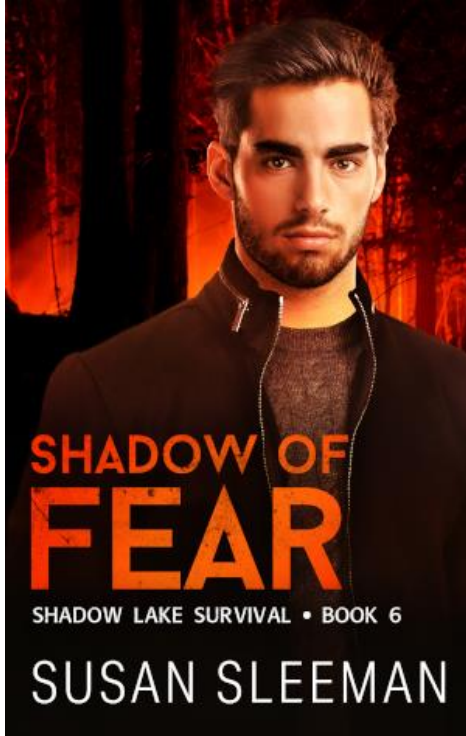


## SHADOW OF FEAR SNEAK PEEK



**Romantic Suspense** – Paperback, E-Book, and Audio

**Shadow Lake Survival Series Book 6**– Nov/2024

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### **To catch a killer...**

Forensic engineer Kinsley Pierce is used to dispassionately digging into building and structure failures to determine the cause of the failure. But when she starts receiving disturbing death threats, she's anything but dispassionate. Fearing for her life, she runs

to the one place she's always felt safe. Her hometown, Shadow Lake. But she never expected her best friend's bossy brother to steamroll in and take over her protection.

### **Will he work outside the law?**

Former deputy Devon (Dev) Graham now team member at Shadow Lake Survival insists Kinsley move to the company's compound for her own safety. He could do nothing else. As a former deputy, he spent most of his adult life protecting others. He also spent years ignoring his attraction to his little sister's best friend. He will never marry, and his sister would never forgive him if he led Kinsley on only to hurt her. Too bad. He would just have to ignore his feelings. She's in danger, and he's the one to watch over her. Whatever the risk. Whatever it takes. Even when they head down an upsetting path of betrayal and false trails that lead to a grisly death,

he'll protect Kinsley with his own life until the killer threatening her is behind bars.

## Chapter One

Kinsley dove to the concrete, her heart pounding in her chest. She had to dodge the bullets and get to her car.

Her dirty laundry in the backseat was her last chance. It had to save her life.

*Seriously.* Dirty laundry stopping a bullet from taking her life. Laughable if her life wasn't on the line. She was grasping at straws, sure, but she'd try anything to stay alive.

Another gunshot rang out. A bullet struck the sidewalk by her legs, shards of cement biting into her ankles.

She wanted to dig her phone from her pocket and call 911, but she had to get out of his line of fire first.

She rolled. Once. Twice.

The rough surface razored against her skin. Rocks bit her knees.

*Don't stop.*

She tumbled behind her car.

A bullet whisked through the air, sounding like a missile to Kinsley and splintering the tree behind her.

If she hadn't moved...

*No, don't think about that. Just keep going.*

She army crawled forward, sliding behind the front end of her small Honda. Additional bullets pinged into the side.

*Keep going. Now!*

Inch by inch. Skinned arms getting worse. So what. She was still alive.

She reached the backseat door. Her target. The location where she'd haphazardly thrown her dirty laundry on the floor to take to the laundromat.

She rolled to her back and clicked the remote to unlock the doors. They beeped in unison with another bullet.

Who in the world was shooting? Was it some random shooter firing at her because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time, or was someone out to kill her?

No. Someone wouldn't really be trying to kill her. Not *her*, of all people. She was just an average person. A nobody. Nothing special.

Shivers raced down her arms, and her muscles wanted to collapse.

Didn't matter. Someone fired bullets from across the parking lot. Bullets that could kill her, and she had to act. Fast. Smart. *If* she was going to survive. And she planned to survive.

She belly crawled onto the seat and swept her hand over the floor. Feeling for. Searching for. Needing her Kevlar vest that lay tangled in the heap of laundry.

A bullet shattered the windshield above. Glass sprayed through the backseat. She ducked and covered. Prayed.

Even if her vest was at her fingertips and would provide protection for her body, it only worked if she could put it on without first taking a bullet.

\*

"No, LT. Stop. Just listen." Devan Graham—Dev to everyone who knew him—counted the barrage of bullets discharged in the far parking lot.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

“We have an active shooter situation at the morgue. In the overflow parking lot.”

“Why there?” his former lieutenant asked. “It should be empty at this time of day unless they have an event going on.”

“No event, but that doesn’t mean someone didn’t park back there.” The overflow lot for the medical examiner’s office and Oregon State Police Forensics Lab was just beyond the tree line that Dev was heading for.

“You think someone is just taking pot shots?” LT asked.

“Could be. If so, they chose a crazy location. Officers and deputies are in and out of here all the time.”

Like all the time. Going to the morgue. Picking up or delivering forensics. Dev being one of them. Okay fine. He was a retired deputy and didn’t come here as often anymore, but he was still carrying and wasn’t going to walk away from an active shooter scenario.

“Regardless, I’ll have units there in a minute,” LT said. “Stay put and don’t try to be a hero. You stand down.”

*No way.* “You know I can’t do that. There could be someone injured back there. Bleeding out and needing my help.”

“It’s not like you can help them if you’re injured yourself. If we have a concealed shooter, that could happen.”

“I’ll just have to take the chance.” Dev rounded the corner. Took cover behind a soaring maple tree. Assessed the situation.

One car. A small white Honda Civic. The back door open. Glass shattered. No movement.

A bullet sliced through the cool October air and struck the front tire. Another one followed, blasting into the back door, the concussive force sounding like a sharp ping.

Dev turned his attention to the call with his former lieutenant. “There’s one car. Shooter is aiming at it and not just taking random shots.”

He itched to go after the shooter on the far side of the lot and stop him. No, as a former law enforcement officer, his duty was to protect innocent lives at all costs. That meant anyone in the car. Check to see if they needed his help.

“I’ll relay that to the responding officers,” LT said.

“You’ll find me at the car. Be sure the deputies know I’m not the shooter.” Dev ended his call and shoved his phone into his pocket.

He slipped behind the trees. Moving from one to another. His footfalls silent on the grass. Trying to travel with speed so he wasn’t spotted. He came parallel to the car. A body lay on the backseat, unmoving.

He opened his mouth to call out. *Stop*. Don’t alert the shooter to his presence. Better to be a surprise. He dropped to his knees. Crawled across the grass to the concrete, the change in ground sharp and irritating. He reached the door. A woman, at least according to the spiky heeled shoes and tight jeans fitting slender legs.

He reached in and tapped her leg. “Are you okay?”

She whipped over, gun in hand. “Get away from me or I will shoot. I mean—oh—Dev. Is that you? What are you doing here?”

He blinked at her. Blinked again. Couldn’t be. “Kinsley?”

She lowered her weapon. “Yeah. I’m trying to get my vest on, then I was going to call 911. There hasn’t been a shot in a while. Is he still out there?”

As if the shooter heard her question, another bullet pierced the front door of the vehicle. Kinsley cringed and rolled into a ball. Dev wasn’t going to stand by while a bullet pierced that door and killed her.

He dove into the car and pulled her out, curling her into his body and putting his back to the shooter.

Any bullet would have to pass through him before finding her.

“What are you doing?” She looked up at him.

“Taking you out of the line of fire,” he said and checked their surroundings to make sure she wasn’t vulnerable. “Was there anyone with you or are you alone?”

“Alone.”

“Then we wait here for deputies to arrive. I called my old lieutenant. Should be here any time. I can already hear the sirens in the distance.”

He expected her to struggle, but she remained curled in his arms. Soft. Warm. Smelling of peaches as she had for years.

*Stop. Someone is shooting at you, and you’re thinking about how wonderful it feels to hold her.*  
*Priorities, man!*

Even if keeping her safe wasn’t at the top of his mind, nothing had changed in the many years he’d known her. She was still his little sister’s best friend. His vow still held true. He’d promised his sister, Jada, never to get romantically involved with Kinsley. Others might not understand why he kept such a promise, but their dad died unexpectedly when she was only six years old. Years passed after that when she refused to do much or make friends. Until Kinsley came along, and they somehow connected. He would never risk Jada losing the friend that helped her get over such a loss.

He searched for something to say to keep him on task. “Since when did you start wearing a Kevlar vest? I didn’t think it was standard operating procedure for a forensic engineer.”

“It’s not.” She focused those big, luminous eyes on him, a grayish blue that almost looked green at times. “But you remember a couple of years ago when there was a shooter on a construction site and they never found him?”

“Yeah, he wounded like five people, right?”

“That’s the guy, and that’s when I had to start wearing a vest whenever I was investigating a site if I wanted to keep my liability insurance at a reasonable rate. At first I didn’t like it, but honestly, I’ve come to appreciate the protection. And today if you hadn’t shown up, it might’ve saved my life.” She shivered in his arms.

He would do anything to protect her and erase her fear, but all he could do was tighten his hold.

“Well, I *am* here and sounds like the deputies are almost here too.”

She cocked her head and squirmed to try to get free. “I need you to let me go. I don’t want them to see me like this.”

He held fast. “It’s no big deal.”

“It is to me.” She pushed free and tugged down her shirt. “I have to work with them all the time, and being a cowering damsel in distress isn’t the professional appearance I want to portray.”

He held up his hands. “Fine, I’m good with that. But we’ll wait here until they arrive.”

She settled on the ground next to him, her thigh touching his. He liked the contact and didn’t move. Thankfully, after the deputies took her statement, she would part ways with Dev, and those eyes that got to him every time would no longer be tempting him to do something his sister wouldn’t like.

That is, if the deputy offered to provide protection for her. If not, Dev wouldn’t let her out of his sight until the authorities caught the shooter and locked him away.

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