

## Extract from *King of Shadows*: Chapter 1

I liked London. It wasn't like any of the American cities I'd seen: Atlanta, New York, Boston, Cambridge. Looking down from the plane, you saw a sprawling city of red roofs and grey stone, scattered with green trees, with the River Thames winding through the middle criss-crossed by bridge after bridge. When the bus first drove us in from the airport, everything seemed smaller than in the United States: the houses, so many of them joined together in long rows; the cars, the highways. There were tall office buildings, but not gigantic; there were supermarkets, but not the same greedy sprawl. An English taxicab wasn't a normal yellow cab with a light glowing on the roof; it was a boxy black car whose shape dated back, Arby told us, to the days when it had to have enough room for a sitting-down passenger wearing a top hat.

Arby was full of stuff like that. He mellowed, the moment he looked down from the plane and saw all those lines and curves of little red-tiled roofs. He'd been born in England, though nobody knew when or why he'd come to the United States, and somehow nobody had ever asked. Once he'd started talking to English people again, he began to sound a lot more English than he ever had at home.

Some of the Company of Boys stayed in a London University hostel north of the River Thames; some of us stayed in ordinary houses, each with a family. Most of these people were Friends of the Globe, members of a group who'd spent years helping to raise money to build the new Globe Theatre, the copy of the one where Shakespeare worked. My foster-family were called Fisher. Aunt Jen had been nervous about letting me go stay with strange foreigners, until she had a long transatlantic telephone conversation with Mrs Fisher and they both ended up swapping recipes for baking bread, which seemed to make her feel much better.

The Fishers lived in an apartment in a big ugly concrete block with a great view of the River Thames. There was a daughter, older than me, called Claire, and a son who was spending the summer doing a course at the Sorbonne, in Paris. I used his room. It had black wallpaper and several paintings of very strange squashed-looking people, so I didn't ask too much about him. Claire was a serious girl whose favourite subject was politics, and she was always asking questions about the U.S. that I couldn't answer. She was very nice to me though, they all were. When I talked about living with my aunt it didn't make them inquisitive, it made

them keep their distance; like, oh, there's something private here, something we mustn't be nosy about. Maybe the Brits are all like that.

Instead of asking questions, the Fishers made sure they were even nicer to me. They had a flyer for our plays stuck up on their refrigerator door, and a poster out in the hallway to advertise us to the rest of the people in the apartment building. THE AMERICAN COMPANY OF BOYS, it said, with weird bright pictures of Bottom in his ass's head and Caesar with blood all over his toga. 'We have tickets for both your opening performances!' said cosy Mrs Fisher happily. 'We're looking forward to it all so much!'

Mr Fisher was a tall, bald man with a voice that rang out like Arby's, though he wasn't an actor, he worked in a bank. 'But I've done a lot of amateur stuff, y'know,' he said to me. 'Trod the boards, after a fashion.' There was a faintly apologetic note in his voice. Because we were to play at the Globe, and perhaps because we were foreign, he seemed to think of us as professionals even though we were only boys.

Gil Warmun was going to be a professional someday, that was for sure. The more I rehearsed, with him playing Oberon, the more I learned about Puck. I was a mischievous spirit but I was also a king's servant, and Gil never let me forget it. I ran lines with him everyday before rehearsal, and had acrobatics lessons - they called it 'tumbling' - with the other youngest boys, from an English friend of Arby's called Paddy, who had first been an Olympic gymnast and then worked in a circus. I was really happy. We all were. We thought about nothing but the two plays, and the day when we'd be up there performing them. Though we had classes every day, they were no more like school than chocolate cake is like rice pudding.



## Extract from 'King of Shadows': Chapter 2

By the time she came back I was curled up in bed in my pyjamas. She'd brought a hot drink that she made me sip cautiously - hot lemon with some sort of medicine in it - and one of those floppy English hotwater bottles, made of rubber covered with a fuzzy woolly fabric. I cuddled it to me, like a little boy with a warm teddy bear. My head was throbbing. I felt really ill, and about four years old.

Mrs Fisher felt my head again gently. 'Try to sleep,' she said. 'I'll check you again in a little bit. You'll feel better in the morning I promise.'

She pulled the curtains to shut out the daylight, which lasts longer on English summer days than it does where I come from, and I guess she went away, but that's all I remember of that night. There's only darkness when I try to look back, and the feeling of being ill, and the buzzing in my head.

But I'll never ever, forget the next morning.

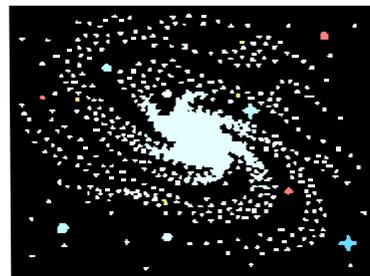
## Extract from King of Shadows : Chapter 3

Between night and morning, Nathan Field has a dream, a dream of flying.

He flies high, high up in the dream, up into the stratosphere, out into space. Space is dark, and prickled all over with bright stars. Then he slows down, coasting and turning in space, as if he were swimming underwater; and below him he sees the planet Earth, bright in the darkness, spinning like a blue ball.

He hangs there for a moment, and then he feels a hand take his own. He can see nobody, there is simply the feel of the hand. It holds him firmly, and pulls, and following the pull he dives down, towards the blue planet. It grows larger and brighter, and he can begin to make out the patterning of oceans and continents. Down he goes, down, until he is heading into a white overlay of clouds.

The hand draws him on, on, into the next day.



## Extract from *King of Shadows* : Chapter 6

'No,' I said truthfully, staring. A white flag was flying from the flagpole on top of the *Globe*, the signal to audiences that a play would be done there that day. For the moment, it was the only thing I recognised. It wasn't the theatre itself that was so startlingly different from the copy that would be built in my time; it was the surroundings. This *Globe* wasn't crowded and dwarfed by towering office buildings; it stood proud and high, and to the south it looked over green fields and billowing trees. In fact there were trees nearly all round it; once we had left the main street that went over London Bridge, I'd felt, with astonishment, that we were walking into the countryside. The streets were still busy and noisy, though, with carts and coaches and horsemen, and others like us bustling on foot.

Like the *Globe* of my own time, the theatre looked new; its plaster gleamed white, the reeds of its thatch lay tight and straight-edged. As Harry chattered proudly on, the apprentice of the Lord Chamberlain's Men explaining his company to the borrowed boy from St Paul's School, I realised that it really was new, finished only a few months earlier. Before that, the company had been playing for years in a theatre - called, believe it or not, just *The Theatre* - across the river in Shoreditch, until their lease ran out and the landlord refused to renew it. Master Burbage and his brother Cuthbert had just inherited *The Theatre* from their father James, who built it. There it stood, useless, on ground they weren't allowed to set foot on. Where were they to act?

## Extract from *King of Shadows* : Chapter 11

I was to wear gleaming green tights, like the skin of some exotic snake, and nothing else but a lot of body paint. The tireman told me that the tights had cost the equivalent of six months of his wages, so that he would personally destroy me if I tore them. He showed me a drawing of the design for the make-up on the rest of me. 'Master Burbage will paint you,' he said, 'but not till the day. It will take almost an hour.'

