

Dancing to the Moon

The first time I set eyes on Patrick O'Leary what I had left of a heart almost jumped out of my chest. All I could see to start with were his soft blond curls I wanted to touch and his smiling blue eyes I wanted to have looking into mine forever. Then I saw him dance and I knew that I wanted to be his only dancing partner. For eternity.

I shouldn't have even been there. I'm only sixteen. They're very strict at the Clerkenwell Arms, especially when the Irish dance trials are on. But it was a new moon that night so I guess I was at my best. Talbot had warned me that I would still have a monthly cycle of sorts though it would be very different from before. And spot on, it follows the moon. This is always my shining day, the day of the new moon.

I've been like this for over a year now and I'm getting used to it. I can never remember the details of the moonless nights, but the next day I'm always full of energy and confident and look much older and very glamorous. So, what with the lipstick, and the short skirt and that bitchy glow inside, I got in without them even asking for ID. I even bought a glass of wine for form's sake. No sweat.

It was the music that made me go in. The music and a need for some warmth. Some human warmth that is - I don't notice the winter's cold any more. And I guess it was because I was just in that sort of mood. New moon day. Daredevil day.

I couldn't take my eyes off him as he danced. Back and neck straight. Gaze fixed. Arms rigid by his sides. His feet never missed a beat and always came down in exactly the right place. My own feet started tapping to the music.

I used to dance when I was a little girl. Lots of us do. I never got all that far with it, though I was not at all bad. I just got into other things. Like you do. But I can still remember all of the steps.

He started dancing around the room. He paused at each table where any good looking female sat. His feet still worked, of course. I had to exercise so much self-control not to go over to those hussies and scratch their eyes out or tear out their hair. He was sweating slightly and his manly, slightly musky smell was getting to me. There were others in the room, other good-looking young men, some of them also dancers, but I only had eyes – and a nose - for him.

At last he paused by my table and fixed me with his eyes. Tap, tap, tap tap, tappity tap, went his feet, as if they were asking a question. A faint smile opened his lips, his eyebrows rose slightly. His pupils grew large. He was taking me in, was he? The bitch inside smirked but I tried to keep my gaze neutral. Tapity, tap. Tap tap. He nodded.

I stood up from the table. My feet began to work. Yes, I remembered the steps. It was easy, especially with all this energy. In fact I had to keep it in check a little, or somebody would have noticed something. I didn't even break a sweat or get out of breath. He was breathing hard by now yet he still kept exact time and rhythm. I loved him for that. I loved him because he was finding it tiring now and was still being perfect. The smell of him made my head light.

We were close at times. The place was so full there was barely a dance floor. We almost touched but not quite. As our shoulders and hands came within inches of each other I felt an exchange of energy. Tingles crackled through my body and I had the feeling that he gained some energy from me. We moved lightly around one another, our eyes and our feet in conversation. This was ecstasy. This I wanted forever. Tap tap tappity tap.

The music stopped. It had to eventually. It felt as though a thread between us was broken. The crowd in the pub started clapping and cheering. He was a little out of breath.

“Patrick O’Leary,” he whispered.

“Fyonah McBride,” I whispered back.

He nodded and held up his hand to shush the crowd. “Ladies, and gentlemen,” he cried. “Fyonah McBride.”

The crowd cheered and hooted.

He turned to me and grinned. “Fyonah McBride,” he said, “will you dance with me again?”

I nodded. “Of course,” I said. Why wouldn’t I? Why wouldn’t I dance with this man forever?

He kissed me on the cheek. “Thank you,” he said.

Now I was breathless.

But then he was surrounded by all the trial officials, and people who were obviously his friends and fans. The moon was rising. A tiny slither of common sense crept back in. This wouldn’t work. I was an underage school girl, with a strange monthly cycle, who had school tomorrow. Better just to go home and dream about him.

The second time I saw Patrick O’Leary I was on the bus two days later coming home from school. He got on at the corner of O’Malley Row and took one look at us all and went back downstairs. He looked straight at me actually, but I thank God that all he seemed to see was just another St Catherine’s girl in green. Green’s not my colour. Red and purple suit me now. And thank the lord all of us girls in this boring little Irish town decided that we wanted ankle length skirts for our uniform or he might have recognised my legs. But there was still enough time for those clear blue eyes of his to send a shockwave through my body.

The third time I saw him was in the village chip shop the next day. I walked straight into him. He was coming in as I was going out. I almost dropped my chips my hands were shaking so much.

“Fyonah McBride,” he said. “I’m glad to see you’re keeping your strength up. But have you been hiding from me? I need you to dance with me again. So when’s it to be then? Hmm?” He lifted my chin up and made me look at him.

I almost forgot to breath. He was so lovely. Lovelier in real life than he’d been in all the dreams I’d made up about him. That look was what I wanted. That face.

He smiled.

“Go eat your chips,” he said. “But come tonight. Half past six. The Arcadia Rooms. Above O Brien’s. Don’t be late.” He touched my cheek and then carried on in into the chip shop.

I didn’t eat the chips, of course. What would somebody with a body like mine want with fat, greasy chips? As usual, I served them to all the stray cats and dogs I could find between the chippy and our house, preserving just a few as evidence.

“Fyonah, are you going to have your tea?” Daddy called as I went in through the back.

“I’ve had chips, Daddy, look,” I replied, showing him the almost empty packet.

“Well, you know what your mummy said, if you don’t start eating properly...”

“Yes, and he’ll only say the same as before,” I said.

“You’re sure those chips were enough?” he went on.

“Sure, Daddy.”

Last time, four months ago, I’d refused to see anybody but Talbot when they’d insisted I saw a doctor.

“He’s a strange man,” said Mummy. “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather see that nice new lady doctor?”

“Talbot or nobody,” I’d replied.

They just put that down in the end to more of my teenage quirkiness.

“She’s not eating properly,” Mummy had said to the doctor. “She doesn’t sit down at the table with us any more.”

That was true. I usually took my food up to my room, disposed of it somehow and then brought the empty plate down later.

“That doesn’t matter so much,” said Talbot. “As long as she is getting enough nutrition, and she looks bonny enough to me.”

He weighed and measured me and mumbled “Fine,” several times.

Then he looked meaningfully at me. “And the – er – monthly cycle is going all right? There may be changes ... as you grow ... “

I nodded.

“You know what Dr Talbot said last time,” I said to Daddy and escaped to my room.

I spent the rest of the afternoon working through my wardrobe trying to decide what to wear for Patrick.

Six evenings in a row we danced and hardly spoke. Tap, tap, tappity tap. It was as though our feet did the talking. My energy was holding up. And he was fit – both ways – and strong. We grew to know each other well even though we didn’t talk. We communicated through our feet. And every evening he walked me home and kissed me before I went in. Just lightly. That daredevil in me wanted more from him.

“What about your school work?” said Mummy.

“Not a problem,” I said. It wasn’t. I just did it at night while they slept.

“Fyonah...,” warned Daddy.

Butt out!

The seventh evening was the end of the trials.

“The couple we want to go forward,” announced the judge, “are Fyonah McBride and Patrick O’Leary.”

He hugged me and kissed my hair. “My good girl,” he whispered.

As we walked to my home that night he talked more than he had the rest of the time we’d been together. He held my hand and squeezed it tight. We were just like any other couple. When we got to my house, he pulled me into the shadows. And kissed me really hard this time. And though, as we got to the middle of the month, the daredevil was calming a little I still wanted more.

“Oh Fyonah McBride,” he said as he pulled away from me. “I think I’m falling in love with you.”

Well, good. Then, panic. If there was no dancing tomorrow, would I see him? All day and all night was already too long to be away from him. Could I bear even one evening alone?

“Can I see you tomorrow?” he asked. “Even though there’s no dancing?”

We walked through the woods. Odd, he didn’t seem to mind the cold. Naturally, I didn’t. It was a fine evening otherwise, with the moon one night off full and shining brightly. A romantic dream. But common sense was kicking in fast. I couldn’t do this any more.

I stopped walking and held back. “I’m only sixteen and I’m still at school,” I said as quickly as I could.

His face did not move at first. Then his eyes crinkled into a smile and I had the sensation of my heart leaping.

“I know,” he said. “I saw you that day on the bus. That’s why I’ve been careful.”

“But I am sixteen,” I said.

He pulled me back towards him and kissed me properly.

“Fyonah, oh my Fyonah,” he whispered. “Dance with me forever.”

Oh, I would, I would. I ran my fingers through his hair. That musky smell about him was even stronger tonight and I loved him all the more for it. He pulled me gently to the ground. I could not get enough of him and he seemed just as eager.

Afterwards, as we were walking home, he sighed. He stopped walking and turned to face me.

“Oh, Fyonah,” he said. “I cannot see you tomorrow. Just the one time.”

“Can’t I come with you?” I asked. “Where do you have to be?”

“No, you really can’t, my love. You really can’t.” He touched my cheek and turned my face so that I was looking into those lovely blue eyes. “But the day after, there’ll be the dancing again. And after that...”

I had to be content. His eyes told me that he really meant it, that I couldn’t go with him. But they also told me that he would be back and that it wasn’t just that he’d got what he wanted and was ready to move on. And I loved him all the more for it.

I didn’t know what to do with myself the next evening. I was no longer content to dream of my man-boy. I wanted him with me now and always. Despite the full moon which should have brought some sanity and smothered the daredevil, she was still there, hanging on.

I decided to try to run off my frustration and made for the woods where Patrick had loved me the night before. I was trying to relive those sweet moments. The memory was so strong that I could smell him but the lack of him was so great that I could feel tears stinging my eyes though I know I can no longer cry.

Then I saw a flash of green. A man's jumper. Someone in the woods in front of me. That way of walking unmistakable. So it wasn't a memory causing me to smell him. He was there and his scent was stronger than ever. What did it remind me of? Man? Dog? Fox? Animal-like anyway. His smell but more of it. It made my ghost heart beat so strongly that it became a physical pain. Why was he here in the woods again? Did he have another lover?

If he did and I found her, I'd kill her for sure.

"Your emotions will quieten mid-cycle," Talbot had said. "This is the best time to kill for vengeance rather than food. You're calm enough to calculate, to use good judgement, yet still strong enough to kill swiftly and cleanly. Avoid leaving evidence at all costs."

My mid-cycle always coincided with the full moon. So, yes, I would kill but I wasn't calm. Talbot was only half right.

Patrick suddenly dropped to the ground. He howled. If my heart could actually beat it would have stopped now. I realised now why he had to avoid me tonight. He too has a pesky cycle. A moon-determined cycle.

This was dangerous for me, more dangerous than if I were a normal girl but the daredevil and the girl who loved Patrick were both too fascinated to move away. I watched the change.

You know, it isn't how they show it in the movies or tell it in the books. Well, not in Patrick's case anyway. He danced into it. He swirled and turned. Gracefully and lightly. Like

when he's at the trials. Like when he's with me. With each turn he became hairier, more animal-like, more wolf than boy.

His clothes and his flesh both turned into fur. Gently. Subtly. His eyes glazed over, lost their humanness. He began to drool, spittle streaking his fur silver. And that wonderful musky smell just got stronger and stronger. It made me want him so much – Patrick, that is, not the wolf. Then he turned and howled at the moon.

When he looked back at me his eyes were all wolf. And then a flash of Patrick. Was he looking at me, his lover, or at his greatest enemy? I should have gone by now but I could still only stare.

“Werewolves are our greatest threat,” Talbot told me just after the change. “The best time to fight them is at the middle of the cycle. You can also outrun them then – though why you would try to when you can kill no one of our kind would know.”

Where could I run to? This island is not big enough.

“You can't outswim them,” Talbot had said. “If the water's too wide for one stride, jump from boat to boat but don't be seen.”

He's was still looking at me, the wolf. He should have jumped by now. Those could not be Patrick's eyes. Talbot said the wolves never remember their human existence until the sun comes up. But he knew something. This wolf did.

I needed to run.

If I was to be Patrick O Leary's dancing partner again I must run and run until the sun comes up.

He snarled, then howled and bore his teeth. He nodded his head, almost pointing the way I should go. Still he didn't spring like Talbot told me he would.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, my Patrick,” I whispered.

I turned and set the daredevil and the energy that was left into running my fastest, over fields, through woods, jumping from hilltop to hilltop and then from boat to boat, ignoring the howls and growls and snapping teeth behind me.

“I will outrun you, Wolf O’Leary,” became my mantra. “For tomorrow I need to dance with my lover.”

I ran and ran. The first rays of the sun appeared over the horizon. The moon began to sink. But the howls were just as frequent and the musky smell seemed stronger than ever even though he was behind me.

“He should be getting human again by now,” I thought. Even my extraordinary energy was going. I could have turned and faced him.... But I might have killed my lover or he might have killed me.

I was getting weaker. Was it possible? Could one of my kind die of exhaustion? Never!

A pain shot up my back. How could this be? We are not supposed to feel pain. Something was gripping me and I could no longer hear him behind me. Wolf teeth in my side.

This would not do. I felt the blood charging round my body, preparing me for the attack. The monster in me wanted to tear off the wolf’s head.

“Remember he’s your Patrick, your lover,” the girl in me whispered. I held back for a split second but then felt a snarl rising in my throat. I had his head in my hands now and I bent towards his neck, ready to bite. His musky smell was driving me into a different sort of frenzy this time.

The sun suddenly dazzled me as it slipped finally over the horizon. The moon had gone. A human hand was holding mine.

“Fyonah MacBride, will you dance with me forever now?” said my Patrick as he smiled at me out of his twinkling blue eyes. “Only don’t run so fast and so far the next time I try to ask you.”

I bit my lip and frowned. I’d almost killed him, my precious Patrick.

He touched me lightly on the cheek.

“Hey Fyonah MacBride,” he said softly. “Don’t you worry now. We’ll get this cycle under control. We’ll dance to the moon.”

Then I knew that Patick O’Leary would be my dancing partner for eternity.