



Shadows Awoken

By Selina A. Fenech

Complete summary including spoilers.

It took Rylan all but dying and being brought back to life to understand that maybe he'd been in the wrong place all along—on the wrong side. Being back at Howell House, reunited with his mother and brother, feels right. But seeing Everly was temporary. He made sure of that.

There was a moment where Rylan thought maybe he could be with Everly—until he woke up from his coma to find her bleeding out on the floor. Rylan knows that Shroudhaven is too dangerous for her. She can't be a part of his life.

While Everly recovers, Rylan, Callan, Cherry, Tammy, Harper, and Denny investigate a weroth presence at The Boutique All. Harper gives an impressive, brutal performance against the weroth they find there, which Rylan finds a bit odd. After all, Harper is only human. What's more, Harper shames Rylan for his treatment of Everly, but Rylan is just happy that Harper and Everly will be leaving town soon, away from this dangerous lifestyle.

The team quickly vacates the shop when they hear police sirens drawing near. Harper relishes the power she feels from secretly using the Bane, which Everly entrusted to her to keep safe. She feels capable of anything. Harper never wants to feel powerless again.

The police arrive and spot the team in the alleyway. They make a run for it, since they know they can't explain the real reason why they just broke into the store. They find an unexpected savior: Cardboard Box Barry. Barry invites the dubious team to crawl inside his box and hide from the police. Inside the seemingly conspicuous cardboard box, the team is shocked to discover a vast maze.

It turns out that Barry knows all about shadyrs and eidolghasts, and that his magical cardboard tunnels lead all over town. He leads them deeper inside to a large cavern where the center of the maze seems to be powered by a magical crystal. Harper struggles with her cravings for the Bane. She knows that prolonged proximity to the Bane made the Gorhanmere shadyrs go crazy, but she is certain she can handle it.

Meanwhile, Jasper mourns the loss of his relationship with Cherry while out on patrol with Nilson, Vonny, and Annabeth. The Darkfrey brace stumbles upon the Howell House team, and Jasper is shocked to discover that Rylan has awoken from his coma. And he seems to have made a decision to desert the Darkfreys in favor of Howell House.

Vonny accuses the Howell House crew of being half-breeds and misfits. She says Tammy is a stain on existence after what she did to Vonny's son. Callan reminds Vonny that what happened to Blaise wasn't Tammy's fault. Tammy gets upset and disappears—this is the first the Darkfreys have seen of Tammy's strange ability. Jasper overhears Cherry make a phone call asking for a Dark Corner pickup.

A quarrel breaks out, and Harper takes a swing at Nilson. Vonny notes Harper's strength, and notes that the Gorhanmere shadyrs were especially strong, too.

The Darkfreys depart, and Jasper is sad to leave Cherry. But he knows that he belongs here with the Darkfreys, even if it means living a lie.

Meanwhile, Everly discovers that her wound from the Bane of Teeth and Stars is much worse than she realized. Around the wound, her skin is breaking apart. She attempts to keep this hidden when she and Harper make a quick trip to Howell House to say their final goodbyes before leaving town. But Everly is overcome with nausea from her worsening injury and passes out.

Lian, Rylan, and Harper are upset with Everly for lying about her wound. Rylan still can't go near Everly without changing form—a strange side-effect of Everly having released part of his soul back to him. Nobody knows why. The group theorizes that the thing inside of Everly seems to be reacting to having been cut by the Bane. Harper is forced to confess that she was cut by the Bane, too, which is how she knows that the reaction Everly is having is unique.

Rylan explains that according to shadyr history, the Everdark wasn't always dark; it was eidolghasts that made it that way. That's what the monsters do: take over a realm and slowly take away all its light until it's entirely beshadowed. While eidolghasts are dark, whatever is inside Everly seems to be made of light.

Their conversation is cut short when Rushelle, who had left earlier to go pick up Tammy from Dark Corner, calls with bad news: Tammy is missing.

The group soon receives a text from Tammy telling them not to worry about; she's off to see about making a wish. They immediately know she's referring to Myrkur Lake and the alleged "wishing stone" that sits in the middle of it. They also know that this is a death trap no one comes back from. They speed off at once to track down Tammy, but Rylan is upset that this emergency is distracting them from helping Everly whose condition seems to be deteriorating.

On the way to the lake, Lian confesses the reason why she left Darkfrey Estate all those years ago: her best friend tried to swim out to the island to wish herself "normal" after the Darkfreys rejected her. She died in the process. Ever since then, Lian has vowed to always take in anyone who defects from Darkfrey Estate, in defiance of the estate's hateful ways. The group now realizes why Lian lets Denny hang around, despite his frequently offensive behavior. Denny was kicked out of the estate for harassing Mordan Darkfrey's daughter, but Denny insists that what he had with Alexis was mutual.

Tammy enters the waters of Myrkur Lake, the depths of which are permanently beshadowed thanks to the shroudpool on the island in the middle. The Howell House team arrives and yells at her to come back, but she ignores them. After Vonny's verbal assault on her earlier, she is determined to swim out there and wish Blaise back.

Callan runs into the water after Tammy. Something attacks them, pulling Callan under. Tammy and Callan fight to survive as monsters in the water try to drag them down. From the shore, Everly saves them using her bright, glowing powers—but then she collapses from the effort.

Tammy confesses that the night Blaise died, they had stolen an artifact from Vonny Mesman. Lian is surprised to learn that Vonny was in possession of a shadyr relic to begin with. Evidently, Vonny and her husband, Kole, had collected more than one.

Harper recalls the lyrics to the famous local song, “There’s a Mermaid in My Lighthouse,” which seems uncannily relevant to the Beast of Teeth and Stars. So far, it’s their only lead.

Puzzled by the news that the Mesmans had hidden a shadyr artifact in their home—which goes against Darkfrey policy—Lian decides to investigate. In town, Lian spots Harper exiting Rook’s Theater, which she finds somewhat odd. Then, nearby, she encounters Vonny, whose behavior confirms that she’s up to something. But Lian doesn’t know what.

Meanwhile, the Howell House team uses Rushelle’s family connection to the Crybel Cove crew to solicit passage across the lake to Carnock Island. When Harper returns from hiding the Bane of Teeth and Stars somewhere safe, Everly, Harper, Rylan, Callan, Denny, and Tammy prepare for their boat ride with Rushelle’s uncle, Flint, and cousin, Layton. Rushelle leaves to go find Lian. Cherry gets an urgent phone call from Jasper and takes off.

The boat heads directly into a storm. Flint and Layton deliver the group to the perilous shores of the island where they have to take a small rowboat the rest of the way. He warns them against nyevmers—the water-dwelling eidolghasts that live in the waters there.

Rylan struggles to control his shapeshifting around Everly as the group hikes up into the forest towards the lighthouse. They are forced to make a run for it when a group of octopus-headed deer begins to chase them. But soon, the strange monsters are scared off by something else.

Eventually the group stumbles upon an old German submarine. Denny is eager to see what booty might be inside, but when he investigates, the group is set upon by fish-like undead Nazis. The Howell House team battles for their lives.

Meanwhile, Cherry answers Jasper’s call. Jasper asks Cherry to serve as backup on a secret mission that Vonny has assigned to him. He’s hesitant to complete the mission alone, because last time a brace member went off on his own, he ended being attacked and put into a supernatural coma. They head to Rook’s Theater.

Back on the island, Rylan rushes to Everly’s aid as she fights for her life. He takes on a powerful new dragon-like form and flies around obliterating the zombies. None of the other shadyrs have ever seen or heard of such a form before.

With Everly’s deteriorating condition, Rylan orders the group to rest and they tend to their wounds from the fight. Everly struggles with her guilt; none of them would be here if not for her. Soon, she experiences a panic attack, and is ashamed to have Rylan and the others witness her like this. But Rylan is impressed with her ability to cope, and Callan assures her that that panic attacks are nothing to be ashamed of.

When Harper comforts Everly, Everly notices new scars on Harper’s wrists, but Harper deflects. Tammy makes a snide remark about Harper being a cutter. The comment angers Harper, and she says she is sick of the group expecting her to act in a certain way, sick of all the contradictory social expectations that

she is forced to carry as a woman of color. Her outburst humbles the group, but Everly can also tell that something is up with Harper.

The group continues their trek upwards along zigzagging staircases. When the group senses a nearby eidolghast, Tammy is unable to fight her transformation, and she takes on a mermaid form. Since she can't walk, Callan carries her, and Tammy feels utterly ashamed. Everly's condition worsens, but she carries on. Then Denny spots a man in the distance—but the Crybel Cove crew told them that no one comes out here.

The man disappears, but the Howell House team follows him. The cracks on Everly's skin are getting worse, and she knows they're running out of time to save her. Soon they find an opening to the cliff where the man disappeared, and they arrive at an underground lake that will require them to swim to the other side. Tammy, already in mermaid form, checks the water for hazards. She reports that there are bones down there, and that she can sense a shroudpool in the depths. The group can also sense a nyevmer nearby, but it seems to be coming from deeper inside the island.

The shadyrs transform into their mermaid forms. Callan and Tammy check the bones again, and discover that some of the bones belonged to infants. Inside the cave, the tide continues to rise. Harper loses a contact, and the group learns her eyes aren't naturally green, it's just another part of her carefully curated persona, that appears to be falling apart.

The group reaches the other side and begins to climb up into the lighthouse. On the walls, they see many portraits that seem to be portraying the different ages of a young mermaid, and they wonder if it's *the* mermaid, like in the song. And if the song is real, that means there's still hope for Everly.

In one room, the group comes face-to-face with a surprise: a young mermaid, who is convinced that they have come here to kill her. She's not the same mermaid from the portraits, but has similarities.

Harper, who finds the shadyr to be the most beautiful woman she has ever seen, introduces herself. The mermaid, Neri, explains that her father warned her against humans. When Harper asks Neri why she doesn't turn back into her human form so that she can walk, Neri is confused. It seems that Neri does not know that she is a shadyr.

Neri is excited when she spots Tammy, another mermaid. She explains that her mother was a mermaid, too—the one in all those paintings. She admits that she has never left the lighthouse because of the dangers her father told her about, and the group is uneasy with the implication: Neri may have been trapped here against her will her whole life, stuck in mermaid form.

Neri tells the Howell team that her mother was shipwrecked here at the age of ten, and that Neri's father found her and took care of her. Disgusted by the implications, Harper resolves to get Neri out of here—she clearly has been held captive and lied to about everything.

Then Neri's fish-like father arrives and warns Neri that these are mermaid hunters. Trying to avoid a fight, Harper attempts to reason with Neri's father. He begins to sing the lyrics to "There's a Mermaid in My Lighthouse," and for the first time, Harper realizes that it is not a love story at all; it is a horrific story of captivity.

Callan demands to know about the human baby bones in the lake, which upsets Neri. Her father tries to plug her ears so that she cannot hear. Callan suspects that the bones belonged to Neri's siblings—the ones who didn't inherit the shadyr gene. An argument with the fish-man escalates into a fight.

Meanwhile, Jasper and Cherry search Rook's Theater for an artifact that has been missing from the estate for a while. Jasper can't help but wonder if Vonny sent him on this mission specifically to get him killed, and worries that maybe she discovered his secret. Would the Darkfreys really send him to die if they found out he was gay? Jasper can't be sure.

Jasper and Cherry find the Bane of Teeth and Stars, and Cherry is surprised to learn that this is what Jasper was looking for. Clearly, Harper must have left it here for safekeeping. Cherry demands Jasper to give back the Bane, but Jasper refuses, and he leaves with it, damaging their relationship even more.

The Howell House team combats Neri's father, who proves to be a formidable foe. The shadyrs are forced to fight in their weaker, human forms, because they'd be at a disadvantage if they took on their nyevmer shapes. The violent battle causes the lighthouse to tip, and water begins to pour in, washing Harper, Neri, and Neri's father out through a broken wall. Harper holds on tight to Neri, but Neri's father is latched onto her tail. Soon, he drags her down, and the two fall, plunging into the waves below.

Denny rescues Harper just in time before she falls, too. Harper is devastated that she wasn't strong enough to save Neri, the effects of the Bane having worn off.

They continue to the top of the lighthouse and find the crystal magically lighting the lamp there. It matches the one Everly broke in her father's antique shop. She realizes it is a piece of the Beast of Teeth and Stars—and that it was this beast that killed her father, not her. The others recognize that the crystal is just like the one that powers Cardboard Box Barry's maze.

The group discusses whether or not they should use the crystal, but Everly refuses; deciding she doesn't want any more pieces of the dragon inside of her.

The removal of the crystal extinguishes the glow of the lighthouse, so the Howell House team makes their way back in the dark. Around them, the lighthouse is collapsing. In the cavern through which they'd originally entered, the tide has risen significantly. They find Neri who survived the fall—but her father didn't. She is crying over something clutched in her hands: a tiny skull.

Then the group hears an approaching nyevmer, and they prepare to fight. The nyevmer is bigger than anything the shadyrs have ever seen. Knowing they can't take on an eidolghast of this size, the Howell House team makes for the cavern exit in attempt to flee. The shadyrs enter a skirmish with the giant nyevmer while Everly, Harper, and Neri attempt to escape—but they don't make it in time, and the cave ceiling comes crashing down, trapping them in the rising water.

Denny, Harper, and Neri desperately try to clear the exit, Tammy supports a gravely injured Callan in the water, and Everly is too weak from her wounds to offer up her dragon. Rylan realizes that he's on his own. After having spent the whole day trying to control his shifting in Everly's presence, he successfully transforms into the demon-dragon form and destroys the nyevmer.

But the water has risen too high. The shadyrs in the group will be able to survive in their mermaid forms for about twenty more minutes because they can breathe underwater—but that leaves Everly and Harper. Everly tries to use her powers, but she's too weak, and she can feel herself dying.

Everly tells Rylan that once she and Harper are gone, he and the other shadyrs need to swim down to the slayed nyevmer to maintain their mermaid forms and wait for the tide to go down. Rylan and Everly have a heartfelt moment as Everly waits to die. Rylan tells her that he loves her—and always has. They share a bittersweet kiss.

Meanwhile, Jasper returns to Darkfrey Estate with the Bane of Teeth and Stars. On his way to report to Mordan, Vonny and Kole Mesman intercept him and ask for the Bane. Jasper is hesitant to challenge Kole, who is possibly unhinged and prone to violent outbursts, but he is also hesitant to hand the Bane over. Vonny reminds him that the last time someone couldn't keep their mouth shut, they found themselves a foul of an eidolghast attack—and the same could easily happen to Jasper. They command Jasper to prove his loyalty by getting Cherry out of the picture for good, or else they'll out Jasper. Angry, Jasper silently vows to acquire evidence against the Mesmans.

Back in the cavern, the group braces themselves to become submerged with no escape. Tammy realizes she has come to love these people like family. With one last push, Tammy, for the first time ever, succeeds at teleporting on purpose while bringing others with her.

The Howell House team appears at Dark Corner. Everly is in excruciating pain, and she knows she is teetering on the edge of death from her Bane-inflicted wound. Rylan wants to use the crystal on Everly to save her. Last time Everly broke one of the pieces of the Beast of Teeth and Stars, it killed her father. The group fans out, creating a safe distance from Everly. Then, Everly breaks the crystal.

She lights up like fireworks. Rylan attends to the quickly fading Callan, who is barely responsive from blood loss. Neri, still in her mermaid form, begins to sing. Somehow, the singing works wonders, and it heals the group from their assorted wounds. Callan sits up, no longer teetering on death. With nothing more they can do for Everly, the Howell House team watches and waits.

Everly finds herself floating in sensory deprivation, unable to move, but her pain is gone. She comes face-to-face with her dragon. The beast tells her that it is called the Coruscare. Everly enters a battle of wills with the being.

The Coruscare transports her to its memories and brings her to its original realm, which is full of shadyr-like beings—the Coruscare's servants. Then Everly sees something she has seen in her dreams many times: a black void of smoky, oozing malice. The large black mass uses the Bane of Teeth and Stars to defeat the Coruscare, breaking it into pieces.

Everly is shown images of shadyrs fleeing their war-torn dimension into the human realm. Three shining crystals are separated and lost. Everly sees herself dropping her father's crystal, where the Coruscare emerges and uses her as its host. Then the Coruscare shows Everly lost and crying in the woods. Rylan appears. The Coruscare partially consumes Rylan, bonding him to Everly as her—and thus, the Coruscare's—protector. Everly is shocked to realize that all those years ago, the Coruscare enslaved Rylan to her, and that was why he'd always been in her dreams. It wasn't fate, or love.

The Coruscare makes a request of Everly: track down its third and final piece so it can become whole.

Everly wakes up at Dark Corner, worried that Rylan's proclamation of love wasn't real at all, but rather, a byproduct of the Coruscare's enslavement. When she tells the group about the Coruscare, the shadyrs

are shocked, because they have myths about a god called the Coruscare whom the shadys used to worship—and now she has two pieces of that god inside of her.

The team regroup at Howell House. Rylan wonders why Everly is avoiding him, but Everly isn't ready to tell him the truth about their bond. Then Cherry arrives and reports that Jasper has taken the Bane. Harper's reaction is severe, and Everly finally makes the connection that Harper has been using the Bane to empower herself.

That week, Harper struggles with withdrawal. Neri—who can now take on a normal human shape—adjusts to her new life at Boderleth Place. While cleaning out the attic to create a new room for Neri, Everly and Harper stumble upon old boxes purchased from an estate sale for a Portia Darkfrey. Included in the invoice is an item listed as “Starry Crystal.” It appears that this might be how Everly's father acquired the item to begin with.

Everly and Harper have a heart-to-heart and resolve some of their earlier tension. Harper explains that she's always had a lot of pressure on her. The standards she lives by as a black woman means that if she's not excelling, she's falling short. When the discussion turns to Neri, Harper blushing admits that she's attracted to her romantically—something she didn't know about herself.

In the boxes from Portia Darkfrey's estate, Everly finds a whip-like sword, which she gifts to Harper.

Everly ponders the Coruscare's request for her to acquire its third and final piece, but Everly doesn't feel like it's a good idea; a fully intact Coruscare could be worse than anything they could imagine.

Everly, Harper, Lian, and Neri are on their way to Howell House when Lian has to slam on the brakes as Jasper stumbles into the road in front of them.

Jasper is wounded—and has come to warn them: the Mesmans are trying to open a Shroudpool to the Everdark.



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