

Shadow's Fall (A Novel of the Shadow World)

By Dianne Sylvan

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Editorial Review

Review
“Dianne Sylvan knows how to deliver one hell of a book!”

“Looking for a new addiction? Go no further.”

"Packed with startling action, sensual romance, and delightfully nerdy vampires."

About the Author
Dianne Sylvan is the author of *The Circle Within* and *The Body Sacred*.

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Chapter One

“You are sure that this Prime is the one we have been searching for?”

From where she knelt below the dais, Lydia looked up at the woman sitting before her, into the cool pale eyes that held over a thousand years’ worth of memory. “Yes.”

“We have been here before, child, and you failed us . . . twice.”

“I know, Mother. I have paid the penance you set out for me.”

“You understand the consequences should you fail again. We are out of time, Lydia. If he isn’t the one, if anything goes wrong, there won’t be another chance. Everything we have worked for has led us to this.”

“I understand. I give you my word as I have given you my blood—we won’t fail.”

The old one lowered her eyes, her hand moving unconsciously to touch the amulet at her throat; the same fire that had forged it had forged the Signets themselves, but hers was one of a kind, passed down through generations to a chosen successor by choice, not by chance. She had led the Order for as long as Lydia could remember . . . and that was a long time. Once, she had intended to step down, leaving her power and her position to someone she had nurtured and loved as her own, only to be denied, betrayed. No one in the Order ever spoke of it, but Lydia knew the whole story, just as she knew the fate that awaited them all if she didn’t complete her mission.

Did it seem, just for a moment, that the old one’s eyes were bright with tears? Or was it a trick of the light? “I had hoped it would not come to this,” she said, almost to herself. She seemed, too, almost transparent, as if her existence in the world were the last dried–out leaf clinging to a bare branch. “As I saw one piece of the puzzle after another falling into place, I prayed that I was wrong . . . yet here we are.”

When she leveled her gaze back upon Lydia, however, it had hardened. “Go, then,” she said. “Make sure he understands his role in all of this. Everything must come to pass exactly as it has been written—only then can we know for certain that our people will survive the coming fire.”

Lydia rose slowly. “I am as always in your service, Mother.”

With a sigh that sounded almost hollow, the old one held out her hands, and Lydia stepped forward to take

the carved wooden box offered to her. One of the Priestess's hands lifted to touch Lydia's head in benediction, and Lydia closed her eyes.

"May the Dark Mother guide you, for you carry the future of the Shadow World."

Lydia smiled a little. "I will be home soon."

Their eyes met once more, and yes, this time Lydia was sure she saw tears. "Good–bye."

* * *

Night in California

Early summer breezes lifted the hem of the curtains and exposed, gently but immodestly, the bare sills of the open windows beneath. The waning night was cool and quiet, the faintest distant scent of the ocean discernible on the wind; the call of an owl was the only sound from outside and the rhythmic tapping of keys the only sound inside until a voice asked, "Coming to bed?"

Prime Deven O'Donnell looked up from the screen of his laptop. "Soon."

Jonathan leaned against the door frame, arms crossed. "What are you doing?"

"Ordering someone's death."

"I had to ask, didn't I?"

Deven smiled. "I told you years ago that you wouldn't want to know."

Jonathan shrugged. "I wanted to know everything about you. Back then I thought such a thing might be possible."

The Prime glanced down at the monitor, then back up to his Consort, who was disheveled and sleepy and absolutely the most gorgeous thing Deven could imagine in that moment. The only thing that would have made Jonathan look more enticing would be if he were holding a bottle of Scotch. "You know me better than anyone on this earth, my love . . . well enough to know that I'll always have my secrets."

Now Jonathan smiled. "And well enough that you should know you don't have as many secrets as you think."

They held each other's eyes. "Touché," Deven replied, extending his hand.

Jonathan walked over and took it, drawing the Prime up out of his chair and into the Consort's arms. Deven burrowed his face into Jonathan's shirt, inhaling the long–familiar scent of immortality, cologne, and Cuban cigars. That smell had always had the power to lift some of the weight from the Prime's shoulders, to let him feel at rest in a way he never had before Jonathan had come into his life.

"So who was it this time?" Jonathan asked, his voice rumbling against Deven's ear. "Dictator, business competitor, candlestick maker?"

"You don't want to know," he repeated, tipping his head back to meet Jonathan's eyes. "But it's worth four million dollars."

Jonathan’s eyebrows quirked and he whistled, impressed. “You’re right. I don’t want to know.”

“Come on,” Deven said. “Bed.”

“It’s only four thirty.”

Deven gave him a dubious look. “Didn’t you just say you were going?”

He grinned impishly. “Only if you were.”

“Ah, I see.” Deven laced his fingers through Jonathan’s. “Lead on, then.”

Jonathan looked surprised but, as usual, didn’t object.

Deven couldn’t say whether it was a genuine desire for more of his Consort’s company, guilt over what had happened in Austin, or perhaps a bit of both, but he had made a concerted effort to let Jonathan know how wonderful he was in as many ways as possible in the three years since then. He hated the thought that Jonathan had lived with the foreknowledge of what would happen between Deven and David for months, uncomplaining, unwilling to upset the balance of future events. The precognitive “gift” was burden enough already; Deven wasn’t going to add to his sorrows by acting like a spoiled brat—if he could help it, anyway.

There had come a point, the first year, that Jonathan had sat him down and said, “Don’t get me wrong, darling, I love that you’re jumping me all over the house, but if you’re only doing it because you feel bad about shagging your boy, well, I’d just as soon you stopped.”

Deven could defeat twelve vampires at once in hand–to–hand combat, but he knew quite well he was a disaster at relationships. He had ample evidence scattered throughout the centuries and over the face of the globe. And even though being Signet–bound guaranteed they would always love each other, that didn’t mean things weren’t downright horrid from time to time, usually because of his egregious misbehavior. They were still two people, after all, and while their souls might be a unit, their personalities definitely weren’t.

About the only thing he could come up with to offer Jonathan was to have someone assassinated. Jonathan had passed.

Since then things had settled down. Deven still had to work at being openly affectionate, and they still fought bitterly on occasion, but overall their relationship had gotten much stronger and Deven wondered from time to time if that wasn’t part of why Jonathan hadn’t spoken up about Austin before it happened.

It was hard to say; people with precog tended to have a strange outlook on fate. Every Consort Deven had ever met had struggled with it, and the wisest, like Jonathan, had learned to keep their mouths shut and let things unfold as they were meant to, because to disturb the order of things often brought far more dire consequences.

Of course, try explaining that to Miranda, for example, who was determined to forge her own destiny no matter what. It would take her a few decades to realize that seeing the future and having power over it were two entirely different things . . . assuming, of course, she didn’t get herself killed first.

“What’s wrong?” Jonathan asked as they entered the bedroom. “All of a sudden you’re a hundred miles away.”

Deven let the Consort lead him to bed and begin relieving him of his pesky attire, including the three concealed knives he wore, which by now Jonathan was well versed in ferreting out. “The Council meeting,”

he admitted reluctantly. He might as well be honest; Jonathan might not know everything there was to know about his mate, but he did know Deven's moods and expressions far better than Deven would have liked. "I have a bad feeling about it."

Jonathan smiled, gently shoving him onto the bed. "That's usually my line, darling. What exactly are you dreading about it?"

"Aside from everything?"

"I know you're not looking forward to being in the same room with Hart."

"He's planning something, Jonathan. He's been up there festering for three years. 8.3 Claret is in deep cover, and it's hard to maintain contact at this level; as far as I know we have a handle on things, but Hart's unstable and could change his plans at any time. I can't predict his actions, and it vexes me. I'm vexed."

Jonathan settled beside him, propped up on one elbow. "And?"

Sighing, Deven added, "And I'm concerned about Miranda. That whole thing with the bloggers last year could have gone so much worse. People have tried to tell her she has to think ahead, but she's just not listening."

Jonathan nodded; he'd heard all of this before. "And?" he prompted.

They stared at each other for a moment before Deven said, "And I'm nervous about seeing him again."

The Consort leaned down and kissed Deven's throat just over the pulse. "Would you like me to see about getting you a chastity belt?"

Deven sighed yet again, but this time at the heady warmth of Jonathan's lips wandering over his skin. It grew increasingly difficult to concentrate on the conversation. "It's not that . . . you know that's not going to happen again . . . don't you?"

A chuckle. "I know you'd rather blow a rabid badger than deal with David right now, but you saw how well avoidance worked last time. I also know that circumstances would have to change radically for the two of you to go down that road again."

"So you don't have any predictions on that score? No visions of shag dancing in your head?"

"Just one," Jonathan said, one hand wrapping around the back of Deven's neck to pull their mouths together.

When Deven got a chance to come up for air, he panted, "Why, Mr. Burke, are you trying to distract me?"

"No," was the reply, somewhat muffled. "I'm trying to get laid. Now, if you wouldn't mind shutting up?"

Deven smiled up at him. "As you will it, my Lord."

* * *

From Rolling Stone:

Since Grammy–winning musician Miranda Grey's debut single "Bleed" devoured the charts, the singer has been subject to wild speculation about her closely guarded private life. Everything from her husband's career

to the state of her health has been debated and dissected in the media, especially on celebrity gossip blogs like Constellation, which last year went public with a controversial interview with an unidentified former employee claiming that Grey is, in fact, a vampire.

For the most part Grey's PR team ignores the rumors, and when asked point–blank by a journalist if she's a vampire, Grey famously said, "Oh, absolutely!" with that wry smile she's become so known for.

Notorious for avoiding public appearances during the day—and avoiding interviews in general—Grey dodged the sci–fi theories about her mortality for nearly a year before Constellation uncovered another explanation entirely: Miranda Grey is ill.

The website reportedly paid handsomely for a set of test results and scans stolen from Grey's medical file revealing that her idiosyncratic behavior may not be caused by something out of legend, but something equally strange: Erythropoietic protoporphyria, an extremely rare condition caused by an enzyme deficiency, causes her skin to itch and blister on exposure to sunlight.

When Rolling Stone finally scored a one–on–one interview with the singer in a luxurious room at Austin's Driskill Hotel, it was first things first:

RS: So, let's get this out of the way.

MG: (laughing) Okay. Yeah, I'm totally a vampire. In fact in bed my husband and I call each other Louis and Lestat.

RS: Well, we're sitting here in this hotel room and I can see you in the mirror over there, so I guess that part of the legend is wrong.

MG: These days every aspect of people's lives is online, so I guess it was only a matter of time before my condition got out in the press.

RS: Why didn't you just come out with the truth in the beginning?

MG: It is kind of fun to go on the fan sites and see people arguing over whether I'm human, but I'd rather people think I was a vampire than some kind of invalid. I don't think of myself as a sick person, but people treat me differently when they find out. There was one guy, though, at a magazine I won't name, who tried to get me to prove I've got porphyria by sticking my arm out a window to see if it burned.

RS: What did you say to him?

MG: As I recall, I said, "Go fuck yourself." That was the end of that interview.

RS: Does your condition cause any other symptoms?

MG: It does. In fact, one of the documents that got circulated was a postsurgical report from when my spleen had to be removed. My red blood cells are defective, and processing them is hard on my organs.

RS: But going out in sunlight won't kill you?

MG: Technically, no. But it hurts like hell and makes my skin come off in sheets, so I'm basically nocturnal. It was never that much of a problem until the rumors started; how often do musicians do daytime concerts? But imagine going online and seeing ultrasound images of your insides on someone's blog—it was unsettling.

RS: Did you ever figure out who leaked the test results to Constellation?

MG: Yes. It was someone who worked for my personal physician, and that person has been dealt with.

RS: Speaking of which, you've worked with your medical team to establish a research foundation for porphyria—do you think you'll find a cure?

MG: Right now our focus is on learning more about the condition and helping people live with it. We've got a team working on a new form of sunscreen that's showing a lot of promise.

RS: Do you miss going out in the sunlight?

MG: You know, you would think so, but I really don't. My life is very full and rewarding and I love every minute of it. If I have to sacrifice having a tan for everything I've gotten to experience and achieve, well, redheads look better pale anyway.

RS: You didn't tour much in support of your first album. Was that a health–related decision as well?

MG: Yes. Travel isn't fun for me. I did a few dates in New York and L.A., but they were a nightmare.

RS: At the same time, though, you've found other ways to reach out to your fans.

MG: I love technology. Those same websites that were telling people I'm a vampire were vital in getting my name out there when I was new on the scene. That's the interesting thing about fame; the tide can turn for you or against you in an instant. One minute people are falling at your feet, the next minute they're driving a stake through your heart . . .

* * *

"My name is Miranda, and I am a vampire."

Two pairs of eyes, wide, were locked on her. She might have expected disbelief, but by now they knew better. They were experienced enough, and smart enough, to recognize the truth when they heard it.

The Queen of the Southern United States stood with her arms crossed at the front of the room, every inch of her from her black boots to her jewel–red hair laced with danger and power, an immortal menace arisen from the darkness to elicit fear in her prey.

At least, she hoped so.

"I'm here tonight because the two of you have been given a special assignment for the Austin Live Music Festival: namely, me. Your supervisor, Detective Maguire, has chosen you to act as liaisons between my security staff and the Austin Police Department. We felt it was important that you know what you're getting into in the unlikely event of an incident Saturday night."

She caught each of their gazes and held them until they looked away. She had found that humans had a hard time keeping eye contact with her; she wasn't sure what they saw, but she remembered a time when she couldn't meet people's eyes either, and she knew the power in that kind of contact.

Detective Maguire sat at the back of the room, keeping his distance from Faith, who was waiting for her cue. They could have sent another Elite to handle this meeting, but after what had happened to Detective Ojedo a few months ago, Miranda had wanted to make absolutely sure the two liaisons understood what they were

dealing with.

“Do either of you know the circumstances of Detective Ojedo’s death?” she asked. They all did, but she didn’t wait for a reply. “He was investigating a drug ring that had hired several vampires as enforcers. He knew what they were, and he knew better than to pursue one alone, but he tried to play hero, and this”—Miranda opened her mouth and pressed her tongue against her canines—“is what happened.”

One officer gasped; the other shrank back visibly.

When her teeth had slid back into her jaw and she knew she could speak without lisping, she went on. “In the event that you are faced with a vampire, either Saturday night at the festival or at any point in your careers, do not engage. You have each been given a code to send via text message, which will bring my people in ninety seconds or less, but under no circumstances—no matter who is in jeopardy—should you attempt to fight or shoot a vampire. You will piss us off and die.”

She gestured to Faith.

The Second rose and walked down to the front of the conference room. The detectives hadn’t known she was there until now, and it was clear they had guessed what Faith was.

“All right,” Miranda said. “I want you to see why trying to fight one of us is suicide. We are stronger, faster, and much harder to kill than you are. Even in Kevlar with a nine–millimeter, you’re basically just food to us. We will drain your blood until you shrivel and we will walk away smiling.”

Miranda nodded to Faith.

Faith shot her a grin, then took a swing at her.

The fight wasn’t choreographed, but they had practiced slowing things down just a little so that the audience would still be able to track their movements instead of just registering a blur of activity. They also had to hold back enough not to damage the room; the training spaces at the Haven were much bigger, and they were used to fighting in alleys without ceilings or desks.

Miranda spun around and blocked Faith’s kick, then backflipped in midair and landed about six feet away, dropping low so that Faith’s boot whizzed past her head but didn’t connect. They weren’t using weapons, which put Faith at an advantage, but Faith had said she considered this part of Miranda’s training, a chance for her to practice without a blade.

Not that the detectives knew that. To them, even the most amateur vampire warrior was Bruce Lee on an espresso–methamphetamine bender. By the time Faith and Miranda stopped their display, bowed to each other, and stepped back, one of the policemen was stark white, and the other one, a stoic Asian man who cleaned his glasses a lot, was gripping the sides of his desk with shaking knuckles.

“Thank you, Faith,” Miranda told her Second. “I’ll be out in thirty.”

Faith nodded, bowed, and strode out the door, locking it again behind her.

Miranda turned back to the detectives. “Now then. I only have half an hour, so let’s get down to it: Any questions?”

Two hands shot into the air.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Linda Haag:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive currently, people have do something to make these survives, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by simply surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a reserve your ability to survive improve then having chance to stand than other is high. In your case who want to start reading any book, we give you this particular Shadow's Fall (A Novel of the Shadow World) book as beginner and daily reading reserve. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

Matthew Ramey:

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Elaine West:

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