

A SHADOW THAT WALKS WHERE BROTHERS FALL

Black

A Shadow That Walks Where Brothers Fall

The night air clung to the stone walls of House Veylan like a damp shroud, heavy with the scent of rain. Kael Varn stepped into its courtyard, the faint hum of conversation and laughter spilling from the main hall as he made his way towards the inner sanctum.

He had received the request in person, a simple note slipped under his door bearing only the insignia of House Veylan: a stylized rose with thorns. The message was clear: Kael's... services were required. He entered the dimly lit sanctum, where four brothers stood waiting, their eyes downcast.

"We have reason to believe one of our own is in trouble," Brother Arin began, not meeting Kael's gaze. "We've had reports of a man seen lurking around Ashen Roads, near the old Broken Writ. Some say he wears a symbol of the Nightforge on his cloak."

Kael raised an eyebrow, intrigued despite himself. The Nightforge, that ancient order, was all but extinct. Its remaining members lived in seclusion, or so the lore claimed.

"I'll take a look," Kael said, already moving towards the door. "Tell me more about this...brother of yours."

Brother Arin handed him a small, intricately carved wooden box. "His name is Eryndor Thorne. He's been sending us cryptic messages, speaking of balance and correction in hushed tones. We fear he may have...overstepped his bounds."

Kael's eyes narrowed as he opened the box, revealing a fragment of parchment with a crude symbol scrawled upon it: the Nightforge emblem.

He slipped into the night, following the thread of subtle clues and rumors that would lead him to Eryndor Thorne. The rain-soaked streets of Ashen Roads lay empty, save for the soft glow of lanterns that marked the way to the Broken Writ - an ancient structure rumored to contain the whispers of the past.

Kael's eyes adjusted to the darkness as he approached the entrance, a massive stone door hidden behind a tangle of vines. He felt the familiar tug of magic within him, but it came at a price: a faint tingling in his fingers, like the prickle of frost on winter skin.

He pushed the sensation aside, focusing on the task ahead.

As he entered the Broken Writ, the air thickened with an almost palpable weight. Kael navigated the narrow corridors, guided by the whispers of the past that seemed to seep from the walls themselves. In a hidden chamber deep within, he found Eryndor Thorne, seated on the stone floor, his eyes closed in contemplation.

A symbol etched into the wall behind him glowed softly – a marker of the Nightforge's presence. Kael approached quietly, observing the man who was said to be one of their own, but who now seemed lost to the same darkness he had once sworn to vanquish.

"Eryndor Thorne," Kael whispered, his voice barely audible over the whispers in his mind. "You're walking a thin line. I can correct it, or...we could speak about balance, and what it truly means."

Thorne opened his eyes, a fleeting moment of recognition before he looked away, lost in thought.

In that instant, Kael knew: there was no correction to be made, only the echoes of failure that haunted the man. The symbol on the wall pulsed softly, as if sensing its own kindred spirit. A faint hum of magic swelled within Kael, urging him to act – but he checked it, remembering the cost.

"I'll guide you out," Kael said instead, extending a hand to Thorne. "But for now, we walk together, in darkness."

And so they emerged into the rain-soaked night, side by side, two shadows moving through the streets of Ashen Roads – Kael and Eryndor Thorne, walking where brothers should not fall.

They navigated the winding streets of Ashen Roads with a silent understanding, their footsteps synchronized by Kael's gentle guide. Thorne's eyes seemed to hold a weight that rivaled the night itself, as if the darkness within him had grown so dense it threatened to consume everything in its path.

As they walked, the buildings grew taller, their windows like empty eyes watching from the shadows. Kael caught snippets of hushed conversations and the scent of cheap wine, but Thorne navigated these alleys with a practiced ease that spoke of a man familiar with the darker corners of this city. He didn't resist when Kael fell back to keep pace beside him, their shoulders brushing together in the narrow passage.

They turned onto a side street lined with blacksmiths and tanneries, where patrons spilled from the taverns into the rain-lashed night. The stench of burning iron and damp leather hung heavy over the cobblestones as Thorne led Kael through the crowded throng, his eyes scanning the crowd with an unnerving intensity. For a moment, Kael glimpsed something almost like recognition flicker across the faces

around them – people knew Thorne, but their expressions were shrouded in fear and suspicion.

The air grew thick with smoke from the tanneries as they pushed into an even narrower alleyway. The smell of tar and hide gave way to something else: oil, burning metal, and a metallic tang that set Kael's teeth on edge. He sensed the presence of magic again – this time, a sharp, coppery scent that made his gut tighten.

"Where are we going?" Kael asked, his voice barely audible over the thrum of hammering from the blacksmiths.

Thorne's only response was to quicken his pace, until they emerged into an open courtyard surrounded by ancient walls. At its center stood a dilapidated forge, its chimney puffing out plumes of smoke that danced in the rain-soaked air. The symbol on Thorne's cloak seemed to glow brighter with each step, and Kael felt the weight of his own magic respond – a stinging sensation like saltwater on an open wound.

Inside the forge, shadows danced across walls scarred by flame and heat, where half-finished projects hung like skeletal hands, waiting for life. A figure hunched over a glowing ember, hammering away with practiced ease. The metal beneath their blows seemed to take shape, twisted into something almost organic. Kael's eyes locked onto the piece: it was a mask, its visage a grotesque parody of beauty.

The figure straightened, revealing a woman with eyes like cold, dead coal, her features chiseled by years of hammering on hot metal. A badge of the Nightforge adorned her leather apron – an unmistakable sign that she was one of their own, though Kael had never seen her before.

The woman's gaze flicked towards Kael, her eyes narrowing into slits as she took in his Black Rose Order insignia. For an instant, Thorne's hand tightened around Kael's forearm, a silent warning to tread carefully. The air was heavy with the smell of hot metal and sweat, and the flickering flames danced across the walls like restless spirits.

"What business do you have here?" the woman asked, her voice like a rusty gate, as she set aside her hammer and approached them with a measured step.

Thorne's grip relaxed, but his hand remained clasped around Kael's arm. "We've been searching for Eryndor," Kael said, his eyes locked on the symbol etched into the wall – a marker of the Nightforge that seemed to pulse with an otherworldly energy. The woman's gaze flicked to Thorne before returning to Kael.

"Eryndor's...indiscreet," she said finally, her voice measured as she reached for a nearby jug and poured a cup of water from its spout. "He's been...tinkering." She handed the cup to Thorne, who drank without hesitation. The woman's eyes flicked to Kael once more, her expression unreadable.

"You're from the Order," she stated, her voice devoid of inflection. "I am Arianna, a humble craftsman of the Nightforge." Her gaze settled on the symbol etched into Thorne's cloak, and for an instant, Kael saw something like pain flash across her face before she smoothed it away.

"We mean no trouble," Kael said, though his eyes remained fixed on the mask hanging from the figure's apron. "But Eryndor's messages have us worried. What does he seek to correct?" The air seemed to grow heavier, as if the very shadows themselves were listening in on their conversation.

Arianna's eyes never wavered, but her voice took on a hint of warning. "Some balance must be maintained," she said softly. "And sometimes, it's necessary to walk the line between light and darkness."

The night air seemed to thicken as Kael's eyes locked onto Arianna, her words echoing in his mind like a whispered promise. "What line are you talking about?" he asked, his voice firm, but his gut twisting with unease. Thorne's grip on his arm tightened, a subtle warning not to push too hard.

Arianna's gaze flicked between the two of them, her expression unreadable as she turned back to her craft. "The one Eryndor seeks," she said, her voice measured, "is a delicate balance. One misstep, and...consequences." The sound of hammering resumed, and the figure at the forge seemed to take on a life of its own, as if fueled by the darkness in the air.

Kael's eyes lingered on Arianna's hands, stained with the residue of metal and sweat, before returning to her face. "What does Eryndor hope to correct?" he asked again, his voice a little softer now, though the tension between them remained palpable. The woman's expression didn't change, but her eyes seemed to cloud over, like the mist-shrouded streets of Ashen Roads.

Thorne's grip relaxed slightly as Arianna turned back to him, her gaze locked onto his. "You're a friend, Eryndor," she said softly, "but even friends can't see the darkness that lies ahead." Her eyes dropped to the cup in Thorne's hand, and for an instant, Kael thought he saw something like sadness there. The symbol etched into the wall seemed to pulse brighter now, casting an otherworldly glow across the room.

The silence that followed was heavy as a weight, and Kael felt it settling onto his shoulders like a shroud. He glanced at Thorne, who stood motionless, lost in thought, the darkness within him seeming to grow denser by the moment. The air was thick with the scent of hot metal and sweat, and Kael's skin crawled as he sensed the presence of magic still simmering beneath the surface.

Arianna's voice broke the silence, her words low and measured. "You should know that the Nightforge isn't what it once was," she said, her eyes flicking to the symbol

on Thorne's cloak. "Not since...the changes." The word hung in the air like a challenge, and Kael's grip on his sword hilt tightened instinctively.

"Eryndor was one of our own," Arianna continued, her voice steady now, though her hands trembled slightly as she poured another cup of water from the jug. "But there are those who believe he's gone too far, that his methods will bring ruin upon us all." Her eyes locked onto Kael's, and for an instant, he saw a glimmer of something like warning.

The night outside seemed to press in on them, as if the shadows themselves were listening in on their conversation. Kael's grip on Thorne's arm tightened, and he felt a surge of magic within him respond – a burning sense of purpose that threatened to consume him whole. He checked it, remembering the cost of his last mistake, but the sensation lingered, like a promise of what was to come.

"You're saying Eryndor's playing with forces beyond his control," Kael said finally, his voice firm, though the darkness within him pulsed in time with Thorne's own. Arianna's expression was unreadable as she handed another cup to Thorne, who drank without hesitation.

"Perhaps," she said softly, her eyes never leaving Thorne's face. "But some balance must be maintained." The symbol on Thorne's cloak seemed to glow brighter now, and Kael felt the weight of his own magic responding once more – a stinging sensation like saltwater on an open wound that threatened to consume him whole.

Arianna's words hung in the air like a challenge, but Thorne's gaze remained fixed on her face, his expression unreadable. Kael's grip on his arm relaxed, though he sensed a deep unease growing within him – a feeling that they were dancing around a precipice, with no clear footing to steady themselves.

The sound of hammering resumed, the metal taking shape beneath Arianna's blows, and the air thickened with an otherworldly energy. Kael's eyes lingered on the symbol etched into the wall, feeling the pulse of magic emanating from it like a call to arms. He sensed that there was more to Arianna's words than met the eye – a hidden truth that only she knew.

Thorne finally spoke, his voice low and measured. "What do you know of Eryndor's methods?" The question hung in the air like a challenge, but Arianna's expression remained neutral as she set aside her hammer and poured another cup from the jug. "Only what he's told me," she replied, her eyes never leaving Thorne's face. "But I fear it may be too late to stop him."

Kael's grip on his sword hilt tightened instinctively, his mind racing with the implications of Arianna's words. He sensed that they were being toyed with – that Eryndor was playing a game they couldn't begin to understand. The darkness within

him responded, a low thrumming in his veins like a drumbeat, and he forced it back down, remembering the cost of his last mistake.

Arianna's gaze flicked to Kael, her eyes locking onto his with an unnerving intensity. "You should be careful what you seek," she said softly, her voice dripping with warning. "Some secrets are better left buried." The air seemed to grow colder, as if the shadows themselves were listening in on their conversation.

Thorne's expression remained impassive, but Kael sensed a deep unease growing within him – a feeling that they were walking a tightrope over an abyss, with no clear path to safety. He glanced around the room, taking in the twisted metalwork and the symbol etched into the wall, pulsing with an otherworldly energy.

The silence that followed was heavy as a weight, and Kael felt it settling onto his shoulders like a shroud. He sensed that Arianna was holding back – that there was more to her words than she dared to reveal. The air seemed to thicken with tension, as if the very shadows themselves were waiting for them to make their next move.

"We need to find Eryndor," Kael said finally, his voice firm, though the darkness within him pulsed in time with Thorne's own. Arianna's expression remained neutral, but her eyes seemed to cloud over like the mist-shrouded streets of Ashen Roads.

Thorne nodded, his gaze never leaving hers. "We need to know what he's planning," he said, his voice low and measured. The symbol on his cloak seemed to glow brighter now, casting an otherworldly light across the room.

As the night wore on, Kael couldn't shake the feeling that Arianna was hiding something from them – a secret she wasn't willing to share, even with friends. He watched her move with a quiet efficiency, her hands moving with precision as she worked at the forge, but her eyes seemed to cloud over whenever Thorne's name was mentioned. The air in the room seemed heavy with unspoken words, and Kael's grip on his sword hilt tightened instinctively.

Arianna finally set aside her hammer and poured another cup of water from the jug, her movements economical and precise. "You're both welcome to stay for the night," she said, her voice low and measured. "But we need to talk about what's happening in Ashen Roads." Thorne nodded, his eyes never leaving hers, and Kael felt a spark of tension between them – a charged moment that seemed to hang in the air like a promise. Arianna handed another cup to Kael, who took it with a nod, feeling the weight of her gaze on him.

The silence that followed was heavy as a weight, and Kael sensed that they were all waiting for someone else to speak – for Arianna to break the silence and reveal what she knew. But the sound of hammering at the forge continued, a steady beat that seemed to pulse in time with the symbol etched into the wall. Thorne's eyes seemed

to glaze over, his expression unreadable as he gazed into the darkness outside – a look that spoke of secrets kept and mysteries yet unknown.

Arianna finally spoke up, her voice low and measured. "I've seen some things," she said, her eyes flicking to Kael's face before returning to Thorne's. "Things that make me wonder if we're wise to trust Eryndor." The word hung in the air like a challenge, but Thorne's expression remained impassive. Kael felt a surge of tension within him – a sense of foreboding that seemed to grow with every passing moment.

The night outside seemed to press in on them, as if the shadows themselves were closing in. Arianna's eyes seemed to cloud over once more, and Kael sensed that she was fighting some private battle within herself. He glanced at Thorne, who stood motionless, lost in thought, his expression unreadable. The air in the room seemed heavy with secrets – unspoken words that hung between them like a challenge.

"It's almost done," Arianna said finally, her voice low and measured. "I can show you what Eryndor's planning to correct." She moved towards the back of the forge, her eyes never leaving Thorne's face. Kael followed her, his heart pounding in his chest – a sense of foreboding that seemed to grow with every passing moment.

Arianna led them through a narrow door hidden behind a tapestry, into a small room filled with row upon row of dusty shelves and strange artifacts. The air was thick with the scent of old books and dust, and Kael's eyes widened as he took in the sheer scope of what lay before him. At the far end of the room, a large map was spread out on a workbench – a detailed rendering of Ashen Roads, its streets and buildings etched in precise lines.

Arianna moved towards it, her eyes fixed on Thorne's face. "This is what Eryndor plans to correct," she said, her voice low and measured. "He believes that with the right balance, we can restore the city to its former glory." The map seemed to pulse with an otherworldly energy, and Kael felt a surge of unease within him – a sense that they were walking into the heart of something much larger than themselves.

Thorne's eyes narrowed as he took in the details, his face lit only by the faint glow of candles scattered throughout the room. "It looks like a plan for a new city," he said finally, his voice low and measured. "But what about the cost?" Arianna's expression remained neutral, but Kael sensed that she was struggling to keep her emotions in check.

"The cost is yet unknown," she replied, her eyes never leaving Thorne's face. "But Eryndor believes it's worth the risk." The air seemed to thicken with tension, as if the very shadows themselves were waiting for them to make their next move.

The map seemed to stretch on forever, a labyrinth of streets and alleys that twisted and turned like a living thing. Kael's eyes wandered over the markings, trying to make

sense of the symbols etched into the corners – symbols he didn't recognize, but which seemed to pulse with an otherworldly energy. Arianna's words echoed in his mind, "the right balance," but what did it mean? He glanced at Thorne, who stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the map as if searching for some hidden truth.

Arianna moved closer, her hand hovering over the edge of the bench as if hesitant to touch. "This is the city's ley lines," she said, her voice low and measured. "The network of power that runs beneath Ashen Roads. Eryndor believes that by manipulating these lines, he can restore balance to the city." Kael's eyes narrowed, his mind racing with the implications. If what she said was true, then Eryndor's plan was nothing short of madness – tampering with the very fabric of the city itself.

Thorne's eyes flicked up from the map, and for a moment their gazes met in understanding. Kael sensed that he was thinking the same thing – that Arianna was holding back, and that the true extent of Eryndor's plan was far more sinister than they dared to imagine. The air seemed to thicken with tension, as if the shadows themselves were waiting for them to make their next move.

Tags: Brotherly Love and Fidelity, Shadows in the Night, Silent Loss