

Fellowship Fallen

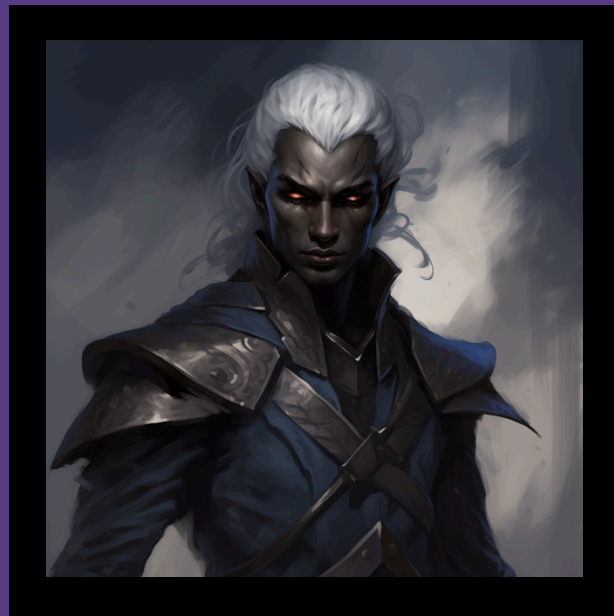
Fellowships are forged in peace, tempered in conflict & broken in silence. Brotherhood is a bridge; strong enough to carry us forward, fragile enough to collapse beneath our weight and bury us both. Know there are wounds that do not heal, scars carved by the shadows of our own choices. Choose well.

- **Chronicles of Anduin: Betrayal, Apathy & Broken Oaths.**

Date: Year 17 After Sundering (AS).

Location: Subterranean Trade Tunnels,
Beyond the Rift, North of the Ashen Sea, Everdark Region.

Dramatis Vitae Anduin: Kraven Valkor & Nyx (Wyvern), Kaelen.



Kraven Velkor noted the tunnels through the Everdark had grown harsher in the weeks since the Abyssal Rift. The silence between Kraven and Kaelen had stretched thin, taut as a bowstring, ready to snap. Kaelen barely spoke now, his words clipped and cold when he did. He had taken to scouting ahead or falling behind, keeping his distance from Kraven whenever possible. The tension hung heavy in the air, unspoken but undeniable. Kaelen's disdain was no longer hidden—it was worn openly, a simmering rage that manifested in every glance, every reluctant word.

Kraven could feel the fracture widening between them with each passing day. He had tried to speak to Kaelen once, but the swordsman had cut him off with a sharp glare and a single, searing sentence: "Don't waste your breath."

Nyx had grown quieter too, as though the strain between her companions weighed on her as well it seemed. The small Wyvern had often hovered between them, her glowing violet eyes flicking back and forth, her mournful chirps echoing in the oppressive stillness.

Kraven spent his nights in restless silence, his thoughts consumed by the faces of the dead—Veltyr, Baelor, the men who had trusted him. He thought of Kaelen's accusations, the venom in his voice when he had called Kraven a coward. He thought of Lilliar's faith in him, the quiet certainty in her silver eyes when she had said, "This is a choice." But more than anything, he thought of the weight of the case of potions at his side.

It had become heavier with each step, each loss, each accusation. It was no longer just a tool for survival—it was a symbol of everything he had sacrificed. Of everything he had failed to protect.

And as Kaelen's disdain burned brighter with each passing day, Kraven found himself staring at the potions and wondering if they were worth it. If he was worth it.

The Everdark stretched endlessly before them, its vast caverns oppressive and unyielding. The fungal glow that lined the tunnels had grown weaker with each passing day, casting only faint, pallid light on the jagged terrain. The silence between Kraven and Kaelen was thicker than the shadows that clung to the walls. Nyx padded between them, her wings twitching uneasily as though she could sense the unspoken conflict simmering just beneath the surface.

Kaelen scouted ahead, his twin swords strapped across his back. He moved with a mechanical precision now, his steps deliberate and devoid of their former fluidity. To Kraven, it was as though Kaelen's body had kept moving forward, but his spirit had stalled back at the Abyssal Rift, left behind with Baelor's final cry.

Kraven walked several paces behind, the case of potions hanging from his side like a leaden anchor. The leather strap bit into his shoulder, the weight of it not just physical but moral. The potions—his mission, his purpose—had come to symbolize everything he had lost. Veltyr. Baelor. Even Kaelen, though the swordsman was still physically present. The gulf between them was vast and growing ever the more impassable.

They hadn't spoken in two days. Not since their last campfire, where Kaelen had stared at Kraven through the flames, his jaw clenched so tightly Kraven thought he might shatter his teeth. He hadn't said a word that night, but the unspoken accusations in his glare had been louder than anything he could have shouted. Kraven's mind drifted back to the Abyssal Rift, as it often did. Did he make the right choice?

Baelor's roar echoed in his memory, the defiance in his voice a searing contrast to the cold finality of what had come next. The massive warrior's body, torn and dragged down by the driders, had become a phantom that followed Kraven everywhere he went. He remembered the look on Baelor's face when the bridge began to collapse—how the warrior had turned toward him, not with anger, but with grim acceptance. You made the right call, Baelor's eyes had seemed to say. Kraven wasn't so sure.

The image of the spidersilk bridge falling apart, the driders surging forward like a tide of venom and shadow, played endlessly in his mind. Baelor had stood his ground, but not because he had a choice. Kraven had made the choice for him.

In that moment, Kraven had thought of Lilliar's words: This will shape you, Kraven. More than you know. He had clung to those words, using them to justify his decision. The potions were vital to Oakendark's survival. Without them, the city would fall to ruin, its people left vulnerable to the horrors of the Everdark and the dark spectres in those cursed Arcane Storms. But now, in the heavy silence of Kaelen's company, Kraven wasn't sure if that justification held any weight.

Kaelen stopped abruptly ahead, his hand raised in a silent signal. Kraven tensed, his hand instinctively dropping to the hilt of his longsword. Nyx hissed softly, her glowing violet eyes narrowing as she crouched low beside him.

"What is it?" Kraven asked, his voice hoarse from disuse.

Kaelen didn't answer immediately. He crouched low, his fingers brushing the ground. The faint bioluminescence of the fungi revealed a trail of jagged claw marks etched into the stone. "They're close," Kaelen said finally, his tone clipped.

Kraven's stomach churned. He had known this was coming—felt it in the shadows that clung to the edges of his vision, in the faint echoes of laughter that drifted through the caverns at night. The driders hadn't abandoned their hunt. They had been following the Shadowguard all this time, waiting, watching. "Let's keep moving," Kraven said, his voice low.

Kaelen rose slowly, turning to face Kraven. His expression was grim, his jaw set. "We're not ready for another fight."

"We'll have to be." Kraven adjusted the strap of the potion case, his crimson eyes meeting Kaelen's glare. "We're too far in to turn back now."

Kaelen scoffed, his lips curling into a bitter smirk. "Too far in to turn back," he repeated, shaking his head. "Is that your answer to everything? Just keep moving forward? Doesn't matter who we leave behind, right? As long as you've got your precious mission."

Kraven bristled, his grip tightening on the hilt of his sword. "You think I don't care? About Baelor? About Veltyr? Do you have any idea what it's like to carry this weight?"

Kaelen took a step closer, his twin swords shifting slightly in their scabbards. "You don't carry the weight, Kraven. You shove it off onto everyone else. Veltyr. Baelor. How many more are you going to sacrifice before this is over?"

"That's enough," Kraven growled, his voice dangerously low.

But Kaelen didn't back down. "You think I don't see it? The way you cling to that case like it's more important than any of us? You didn't even look back for Baelor. You didn't even try to—"

"Enough!" Kraven snapped, his voice echoing through the cavern.

Nyx flinched at the sharpness of his tone, letting out a low, anxious chirp. The sound cut through the tension like a blade, but it didn't ease the fury in Kaelen's eyes.

The two men stared at each other, the air between them crackling with unspoken resentment. Kraven's heart pounded in his chest, his mind racing with a thousand retorts, a thousand justifications. But none of them felt strong enough to bridge the gap that had grown between them. Even if he was right, words of such wouldn't fix this.

Finally, Kaelen broke the silence. "There's no Shadowguard left, your not my Shadow Warden anymore, your no Blade of Oakendark" he said, his voice laced with disdain. "You're just a coward sacrificing others to save yourself." And with that, he turned and walked away, leaving Kraven standing alone once more. At least he had headed in the right direction.

As Kraven watched Kaelen disappear into the shadows, a deep unease settled over him. This wasn't just anger—it was the kind of fury that festered, that grew into something dangerous.

He rested a hand on Nyx's neck, seeking comfort in the wyvern's steady presence. But even she seemed uneasy, her glowing eyes flicking toward the darkness where Kaelen had gone.

Kraven exhaled sharply, his breath fogging in the cool air of the cavern. He thought again of Lilliar's words: This is more than a journey. It's a choice.

Kraven clenched his jaw, his crimson eyes narrowing as he stared into the dark. He had always believed that strength and resolve were enough to see him through. But now, with his companions dead or turning against him, he wondered if Lilliar had been right all along.

Strength alone isn't enough.

He tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword, his gaze hardening. The mission wasn't over yet. But Kaelen's disdain was a festering wound, one that Kraven knew would only grow deeper until it split them apart completely.

And when that moment came, Kraven wasn't sure he would have the strength to stop it.

Veltyr's death haunted him. Baelor's sacrifice clawed at the edges of his mind. And now Kaelen... Kaelen, who had been the most disciplined, the most steadfast of them all, was slipping further away. Kraven had lost control of his Shadowguard. Or perhaps, he thought bitterly, he had never truly had it.

They camped in a narrow tunnel that night, the glow of bioluminescent fungi casting an eerie green light across the jagged stone walls. Kaelen sat apart from the group—what little of it remained—his twin swords laid across his lap as he sharpened them with deliberate precision. The metallic scrape of whetstone against steel grated on Kraven's nerves, but he said nothing. Nyx curled beside him, her wings twitching uneasily as though she, too, could sense the tension in the air.

Kraven stared into the small fire they had managed to coax from the resin of petrified fungi. The flickering flames cast long shadows on the walls, and for a moment, they reminded him of Veltyr's laughter, of Baelor's booming voice. He closed his eyes, his jaw tightening as he forced the memories away. There was no room for weakness. Not now. Not ever.

"You're quiet tonight," Kaelen said suddenly, his voice cutting through the silence like a blade. Kraven opened his eyes, his crimson gaze meeting Kaelen's across the fire. There was no warmth in the swordsman's expression, only a cold, simmering fury. "Not much to say," Kraven replied evenly, though the tension in his voice betrayed him.

Kaelen let out a low, humorless laugh. "Not much to say," he repeated, shaking his head. "That's rich. You always have plenty to say when you're giving orders. When you're telling us who gets to live and who gets to die."

Kraven stiffened, his hand resting on the hilt of his longsword. "Careful, Kaelen," he said quietly, his voice low and dangerous. "You're treading on thin ground."

Kaelen stood abruptly, his swords glinting in the firelight as he sheathed them with sharp, deliberate movements. "Thin ground?" he said, his voice rising. "You think I'm afraid of you, Kraven? You think I don't see what you've become?"

Kraven rose to his feet as well, his hand tightening around the hilt of his blade. Nyx growled softly, her glowing eyes flicking between the two men. "I've done what I had to do," Kraven said, his voice firm but strained. "For Oakendark. For the mission."

"For the mission," Kaelen spat, stepping closer. "That's all you care about, isn't it? The mission. The potions. The damn council. You don't care about us. About Veltyr. About Baelor. We were just tools to you. Sacrifices for your precious purpose."

Kraven's chest tightened, the words hitting him like blows. "You think this has been easy for me?" he demanded, his voice raw. "You think I wanted to lose them? To lose you?" Kaelen's eyes blazed with fury. "You didn't lose us, Kraven. You threw us away. Baelor didn't have to die. Veltyr didn't have to die. You made those choices. And now you're standing here, pretending like you're the only one carrying the weight of it."

"I am carrying it!" Kraven shouted, his voice echoing through the cavern. "Every step I take, every breath I draw, I'm carrying it! You think I don't hear their screams in my head? You think I don't feel the weight of every choice I've made? You don't know what it's like to lead, Kaelen. To make the hard calls. To—"

"To lead?" Kaelen interrupted, his voice cold and venomous. "You're not a leader, Kraven. You're a coward. A coward hiding behind his mission. A man too afraid to look back at the wreckage he's left behind."

The words cut deeper than any blade, but Kraven refused to let them show. He drew himself up, his crimson eyes blazing as he stepped closer to Kaelen. "If you have something to say, Kaelen, say it. Otherwise, get out of my way."

Kaelen's hand shot to the hilt of his sword, his movements sharp and deliberate. "You're not walking away from this," he said, his voice low and deadly. "Not this time."

The air between them crackled with tension, and for a moment, Kraven thought he might be able to talk Kaelen down. But then Kaelen drew his swords, the twin blades gleaming like shards of moonlight in the dim cavern.

Kraven's heart sank. There was no coming back from this.

Kaelen struck first, his movements quick and precise. His twin swords whirled through the air in deadly arcs, forcing Kraven to draw his longsword just in time to parry. The clash of steel rang out like a bell tolling in the cavern's oppressive silence, the echoes amplified by the hollow expanse around them. Nyx backed away with a startled growl, her violet wings folding tightly against her body, her eyes glowing with unease.

"You always think you're right, don't you?" Kaelen snarled, his blades flashing in the dim light of the fungal glow. "Always so sure of yourself. So sure of your mission."

Kraven's jaw tightened, his muscles straining as he blocked another strike. Sparks flared as their blades met, and his boots slid against the stone floor. "I've done what I had to do," he growled, his voice taut with anger and effort. "For Oakendark. For all of us."

"For all of us?" Kaelen barked out a laugh, bitter and cutting. His swords flashed in a flurry of strikes that drove Kraven back, forcing him closer to the jagged wall of the cavern. "Don't lie to me, Shadow Warden. You did it for yourself. For your pride. For her."

The words hit like a physical blow, but Kraven held his ground. His crimson eyes narrowed as he adjusted his footing, his longsword raised defensively. "Don't," he warned, his voice low and dangerous.

Kaelen ignored him, his lips curling into a snarl. "What, you think I don't know?" he spat, circling Kraven like a predator. "Everyone knows, Kraven. Lilliar's little pet. That's all you are. You didn't climb the Shadow Keep on your own merit. She paved the way for you, didn't she? Whispered your name into the right ears, smoothed the path for her favorite tool."

"Stop," Kraven growled, his voice shaking with suppressed fury.

But Kaelen didn't stop. He pressed closer, his twin blades poised like vipers ready to strike. "What did you trade for her favor, I wonder? Your honor? Your dignity? Or maybe she just liked the way you knelt." His voice dripped with venom. "What is she to you, anyway? Mentor? Lover? Or just a whore who knows how to twist a blade like she twists men around her fingers?"

Rage surged through Kraven like a tidal wave, drowning out every other thought. He lunged, their blades clashing in a flurry of strikes so fierce it sent vibrations up his arm. Kaelen laughed darkly, a cruel, mirthless sound that echoed through the cavern. "There it is," he hissed, parrying Kraven's blows with ease. "The truth always stings, doesn't it?"

Kraven's movements grew more erratic, his strikes heavier and faster, driven by pure anger. He swung his blade in a brutal arc, but Kaelen sidestepped, one of his swords slicing across Kraven's shoulder. The pain was sharp and immediate, but Kraven barely felt it, the fury burning inside him blotting out all else.

"You don't know anything about her," Kraven snarled, his voice raw.

"I know enough," Kaelen shot back, his eyes blazing with contempt. "She's not some untouchable goddess, Kraven. She's a manipulator. A snake. And you're too blind—or too whipped—to see it."

Kraven hesitated, just for a fraction of a second, and Kaelen seized the opportunity. He lunged, his swords aiming for Kraven's exposed side. Kraven barely managed to twist away, his longsword coming up in a desperate parry. The force of the clash sent them both staggering back, their breaths heaving, their faces slick with sweat.

"You're wrong," Kraven said, his voice shaking with a mix of rage and anguish. "Lilliar is the only reason any of us have a chance. She's the only one who—"

"She's the reason we're here," Kaelen interrupted, his voice rising. "She's the reason Veltir is dead. The reason Baelor is dead. She sent us to die for her schemes, and you're too blinded by your devotion to see it!"

"Enough!" Kraven roared, his voice echoing through the cavern. He swung his longsword in a wide arc, forcing Kaelen to leap back. "I'm warning you Kaelen – you don't know what your talking about!"

"And you don't know what it means to lead," Kaelen snarled. "A real leader doesn't sacrifice his men for blind order and ambition. A real leader doesn't trade lives for potions and promises."

The words stung, but Kraven refused to let them sink in. He tightened his grip on his blade, his mind racing. He couldn't let this spiral further. He couldn't let Kaelen break him.

"Put down the sword, Kaelen," Kraven said, his voice low and strained. "We can end this. We can—"

"There's no ending this," Kaelen snapped, his twin swords gleaming as he readied himself for another strike. "Not while you're still breathing."

Kaelen lunged, and Kraven reacted on pure instinct. His longsword came up to meet Kaelen's strike, the force of the clash sending sparks flying. For a moment, they were locked together, their blades grinding against each other in a brutal contest of strength and will.

Then Kaelen shifted, one of his swords slipping past Kraven's guard to slice a thin line across his ribs. The pain was sharp and immediate, but Kraven didn't falter. He twisted his blade, breaking the deadlock and forcing Kaelen to stagger back.

"Who said you can decide who lives and dies?!" Kaelen said, his voice hoarse with exertion. "You're just a dog on a leash. Her leash."

The words snapped something inside Kraven.

With a roar, he surged forward, his longsword cutting through the air in a brutal arc. Kaelen blocked, but the force of the blow knocked him off balance. Kraven didn't let up. He swung again and again, each strike heavier and more desperate than the last.

Kaelen parried as best he could, but the onslaught was relentless.

Kraven felt a loss within himself, born of frustration, born of weariness, born of suffering and sorrow. He should have held back, should have tempered his talent and rage, but he hesitated too long, and his blade found its mark, slashing across Kaelen's chest.

The swordsman staggered, blood spilling onto the stone floor as he dropped to his knees.

Kraven stood over him, his longsword trembling in his grip. His chest heaved, his crimson eyes blazing with fury that quickly gave way to anguish, like light fading into shadow.

"Kaelen..." he murmured, his voice raw.

Kaelen looked up at him, his expression a twisted mix of fury, grief, and bitter satisfaction. Blood bubbled at the corner of his mouth as he spoke. "Betrayer," he rasped. "Murderer."

Kraven's hands shook as he raised his blade. For a moment, he hesitated, the weight of Kaelen's words pressing down on him like some unseen force. The wound was fatal—Kaelen would die, slowly, painfully.

But then he thought of Lilliar—her silver eyes, the way she had looked at him the night before he left Oakendark. He thought of her faith in him, her quiet strength, her impossible expectations.

"Night knows, brother," Kraven murmured, his voice a hoarse whisper. "Night knows."

With a single, precise strike, he ended it.

Kaelen slumped forward, his swords clattering to the ground as the life drained from his body.

Kraven dropped his longsword, his hands trembling as he stared down at Kaelen's lifeless form. His chest felt hollow, the weight of what he had done pressing down on him like a mountain.

Nyx, his loyal companion, let out a mournful cry, her wings folding tightly against her body as she nuzzled Kraven's shoulder.

He sank to his knees beside Kaelen, his breath hitching as the reality of his actions set in. The mission was still intact. The potions were safe. But as he looked into the shadows where Kaelen had fallen, he couldn't shake the feeling that he had lost something far more important.

Kraven sat alone in the dark, and for the first time in his life, he felt it closing in.

He stared at his hands—hard, calloused, and trembling, covered in blood. His brother's blood. His chest tightened as his breath climbed higher and higher, refusing to settle. His head was ringing, his vision blurring, and he fought to keep his eyes open, but the weight of it all threatened to crush him. Kaelen—now dead—felled by his own hand.

Kraven doubled over suddenly and retched. It came up sharp, baleful, broken, his body heaving with a violence he could not contain. The sound of it echoed into the void, yet the whispers still lingered. Mocking laughter, sly and sinister, weaving through the air like a song. The drider-sirens. Even now, their cursed melody clung to him, haunting him, taunting him.

Fear lingered, curling at the edge of his senses like tendrils of fog. He felt it, and with it came the rise of something else—hatred.

Hatred he could work with.

He latched onto it, clenched it in his fists, and fed it. Hatred for the Driders, for the cursed Arcane Storms, and for the pitiful plight of Oakendark. Hatred for himself—for failing his men, for failing his brother. The hatred burned, fierce and unrelenting, and Kraven welcomed it. If he could not stop the darkness, then he would let the hatred guide him through it.

Hatred to fuel him today. Vengeance, or perhaps redemption on the morrow.



Thank you for exploring the Fallen Fellowship. Hope this chapter has ignited your imagination and inspired your own journey in Kinslayers: Fall of the Arcane Storms.

Stay tuned for more stories, may your spellcraft and stratagems win the day!

Vlaan

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