

Silver Falls

# Heavy Shadow

Sungrand Studios

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### Chapter III

The morning warmed up as the soft, orange glow of the sky shifted into a vibrant blue. The drive to Karn's house was filled with laughter and swapping of stories about Nickelas' UFO obsession and The Midnight Falcon records. Dodger recognized the road Karn lived on but had never really noticed his house down a long, twisting dirt road. As Dodger carefully made his way down the pothole filled track, two buildings slowly arose from out of the forest. Hanging from the awnings of the buildings danced prism colored wind chimes and decorations, grasping at the morning breeze as if trying to grab on and fly away on a whimsical adventure. Old license plates, vintage metal signs for motor oils and sodas, and wood carving art accentuated the front porch of the house like a bushy moustache and wild, scraggly beard.

The workshop building stood taller and prouder than the house, wearing old road signs like badges of honor. Windswept pine and spruce trees towered high above the two buildings, leaning in as if peaking into the workshop to watch Karn work while simultaneously keeping the buildings a secret from the world. A familiar, sweet scent of burning firewood greeted Dodger with a sense of home and welcome as he stepped out of his truck. Somewhere above, the chittering of birds peeped out into the morning air as if alerting Karn that an unfamiliar vehicle had appeared in his yard.

"Nice place," Dodger said, stepping closer to the workshop to peek inside.

“Hey, it’s home. It’s just right for me,” Karn smiled while stretching his arms. He picked up his foam take-away container of leftovers from breakfast and walked toward the house. He hopped up onto the front porch, ignoring the two steps leading up. It was not with a key, but a mere flourish of his wrist that Karn turned the knob of the front door. The sturdy mahogany door with an ornate stained glass window gently eased open like a butler bowing to greet his employer.

Karn made his way to the fridge as Dodger followed him. Hanging from the handsome timber log walls were countless hand tools from various decades, dream catchers, and old wood saws with sweeping, hand painted wild west landscapes, each one telling the story of a time long past, existing then only in dreams. Dodger noticed numerous bull whips, rusted old spurs, hand-carved animal statues of all kinds, and old tin serving trays, each one barely clinging on the colors of a faded brand of vintage cookies.

Next to an ancient, dust covered TV, comfortably rested a shelf filled with framed photos. One photo showed four men in their 30’s dressed in traditional 80’s biker garb, faded denim and black leather, posing next to four classic, chrome covered motorcycles. Another photo depicted three men sitting at the dock of a lake at sunrise, each one holding up a peace sign with two fingers. Nuzzled close to that was another photo of two men, one of which Dodger recognized as a younger Karn, smiling and standing next to a barbeque grill at what must have been a local Moose Steak Festival from years past.

“Anyway, Dodger, welcome. My house is your house, man. When you’re here, you’re family,” Karn smiled to Dodger

before turning around and setting the breakfast leftovers in the fridge. Dodger looked closer at the photo shelf but could not identify any photo that seemed to contain a wife or kids. The off-balance smell of a fridge without power suddenly hit his senses, bringing to his attention the fact that Karn had just placed his food into a non-working fridge.

“That food will go bad if the fridge isn’t working,” Dodger said, following Karn into the kitchen.

“That’s why you’re here, right? You’re gonna fix the electricity?” Karn laughed, pointing up at a light bulb.

“Oh yeah, right. Of course. Leave it to me,” Dodger replied, a bit embarrassed that he had become so lost in admiring Karn’s house, he forgot about the reason he’d gone there in the first place. With very little effort, Dodger tracked down the blown fuses and melted power sockets in Karn’s house, and replaced them with the parts he had just picked up for his own house. After years of working as an electrician, Dodger found he could do the work on auto-pilot. In this case, he knew any power sockets connected to major electrical appliances would be melted. He knew all the fuses would be blown. Of course they would be. Dodger’s house was in the exact same condition. It had been that way since two weeks ago. Two weeks since the bright, fiery flash in the night sky.

It was while Dodger was checking that all repairs had been done that he noticed a photo of 3 bearded, long-haired hippies, seemingly in their 20’s, resting their arms over each other’s shoulders, laughing while standing in front of the once-a-year lake at Diamond Springs. There in that photo was a figure Dodger had seen countless times in concert videos

and posters. It was unmistakable. Dodger knew who one of those men was.

“Holy shit. Is that Bran Steelhide?” Dodger exhaled, expending the entirety of his breath.

“Oh, yeah! That was a hell of a summer. My buddy Hogan there and I rode the Copper Rush with Bran that year. I had actually just bought my first motorcycle! 1972 Starbridge Model III with custom handlebars. See, I’m not that tall of a fella, you see? Bran was too shy to skinny dip in the lake with everyone else so Hogan and I pantsed him and we all jumped into the lake just after that photo was taken,” Karn reminisced, chuckling to himself.

“No way,” Dodger stood in disbelief, looking back and forth between the photo and Karn as he tried to see figure out which of the men in the photo was Karn. With a flick of a switch, a light bulb had turned on just above Dodger’s head.

“Oh, great! It looks like you’ve got it all fixed and working!” Karn said with his hand still on the light switch.

“So- you were friends with Bran Steelhide? You really actually knew him?” Dodger could barely believe what he had just heard.

“Huh? Well, I don’t really see him all that often. Every few months or so he’ll call me over for a few rounds of tennis. I usually have him and a couple friends over here for things like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and the odd birthday party,” Karn said plainly, as casual as he would have been reading off a shopping list or instructions on heating a microwave dinner.

“No kidding. *The Bran Steelhide*, lead singer and guitarist from The Midnight Falcons.” Dodger stood in amazement. He had heard rumors that Bran lived on property somewhere around Silver Falls but he never believed it.

“So can we check out my workshop?” Karn broke the spell of enchantment the old photo had cast over Dodger.

“Oh, yeah, of course,” Dodger snapped back to attention.

Karn led Dodger out to his glassblowing workshop, which housed all sorts of strange tools for grabbing, poking, bending, and shaping. Dodger replaced some sockets and examined the barrel sized furnace which looked to weigh a ton. With a heavy clunk, Dodger flipped a switch at the entrance of the workshop and the lights came on. Karn fiddled with some knobs and tickled some switches before a soft light began to grow within the furnace.

“You’re a miracle worker!” Karn laughed, hopping back over to Dodger. “I can finally get back to work! What do I owe you?”

“What? Oh, I couldn’t accept anything. Old friends couldn’t charge for something like this,” Dodger took off his cap and slicked back his short hair in one smooth, cool motion.

“Huh, old friends? Yeah, old friends! Of course!” Karn squinted hard, thinking hard before a big grin appeared on his face. “I sure appreciate the help. Let me buy your drinks at the Dusty Cactus tonight at least.”

“Well, it’d be rude if I didn’t accept,” Dodger answered, putting his cap back on his head.

“Can I get you a coffee?” Karn offered, walking toward the workshop entrance.

“No thanks, maybe next time. I need to fix up a couple things around my house today,” Dodger declined against his own will. He would have loved to admire more of the decorations around Karn’s house.

“Next time? Yeah, you come by any time, Dodger! And hold on, I got something I wanna give you!” Karn almost shouted with excitement. As the glow within the furnace blazed brighter and brighter, so did the fire of Karn’s soul. Karn led Dodger over to a metal cabinet with sliding drawers. Karn gently ran his hand along the top drawer, squinting as if reading something beyond the range of his bifocal glasses. He shook his head before running his hand along the next drawer, and then the next, and after that, the next drawer. Finally, it seemed as if he found just what he was looking for.

Carefully, gently, without making a sound, Karn slowly slid open the drawer, revealing rows of perfectly placed glass sculptures, lined up in flawless rows. Each one seemed to shine with the delicate glow of an autumn sunrise. Karn reached down and picked up a circular, somewhat flat sculpture about one third the size of his open palm. He ran his fingers along it slowly as if checking for imperfections before he nodded in approval. In silence, Dodger watched Karn run a leather cord through a loop in the sculpture, effortlessly measuring, cutting, and tying the cord into a necklace. It was in that silence that Dodger began to hear a gentle, delicate humming.

He turned toward the still open drawer, wondering if the cabinet had some sort of electric lock system. No, it just seemed to be a standard cabinet. He turned around to look at the furnace only for him to verify that the sound indeed was coming from the open drawer. It was almost as if the voices of a distance choir were calling out to him. The nearly inaudible sound had entranced him so that he almost could not stop himself from calling out in response.

“Hey, do you hear that?” Dodger asked, turning his head side to side to verify the source of the humming.

“Hear what?” Karn said, finalizing the locking mechanism of the necklace.

“There’s this weird hum in here. Is that normal?” Dodger added, beginning to feel flustered.

“No, everything seems normal to me,” Karn shrugged, turning to face Dodger. “Here, I want you to have this.” Karn held the small sculpture carefully, like a precious egg, handing it to Dodger. The morning light seeping in from the overhead windows poured onto the sculpture, illuminating what seemed like something far too valuable to be given away for free. The body of the sculpture showed a perfectly round disc with subtle craters carved into it. No, it wasn’t just a disc. It was clearly a full moon. Along the outer edge of the moon was a leaping wolf, with its tail curled up, its legs stretched out, and its fangs poised as if ready to take a bite out of the moon. Its eye sparkled with the intensity of a star in the night sky. Its fur was impossibly detailed with such intricacy, there was no way a normal human being could have created something which seemed to possess a soul of its own. Dodger had been



caught in a spell. He slowly extended his hand out to receive the sculpture.

“A wolf who bares his fangs at the moon will never reach his prey, but that wolf will have run faster and jumped higher than the wolves who sat in shadows,” Karn’s voice changed into a deep, somber sound which Dodger had never heard before. Dodger took the necklace into his hand, imagining that he could almost feel it humming, as if the wolf were howling as it jumped into his hand.

“That’s really something. I’ll take good care of it. Thank you,” Dodger whispered, awestruck by the beauty of such a small thing. He held it up to his eye, admiring the shimmering luster which seemed to have stars floating within its body.

“I make this using a mixture of sands I pick up from lakes up all around the mountain. I call it Starglass,” Karn whispered as if trying to keep a secret.

“Starglass, huh?” Dodger held his breath as he placed the moon and wolf into a zippered pocket inside his jacket. With that, the two men agreed to catch up later that evening at their regular bar. Dodger backed his truck out of the driveway, already wondering when he would next get the chance to visit Karn at his house again, and thinking of excuses he could use to return there.

On the drive home, Dodger turned off the radio to finally be rid of the static noise. He intermittently reached into his pocket and brought the Starglass up to his ear, wondering if he would hear that mysterious humming. No, there was no sound. He must have been imagining things.

Before he knew it, he was already pulling into his driveway. As he turned his truck to line up with his detached garage, his eyes landed upon his basement door, hiding in the shadow of his two-story home. As if by reflex, he averted his gaze, looking away. He didn't want to think about what had been down there, or what might still be down there. He didn't want to face the idea of opening the door to a nightmare he was certain wasn't real. Instead, he kept his eyes locked firmly on the ground just before his boots until he made his way to the front door.

He took a seat at the kitchen table, planning out going back to the hardware store to pick up electrical parts to replace what he had used at Karn's house. It was about lunch time so he thought it might be a good idea to call Dahlia and see how things were going at school. As he reached for the phone, his hand trembled. Why was he so nervous? What was he afraid of? No, he was being silly. There was nothing that could go wrong. He was just going to see how his daughter was doing at her new college in Leaden City. He fought to keep his fingers from shaking as he typed her number into the phone. With each the press, the electronic beep echoed throughout the empty house.

Ring.

Ring.

What if she doesn't pick up?

Ring.

What if she is in trouble?

Ring.

What if she doesn't want to talk to me?

Ring.

"Hello? Dad?"

"Dahlia, honey. Yeah, it's me. I'm just calling to say hello and see how you're doing."

"No! Stop, that tickles!"

"Huh?"

"Oh, sorry! That's my friend, Lucy. We're at the park studying, but she's trying to make me drop my ice cream."

"That sounds like fun."

"Yeah! No. Oh, it's my dad. Yeah, I'm on the phone with my dad."

"Oh, well it sounds like you're busy."

"Ahh!! Hahaha you're such a bitch!"

"Is everything okay?"

"Sorry, dad! I just spilled my ice cream on my new jeans! Hahaha!"

"Oh, well, I can call back another time."

"Okay. Bye dad! Ahhh! Lucy! I'll get you for that!"

Dodger sat at the kitchen table with the sound of a dial tone bellowing in his ear. Maybe he could catch Karol on her lunch break. He reached into his pocket and found a folded

paper with the phone number of the Burden Lake Campground scribbled on it.

Ring.

Ring.

“Hello, Burden Lake Campgrounds, this is Beattie speaking, how can I help you?”

“Hi, I was hoping I could speak to Karol Rodgers. This is her husband.”

“Oh, sure. I’ll forward your call to the staff lounge. She might be on her lunch break.”

“Thank you.”

Dodger waited, listening to the sound of his heartbeat as it grew louder and louder.

“Hello? This is Karol.”

“Karol, babe, it’s me.”

“Oh, hi honey! Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, everything is just... great. I just wanted to say hi and see how you’re doing. How is it up there?”

“Oh, it’s just been beautiful up here. The weather has been divine. We have a bunch of visitors from Europe. They love it here.”

“That’s great.”

“How’s Samba? Is he alright? He’s not missing me too much, is he?”

Dodger nearly choked as he struggled to put words together. What should he say? Should he tell Karol the truth? No, it wouldn’t be fair for Dodger to ruin her time at the campground by telling her about Samba.

“No, Samba and I are... just fine. Couldn’t be happier.” Dodger heard his own voice tremble. He felt his knees buckling below him.

“Well, you give that big lovable goofball a hug for me,” Karol laughed.

“I will.”

“Okay. Oh, my lunch is ending soon.”

“Right. Was there anything you need from home? Do you want me to make some breakfast for you and drive it up some day this week?”

“No, that’s alright. I’ve got everything I need here.”

“Oh-... okay. Well, guess I better let you go.”

“Oh, gotta run! Love you, hon!”

“Love you too, babe.”

Dodger sat at the kitchen table with the sound of a dial tone bellowing in his ear. The phone fell out of his hand, landing on the kitchen table with a deafening slam that he could not hear. He dragged himself to the couch, facing the

fireplace on top of which sat Samba's collar. His lungs tightened up more and more until he could barely breathe.

Slowly, the world around him expanded. The fireplace stretched out farther and farther until it was no longer within his grasp. The photos hanging on the walls were so far away, he could no longer see the faces of the people he called family. As the carpet at his feet spread out like a pool of water, the front door to his house raced so far out of his grasp, there was no way he would ever be able to leave. The walls of his home had abandoned him. A cold, surrounding darkness enveloped him. He had no choice but to accept it.

With the force of an earthquake, Dodger was jolted awake by a slamming at the front door. By pure instinct, his arms shot up to cover his face as if to protect himself from an attack. He opened his eyes and struggled to steady himself as the world around gradually stopped spinning. The knocking came upon the door again. With uncertain footing, Dodger made his way to the front door and opened it wearily.

"Hi, Mr. Rodgers. Is now a good time for me to drop by?" Fort greeted him with a grin.

"Yeah, yeah, of course. Come in," Dodger cleared his throat. Dodger directed Fort to have a seat at the kitchen table while making himself a cup of coffee. He offered a coffee to Fort, who politely declined.

"Let me grab your camera. I'll be right back," Dodger said, creakily making his way up the stairs. A bit uncomfortable with being left alone, Fort sat, tapping his fingers on the kitchen table. He looked around the kitchen shelves adorned with rural country art; dried flowers, ceramic

animal statues, vintage replica car models, and old tin gas station signs. Next to the fridge hung a wooden plaque holding three handsome, hand-made throwing knives. Mounted on the living room walls were photos of Dahlia at various ages. All laughing, all smiling, all happy being at Dodger's side. Fort couldn't help but smile, seeing so many family photos hanging on the walls, silently wishing his own parents had bothered to take any photos when he was young so he too could proudly hang them on the wall.

Dodger lumbered down the stairs, shaking off the last of his drowsiness. He collapsed into his chair before carefully handing the camera to Fort.

"Is everything alright?" Fort asked, concerned. He had never seen Dodger so sluggish.

"Yeah, fine. I just woke up from a nap," Dodger tried to laugh but was stifled by a yawn.

"So, what went wrong with the camera that I can help with?" Fort opened the memory card compartment to check that the memory card was indeed still in the camera.

"Can you recover the lost data on that memory card? I had video on there but now the camera says it's corrupted and can't be viewed," Dodger kept his voice low as he sipped his coffee.

"Maybe. There's no guarantee. It depends on what happened to the memory card. When did it get corrupted?" Fort removed the card to check for visible damage. Dodger's brow furrowed as the Ritmo coffee kicked in.

“Two weeks ago,” Dodger answered, hearing his own voice as if it came from somewhere else. The same night the power in his house went out. The same night Karn’s power went out too.

“Just see if you can recover the files, but definitely don’t watch any of it,” Dodger pushed in toward Fort firmly with a stern gaze.

“Right, don’t watch the videos. And it’s not weird sex stuff?”

“No! It’s not weird sex stuff!”

“Okay, got it. I’ll take it home and see what I can do but I can’t guarantee anything. I might only be able to recover fragments of footage if I’m lucky,” Fort said, looking up as if he were searching for something. “Hey, uh, random question,” he said, avoiding making eye contact with Dodger.

“Sure, kid. Fire away,” Dodger replied, finishing his cup of coffee.

“About eleven years ago or so, do you remember doing some electrical work at my parents’ house? Sally and Dean Fordero. We live over on Charging Bull Rd.” Fort asked sheepishly.

“No, I don’t think so. It was a long time ago. Why do you ask?” Dodger searched his brain but he already had too much on his mind. How was he supposed to recall something like that when he’s done hundreds upon hundreds of jobs since then?



“Yeah, haha, it was a long time ago. I just remember you did this cool trick with a throwing knife, and, uhh, never mind. I saw those throwing knives on the wall and thought they were cool,” Fort fumbled his words as he packed his camera away. “Anyway, it might take a few hours but I can bring this back here when I’m done.”

“I’ll probably be at the Dusty Cactus on the main street. If you manage to recover any of the video and feel like bringing it back, you can find me there. Don’t stress out over it. There’s no rush,” Dodger stood up and set his favorite mug into the sink. The coffee had brought him back to his senses. “So how much do I owe you for the help?”

“Oh, no. I couldn’t charge you for something like this,” Fort stood up and almost shouted.

“I don’t want to be unfair. You let me borrow your camera and all,” Dodger said.

“It’s no big deal. I’d feel weird accepting any money for this. But-... maybe you wouldn’t mind showing me how to throw a knife sometime,” Fort said, shrinking into his own shirt. His voice became increasingly meek as his sentence trailed on.

“Yeah, sure, we could do that sometime I guess,” Dodger answered, not really thinking about what was said.

“Oh, cool! Wow, thanks Mr. Rodgers. I’ll head straight home to work on this!” Fort shouted. His eyes lit up with fire. With that, Fort charged out the front door and back to his car.

Dodger picked up his car keys, planning on where to have dinner. For brief a moment, he forgot the electricity in

his house was still out as he flipped a switch to turn on the kitchen lights. Everything was working fine until just two weeks ago. He would still have the video from the camera if it wasn't for what happened two weeks ago. Did anyone else experience the same thing as him? Did anyone in town have any idea about just what in the hell happened two weeks ago? Just as he set his hand on the front door, a heavy knocking rattled the entire house.

“Dodger, you in there?” a panicked muffled voice called out from the other side.

“Who is it? What do you want?” Dodger shouted back.

“Open up! It's Nickelas Dollarbuck. I've got something you really need to see!”