

EVERNIGHT



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*For Lorna,
and the childhood
adventures we shared*





SHADOW JACK

There was a man made of midnight, and his name was Shadow Jack.

The name suited him well; his clothes were dark and his hair was darker. His eyes were pools of shadow. As he slipped through the winding labyrinth of the slums on the night our story begins, his intentions were darkest of all.

He crossed a wooden bridge to a putrid lump of half-flooded land cut off from the rest of the slums. Filth lay thick on crowded, leaning dwellings and the rain-swollen river was black as tar and coated with a film of weed and scum. There were few streets or alleys or courts; mostly there were only waterways and flooded ditches, channels crossing this way and that, with houses built upon crazy-looking wooden stilts to escape the water, which seemed to swell every minute with the rain.

This was Devil's Island, and even at such a late hour there were huddles of coats gathered on wooden boats,

shifting movements in the darkest corners. They left Shadow Jack to his business.

He took a deep sniff of the soaking air, searching through the many layers of death and filth and disease.

‘There you are.’

Cutting down an alley, he came out at the bank of a canal, and sniffed again.

Somewhere nearby, over the rain, he heard an argument, and a fight, and then all was suddenly quiet. Across the waterway, the flicker of a lamp caught his sharp eyes, where a sorry figure stumbled to a glassless window and tipped a bucket of sewage out into the water.

Shadow Jack made a movement, quick, fluid, and at once he was gone from that spot in the alley and a black raven the size of an eagle was soaring into the wild night. The raven circled, looking down over the winding waterways and canals and crumbling buildings of Devil’s Island, and then it swooped down, coming to rest on the ledge of a high window.

The raven hopped into the damp-ridden apartment within. With a sound like dark velvet it became a man once more, wrapped in his midnight coat. The room was bare, save for a simple bed and a wooden chair under the small window. It seemed, at first glance, that there was nobody there. But Shadow Jack heard a heartbeat, fast and frightened.

‘We both know you’re here, Jenny Winter,’ he said in a low, dangerous voice. ‘You know what I am. Your tricks

won't cut it with me. I hear your heart, hear how *frightened* you are. And you should be fright—'

He stopped, because across the room there was a shimmer in the air, and a woman appeared before his eyes as if she had been wearing a cloak made of the very fabric of the world and had slipped it off. Jenny Winter raised a trembling hand. In her fingers she clutched a thin wooden stick, fitted, like a pistol, with a round of chambers; but instead of bullets these chambers held small bottles, and inside the bottles were coils of glowing coloured light.

Shadow Jack picked a speck off his coat sleeve, and examined it, before flicking it away.

'You can't kill me with magic, you know. Twelve of you have tried and failed already.' He took a small step towards her, and she raised her wand. The spells glowed fiercely in their bottles.

'One more step, and I'll send you through that wall!'

Shadow Jack turned his eyes skyward. 'Look . . . we both know this journey has come to an end. You're on your own, Jenny. Wherever you go, I'll find you. You've been running so long . . . you must be *exhausted*.' His voice had taken on a soothing tone. 'Imagine how wonderful it would feel to be free of the weight you've been carrying. Give me the Doomsday Spell, Jenny, and it'll all go away.'

Jenny's thoughts betrayed her; her hand made an involuntary movement to the place in her coat where she had stowed that most precious of objects.

Her eyes met his.

Shadow Jack lunged forward.

It happened in a fraction of a moment: Jenny Winter flicked her wand at him, and one of the magic bottles shone bright as a new coin in the sun. The tip of the wand glowed, and a bullet of blazing light hit Shadow Jack in the chest. It sent him crashing through the rotting brick wall, and he was falling, falling.

Jenny watched him. When he hit the water, *splash*, she seemed to wake from a daze, and she turned and ran, barging down the stairs and out into the driving rain. Out of the alley, across a narrow wooden footbridge, the river churning below, and along another short street, falling on her front in hurry and panic, staggering back up, continuing on. Then across Devil's Gate Bridge to the city proper.

There was no plan in Jenny's mind, no safe place to run to. The rain and wind pelted her, merciless and cold, and her hair stuck to her face. Around a corner, down a narrow winding path – she scattered a pack of drunks, and they yelled and cursed after her. She ran and ran and ran, until her lungs burned and her legs stiffened and every breath was a knife in her chest. At last she stopped in a dark, deserted lane branching off Milk Street, collapsing to her knees in a puddle, sucking in ragged gulps of air. But there was no time for rest. She struggled up, found a manhole cover and pointed her wand at the ground. One of the bottles in the round lit up, and a blazing spell shot out of the wand

and hit the metal cover, leaving a crumbling black hole in the street.

The sewer stream below was a foaming torrent. Jenny knew at once if she tried to escape through the tunnels she'd surely drown.

Something moved, up by the rooftops. A huge raven circled down through the storm, landed in the lane up ahead. It spread its wings, made a movement, and in a swirl of rain and mist, Shadow Jack was back.

Jenny raised her wand and shot a spell through the night towards him. He dodged it. Desperately she shot another, and another, until each of the spell bottles loaded in her wand was empty.

'No more,' said Shadow Jack. He held out an open hand, and to his amazement, Jenny reached into her coat and produced the small box made of polished wood. He stared at it, hardly able to believe that, after all these years, here it was – the Doomsday Spell, the key to his freedom.

He reached out.

But Jenny Winter spat at him, spun away and tossed the box into the coursing sewer water below.

'You Hag!'

Shadow Jack clubbed Jenny on the side of the head, knocking her down, and stared into the rushing stream. When he turned back, she was fiddling madly with the compartments in her belt. She pulled out a bottle, tried to load it into the wand's revolver chamber, but he

kicked her hand, and both the wand and spell bottle went spinning.

As he stood over her, something on her glinted, and Shadow Jack reached down and grabbed the slender chain she wore around her neck. With a jerk he snapped it and a wooden pendant slid into his hand. The pendant was the shape of a teardrop, and something had been etched into it, a symbol so simplistic that it might have been the work of a child.

A bird in flight.

Shadow Jack gazed at it for a moment, then reached into one of the many pockets of his long black coat. When he brought his hand out, and opened his fist, there were eleven identical pendants nestling in his palm.

‘Yours is the last,’ he said, dropping the pendant he’d taken from her onto the pile. ‘A shame one of the thirteen was destroyed. I would have liked the complete collection.’ He closed his long fingers around the trinkets and tipped them back into his pocket. ‘I want you to know, Jenny Winter, that some of your friends broke easily when I found them over the years – without much persuasion at all in fact. A few of them begged, and bargained, and names and locations spilled out of them, until only your name remained.’

Jenny stared up at him through her soaking red hair. Blood from her mouth mixed with the rain and tears on her face.

‘In all the old legends, the Djinn are powerful beings,’

she said. 'But you're not powerful. You're weak. You're broken, and desperate, and all I feel is pity.'

Shadow Jack crouched down, and Jenny noticed for the first time that he cast no shadow.

'I don't care what you feel. I only care about finding that spell and claiming back my freedom.'

'You don't know what you're doing! If Hester gets the spell it'll change *everything!*'

'What happens in this world is of no concern to me. When I am free, there are other worlds waiting. In any case, you won't have to worry about the future.'

Shadow Jack leaned in, almost as though he were going to kiss her. He opened his mouth wide, the bones in his jaw clicking and snapping, revealing rows of sharp teeth, and a gaping, rotten darkness. Jenny could not move, could not breathe.

'Are you frightened of me now, Jenny Winter?'

Jenny screamed.



BENEATH THE STREETS

Larabelle Fox was sheltering in the tunnels beneath the city when she heard a commotion.

She almost didn't notice, such was the great cacophony of rain and wind and rushing water barrelling through the darkened sewers. Rivers of rain had fed the stream, leaving many of the tunnels inaccessible. Fierce water rumbled past her feet, splashing her wax-coated boots, gurgling and foaming, carrying twigs and leaves and drowned rats and cats.

Lara's eyes were sharp and alert, and they flicked here and there and all about, watching the water as it passed through the golden light from the dragon-breath lamp tied around her neck. Her muddled reflection stared back at her from the rough surface, thirteen years old and brown-skinned and fiercely focussed. She was hoping to glimpse shining things in the waters: coins, or lost jewellery.

But it was not a treasure that caught her attention now. It was the sound of an argument.

Lara extinguished her lamp at once, and crushing darkness folded in on top of her. A newcomer to those tunnels would have been instantly lost. Disoriented. Panic-stricken. Not Lara. Lara breathed deep and stayed calm. She knew every twist and turn and dip of the sewers in the same easy, natural way a small child might know the rhythms of a nursery rhyme.

Creeping forward, she followed the voices, the sound of her footsteps smothered by the stream. Around a bend she went, to an intersection where several sewers met. Light spilled from an adjacent tunnel, and Lara slowed, crouching low against the smooth cold brick. She peeked around the corner, tingling with curiosity.

There were five of them. Five boys. Each was dressed in a tosher's things: a wax-coated jacket and boots and gloves, with a dragon-breath lamp hanging around his neck. Four of the boys were large, almost men, but the fifth . . . the fifth was younger, and much smaller. The four larger boys had formed a circle of sorts around the smaller one. Lara knew him very well indeed, for she had taught him the ways of toshing herself. His name was Joe Littlefoot, and he was looking around at the others with fierce, frightened green eyes.

'It's mine!' His hand hovered protectively on the toshing bag slung over his shoulder. 'I found this stuff fair and square. I'm not even on your patch!'

'Well, we've decided to expand,' said one of the older

boys. His head was pale and shaved, his voice gravelly from all the pipes he smoked. Vin Cotton was his name, and Lara knew about him and his gang, and was wary of coming across them. ‘I reckon the tunnel running under Milk Street belongs to us now. Which means the loot you find here is ours.’ He pointed to the bag.

‘You can’t just claim tunnels!’ cried Joe.

‘And who’s goin’ to stop us? *You?*’

Lara bristled at this, felt her hackles rise. Toshing was not a noble profession, perhaps, but there had always been a sense of honour to it, an unspoken respect between the folks who risked their lives to find lost things beneath the world. To be a tosher took guts, and smarts, and bravery, and Lara thought that Cotton had none of these things. He was a coward. A bully.

‘Last chance,’ he said.

Joe shook his head.

‘I need whatever I can get. My granny . . . she needs lookin’ after . . .’

Cotton held up a finger to quiet him. Then he brought a knife out from his coat and pushed the point of the blade against Joe’s throat; not enough to draw blood, but certainly enough to frighten Joe out of his wits. Lara almost cried out.

‘I don’t give a Hag’s tongue about your granny. You need to learn a lesson in respect, sunshine.’ He nodded to the others. ‘Take everything he’s got.’

They closed in. Thinking quick, Lara reached into her

own toshing bag, and brought out a bent metal spoon she'd found in the tunnels earlier. She stood up, reared back, and threw the spoon as far down the sewer as she could manage. It hit the wall with a *CLANG* and Cotton and his gang spun around and held up their lamps.

'Who's there?'

'Run, Joe! Run!'

Lara stepped into the light, and Joe's eyes grew wide. He broke into a sprint, his wax-coated boots splashing through the water towards her. Then they were away, twisting, turning through the tunnels, the stinking air filled with curses and threats from Cotton and his gang.

'Son of a Hag! Get them!'

'You're dead!'

'Put your light out!' Lara told Joe. He did as she said, and soon they were running almost blind through the tunnels, guided by memory and instinct.

'Nearest way out?' asked Joe.

Lara tried to calm her breathing, pictured the sewers in her mind. 'Needle Street!'

They tore along, to a spot where the tunnel forked in two, and they took the path to the left, Vin Cotton and his gang chasing . . . yelling . . . *gaining* . . .

Still they ran, gasping and panting, until something awfully wrong dawned in Lara's head, making her skid to a halt.

'Why've you stopped?'

‘Sshh. You notice something?’

‘Yeah. I’ve noticed we’ve stopped. C’mon!’

Lara didn’t budge. The air had changed. She tapped her foot on the tunnel floor.

‘The sewer stream. Where’s it gone?’

The rushing sewer water had become a trickle.

‘What does it matter? Come on!’

‘No! Something’s not right!’

Lara fumbled for the lamp around her neck, sparked it to life, and honey-coloured light pushed back the darkness.

Joe began to shout at her, but then he stopped, and stood by Lara’s side. The two of them stared up the tunnel. A short distance ahead, the walls had collapsed inwards, and the way was completely blocked by brick and debris.

Back the way they had come, Cotton was sloshing up the sewer.

There was no way out.