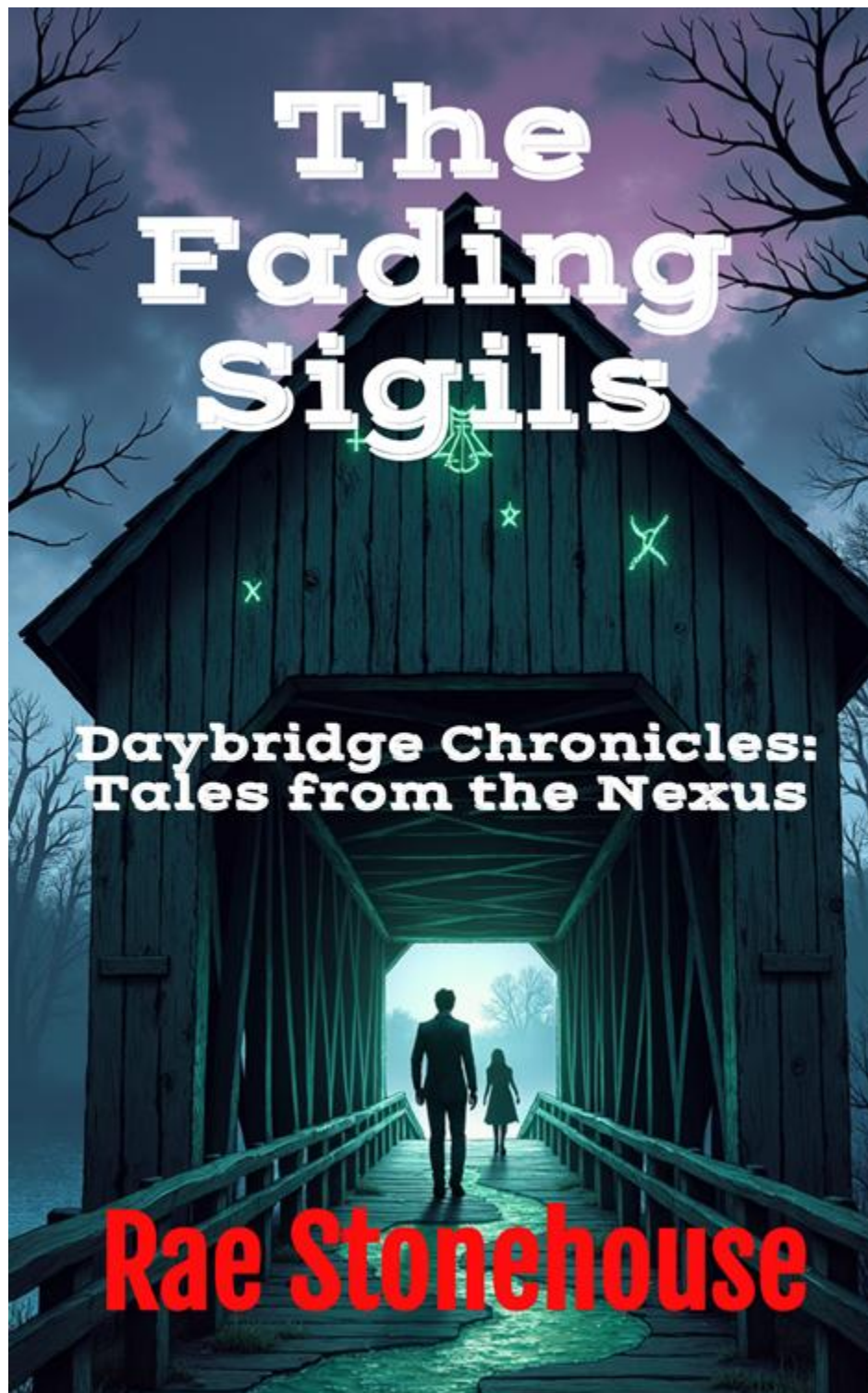




The Fading Sigils

Welcome to Daybridge—a town where legends walk, bridges connect more than riverbanks, and the line between protector and monster depends entirely on perspective.

You're about to meet Walter Thorne, an eighty-four-year-old man who has painted the same bridge every morning for forty-seven years. The townspeople call him eccentric. The tourists barely notice him. But paranormal investigator Ethan Reeves sees something else in Walter's meticulous ritual—something that doesn't quite follow the laws of physics, something that hums with purpose beneath the surface of ordinary routine. When Walter's steady hands finally falter and his cryptic final words set a supernatural countdown in motion, Ethan discovers that some paint jobs are literally holding back the darkness. Welcome to your first glimpse of *The Fading Sigils*, where a morning ritual becomes a mystery, a mystery becomes a crisis, and nothing beneath Daybridge Bridge is what it seems.

This is Chapter One of a complete novel that will take you from this quiet morning observation to dimensional breaches, ancient guardians, and choices that will transform everything Ethan thought he knew about monsters and magic. We invite you to experience where it all begins—with an old man, a bridge, and paint that moves against gravity.

— Rae Stonehouse – Author

THE DAYBRIDGE CHRONICLES - SERIES OVERVIEW

The Daybridge Chronicles invites you into a universe where the boundaries between dimensions blur, consciousness evolves beyond human comprehension, and ancient cosmic forces clash with modern ambition. Born from **The Ethan Reeves Werewolf Detective Series**, this expanded universe transforms familiar characters into witnesses and participants in humanity's most profound crisis—where werewolf instincts become heightened perception, detective work becomes dimensional investigation, and solving crimes means preventing the collapse of existence itself.

In the shadow of Daybridge bridge, an unremarkable city becomes the epicenter of humanity's transformation. This collection offers glimpses into interconnected stories featuring brilliant scientists grappling with reality-rewriting technologies, enhanced sensitives bridging human and cosmic consciousness, and reluctant heroes thrust into conflicts spanning dimensions. While each book stands alone with its own complete narrative, they weave together into a larger tapestry exploring one ultimate question: **Will**

we transcend our limitations through unity, or face annihilation in the void between realities? Choose your chapter, enter the universe, and discover what happens when humanity's evolutionary leap collides with forces beyond comprehension.

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Free Sample:

INTRODUCTION:

Dear Readers,

The story you are about to experience represents a unique branch in the Ethan Reeves Werewolf Detective Series timeline. While featuring the familiar faces of Detectives Ethan Reeves and Alice Chen, "The Fading Sigils" exists in what we might call a parallel dimensional thread of the Daybridge universe.

Those familiar with the established events in "Shadows of Daybridge" and "The Blood Beneath Daybridge: The Making of a Monster" may notice certain divergences in this narrative. Consider this tale as occurring in an adjacent reality where certain events unfolded differently, particularly regarding the true nature and purpose of the bridge ogre.

As anyone who has spent time in Daybridge knows, the town exists at the intersection of multiple realities. It should come as no surprise that stories from Daybridge might occasionally bleed across dimensional boundaries, just as the supernatural entities within them do.

Whether you view this as an alternate timeline, a parallel universe, or simply another facet of the complex and ever-expanding Daybridge mythology is entirely up to you. After all, in a town where werewolf detectives investigate paranormal phenomena, who's to say which reality is the "correct" one?

Enjoy your journey across this particular version of Daybridge Bridge. And as always, mind the shadows beneath.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DAILY RITUAL

The eastern span of Daybridge Bridge emerged from the morning mist like a spectral limb. Fog curled between weathered planks and twisted around support beams, creating phantom shapes that dissolved as quickly as they formed. In this ethereal landscape, Walter Thorne's hunched figure appeared right on schedule, 5:17 AM—same as yesterday, same as the day before, same as the last forty-seven years.

Walter's gnarled hands clutched a worn leather satchel as he shuffled toward his daily appointment with the bridge. At eighty-four, each step carried the weight of dedication rather than obligation. The town called him "the Bridge Painter," though few bothered to notice the old man's work anymore. The nickname had outlived curiosity about his purpose.

From his vantage point at a riverside café table, Ethan Reeves lowered his newspaper slightly, eyes tracking Walter's approach. Three days of surveillance had yielded a predictable pattern, but patterns were exactly what concerned him. Steam rose from his untouched coffee, adding to the morning haze.

"Still at it, old timer?" he murmured, adjusting the tourist-grade camera hanging around his neck. The disguise was probably unnecessary in a town this size, but habits formed over years of paranormal investigation died hard.

Walter reached his starting point—the third plank past the eastern railing post—and knelt with practiced precision. Bones cracked audibly in the morning stillness. He opened his satchel with reverence, revealing an assortment of small antique vials nestled in velvet-lined compartments. The glass containers caught what little light penetrated the fog, their contents shimmering with colors that seemed to shift when Ethan blinked.

Ethan's phone vibrated in his pocket. Alice Chen's text was characteristically direct: *Any changes?*

He typed back: *Same ritual. Starting now. Something about those vials feels wrong.*

His partner's response came seconds later: *Define "wrong."*

Ethan paused, watching as Walter uncorked a cobalt blue vial with trembling fingers. *Wrong like our Blackwater case. The liquid moves against gravity.*

Walter poured three drops of the substance into a small ceramic bowl. The droplets clung to the glass, reluctant to fall, before finally detaching with unnatural slowness. Even from Ethan's distance, the liquid seemed to pulse with its own heartbeat once it settled in the bowl.

The old man reached for a crimson vial next, adding a single drop to the mixture. The surrounding fog momentarily thickened, as if drawing closer to witness the ritual. Walter began to hum—a discordant melody that raised the hair on Ethan's arms. The sound wasn't just coming from Walter's throat; it resonated from the bridge itself, wood and metal harmonizing with human voice.

Recording audio, Ethan texted, activating his phone's enhanced microphone. The Daybridge Police Department hadn't specified what "unusual light phenomena" meant when they'd contacted Reeves & Chen Paranormal Investigations, but they'd emphasized the bridge's historical significance and recent anomalies that frightened tourists.

Walter's humming transformed into muttered words—phrases that slipped between languages, ancient and modern tongues intertwining. Ethan caught fragments that sounded Sumerian, others like archaic Welsh, all structured in a rhythm that made mathematical sense despite semantic nonsense.

"Keeper bind the hungry dark... passage sealed by willing mark... chains renewed by blood and bone..." Walter's voice gained strength as he mixed the contents with a brush carved from some unidentifiable dark wood.

Ethan zoomed his camera lens, focusing on Walter's weathered face. The old man's eyes reflected something beyond the visible spectrum—pinpricks of light that shouldn't exist in the natural world. Ethan had seen that look before, in practitioners who regularly communicated with entities beyond human comprehension. It left traces, like radiation burns on the soul.

Walter dipped his brush into the mixture, which had transformed into an opalescent paint that refused to settle into a single color. He approached a section of railing that appeared perfectly sound—recently painted, even—and began applying careful strokes in a pattern that made Ethan's vision blur when he tried to follow it directly.

Definitely protective sigils, Ethan texted. *Classical containment configuration with modifications I haven't seen before.*

Alice's reply was immediate: *Containment or invitation?*

The question sent a cold prickle down Ethan's spine. In their line of work, the difference between warding something away and inviting it closer often came down to subtle variations in seemingly identical patterns. He'd seen enough botched summoning circles in his career to respect the thin line between protection and catastrophe.

"Neither" he muttered, watching Walter complete a series of precise brushstrokes that formed a pattern Ethan recognized from their case in Vermont two years ago. "It's a boundary reinforcement."

Walter continued his methodical work, moving along the bridge's eastern span with the certainty of a man following invisible guidelines. The sigils he painted would be invisible to ordinary passersby—not through any magical concealment, but because humans were remarkably skilled at ignoring what didn't fit their understanding of reality. The patterns would register as decorative flourishes at most, their true purpose hidden in plain sight.

The fog began to thin as the sunlight strengthened, revealing glimpses of the dark water churning beneath the bridge. Walter's pace quickened, his brush dancing across wood and metal with increasing urgency. Each completed sigil seemed to hum briefly before fading into the bridge's surface, leaving behind only a faint residue visible to Ethan's trained eye.

"You're running out of time, aren't you?" Ethan murmured, noting how Walter's gaze flicked nervously toward the rising sun. Whatever ritual the old man performed clearly required completion before full daylight—before the bridge opened to morning traffic and curious eyes.

Walter reached the midpoint of the bridge, where the eastern and western spans met. Here, his movements became more elaborate, the sigils more complex. Sweat beaded on his forehead despite the morning chill. His lips moved faster, the incantations taking on a desperate quality that made Ethan lean forward in his chair.

Then it happened—the moment that would transform a routine surveillance into something far more urgent.

Walter's hand faltered mid-stroke. The brush clattered against the wooden planks as the old man clutched at his chest, face contorting in pain. He staggered backward, eyes wide with something beyond physical agony—a profound horror as he realized what was happening.

"No," Walter gasped, the single word carrying across the empty bridge with unnatural clarity. "Not today. Not yet."

Ethan abandoned his cover instantly, sprinting toward the bridge as Walter collapsed onto his knees. The old man's eyes locked with Ethan's approaching figure, recognition and terror mingling in his gaze.

"You," Walter wheezed as Ethan reached him. "You see them too."

"The sigils? Yes." Ethan knelt beside him, phone already dialing emergency services. "I'm getting help. Just hold on."

Walter's gnarled fingers clutched Ethan's wrist with surprising strength. "Not enough time," he rasped. "The thinning comes. The bridge must be—"

His words dissolved into a rattling cough. Blood flecked his lips, startlingly bright against his pallid skin.

"What's thinning? What about the bridge?" Ethan pressed, instinct telling him these might be the only answers he'd get.

Walter's eyes cleared momentarily, focusing with unnerving intensity. "Forty-seven years," he whispered. "My watch ends. Find Rebecca. She knows. The calendar... marked date..."

The ambulance's distant wail cut through the morning silence. Walter's grip weakened, his gaze drifting toward the unfinished sigil on the bridge.

"Tell them," he murmured, "tell them not to cross after dark. It wants out."

As emergency services rushed onto the bridge, Ethan stepped back, watching the paramedics work with efficient urgency. Their efforts seemed distant, secondary to the unfinished pattern that now glared at him like an interrupted sentence.

The paint on the bridge seemed to move, flowing toward Walter's collapsed form as if drawn by magnetic attraction. The motion lasted only seconds—so brief Ethan might have dismissed it as a trick of light if not for the years he'd spent witnessing the impossible.

His phone vibrated. Alice again: *What happened? Sensors just spiked.*

Ethan watched as the paramedics loaded Walter into the ambulance, their expressions already shifting from urgency to resignation. He knew before they confirmed it—Walter wouldn't survive the journey to the hospital.

Painter collapsed. Critical condition. But that's not our biggest problem.

He approached the unfinished sigil, careful not to disturb the pattern or the scattered painting supplies. The incomplete design pulsed with subtle wrongness, like a circuit with critical components missing. Whatever Walter had been maintaining was now compromised.

Alice's response reflected their years of partnership, her intuition aligning with his concerns: *Coming to Daybridge. Don't touch anything until I get there.*

Ethan pocketed his phone and looked out over the dark waters beneath Daybridge Bridge. The morning sun now illuminated the town beyond, its light reaching everywhere except the shadows beneath the weathered structure. Those shadows seemed deeper than physics should allow, as if the space under the bridge connected to somewhere light couldn't penetrate.

"What were you keeping at bay, old man?" Ethan murmured.

As if in answer, a sound rose from beneath the planks—not quite a growl, not quite a voice. Just enough to confirm that Walter's daily ritual had been far more important than a simple paint job, and that its interruption had awakened something that had waited a very long time for this moment.

Ethan backed away from the unfinished sigil, years of paranormal investigation having taught him when to observe and when to retreat. Whatever dwelled beneath Daybridge Bridge had just lost its keeper.

And Ethan couldn't shake the feeling that it knew exactly who to blame.

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### About the Author

Rae Stonehouse crafts dark supernatural mysteries where noir meets the paranormal. Drawing on over 40 years in psychology and mental health, he brings emotional depth and psychological complexity to urban fantasy. The Ethan Reeves series explores the shadows lurking in Daybridge—where every case uncovers secrets better left buried.

**Connect:** [ethanreeveswerewolfdetective.com](http://ethanreeveswerewolfdetective.com) | [daybridgeparanormal.substack.com](http://daybridgeparanormal.substack.com)

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**Walter's ritual is broken. The sigils are fading. And something ancient stirs beneath Daybridge Bridge.**

You've witnessed the beginning—now discover what happens when Ethan Reeves traces that shadow-mark on his wrist back to its source, when Alice Chen arrives with her gifts for reading the dead, and when they uncover the terrible truth about what Walter was really painting all those years.

The clock is ticking. The binding weakens by the hour. And the federal government is about to make everything infinitely worse.

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- Rebecca Hines's devastating confession about why she fled the Warden's duty
- The ritual that will either seal the dimensional breach—or consume everyone Ethan cares about
- A transformation that transcends the boundary between human and entity

- An ending that will redefine everything you thought you knew about sacrifice

Walter chose Ethan for a reason. The binding has already begun its transfer. And beneath the bridge, something that has been enslaved for centuries is about to make a choice that will change Daybridge—and Ethan—forever.

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