

### **Extract from Chapter Eight – Brotherhood of Shades by Dawn Finch**

‘I have allowed us to slip into the World Between,’ D’Scover said. ‘This is the realm between life and death. This is where you would remain without the Brotherhood, and this is what happens to those who cannot pass over successfully. This is not a safe place.’

Adam stood up and staggered as a great weakness overtook him. Abject terror gripped him as he looked down at his hands, curling his fingers into his palms as each one crumbled to a fine grey powder peppered with blood-red fragments. He lifted them in front of his face and the dust trailed in the air. Around him the office walls had become colourless and they shifted shape as he watched; they appeared to bend and flex, enveloped in a bleached vapour. All that remained of the room that he remembered were the paintings and porcelain bowls that still seemed to hold their vibrant colours in this veiled new world.

Adam spun round in the bloodied mist to face D’Scover and he could see the terror in the boy’s eyes. He had seen this look many times in new recruits. He knew that he could offer no comfort, only explanation.

‘This office has been constructed to remain outside the linear passage of time and so I can just as easily see the tenth century as the twenty-first. This site was the first official office of the Brotherhood, but it goes back much further than that. There has been a growth in this place for over a thousand years. The Romans built here, close to the river, and every group of inhabitants since has carried on adding to the city.

‘Due to the great age of this place, and the number of people who have entered the Passing here, buildings have trouble holding shape in this realm. It is why the walls do not seem firm anymore. They are brick and glass just as any other building, but the spirits here have a greater influence than any modern building materials. I have maintained the floor for you, as it can be too disconcerting to suddenly be twenty floors up in the air. Here, with practice, we can slip between the leaves of time and look at the city as it once was and, so the ancient Texts say, even as it will be.’

Adam walked to the faint illusion of the window and looked down on the city. Pale memories of towering office blocks drifted in and out of focus over a tumbling mass of buildings from

all of the ages of the city. Wooden structures spanned the slithering river for fractions of seconds and, as he watched, he saw a ripple of fire lick the heart of the city and vanish.

‘I would advise you not to look for too long,’ D’Scover said. ‘It takes a lot more practice to handle the city in this state. Any city that has a long and bloodstained history heaves in and out of this state of flux. London is in constant struggle to stay out of this realm. Occasionally a sensitive person can see the rift in ancient places like this and they see a pocket of, say, the sixteenth century in somewhere like Versailles or Rome. Roman cities often hold troubled times, memories of conquest and siege, which is why soldiers are often seen there.’

‘Who controls this world?’

‘An excellent question,’ D’Scover replied. ‘Here no one is master, and the Senior Council would have us believe that this realm is beyond control as the past has already been played out. It is rather like a filmed image: you cannot change what has already happened. However, there is a theory that the right spirit could influence the past and change the future and so this realm is occasionally patrolled by agents to check that nothing is changing. Another reason for our existence – this place is riddled with malevolence and danger.’

‘I can’t see any danger ... Are you ...’ Adam trailed off, dreading asking the question.

‘I am holding it back.’ D’Scover’s voice was chilling. ‘You are not ready to see the chaos of this place. You may never be.’

‘Whoa,’ Adam shivered. ‘That’s way too scary.’

‘You wanted straight answers.’

‘So it’s really full of crazy ghosts and stuff?’ Adam could not take his eyes from the misty world around him. ‘And no one has full control? Kind of like the Wild West, lawless, out of control?’

‘A fair comparison,’ D’Scover said. ‘We should leave. Too much time here can be potentially damaging to a new Shade.’

Adam turned back towards the room and shook his head in confusion at his frail surroundings. He looked around at the drifting illusion of faint walls and to stabilise himself he focused only on the bright colours of the paintings and the solid forms of the bowls.

‘What about the ...’ Adam began, but his voice sounded distant and faint and this surprised him enough to trail off before he could finish the sentence.

‘My collection?’ D’Scover anticipated the question. He walked to the nearest bowl and picked it up. The vibrant blues of the delicate yet complex geometric decoration on its flawless surface rested uneasily in the faint hand that held it.

‘There is such passion in these works,’ D’Scover said, still looking at the bowl and running his fingers round the rim. ‘All of these have been fervently believed in, and that in turn leaves a trace on their substance. They survive here in their solid form because their creators knew they were different and would last throughout time. Not all art lasts like this, only rare pieces.’

Adam looked with fresh eyes at the extraordinary colours that bled out from these works of art into the now bland room.

‘You mean people died making this stuff?’

‘I mean that people died *for* it, either creating it or protecting it. Items that have evoked such emotion leave a trace that time cannot diminish. It is why I collect them. I feel that the love left here is worthy of protection.’ D’Scover spoke with genuine emotion.

‘I’m cold,’ Adam said, still getting to grips with a voice that sounded as though it was speaking from another room. ‘but I’m probably remembering what cold is like and imagining it. Is that right?’

‘You are beginning to understand,’ D’Scover replied. ‘Would you like me to return substance to the room?’

‘I think I can do it,’ Adam answered. ‘Now I know it’s not really here, I think I can ...’

He closed his eyes and screwed up his face and fists, and the room flickered in and out of focus with sharp red sparks. Adam began to shake and the red sparks crept from his feet and crackled out across the floor like fiery drops of blood. After a few moments he gasped and slumped down into the shadow of what was once the couch.

‘I can’t do it,’ he sighed. ‘It looked so easy when you did it.’

D'Scover placed his hands, palms outwards, once more and moved them to his sides as though pushing through a curtain and the colour whisked through the room, returning it to the land of the living.

'Adam, all of this takes time.' He sat next to the boy. 'You have a natural gift; it is why you have been chosen. I have already seen you do things which should not be possible. You changed the Memoria. I have never seen anyone do that; I was not able to do it when I first died. You could be great, but it will take time.'

'Time? I've got loads of that. It's all I've got now, isn't it?' He slumped forward and dropped his head in his hands. 'I don't think I can do this. Maybe I should just take that Passing deal and be done with it.'

'The choice is yours, but I have great hopes for you within the Brotherhood,' D'Scover reassured him. 'I have confidence in you.'

'I can't get to grips with the whole dead thing,' Adam muttered. 'I can't do this.'

'I understand.'

'NO, no, you don't,' Adam snapped, standing quickly and striding forcefully around the room to where the bowl stood that D'Scover had previously held. 'You see, I died without anyone loving me; there's nothing to keep me in your world.'

He grabbed the bowl with one hand and held it up. 'You see this bowl?' he asked. 'Even this lousy bit of china has been loved more than me. It will stay perfect and whole forever because someone loved it, but I'll always be a damned shadow of a person. How can you know what that's like? You're an old man; you must've been at least forty when you died. You probably had a family and a nice warm life and love. How can you understand what it was like to be me?'

Adam held the bowl out and, as he lost concentration on his substance, it slipped through his blurred fingers. They both watched as the bowl fell to the floor and shattered into hundreds of thin blue and white slivers that cascaded round Adam's feet like jagged confetti. The boy slumped back to sit down on the couch and began to sob, a deep, shaking grief, and buried his face deep in his hands. D'Scover stood and walked to the couch to sit next to Adam; he rested his ice-white hand upon the boy's shoulder.

‘I’m so sorry.’ Adam lifted his red-eyed face. ‘I didn’t mean to; my fingers just weren’t there. I’m sorry I shouted, but how could you know what it’s like to be me?’

‘I do understand, Adam,’ D’Scover said. ‘Far better than you could ever imagine.’

He walked away from the boy and passed his hands over the shattered fragments of the bowl causing them to gather into a neat pile at his feet.