

Henry North
6891 Old Fox Trail
Stone Mountain, GA
(678) 836-4912
northwindswriting@gmail.com

about 4,500 words

Kindred Blade

by Henry North

Hello Devlin,

It has been quite a long while, hasn't it? I bet you
have grown to be quite the young man, since we've last
seen each other. I would love it if we could meet again
and catch up for old time's sake. Perhaps you've
considered my previous proposition a little bit more and
we can start you on your training. Oh, the prospect of
you fulfilling your duties excites me so! But enough

with the pleasantries; attached to this letter is the address to my new place of residency. I do hope you come and visit soon. Don't keep me waiting too long, alright?

Forever in my thoughts,

Freya

Devlin reread his mother's letter to him for the fifth time this week, rolling his eyes in disgust at her trying to feign compassion. The pungent smell of orchid perfume had finally begun fading from the paper, much to his delight. He had gotten sick of the reminders of his past that the smell was attached to. His childhood home burning to the ground in the dead of the night, Devlin tried his hardest to escape from the intense flames. He vividly remembered bursting out of the house and onto the cold, smoky yard, collapsing in a heap near his mother's flower garden. Before he passed out, Devlin saw the figure of his mother striding towards him, her back to the burning wreckage.

"You'll thank me for this... someday," his mother stared down at him with a warm smile and dropped a bouquet of purple flowers next to him. She then gave him a swift kick in the

stomach, and turned to walk away, as Devlin succumbed from the pain and exhaustion.

Clearing his head of bad memories, Devlin shoved the slip of paper into the pocket of his ragged jeans and looked around the new location the bus had deposited him in. A quaint suburban neighborhood, definitely upper-middle class by the looks of it, was sprawled around where Devlin stood. I still can't believe she let me know where she lived. At least this will make it easier to get my revenge for letting my brother die in that fire. The house his mother gave him the address to, however, was nowhere to be found. Instead there was just a mailbox and a long paved road that lead into the forest.

She did always love her privacy. Devlin shook his head and tightened the grip on the hilt of his blade, preparing to trudge down the path to finish his business with Freya once and for all. If there was one thing he didn't regret keeping, it was the dagger with the dark purple sheath she left in the bouquet long ago. As much as he hated using it, Devlin wouldn't have made it this far without his mother's gift.

At the tender age of eight, he had lost everything and had to fend for himself. It has been a decade since then, and Devlin had indeed grown just as his mother had stated in her letter. His tan skin was a canvas of scars from constant fighting, but the thick hair on his limbs helped to hide them from glancing eyes. His once sandy brown curls had been dyed black to help conceal his identity from his community. As far as anyone knew, he and his entire family died that night in the fire and he planned to keep it that way; no sense in holding on to old relationships when you're trying to start over. He had grown to be quite tall and had replaced his skinny frame with a bit of muscle from practicing survival on the streets. He was definitely a reflection of his rougher upbringing, yet still kept the quiet demeanor he had as a kid.

As he walked down the driveway, the foliage around him grew denser. He looked behind himself briefly, noticing the neighborhood disappearing behind the leaves and branches. The plants began to shift in style as well, from the pine trees he first encountered to a variety of trees and flowers of every color. It was a little unnerving, being in his mother's domain again after all this time. He was getting antsy being out in the open, so he walked faster and took shortcuts

through the now winding path, carelessly crushing flowers along the way.

Eventually, Devlin saw a clearing up ahead and ducked behind an apple tree to scout it out. There it was; the house his mother had written to him about. Among all these woods, a Tudor-style house sat alone, the rays of the sun casting a bronzing effect over it. Devlin couldn't see much into the house, but took note of the various orchids that bloomed around it and gagged in disgust. He scanned the house once more and decided that a side window would be the best entrance. He also just wanted to get as far away from the fragrance of those dreaded flowers as possible.

Upon making sure the coast was clear, Devlin took his chance and dashed towards the side of the house. He sidled up next to the window and tried to fiddle with the latch, but it wouldn't budge. He then gave up on subtlety, and banged on it with the butt of his dagger until it finally popped off. He pried the window open and hopped inside into what seemed to be the laundry room. There were folded towels set to one side and a washer and dryer both currently running. Good,
hopefully this means she didn't hear me enter.

Devlin walked to the door and opened it slightly, peering through the crack to figure out where to go next. He saw nothing but a hallway and a bathroom across the hall, so he decided to take his chances with walking in plain sight. The house was strangely quiet, even for just one person living here. The walls were lined with home decorum, from pressed flowers to works of art, all of which Devlin resisted from tearing down out of spite.

He rounded the corner and found his way into the living room and finally he saw what he came for. Sitting across the way in what seemed to be the kitchen was his mother, her back to him, completely unaware of his presence. She was a lighter brown complexion than he remembered, but he shrugged off the useless thought. He began to sneak ever so carefully closer to her, slowing his steps and stifling his breath to the point of near asphyxiation. He grabbed his dagger in his right hand, preparing to quickly lash out at her at the perfect moment. His journey was almost complete. Once he got close enough, Devlin jumped at her, dagger primed to slash her throat. He was inches away, until his dagger was parried and pinned to the table by a salad fork.

"Honestly, dear, is that any way to greet your precious mother after all this time?" Freya still hadn't turned around to look at him. "Your form's nice though, I'll give you that, but your execution is quite lacking. Now could you please take that dagger away so I can finally see my son?"

Devlin quickly retrieved the dagger and placed it back in its sheath as Freya loosened her hold on it. He managed to maneuver around her to the other side of the table to keep his distance from her and get a look at the visage he had started to forget. She had hardly changed in appearance over the past decade. Her golden brown hair flowed down to her shoulders and curled a bit at the ends. Her eyes were an icy grey, just like Devlin's, but held much more wisdom and cunning than she would ever admit to. She wore a dainty smile that began to show the tiniest of creases in her skin, but other than that, she still seemed pretty youthful. Devlin glared at Freya the entire time he was taking this in, reminding himself that this was just a façade that he had to ignore.

"So, darling, how has it been? Come and sit, tell me all about your adventures," Freya said. She's laying on the fake charm already? How much of an idiot does she take me for?

"Would you like a cup of tea? It's freshly brewed, flowery and good for—"

"Cut the shit, Mom" Devlin was already tired of their meeting. "You know why I'm here, so don't act like an ass pretending that you actually give a damn about me."

"Language, young man! You might be all grown up now, but is that any way to talk to your dear mother?" Freya raised an eyebrow, clearly feigning shock.

"Please, you're only a mother in name. You've never raised me or taught me anything, except that you'll do whatever it takes to get what you want."

"Now, now, Devlin, that's all in the past, right? The fact that you made it through all of those terribly grueling trials in life, the house burning in particular, means that you are ready for that proposal I asked you about before."

"I'm not going to take your place as the head of the Orchid's Shadow! I still can't believe you expected a kid to want to start training for something he never asked to be a part of." Devlin was trying to keep from attacking her again. "I don't care if the 'assassin's guild' needs new blood, I'm

not going to become a murderer for a cause I don't believe in."

Freya casually continued drinking from her mug. "But, honey, surely you've had to do a little killing on your journey here, right? What's a little mor—"

"Who I had to kill in order to stay alive is none of your concern. The people you've killed to try and force me down your path is a different story. Why *him*? He had nothing to do with this, and you didn't even try to save him that night."

"Who are you talking about...?" Freya sat her tea down, and placed a hand on her chin, until her eyes brightened. "Ah, right, you don't know, do you? Here, come with me. I have a little story to tell you."

Freya got up from her seat at the table and began to walk towards the exit of the kitchen before looking back. "Oh, and no funny business with that dagger, sweetie; you know mother has eyes in the back of her head." She winked, and continued out of the room.

Devlin hesitated for a second. Where is she trying to take me and what is it she wants me to know? Should I really

trust anything she says? It doesn't look like I have much of a choice now, but I should keep my guard up anyway. Devlin followed his mother out of the kitchen, through the hallway and out the back door of the house, onto a path that he couldn't see from the front when he first arrived. Like the front yard, this area was covered in orchids. He was getting really tired of the scent of this flower now and couldn't wait until he could finish his mission.

The duo walked along the path at a slow pace, neither saying a word. Freya kept the lead as Devlin made sure to follow behind closely, but only enough so that he didn't fall behind and get ambushed by any of her men that might be lurking about. The path was similar to the entrance walkway at the front of the house, plenty of flowers and trees, but this time, they seemed to be placed with more purpose into ornate designs. The flower fields created insignias, which Devlin assumed to be that of the Orchid's Shadow.

"You were probably asking me about your brother earlier weren't you?" Freya finally began to speak again. "Rather than just answering your question, I thought it would be better to tell you exactly what happened the night of the fire.

"If you remember at all, earlier that day you had been brought with me to one of my guild meetings so that I could show you the ropes before getting you started on your future. However, you thought it best to defy my wishes and hurt your poor mother's heart, running away and forsaking the guild," Freya grasped her chest like she was in pain, but Devlin just rolled his eyes and ignored her.

"I do remember. You wanted me to bear witness to a man being unfairly judged and sentenced to an execution because he happened to witness one of your men killing a politician."

"He was at the wrong place at the wrong time, sweetie. We can't just have people outing our secret society; it would undo all of our work and more importantly, the grand legacy we uphold," Freya's prideful tone made Devlin want to wretch.

"He was the politician's assistant. He was working in the same office!"

"Semantics, dear, maybe he should have called out that day," Freya shrugged and began making gestures to accompany her tale. "At first I thought it was my own foolishness that caused your refusal, because I tried to start you at too early an age. Of course, I figured that couldn't have been

the truth; after all, most of the other assassins were trained from birth. That's when I decided to truly test you. I waited until you had fallen asleep and then set our old home ablaze. You managed to make it out with very few burns and little injury, so I thought that maybe I was wrong about you."

"Look, 'mother', how is any of this answering my question? You're just telling me things that I already knew and making me relive a terrible event. Did you just bring me here so you could gloat?" Devlin was frustrated and confused. Her words weren't making any sense to him, so he stopped in his tracks, refusing to continue into a potential trap.

"Hm? Why did you stop, do you still not trust that I have no intentions to harm you right now?" Freya looked back and sighed. She placed her hands behind back. "I assure you we are alone out here, but if you'd like, I will allow you to hold me hostage an-".

"Alright, whatever, let's get a move on. I'm warning you if you try anything, I won't hesitate to spill your blood all over your precious flowers," Devlin was shocked, but at least found it somewhat easier to be in his mother's company. He

grabbed her wrists, placed his dagger at her back, and gave her a small head nod to continue moving.

"You should really learn to stop interrupting your parent, it is quite rude. I know you grew up on the streets but you don't have to act like a ruffian." Freya wagged a finger shamefully at him. "Anyway, where was I? Right, the test; you know, there was actually a second part to it that you were completely unaware of. I decided that while I let you live your life alone to try and strengthen your... weak resolve, I would train another person myself to see who would be better suited for taking my position. As good as my assassins are I'd rather handpick the next leader; someone who I can trust to keep tradition is always the best choice."

Who could she be talking about? I thought she could only train a child of her blood to take her position or else it would go to the next in line of her subordinates?

Freya and Devlin had finally made it to their destination, a small, wooden barnlike building that was surrounded by the same flowery arrangements that lined the path. Freya motioned at the door. "Inside here, you will see the answer to your question. You may not believe your eyes,

but I assure you, that you are not being tricked. Please, step inside."

Devlin glared at her for a moment, before finally deciding to enter the building, keeping Freya held firmly in front of him. On the inside, it was nothing but a wide open space, almost like a stage or arena. The windows were quite high, being about ten feet from the ground. Devlin didn't really see much about this place as he looked around, until he focused his eyes on the person who was sitting on the floor at the opposite end and almost dropped his dagger.

Freya was right, Devlin stood uncomfortably still, petrified with disbelief, but the evidence was sitting right in front of him, like he was staring in a mirror. The same icy grey eyes, the same slightly built, willowy body frame and even the same sandy brown hair he used to have.

"No, it can't be. You're supposed to be dead! I saw you trapped in your room before I fled the house. Freya, what are you trying to pull!?" Devlin's twin brother was very much alive and well.

"Like I said, there are no illusions here. The only trick I've pulled on you was when I planted that body in your

brother's room to make it seem like he had died. It was just one of the target's the guild had to get rid of, so we used it to create that marvelous trick. I wanted to help fuel your growth from the experience," Freya was being very nonchalant about the whole ordeal, and Devlin wasn't sure what to do anymore. He was at a loss for words or action.

"Hello, Dev. It's been awhile hasn't it? Mom said you would come back eventually, and she was right." Devlin's brother stared at him, a half-smile forming on his face.

"...Ciel. So... that's really you, huh?" Devlin started to walk towards his twin, wiping his eyes with his arm in an attempt to keep from crying. "I thought I'd never see you again, but here you are."

"Now that you have your answer, what do you think?" Freya moved to shut the door behind her and tapped her foot impatiently.

"About what?" Devlin was still confused, until it finally hit him. "You can't be serious. Have you been training Ciel to be an assassin this entire time? That's the other person you've been mentioning? Because I refused, you decided you could corrupt my brother instead?"

"He hasn't been corrupted, you naïve boy. He only succeeded where you failed. Honestly I think he will be the best leader the guild has had in a long time, possibly even trumping my abilities. There's just one part to his training left and that is why I brought you here." Freya started to show her true colors and revealed a wicked smile. "Ciel, could you be a dear and show your brother what you can do?"

"Yes, mother," Ciel stood up and before Devlin could protest, he lunged at him with a rapier. It took all Devlin could muster to block with his own dagger and prevent himself from harming his brother.

"Ciel, what happened to you? Did she brainwash you? You've gotta snap out of this, what happened to the friendly kid I knew?" Devlin jumped back out of the clash, but Ciel just kept coming at him. Devlin had never fought an opponent so skilled with a weapon that wasn't a gun out on the streets. Whenever he would knock away his brother's blade and try to get out of his range, Ciel would effortlessly get back into his rhythmic pursuit. Ciel's eyes were warm, yet they filled with a bloodlust that Devlin wasn't prepared to deal with. Even though he couldn't imagine harming his brother, he could tell that Ciel had no qualms with this issue. He had to

figure out how to get out of this situation, but his brain was running on empty.

"That 'friendly kid' is right here. I'm not brainwashed, you fool," Ciel chided Devlin as he chased his target. "Mom just gave me my final test and I'm showing her what I'm worth. It's a shame it had to be you, though."

Devlin couldn't believe what he was hearing, but his fear had turned to rage. He had had enough. He began to go on the offensive, pushing Ciel back with powerful swings and deft movements. He thought he had a chance to subdue his brother when Ciel stumbled, so Devlin jumped at the opening. However, it was merely a feint, as Ciel parried his strike and tripped him, forcing Devlin to the ground as Ciel pointed his rapier at Devlin's neck.

"So, Mom, what do you think? Have I done well?" Ciel's voice held an innocent tone that Devlin couldn't believe was about to be the reason his life was ending.

"Excellent, my darling, pure excellence indeed," Freya was quite delighted with her subject, clasping her hands in a show of satisfaction. "Now, all that's left is to finish the job and we can get you ready to take over Orchid's Shadow."

"Please, Ciel, don't do this. I'm pleading with you, she doesn't care about you. She's just been setting you up to be a heartless killer this entire time. You know this isn't who you are. Listen to me!" Devlin tried reaching his brother once more as Ciel hovered over him, preparing to slash through his throat.

"Whether you're words are true or not, I have to see my objective through. Goodbye, Devlin," Ciel placed his free hand behind his back and smiled at Devlin again. Freya watched eagerly from the entrance to the building. Devlin submitted to his fate, wishing he had been able to save his brother from Freya's schemes. He closed his eyes and waited for the feeling of cold steel to pierce his skin, until he heard Freya let out a high-pitched scream.

Devlin opened his eyes and saw that Ciel's sword was no longer aimed at him, but instead focused at Freya. Freya was clutching at a small knife that was lodged in her upper arm, glaring angrily at her two sons. "You ungrateful urchin, how dare you attack me? After all I've done for you, you also turn against your mother?"

"Mom, you may have raised me to become a cold, calculating murderer, but that's not who I am. I used to think that you kept me in this house to protect me from an unknown danger, yet now I know the truth," Ciel stood in bold defiance. "I was only doing what I thought he would have wanted, but when I discovered that you had only been manipulating both of us to get a worthy apprentice, I waited patiently and learned all I could from you until the day that I could stop your malevolent plans for good."

Devlin was happy to see that Ciel had had a change of heart and relieved that he had an ally after being alone for so long. He scrambled to his feet and primed his dagger to assist in the fight with Freya; however, she had seen and heard enough.

"Hmph, whatever, I don't need either of you anyway!" Freya was livid at this point; her calm demeanor had completely washed away. "I did what was best for you, Devlin, making you have to deal with the harshness of the world so you could understand why the guild needs you! And you, Ciel, after all of the nurturing and personal training I gave you over the years, you repay me by joining your worthless brother?! Whatever, I'm done trying to help ungrateful brats!"

Orchid's Shadow will move forward with or without you. Just be prepared, because you'll never be safe from our cause. We will cleanse this world of you and all the other scum!"

Devlin had heard enough and lunged for Freya, but as he drew near, she dropped a ball that released a cloud of strong perfume and Devlin lost sight of her while trying to cover his face. As the mist cleared, Freya was nowhere to be found. Devlin took her escape as a sign to relax and plopped on the ground, breathing heavily.

"Well, that's over for now, I guess. I can't believe she pulled this whole stunt." Devlin was still processing what had just occurred.

"Seeing you is proof enough for me of Mom's wickedness," Ciel holstered his rapier and began to pace. "For the longest time, she had me believing that you had died in the fire and that as a last wish, you wanted me to continue your training to become the next leader of the guild. It wasn't until recently that I learned the truth when I discovered she was sending you letters."

"Wait, so you knew before now and still attacked me? What the hell, Ciel?"

"Mom said I would be having a special guest for my last test, but I couldn't have figured it would be you. I almost didn't recognize you with how much you've changed your appearance. I thought you were just some thug that Mom picked up off the street, until you started acting like you saw a ghost" Ciel said.

"Ouch, only a common thug? I thought I looked better than that," Devlin smirked, his hostility diminishing as he realized he had his brother back. "Guess that explains why you beat me like I came to mug you."

"Sorry about roughing you up so much, Dev," Ciel walked over with his head hung low and sat next to Devlin. "If Mom had even the slightest idea that I wasn't going to continue being her obedient pet, I may not have gotten the chance for her to bring us back together."

"Don't worry about it, man. I have to forgive my own brother; it's like you said, you needed to keep her clueless. You did a great job, but next time, please watch where you put that blade," Devlin rubbed his throat. "Anyway, what about the guild, shouldn't they be on the way here after

Freya alerts them to the fact that there are two people aware of their existence and actively opposing them?"

"It's okay, we can rest a bit before we make our escape. The guild has no idea this place exists, Mom made sure to keep it a secret so she could have some peace while training me. My question is what are we going to do now that we are both on the run?"

Devlin pondered this for a moment and smiled. "Well, I think it's clear that we should definitely keep a low profile for now. But when the time comes, we should find a way to shut down Orchid's Shadow for good. They've been running their little organization a bit too long now; it's about time someone puts a stop to their work."

"Sounds like fun, count me in." Ciel and Devlin bumped fists, got up and prepared to leave. They knew they were going to have a long journey ahead of them, but they were ready for it, knowing that neither one of them would have to go at it alone anymore.