

THE WOLF'S NAME

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Published by Outland Entertainment LLC

3119 Gillham Road

Kansas City, MO 64109

Founder/Creative Director: Jeremy D. Mohler

Editor-in-Chief: Alana Joli Abbott

ISBN: 978-1-954255-25-8

Ebook: 978-1-954255-21-0

Worldwide Rights

Created in the United States of America

Editor: Gwendolyn N. Nix

Copy editor: Alana Joli Abbott

Proofreader: Tara Cloud Clark

Cover Illustration: Raelyn Teague

Cover Design: Jeremy D. Mohler

Interior Layout: Mikael Brodu

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.

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PART I
— INDUCTION —

June 15th, 1883

Lucas kept his word. His front-page advertisement in the paper brought half of New Westminster to my show. On the outdoor stage, a simple suggestion from me had Mr. Richards howling at the late afternoon sun and pawing at an itch with the toe of his muddy shoe. The air filled with laughter, and the eyes in the crowd glittered so bright I thought they were diamonds.

They wouldn't have grinned if they'd known how the Power could enslave them. If I only knew how to wield it. If I let it enslave me first. Oh, how it wanted to.

At dusk I had my usual drink with Lucas at the printing press, but this time he'd invited Joseph and brought twice the whiskey to celebrate. Lucas kept my glass filled and promised to finance more shows if I'd teach him a few tricks.

We'd downed a few too many when Mr. Richards barged in on us. He'd had too many himself. I reminded him he was the one who'd demanded to come on stage, but from his slurred rambling, I realized he wasn't angry about me embarrassing him at the show. Then I thought he'd come to pester me again to sell him the farm, but, no, it was something else... Something about wild dogs in the woods I could "magic away."

Lucas managed to escort Richards away without protest. He has a magic all his own, but Richards would give anything for the last word. Perhaps it's still coming.

Once they were out of earshot, Joseph leaned in with a warning. "Don't be swayed by Lucas's promises," he said. "He can afford his schemes, but when it fails, you'll be the one to pay."

But to have the O'Connor name remembered with diamond eyes instead of— Well, I might even sell myself to the Power.

God forgive me, I know I would.

— CHAPTER ONE —

NATHANIEL

The hum of magic through Nathaniel's body made him feel like a god and less than human all at once.

As he ran, the damp Canadian autumn chilled his lungs, but his skin baked under the heat of the Power sizzling about him. His senses became heightened with it. His prey had left footprints he shouldn't have been able to see in the night and shadow, but even with the Power's aid he barely heard the scamper of feet through the woods ahead.

He won't escape this time. Not this time!

Movement flashed at the edge of Nathaniel's vision. The beast darted under an arch of skeletal firs, their branches entwined in a gateway to some unknown hell, and it disappeared down an overgrown path. Nathaniel vaulted over felled trees and unearthed roots in pursuit. The path broke into a narrow clearing where his quarry halted, turning from flight to fight. Nathaniel dug in his heels.

Given up on its escape, the beast stared him down with bloodied teeth bared. It backed toward the door of an abandoned cellar half-hidden in the wisps of tall grass, unwilling to abandon its only refuge. Nathaniel had the animal cornered, which made it more

dangerous. Even to him. His finger curled around the trigger of his old Model P pistol for courage.

“Caught you.” Nathaniel’s voice carried the tickle of the Power instead of weariness from the chase. “Don’t you try to run again.”

Naked but for the mud on its skin and a haystack of orange hair, the beast showed no weakness to the cold night. It snarled with the craze of a rabid mutt but walked upright on the balls of two human feet. Instead of paws, it flexed scythe-like fingers with ragged nails. It was skinnier than the last time Nathaniel had seen it. Far too skinny. A sack of bones and bloodlust abandoned to death and damnation.

Little remained of the foolish boy he’d first met, but there was enough. Enough to make it right.

“Keith,” Nathaniel said, “come back to your senses.”

With a ravenous growl, the beast charged.

Instinct alone called the Power to Nathaniel. It crackled around him in a shield of sapphire light. Out of habit he searched for the flicker of a Name around the creature, but he found none. It didn’t matter. The boy’s true identity was etched into Nathaniel’s memory like a scar.

The beast leapt. Nathaniel threw out his arm, striking the animal with a hammer of raw energy.

“Regret!”

The sound of its Name knocked the creature from its feet. A light the colour of decayed leaves flared over the treetops and slammed into the creature, a dying star striking the earth.

Keith sucked in a breath as the sickly fire of his Name entered him. His arms and legs jerked toward his centre. When he recovered from the blast, a sputtering yellow glow emanated from him. He groaned, the sound broken but recognizably human. The beast had vanished, but there was nothing Nathaniel could do about the monster left behind. Trying had only made everything worse.

“Y— you—” Keith said as though he’d never spoken the word before. Nathaniel offered a reluctant hand, and the young man, barely more than a boy, eyed his palm with suspicion. “I—”

“Welcome back to humanity,” Nathaniel said. Warily, Keith accepted Nathaniel’s hand, and he hauled the boy to his feet. “Horrid, isn’t it? Men are fouler than dogs.”

Keith’s legs wobbled once the support of Nathaniel’s hand was gone. He snaked his arms around his naked chest, his shoulders tucked up to his ears. “Why’d you help me?”

“I’m not helping *you*.” A poison roiled in Nathaniel’s gut at the thought. “And I have my reasons.”

“Yes.” Keith shook his head as if to clear up space in his mind. “Yes, your sister. I think I remember...”

He remembered too much.

“There’s no time; he’ll already know you’ve got your Name again.” Nathaniel tapped his pistol against his leg to be sure Keith knew it was there. “Tell me the truth. Where’s the other mutt?”

“Mutt...?” Keith wrinkled his nose in confusion. “Ah, Sheridan! He was turned—”

“Yes, yes. I know that already. Tell me where he is so I can deal with him.”

Keith chuckled darkly, the sound fractured between the shivers that rocked his body. “He’s in these woods, but you won’t find him.”

“You’d better pray I do. Pray hard. *Regret.*”

At the command, Keith’s light left his body and streamed into Nathaniel. He hated this part—where another’s Name left its stain on him. Keith’s brought a bitter taste to Nathaniel’s mouth that reminded him of rotten potatoes and the pain of hunger. All of Keith’s regrets felt like his own: the heartache of a sister’s death and the loss of a home and country he barely remembered yet could never forget. Luckily, Keith’s light had weakened in the time it had been away from him. With so much regret of Nathaniel’s own, it would have been easy for him to be consumed by it.

Drained of his light, Keith's shivers diminished again. His arms dangled like twigs from his shoulders, and his vacant eyes stared forward.

"Forget." Nathaniel sent the command on tendrils of the Power and let them seep under Keith's skin. It was too good a punishment for someone like him, too merciful, but Nathaniel no longer had the right to judge him. "Forget your life as a dog and go back to the Brotherhood. Convince them to return to Washington. For good."

The command given, Nathaniel released the boy's light for the final time, and as the rays emptied from his body, the bitterness on his tongue subsided. Keith's regrets faded and left only the ones Nathaniel had earned for himself.

When the boy's aura descended back upon him, Keith's eyelids fluttered, but he didn't seem to see Nathaniel. With glazed eyes locked forward, he limped noisily into the trees, pulled by an invisible rope.

How long before his memories return? How long will I have?

Hanging above the clearing, Orion's belt dimmed as the first gestures of dawn lightened the sky.

Sheridan will already be in hiding.

Nathaniel released the Power like a long sigh and let it weaken until he no longer felt even a spark of its allure. His hearing deadened. His vision dimmed. Tremors now moved through his body, and as he stumbled through the shadows of the woods, the wheeze of his breath made him feel less of a devil.

One more day. Sheridan could wait one more day.