

The Shadowkin

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www.bravenewbooks.nl

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Published through Brave New Books

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ISBN 9789465469997

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank my husband. He has shown incredible patience during my writing journey. Without my dear father, who introduced me to slashers, I would never have written this novella. Thanks, Dad! And then there's my late friend Peter. He recognized my love for literature and nourished it. Thank you so much and RIP. Through my brother I learned to love the English language and Anglo-Saxon culture. Another friend I should mention here is Cheryl, a kindred spirit. She always believed in me. Cheers, Darling! I owe so much gratitude to many other people. You know who you are.

Prologue: The First Falling

The Dutch theme park Efteling had not disappointed Lafayette Marceaux so far. At thirty-six, the Creole worked the door at an LGBTIQA+ bar on New Orleans' Lavender Line. He rarely danced, but whenever he did, heads turned. The Louisiana native had warm copper-brown skin and a neatly trimmed beard. His physique was striking: broad-shouldered, muscular, and solidly built, with powerful arms and a lightly furred chest. Anyone familiar with gay culture would have called him a bear. His hair was cut short, slightly curly with a fade on the sides.

For Halloween, he had rubbed blue glitter into his magnificent beard and sexy 'stache. A tight black mesh jersey clung to his impressive pecs. The hint of a soft curve would appear whenever he allowed himself to fully relax. A leather harness wrapped his upper body, utilitarian in shape and modest in its appeal.

Lafayette was wearing black cargo pants, with metal accents. Military boots, heavy and unyielding, finished the portrait of him. This evening, his eyes, in which many had already drowned, were made up extra with dark eyeliner and a single red stripe underneath.

Lafayette was not flashy. He never needed to be. There was a quiet weight to him, a calm confidence that made people notice without quite knowing why. Men who craved attention had to chase it. Lafayette, on the other hand, just existed.

He had the kind of open face that invited conversation—until you perceived the stare. Sharp, unforgiving. You had best not cross him when he was in a grumpy mood. His folks weren't well off, which gave him a realistic view of life. Lafayette would come out with things like "Life don't owe you nothing. In the end, we all get our little patch of earth and don't come back from it." Even after all these years, he did not take much for granted. A steady job. A family that still called just to hear his voice. A body that had carried him through thirty-six hard years without letting him down.

When the email confirmed he had won the trip to Europe, he read it twice before the words truly settled in. Then he lowered himself to one knee on the living room floor. He folded his hands, bowed his head, and whispered a quiet prayer of thanks to the God who'd watched over him for as long as he could remember.