

INTO THE SHADOWS

by: Shannon Langel

The eerie shrieks and moans of the undead always sent an unsettling shiver up my spine. It was imperative that I remained focused while in the Spirit Realm. If I didn't keep a clear head there was a chance I'd slip back into my human form and that would be disastrous for me. For I am a Shadow Walker and my task is to keep the land of the living unaware of the supernatural realms, mainly that of the Spirit Realm. My current position is in New Orleans, LA and it is particularly due to the increase of the mundane seeking out psychics. The stock market crash has caused many deaths which means loved ones are trying to converse with those they have lost. This has stirred up quite a mess since seances and Ouija boards open up portals that allow spirits to slip through.

I continued along the dark and dreary path in the form of a grey fox. I entered the Spirit Realm to drop off a spirit that had been summoned by a seance. The family that summoned the spirit had been trying to reach their child who recently passed away. My heart ached for them. The child passed because they simply didn't have enough money to put food on the table, let alone take the child to the doctor for medical issues. Unfortunately, when a seances is performed it's basically a Russian roulette on which spirit actually comes through the portal. It's rarely ever the person being asked for. The poor family will probably have nightmare now. The spirit who came through was a nasty one. It threw things at the family and scratched rather foul language across the walls. Even a sailor would have blushed at the profanity. Perhaps they would think again about trying to reach out to the Spirit Realm.

A grey wolf appeared in front of me and I bowed my head to him as I approached. He mirrored my behavior and then began following me. The realm was dreary as always. The only colors here were shades of black, grey and white. We stopped walking once we reached the tree of life. The tree was actually the only living thing that existed in the realm, well, other than us of course. This was our ticket back to the land of the living. We entered a small burrow below the tree. Once inside my companion lifted his paw and traced a rune shape in the air and a swirling grey portal formed where his claw had been. He jumped through the portal which began changing different colors and spiraling at a rapid pace. After a moment, it calmed and turned a shade of grey. It was my turn to enter. I took one last glance around to make sure the spirits hadn't followed us, I was alone. There was a high pitch wail outside the burrow and I knew the spirits had sensed the open portal. It was time to leave. With a running start I jumped into the portal and returned to the land of the living.

The exit from the portal was through a mirror. I gracefully stepped out and turned to glance in it. I was in my human form now; my jet-black hair was still pinned up perfectly. I was dressed in a brilliant red swing dress with matching red lipstick and of course, my favorite red Mary Jane shoes. Due to the lack of color in the Spirit Realm, I preferred bold colors. My companion began wiping the rune off of the mirror with his handkerchief. He was dressed in a blue pinstripe suit and had on a matching fedora. Pinned to his shirt collar was a small medal rune. I had a matching one pinned on my dress. It is what we used to capture the spirits and transport them back to the realm. He gave the mirror another once over. When he was confident the portal was closed he turned to face me.

"You look lovely today, Margaret."

"Thank you, James. You don't look bad yourself. Were you in there making a deposit as well?"

He chuckled at this and nodded.

"Yeah, some poor soul slipped through the cracks and tried to return to his loved ones. Sadly, the poor bastard's family had been evicted from their home and were out on the streets."

"I'm assuming he turned?"

"You betcha. Poor soul turned dark with vengeance and started attacking the current homeowner. Even tried to possess one of 'em."

I shook my head. This was one of the reasons why our job was so important. We needed to keep the spirits contained in the realm for the safety of the living and for the spirits safety as well.

"Well, I better be off. There is another seance happening at Madam Hancock's place."

"I'm going to check out the cemetery. I overheard some teenagers daring a younger boy to use a Ouija board with them there."

I rolled my eyes at this and then walked down the street to Madam Hancock's. As always, the streets were filled with people. Somewhere laughing and having a good time. They were dressed in their swing attire for a night of dancing. While others were sitting on the side of the street holding up signs stating they needed financial help or food. I pitied them because I knew if they did not get the help they needed then I would be escorting them to the realm soon.

There was a group of seven people outside on Madam Hancock's stoop. I glanced to see if anyone was watching. When I was sure it was safe I forced myself to mold into my shadows form. As I did this though, I felt an unfamiliar pain. Something was fighting to stay attached to

me. Time seemed to move rather quickly, I glanced up from the shadows and saw a transparent apparition hovering above me.

"Dang it."

I spoke a little louder than intended. Just because I was in the shadows it didn't mean people couldn't hear me. The group of people at Madam Hancock's looked over in my direction, but of course they weren't able to see anything. I reached for the rune pin on my dress, but it was too late, the apparition had vanished.

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The room was dimly lit and the crowd from outside Madam Hancock's stoop now gathered around a table in the center of the room. Madam Hancock called out to the spirits.

"I call upon the Spirit Realm and ask for Tommy Belmont to come forth. Tommy, give us a sign that you are here."

Of course, Madam Hancock was a typical fraud of a psychic. There were all sorts of parlor tricks setup to make her customers believe that her seances really worked. She pushed a button under the table which created a knock.

"Tommy," one of the girls cried out. "Is that you?"

There was another knock. The girl let out a sigh of relief and began to cry. I walked around the room utilizing the shadows to avoid being seen. I was still a little shaken about the apparition from earlier. It meant at some point a spirit had latched itself to me and had piggybacked its way into the land of the living. How could I have missed it? How did James not notice it either? Now, I needed to figure out who was out and why. First, I needed to see to the matter at hand. I needed to be sure that Madam Hancock didn't accidentally open a portal during the seance. She had opened one in the past. It was purely by accident of course and it actually

had been one of those rare occasions where the spirit she was calling for came through. Her business had been booming ever since.

I watched as Madam Hancock pulled clear fishing wire and made things around the room move. To the untrained eye it appeared as if there was a spirit in the room. I was about to leave when a chill swept through the room. I turned back around and glanced at the people in the room. Each time a person exhaled it could be seen in the room. The little light that was in the room began to flicker. Without realizing it, Madam Hancock had actually opened a portal again. Except a portal didn't appear above the center of the table like it should have. That's odd, I thought. I glanced around the room and spotted the apparition in the corner.

It jolted across the room and headed towards one of the young fellas in the room. I darted quickly through the shadows and flew in front of it before it had the chance to make it to its intended victim.

"Gotcha." I said.

Everyone in the room looked around at the sound of my voice. Oops. Utilizing the shadows, I slipped out of the room and back onto the streets. I slipped back into my human form and headed back to base. I climbed up the stoop and unlocked the door. Once inside I closed my eyes and focused on my rune pin. I was able to sense who I had captured. The trapped spirit was a man named, Charles. Poor soul had been murdered over a year ago. He had turned into a vengeful spirit and had been a frequent escape artist.

"When will you learn, Charles? One of these days you'll finally stay put in the realm."

I pulled out my favorite red lipstick and began drawing a rune on the mirror. This opened the portal and I watched in the mirror as the colors in the room turned grey. I closed my eyes and

transformed into the grey fox once more, then I jumped through the portal and landed into the spirit realm.

The familiar wailing screams once again filled my ears and sent shivers down my spine.

"Concentrate," I told myself.

I began my journey through the realm to the drop off point. We had to release the spirits at a specific location. It held the spirit in place long enough for us to return to the tree of life and exit without them escaping again. I was almost there when I felt a prickling sensation on my neck. I stopped and scratched myself with my hindleg, but it didn't seem to be working. I leaned down to the ground and tried rubbing my neck this way. It was a foolish mistake that I had realized all too late. By scratching at my neck, I had knocked the rune pin off releasing Charles from his temporary prison. That wasn't even the worst of it, realizing my error meant I lost my focus on my fox form. I glanced down at myself and saw the bright red dress in a world of grey.

"Crap."

Panic set in and it was too late for me to transform back. The spirits had seen me and began attacking. They were angry. They wanted me to know their pain and to join them in their misery. They might just be apparitions, but they are still able to inflict pain. Cuts began to form across my body. I screamed out in agony. I watched as my life force spilled out onto the ground below me. The world began to blur.

Something wet ran across my face. I opened my eyes to see a drool covered tongue coming at me for a second time. A look of relief came over the grey wolf's face, it was James. He let out a low growl keeping the spirits at bay. I needed a few more minutes to heal before I could transform again. His efforts wouldn't be able to hold them off much longer though. James must have realized this because he did the unthinkable. He transformed into his human form.

"What on God's green Earth are you doing, James?"

"Protecting what I love. Now go!"

I stared at him in disbelief. I couldn't just leave him here. I wouldn't.

"Margaret, go. I'll follow."

I transformed into the fox, ran to the portal and waited. James didn't return.