

London Nights

Book 1: The Lost Boy

Von Ulysses

Kapitel 4: Fire and Tears

The house was quiet as Jonathan entered through the servants' access and sealed it magically behind himself. He made a mental note to tell Mrs Gunderson in the morning so that she didn't get a nasty shock should she try to go to her herbal garden from here. Jonathan made his way into the main hall through the inconspicuous door beneath the grand staircase. No proper Victorian wanted to see the servants do their job after all. The drawing room was empty now, save for a few abandoned glasses on the table which Steven would remove later after he was done with Sydney's luggage. Jonathan walked over to his tumbler and emptied the remaining whisky in one swoop. "Everyone else went back to bed. You looked tired, too."

Velkan stood in the doorway and leaned against the frame, his big arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Well, it's late and there's been a lot of commotion. Syd is off to Paris by the way, he offered me to come along."

"So why didn't you leave?"

Jonathan took his time with the answer to that question as he walked over to the wolf. He wondered if he should be offended by Velkan's tone, but decided against it.

"Easy. You are here and you are dead set on helping that boy. That means this is where I am staying. Someone has to keep you from messing up, wolf."

"I love you too."

Jonathan chuckled and stole a kiss from his partner. He enjoyed the short moment of intimacy. Those were the moments which proved to him that he was making the right choices.

"Where is our little Tran..." He caught Velkan's disapproving expression. "Where is our little Banshee-boy?"

"With Richard, upstairs." Velkan nodded towards the floors above them.

"I'll go have a chat with him. We need to know more about the magic they, whoever they are, used on him to change his body."

"If you say so. I trust you on the magical side of things."

"Wise choice."

"Go and do your thing, I'll clean up here. We can't always leave everything to Steven."

"Okay. I'll come back to bed when I'm done upstairs."

"Don't make me wait. The bed is cold without you."

Velkan gave him another kiss before he started to collect the glasses. Jonathan watched him work for a moment - mostly because that meant he could see his lover

bend over to pick up a glass in those well-fitted jeans of his - before turning around and heading up to the room Richard and Tariq were sharing.

Jonathan looked forward to the Ifrit's return. He understood Tariq's reasoning for staying behind and help his parents look after his brother while he was recuperating from his ordeal with the ancient flower demon but he missed having the man around who was quite literally his partner in crime and one of his closest friends.

Richard and Kearon sat on the windowsill next to the bed and were in a lively conversation as Jonathan entered. The Banshee looked much better already. His hair was freshly washed and combed back and he wore one of Richard's shirts and one of his sweatpants. Both were comically oversized on the scrawny boy. He was reaching gleefully into a bowl of fudge which stood between him and Richard.

The window was open and a gentle breeze played with the colourful canopy over the bed.

Jonathan knocked against the doorframe to announce his presence even though he was sure Richard had already noticed his arrival.

"May I intrude?"

"What is it?" Richard's tone made it obvious that he hadn't forgiven Jonathan yet for calling Kearon a street rat earlier.

"I would need a word with Kearon."

"Why?"

"Look, Richard, I know I'm not your favourite right now." Jonathan said, making no effort to hide the exasperation in his voice. "However, I'm also the one person in this house who is best versed in magic. So you'll have to put up with me for now, mate."

Richard chewed on his lower lip and avoided Jonathan's eyes but he clearly wasn't happy with this. Jonathan, however, couldn't care less.

"Fine, but I'll stay here."

"If Kearon is okay with that." Jonathan said in an attempt to sound more amicable. "I would understand if he'd prefer we talk in private about those matters."

"No, it's fine." the Banshee finally joined the conversation. He smiled at Jonathan but it didn't quite reach his shining purple eyes.

Jonathan could sense the magic which surrounded the boy but he couldn't tell if it was the Banshee's own power or residue left by the spell used to change the boy's physical gender. However, he could tell that his gaze made the boy uncomfortable, so he put on a smile.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to stare. You're just a fascinating case."

"He's not some kind of specimen to research, Jon."

"Tell that to Myra." Jonathan quipped but it was lost on Kearon's valiant protector.

"Fine, I didn't mean it like that."

"You think I'm fascinating?"

"Indeed." Jonathan came into the room. "You're a Banshee but you're a man now. That's some potent magic right there."

"I'm not a man *now*. I always was one." Kearon said, his lips curling in vexation. "It wasn't some spur of the moment decision."

"I'm sorry."

Jonathan meant that. He had met quite a few people who were transgender on his travels and he didn't understand the issue some folks seemed to have with them. However, he had never really bothered with the personal background.

"You know what I meant, though, right? That it needed a lot of magic to pull something like this off. And I can feel a strong presence from you but I can't tell if that

is your own magic or leftover from what was performed on you. I just want to make sure that everything is in order."

"Will it hurt?"

"Not a bit." Jonathan replied truthfully. "Lay down on Richard's bed for a moment, will you?"

Kearon did as Jonathan asked. He watched with fearful eyes as Jonathan stood over him and placed his hands close above the boy's trembling chest.

Jonathan began mumbling words in a long forgotten language and reached out into the boy's aura. It took some effort to break through the barrier around it.

The air around the bed began to vibrate with magic as Jonathan increased the intensity of his spell and a sudden burst of energy signalled that he had intruded into the world of Kearon's magic. What he found there, was totally unexpected.

Jonathan felt pulled into swirling chaos of purple darkness as a horrible scream swelled up in his head. He wanted to let go, retreat, but couldn't. The darkness drew him in, overwhelmed him.

There was a voice, Jonathan wasn't sure if it was in his head or real, which tried to reach him over the terrifying screaming. The scream filled his entire being and Jonathan realized that it was a horrifying sound of his past which shattered its way into his mind: His mother. Screaming as she was burning alive.

Someone grabbed his arm. Jonathan's eyes flew open. Richard was saying something but Jonathan couldn't hear it.

He looked back at Kearon who had grabbed his wrists. He tried to get Jonathan to let go. The boy's eyes were widened and pitch-black, his face distorted from fear.

Then Jonathan saw it: His hands were burning. Flames danced on them, eating away at his flesh, searing the glowing tattoos on his fingers. The fire spread, rising up along Jonathan's arms as he tumbled back in panic, slapping at his arms in a desperate attempt to stop the flames. His skin was blackening while the fire engulfed more and more of his body. He would die. Burn and die.

Richard grabbed him again, held him tight with the full strength that the wolf part of him had to offer and shook Jonathan.

"Jon, calm down! What the hell is going on?!"

Jonathan wanted to scream but choked as the flames took away the oxygen around him. Why didn't Richard help him? Why didn't he... burn?

It was over just as quick as it had begun. Jonathan stared at his hands, hot tears running down his face. There was no fire. His hands were okay, so was everything else.

"Jon, what happened?"

Richard's voice seemed impossibly far away. Jonathan staggered away from Richard's grip and almost fell over the thick oriental carpet on the floor.

"Keep that thing away from me." he muttered.

"I'm sorry!" Kearon sat up and watched the scene with fearful eyes which had now turned back to their usual purple glow. "I didn't mean to."

"Keep away. Just... keep away." Jonathan made a step back as Richard attempted to support him and turned around to flee from the room.

Jonathan found himself in the drawing room again. He was still shaking while he switched on the old standard lamp and grabbed the whisky decanter from the silver tray on the sideboard. Ignoring the glasses, he simply removed the crystal cork and

tossed it on the sofa before drinking directly from the decanter. Steven probably would have keeled over on the spot had he seen this but at this moment the damn butler was the least of Jonathan's worries. The alcohol burned in his throat as Jonathan drank more than a tumbler's worth in one go.

The whisky bottle in hand, Jonathan slumped down on the Victorian sofa and stared at the dying embers in the fireplace. Goddamn fire. Something wet dripped on his hands and only now, Jonathan realized that he was still crying. He wiped his hand across his face in an attempt to stop the tears from falling.

Several more large swigs of whisky finally brought the desired feeling of levity. Clinging on to the bottle like a drowning man to a piece of driftwood, Jonathan took another mouthful with the intent of ending night as drunk as possible.

He had already emptied half of the bottle's content as the privacy he so thoroughly desired was interrupted by Richard, who entered the drawing room and came over to him.

"Are you okay?"

Jonathan looked at him for a moment. At this wide-eyed, well-meaning little arsehole with the wild ginger hair and the pretty face. Richard was genuinely concerned for him despite their earlier disagreement. And that only made it worse.

"Fucking perfect, Dickie." He toasted the young man with the decanter before drinking from it again.

"I can see that. You're still shaking."

He was right. Jonathan's hands still trembled, even the one with the heavy crystal bottle.

"Gold star for attention to detail. What do you want?"

"See if you were okay." Richard said with a sad smile. "I don't know what happened there but he sure didn't mean..."

"I don't want to hear it." Jonathan interrupted. "Save your excuses for someone who's in the mood for them."

"You scared him."

"I scared him?! I fucking scared him?!" Jonathan laughed and tried to drink again but Richard grabbed the decanter and wrenched it from his hand. Jonathan glared at the young man. "Richard, believe me, this is not the night you want to get between me and booze."

Richard held on to the bottle for a moment while obviously trying to figure out how to best proceed but then he handed it back to Jonathan, who gave him a sarcastic smirk.

"Good boy."

"You think this is the right way of dealing with this?"

"Listen, Richard, I don't care for your approval." Jonathan slurred his words a bit. "I couldn't give less of a fuck what you think about me at this moment. Why don't you piss off and take care of the little monster you dragged into our house?"

"He's not a monster."

"He is." Jonathan laughed drily. "Here's a little lesson, free of charge." He waved the bottle about. "Magic isn't coming out of thin air, it's a part of you, a part of me, it is a part of every being which is tuned into the magical ether. But, and this is a big fucking juicy but, it's highly unique. Your fae magic is different from mine and both are different from bloody Banshee magic."

"I know that and-"

"Shush, I'm talking!" Jonathan held up his index finger and ignored the pouty

expression on Richard's face. "Magic is connected to your body chemistry. And that's where things get messy. Little Bashee boy up there went and allowed people to mess with his body on such a deep level, that it fucked up his magic. There is a maelstrom of chaos churning in this scrawny body and I got a taste of it."

"That's why he needs our help."

"Speak for yourself. I'm done with this." Jonathan sank back into the sofa. "And now, please, pretty please, fuck off."

"What happened up there?"

Jonathan drank from the decanter before looking over the rim of the bottleneck.

"What's your deepest fear, Richard? I'm just asking out of curiosity for when he utilizes it against you."

"Whatever he did, he didn't mean to. He was almost inconsolable."

"Good for him." Jonathan pointed at the door. "And now piss off. I mean it. I want to be alone."

Richard clearly wasn't satisfied and his sad puppy eyes would have been heart-breaking in any other situation but Jonathan was drunk enough not to care. He leaned back as Richard left the drawing room with his shoulders hanging. Alone at last.