



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

# SHADOW ME

A SHATTER ME  
NOVELLA

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE SHATTER ME SERIES



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**HARPER**

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# One

I'm already awake when my alarm goes off, but I haven't opened my eyes yet. I'm too tired. My muscles are tight, still painfully sore from an intense training session two days ago, and my body feels heavy. Dead.

My brain hurts.

The alarm is shrill and persistent. I ignore it. I stretch out the muscles in my neck and groan, quietly. The clock won't stop screeching. Someone pounds, hard, against the wall near my head, and I hear Adam's muffled voice shouting at me to shut off the alarm.

"Every morning," he shouts. "You do this every morning. I swear to God, Kenji, one of these days I'm going to come in there and destroy that thing."

"All right," I mumble, mostly to myself. "All right. Calm down."

*"Turn it off."*

I take a deep, ragged breath. Slap blindly at the clock until it stops blaring. We finally got our own rooms on base, but I still can't seem to find peace. Or privacy. These walls are paper thin, and Adam hasn't changed a bit. Still moody. No sense of humor. Generally irritated. Sometimes I can't remember why we're friends.

With some effort, I drag myself up, into a sitting position. I rub at my eyes, making a mental list of all the things I have to do today, and then, in a sudden, horrible rush—

I remember what happened yesterday.

*Jesus.*

So much drama in one day I can hardly keep it all straight.

Apparently Juliette has a long-lost sister. Apparently Warner tortured Juliette's sister. Warner and Juliette broke up. Juliette ran off screaming. Warner had a panic attack. Warner's ex-girlfriend showed up. His ex-

girlfriend *slapped* him. Juliette got drunk. No, wait—J got drunk *and* she shaved her head. And then I saw Juliette in her underwear—an image I’m still trying to erase from my mind—and then, as if all that wasn’t enough to deal with, after dinner last night, I did something very, very stupid.

I drop my head in my hands and hate myself, remembering. A fresh wave of embarrassment hits me, hard, and I take another deep breath. Force myself to look up. To clear my thoughts.

Not everything is horrible.

I have my own room now—a small room—but my own room with a window and a view of industrial AC units. I have a desk. A bed. A basic closet. I still have to share a bathroom with some of the other guys, but I can’t complain. A private room is a luxury I haven’t had in a while. It’s nice to have space at the end of the night to be alone with my thoughts. Somewhere to hang the happy face I force myself to wear even when I’m having a shitty day.

I’m grateful.

I’m exhausted, overworked, and stressed out, but I’m grateful.

I force myself to say it, out loud. *I’m grateful*. I take a few moments to feel it. Recognize it. I force myself to smile, to unclench the tightness in my face that would otherwise default too easily to anger. I whisper a quick thank-you to the unknown, to the air, to the lonely ghosts eavesdropping on my private conversations with no one. I have a roof over my head and clothes on my back and food waiting for me every morning. I have friends. A makeshift family. I’m lonely but I’m not alone. My body works, my brain works, I’m alive. It’s a good life. I have to make a conscious effort to remember that. To choose to be happy every day. If I didn’t, I think my own pain would’ve killed me a long time ago.

*I’m grateful.*

Someone knocks at my door—two sharp raps—and I jump to my feet, startled. The knock is unusually formal; most of us don’t even bother with the courtesy.

I yank on a pair of sweatpants and, tentatively, open the door.

*Warner.*

My eyes widen as I look him up and down. I don’t think he’s ever shown up at my door before, and I can’t decide what’s weirder: the fact that he’s here or the fact that he looks so normal. Well, normal for Warner. He looks exactly like he always does. Shiny. Polished. Eerily calm and pulled

together for someone whose girlfriend dumped him the day before. You'd never know he was the same dude who, in the aftermath, I found lying on the floor having a panic attack.

"Uh, hey." I clear the sleep from my throat. "What's going on?"

"Did you just wake up?" he says, looking at me like I'm an insect.

"It's six in the morning. Everyone in this wing wakes up at six in the morning. You don't have to look so disappointed."

Warner peers past me, into my room, and for a moment, says nothing. Then, quietly: "Kishimoto, if I considered other people's mediocre standards a sufficient metric by which to measure my own accomplishments, I'd never have amounted to anything." He looks up, meets my eyes. "You should demand more of yourself. You're entirely capable."

"Are you—?" I blink, stunned. "I'm sorry, was that your idea of a compliment?"

He stares at me, his face impassive. "Get dressed."

I raise my eyebrows. "You taking me out to breakfast?"

"We have three more unexpected guests. They just arrived."

"*Oh.*" I take an unconscious step back. "Oh shit."

"Yes."

"More kids of the supreme commanders?"

Warner nods.

"Are they dangerous?" I ask.

Warner almost smiles, but he looks unhappy. "Would they be here if they weren't?"

"Right." I sigh. "Good point."

"Meet me downstairs in five minutes, and I'll fill you in."

"Five minutes?" My eyes widen. "Uh-uh, no way. I need to take a shower. I haven't even eaten breakfast—"

"If you'd been up at three, you would've had time for all that and more."

"Three in the morning?" I gape at him. "Are you out of your mind?"

And when he says, without a hint of irony—

"No more than usual"

—it's crystal clear to me that this dude is not okay.

I sigh, hard, and turn away, hating myself for always noticing this kind of thing, and hating myself even more for my constant need to follow up. I



can't help it. Castle said it to me once when I was a kid: he told me I was unusually compassionate. I never thought about it like that—with words, with an explanation—until he'd said it to me. I always hated it about myself, that I couldn't be tougher. Hated that I cried so hard when I saw a dead bird for the first time. Or that I used to bring home all the stray animals I found until Castle finally told me I had to stop, that we didn't have the resources to keep them all. I was twelve. He made me let them go, and I cried for a week. I hated that I cried. Hated that I couldn't help it. Everyone thinks I'm not supposed to give a shit—that I shouldn't—but I do. I always do.

And I give a shit about this asshole, too.

So I take a tight breath and say, "Hey, man— Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." His response is fast. Cold.

I could let it go.

He's giving me an out. I should take it. I should take it and pretend I don't notice the strain in his jaw or the raw, red look around his eyes. I've got my own problems, my own burdens, my own pain and frustration, and besides, no one ever asks me about my day. No one ever follows up with me, no one ever bothers to peer beneath the surface of my smile. So why should I care?

I shouldn't.

*Leave it alone*, I tell myself.

I open my mouth to change the subject. I open my mouth to move on, and, instead, I hear myself say—

"C'mon, bro. We both know that's bullshit."

Warner looks away. A muscle jumps in his jaw.

"You had a hard day yesterday," I say. "It's all right to have a rough morning, too."

After a long pause, he says, "I've been up for a while."

I blow out a breath. It's nothing I wasn't expecting. "I'm sorry," I say. "I get it."

He looks up. Meets my eyes. "Do you?"

"Yeah. I do."

"I don't think you do, actually. In fact, I hope you don't. I wouldn't want you to know how I feel right now. I wouldn't wish that for you."

That hits me harder than I expect. For a moment I don't know what to say.

I decide to stare at the floor.

“Have you seen her yet?” I ask.

And then, so quietly I almost miss it—

“No.”

Shit. This kid is breaking my heart.

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” he says, his eyes flashing as they meet mine.

“What? I don’t— I’m not—”

“Get dressed,” Warner says sharply. “I’ll see you downstairs.”

I blink, startled. “Right,” I say. “Cool. Okay.”

And then he’s gone.