

## “The Last Legend of Gedrin Shadowbane”

By Erik Scott de Bie

*It is said that heroes of legend can see death lying in wait before it rises to meet them.  
And though all heroes die, what makes them legendary is how they choose to face  
death—whether it is with weeping or with a smile.*

~ Catalan the Mad,

*Eleven Lost Champions*, published 1403

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*Flamerule, The Year of the Reborn Hero (1463 DR)*

Gedrin Thalavar was an old, old man.

As the years passed—and for the man called Shadowbane, they numbered many more than most men of his heritage could ever hope to know—he found himself yearning for the simple pleasures he had stringently denied himself as a youth: an evening’s ride through the countryside, a pleasant goblet of wine accompanied by a warm pipe, bouncing children on his knee and listening to their laughter. Other men enjoyed these pleasures, men both lesser and greater than he.

Once, he would have called such men spurious. Now, he called them blessed.

A familiar ache sprang up behind his eyes, and by that Gedrin knew he was not alone.

“Master?” came the voice behind him.

Gedrin continued to sit silently before the boarded window of his rented chamber, looking down into the wreck that was the rotting port city of Luskan. He saw fires in the streets, burning into the night with no one to douse them. He heard the screams of the wounded and dying, pleading for rescue that would never come.

Such was a city that the gods had abandoned, in a world they had broken.

“Master?” His squire crept deeper into the room and paused when he caught sight of Gedrin sitting as still as a corpse. Gedrin turned his head slightly, and the boy veritably jumped backward. “Oh, my apologies! I did not . . .”

“It is no matter, Drovesm.” Gedrin waved one leathery hand, the skin spotted with far too many years. “The hour grows late, I know. Give me but a moment more.”

“As you wish, Master Shadowbane.”

Gedrin turned his pale eyes toward his apprentice. They had faded to near-sightless white three decades past, and one of them had gone entirely blind. The lad flinched.

Not really a *lad*, Gedrin supposed. Dark haired and slender, Drovesm was sixty years Gedrin’s junior, but that still put him past his thirtieth winter by now. It made Gedrin feel old, which seemed appropriate. Gedrin never sought to evade the truth: he *was* old.

He smiled gently. “No fear,” he said. “All will be well, as ever the Eye sees.”

“Of course, master.”

He froze Drovesm with his eyes, as easily as if he had reached out and caught him by the arm. It was simple now to hold a man with a stare, even a nearly blind one, though it had taken him fifty years to learn the art.

“The Eye sees all things,” Gedrin said. “*All* things.”

Drovesm’s face lost what little color it had, and his eyes darted down and to the side. He murmured something that might have been an affirmative, or possibly a prayer.

“A moment, master, and then we should make haste.” Drovesm would not meet his gaze. “Would you care for tea or aught to eat?”

“No,” he said. “But you should eat. You are a young man, and must have your strength.”

“Of course.” Drovesm clearly wasn’t going to eat. Gedrin wouldn’t have been surprised if his stomach was tied in an artisan’s knot. “I shall bring your walking staff.”

Gedrin smiled wanly. This night would have been the perfect night to pass on Vindicator if Drovesm wasn’t set to betray him this very eve.

“So you will be the one,” Gedrin mused so softly only a justiciar or a trained thief could have heard him clearly. “I had thought better of you.”

Drovesm paused at the door. “Did you say something, master?”

Gedrin shook his head. “The elephant-headed one, I think. Bring it here, ‘ere you prepare your own arms. I would stand a moment and collect myself.”

“Yes, master.”

When the lad had gone, Gedrin turned back to the window and sighed.

In the old world, before the Spellplague had rewritten the laws of magic, holy paladins could smell out evil where it lurked, however hidden. Now, such powers were mostly lost to mortals. But Gedrin was a relic of that age and he well remembered how to read the hearts of men, even if there was no magic about it. Drovesm reeked of darkness—the very darkness Gedrin had fought all of his five and ninety joyless winters.

No—no, that was not right.

There *had* been joy in his long life, Gedrin reflected: evenings when he had lain in his wife Sivgena’s brown arms, spelling out her name in the stars, and then, years later, those of their children. On warm nights such as this, when Selûne rose full and bright, he could still hear phantom laughter on the wind or see her beautiful smile from the corner of his eye.

Gedrin’s eyes may have failed him decades ago, but his ears remained keen as ever. He heard the murmur of Drovesm’s voice below, as the squire spoke in hushed tones to a messenger.

All was being arranged, Gedrin knew, and it gave him a certain peace.

He'd known so little peace, in nearly eighty years of carrying the Threefold God's sword through battle after duel after war. He had buried most of his students and friends, watched each of his children perish, and cut down his own wife. When priestesses of Shar twisted Sivgena against Gedrin and the Eye, Vindicator had shed her blood. It had been Gedrin's duty, though he had never forgiven himself. An end would be truly welcome.

But when it came, he would make it such an end . . .

"Master Shadowbane, are you unwell?"

A light brown fringe of beard framed Drovesm's nervous face as his dark eyes looked upon his venerable master. That was what so many years of toil and blood had left Gedrin: venerable. He did not expect anyone would venerate his memory, though.

"Peace, son," the old man said coolly. "I am ready."

"Thanks be to the Threefold God." Drovesm wiped the sweat from his brow. "For a moment, I thought we would not be able to do our duty this night. I worried—"

"I know what you worried about." Gedrin regarded the acolyte serenely, though his face bespoke the gravity of the situation. "I am merely old—not crippled."

"Indeed, master." Drovesm bowed. "Forgive me, if I implied otherwise."

Ignoring the ache that had begun as soon as the lad had come into his presence, Gedrin shook his head. "There is nothing to forgive," he said softly.

Drovesm handed him his ivory-headed cane, with its head shaped like an elephant's face. Decades of use had smoothed the ivory to a softness that reminded him of Sivgena's skin. With this staff, Gedrin was able to stand. Once Drovesm had seen him safely on his feet, the lad went

away to don his own arms in preparation for the night to come, leaving Gedrin alone at the window.

As he listened to Drovesm rustle about the antechamber, donning armor and belting on his steel, Gedrin looked once again out into the smoggy night sky. He wondered if Selûne had accepted Sivgena into her embrace, especially after she had cuckolded them both with Selûne's dark sister, Shar. He wondered if his wife or their children were waiting for him beyond the veil, and whether a life of heresy meant eternity in the wall of the faithless and false.

At least he had one child left. Even if his darling Levia was not his own flesh and blood—and young enough to be his grandchild—she loved him like a daughter to a father, and that love had sustained him well these many years. Without her, he would have died long ago.

What legacy was he leaving for her? Was this a fitting end to a life dedicated to fighting the shadows? Who would take up Vindicator after this night—or would it fall into darkness, like so much of the world?

These questions plagued Gedrin, and for the first time since he'd been forced to slay Sivgena in their bedroom he felt the cool nails of doubt tapping at the base of his skull. He had thought it would not matter—that the cause would be lost—but now . . .

“Are you prepared, master?” Drovesm asked from the door. He had donned his black leather cuirass and wore twin blades that seemed more suited to a thief than to a paladin. It was the way he trained—the way Gedrin had trained them all.

Gedrin saluted, showing the back of his hand, fingers up. The eye of the long-dead god of guardians, Helm, gleamed from the ring he wore on his left ring finger. When he let down the salute, his black cloak folded over the ring, shrouding the symbol in shadow. The salute was abrupt then hidden, just as Gedrin had lived his life.

Perhaps there would be no light left in the world after his went out.

He patted the hilt of Vindicator, his trusty hand-and-a-half sword—the god’s sword, which he had first seen in a vision before the Spellplague, and carried every day since.

“Once more, old friend,” he whispered. “Once more—then we can rest.”

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The crippled port of Luskan squatted on the coast of the Trackless Sea like a canker waiting to be gouged out—a sore that had grown so bulbous, foul, and deep that it could not be lanced without killing the body of Faerûn around it. Gang leaders held court in once-great audience chambers and crumbling fortresses. Thieves and murderers ruled the streets—men feasting like beasts on any they could catch.

The place had been deteriorating for a century, and while it still resembled a city for now, Gedrin estimated that in ten or twenty years, it would fall to complete and total anarchy.

The two knights passed a ramshackle inn called Old Mari’s, and Gedrin saw a group of men and women clustered around the alley door, who were staring fixedly like folk half-dead. Their cloaks were stitched together of sackcloth that might once have held potatoes or grain, and now held bodies like broken twigs. They waited, twitching and shivering but not talking.

“What is it, master?” asked Drovesm, but Gedrin only shook his head.

The door finally opened to admit a woman of sixty or seventy winters with a sharp face to match—Mari herself, Gedrin suspected. The hungry folk pressed forward mindlessly, but she warded them off with a stout cudgel. When her porch was clear, she reached inside the inn and set out a large black iron pot for the gathered folk.

“Ye have what’s left, and see that me pot’s clean,” she said, wiping her arm across her brow. “Got to start the stew for morn ‘ere midnight.”

The starving folk fell upon the proffered pot like dogs upon a fallen fox—like crows upon a corpse. Gedrin thought Mari would have the pot back within a fifty count.

“Gods know I’m too generous,” she grumbled to no one. “But a touch o’ kindness never killed none, that it didn’t.”

Gedrin caught her eye, and she offered him a cold, weighing look that softened to a sort of understanding. He looked away, and they continued on their path.

Luskan’s buildings and plazas had never been great or wealthy, but now they were little more than half-collapsed lotus dens or stinking warrens where pox-ridden men and women rutted for coin like pigs for mud. A chorus of grieving and dying voices floated up from the sagging houses and gutted manors, rippled through the streets and the gutters, to join with mocking voices and cries raised in the pleasures of the flesh.

Most of these last emerged from the windows of the Shined Spur across the street—a festhall, whose boarded-over windows permitted glimpses of old silks and flitting aromas of incense. The coat of arms had only seven of its original letters, and it could once have been the “Shining” Spur.

Gedrin Shadowbane had found joy only rarely in the arms of a lover. Thus, the sounds of prostitutes at work were a sort of reminder of a life empty of the flesh. But he heard also a testament to the power of mortal men and women to see light ahead, despite the darkness. They traded their bodies and surrendered their will for coin, yet they found a kind of joy. They gave and took solace in one another, even surrounded by their rotting city.

As a younger man—a fanatic of the Threefold God—he would have condemned them as hopelessly irredeemable. Now, in his dotage, he could not help but smile bemusedly. All those years spent despising the unrighteous—all those years wasted.

At his side, Drovesm also harkened to the sounds of coin-lads and lasses in the festhall, but Gedrin knew there was no enlightenment in his apprentice's interest. It was simply lust, and had naught to do with light or darkness at all.

"Squire," Gedrin said, and Drovesm snapped to attention. "My eyes betray me in Selûne's moonlight. Lead our way."

"Of course, master, of course." Drovesm turned his attention wanly away from the festhall. He spat on the muddy street. "*Whores.*"

Gedrin appraised him critically but kept his silence.

Then his gaze shifted to a beggar who sat at the corner of the Spur.

His eyes were poor, the street far from ordered, and Selûne had hidden herself once again behind foreboding clouds overhead. Because of these things, Gedrin could not say how he managed to see the beggar boy: a child of eight or so winters, slumped over, wrapped in a number of moldering sackcloths. Perhaps the lad had coughed or moved in some way, or perhaps it was the way the lad stared across at Gedrin with a burning intensity he'd not seen in many, many years.

"Master?" Drovesm asked as Gedrin stepped into the road. "Master, what—?"

Gedrin crept slowly toward the boy, but only out of consideration for his age, not wariness. He felt again the familiar sensation of darkness from this boy, but there was light as well. Here was a soul not lost, but neither was it saved. The boy's eyes—so pale gray as to be almost white—lingered on Gedrin's face with a certainty and confidence that impressed him.

They stood there, the old man and the boy, regarding one another. Gedrin saw scars about the boy's lips—as if he bit them often—and a nose that had been broken and set poorly. His skin



seemed more grime than flesh, cut only by lines of tears. He was clutching his left hand, which was clearly quite broken. And the fingers also had bite scars.

Then the boy extended a chipped ceramic bowl toward him. “Spare a copper?” he asked. “Haven’t eaten in days.”

Gedrin scowled. “What did you say to me, boy?”

Another beggar might have scampered away in the face of Gedrin’s mounting wrath, but the boy only set his jaw and stared back, unafraid.

“I’m hungry,” he said. “Give me a copper, that I might eat.”

Gedrin smiled halfway. The boy certainly had courage.

His apprentice called back, his voice nervous. “Master? We must hurry.”

“Stay and belt up, Drovesm.” Gedrin crossed his arms. “Your name, lad.”

The boy looked at him curiously, as though no one had ever asked him this.

“You *do* have a name,” Gedrin said.

“Kalen.” The word sounded hesitant on the boy’s lips. “But none call me that. None but my sister.” He looked wary, as though he had stepped over some line and offered too much of himself. The nigh-colorless eyes were distrustful, but also full of spirit. And they seemed, to Gedrin’s blurry vision, a single eye, watchful and vigilant. A sign.

The visionary leader of the Eye of Justice had never turned away from a sign.

“I am the paladin Gedrin Thalavar, also called Shadowbane,” Gedrin said. “Lord of the Eye of Justice—chosen knight of the Threefold God. Do you understand?”

The boy frowned. “No,” he said, honestly. “Your name, aye, but I’ve never heard of—”

From under his cloak, Gedrin drew forth Vindicator—sheathed in its black scabbard, perfectly balanced—and drew the blade a hand’s span. The boy’s breath caught at the sight of

the burnished steel. There was naught of fear in his grey eyes, only wonder. Gedrin could plunge the blade into his small chest in a heartbeat and the boy would not stop marveling at Vindicator.

Perhaps Gedrin had chosen rightly, after so many years.

Gedrin held Vindicator reverently, taking one last measure of its familiar feel, then let it fall contemptuously, as though ridding himself of a troubling nuisance. The sword clattered softly to the broken cobblestones and rocked to a rest before the boy.

“Never beg again,” Gedrin said.

When the boy made to speak, Gedrin shot out a hand and clouted him on the ear. Startled, his eyes filled with sudden rage, the boy glared up at the old man. “What was that for?”

“So you remember,” Gedrin said. “Accept it—don’t try to run from it, as I did.”

Then he drew a ring from his hand: a silver ring with the image of an all-seeing eye in the palm of an upraised gauntlet. It was the symbol of a long dead god, who was the first of the three. This he dropped into the boy’s bowl, where it landed with a loud clink.

“When you follow the sacred path Vindicator demands of you, go to Westgate,” he said. “Find my daughter Levia and show her this ring. She will know what has passed between us.”

“But—” The boy gaped at the sword on the cobblestones. “I don’t understand.”

Gedrin turned away, sweeping his cloak wide to hide the boy behind him. In the same motion, he draped the cloak over his left arm to conceal Vindicator’s empty scabbard. With luck, Drovesm would not have seen what passed between him and the beggar, and would not have heard it either over the cries from the festhall.

Drovesm was approaching, his puzzled face filled with worry. “Master, what are you—?”

“Enough of this delay.” Gedrin seized Drovesm by the arm before he could see the beggar boy. “I would have us be about our business, and soon.”

Drovesm tried to look, but Gedrin pulled him on. The younger man relented.

They walked on down the street, toward the ruined docks and their destination. Barthul's Wares was a cavernous storehouse owned by a disreputable merchant thought to deal with the shadiest Waterdhavian merchants, those who sold near-stolen goods for a killing on the streets of Luskan. This very eve, there was a meeting of powerful merchants and scoundrels who dealt in arms and poisons. Barthul's actions led to death and chaos in this rotting city, and Gedrin would put a stop to it, one way or another.

They hesitated outside the storehouse. Barthul's wealth apparently afforded him glass windows even in Luskan, and that they were still intact told Gedrin he was known to honest thieves hereabouts as a force to be avoided. Murky light filled the bleary windows, and the sounds of voices rose to his sensitive ears, mingling with the stench of carrion in his nostrils.

Gedrin looked out over the bay, taking in one last glimpse of the world he loved—and hated—so very much. The few remaining ships rocked gently in their encrusted docks. The wrecks of less fortunate ships marked the watery graves of untold numbers of sailors, and new bodies were joining the ranks of the dead every night. Nearby, Gedrin saw two men disposing of a cart-load of naked, stripped corpses that looked to have fallen to plague, murder, starvation, or anything else that might stalk these streets.

Gedrin wondered just what sort of creatures might be haunting these streets. He thought of the boy with the white eyes and smiled. The world had no idea—not yet.

“Your ring, Master,” said Drovesm, pointing at the gnarled hand that gripped the elephant-headed cane. “Did you misplace it?”

Gedrin smiled. “I hope to the gods I have not.”

He glanced behind him, and sure enough, the beggar boy was gone.

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Drovesm led Gedrin into the midst of the thieves and scoundrels waiting in the storeroom of Barthul's Wares. Gedrin was not surprised. The familiar ache had never misguided him, and he had seen this betrayal coming for months.

"I swear, master, I had no idea—" Drovesm protested. But Gedrin wasn't listening. Instead, he quietly evaluated the thugs who had come to end his life.

"Welcome, Shadowbane," called a deep, hearty voice. Barthul himself, Gedrin guessed from the way the fat man commanded the attention of the room. He must have once been a bull of a man, though he'd gone to bloated rotundity in his advancing age. He was dressed in purple robes and applauded, mockingly. "What an honor this is!"

Gedrin made no reply.

At Barthul's right stood a priestess of Bane in spiked black armor, who bore a scepter that crackled with green lightning. Gedrin recognized her, though not by name—they had fought once before in the alleys of Westgate, and this was like to be her vengeance for that defeat.

At the fat merchant's left stood a bearded man in dark robes who wielded a wand in either hand—a zhent wizard, no doubt. They were all alike, wizards of the Black Network, though far weaker than they had once been, nigh a century gone.

Four other merchants—men and women from as far away as Amn and Calimshan by their features and dress—hovered nearby. Clearly, they were not combatants but mere bystanders. Between Gedrin and the merchants stood a dozen men and women armed with swords, studded clubs, and knives of various sizes and shapes—many of which fairly dripped with dark green poison. Their eyes were hungry and their sneers venomous.

“What an honor,” Barthul continued, “to have such a noble and legendary hero grace us with his presence.”

Gedrin said nothing, only nodded stiffly. He would bow to no man.

The dismissive gesture was not lost on the merchant, who turned slightly pink. “You have troubled my affairs in Luskan for some time now, Gedrin Shadowbane.” Barthul dropped all pretence of courtesy. “Tonight, I shall make an example of you for my associates. See now, fellow lords and ladies of coin, what happens when you cross steel with Barthul the Black.”

The thugs clutched their weapons. Their faces, however, were nervous. After all, Gedrin Thalavar was a hero, and none wanted to be the first to move. The wizard and priestess waited, spells at the ready, though Gedrin could see worry in their eyes as well.

“I am sorry, master,” Drovesm repeated from the door. He had eschewed his attempt to convince Gedrin of his innocence, and instead spoke truth. “They offered me too much coin. It is better this way. Better for us all.”

Gedrin did not bother to reply. There was no purpose in it, though he admired that Drovesm could admit his flaws. Honestly, he’d thought that beyond the lad.

Awkwardly, slowly, he knelt and bowed his head.

“This is the last conspiracy I will thwart,” he said. “The last den of evil I shall cleanse and expunge before I know peace and rest. Shadow and darkness must be pursued in every form, through every street, down every path, no matter how dark, until it is wiped from the world.” He looked around at all of them. “You are all corrupt, and so must be burned.”

The words of his boast echoed about the chamber, and the gathered folk stiffened. The merchants in particular went pale to hear his condemnation. Even the priestess looked dubious, and the wizard’s hands shook, the wands wavering.

Barthul, however, was unconvinced. “Tell us, *Shadowbane*,” the corpulent merchant sneered, pointing at Gedrin’s belt. “How is it you plan to slay us without your legendary blade? The stupid greybeard comes before us unarmed!”

That went some way toward reassuring Barthul’s hireswords and hirespells. The awe that radiated from Shadowbane dimmed, and the thugs visibly relaxed. A few even whispered jests of their own, and laughed hollowly. The priestess looked satisfied and the wizard grinned, exposing a mouth full of filed, sharpened teeth.

“Kill him now,” Barthul said, and his small army crept forward.

Gedrin Shadowbane gave a tiny smile—the most emotion he had ever showed any being outside his family—and closed his eyes. He whispered a prayer to the threefold god.

Then he burst with light, sending the men flying away through the air.

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When Gedrin next opened his eyes, the world was on fire.

Barthul, the thugs, the wizard, the dark priest, as well as the treacherous Droversm—all of them burned. They screamed and clawed at the walls, trying to escape the searing radiance. Light burst again and again from the kneeling figure, and the rays burned eyes from sockets, blackened hair and flesh.

Those who caught the brunt of the radiance died quickly. Barthul popped like an overripe grape and evaporated, leaving behind only a shadow shaped like a terrified man. The wizard flailed crazily and fell to black flecks of ash like a wisp of paper caught in a raging flame. The sobbing Banite arched against the wall like a crucified woman, nailed into the plaster and loam by the old paladin’s burning light, then fell to the floor as so much bones and charred flesh. The soldiers unlucky enough to be trapped between Gedrin and their masters cried out as their

weapons caught brilliant flame. They fell choking and heaving to the ground, unable to breathe the burning air.

“Master!” Drovesm cried. “Master—please! I was wrong!”

“Let the light of righteousness purify you, as it has purified me,” Gedrin prayed through the raging gleam. “The wicked cannot stand, but the light shows mercy to the repentant.”

Abandoning words, Drovesm pounded his head against the wall, trying desperately to stop the pain. Finally, there was a crunch, and he slumped down, body locked in spasms.

Men and women clambered down to their knees, begging forgiveness, but the light was all-consuming. Those nearest to the paladin incinerated to ash, and those slightly farther away shed boiling blood and scalding tears in equal measure.

The storehouse was full of death that eve—death that came swiftly on the wings of scorching radiance, before which none could stand.

“But—but we are not evil!” cried an Amnian merchant who tried vainly to hide from the light. “Please! I—I trade in coin! I’m not a good man, but I’m not *evil*!” Beside him, a Calishite woman with a nose like a knife screeched as she shielded her scalding face.

The radiance dimmed slightly, as though the words dampened it. Then Gedrin sighed.

“But you are corrupt,” he said sadly. “And that is the same thing.”

The light was renewed, brighter than before. The merchant collapsed with a moan, and his companion’s hair burned away as she fell senseless, her limp hands revealing a charred mess where her face had been.

The cries faded—all his foes burned to little that still resembled life.

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After a dozen excruciating, agonizing breaths, the light finally dimmed and faded around the ancient paladin. He knelt at the center of a vast circle of ashen death and looked about it with a mixture of sadness and resignation. Until he rested for a time, the light would hide beyond his reach. He had spent as much of it as his flesh could stand.

Gedrin Shadowbane felt his heart beating madly. He had not channeled such power for decades, not since he had slain a great shadow wurm in service to his god. Perhaps death was coming at last, and he feared and longed for that darkness in equal measure.

Darkness did descend, though it was not as he expected.

A shape faded out of the shadows. Had he looked behind him when the light was flaring forth, he might have seen the shadow man pressed back in the corner, as far from the searing light as he could be. The creature walked through the shadows as though they were in a world all their own, and indeed they were.

Gedrin recognized his old foe, though it had been many, many years indeed since they had last met. “Kirenkirsalai.”

It was a name he had not spoken for thirty years, not since the duel in which he had destroyed the creature Sivgena had become—a creature into which *he*, the shadow man, had made her. It mattered little, now. Gedrin was done and finished.

“You remember,” Kirenkirsalai said. “You remember the name I gave you to call me.”

Gedrin considered his foe. He may have once been a mortal born of a human and an elf, but there was little mortal about him now—had not been in more than a century. His eyes were completely black—no irises, no whites, only impenetrable blackness.

“Yes,” he said. “That, and your true name, Ne—”



“Never that name.” A hand settled upon the old man’s throat, choking off his words.

“Never again will I wear that name. I am beyond that—*better* than that. Perfected.”

He blinked up wearily. Breath was almost gone, and with it words. He was dying, he knew—one last show of radiance before the end. He thought he could see the threefold god’s faces, and he might have smiled, had his face been accustomed to the expression.

“Where is she, Shadowbane?” Fingers wrapped in darkness caressed his bald scalp.

“Where is she, the child you promised to deliver to me, all those years ago? You *must* have her.”

Gedrin stared up into his tormentor’s face. He would not lie, nor would he beg. “No.”

“Nigh eighty years, and yet you *still* do not have her?” The creature drew back, his face splitting into a vicious, mad smile. “You men are all alike! Paladin or murderer, the vows you make in the name of honor are but *wind* in my ears.”

“You are wrong,” Gedrin said, but could say no more. His heart was pounding, and the left half of his body felt like a horse lay upon it. His time was over.

Shadow passed between him and the light above. His world grew dark as it ever was.

“Do not think to escape me. I’ll not let mortal age rob me of my vengeance.”

Then Kirenkirsalai hesitated.

“Your sword, Shadowbane.” The emotionless voice sounded almost agitated. Frustrated.

“You old fool—what have you done with your *sword*?”

Gedrin just smiled. He was looking at two points of light in one of Barthul’s murky windows. The boy with the grey-white eyes was staring at him, pleading with him.

*Do not beg, he thought to the boy. Do not try to run, as I did.*

“You are useless,” said the shadow man, drawing away from the paladin contemptuously.

“A pathetic, ruined old man with no more purpose. You are done, old man. Done and dead.”

“Perhaps,” Gedrin whispered. “But he is not.”

“What?” the shadow man asked. “Does the old man ramble, when his time is upon him?”

“My chosen heir will carry on.”

“Chosen heir?” The shadow man laughed. “Your apprentice turned on you and now lies dead at your hand, Shadowbane.” He pointed to the pile of ash that had been Drovesm. “Or have you forgotten? All have betrayed you and you have naught left. You will die a broken man—a failed cause.”

The words fell on Gedrin’s ears, but he hardly paid them heed. He was staring at the boy with the pale eyes, luminous in the tiny window to the burned out room.

We shall see, he thought.

The old paladin gave one last smile, then looked away from the boy at the window, and back toward the creature of darkness who stood before him. There was a sword in his hand—a long thin blade composed of pure midnight. He assumed a graceful thrusting stance, the blade poised over Gedrin’s heart.

“You can die now, Shadowbane.” He sneered, his vivid black eyes gleaming with malice.

His heart was hammering. His chest felt like it was caving in on itself. Breath would not come, let alone speech. Gedrin Thalavar closed his eyes, knowing he could do nothing—no strength, no sword, no radiance left. Only acceptance.

The blade stabbed into his chest.

He thought of Sivgena and their children.

True darkness came.

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The next day, Kalen Dren hawked the ring and the sword, intending never to leave Luskan and never look back.

But fate had a different design in store for the young man...



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Kalen “Shadowbane” Dren

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