in the night, you are just like me

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1188.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Batman - All Media Types
Relationships:	Duke Thomas & Bruce Wayne, Alfred Pennyworth & Bruce Wayne
Characters:	Duke Thomas, Bruce Wayne, Alfred Pennyworth
Additional Tags:	Creature of the Night Bruce Wayne, Duke Thomas Needs a Hug, probably he's sooooo little in this fic, Duke Thomas Has Photokinesis, in the sense that....., Child Duke Thomas, Duke Thomas Deserves the World, Protective Bruce Wayne, Alternate Universe - Setting Change - Fantasy, Cross-Posted on AO3, Cross-Posted on SquidgeWorld
Language:	English
Collections:	anonymous
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-03 Words: 1,211 Chapters: 1/1

in the night, you are just like me

by Anonymous

Summary

a bright-eyed little boy convinces a creature of the night to break his self-inflicted exile.

Duke's eyes are young, and bright with all they have yet to see.

Bruce has seen millennia fall away, has watched civilisations burn bright into nothing at all. Bruce has never seen anything as trapping as Duke's eyes.

Is that why, when the child comes to his door with leaves in his hair, wet dirt dragging underfoot and even wetter hair sticking and obscuring his face but not his eyes as he spoke. Is that the reason he listens?

A desperate tale of betrayal and terror, of dark magic and murderous demons and a child determined to trudge his way through the thick barrier of forests and cliff sides and awful mountain weather to ask another monster for their hand in saving his village.

His eyes were beacons. Even in the warm light of the fireplace, Bruce sees them shine the same. Even as he speaks his horrific tale wrapped in blankets and steadily gripping the mug of warm confection Alfred had dredged from the stores, even then his eyes never dim.

He is so little, Bruce thinks. His shadow, cast on the carpet, envelops him with too much ease. Bruce holds no intention of touching him, of even pushing air from his chest onto the child. An image of cracks rushing across dark skin plays cruelly at the top of his mind, new and familiar all at once.

He had touched the human world before. Seven times prior. Each formed a regret borne of his own hubris. Each a reminder not to brush against it again.

He looked at Duke. His eyes closed and Alfred's own trained on his back.

In sleep, Duke's breathing attains new rhythm, tension falling away from his face and back like leaves on a tree in Autumn. Slow and necessary.

"Sir. Your armor is prepared for you."

"...I have yet to make any decision, Alfred." He did not turn to meet his butler's gaze but his ears pick up the soft push of breath he knows to mean Alfred is laughing.

"Of course, sir. It will remain there." And then he is off and Bruce is alone with his thoughts and the light snores of a sleeping child.

Really, he never had any choice.

Duke opens those shining eyes to Bruce's armored form crouched beside his makeshift bed of pillows and blankets on Bruce's loveseat.

He says, "I will accept your quest."

Bright eyes widen and the blankets shift.

He says, "you will stay here with Alfred."

Those eyes narrow and catch him in their slimmed view. He does not need to be told what they feel.

But he has made enough mistakes.

Without calling, the shadows shift and Alfred appears. Always listening in, always ready.

Batman stands. “Duke.”

Those eyes don’t move from his even as Alfred makes his presence known. He tries to use that in his favour.

“You will. Stay here.” He says, looking into those eyes. He feels like he’s losing.

Then. Quietly, a whisper over the crackle of kindle in the fireplace and the rustle of blankets moving on the loveseat, a gruff little, “fine.”

The eyes break away from his own finally, looking to the fire. Alfred catches them from behind the curls of the disgruntled child and Bruce nods once and turns to go.

The corridor to the door is unlit and yet the painted eyes hanging from the walls watch him, judging, reminding him of his every failed promise. None of them rest as heavy on his back as the bright gaze he leaves in front of the fire.

Batman catches Alfred’s voice, soft and assuring, as he crosses the threshold of his home for the first time in, perhaps, far too long.

The sky is still dark. The ground underneath has already swallowed every trace of Duke’s trek to his door.

Only his thoughts accompany him through the thick of the forests that had risen atop his hill.

He had not let Alfred tend to their lands since his retreat. He sees the result of that now, with each branch he must duck and every root he must step over.

He does not wholly regret that now, somewhere in him still assured of the necessity of protecting others with the added barrier of thick, unnavigable forests atop the wards he had woven into the earth. He does regret every leaf that was caught on Duke.

Even now, he can taste his own magic, thick and cool in the air.

It is untouched.

He nears the end of his lands soon but he pauses.

There is no gap in his wards. No fading, weakened wall that might be amenable to a trespasser.

There is no hole that would let through a child.

Batman picks up the sound in the air, pulling what he can from the Manor he had so long ago departed. There is nothing of concern there.

Instead, what alerts him is the rustle of branches from high above, the sound circling and then dropping nearer. He stiffens in wait and then--

Duke’s eyes meet him from a low-lying branch. His blanket hangs around his neck, the ends pushing off the ground in the wind.

"Sorry," he says in lieu of explanation, "I didn't expect you to take the long way."

Batman thinks of witches and witchcraft and how many times he has burned and been burned by humans who have dipped their fingers into magic.

Bruce thinks of a woman with brown skin and dark eyes and the warmth of her hands clasped in his for the final time.

He says, "Alfred?"

Duke's eyes flutter, but his voice is honest. "Still at the manor. Sorry," again but different. Not to him. "I had to sneak out." The gaze never leaves him, dogged determination pooling with every word.

The mask rests heavier on his body than his armor when he nods, takes the final steps out of his lands with that faint rustle following him.

The night is long, trailing after them in the hush of the dirtpath to the village.

He has not placed the years since he had last left the Manor, but in the dateless memories he holds of this path there was… Hustle. And bustle.

A certain aliveness to the dirt that was more than just the fleeting rustle of Duke's feet brushing leaves, the soft whistles of faraway birds.
It was the scents of carriages and caravans just gone by and whatever remnants left, the ever present warmth in well-trodden soil, that buzz of faraway conversation catching a breeze as birds chirped nearby, all of that bridging to the unshakeable knowledge that life was near.

All of that is gone.

Now, he shivers and adjusts the hood of his cloak. Duke steps closer and Bruce listens for the pattern of his breathing, layered over his footsteps. The path to Gotham is not so lifeless, then.

Still, how long has this route been so abandoned? And why?

Duke's story had held an urgency to it, the type that made him certain it couldn't be the same cause of the years of emptiness he was seeing. But what kind of place would see a child lose everything and let him journey alone to beg his life be returned?

Gotham Town would, apparently.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!