Summary

When Farouk escaped David, he found Oliver. What Oliver didn’t expect was to be given the keys to his body under the pretense of a partnership. What surprised him, however, was how hard the shadows’ words are to shake when they're whispered in your ear.

Notes

As a particular person whose particular fic inspired me to write my own after they've dragged me into Legion purgatory. This is going to be rather the bumpy ride.
Proposition

There were two sounds currently playing in an empty white room on some faraway corner of the astral plane; screaming, and Vivaldi’s Four Seasons. (The latter was more audible than the other, if only just.) Some may read this and think this as a sign of the duplicity of man, for how inner turmoil most often came in the wraps of something smarter, something more approachable, appreciable—but, you may read this and instead say that this is the noise of a telepath being possessed by another telepath. It’s your choice as to which you believe.

The screaming died earlier than Vivaldi did, and so the emptiness of the room went the same way, now captured in the image of a mid-century villa, complete with patio and pool. The sun’s whine as it beat down all that it touched replaced it as though it had never been.

Oliver Bird, shirtless and drinking from a martini, adrift on the pool in a lime-yellow floating mat, decided that possession didn’t hurt as he had imagined it would. Vivaldi was about through with spring when, without thinking, he brought the glass to his lips. It was only then, really, when the gin touched the back of his mouth and burned it, that he realized what had happened besides the sensations of possession. Not unlike a wire finally meeting its jumper.

“This is new,” he said, aloud, to no-one. “It’s warm, though.”

He could contend with warm, for having lived in the shell of an ice-cube for… what was the word? Long? No, that was the measure. It was—ah! Yes, it was time. A long time. He’d since lost the sense for being exact.

“Mm…” He took another sip of his martini, briefly thoughtful. “I don’t like this music.”

Vivaldi, offended, exited stage left for punchy jazz. Oliver smiled, snapping his fingers in beat to the tune. “Much better.”

He was alone, for a while. Eventually a woman came from the villa and out to the patio, tired and twitchy, and Oliver didn’t mind it when she got on her own float and was beside him. It was company. He could abide by company, as he did the warmth. They didn’t talk, though. That was fine. Oliver wasn’t the type to expound on some subject if the other wasn’t of a mind for it.

Then, abruptly, he turned over and the woman was gone. Perhaps she’d been summoned. Oliver wondered if he’d be summoned sometime, too.

He didn’t have to wait for very long.

“Farouk.” Simple, easy, as if stating the weather. (Oliver was more cut up about the loss of his martini, all told.)

“Mon ami,” went the raspy, low voice, in a particular interpretation of what French sounded like—accurate to be understood, at least. “A question.”

“What is it?” Oliver was in another room, a dark room, blazoned by neon lights that emanated a color slightly purple, slightly gray. They were both seated.

“Have you,” Farouk pointed with his index finger, the rest of his hand on a shot of rum, “Ever
encountered another telepath before? Not including our dearest friend David, of course.”

Oliver thought about it. Then he said, “That I remember? Well, that’d be you, Farouk. In the astral plane. Although, we never did talk. I suppose I enjoyed the comfort of my cube. Apologies for the lack of any correspondence.”

Farouk, behind his black-tinted glasses, was smirking. “None taken. You helped me.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I didn’t think of it as so before,” said Farouk, “but… Changements de perception. Perception changes, mon ami. You helped me a great deal, waking the others to their fantasy of that hospital. I, perhaps, laid it on thick. But now, I am free. Vous avez ma gratitude.”

Oliver raised a brow. Then, looking around, very much feeling naked without a martini, frowned. “In my body.”

“Do not look so blue,” Farouk said. “It will be taken care of. In fact, I have come to you with a proposition, mon ami, should you listen.”

Oliver was listening.

Farouk let down his shot glass and knitted his fingers together above the knee. “I want you to have control.”

…

Oliver’s head could have hit a clear forty-five degrees. “What?”

“I know, it sounds most strange, doesn’t it? The angul—the parasite—handing it back to his host, so soon. But here is the thing, mon ami. When I was in David, I spent my energy hiding. Boring, so boring. Oh, sure, some exhilaration here and there when I manifested as David manifested, only to be left back in a low place, waiting once more for that high. I want to experience the world, mon ami. The sights. The sounds. I have missed them the most. But when I must focus on carrying that body around, it takes away from that experience, you see? So let me be… a friend on the shoulder. The voice in your ear.”

Oliver studied Farouk’s expression and found little purchase. His words, though, were layered like honey, purposefully soothing as much they were confusing. He couldn’t say he felt at ease, wiping an imaginary spot in his cream suit for a physical worry. Farouk wasn’t lying, figured Oliver, not in the saying one thing and meaning another variety. He was lying by omission, and they both knew it.

Farouk only smiled. “Ah. You’re afraid I’m doing this to torment you. Warum ärgern? Are we not friends, mon ami? Two spirits who have spent their dues on this very plane, exercising our powers to become gods? You spent twenty-one years here, of your own volition. Do you not look upon the real world with a sense of nostalgia? It will benefit the both of us. It is no punishment. Think of it…” He gestured for the air. “…as a reward. For letting me in.”

For letting me in.

Oliver was not David. Oliver was a man who had dreams, who thought to create Summerland as a temple to that dream, only to let himself fade to the astral when he realized that more than that he
wished to be among the land of dreams instead of merely having their memory. If he were David, he’d have spit at Farouk’s feet and told him to go to Hell. He didn’t have to say anything for that much to be clear.

Farouk’s smile showed teeth. “Good, good,” he said, as if praising a child, or a pet. “This is the beginning of a wonderful partnership, mon ami.”

Oliver’s eyes widened. He—they—were in a car. Driving south. “Where are we going?”

Farouk was in the back seat. “To a nightclub, my dear.”
Let’s address the elephant in the room.

Although technically not coined yet, it’s only a few years off, enough to lend the benefit of the doubt. It’s a little something known as Stockholm Syndrome. What is Stockholm Syndrome? It is officially described as a condition where the hostage develops a psychological alliance with their captors during a hostage crisis as a survival mechanism, but wearing glasses and a white coat about it doesn’t begin to address the reality of the scenario.

Stockholm Syndrome, at its core, is being captured and learning to love the fact you were. It’s taking reality and bucking it for the most comfortable thought of all: that you love and are loved, even when a gun is next to your temple and commands are barked at you a mile a minute. Like a turtle retreating into its shell, believing then, it’s invincible.

Terrible kitschy music blaring on the speakers and a horde of bodies a milieu, Oliver did not find himself feeling at all that invincible.

Farouk was beside him. “You do know why we are here, no?”

“No.” Oliver was being honest. “You haven’t told me anything, Farouk. Aside from the deal, which, a part of me…” He sipped the glass of bourbon. “…wonders why I said yes.”

Farouk laughed, as if Oliver had told him a fine joke. “Oh, but you know why. I told you, mon ami. Is Amahl Farouk a liar? Unzuverlässig?”

“A deceiver,” Oliver clarified helpfully. “It’s strange.”

“What is? The nightclub? Yes, most strange. I have never heard this music in my life, neither the dancing. I cannot say if I like it, or if it’s among the worst I have witnessed.”

“Not that, although, for what it’s worth, I agree,” said Oliver. “What I meant, Farouk, is the fact you’ve revealed yourself to me. There’s no mask. This is you.”

Farouk was laughing again. This time, it was loud.

“Oh,” he said, righting his glasses over his eyes, “That is a good one, my dear Oliver. But… Hmashh ake maske wjwd dard. There is always a mask. Besides—”

A hand was on Oliver’s shoulder. He was stiff as marble. “—there is no need to hide, anymore. You must understand, mon ami, I am tired of the hiding. The playing hide and seek. You and I have more important things to be doing than me speaking to you in the mouths of proxies. Which one would I choose? Your wife? You don’t even remember her. So, je suis simplement. It is easier on the both of us.”

“You’re rather fond of saying that.”

“Mm?”

“Easier for the both of us. As if we were a team, Farouk.”
Farouk raised a brow. “Are we not?” He gestured with the hand to the rest of the nightclub floor from the bar shelf, then had it returned to Oliver’s shoulder. “Which one of us brought us here? To this place? Whose hands were on the wheel, when he could have sent us both hurtling off a cliff or into a tree? *Mon ami,* I am your passenger. You’re taking care of me.”

Oliver took one long look at Farouk, then downed the rest of his bourbon right then and there.

“For the record,” said Oliver, leaving the glass on the counter, “I’m still eighty percent sure she’s Chinese.”

Farouk let go of him, looking back on the crowd, one leg crossed over the other on his three piece suit. “We’re here to look for someone,” he said. “A rather important person. A rare specimen, too.”

“Who?” Oliver asked. “You already have me.”

Farouk grinned, holding up a finger. “Ah, but *mon ami,* for as much as I treasure your company, I want more. There is more to life than burrowing myself in the bodies of others. I want… mein Körper.”

Oliver was confused. “How? When I was in the plane, I was frozen. For all the good it did me, too, because it trapped me in that damnable ice cube for as long as it did. You weren’t, too, were you?”

“In a sense, I was. They could not destroy my body, when I was so cruelly ripped from it back in my country. It is a tragic story. Perhaps I will recount it to you, during this partnership of ours. They put it away. But, I have learned, that there is no burial deep or hidden enough to hide from me. My dear Oliver, do you know how long it took me to find our friend David?”

“I’m not familiar, no.” Oliver wasn’t entirely certain he liked where Farouk was going with this. It was a sensation he’d be well acquainted with in the coming weeks.

Farouk shined his teeth with his grin. Then his face was softer, as if mimicking regret. The music and dancing continued to blare around them, but colder, less energetic. The world was slowing down. Grinding to a halt. Being suspended so that Farouk might look into Oliver as if he were less a person, less an idea, and more a savory slice of meat with a pair of ears as a captive audience. He leaned forward.

“When he was born,” whispered Farouk, the fangs of a spider, “I was there.”

Oliver couldn’t take his eyes off the black rims of Farouk’s glasses. His head swung just enough to flag down the bartender. “Barkeep! Another bourbon, like your life depended on it!” And when it came through the veil, the world started spinning again. Farouk was not beside Oliver, faded to the wind in the impression of his immortal cavalier.

*We are looking for a monk,* said a raspy voice in Oliver’s head. *You’ll know when you see him.*

Oliver had a death grip on his bourbon. Raising it to his face, looking out to the lamps and lights of the crowd, the heat pounding through the dancefloor, he made a face strung halfway between a smile and a grimace. It was there that Oliver decided, with certainty, that he did not feel invincible in the slightest, not when the spider lived in his turtle’s shell. He chuffed.

“Groovy.”
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