



# The SHADOW LANTERN



TERESA FLAVIN



# Chapter 1

The Wee Cuppa Café was packed with chattering teenagers who had just escaped from nearby Braeside High School. Every seat was taken, and the tables were covered with cups, crumbs and scrunched-up napkins. So many backpacks and wet jackets were piled on the floor that Ellie the waitress had to kick them aside with her foot as she bustled over to Sunni Forrest and Blaise Doran's table.

"What is it with you two?" she asked good-naturedly, as she put down another hot chocolate for Sunni and a second latte for Blaise. "Got no homes to go to?"

"It's Friday, Ellie!" Sunni said, inhaling the delicious fumes rising from her cup. "Besides, who wants to walk home through that?" She nodded at the wind and rain lashing at the café's picture windows.

"It's just a bit of weather." Ellie shrugged. "Or are you scared the ghosties will get you?"

"I think all the ghosties are in here." Blaise waved his hand at the Halloween decorations hanging on every wall and door. Ellie laughed and hurried away.

"And all the ghouls too," said Sunni under her breath, looking sideways at a table of boys teasing a girl across the room. "Wonder how long it'll take Shug and his friends to start on us."

“Who cares? I sure don’t.” Blaise doodled in his new pocket-size sketchbook. “Just ignore them.”

Sunni sighed and watched him draw. He was so laid-back, she wondered whether he’d even notice if she wasn’t there, and whether he’d care. She’d lied to her stepmom — again — about where she was going after school so she could be with Blaise, and sometimes he didn’t seem to appreciate it at all.

“What are you doing tonight?” she asked, spooning whipped cream into her mouth.

“Aw, probably not much. Maybe watch a movie with my dad or something. What about you?”

“I’m going to Mandy’s birthday party,” she said.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. It’s a sleepover.”

“Bunch of girls, then.”

“So?”

“So . . . nothing.” Blaise finally looked up at her. “I guess you’re not grounded anymore if you can go to a party.”

“They’re letting me go because she’s my oldest friend.” Sunni winced inside. She hated being dishonest, but she didn’t want to hurt his feelings.

“Then tell Mandy happy birthday from me.”

“Okay.” She sipped her hot chocolate to calm herself down. She got butterflies every time she saw Blaise now. It wasn’t just because she was lying to him. That was awful enough. What hurt more was that he was always polite and friendly, but nothing more. Eight weeks ago in London, they had almost kissed, but there was no sign of that happening again, thanks to Sunni’s stepmom and dad.

*We just want you to have a little break from Blaise.* That's how Dad had put it to her, but it wasn't what she had overheard her stepmom, Rhona, say to him. *That boy's father let them roam around alone in London and look what happened. Blaise took Sunni to that Starling House museum because a stranger told him it was cool—and they were kidnapped! He's a nice-enough kid, but he's not a good influence on her.*

Sunni hadn't been able to tell Blaise that her parents blamed him for getting them in trouble during their visit to London, so she had said she was grounded. After a while he stopped asking her when she'd be free to hang out again. That's when she started to lie to Rhona and her dad.

"What are you doing tomorrow night?" Sunni asked. "For Halloween."

"Not sure. Probably nothing. Maybe Dad and I will—"

"Watch a movie?" Sunni finished for him. "Two nights in a row?"

"Are you saying I'm boring?" Blaise grinned as he downed the dregs of his latte.

"No, it's just that Halloween is on a Saturday night this year! You should do something fun."

"I don't have a costume," he answered. "And it wouldn't be any fun without you there."

Sunni flushed. "I hate this. I wish I could do what I want, when I want." *And with whomever I want.*

Blaise just gave her a somber smile. Then his gaze shifted to something behind her shoulder. He stared for so long that Sunni turned around to look.

"What is it?" she asked, noticing nothing but crowded tables and the windswept street outside the café windows.

"I'm not sure," Blaise said. "I thought I saw something—someone—hanging around outside, staring at us. But he's gone now, if it was a 'he.'"

"There are lots of people out there," Sunni said. "Was it someone we know?"

"I couldn't see his face. He had a hood on."

"You don't think that we're being followed again, do you?"

"Who knows? Soranzo had his spy follow us all the way from Braeside to London just so he could try to make us tell him Fausto Corvo's secrets, and we didn't notice." Blaise frowned. "Boy, was that stupid."

"But that's all over now. Soranzo can't mess with us again. He's stuck back in his own century, and we're back in ours," she said. "When we left Starling House, that painted door was closed and there was no way he could open it again."

"I know. But the guy in the hoodie could be one of his pals." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Another slimeball who wants to find Corvo's lost magical paintings."

Sunni whispered back, "I wish we could just tell the world that we saw Corvo alive inside his painting at Blackhope Tower . . . and that his three lost paintings were with him so no one can ever steal them because the only way in is shut forever!"

"Well, we can't tell anyone," said Blaise. "We promised Corvo."

Sunni remembered the sorcerer's last words to them. *You have witnessed the magic of the heavens, a miracle few have ever seen. That I have allowed you to see it means that we have a bond of trust. You are privy to my work and must help*

*protect it.* She, Blaise, and her stepbrother, Dean, were the only people, other than those still inside *The Mariner's Return to Arcadia*, who knew that Corvo had harnessed the power of the planets and stars to bring his drawings and paintings to life. And they knew that he had hidden all his secrets under the surfaces of the three most magical paintings he had ever created, which is why Soranzo wanted them. That greedy man would do anything to possess paintings that he could slip in and out of whenever he wished—and where he could learn the secret of immortality.

“And we haven’t told anyone,” Sunni said, remembering how Soranzo had nearly killed them for defying him. “But he might not be the only one who thinks he can force us to say where the three paintings are.”

“That’s why we still have to be on guard.”

“I really hope you’re just imagining things,” she said. “About the hoodie guy outside.”

Blaise tapped his pencil against his sketchbook. “Me too. But it’s not the first time I’ve seen someone hanging around.”

A shiver ran down her neck. “What are you talking about?”

“It’s happened a few times recently. He always vanishes before I get a look at his face,” he said.

“Don’t go all spooky on me just as it’s getting dark outside,” Sunni said.

“I’m not trying to freak you out! I’m just telling you so you know what’s going on.”

“Great. I’ll keep my eyes open for sketchy hoodies.” Sunni sighed, glancing at the wall clock. “I’d better go

home or Rhona will be on my case. Are you coming?"

"My dad's supposed to pick me up here in a while." He glanced at the café windows again. "But I can walk you home."

"It's okay. I'll be fine on my own." The last thing she needed was for Rhona to see her with Blaise.

"Be careful."

Sunni pulled on her jacket. "Blaise, I only live two minutes away. I think I can manage."

"Okay, then don't be careful!" he said. "Sheesh."

Sunni bit her lip. "Bye. Guess I'll see you on Monday."

"Yeah. Have fun tonight. And happy Halloween."

"Thanks. Happy Halloween, Blaise."

As Sunni reluctantly left the Wee Cuppa, she turned around to wave, but he was bent over his sketchbook, lost in his own thoughts.



Blaise angrily rubbed out the sketch he was working on. *I can't do anything right today*, he thought.

He looked up at the café windows, but Sunni was long gone. She'd be home with her stuck-up stepmom, Rhona, just where that lady wanted her—safely out of Blaise's company. He was pretty sure that Rhona blamed him for their London escapade by the cold way she'd acted toward him and his father when they arrived home with Sunni and her dad. No matter how many times she insisted that she was still grounded, he knew Sunni was trying to spare him from the truth.



He thrummed his pencil hard against the sketch pad. Everything was screwed up now. They had to sneak around like being together was wrong. And the worst thing was, he'd completely lost his nerve about kissing her. He knew he still liked her as much as ever, but did she like him in *that* way? He couldn't tell.

"Where's your girlfriend?" A sneering boy scraped Sunni's chair along the floor. "Gone off to fairyland again?"

Three boys surrounded the table.

"Naw, she's flown away on her broomstick," answered another.

The first boy squinted over Blaise's shoulder. "Draw us a pink unicorn like you saw inside that painting."

Blaise looked up briefly. "Give it a rest, Shug."

The boys guffawed.

"Go on," Shug said. "Draw it."

The other boys began a low chant of "Draw it, draw it."

Blaise flipped his sketchbook shut and sat up straight. "Get lost."

But the chanting went on, and heads started to turn in their direction.

"I said to get lost." Blaise stood up to his full height.

The boys feigned being scared and continued to taunt him like grinning monkeys, glancing at the counter to make sure Ellie didn't notice.

*Stand your ground.* Blaise gritted his teeth. *Don't give them anything to use against you.*

Shug knocked Sunni's empty cup over and hooted.

All of a sudden, a host of masked figures appeared at the boys' backs, and a female voice cackled, "These idiots will

boil up well in my cauldron. Plenty of blubber for us all!"

The creatures laughed, and the boys stopped chanting.

"What's wrong, wee man? You've got a face like a burst tomato," said the witch from behind her mask. Shug snorted and elbowed her in the ribs. She rubbed her side and hissed something at him in a low voice.

The tallest figure, disguised in a furry purple animal head, clamped a hairy paw onto Shug's neck and said in a deep voice, "Beat it, all of you, or Ellie will ban you for life. And she's far scarier than we are."

The boys swore, but they stalked to the exit, kicking bags and knocking into people. Shug made an insulting gesture and disappeared into the dusk.

Blaise looked around at his rescuers. "Um . . . thanks."

The witch pulled her mask off, and he recognized Iona, one of Mr. Bell's art students who was a couple of years ahead of him. "No problem."

The others shed their masks, grinning. They were all older kids whose artwork he'd seen displayed in the school corridors and school exhibitions, but they'd never talked to him before. The tall one in the fur mask turned out to be the impossibly talented James, who everyone said was destined for great things.

"Idiots. They wouldn't dare have tried that if they weren't in their little posse," James said, scratching his chin with a furry claw. "I should have lined this mask with something. It itches like crazy."

"You made that?" Blaise asked.

"Yeah. I'm into making masks at the moment," said James. "Handy for this weekend."

"You going, Blaise?" asked Iona, shaking out her shiny copper-colored hair and tossing a leaflet onto the table. "It's the Enigma Festival at Blackhope Tower."

For a moment he was taken aback that she even knew his name but then realized it must be for the same reason everyone else did—his disappearance last winter at Blackhope Tower. But she had spoken to him in a friendly way, unlike some people at Braeside High School who didn't believe they'd been pulled inside Fausto Corvo's painting that day.

"I heard about it," he said, eyeing the leaflet. "But I'm not sure."

"Because of what happened to you there?" asked Iona.

"No." Blaise felt himself going red. "I just don't like crowds."

"I get it," said Iona, and the others nodded. "But this festival is going to be cool. Mr. Bell's in charge of all the decorations, and they look amazing."

Blaise knew some Braeside High teachers had volunteered to help with the festival, including his art teacher, Lorimer Bell. "Yeah, he mentioned it during class."

"We made a lot of the decorations after school." Iona nodded at the leaflet. "And James did the artwork on this too."

"It's excellent," said Blaise, smiling approvingly at the flying witch on the cover. He glanced at the information inside and was about to hand it back when he read something that made him catch his breath.

"If the festival gets a lot of visitors, they're going to do one every year," said James. "Mr. Bell says they've got some big names to do talks and stuff. There's even this one guy

who's going to take photos of Blackhope Tower's ghosts."

"Umm," Blaise murmured, only half listening as he reread the announcement that had just taken him by surprise. "Sounds good."

"Oh, it will be," said one of the girls. "There's a costume party tomorrow night."

"Uh-huh." He had to speak to Mr. Bell as soon as possible. Apart from Sunni, his art teacher was the only person who would understand.

"It's getting late," said James, stuffing his mask and paws into a backpack. "We'd better head over there now."

Blaise looked up and blinked. "Isn't Blackhope Tower closing soon?"

"Yes," said Iona, "but they'll let us in to help finish decorating. Mr. B's up there already."

Blaise handed her the leaflet, but she shook her head.

"Keep it," she said, and joined James, who was already moving toward the exit.

"Would it be okay for me to come along and have a look?" Blaise asked hastily.

James threw a glance over his shoulder. "You mean now?"

"Yes," he replied. "But if it's not cool, no problem."

Iona shrugged at James and the others. "Why not?"

Blaise phoned his father as he trailed them out of the café. "Hey, Dad," he said in a low voice. "You don't need to pick me up at the Wee Cuppa. I'm doing something with some people from school. I'll call you when I'm on my way home."

The night was sweeping in on a vicious west wind. A dead leaf hit Blaise in the back of the neck, and he whirled

around, ready to fight. He walked backward and watched the empty road behind them for signs of someone following. The hedges and driveways were black and silent, but he imagined the silhouette of a jacket hood could move into view at any moment, skimming past the light of a window like a shark's fin.

## Chapter 2

Hey!" Dean's hoarse voice called. "Where've you been?" Sunni backed up two steps and stuck her head into the front room. "None of your business."

Her stepbrother was slouched in her dad's leather chair, eyes glued to a screen, poking and prodding game controls. He swore and continued jabbing.

Sunni shook her head and kept walking toward the stairs. With every inch Dean had grown this year, his attitude had increased with it. He was now much taller than she was and never stopped reminding her of it.

"You weren't with Blaise, were you?" Dean taunted.

"Like I said," she called back wearily, "my business, not yours."

"That's a yes, then."

*Just ignore him*, Sunni said to herself. But that's what she'd been doing for weeks. She turned on her heel and stalked into the front room.

"Get a life, Dean!" she said. "You're like some old granny sitting here all the time, watching who comes and goes. It's just pathetic!"

"Me, pathetic?" Dean wore a smug little grin. "Go look in a mirror, Sunni."

"That's out of line—"

"Oh, yeah?" he interrupted. "At least I'm not permanently miserable. And like I really care where you've been when you act all secretive."

"You seem to! You jump on me every time I walk through the door."

"Because you're going to get caught soon," Dean smirked. "And I want to be there when Mom finds out. Which she will. And I know you haven't got the guts to stand up for yourself."

Sunni stared at him. "I had enough guts to come and rescue you inside the painting last winter!"

"Yeah." Dean shrugged. "That was then . . ."

"I'm not listening to this." She swept out of the room before he started needling her again.

"Is that you, Sunni?" Rhona asked from her bedroom.

"Yes."

"What time are you going to Mandy's?"

"Soon."

"How are you getting there?"

"Walking."

"I'm not so sure about that . . ."

"I am."

She locked her bedroom door and threw her bag onto her bed. *You haven't got the guts to stand up for yourself.* Dean's words sat in her head, refusing to budge. The longer they sat there, the angrier Sunni got, because maybe her annoying stepbrother had a point.

Her Halloween costume was hanging on the back of the door. It wasn't her most original idea to be a ghostly maiden, but it was easy. Still fuming about Dean, she took her

costume and makeup into the bathroom, emerging twenty minutes later in a white vintage nightgown, shawl, and flat shoes. Her face, lips, and arms were chalky pale, and her long white wig made her look like she'd stepped from a snowdrift. Her eyes were darkly circled with gray eye shadow.

She put her pajamas, a change of clothes, and Mandy's birthday present into an overnight bag and tiptoed carefully downstairs. She could hear Dean in the front room and went out through the back door so she wouldn't have to see him again.

"I'm off," she shouted back into the house. Rhona's voice buzzed a question from upstairs, but Sunni just answered, "I've got my phone. See you tomorrow."

The wind blew the thin gown up over her knees, and she held the wig down as she made her way along the dim street. The rain had stopped, but she had to step around slimy piles of leaves and twigs. Something behind her made a cracking sound, and she nearly tripped over an uneven paving stone as she turned around.

*What if Blaise is right and we are being followed?* She squinted into the gloom but saw nothing. It couldn't be Soranzo. He was back in the 1500s where he belonged, but what if someone else was after them?

Headlights cut through the darkness, as a car slowed to a halt by Sunni. A vampire girl in the backseat rolled down the window.

"Sunni?" she shouted, and opened the car door. "It is you. Get in, or you'll ruin your costume."

"Vicky! Nice timing." Sunni heaved a sigh of relief and jumped into the backseat.



"You should have phoned me. We could have picked you up."

"I thought I'd walk," Sunni said. "Dean's been driving me crazy and I needed to calm down."

"What a surprise," said Vicky, rolling her eyes. "You look so cool, Sunni. For a minute Mom and I thought we were seeing a real live ghost."

"There's no such thing as a live ghost."

"Whatever," said Vicky. "Your jacket and bag gave you away."

"I guess real ghosts don't need to carry their pajamas." Sunni grinned. "Nice fangs, by the way."

The two girls jumped out of the car in front of a stone house with leering jack-o'-lanterns glowing in each window and a skeletal scarecrow flapping at the gate.

The main door swung open by itself. Mandy's front hall was completely dark and silent.

"Oh, no, here we go," Vicky whispered. "Her dad's up to his old tricks."

"Yeah, you can see it coming a mile away." Sunni took a step inside, her hands up in front of her face to ward off whatever was coming. "Hello? Mandy?"

Vicky was moving ahead, close to Sunni's side, when someone right next to them screamed and something whizzed through the air. A tangle of sticky, stringy stuff hit Vicky in the face, and she shrieked, batting it away.

"Ewww!" she shouted, her voice nearly drowned out by the piercing screams nearby. "Get it off me!"

Sunni yanked Vicky sideways and stumbled forward. She put her hand out to feel for a wall or furniture and

grasped something like a railing. But it felt plasticky and moved slightly.

“Oh, no, Vic,” she murmured, as the thing came away from whatever had been holding it in midair.

“What?” Vicky managed to ask in between nervous giggles.

Before Sunni could answer, a flashlight flicked on, revealing Mandy’s dad in a Frankenstein costume. He held the light under his chin, making his face shadowy and horrible, and then flashed it at them.

“Arm,” he grunted, waving one empty sleeve. “Give me my arm.”

Sunni gaped at the bloody arm in her hand and dropped it to the floor with a screech.



There was a fragrance of wood smoke in the air, and the dense trees swayed in the dark as Blaise followed James, Iona, and the others up Blackhope Tower’s long drive. He chatted and laughed with them, but dark memories of this castle were flooding over him.

The place had had an eerie reputation for centuries because of its connection with the artist Fausto Corvo, who was also suspected of sorcery. In 1582 Blackhope Tower’s owner, Sir Innes, paid Corvo to make him a special painting, *The Mariner’s Return to Arcadia*, which hung in the Mariner’s Chamber. The artist also designed a notorious tiled-floor labyrinth for the chamber before he vanished mysteriously. Ever since it had been constructed,

skeletons had appeared suddenly on the labyrinth with no explanation.

Blaise had known the rumors that Corvo had made magical paintings and had escaped Venice to protect his artwork from being stolen by the rich and greedy Soranzo. But he would never have imagined that *The Mariner's Return* was also a magical painting and that the labyrinth would transport him to the heart of it, into the wondrous but deadly worlds of Arcadia, on that unforgettable afternoon.

Iona broke into his thoughts. "Have you been at Blackhope Tower a lot since . . . you know?"

"Off and on," he replied. "But everything's different in the Mariner's Chamber now. You can't get up close to see the painting anymore."

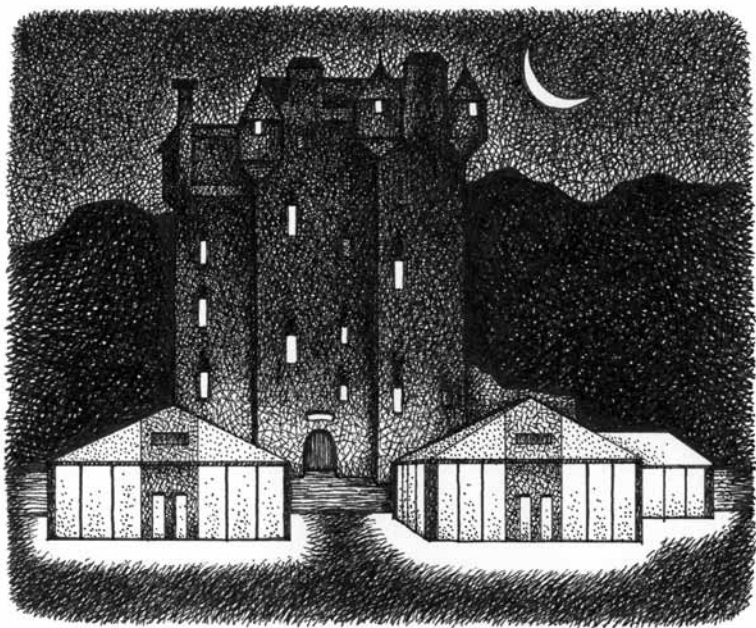
"I know. It's total rubbish!" James said. "Lucky you got inside it while you could."

*Yeah, lucky me,* Blaise thought. *I get to worry whether criminals will be after me for the rest of my life.*

"I'd love to know what it was like to be inside *The Mariner's Return*." One of the girls got into step with him. "I know a lot of people at school think you made it all up, but I believe you."

"Uh, maybe later?" He didn't want to talk about it, and his attention was attracted to a row of tents on the lawn in front of Blackhope Tower. They glowed from inside like paper lanterns, and he could see a few people lugging equipment back and forth from cars and vans. The tall stone castle loomed behind, dotted with lights in its small, deep-set windows.

The girl shrugged. "Oh, okay."



She left him and caught up with James, who led them into Blackhope Tower's entrance hall and told the lady behind the reception desk where they were going.

"I bet Mr. Bell will be up in the Great Hall," said Iona as she skipped ahead of James to the spiral staircase. They wound their way up the narrow stone steps to the first floor, following the hum of voices.

Blaise stopped short at the Great Hall's entrance. "Wow."

"It's good, isn't it?" Iona grinned.

The enormous room had been transformed into an atmospheric cavern. A canopy of giant black spiderwebs

hung overhead, a vast net below the grand vaulted ceiling and brass chandeliers. Stags' antlers and ancient shields were still mounted high on the walls, but the rest of the paintings and decorations had been taken away to make room for large black silhouettes of flying witches with tattered robes trailing behind them and grinning skeletons dancing hand in hand. A row of tiny jack-o'-lanterns, carved out of turnips, lined the windowsill of the large window in one wall, waiting to be lit. The huge walk-in fireplace contained the largest pumpkin Blaise had ever seen. Mrs. Gordon, a math teacher at Braeside High, was hunched on a stool sawing a face into it.

She let out a puff of air. "Mr. Bell! The wretched thing has defeated me. Can you give me a hand, please? This pumpkin refuses to become a jack-o'-lantern."

"I'll do it, Mrs. Gordon," said James, striding over.

She shook her head. "I'm sure you'd do a lovely job, but let's not risk a visit to the ER, hmm?"

Lorimer Bell called out, "Just give me a moment. I'm caught up with the web." He was balanced on a ladder, tying a long-legged felt spider into the web with a piece of elastic.

"Blaise," he said with a smile as he caught sight of his pupil. "What are you doing here?"

"I came with the others to have a look." Blaise nodded at James, who was now walking around with several other spiders bouncing up and down from his fingers. "That web is amazing."

Lorimer pulled on the spider to make it dance and climbed down the ladder. "Made by Iona and her crew. Don't ask me how they did it because I think it involved

witchcraft. And crocheting many, many balls of black wool with gigantic hooks."

"Can I help?" Blaise asked.

"Hmm, let's see," his art teacher said, scanning the volunteers arranging round tables and folding chairs. His eyes rested on a woman in a flowing dress tacking a skeleton silhouette to the wall. Strands of her long dark hair were dyed violet and indigo blue. "I'm not sure . . ."

"Anything."

"That's very kind, Blaise, but I think we're all set with helpers in here."

"Okay." Blaise touched the festival leaflet in his pocket, and his heart began to thump a bit faster. "But do you have a minute to talk? I need to show you . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Bell," said Mrs. Gordon sharply. "The pumpkin?"

"One moment, Mrs. Gordon," Lorimer replied. "What is it you need to show me, Blaise?"

"Can we go outside for a second?" he asked, dropping his voice.

"Of course." Lorimer led him outside the Great Hall's door and asked, "What's the matter?"

"This." He pulled the leaflet out and pointed at the block of words that had caught his attention.

Lorimer glanced at it and nodded. "The Oculus. I saw that too."

"Do you know anything about this, Mr. Bell?" asked Blaise.

"Nothing more than it says here," said Lorimer. "A fellow called Munro is going to exhibit a magic lantern designed by Fausto Corvo called the Oculus."

"Yeah, Fausto Corvo!" Blaise said breathlessly. "Since when did he design magic lanterns?"

"It was news to me, too, but not that surprising when you think about it. Corvo created paintings and labyrinths, but he also designed sculptures and even the rapier he carried."

"I guess it is the kind of thing that would interest him." Blaise stuffed the leaflet back into his pocket. "But this came out of nowhere. Some guy's just turning up with this Oculus and showing it off in the Mariner's Chamber . . ."

"Where everything happened to you last winter." The art teacher nodded sympathetically. "Is that what's really bothering you about this?"

"Yeah, maybe," said Blaise. "It feels wrong. Why can't people gawk someplace else? Why can't they just leave the Mariner's Chamber alone?"

"I've sometimes felt the same way after what happened to Angus." Blaise saw a shadow cross Lorimer's face at the mention of his crooked cousin, Angus Bellini, who had pursued them into *The Mariner's Return to Arcadia*.

"Sorry, Mr. Bell. I didn't mean to remind you . . ."

"Don't be sorry," said Lorimer. "It wasn't your fault. Angus brought everything on to himself. But you and Sunni and Dean returned safely, thank heaven, and the labyrinth faded to nothing. It can't take anyone else away now."

"It must be weird for you to be here doing this festival."

"Because of Angus? Sometimes. I'd give anything to have him back, even after what he did, because he's still my flesh and blood. But I'm learning to accept what I can't change, Blaise," Lorimer said. "It might sound a bit strange, but when I'm here, at least I can go to the Mariner's Chamber

and say hello to him. I know he's somewhere deep inside that painting."

"I talk to my grandmother at her grave," murmured Blaise, and as soon as he said the word "grave" he wished he hadn't. Angus wasn't officially dead, though he might as well be. "Oh, man, I'm sorry."

Lorimer laughed under his breath. "Don't worry. I know what you mean, though Angus would hate being compared to anyone's granny." He rubbed his hands together. "Now, then. Aren't you a little curious about this magic lantern Corvo designed?"

"Sure."

"So am I," said Lorimer. "I'll be having a close look at it myself when I can get away from festival duties. Speaking of which, I'd better get back to that pumpkin." He turned to leave. "You coming, Blaise?"

"No, I think I'll head home."

"You're not going to hang out with Iona and James and the others?"

"They're pretty busy. Maybe I'll see them tomorrow." Would he? Had they even noticed his absence from the Great Hall? He had no idea. "Good luck finishing up tonight, Mr. Bell."

"Thanks, I think we're nearly there." Lorimer smiled. "And you're okay, right?"

"Yes," Blaise answered. "Guess I just needed to talk."

"Good. Safe trip home, then."

Blaise's mind was racing. He took a few hesitant steps down the spiral staircase then turned around and sprinted up to the next floor.



The corridor was empty and silent. He crept toward the Mariner's Chamber, hoping it might be open for last-minute festival preparations. An elaborate sign outside proclaimed that Munro would be displaying the Oculus at regular times throughout Saturday and Sunday, plus a Halloween show on Saturday night, but for now the door was firmly shut.

As he walked away, Blaise tried to let go of his uneasy feelings. For all his teacher's soothing words, he still worried about the arrival of Corvo's invention. Where had it come from? And why had Fausto Corvo made a magic lantern at all?

Blaise swung down the narrow staircase and hunched into his collar as he crossed the entrance hall. When he hit the outdoors, he broke into a jog and set off down the drive past the tents. The wind hit him square in the face, and he had an unnerving moment of *déjà vu*. Eight months before, he'd left Blackhope Tower alone one snowy late afternoon and walked this route with his head full of another problem. He had tossed and turned all that night trying to decide whether to go into *The Mariner's Return to Arcadia* to find Sunni and Dean. And he'd despised himself for taking so long.

A new ball of emotions was now spinning inside Blaise. Blackhope Tower was drawing him back, if it ever had let him go. Part of him wanted to run the other way, but another part wanted to know about this Oculus.

He leaned into the wind and pushed on. By the time he reached the bus stop on the main road, he knew what to do.

# The Shadow Lantern

Teresa Flavin

"Not only dramatically and emotionally suspenseful, it is also vividly drawn and wonderfully well-paced, as one might expect from a master storyteller." – *The Guardian* (U.K.)

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