never mind.”

“I’m sure Jax didn’t mean to call Casimir a gorilla.” Raidh got to his feet then dusted off his butt. “Things were tense.”

“You really are a little peacekeeper.” Damon let out a small chuckle. “Casimir is a gorilla in size comparison. I didn’t take any offense.”

“How are you going to lock the door?” Raidh looked nervously past Damon’s

shoulder. “Sorry, but I’m not going anywhere near it. I don’t need any vampires spotting me.”

Raising his hand, Damon wiggled his fingers. “One hundred percent chance of fog in the forecast, folks. As soon as it’s thick enough, no one will see you locking the door.” He pouted. “I still wish I’d gotten laser eyes.”

From behind the counter, Damon’s hand began to glow. He concentrated on the area right out front so he could quickly mask Raidh before Damon stepped outside.

Casimir was going to kill him, but Damon couldn’t sit on his ass and do nothing. Those were his family and friends out there fighting. If he needed to get away, he had wings. But Casimir was still out there battling Elouan. That fight should have ended already since his mate had had his magic restored.

Which made Damon think something else was at play. He was still tripping over the fact ghouls existed, but he doubted that was the reason the fight hadn’t ended already.

“Ready?” he asked Raidh when the fog had cut visibility outside the restaurant down to zero.

But Raidh didn’t look ready. He looked terrified at the mere thought of going anywhere near the door. Jaytee would ground Damon into dust if his twin knew he’d just scared his mate half to death.

“Raidh.” Damon snapped his fingers a few times to get the fairy’s attention. His brother-in-law glanced at him then past him.

There was no way Damon could ask Raidh to do something that scared him this badly. “Okay, hon, I’ll stay here,” he said softly. “I’m not going to leave you alone.” He wiggled his brows. “Want to see what food we can chow down on while the world

is ending? We could have some pulled pork pandemonium, French fry fiasco, coleslaw chaos, or my favorite, apple pie apocalypse.”

The side of Raidh’s mouth quirked. “My favorite would be chicken tender catastrophe.”

“Aw, come on, man. We already used a C,” Damon objected playfully. He leaned his butt against the counter and crossed his arms. “You can do better, Raidh.”

The fairy tilted his head. “It’s so weird sometimes. I’m looking at an exact replica of my mate, and while I adore you, there’s no connection with you like I have with Jaytee. There are times when I see you in the house, and for a split second I think you’re my mate and I panic because I don’t feel our bond.”

“Then you realize it’s just lil ol’ me.” Damon grinned.

“Little?” Raidh stared wide-eyed at him. “You’re six-two, have huge muscles, and a long beard. I hope you don’t get offended, but I can’t for the life of me picture you pregnant.”

Damon burst out laughing. “Now you know how I feel. If you recall, when I had my breakdown in the kitchen, I said almost the same exact thing.” He looked around as if anyone would be in the restaurant. “You wouldn’t happen to know where this pup is coming out of, do you?”

Swear to god, Damon had never seen anyone who turned that deep shade of red. He had an urge to grab the fire extinguisher. “How would...I don’t...I mean, I guess...”

“Calm down.” Damon smirked, stroking his beard. “All you had to do was say you didn’t. I guess it would be useless to ask you what kíen means.”

Raidh just stood there with his mouth hanging open, and his lavender-grey eyes bugged. It seemed Damon was two-for-zero. “Close your mouth before you catch flies.”

“Did Casimir teach you that word?” Raidh scowled, his hands planted on his hips.

“Oh my god,” Damon groaned in disbelief, his arms spread out. “How bad could it be?”

Raidh glanced around, just like Damon had, licking his lips. “It originated with the Méityah , but others have learned about it, though I personally would never use it,” Raidh whispered like his mom was lurking around the corner with a bar of soap, ready to wash his mouth out. “From my understanding, since guardians rarely—”

Both their gazes shot toward the entrance when they heard what sounded like sharp nails clicking along the glass.

“Get behind me, Raidh.” Damon let out a low growl, turning to face the front of the restaurant.

“I am behind you,” Raidh replied nervously.

The fog still clung heavily outside, making it impossible for Damon to see past it. He didn’t like not knowing who was taunting them.

“You got some kind of chant to let us know what’s going on out there?” Damon’s claws slid free, studying the glass door and large window, trying to get a glimpse of who it was.

“I don’t need a spell.” Raidh swallowed roughly. “I can already tell you it’s no one we want to let in.”

Damon wanted to tell Raidh to go into the kitchen, but since he couldn't see back there, he wasn't sending the little fae into a room for a potential ambush. "Get down on the floor. If they look inside, all they'll see is me."

Raidh dropped to his hands and knees.

"Do me a favor," Damon said without taking his eyes off the front of the restaurant. His gut told him that whoever was out there would try to get in. Since he was the only one in there, it was his job to keep Raidh safe. "Check the cupboards or whatever storage Mason has back there for cooking oil." He reached down and grabbed Raidh shoulder before the fairy could slide into the kitchen. "Don't go too far back there. I didn't hear or smell anyone come through the back door, but I would rather err on the side of caution."

Raidh nodded rapidly before Damon let go of him. Not even a minute later he returned with a gallon jug clutched against his chest. Raidh's face was red, and he was grunting before he dropped the container on the counter. "I didn't know oil could be so heavy."

Damon didn't comment. Now was not the time to tease his brother-in-law. He retracted his claws, grabbed the jug, then walked to the front door. Then Damon walked slowly backward, spilling splotches along his way.

Hopefully, whoever it was wouldn't see the oil spots. Damon was counting on them slipping and falling. They wouldn't stay down, but it would buy Damon enough time to get Raidh out of there if the enemy was more than he could handle.

When he was almost to the counter, the nails slid along the glass again. All Damon could see was a hand with thick, black claws. Damon began to pant heavily, feeling as if the happiness inside of him was draining out of him, leaving him with guilt and shame over what he'd put his mate and family through.

“Oh god,” Raidh whispered, tears in his voice. “I should have never involved Jaytee in my sordid mess. I never meant for any of it to happen.” He burst out crying. “If my father hadn’t paid Vicino to come after me, you wouldn’t have been put in that sleep. Look what I’ve done to you. I’m so sorry, Damon.”

This wasn’t right. Damon had accepted what he’d become. Was happier than he’d ever been. “Raidh, whoever is out there is drawing out our regrets and guilt. Can you counteract it?”

Because Damon felt the darkness inside of him trying to claw its way out. If it succeeded, he would attempt to drain the fairy of all his blood.

“I really need you to counteract this effect, buddy.” Damon felt his fangs straining to lengthen. He wanted to join Raidh behind the counter, to stay close to Jaytee’s mate, but he feared getting any closer to the fae.

Damon was left with no choice when the glass on the door shattered and in walked two men. They were Damon’s height and build, but one had short, black hair and the other was a blond, his long hair in a braid that hung over his shoulder.

“Look what we have here, Niall,” the blond said to his friend. “A cute little fae and...” He sniffed the air before his brow creased. “What exactly are you?”

Damon fought against the dark urge clawing inside of him. “I’ll be a gracious host and allow you to go first.” He tried not to breathe in Raidh’s sweet smell.

The blond bowed. “We are *infernus incolae* , but you can call us hellhounds.”

Damon’s blood ran cold. No wonder all his joy had drained away. That was one of the things hellhounds were known for, though this was his first encounter with the creatures.

Niall sniffed the air. “He almost smells like a Zantharian, but there’s something way off about his scent.” He frowned. “It’s your turn to tell us what you are, mutt.”

Nazaryth stepped through the broken door frame and stabbed the blond behind his ear. Damon’s brows shot up, and Raidh squeaked when the hellhound burst into dust. That was one hell of a way to die. But at the same time, Casimir followed behind the winged beast and stabbed his sword into the dark-haired man’s head with a snarl, ending the guy in the same way.

“Are you two okay?” Nazaryth asked as Casimir crossed the room, hurrying toward Damon.

But he slipped on the oil and fell right on his ass. He hit so hard Damon felt the floor vibrate.

“Watch out for the oil,” Damon said belatedly.

Nazaryth smirked down at Casimir as Damon’s mate sat up and glared at him. “Your timing sucks, nékah .”

“We’re okay.” Raidh nodded then started around the counter.

Too late Damon smelled the approaching enemy. They came from behind him, clearly gaining access through the kitchen.

Damon turned to find Elouan coming around the corner. Elouan drove his sword through Damon’s gut with a triumphant shout. Damon cried out, his insides feeling as if the fires of hell were burning inside of him. Elouan yanked his sword free as Casimir and Nazaryth attacked

Dropping to his knees, Damon clutched his stomach, hot tears coursing down his face

as he thought of his and Casimir's child. He thought of the conversation he'd had at this very counter with his dad, Kalen offering to build the pup's crib by hand. How happy Casimir had looked as they'd stood in the bathroom mirror and his mate had touched the line of butterflies on Damon's neck.

There was no way their unborn child could have survived the wound. Damon didn't think he was going to either. The sword had been glowing when Elouan had skewered him, and already Damon felt himself weakening, unable to shift.

The entire building shook as a fissure raced along the floor while cracks climbed over the walls. Casimir, Nazaryth, and Elouan were unable to stay on their feet. Nazaryth spread his wings and hovered as the interior of the restaurant pulsed.

Aldrin appeared right next to Damon, hell's wrath twisting his features.

"Help Damon!" Casimir flipped to his feet when the building grew still and raced toward him, dropping to his knees when his mate reached out to him. "It's going to be okay, ceutya nétya ," his mate said through tears. He pressed a shaky hand over Damon's stomach, blood instantly coating his hand.

Damon collapsed sideways, but Casimir caught him and lay him on the floor. He knew he wasn't going to make it by the horrified look in Casimir's cerulean-blue eyes.

"I swear to you I killed him," Casimir said frantically. "I ran my blade through his heart. He fell dead at my feet." He wiped his tears with the back of his arm. "I'm so sorry, nékah . Our babe..." He clenched his eyes shut as a sob escaped.

"No one is going to stop this child from being born." Aldrin's voice sounded demonic. When Damon glanced at him, he was stunned to see the man's irises had turned into swirling galaxies, and his features were... Damon had never seen

anything that terrifying.

Elouan screeched as he was lifted up into the air, his weirdly cut hair a falling cascade.

“I erase you from existence.” Aldrin’s voice sounded like it was echoing as Elouan slowly dissolved into tiny particles before they died out. Then Aldrin lowered to one knee and poised his splayed hand above Damon’s stomach.

The intense pain eased. Damon yanked his shirt up, and although there was blood on his skin, he didn’t see a wound.

“I just keep pulling your ass out of messes.” Aldrin shook his head.

“This one wasn’t my doing,” Damon replied, pressing his hand against his stomach, almost too afraid to ask. “The baby?”

“Safe and sound, and since danger keeps riding your ass...” Aldrin closed his eyes and spoke in a language Damon couldn’t understand, but he felt a tingle race through him.

“What was that?” Damon was too overwhelmed about the pup to even put his emotions into words. His pumpkin seed was fine, still tucked away inside of him.

Aldrin opened his eyes. “A powerful enchantment that will keep your babe safe. When you give birth, it will stay with your child for their entire existence.”

Damon was blown away. “What exactly is my pup’s purpose?”

“You wouldn’t happen to know if it’s going to be a boy or girl, would you?” Casimir asked.

Damon slapped his mate's arm. "I think my question is more important."

Aldrin vanished.

"Damn it," Damon snarled as he pushed to his feet. "Why was I lying on a dirty floor? Do you know how disgusting public floors are?"

"Care to tell me why you had vampires after you?" Nazaryth asked.

Damon frowned. He recalled Arion warning that they were coming, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember who Arion was talking about or why they were being attacked.

Casimir shook his head. "I was in the forest when I was ambushed by a swarm of vampires, but I don't know why they attacked me. And tonight..." He frowned. "Arion warned us about the impending attack, but I have no clue why those vampires wanted us dead."

"Arion..." Casimir cursed. "I need to find out if Jax and Elvine found him."

"They did." Kalen walked through the door. An image flickered in Damon's mind—destroyed floor and walls, broken glass—but as quickly as it came, it disappeared. When he glanced around, the interior of the restaurant looked fine. Why had Damon thought Wild Tiger Barbeque had been demolished?

"Is he okay?" Raidh asked.

"He's alive," Kalen replied. "Jax and Elvine took him home. Jax called Jaytee to give him the update." He glanced over his shoulder. "Does anyone know why those vampires attacked us?"

“We were just trying to figure that out,” Casimir replied.

“Whose clothes are you wearing?” Damon asked his dad.

“Mason had some extra in his go-bag. I think it’s time we head home.”

Damon couldn’t have agreed more. He took Casimir’s hand as they headed for the door.

* * * *

“How’d it go?” Panahasi asked when Aldrin walked inside the demon leader’s apartment.

“The babe is safe.” Like he’d told Elouan, no one would stop the child from being born. It was more important than anyone knew.

Currently, Zennor slumbered. He was a vile, merciless god the likes of which no one had ever seen before.

Even Aldrin feared him. Maybe because he was one of four who’d forced Zennor into a billion-year sleep. They’d thought they would find a way to kill him before he woke up. They hadn’t, and they were running out of time. In two hundred years, Zennor would wake up and unleash hell on earth. Thankfully all wasn’t lost.

When Damon and Casimir’s child found their mate, the couple’s combined powers would become unparalleled. They would be the only hope of the entire world surviving Zennor’s wrath.

After making himself a drink, Aldrin sat next to Panahasi at his in-home bar. “Wiped Elouan from existence, which means he never was born.”

Panahasi frowned. “Then how did you explain the attack?”

“I didn’t.” He took a sip of his bourbon. “They have no clue why they were attacked. I also wiped their memories of the hellhounds showing up, of Damon being stabbed, and the protection spell I placed on their child.”

Panahasi snorted. “Why didn’t you just erase the entire event?”

“Arion.”

A knowing look entered Panahasi’s eyes. “Jaytee and Elvine would have never found their other mate if you’d done that.”

Aldrin turned his tumbler slowly around on the counter. “I might have blocked Jax’s and Elvine’s connection to each other until they met Arion. That way all three could discover they were mates at the same time because I didn’t want Arion to feel like he was coming into an already established relationship. The guy has suffered enough and needs something beautiful in his life.”

“At least Fate can be pissed at you this time instead of me,” Panahasi snarled.

Aldrin didn’t blame him. Fate had been a straight-up dickhead.

He downed his drink. “Let him get pissed. I’m heading home to my mate.” Now that he’d saved humanity’s future.

“Are you sure this child is humanity’s savior?” Panahasi asked.

He’d been one of the four who’d put Zennor into the sleep and knew how important it was to find a way to kill the god.

“I can already feel their power from within Damon. So, yes, I’m sure.”

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:31 am

“I was thinking we could make that area over there the baby’s nursery.” Damon pointed to the other side of the room where his breakfast table was. “No, wait, that’s where we had breakfast the morning you got all emotional on me. Now I think about it every time we sit there.”

“You mean the morning you took off out the window and made me chase you?” Casimir teased.

A wide grin spread across Damon’s face. “That’s part of the memory, goof. And what you did to me when you caught me.” His grin faded. “How about...” He spun around their bedroom. Although the room was large, Damon couldn’t decide where to set up the nursery in their bedroom.

He reached for his beard to run his fingers through, only to remember he’d shaved it off, refusing to be a hairy pregnant guy. Now he missed it.

“I still don’t see why we can’t use the room across the hall,” Casimir argued. “Elvine is Jax’s mate, which means she won’t need it anymore.”

“Just because they’re mates doesn’t mean she’ll instantly sleep in his room.”

Casimir frowned. “Why not? They have Arion to take care of.”

“Babe.” Damon shook his head. “They probably started to look at each other as family, like I see her as a pesky, funny little sister, and then they discover they’re mates. It’s probably going to be a readjustment for them.”

“But they’re not family,” Casimir stated. “Friends turn into lovers all the time.”

“I don’t think...” He reached for his beard again and groaned. As soon as he popped the pup out—he still didn’t know from where—he was growing his damn beard back. He made sure to whisper, just in case she heard him. Preternatural hearing. “I don’t think she’s...” He didn’t feel right talking about her intimate life. “She doesn’t look that experienced to me.”

Casimir’s brows shot up. “You do remember she’s over a thousand years old, right? I highly doubt she hasn’t—”

“Bleh.” He held up his hand. “Don’t say it. I feel like I’m discussing my baby sister’s...”

“Sex life?” Casimir smirked.

“You keep that word out of your mouth.” Damon pointed a finger at him. It might have been close to three weeks since Elvine had entered their lives, but she had a way about her that had endeared her to their family.

And now she was a Frost, Damon’s sister-in-law, so technically she was his sister. He’d just thought about that. Wow. He had a sister now, and his protective instincts just shot through the roof for her.

“What word, life?” Casimir chuckled and jumped back when Damon tried swatting him.

“Keep it up and I’ll spank you.” Damon glanced around the room. “Maybe we can put the nursery over there.”

“Nékah , you want to put our pup’s crib between the bathroom and closet door?” Casimir looked incredulous.

“I clearly suck at redecorating.” He threw up his hands. “I say we just put the babe in the bed with us and worry about where they will sleep around six months after they’re born.” Damon was getting a headache trying to figure this out.

Curling his arms around Damon, Casimir gave him a quick kiss. “We are not putting our nyliché in the bed with us. What if one of us rolls over on him or her? And...” He kissed Damon’s neck. “I will not be deprived of your body for half a year. We’re going to give our child a full nursery, not a crib in a corner of our bedroom.”

“But—” Damon was cut off by Casimir’s lips descending on his. That was one way to shut him up. Now that Damon didn’t have his beard, he could feel the soft hairs of Casimir’s beard gliding across his skin. The sensation was stimulating, but Damon wanted his own back.

“I love how you look with no facial hair.” Casimir gave a low growl. “You’re even sexier than you were before.” He nipped Damon’s hairless chin. “I hope our pup has your strong jaw.”

“Unless we have a girl.” Damon curled his arms around Casimir’s neck. “Our...” He frowned. “How do you say that word again?”

“Nyliché.”

“Our nyliché could be a girl, which means I hope she doesn’t have my strong jaw.”

Casimir smiled dreamily. “A daughter.”

“With two deadly fathers, two lethal uncles, and a grandpa who will kill anyone who comes near her.” He groaned as he tilted his head to the side, giving his mate more room to nibble at his neck.

“Don’t forget three fae who know magic.”

Casimir cupped the back of Damon's head and kissed him so thoroughly he felt faint. It amazed Damon how far they'd come after the way things had started out for them. With everything they'd been through, it felt more like a year than a little over a week.

The two of them had already been through a lifetime of problems, so hopefully they'd gotten trouble out of their way. Because all Damon wanted now was a good life with his mate and family and to raise their child. Or children. He wouldn't mind having more, but he wouldn't tell Casimir that.

His mate was already trying to fuck him every five seconds. If Damon told him he wanted more children after this one was born, his warrior would never let him out of bed.

"Regardless of gender, I will teach them the greatest fighting skills an elite warrior has to offer," Casimir said against his lips. "Like any parent, I have a feeling our pup is destined for great things."

Damon grinned. "It would be so cool if they were born with laser vision. After all, they'll have demon in them."

Casimir chuckled. "Babe, let it go. Your ability to create fog saved me from a swarm of vampires. Laser eyes would have done me no good in that situation."

"I agree to disagree." Damon gasped when their clothes vanished. His jaw dropped as he looked up at his mate. "What's going on? How did we get naked?"

"Yes." Casimir rolled his shoulders and closed his eyes briefly. "It feels so good to flex my magic." He looked at Damon. His eyes were glowing again. "I just felt my béskym magic finally flow through me."

"But..." Damon frowned. "I thought your magic was already restored. When my wolf claimed you. When Raidh had to help you."

Casimir nibbled along Damon's collarbone. "They did, but as Méityah Bésnym , I had what you might call bonus powers. Special gifts." He felt Casimir smile against his skin. "They took the longest to restore, but I'm glad they're back."

So was Damon if his mate could just make their clothes disappear. "Just don't use that handy trick when we're in public."

"Never," he whispered against Damon's skin. "Your sexy body is for my eyes only, nékah ." Casimir playfully nipped at Damon's jaw. "I will poke out anyone's eyes for looking at my gorgeous playground."

Damon burst out laughing. "Your what ?"

"I was trying to be smooth," Casimir growled.

Oh sweet hell. Damon didn't think he could love his mate any more than he already did, but the huge warrior was adorable when he pouted. "I'm sorry." Damon cleared the laughter from his throat. "Go ahead. Try again."

"You're an ass." His mate smirked.

That only made Damon laugh again. "Didn't I tell you we had to work on your sexy talk?"

Damon yelped when Casimir lifted him up and carried him to the bed. Then he laid him down softly.

"I thought you were going to make me bounce."

His mate splayed his hand over Damon's stomach, a tender look in his eyes. "I don't want to jostle our nyliché ." Damon's heart warmed until Casimir said, "But you will be bouncing, sweetheart. Just in a different way."

He chuckled. “Your sexy talk is improving.” Who was Damon kidding? His mate was amazing at it. He just liked giving Casimir a hard time. “And I highly doubt you can jostle our...how do you say it again?”

Casimir groaned. “Nye-lish. And here I thought those pop quizzes paid off.”

“I got a quiz you can pop.” Damon pulled his mate down to him. “But you have to guess where it is.”

Damon’s breath caught when Casimir spread his legs and pressed the head of his cock at his entrance. He furrowed his brows when he didn’t feel the spurt. When Damon looked down, he saw his mate cupping the head, catching the pre-cum in his hand.

“What are you doing?” He had no clue why his mate would stop Damon’s muscles from relaxing before fucking. It made no sense.

Until Casimir leaned forward and went to work stretching himself.

Damon. Was. Dying.

He couldn’t move or think as he watched with greedy eyes how Casimir writhed as his arm pumped back and forth. Damon probably looked like an idiot, with his mouth hanging open and a wide-eyed stare consuming his face, but he didn’t care. What Casimir was doing was so erotic Damon wanted to burn the image into his memory.

When Casimir dropped forward, Damon sucked in a quick breath, fearing for a second that Casimir would land right on top of him. But his hand hit the covers, right next to Damon’s head, using his free hand to guide Damon’s cock to his lubed hole. Damon’s lungs froze and he couldn’t move as he watched Casimir impale himself.

“Don’t. Move.” Casimir gasped. “You have to give me a moment. I’ve never done

this before.”

Damon was shocked. “I’m taking a four-thousand-year-old man’s virginity?” No goddamn way. Holy... He wasn’t sure what to think, but he was honored his mate was giving it to him.

“If my nékah can carry my child, then I can gift him with something no one else has had.” He blew out his breath. “Let me know if I’m crushing you.”

“Sweetheart.” Damon cupped Casimir’s cheeks. “I...thank you.”

Casimir looked down at him, his eyes still glowing. “I love you, ceutya nétya . I would give you anything your heart desires. You were mostly a top until you mated with me. I don’t want to take that pleasure from you.” He winked. “How’s my sexy talk now?”

Damon chuckled. “Phenomenal. Take your time, babe. Adjust to my girth inside of you.” He ran his hands up and down Casimir’s sides, amazed at how gorgeous his warrior looked sitting atop him.

Every time Damon turned around, Casimir proved to him what an incredible mate he had. His fae had ridden through Damon’s storm, had stuck by his side, and comforted him when he needed it most. Protected him, risked his own life to feed him, loved him, and if it wasn’t for Casimir showing up when Damon was in the deep sleep, Damon wasn’t sure where his life would be right now.

“I love you.” Damon placed his hands on his mate’s lean hips. “More than you will ever know.”

His mate smiled warmly at him. “I know how much you love me. I can feel it in your gaze every time you look at me, every time you laugh, and every gasp you give me when I make love to you.”

Damon flexed his fingers on Casimir's hips. "Fast or slow?"

His mate chuckled. "I am sitting on my pregnant nékah . I refuse to be rough."

With a growl, Damon flipped them, dropping Casimir on his back. "Fast or slow?" he snarled.

Casimir's eyes became heavy-lidded. "Fast."

"Whatever my virgin mate wants." Damon winked, reared back, and gripped his mate under his knees, locking Casimir's legs to his sides.

"Why aren't you moving?" Casimir moaned. "I've never felt a cock pounding my ass. I want to feel it, Damon."

"Feel it, nékah . Take just a moment and feel how intense my cock throbs inside your body." The same exact words Casimir had given him.

"Trust me..." Casimir panted, his features strained. "I feel your dick in every inch of my ass."

Did that mean he was in pain? His face wasn't exactly relaxed. As much as Damon treasured what his warrior had given him, it wasn't worth hurting Casimir. He started to pull out, but Casimir grabbed his hips to stop him.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Damon argued.

"My expression is pained because a certain someone refuses to move," Casimir snarled softly. "You're kneeling between my legs, your cock shoved in my ass, staring at me with moony eyes. Can you please, for the love of god, be awestruck after your cock pounds my ass?"

A wide grin spread across Damon's face. "Be careful what you wish for."

Lifting Casimir's powerful legs over his arms, Damon moved in closer, causing his cock to push deeper into the tight heat. So fucking tight. Damon shuddered at how good Casimir's ass felt gripping his cock.

"Shove those pillows under your ass, babe," he instructed. "I need you a little higher."

Casimir slapped his hand over his head and brought two pillows down. He lifted his hips, and...oh god. When he lifted his hips, it caused his clenched ring to squeeze Damon's cock more than it already was. Damon blew out a few breaths, praying like hell he didn't come within the first five seconds.

Casimir stuffed the pillows under his gorgeous ass. Damon stared at his cock stretching his mate's ass. "It's so beautiful."

"Damon," Casimir growled. "Awe later. Fuck now."

"Okay, caveman." Using his mate's legs to steady himself, Damon yanked Casimir's ass onto his dick repeatedly, groaning and hissing at just how good his tightness felt as his shaft pistoned inside Casimir's delicious hole.

"Baby, so good, so goddamn good." Damon's mouth dropped open slightly as he moved faster, succumbing to the wicked pleasure. When he looked down at his mate, Damon was blown away at just how astonishing his warrior looked beneath him. His hair was fanned out, his muscles flexing, his expression pure rapture.

"Feel good, nékah?" Damon asked, never slowing his pace. His dick plowed into his mate's ass as he thrust repeatedly. He wanted to make sure his warrior's first time was memorable. That he was giving Casimir the pleasure he deserved.

Casimir opened his eyes, gazing at Damon with an almost drunken look. “Words cannot describe how this feels,” he replied on a long, salacious groan before he closed his eyes again.

“Look at me,” Damon said. “I want to see your wondrous eyes, sweetheart. I want to fuck you while I gaze into their glow.”

Since when had Damon become such a dirty talker during sex? He wasn’t sure but loved it.

“How does my dick feel hammering into your ass?” Damon grunted, feeling himself getting closer, feeling his canines lengthening.

When his mate just thrashed his head, Damon slowed. “Tell me or I stop.”

“No,” Casimir snarled. “You better keep going.”

Damon’s breathing was ragged, a thin layer of sweat covering his body. “Tell me.”

“Only if you go back to the speed you were fucking me with.” Casimir arched his back, shoving his ass down on Damon’s cock.

His hips picked up in speed, his fingers flexing on his mate’s calves. Damon needed to come. He needed to make Casimir orgasm, because he wasn’t sure how much longer he could hold his mate’s powerful, heavy legs. They felt like they weighed a ton.

“Metkíen kuynté, ceutya nétya .” Casimir panted.

Damon remembered his mate saying that one time before. “What does it mean?”

He slowed just a little, letting his mate know to answer him.

“It’s...” Casimir was breathing just as hard, his body coated in sweat also. “It’s poem, and I’m not very good at it.”

Damon gripped his legs a little harder. “I don’t care how awful you think it is, tell me, ceutya yato .” Wait. What had Damon just said? He wasn’t sure. He just remembered Casimir using that second word at one time. “No shame between us, remember?” He rocked slowly inside his mate.

Casimir swallowed and closed his eyes. Damon wouldn’t complain. If closing his eyes made him brave enough to translate, so be it.

“ Metkíen kuynté, ceutya nétya . You are sweeter than any dream I dared allowed myself, beautiful wolf.”

Damn. Damon lowered his legs and leaned forward, resting his forearms on either side of his mate’s head. “Look at me, Casimir.”

He gifted Damon with his enchanting glowing eyes. His warrior was the epitome of manliness, strong, fierce, yet in that moment, he looked so vulnerable, so beautiful. “I feel the same way about you. You’re my everything—my heart, my very breath, and my future. The father of our pup. Our nyliché . You’re my mate, my nékah , my zaterio .”

Damon cupped Casimir’s handsome face, kissed him fiercely, curled his hips upward, and pushed his cock deep into his mate’s tight heat. He punched his hips faster as he swept his tongue inside Casimir’s mouth, sliding his fingers over the sensitive points of his mate’s ears and smiling when they wiggled.

Then he sank his fangs into mate’s neck, crushed his lips into his skin, and drank what he needed.

Casimir threw his head back and cried out, his cum erupting between them. Damon

licked the pinpricks closed then sank his canines into his mate's shoulder, thrusting hard before he buried his cock, convulsing and shuddering as he came.

He extracted his teeth and licked the wound, resting his forehead against his mate's neck. "That was the most intense orgasm of my life."

Casimir curled his arms around Damon and chuckled.

"Okay, maybe it wasn't for you." He frowned, wondering why his mate was laughing.

"Oh, no. It was phenomenal," Casimir said with a grin. "We are definitely going to take turns bottoming." He gazed at Damon, merriment in his eyes. "Ceutya yato ." Another chuckle escaped. "You called me your beautiful feed."

Damon groaned. "I thought I was being smooth. I've lost my Rick-Blaine charm."

Casimir kissed him just under his ear. "I am your beautiful feed. You're amazing, banana bag."

He slapped Casimir's chest as he laughed. "Asshole. You were supposed to let me get away with that slipup."

"I'll never let you get away." Casimir kissed him. "After an eternity of loneliness, I've finally found a home in you, and I'm not giving that up for anything."

Damon swallowed roughly. He felt the exact same way about his mate. "I think Jax needs to make that store run, because if you keep talking to me that way, I'm going to need a ton of ice cream to cry into."

Grinning, Casimir hugged him tightly, and Damon prayed his warrior never let him go because he wanted to stay in the man's arms forever.

THE END