

London Nights

Book 1: The Lost Boy

Von Ulysses

Epilog: Epilog: Wounded

It wasn't the first time other people's recklessness had resulted in him being the one to shoulder the burden of their mistakes. Being the biggest out of the group, it was practically in the job description whether it was said so or not. Either way, Velkan made no show of just how gruesome his wounds were for the sake of the group, moreover for the sake of the guilt-wrecked Banshee quivering in the corner of the kitchen.

"It's not as bad as it seems, Kearon. Truthfully, mate. You can relax." Velkan assured, gritting his teeth into a non-convincing smile as his partner, Jonathan, pressed a wet rag to a particularly deep and angry cut on his bicep.

"Better you than him," Jonathan said grimly. There was no trace of jest in his eyes as Velkan looked into them, expecting there to be at least a smidge of sarcasm in his words. "Cut like this would have killed him outright."

Kearon wilted even more in the corner, hugging himself so tightly Velkan worried for the kid's breathing.

"Oh god!" Kearon wailed. His lower lip trembled and he took a step forward. The young Banshee chewed his lower lip anxiously before settling back in the corner, watching with red-rimmed eyes.

"Good going, babe," Velkan grumbled. Jonathan shrugged.

"He needs to know the implications of his actions. And the consequences. Hold that there," Jonathan instructed. Velkan rolled his eyes and offered Kearon a reassuring smile.

"It's a common mistake," Velkan shrugged.

"No, it isn't," Jonathan objected. Kearon whimpered and looked like he was going to faint. A low growl rumbled from deep inside Velkan's chest. Before the wolf could chastise his lover, the door to the kitchen opened, nearly smashing into Kearon who was huddled in on himself behind it.

"So I heard the wolf almost got himself killed saving the Tran-!" Sydney began as he skipped into the room as if it were Christmas morning.

"SYDNEY!" Velkan interrupted loudly. Sydney's brow crumpled and Velkan jerked his head forward, indicating for Sydney to turn around. He quirked an eyebrow and did so, noticing Kearon in the corner.

"Ah. Yes, that would be him." Sydney nodded, plastering on a painfully fake smile.

"Hey there, death-baby. How's it going?" Sydney gave a curt wave of his hand before turning his back on Kearon, a look of guilt flitting across his face.

"So what is it Liz has you chasing this time?" Sydney continued. He stepped closer to Velkan, his eyes inspecting every cut and bruise on the wolf with scary precision.

"We actually could have used your help on this one." Jonathan said. He came back from rummaging around in his bag on the chair. "It was some type of barbed thorn demon in Hyde Park. Whatever is in its venom won't let me close the wound. I already stitched him up twice and it's eating through my stitches."

"Mon dieu! Are you sewing with your eyes closed, Blondie?" Sydney snorted. Jonathan stood up and levelled Sydney with a challenging glare.

"You think you can do better?"

"Yes." Sydney said simply and plucked the needle and thread out of Jonathan's hand. He shooed Jonathan out of his way and stood next to the wolf, the patient having been instructed before to take a seat on the table so Jonathan could work level with him.

"So, what went wrong?" Sydney wanted to know.

"Ouch!" Velkan yelped as Sydney pierced his skin with the needle.

"Baby," Jonathan teased, his thin lips pulling into a smirk. Velkan stuck his tongue out at him. Jonathan turned to Kearon and sighed, crossing his arms over his chest. He gestured for the Banshee to come out of the corner.

"Care to enlighten the short horny bloke on what went wrong?" Jonathan said.

"I could just as easily sew your mouth shut when I'm done here," Sydney said in a tone that had the rest of them questioning the levity of his claim.

"I....." Kearon cleared his throat and avoided looking at anybody's eyes; he avoided looking at Velkan altogether. "I stalled. I had the chance t-t-to incapacitate him with a scream--"

"Whoa, what?" Sydney said sharply, his eyes cutting to Velkan and Jonathan. "He's using his scream in the field already?"

"Yes." Jonathan said. "He has been for quite some time now."

"You'd know that if you were here more often and not gallivanting around Paris," Velkan said but with a snicker. Sydney said nothing but Kearon noticed that he shifted away from him.

"I stalled and.. and... Velkan stepped in the way to take the blow." Kearon said.

"Stupid," Sydney said.

"Hey! Be nice, he's new to going on missions with us." Velkan snapped.

"Not him, idiot. I mean you!" Sydney said. He finished sewing the cut shut and bit the string off. Jonathan put his hand on his hip and pointed at the wound.

"Now watch. It'll start to fray." Jonathan said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah....." Sydney said. He held his hand over the wound and danced his fingers along with the stitches as if he was playing the piano, his slender digits moving sensuously. Tendrils of green vapour spun from the tips of his fingers, curling back against his hand and snaking through his fingers, lithesome and entrancing. Sydney bent his wrist forward only a bit and the vapour darted forward like a snake at Velkan's wound. Sydney continued his finger-dancing, his mouth falling open a bit. A second snap of his wrist and the vapours streamed into Velkan's wound, pulling away from Sydney's fingers until they vanished into the wolf's skin completely.

"What was that?" Kearon asked his voice barely over a whisper.

"I encouraged Velkan's body to heal faster by giving his already impressive regenerative abilities a pheromone boost," Sydney said, again not even looking at Kearon. Velkan looked at his arm and gently touched the stitching, cringing as it clearly still hurt.

"It's holding," Velkan observed.

"Of course it is," Sydney said, glowing with pride. Jonathan mumbled something that sounded like 'show-off.'

"What about that scratch you got, little buddy?" Velkan asked. "Shall we take a look at it?"

"Probably better. hm?" Jonathan said, stepping over to Kearon. The Banshee took a reflexive step back. Jonathan's eyes widened and he held his hands up. "Whoa...sorry. I was just going to have a look."

"I'm...I'm fine. It is really... really just a scratch... I...I think I'm going to take a shower. You know...clean up a little bit." Kearon said, excusing himself. He slipped through the door and headed towards the stairs before anyone could react. Almost up the steps to the door into the grand hall, he stopped and listened even though he didn't know if he wanted to hear what they were talking about now.

"When has he started screaming?" Sydney asked.

"About a week ago. We have him training with small things first, you know. Localizing it, focusing it on one central object." Velkan said. "Which, I must admit, still needs work."

"How is the ringing in your ear?" Jonathan teased.

"Oh come on, that was an accident. He'll get there. Just wait, he'll direct that awful sound like a pro soon enough."

"Oh, so he'll be a precision killer. That's good." Sydney said, sarcasm abounds.

"He won't be much of anything if he keeps freezing like that," Jonathan said. "His fear-inducing ability is powerful but he has almost no control over it and it's of little use because he has to touch people for it. If he can't master that scream, he'll be dead weight."

"Babe."

"It's true. Some people are not cut out for this work. That's why they go to Paris to shop instead."

"About sewing your mouth shut..." Sydney said, causing a burst of laughter from both Velkan and Jonathan.

Kearon couldn't listen to anymore. He hurried up the stairs and through the door into the hall, desperate for a shower.

Half an hour later, Kearon was sitting on his bed and stared at the wall across from him. His hair was still wet and the purple ends darker than usual. He had picked a room close to the stairs which led up to where Richard and Tariq lived and across the hall from Myra. He didn't own much but the room was made homely by presents which he had received from the others.

A string of fairy lights which he had gotten from Richard was draped over the shelf with his books. Velkan had made a sketch of Richard and Kearon which Kearon kept in a frame next to the books. Tariq had given him a scented candle, which was a sign of true friendship according to Richard since the Ifrit was obsessed with those.

Now staring at those presents brought tears to his eyes. He jumped as he heard a knocking on the door.

"It's me. Can I come in?" Velkan said muffled through the wood.

"Just a moment!" Kearon scrambled off the bed and quickly put on some jeans and a shirt. "Come in!" he said and then noticed he was wearing the shirt backwards.

"Can we talk?" Velkan asked as he came into the room. If he noticed that Kearon was wearing his shirt the wrong way, he didn't show it.

"... sure."

Kearon sat down on the bed, a little uncertain what to do and where to look, while Velkan sat cross-legged on the floor, smiling up to him.

"You know I have good ears, right?"

Kearon nodded. His eyes were fixed on the reddened line of stitches on Velkan's bicep.

"I heard the door and your steps, you were listening in."

Kearon flushed but nodded again. "It's okay... what Jon said..."

"He doesn't mean it-" Velkan started but Kearon interrupted him right away.

"He does. And he's right. I'm useless."

"Don't say that, little buddy. You're only just starting. And I was against taking you along, to begin with. It's too early. Hell, I would be against Richard going out there if he wasn't old enough to decide. Same goes for Myra. I hate seeing you guys in danger."

"But I need to be useful!" Kearon's long fingers dug into his duvet. "I need to be, because..."

"Because otherwise, we'll kick you out?"

Kearon looked up, finally meeting Velkan's gaze. He didn't know what to say but the wolf was right. He was scared of being useless for exactly that reason. Everyone in this group played a part. Everyone but him. Everyone had his place here. Everyone... but him.

"Do you really believe that?" Velkan said quietly, a warm smile on his face. He had read Kearon's expression correctly. "Do you really think that Richard or I would allow that, even if it were true?"

"You are... my family..." he muttered, a tear running down his cheek at last. He wiped it off quickly, not wanting Velkan to see it.

"We are. And that's all that matters." Velkan stood up from the floor and took his place next to Kearon on the bed, wrapped his arm around Kearon's thin frame and gently pulled him closer. Kearon felt a lump in his throat and fought down the tears which tried to come up into his eyes. He needed to be strong.

"You got... got... hurt because of ... because of... me."

"And I'm glad it wasn't you, little buddy."

"... I'm..."

"You're not useless," Velkan said with benevolent determination. "You are part of this family and nothing will change that. If you want to see useless, look at Sydney. He's off shopping half of the time or doing Gods know what."

Choked laughter escaped Kearon. "Don't let him hear that..."

"What's he going to do? I'm stronger than he is." Velkan winked. "You don't have to prove your place here, Kearon. This is your home. And when you're ready, you'll know it. And if you really don't find your place in the field, it doesn't matter either. Take Castor, for example. He's strong as a horse but he's usually not with us on assignments."

Kearon still wasn't fully convinced but he also couldn't argue with what Velkan told him. He sat up straight, though the corners of his mouth still quivered a little. He gave Velkan a brave and determined nod, which was mostly to convince himself.

"What about the scratch on your arm?"

"It's really okay. It wasn't bad." He showed the wolf the spot where he covered the

wound with a bandaid after he had carefully cleaned it under the shower.

"See? You're stronger than you think."

"If you say so..."

"We'll work on that response." Velkan chuckled. "How about we go downstairs and watch some telly together? Or we could head out to Folklores."

"I'd like that," Kearon said, not picking either. He rather meant it as a general decision because no matter what they did, he was glad to be with his family.