

*Shattered  
Illusions  
Shadows*



*Brenda Cothorn*

*Shattered Illusions*

*Brenda Cothern*

Shattered Illusions  
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Author Note: Contains m/m sexual practices and is intended for readers of legal age in the country in which they reside.

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### *DEDICATION*

To all my fans that have fallen in love with Shadows and those Guns & Hoses fans who wanted John's story!

### *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

As always, to my wonderful beta team: Lora, Sparkles, Shirley, Ann, Beth, and Steve. I don't know what I would do without you!  
And, of course, to my favorite Tampa bar, The Body Shop and to Bubba's Sports bar for letting me camp out on a bar stool and treat the place like my own personal office!

## *Author Message*

Thank you for buying this book. As an indie author it means a lot to me that you are spending your hard earned cash to read my work! To show my appreciation, I make a promise to you, my reader. The first chapter of every book that I have ever written or will ever write will be FREE on my website for you to read. As an avid reader myself, I know there is nothing worse than purchasing a book only to discover it is not that good. So, please enjoy the sneak peeks at the end of this book and visit my website if you would like to 'try before you buy' my other books!

## *About Shattered Illusions*

The Tampa nightclub Shadows, in Ybor City, is the refuge for those who are not quite normal. Simon finally found a home away from home where he 'fit in' but he was still the only single person in his new family. Being different made dating a nightmare.

John was still hung up on his best friend but when a bartender rescued him from a gay bashing, he never expected his life would go in such in a bizarre direction. Learning about himself and accepting who he was, was a challenge and one he wasn't sure he could handle.

*Other Titles*

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When Beasts Bite

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Undercover Love (v.1-2)

**Mad Dogs**

Sixth

Deployed

Extraction

Mad Dogs Volume One (v.1-2)

Guns & Hoses

Before There Was Beer Pong (FREE!)



It was just another Friday night at Shadows, and felt like half of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, hell, half of Ybor, was in the club as Simon served drinks at his end of the bar. The patrons were three deep. Had Simon not enhanced his hearing before his shift, he wouldn't have heard the drink orders over the thumping bass that DJ Rhonda was spinning.

Roni's end of the bar was just as busy. They had both worked at the night club since it opened almost five years ago. Until recently Simon had only worked part time, but that didn't mean he wasn't experienced. In fact, it was their combined experience that kept them from pissing people off by falling behind filling drink orders.

Roni was in her preferred form tonight. It was the look Simon liked to see the changer in most. There was just something about the small, quiet changer with her multiple piercings that made him smile. The few times he had worked with Roni in her blond and busty form, the persona she had adopted had gotten on his nerves. Her male form, which she chose for the Fant-Night, had a demeanor more like what Simon considered the 'real' Roni.

Simon allowed his mind to wander as he poured drink after drink. He really lucked out when he was hired by Alec. The owner of Shadows gave off a weird vibe during Simon's interview. His Grand-mère always said he had the gift to detect 'special' people and he did. The vibe from the owner of the club distracted him throughout the interview. It wasn't until the interview concluded and he was hired that Simon dared to ask.

*"I know this may be an inappropriate question, Mr. Ekhidna," Simon paused.*

*"All my employees call me Alec, Simon. I like to think of us as a family."*

*"Okay, Alec."*

*"So, you had a question?" Alec smiled as if he already knew what Simon was about to ask.*

*"I do," Simon agreed and plowed on. "What are you?"*

*Alec laughed and Simon was relieved that his new boss wasn't confused about his question. He was even more relieved that Alec wasn't offended, or worse, going to change his mind about hiring him.*

*"Since you are now part of my family and I sense something more in you as well, I don't see any harm in you knowing."*

*When Alec smiled reassuringly at Simon, there was no way he could miss his boss' elongated eye teeth. It took all of Simon's self-control not to react to the first set of fangs he had ever seen or the first life-drinker he had ever encountered.*

*"Don't worry. Employees are never on the menu." Simon watched as Alec's fangs retracted. "Your turn."*

*Turnabout was fair play so Simon just opened his hand, palm up. His eyes never left his new boss when a four inch flame appeared. Without any thought or intention to show off, the flame shifted into the form of a dancing woman.*

*"Elementalist," Alec grinned. "It's been a long time since I have encountered one of your kind."*

*"Actually," Simon began and dismissed his flame dancer. He said no more as he willed Alec's office to change.*

*The cream colored walls became a thick forest. Alec's desk disappeared as did the rest of the furniture. Their chairs became fallen moss covered trees and the faint sounds of woodland animals reached their ears.*

*"Illusionist," Alec laughed with pleasure while he looked around what he knew was still his office.*

*“Primarily, with a touch of mage craft,” Simon replied and let the forest fade away until they were seated in Alec’s office once more. Simon stood when Alec did and they reached the door before Alec spoke again.*

*“You’ll fit right in. Welcome to the Shadows’ family, Simon.”*

“What has you so happy?” Roni asked when she walked up to the register and waited for Simon to finish grabbing his change. “You find some hot stud for after work?” Roni winked and Simon turned to deliver his customer’s change.

It was almost an hour later when their paths met up at the register again and Simon was able to reply.

“Shit, don’t I wish! I’d have better luck next door at Bradley’s if I didn’t work every weekend.”

Roni rolled her eyes and darted back to her end of the bar to fill their waitress, Sin’s, order. It was another thirty minutes before their conversation at the register resumed.

“Gay guys come in here too, you know.” Roni said as if she knew for a fact that there were gay men in the crowd.

Simon laughed. “One in thirty if I am lucky and if they are in here, they are either married or not looking!”

Their paths never crossed at the register again for the rest of the night. Simon knew Roni meant well but if he wanted a hit and run, he wouldn’t find it while working behind the bar in Shadows. Hell, if he wanted more than that, he wouldn’t find it in a bar at all.

“Last call, ladies and gents,” DJ Rhonda’s voice overrode the dance tunes she was spinning before the music went back to its deafening level.

Five minutes later, the house lights lit up the darkness and washed out the lasers that were creating patterns on the dance floor. Simon and Roni served their last customers’ drinks before they began to collect the empty glasses and bottles that littered the bar.

“Finish up, folks,” DJ Rhonda said over the mic after cutting off the thumping bass. “You don’t have to go home, but you can’t stay here! See you all next weekend!” She said the same thing every night she worked and right on schedule, the horde of humanity started toward the exit.

Simon and Roni had no time to rest as the empties along the bar multiplied. Roni joined him at his end of the bar to help clear the bottles and glasses. Since his end was closer to the door, he always had more empties and his clean up consequently took longer. It made up for Roni having to fill the drink orders for the waitresses all night. Still, they worked as a team and when Sin finished the tables in her section, she always helped them behind the bar.

Like every night, several of the employees stuck around for their shift drink if they didn’t have somewhere else they wanted to be. Jordy, their bar manager and head bouncer, sat next to his crew, Nick and Cham. Next to Cham sat Sin and as Simon looked at his co-workers and friends, he smiled. They were coupled up. Jordy and Nick. Cham and Sin. He and Roni joined them on the other side of the bar and sat down for the first time that night.

None of the part-time human employees ever stuck around after the shift. Simon wasn’t sure why they didn’t but had a feeling that it had a lot to do with none of them encouraging friendships with the humans.

It dawned on Simon that he was the only single person present and he sighed into his vodka and Sprite. Roni had her two men to go home to and the other couples had each other. He had no one. There hadn’t been anyone since he left New Orleans and Simon wasn’t sure if he liked it that way or if being alone had just become a habit because he was different.

Roni threw an arm around his sweaty shoulder when he sighed. “What’s wrong, Sy?”

Even after all of his years working at Shadows, the nickname made him smile. Aside from his family at the bar, his Grand-mère was the only person to call him by the endearment. His friends didn’t know that though. They only knew that the nickname made him smile and he had a feeling that was why they all used it.

"I'm the odd man out," Simon offered his friends a grin.

"Oh, you're odd alright, Sy," Nick gave him a wink.

"But that's what we love about you!" Sin added as she leaned into her huge boyfriend.

Simon glanced back at Roni and could see the concern in her gaze. He gave her a reassuring smile and shrug before taking another sip of his drink.

"It's all good," he said when he lowered his glass.

"You need night off on the weekend," Roni decided.

"You need to get laid," Sin piped in.

"Why am I not surprised you said that, Sin?" Simon shook his head at the lusty waitress. Before she had met Cham, Sin had a new lover almost every night. With a wink, a smile, and a few teasing words, she took home her pick of the horde of Shadows' customers.

"Because it's true?" Sin replied with an innocent look before she broke out in a fit of giggles.

"Alright, you." Cham took Sin's half empty wine glass from her hand and set it on the far side of the bar.

They all knew that Sin had not had too much to drink and that Cham just couldn't wait to get his girlfriend home. It was their routine and if Sin didn't drink her shift drink before Cham finished his own, it was no one's fault but her own when Cham decided they were leaving. When Sin hopped off the bar stool, Simon was once more reminded how large Cham actually was and it had nothing to do with Sin's smaller height.

"Alright gang. Let's go," Jordy stood and the rest of them followed suit. "You in the garage again?" he asked Simon as if he didn't already know the answer.

"Of course," Simon replied to Jordy. "Where else would I be? I'm not parking my baby out back. At least in the parking garage she is semi-safe."

"If you rode your bike it wouldn't be a problem," Nick added as they all walked Simon to the front door.

"Not all of us will ride rain or shine. And, in case you haven't noticed, it's currently the rainy season in Florida."

"Yeah, yeah, weekend warrior," Nick busted his balls.

Simon didn't reply when he stepped out onto 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. and waved goodnight to his friends. He was used to Nick giving him shit about how little he rode his motorcycle.

There were still some stragglers out on the sidewalk and most were heading toward the parking garage like him. Simon didn't bother to take the stairs since there really was no need. He had to be at Shadows early enough that he was parked near the top of the ramp that led to the second level. There was only one other car parked along the incline as Simon made his way up to his Nova. He heard grunting and body on body noises coming from above before he could see into the next level.

*Fucking in the parking garage*, Simon shook his head and smiled. *At least somebody's getting some.*

The sounds grew louder as he continued up the ramp toward his car. He wasn't a voyeur but that didn't stop him from looking toward the noises that were reaching his ears. The moment he was high enough on the ramp to see into the next level of the parking garage, he saw that his assumption about someone getting lucky was way off base. The grunts and groans he heard were not those of fucking but instead those of someone getting the shit beat out of them. Two men stood over a third who was curled up into a ball on the ground. Neither man spoke as they kicked the shit out of the downed man.

*Shit*, Simon thought and hoped he wasn't about to do something stupid.

