

# SHADOW FOLLOWERS



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## CHAPTER ONE

### Jacob, Son of Thunder Born of Lightning

An unearthly rumbling, deep and visceral, followed by an explosive clap that sounded like someone snapping a massive tree in two, pierced Jacob's tranquil dreams; a rolling thunderous noise so intense that it shook him into consciousness. Jacob literally flung himself over in his bed facing the ceiling-- listening carefully. Quietly, with heavy sleepy eyes he surveyed his bedroom-- still dark and silent. The distant sound of night crickets singing outside his window was somehow reassuring and peaceful. And he found himself wondering if he had heard anything at all? Perhaps it was nothing more than a bad dream, he thought.

And then--as if in reply--the answer came to him in bright blinding shards of white light. So bright, in fact, he had to cover his eyes with his hands. And then, a massive clap of thunder so intense it nearly shook the entire house.

Jacob sat up straight and then hurried to his bedroom window. He watched with particular fascination as each revelation of light revealed a magnificent storm. Like

an invisible beast, ravenous and angry, tossing his grandfather's farm into disarray.

An explosive gust of wind hammered away at a stack of old boards leaning against the barn. They rattled uncontrollably until they suddenly all toppled to the ground!

Another flash of lightning exploded in the night sky-- shooting through the clouds-- splitting into fiery veins. To Jacob it was as if they were a thousand fingers reaching in every direction.

The trees around his grandpa's home bent and swayed in the wind nearly touching the ground. Another flash of lightning and then another! Leaves, exploding in every direction, overwhelmed the night sky with a clutter of green that was spectacularly lit by the erratic flashes of light.

Jacob had never seen anything this amazing before. He had spent most of his life living in the city with his father and mother. And while they had their storms, there was little in comparison to

this! Another angry outburst of thunder shook the house.

With the unexpected death of his father, Jacob and his mother moved to the other side of the country, almost a world away from everything Jacob understood. To live with his grandfather in a new and completely unfamiliar place--a farming community near a little township called Carthage Falls.

In truth, Jacob knew little about his Grandpa Ezra. So far apart from one another, the best they could do was brief conversations in long distant phone calls. Jacob's memories and visions of his grandfather were mostly from short greetings followed by moments of small talk, and an old photo of him on his father's desk.

So--here he was now--in his grandpa's house. Fate, presenting him with a peculiar twist of life, being a stranger in a strange land; and yet the beginning of something new, and apparently, at this moment, ushering it in with spectacular force!

Jacob felt oddly drawn to the wind and the commotion happening outside--the lighting. He opened his bedroom door and looked down the hallway of his grandfather's home. It was dark and

quiet. He listened intently for any familiar sound. Only the wind rattling the shingles on the roof and the distant sound of thunder resonated amongst the walls. Slowly he ventured into the hallway and crept along quietly so that neither his mother nor his grandpa would hear him. Another flash of lightning and a low rumble of thunder caused him to pause. He was standing right outside his mother's open bedroom door. He marveled at the fact that she was still sleeping.

As he continued down the hall there was another crashing sound of thunder that shook the house so completely, he wondered if it might collapse. This time he was sure it would wake them, so he stood silently in the dark waiting, listening for them to stir; expecting them at any moment. He was curious, *how would they react?* Would his mother be afraid? He imagined her wrapping her arms around him, being reassuring and comforting. What would his grandpa do?

He waited, listening; in the dark it felt like forever. And yet, oddly, they never came. He cautiously continued along the hallway and then crept down the stairs, moving along until he was in the kitchen. The kitchen that was so dark; so unfamiliar

and new to him. Yet, it was filled with things; things that made him feel safe; things that he immediately identified with his grandfather.

Jacob hurried to the back door and opened it as quietly as possible. Though, he wasn't too worried. Neither his mother nor grandfather had heard the storm raging outside. And they hadn't heard him.

A sudden gust of wind took hold of the door yanking the knob from his hand, forcing the door all the way open. He closed his eyes and breathed in deeply. It was a warm wind, earthy and fresh, rushing over his arms, tossing his hair in every direction. Once more in erratic bursts, the lighting lit the way, revealing the entire yard. And somehow, in the strange glow from the storm it looked different—magical; a world which could only be seen between the twilight and the brilliant blinding eruptions of each thunderbolt.

Jacob closed his eyes and raised his arms as he walked out into the turbulent wind. A gathering of leaves rustled around him, bumping into him as if they were alive; lightning igniting bolts of blue light illuminating everything. It was strangely exhilarating. He opened his

eyes and ran through the wind to the front of his grandpa's house where he found himself standing on the brick walkway.

As if the lighting energized him with strength, he could feel a shiver climbing his spine and the hair bristling at the back of his neck. It was at that moment he sensed something. He couldn't put his finger on it at first, but he felt like there was something or--someone standing behind him!

Jacob slowly turned around, all the while feeling a nervous sickness in the pit of his stomach. But the lightning had abruptly ended and he found himself standing in intense darkness--silent, unnerving darkness. He stood waiting for the next thunderbolt of light. Watching, knowing it would come, yet growing a little frightened with each moment. As expected, another flash of lightning lit up the night sky to reveal something off in the distance. It appeared to be someone walking towards him. And then, once more, darkness overwhelmed him. Oddly enough, this time he wasn't afraid; instead he felt powerful--almost invincible. But he didn't know why? Again he waited completely enveloped by the night. And then, in the next burst of light—he was startled to find himself nearly face-to-face

with an old woman. She was standing only a few short feet from him. How? he thought, how did she get here so fast?

“Boy,” she said tartly with an elderly crackle in her voice. “What are you doing out here--boy?”

With that, Jacob did something that surprised even him. Without the slightest hesitation, he courageously took a step closer to her. Though he didn’t say anything to her, but just stood there searching her expression. She was much older in appearance than he had first thought.

“Boy,” she growled a second time. “I asked you a question. What are you doing out here on a night like this?”

With little doubt in his mind he answered her boldly. “I am Jacob,” he declared, “and this is *my* storm!”

She looked upon him with apparent disdain. And a frown formed at the corners of her mouth. The old woman eyed him from head to toe. “*Your* storm?” she said flatly, but curiously. Now with a slight smile, she asked: “How is it *your* storm?”

As this curious meeting continued, the wind whistled around the two of them. At different moments, the flickering light from the storm seemed to make her appear

and then disappear; in and out of darkness—here—then not here.

All of a sudden, an entire series of lightning strikes seem to pummel the earth one after another. The sound of the thunder was piercing; a cacophony of crashing low rumbles and ear shattering explosions.

Jacob held his arms out again and spread his fingers apart allowing the wind to pass between them. “I don’t know,” he finally answered. “*It* just *is*. It makes me--” He hesitated for a second, causing the old woman to grow impatient.

“It makes you--what?”

“It makes me feel strong, like I could do anything!”

“As if you could feel the energy from the lightning and the power from the thunder within your very soul?”

Surprised, Jacob lowered his arms and stared at the old woman. He was astonished that she, of all people, seemed understand what he was feeling. At that moment the stern appearance in her expression changed, becoming somewhat softer. Jacob also felt something else. He suddenly felt close to her, even safe around her.

With the change in her countenance she began to speak once

more. "My son, you are a very special young man and you will one day be a great man." She spoke quietly, almost reverently. It appeared to Jacob that everything around had become frozen in the moment, as if they were in a bubble. Yet the storm continued raging all around them; the wind blowing, leaves flying in every direction, but never touching them. Jacob listened carefully to her words, a little surprised and yet, for some unknown reason, they felt right.

Then she called to him. "Son of Thunder," she proclaimed, "yours is a mighty work and an arduous path, but know this--unseen to the world is an ancient war that has been waged for millennia; a war between the followers of the Great Serpent of Light and those who follow in the shadows of darkness." She pointed to the dark places under the trees and whispered, "They are the Shadow Followers. They once walked in the light of day, but sought after the promises of the Shadow King and have become subject to the night!"

Suddenly there was an odd guttural sound, a snarling voice from the dark places surrounding them--the shadows. "J-a-c-o-b," the voice hissed, slowly speaking his name. Lightning lit up

the sky once more and then everything went dark. He waited patiently for more lightning. And then in the next moment, with the next flash from a thunderbolt, he was surprised to see the old woman standing back to where he had first seen her; far off in the distance. She spoke once more, her voice sounding as if she was still standing right next to him.

"Remember Jacob, Son of Thunder, the Shadow King seeks to sift you as the very sands of the sea!"

Suddenly, another flash of lightning lit up the sky, so bright that Jacob could only watch from the corner of his eye. And then another clap of thunder as everything fell into intense thick empty darkness; then, in the next light he could see that she was gone.

Jacob marveled at her words as the wind tickled the back of his neck. And then, unable to resist the temptation, he found himself staring back into the dark places under the trees.

Once more an unearthly voice from the darkness spoke to him. "J-a-c-o-b," it moaned. There was a very curious nature about the voice. He thought he could hear distant screaming somehow intertwined within the very pitch and tone of it. And then, at that moment, the rumbling of

thunder seem to morph into a multitude of voices; a chorus which surrounded him; unearthly, hollow echoes whispering to him from the shadows. “Jacob--” they rasped in unison. His name became a hushed chorus of hellish moans which continued to increase in intensity until he found himself turning wildly in circles looking for the source of the demonic voices.

“Come with us, Jacob,” they hissed,  
“Come with us--”

To his horror, he watched as eyes began to open in the shadows; hellish green points of light, only two-by-two; like stars appearing in the deepest darkest depths of space. Jacob turned in terror and ran towards his grandpa’s house, but it suddenly felt like it was far away from him. He struggled against the darkness that appeared to be closing in on him; until he began to feel something new; a strength welling up inside of him. He whirled around. “Leave me alone!” he ordered, screaming and clenching his fists. Then he remembered what the old woman had said to him. And as he thought of the words a feeling of power came over him. “I am Jacob,” he screamed. “*I am* the Son of Thunder!”

To his amazement the hellish voices began to fade. At which he shouted the words again. “I am Jacob, Son of Thunder!”

This time the effect of his words was complete and the voices from the shadows fell silent. There was another flash of lightning, then everything became eerily dark. The storm was gone, replaced by a stifling darkness that overwhelmed him, causing him to feel trapped.

Another voice called to him, but this time it was different--he wanted to answer it. But something in the darkness was so constricting he could hardly speak. He struggled to shake off the heaviness, attempting to make a sound. He couldn’t! Once more the voice called to him; it was gentle and kind, and familiar. It was then that he felt the heaviness of his eye lids; then that he understood why it was so dark. Why they felt as if they were sealed shut. Jacob struggled against a force that seemingly controlled every muscle in his body; a force so intense that it even controlled his eyes--it was sleep.

With one last attempt, calling up every ounce of strength he could think of, he literally willed his eyes to open—to finally see where he was; where he’d been the entire time—sitting on his bed; his mother

shaking him by his shoulders trying to wake him. “Jacob,” she whispered, her voice heavy with concern, “are you all right?”

He looked around at his bedroom and then back into his mother’s eyes. He was still very disoriented. It was all a dream, he thought, just a dream!

“Is he ok, Sarah?” asked Grandpa. His voice was a little gravelly and sleep stricken as he spoke. He was standing in the hallway just outside Jacob’s room. The same place Jacob had stood when he started his *Alice* adventure. Sarah just nodded to him quietly. Ezra, apparently relieved, continued to watch until he was sure he was no longer needed.

Jacob, still groggy, shook his head trying to clear his mind. “The storm was so loud,” he mumbled, still disoriented. “I went outside to look at it and--there was this old lady--” He stopped himself, seeing his mother looking past him. He followed her gaze to his bedroom window, now realizing that it was completely calm outside; not a hint of lightning or thunder; not even the slightest breeze.

His mom patted his leg and stood up. He could see by the look in her tired expression that she didn’t think it was something to be worried about. In a

hushed voice she said: “It was just a bad dream, Jacob. That’s all. You need to get some sleep, honey.” She started for the bedroom door. “We’ll talk about in the morning, okay?”

As soon as the door shut behind her, Jacob quietly stood at the window and looked out. He could see the backyard lit up from the dull yellow glow of the porch lamp. *Certainly not lightning*, he thought, *and definitely not what I saw in my dream*. He walked back to his bed, stood at the edge of it and flopped onto his mattress face first. It had all seemed so real!

Jacob lay for the longest time unwilling to go back to sleep—thinking about the dream or--nightmare. He wasn’t sure what he had experienced. It had been so real to him that he was half willing to consider that he had actually experienced something.

The still quiet of Jacob’s room, that and his soft bed—the darkness—gently lulled him back into a near sleep state. When he heard what he thought were the low tones of voices, as if someone were whispering; talking out in the hallway. He turned over in his bed and listened more carefully. Clearly, there *was* someone talking, he thought. As he lay there

listening, he quickly realized that it was his grandpa and his mother. *Were they still in the hallway talking?* he wondered. Jacob got out of bed and quietly walked over to his bedroom door and listened. He could hear the weariness in his mother's voice as she spoke. But it wasn't just because she was tired. He had been hearing it in her voice for a few months now. It was because she was worn out, worried.

Finally, he heard her say: "It's going to take some time, Dad--" And with those words, Jacob new instantly what they were talking about. He knew that his mother had been deeply worried about how he was dealing with his father's death. And that she probably thought his nightmare was due to that. Right then, everything from the strange dream seemed to evaporate from his mind. Jacob returned to his bed, a sick feeling welling up in the pit of his stomach. Though, it wasn't an unfamiliar feeling. He rested his head on his pillow, his eyes moist and fell asleep.

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The next morning, he awoke to the aroma of bacon and fresh coffee. For a moment

he just laid there, still not quite awake, thinking about the strange dream and pondering the words of the old woman. But his thoughts quickly gave way to the irresistible scent calling him to breakfast. Jacob slipped into the clothes he'd worn the day before and headed for the kitchen.

"Good morning, young man," his grandpa smiled as he entered the kitchen. "I'll bet you haven't ever had fresh eggs before, have you?"

Jacob shook his head deciding to take his time getting to the eggs, but the bacon was definitely working for him, so he sat down without a word and waited.

"Is that coffee?" he finally asked his grandpa, now eyeing the pot sitting on the stove.

"Yes," he smiled. "Would your mother mind if you have some?" But Jacob didn't have a chance to answer him.

"Not yet," his mother said as she entered the kitchen and sat down at the table next to him. "I know you're almost fourteen and all, but I don't want you to start having coffee yet; you're still growing." She turned to Ezra, "Thanks for making us breakfast, Dad"

"No problem, I'm happy to do it!"

Sarah turned back to Jacob, "You had quite a night. Do you remember me coming in and waking you?"

Jacob wasn't sure if he wanted to talk about his dream. It was a little weird and felt somehow very personal.

"Well?" Ezra announced. "What happened? The way you were caterwaulin' in there, I thought that maybe the world was ending."

"It was just a bad dream, Grandpa--" he said as he took a piece of bacon and bit into it so he wouldn't have to talk. How could he expect other people to understand, when he couldn't even get a handle on it himself?

Ezra realized that Jacob didn't want to talk about it, and he had no desire to force the issue so he just smiled and went back to cooking. But Sarah wasn't satisfied and decided to probe him further, "You mumbled something about an old woman when I woke you up."

"Yeah--she was nice--" he said, cramming another bite of food in his mouth.

Sarah was confused, "Then, what was so scary about the dream?" He paused again, thinking about what to tell her. He didn't want to say it out loud. It sounded so juvenile. "There were these

shadowy things hiding below the trees in my dream and they were coming after me," he said through his chewing.

"Hmmm-- Funny how the strangest things can be scary in a dream," Sarah said thoughtfully.

Jacob nodded, but he knew those shadows would have been just as creepy in real life.

As his grandpa walked by he patted him on the shoulder. "Hey, do you want to go out to the farm and help me for awhile?"

Jacob jumped at the opportunity. "That would be great, Grandpa."

After breakfast, both Jacob and his grandfather grabbed their jackets and started for the door. Ezra searched his pockets for a minute. "Nuts, I think I left my keys up in my room." He looked at Jacob. "Hey, would you mind running up there and getting them for me?"

"Sure," Jacob said and quickly took off running up the stairs.

"They're in the top drawer by the side of my bed," Ezra yelled. But it was too late; Jacob was already up the stairs. He had heard his grandpa yell something about, "drawers," so he figured he would start over by the dresser. As he ran into his Grandpa's bedroom he looked around. It

was a room full of old memories with lots of pictures. He hadn't been in here before and he noticed the room smelled a little funny, but not necessarily bad.

There were all sorts of pictures hanging on the wall above the dresser; old pictures of old people in old places. He took his time looking them over, one by one. Then he saw something that sent a chill up his spine.

He stood there frozen, staring at the wall, as his mother walked by the open door with an arm full of laundry, "Jacob?" she said.

He didn't answer her, so she walked into the room trying to get his attention.

"Jacob, isn't your Grandpa waiting for you?" She stood by his side. "What are you looking at?"

He pointed to the wall. "It's... It's her," he stuttered.

"It's who?" She followed his finger to the wall of pictures.

"The lady from my dream," he said, pointing to one of the pictures on the wall. Sarah stood there in total confusion as Ezra walked in wondering what was

taking his grandson so long, and hearing the last part of the conversation. He looked to see who Jacob was pointing to. "That's my mother," he said quietly so as not to startle them. "If there ever was an angel on earth it was her... she had a heart of gold." Ezra continued, in response to the shocked looks on both of their faces, "She came to live with us during the last years of her life." Jacob listened to his grandpa intently as he continued to speak, "She loved your daddy, Jacob. It was hard on him when she passed away. In fact he wasn't much older than you at the time."

He put his hands on Jacob's shoulders, "Perhaps your mother and I need to hear about this dream of yours." Jacob looked back at the picture of his great-grandmother and nodded slowly. What had been just a weird dream had now taken an amazing turn into reality.

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