

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

It was a cool night in late September, Anna was fast asleep gripping her fluffy little plush dog when she woke to a strange sound coming from the living room. As she listened from the imaginary safety of her soft purple bed guarded by toys and dolls, she heard a sound like something moving, scraping the carpet and knocking against the walls. Then, a crash like breaking glass. Anna grabbed her dog and hugged it close to her chest as if the toy would protect her from harm. She listened carefully for any sound but the noise had stopped. As the silence dragged on, Anna thought of her parents. They should know what was going on. She slowly crept out of bed and walked towards the door. In the dark she stepped on one of her toys.

“Sorry Stormy” she whispered to the toy as she passed to the door.

Peering in the hallway, she could see a light coming from the living room. *Perhaps the TV's on. I don't want to wake them up if it's just the TV.* Anna headed to the light. Peering into the living room from the hallway she saw that the TV **was** on but it was on mute and there wasn't anybody watching it. Distracted by the light of the TV shining on the couch, she almost missed a shadow move in her peripheral vision. She turned to see if she could spot what had moved but whatever it was, was gone. Anna started to tremble as her imagination began to come up with terrible possibilities and she thought maybe she should wake her parents after all. She walked quickly back down the hall, frightened but aware that it was likely just her imagination or possibility a raccoon that got in the house. Suddenly, she felt something latch onto her arm. She looked and saw a long, black skeletal arm reaching from the darkness. Before she could even scream, more hands came from the darkness and grabbed her mouth, arm, and legs. Her screamed and struggled but the hands silenced her cries and pulled her back with inhuman strength. It wasn't long before she vanished into the darkness.

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Anna awoke gasping, pulling her face out of the black snow that covered. All around her were deep red trees were twisted and gnarled and the world around her felt off, feeling somewhere between dreaming and spinning. Black snow fell lightly from that starless night sky. Anna looked about with a shocked expression. The bite of the snow letting her know that this was not a dream.

“HELLO!” she called out “CAN ANYONE HELP ME!”

A loud sickly bird call was all the reply she got. Anna walked alone through the forest hoping to find something that could help her, but she saw nothing. The wind blew through the trees and strange bird calls broke the silence now and again. The grass rustled against her legs and the snow crushed under her feet. Then, Anna began to feel like something was wrong. The birds stopped and the air began to feel heavy. A rustle in the grass caught her attention and she turned slowly to see a pair of eyes staring at her from the bushes. Anna wasted no time. She ran, and as she did, she could hear the sound of something chasing after her. She started zigzagging through the trees to confuse the beast but it stayed on her tail. Suddenly, a tree fell and she heard a loud yelp. She turned to see a monstrous foxlike creature with eight arms and glowing eyes pinned under a massive tree.

#

Duna had watched in silence as the girl had appeared in the woods, her shadowy form blending into the trees with little effort. A part of her was sorry for the girl. In many ways the girl reminded her of herself before she died. But she had no time for distractions right now, she was trying to think about how to get past that thing’s defenses, yet as she watched the screeen chase the girl she began to realize that was exactly what she needed right now. Duna slithered through

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

the grass and over to a nearby tree, using her power to make the tree fall just behind the girl, and right on the screech. The girl was too fixated on the screech to notice the shadows wrapping around her. Before she knew it, Duna had the girl restrained. She struggled against her but Duna was strong enough to keep her still.

“Whoa, hold on now. I’m here to help.” Duna said in a ghostly girlish voice.

Duna’s shadowy eyes and mouth began to glow a soft shade of purple that she hoped would help soothe the panicking child. She put on a pleasant smile.

“Name’s Duna, I heard your crying back there and knew you would need some help. Would you mind telling me your name.

The child calmed a bit but looked at her with suspicion.

“My name’s Anna.”

“Anna, good, now listen to me. You have been brought to another plane. A dark plane that lurks far below; for lack of a better word; the material plane. There is no way for you to ever get back to the physical world...without a guide.”

“You can show me the way back home?”

“I can, this place has had me for years uncountable, and I say I’ve seen far too many newcomers come and go in the worst of ways. I wanna make sure you actually make it out. Luckily, my time in this place has shown me exactly what you need to escape and I can lead you right to it. There’s just one problem.”

“What’s that?”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“The thing you need is guarded and the thing guarding it has put up a barrier to make sure spirits like me can’t enter.”

I want to help you but I can’t get in without an anchor.”

“Why do you need an anchor?”

“If I have something physical to attach to, I can be carried past the barrier.”

“Can it be anything?”

“No exactly, I need to have something with meaning.”

Anna struggled to get an arm free and curious, Duna loosened her grip. “Can you attach yourself to this?” Anna said holding up her plush dog.

“What?! No way! That thing’s too flimsy. But...” Duna wrapped herself around Anna like a snake around its prey. “I could bond to you. If you let me do that then I could protect you.”

“I’m not sure about that.”

“Come on, you need me. And I need you. I want to get out of here too, and the only way we’re getting out is together.”

“I can bring the dog back home with you on it.”

“But I won’t be able to use my full power attached to that thing. Don’t you want me to protect you?”

“I do but...I don’t know about having some else in my head.”

“But...” Duna sighed; she was gonna have to think of another way in. “*Fine*, I’ll bond to the doll **FOR NOW**. But I will be looking for something stronger. Deal?”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“Deal.”

Anna handed the doll to Duna who looked at it with displeasure before relenting and phasing into the toy. Once Duna was comfortably in the toy, she squirmed out of Annas arms.

“Follow.” Duna commanded

As Duna lead Anna through the woods she began planning what she would do when the time came.

#

Anna followed her possessed doll through the woods till they found a clearing in the trees with a small gothic stone building in the center.

“Stop.” Duna said before she could set foot in the space. “This is the place. The creature in here has exactly what we’ll need to get back to the material world. We’re going to sneak inside and steal something. A mirror.”

“What do we need a mirror for?”

“The creature inside there is called an oroban, they store the source of their power in a mirror. Break the mirror and...*we* can steal its power.”

“Steal it’s power?! You want to steal it’s power!?”

“Yep, I want you to take me there, it’s already taken measures to make sure beings like me can’t get to it. We’re gonna need that power to get you back to your world, that is what you want right?”

“Right...”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“Then it’s settled, you get me in there and me will get you back to the material plain right quick.”

“First however, we have to get inside. The place is underground and the door is protected.” Duna said pointing to the luminous flowers in the clearing. “Stick by me and I can get you past them, but since I’m in such a weak body I can’t extend myself very far which means...” Duna sighed “You’ve got to hold me.”

Anna knelt down and picked up the living plush.

“Don’t you cuddle with me.” Duna said as she lifted her plush arms and a slim bubble of shadows appeared around them. It was skinny enough that Anna had to squeeze herself tight to fit inside. Anna slowly began to walk forward and as they got closer the flowers started to move and turned their glowing petals toward them, as if looking at them, and continued facing them as they wove their way through the field.

“Don’t touch the edge of the bubble.” Duna warned “They’ll burn you to nothing as soon as you do.”

As she said that Anna looked down to see a charred bone in the grass, making her increase her pace. As soon as Anna stepped inside and closed the door, Duna dissipated the bubble and went slack.

“This form doesn’t allow me to do much before resting. I could be so much more helpful if you let my stick to you.”

“I’m not letting you live in my body.” Anna said firmly

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Anna set Duna down and when Duna was ready, they made their way down the stairs. At the bottom they found a room filled with books and bizarre objects. Alien specimens floated in jars, dried snake heads hung from the ceiling, ornate yet strangely unnerving objects and decorations filled the room. Blank faceless dolls sat in the corners of the room, and books in a strange language took up so much space on the shelves and deck they couldn't even fit without many of them falling to the floor. Light blue orbs floated about the room providing illumination and the walls were covered in ominous looking sigils and signs carved into the wood. Anna tried not to step on anything as Duna ran around the room inspecting the various arcane books and objects with the vigor of a child in a toy store.

"How are we going to find the mirror? We can't just dig through all this and hope they don't notice."

"The mirror isn't going to be in a pile of random things. It is too central to it's being. It'll be in a special place. Most likely behind a secret door."

"Then, how do we find the door?"

"You use your eyes and I'll use my...other senses."

They crept downward through the rooms and twisting halls looking for any sign of a swinging bookshelf or a trap door when then heard something coming down the hall. Anna and Duna dashed to a nearby table and hid under the table cloth. They watched as a pair of dolls with realistic eyes sewn all over turned the corner and staggered past them and out of sight.

"What are they?" Anna whispered when they were alone.

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“They’re the victims. These poor souls are the oroban’s poppets, and they have a hive like mind. Even in this form I could probably take one, but taking out one means taking on all, so keep your head down!”

They left the table and searched high and low, dodging the poppets as they scoured the place. Anna’s chest tightened with fear as they avoided the poppets and made their way to what appeared to be a bizarre trophy room full of disturbing taxidermy nightmares. Suddenly, they heard a high-pitched scream come through the walls.

“What was that!?” Anna whispered nervously

“It sounds like another victim to be, but it sounds like she’s close. Maybe if we find her...come on, let’s get going.”

They followed the sounds of screams and cries through the trophy room till they came across what appeared at first to be a bright pink lantern hanging from a hook just above their heads. Upon closer inspection they realized that it wasn’t a lantern but a cage holding a small glowing crying humanoid figure with wings.

“That’s a fairy! What is a fairy doing **here**?” Duna asked herself outload.

They crept closer to the fairy.

“Hey, would you like some help?” Anna said to the crying pixie.

The pixie stopped crying and looked down at Anna with her glowing white eyes.

“Dear child, how have you found yourself here. Ye must flee this place.”

“My friend and I are looking to get back...”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“We’re looking for the orobans mirror.” Duna interrupted

“It’s mirror? You seek to kill the oroban?” the fairy said in surprise

“That’s right, we monster hunters looking to destroy the thing.”

Anna looked at Duna with an expression of shock.

“You look a little young to be hunters.”

“She’s human and I used to be human. We mature quickly compared to your kind.”

The fairy thought for a moment. “True, you are an ephemeral race. Alright, if it is the mirror you seek, I can show you the way. But you have to get me out first.”

“Oh, how do we help get you out?” Anna said

“The lock is enchanted and can’t be picked or broken. You would need to find the key.”

Duna looked about but couldn’t see or sense a key nearby. “Where is it?”

“It’s probably in the orobans quarters. Find it and set me free.”

Duna cocked her and looked at the fairy with her beady eyes “We set you free and you will...?”

“If you set me free, I will lead you to the orobans mirror. Deal?”

“Deal” Duna responded before looking to Anna “Could you hold me up to the cage?”

Anna lifted Duna to the cage.

“What are you doing?” Silby said in alarm.

Duna looked at Silby “I thought you’d make a nice lantern.”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Duna swung her plush paw and a wave of darkness went through the chain holding the lantern. The chain shattered and Silby screamed as her cage fell to the floor. Anna dropped Duna and quickly went to pick up the cage.

“Are you alright?” Anna asked. Anna looked at Duna. “Why didn’t you tell me you were going to do that?”

“Hey, it will be easier to bring her with us than to find the key and come back here.”

Just as Silby was about to say something, they heard a clicking noise like bones clacking and fur dragging across the floor coming from further down the hall.

“It’s coming. Run!” Silby said in alarm.

Anna grabbed the handle of Silby’s cage and began running as they took off down the hall. Moments later they heard a horrible inhuman screech come from the trophy room. They heard the dragging and clicking get louder as it began to chase them down the hall. As they ran Silby pointed out the way, soon their running drew the attention of the poppets. A poppet fell from the ceiling landing on Anna’s shoulder, biting her before she could throw it away. More poppets poured in, from the rooms and shelves as the oroban continued to chase them. Then one of the poppets tackled Duna.

“GET OFF OF ME!” Duna scream at the drone as more began to swarm around her.

Anna looked back at Duna. Duna had torn up a few of them, but they had her pinned and she clearly wouldn’t be able to get out alone.

“COME ON, WE HAVE TO GO!” Silby urged, but Anna ignored her.

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Panicking, Anna's eyes scanned the hall for anything that could help as the steps of the oroban grew in her ears. She looked till her eyes fell on a cane rack. She grabbed a cane with a large horse head on it and charged at the poppets. She swung at the poppets pinning Duna down and knocked it into the wall. She waved the cane about like a mace to push back the poppets before grabbing Duna and escaping.

"You saved me!" Duna said as they ran.

"Of course, I couldn't just leave you behind." Anna said panting.

They dashed through the halls for who knows how long before Silby told Anna to stop. Silby pointed to a nearby room.

"THERE!" She screamed

Anna ran into the room and slammed the door behind her. Anna then set Duna and Silby on a nearby table before pushing it and several chairs in front of the door. She listened as the shifting sounds of the shambling poppets and the clinking of the oroban came closer and then left. As the last of the sounds disappeared into the distance, Anna turned to get a closer look at the room she was in. The walls of the room were covered in creepy looking masks and a web of bobbles, beads, and chimes hung from the ceiling. Two bookshelves stood to the left and right with a bear rug in between them. A door stood to the left of the right bookcase and at the back of the room, was a large bed with a chest at the foot. Silby was the only source of light in the room.

"The key has to be in here." Silby said.

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

They dug through the room, tossing the covers and looking through the bookshelves. As Anna searched for the key, Duna opened a drawer on the nightstand and pulled out a beautiful bejeweled knife.

“What’s that?” Anna asked when she saw the knife.

“Oh, just something to fight with. In case they get in here, ya know?” Duna replied over her shoulder.

Silby peered at the knife in Duna’s hands with a devious smirk but said nothing. After a bit of searching, they decided to check the door next to the bookcase. Anna’s vision swam as she gazed at the rows of dried heads with their eyes and mouths sown shut. Anna slammed the door and leaned against it trying to steady herself.

“Hey, calm down.” Duna said in a soothing voice.

“There are so many!” Anna said in a panic

“You charged an army of evil poppets to save me. Don’t be scared of some dead weight.”

“Those were dolls, what’s in there. They were people.”

“...Yes, they were, and...they are...still trapped here. If we steal the orobans power their souls will be freed. So, you’ve got to be brave. They are relying on us. Besides, I could feel the magic from that key in there.”

Anna sat for a moment, mustering her resolve before standing and slowly opening the door. They walked slowly through the long claustrophobic room, the unseeing heads seemingly watching them as they went. Anna looked straight ahead while Duna looked at the heads with a troubled look and Silby merely shivered in her cage. It wasn’t long before they made it to the

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

back of the room. On the wall in front of them was a tiny little head mount just big enough for Silbys head. Hanging on the mount was a small silver key. Anna grabbed the key just as rattling a sound began to fade in. They turned to see that the heads were one by one beginning to shake and rattle. They ran back through the room as the rattling began to get louder and louder.

Muffled moans escaped the sewn lips and the room seemed to stretch getting longer as they ran.

Just as Anna began to think that they might never escape, they were suddenly through the door.

Anna slammed the door and all was silent. Anna breathed to calm herself down. After a moment,

she steadied herself, lifted Silbys cage, and unlocked it. The bottom of the cage flew open and

Silby flew out the hole and all about the room in a rush to celebrate her new freedom of movement.

“Finally, I can get out of this horrid plain!” Silby exclaimed in excitement.

“don’t forget you have a task to complete before you go.” Duna reminded her.

“I would never forget the details of a deal.” Silby said, offended at the mere suggestion.

Silby flew down to the floor where she hovered over the head of the bear rug. Anna watched in jaw dropping amazement as Silby opened the bears mouth and kept opening it wider till it was taller and wider than a grown man. Anna and Duna moved over to the new door and peered down at the toothy stairway leading into the darkness.

“Right this way.” Silby trilled with an inviting gesture

They followed Silby down through the tooth lined stairway and as they descended Anna got the feeling that the stair where curving downward. At some point the perspective switched and they were now climbing upward though they couldn’t tell when that had changed. Then, a strange glow began to appear on the horizon. It came up like she had been walking up a hill. At

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

the top of the stairs she saw a cave with a tiled floor. Each of the tiles had a glowing red sigil upon it and in the center of the room was a ring of obsidian obelisk around an old mirror that seemed to sting her eyes any time she tried to look at it. Above them the walls of the cave seemed to stretch on forever. Then Anna became aware of an awful smell coming from somewhere.

“Aug, what is that!” Anna said covering her nose.

“Uh, don’t worry about it. We’ll be out of here soon.”

“Ok, I lead you here. Our contract is complete.” Silby said

“What do you mean, we still need to break it.”

“No, you need to break it. Without iron confining me I can go to whatever plain I want.”

“Wait, could you take us to the material plain?” Anna asked

“I could, but you don’t have anything I want and I don’t want to stick around any longer than I need to so this is goodbye.”

“WHAT!? Wait a...”

In a flash of light, Silby was gone. Anna tightened her grip on the cane.

“Did you know she could have just taken us back?” Anna asked Duna

“We didn’t need to get home off the favor of a fairy when we could have the power to find a way back ourselves.”

“But this would all be over.”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“It still can be. All that’s standing in our way is a mirror...Just...you know...smash it with your cane.” Duna said looked slightly to the side and trying to hind the knife behind her back

Anna looked to the space where the mirror was and braced herself before walking towards it. Looking at the mirror felt like looking at the sun so she stared at the obelisk but soon it wasn’t just her eyes being affected. Her fingers and toes began to tingle and she began to have trouble breathing.

As Anna got closer to the ring Duna’s paws began to tremble. She looked at the knife in her hand and debated what she wanted to do. Anna was about to cross into the ring when...

“WAIT!” Duna cried.

Anna turned to see Duna running towards her, the knife in her hands pointed backwards.

“You can’t go in there!” Duna cried

“Huh?”

“The power in that space is too powerful for you.” Duna looked at the knife in her hands as though it was a treasured heirloom “You need something that will allow you to take the power without harm.”

Duna handed the knife to Anna. As soon as Anna grabbed the handle, the tingling in her fingers and trembling in her legs began to fade. The burning in her eyes stopped and her breathing returned to normal.

“It’s...a...power...drinker.” Duna said suddenly weakened. “Only thing...that can break it...only thing...that can beat it.”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Anna stared daggers at Duna as the realization hit her. “You just wanted the power, didn’t you? You didn’t want to help me you just wanted to use me”

“I admit it, all I had to do was let you cross the threshold and I’d have it, but then I saw what I was doing and...I just couldn’t do it. So fine, take it yourself...I’ll just go back to the woods.”

Duna turned to leave but before she could go very far, Anna scooped her up and gave her a hug.

“Ach, What!? What are you doing?! I was moments away from betraying you.”

“You where, but you didn’t, and you gave up everything to save me.”

“Don’t rub it in.”

“I’m going to rub it in a little.”

“There you are.” A loud inhuman voice gurgled from across the room.

Standing at the stairway was a tall humanoid covered in pelts. It had shriveled black claw-like hands and wore a stuffed alligator head like a helmet, it’s glowing eye’s peering at them from inside the alligator’s mouth. A writhing iridescent bolt fired from the creature fingers and flew towards Anna. Anna dropped Duna and blocked the blast with the knife which seemingly drank it before sending a cold but comfortable wave through Anna’s body. Anna turned and tried to run for the mirror but an invisible force grabbed her by the ankle and began dragging her back. She fell, the knife flying into the ring. Anna twisted to see that the poppets were pouring from the stairway, their horrid forms stumbling towards her.

As Anna fought the force holding her down, Duna looked to the knife in the ring. She hesitated, but looking back at Anna strengthened her resolve. She readied herself and sprinted

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

forward. Her little plush body feeling heavier and heavier as she approached. She crossed the threshold and almost collapsed right there but she kept moving. She slowed to the point that soon she was inching her way to the knife. Then, she started burning.

Anna was trying to fight the will of the oroban and fend off the poppets with her cane when an orange light appeared from behind. She twisted to see Duna reaching for the knife as flames began to blacken her plush body. She pushed and tried to crawl towards her. She focused on just trying to get out of the magical grip and as she did, she felt that same cold feeling washes over her. She could feel as the foreign power pushed out and allowed her to just barely slip from the spell.

“No, wait! Don’t go! Stay with me!” She yelled to Duna.

She watched as Duna collapsed into ash a mere inch away from the blade. Then her body seized as electricity filled her. She twisted and raised her cane like a spear in a futile attempt to fend off the approaching monstrosity. She didn’t know if the nausea she felt was from the mirror or from the sight before her. The oroban raised a hand and the cane was telekinetically ripped from her grasp. The shadows seemed to grow longer as the horror approached. The shadows slowly began to wrap around the oroban... before suddenly pulling him back. A shadowy serpent coiled itself around the oroban, squeezing it with all its might. Looking down Anna saw that it was her own shadow doing the fighting.

“Here, you’ll make better use of it than me.” Duna said as a shadowy arm threw the knife at her feet. Anna grabbed the knife just in time for the oroban to break from Duna’s hold. He shot a blast of fire Anna’s way but she held up the blade and absorbed the blast. The oroban seeing this charged at her with its claws but before it could get close Duna rose from the ground

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

and slashed at the beast with a massive shadowy claw. The oroban struggled against Duna as the poppets swarmed towards Anna.

“You! I thought I banished you!” the oroban gurgled at Duna.

“Some banishment, All I needed to get past your barrier was a plush toy.” Duna said with a wicked grin.

Anna backed towards the mirror slashing at the horde of poppets staggering towards her. She was quick, but she wouldn't be able to hold them off of her for long. She stumbled as one she had missed bit her painfully on the heel. She stabbed another as it was sinking its teeth into her arm. More and more she began feeling them claw and bite at her faster than she could kill them. Then She felt a warmth build in her and from her feet came the same blast of fire the blade had devoured earlier. The poppets recoiled from the flames and she used that time to sprint to the mirror. The oroban, seeing this, tried to trip her up again but she was ready. She twisted and slashed at the invisible tether draining it of its strength.

“NO!” The oroban yelled as it fought to escape Duna's grasp.

Anna raised the knife to the mirror and stabbed it. The mirror didn't shatter like glass, instead the knife sank into it like it was sinking into flesh. The mirror rippled like the surface of water and Anna only had a moment to process what was happening before the power overloaded her senses. She felt every feeling, saw every color, and was so lost to the experience that she didn't even hear the inhuman shriek of agony as the oroban began losing its mind. It slashed at Duna like a wild animal, its attacks so ferocious that Duna was starting to tire. Then Duna too began to feel the surge of power.

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

With Anna's sudden invitation, Duna had formed a connection with her and it was bleeding power. Duna grew to a massive size and with a wave of her claws she swept away the oroban, along with several of its poppets. The oroban threw spells randomly at Duna, but Duna knocked the spells aside. She looked down at the feral creature and its servants who were quickly losing what coordination they had.

“What a pitiful, terrible thing you are. And to think I almost became just like you.”

Duna raised a massive claw and slammed down, smashing the weakened oroban like an insect. The poppets collapsed, the eyes on their bodies closing and vanishing, as Duna felt the surge end. She turned to see Anna unconscious in front of the now solid black mirror. Duna shrunk down to her normal size to stand at her side.

“Hey, Anna, are you alright?”

Anna merely groaned in response.

“Come on, we have to get out of here.”

As she spoke, the poppets began to rise, or rather, fall one by one into the pit that they were on the ceiling of.

“Oh no”

Duna dashed for the stairway but only got so far before she was stopped. Her tether to Anna didn't allow her to go any farther without her help. She crawled her way back to the stairs, dragging the unconscious Anna as more of the poppets began to fall into the abyss. She began digging her claws into the polished tile, breaking the sigils but

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

allowing her to hold on as the gravity started to reverse. As Anna's unconscious form began to fall. Duna reached out and caught her. The fall finally managed to awaken Anna who screamed as she was thrown through the mass of falling bodies to the edge of the stairway. Anna grabbed onto the ledge and Duna used her connection to move over there as well. She grabbed Anna by the wrist and pulled her up. Duna then began clearing the teeth as they scrambled their way back up the downward curving stairway.

Anna climbed out into the room where the tables and chair she had used to block the door had been tossed aside. All her senses were on fire. The adrenaline of almost dying and falling into a bottomless pit had her heart racing.

"Hey, we did it. We beat it." Duna said in a cheerful tone. "and would you look at this, I didn't know I could bond to a shadow like this. I think it fits."

Anna looked down at her hands which tingled with a feeling she had never felt before.

"Now that I have this power, can I get back home?"

"Uh, yeah, I'm sure there's a way. We just have to look around a bit for the proper spell."

"What?! This place is **huge**, we'll never find the spell we're looking for even if it **is** here!"

"Alright, we'll look for another way out. I forget that being alive means you don't get to just wait for years for something to come up." Duna thought about the situation. Then a thought occurred to her. "Say, we never did find out why Silby came here."

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“She didn’t come here, she was captured.”

“The oroban might have had a spell for going to a few other plains but it could have never entered Tir Na Nog, the forces there would never let something like it in. That means it caught her roaming around here, and a fairy, being able to pass through plains at will wouldn’t hang around here unless they were looking for something, **is** looking for something.”

#

They wondered through the twisting house, now perfectly quiet without the monster and its poppets. Even though she knew the beast was dead she could still feel its presence in the shadows, ever hateful but powerless to stop her.

“I can sense something nearby, go that way.” Duna point down a hall to their left.

Anna followed the path to a large ornate door. Anna slowly opened the door, and a familiar pink light shined from within. Behind the door was a room filled with shelves of arcane treasures, glowing gems, strange devices, and bottles of mysterious liquids all locked behind multi-lock doors. Silby was trying to figure out how to open a particular door holding a crystal ball with a tiny golden tree inside. As Anna came closer, Silby threw spell after spell at the lock. Duna sunk into the floor and soon the shadows where beginning to move yet Silby took no notice.

“What are you doing?”

Silby turned with a start but relaxed when she saw Anna “Oh, so you survived. I guess the oroban is dead then.”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

“Yes, no thanks to you.”

“I didn’t think you would win, and while I wasn’t going to stop you, I wasn’t going to get caught again.”

“Yet you stuck around to try and steal that thing.” Anna pointed to the crystal ball.

“You wouldn’t understand it.”

“We don’t need to.” Duna said.

Silby turned to see Duna had slipped right through the cracks in the door and was holding the crystal from within with both claws.

“What are you doing?” Silby asked alarmed.

“You said we had nothing to offer you, well now we do.”

“So, you want me to send you to the material plane?”

“No, I want you to teach us how to plain shift.”

“What, I can’t teach a human how to plain shift. That’s a secret of the fey.”

Duna tightened her grip on the sphere. “Then I guess I can just break this then.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“We can’t understand it, why would we care?” Duna tightened her grip.

“Ok! We have a deal.”

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

Silby flew over to Anna and placed a hand on her head. In moments Annas mind was flooded with knowledge of how to move through the folds of space and soon the path home was clear, but the experience was so sudden and disorienting that she collapse to her knees. Duna twisted her claws through the cracks and into the lock and the door swung open. Duna handed the crystal ball to Silby who cradled it with care.

“A deal’s a deal.”

Silby looked at them with fury on her face before disappearing in a flash of light. When Anna was able to stand again, she looked around with her new eyes.

“Where to?” Duna asked.

“This way!”

Anna ran through the house and back up the stairs before finding the spot she was looking for. She summoned her newfound power and force the path open. In a single moment she shifted through the folds of space and when it was over, she was back in her room.

“We did it!” Anna exclaimed in excitement

The rays of the rising sun shone through her window as she ran to the door, but as she stepped into the hall, she felt the same sense of foreboding she had felt before. She turned and saw what she couldn’t see before. A creature with many arms hiding within the folds in space that humans cannot see. It noticed her looking at it and changed at her with its claws outstretched but as soon as it crossed fully into the material plain, a shadowy claw came down and removed the creatures’ head. Its body slid back into the

In the Shadows

By Dustin Simmons

ways and fell into the void, leaving only its head at her feet. Duna picked up the head to get a closer look.

“Ugly thing isn’t it. So, this is where you live? I haven’t been in the material plain for a long time but I can see why you wanted to come back.” Duna wrapped herself around Anna. “So, want now?”