

BOOK OF
NIGHT

HOLLY
BLACK



A Tom Doherty Associates Book
New York

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

BOOK OF NIGHT

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For everyone who has ever come to New Year's Eve
at my house

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

—From “My Shadow” by Robert Louis Stevenson

PROLOGUE

Any child can be chased by their shadow. All they need to do is run straight toward the sun on a lazy afternoon. As long as they keep moving, it will be right behind them. They can even turn around and try to chase it, but no matter how fast their chubby legs pump, their shadow will always be a little bit out of reach.

Not so with this child.

He runs across a yard dotted with dandelions, giggling and shrieking, his fingers close on something that shouldn't be solid, something that shouldn't fall *before* he does onto the clover and crabgrass, something he shouldn't be able to wrestle with and pin in the dirt.

After, sitting in the mossy cool beneath a maple tree, the boy sticks the tip of his penknife into the pad of his ring finger. He turns his face away so he doesn't have to watch. The first poke doesn't go through the skin. The second doesn't either. Only the third time, when he presses harder, frustration overcoming squeamishness, does he manage to cut himself. It hurts *a lot*, so he's ashamed of how tiny the bead of blood is that wells up. He squeezes his skin, to see if he can get a little more. The drop swells. He can sense the shadow's eagerness. His finger stings as a dark fog forms around it.

A breeze comes, shaking loose maple seeds. They spiral down around him, coptering through the air on their single wing.

Just a little drink every day, he'd heard someone on the television say about their shadow. *And it will be your best friend in the world.*

Although it has no mouth and no tongue and there is no wetness at its touch, he can tell that it's licking his skin. He doesn't like the feeling, but it doesn't hurt.

He's never had a best friend before, still he knows that they do things like this. They become blood brothers, smearing their cuts together until it's impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins. He needs someone like that.

"I'm Remy," he whispers to his shadow. "And I'll call you Red."

1

HUNGRY SHADOWS

Charlie's ugly Crocs stuck to the mats on the floor behind the bar, making a sticky, squelching sound. Sweat slicked the skin under her arms, at the hollow of her throat, and between her thighs. This was her second shift today; the afternoon guy quit abruptly to follow his boyfriend to Los Angeles and she was stuck with his hours until Odette hired a replacement.

But as tired as Charlie was, she needed the cash. And she figured she better keep busy. Keeping busy meant keeping out of trouble.

There'd always been something wrong with Charlie Hall. Crooked, from the day she was born. Never met a bad decision she wasn't willing to double down on. Had fingers made for picking pockets, a tongue for lying, and a shriveled cherry pit for a heart.

If her shadow had been one of those magic ones, she was pretty sure even that thing would have run away.

But that didn't mean she couldn't *try* to be different. And she was trying. Sure, it had been hard to keep her worst impulses in check these past ten months, but it was better than being a lit match in a town she'd already doused in gasoline.

She had a job—with a timesheet, even—and a stolid brick of a boyfriend who paid his share of the rent. Her gunshot wound was healing nicely. Little successes, but that didn't mean she wasn't proud of them.

It was on that thought that Charlie looked up to see a test of her resolve walk through the double doors of Rapture Bar & Lounge.

Doreen Kowalski's face looked hot and blotchy with crying—she'd obviously tried to fix her makeup, but had wiped her mascara so hard that it winged out to one side. Back in high school, she wouldn't have given Charlie the time of day, and she probably didn't want to tonight either.

There are countless differences between the lives of people with money and people without. One is this: without the means to pay experts, it's necessary to evolve a complex ecosystem of useful amateurs. When Charlie's dad got what the doctor told him was a skin cancer, he drank a fifth of Maker's Mark and asked a butcher friend to cut a divot out of his shoulder, because there was no way he could afford a surgeon. When Charlie's friend's cousin got married, they asked Mrs. Silva from three blocks over to make their wedding cake, because she loved to bake and had fancy pastry piping doodads. And if the buttercream was a little grainy or one of the layers was a bit overbaked, well, it was still sweet and just as tall as a cake in a magazine, and it cost only the price of supplies.

In the world of shadow magic, Charlie was a successful thief, but to the locals, she would always be a useful amateur, willing to palm a wedding ring or retrieve a dognapped pit bull.

Charlie Hall. Drawn to a bad idea like a moth to a wool sweater. Every hustle an opportunity to let her worst impulses out to play.

"I need to talk to you," Doreen said loudly, reaching for Charlie as she passed.

It'd been a slow night at the lounge, but Odette, the ancient, semiretired dominatrix who owned the place, was sitting at a table out front, gossiping with her cronies. She'd notice if Charlie chatted to one person for too long, and Charlie couldn't afford to lose this gig. Bartending at Rapture was a lucky break, given her track record.

It'd been arranged by Balthazar, who ran a shadow parlor out of the basement, speakeasy-style, and had good reasons to keep an eye on her—not the least of which was that he wanted her to come back to work for him.

And as Charlie looked over at Doreen and that familiar excitement stirred in her, she felt the precariousness of her commitment to the straight and narrow. Like a strategy for success that's only the word "profit" with a lot of exclamation points.

"Can I get you a drink?" she asked Doreen.

Doreen shook her head. "You have to help me find Adam. He disappeared, again, and I—"

"Can't talk now," Charlie interrupted. "Order something to keep my boss off my back. Club soda and bitters. Cranberry and lime. Whatever. It's on me."

Doreen's wet, red-rimmed eyes suggested that she'd have a hard time waiting. Or that she'd had a few drinks before she arrived. Maybe both.

"Hey," one of the regulars called, and Charlie turned away to take his order.

Made a cosmopolitan that spilled ruby red out of the shaker. Topped it with a tiny pellet of dry ice that sent smoke wafting up, as though from a potion.

She checked on another table, a guy who was nursing a beer, trembling fingers applying a third nicotine patch to his inner arm. He wanted to keep his tab open.

Charlie poured a shot of Four Roses for a tweedy guy in dirty glasses who looked like he'd been sleeping in his clothes and told her he didn't like his bourbon too sweet. Then she crossed to the other end of the bar, pausing to make a whiskey-and-ginger for Balthazar himself when he waved her over.

"Got a job for you," he said under his breath. With his flashing eyes, light brown skin, and curls long enough to be pulled back into a disreputable ponytail, he lorded over his shadow parlor, making the town's corrupt dreams come true.

"Nope," Charlie said, moving on.

"C'mon. Knight Singh got murdered in his bed, and the room was trashed. Someone made off with his personal folio of magical discoveries," Balthazar called after her, unconvinced. "This is what you were best at."

"Nope!" she called back as cheerfully as she could manage.

Fuck Knight Singh.

He had been the first gloamist ever to contract Charlie's services, back when she was just a kid. As far as she was concerned, he could rot in his grave, but that still didn't mean she was going to rob it.

Charlie was out of the game. She'd been too good at it, and the collateral damage had been too high. Now she was just a regular person.

A drunken trio of witchy-looking twentysomethings were celebrating a weeknight birthday, black lipstick smeared over their mouths. They ordered shots of cheap, neon green absinthe and winced them down. One must have recently gotten her shadow altered, because she kept moving so the light would catch it and project her new self onto the wall. It had horns and wings, like a succubus.

It was beautiful.

"My mother haaaates it," the girl was telling her friends, voice slightly slurred. She gave a hop and hovered in the air for a moment as her shadow wings fluttered, and a few patrons glanced over admiringly.

"Mom says that when I try to get a real job, I am going to regret having something I can't hide. I told her it was my commitment to never selling out."

The first time Charlie had ever seen an altered shadow, it had made her think of a fairy tale she'd read as a child in the school library: *The Witch and the Unlucky Brother*.

She still recalled the story's opening lines: *Once upon a time, a boy was born with a hungry shadow. He was as lucky as lucky could be, while all the ill luck was bestowed on his twin, who was born with no shadow at all.*

But, of course, this girl's shadow wasn't lucky. It looked cool and gave her a bit of minor magic. She could maybe get three inches off the ground, for a couple of seconds at a time. A pair of stacked heels would have taken her higher.

It didn't make the girl a gloamist, either.

Manipulated shadows were the specialty of alterationists, the most public-facing of the four disciplines. Alterationists could cosmetically shape shadows, use them to trigger emotions so strong they could be addictive, and even cut out pieces of a person's subconscious. There were risks, of course. Sometimes people lost a lot more of themselves than they bargained for.

The other gloaming disciplines were more secretive. Carapaces focused on their own shadows, using them to soar through the air on shadow wings or armor themselves. Puppeteers sent their shadows to do things in secret—in Charlie's experience, largely the kind of foul shit no one wanted to talk about. And the masks weren't much better, a bunch of creeps and mystics intent on unraveling the secrets of the universe, no matter who it hurt.

There was a reason they got called glooms, instead of their proper title. You couldn't trust them as far as you could throw them. For example, no matter what gloamists said, they all trafficked in stolen shadows.

Charlie's boyfriend, Vince, had been robbed of his, probably so some rich fuck could have his third go-round at an alteration. Now he cast no shadow at all, not even in the brightest of bright light. It was believed that shadowless people had an absence in them, a lack of some intangible thing. Sometimes people passing Vince on the street would notice and give him a wide berth.

Charlie wished people would get the hell out of her way too. But it bothered Vince, so she glared at every single person who did it.

When Charlie circled back, Doreen said, "I'll take a ginger ale, to settle my stomach."

Odette seemed distracted by her friends.

"Okay, what's the problem?"

"I think Adam's gone on another bender," said Doreen as Charlie put the drink in front of her, along with a cocktail napkin. "The casino called. If he doesn't come in on Monday, they're going to fire his ass. I keep trying his cell, but he won't answer me."

Charlie and Doreen had never been particularly friendly, but they knew some of the same people. And sometimes knowing someone for a long time seemed more important than liking them.

Charlie sighed. "So what is it you want me to do?"

“Find him, and make him come home,” Doreen said. “Maybe remind him he’s got a kid.”

“I don’t know that I can make him do anything,” Charlie said.

“You’re the reason Adam’s like this,” Doreen told her. “He keeps taking on extra jobs that are too dangerous.”

“How exactly is that my fault?” Charlie wiped down the bar area in front of her for something to do.

“Because Balthazar’s always comparing him to you. Adam’s trying to measure up to your stupid reputation. But not everyone’s a born criminal.”

Doreen’s partner, Adam, was a blackjack dealer over at the Springfield casino and had started working for Balthazar part-time after Charlie quit. Maybe he thought that dealing with whatever sketchy shit went on at the tables prepared him for stealing from glooms. She also suspected that Adam had thought that if Charlie could do it, it must not be that hard.

“We can talk more after my shift,” Charlie said with a sigh, thinking of all the reasons she ought to steer clear.

For one, she was the last person Adam would want to see, in any context.

For another, this was going to result in zero money.

Rumor had it that Adam had been spending his extra Balthazar-dispensed cash rolling bliss—that is, getting your shadow tweaked, so you could stare into space for hours as awesome emotions flooded through you. Adam was probably lying on his back in a hotel room, feeling real good, and definitely wouldn’t want Charlie dragging him home before that wore off.

Charlie looked over at Doreen, the last thing she needed right then, sitting at the other end of the bar, playing miserably with her stirrer.

Charlie was just reaching for the seltzer pump when a crash made her look up.

The tweedy guy, with the “not-too-sweet” bourbon request, was now on his hands and knees next to the empty stage, tangled in a swag of velvet curtain. One of the goons from the shadow parlor, a man named Joey Aspirins, stood over the guy as though trying to decide whether to kick him in the face.

Balthazar had followed them up the stairs, still yelling. “Are you crazy, trying to get me to fence that? You setting me up to look like I’m the one that stole the *Liber Noctem*? Get the fuck out of here!”

“It’s not like that,” the tweedy guy said. “Salt’s desperate to get even part of it back. He’ll pay real money—”

Charlie flinched at Salt’s name.

Not a lot rattled her, after everything she’d seen and done. But the thought of him always did.

“Shut up and get out.” Balthazar pointed toward the exit.

“What’s going on?” Doreen asked. Charlie shook her head, watching Joey Aspirins shove the tweedy guy toward the doors. Odette got up to talk with Balthazar, their voices too soft for her to overhear.

Balthazar turned, catching Charlie’s eye as he was walking back to the shadow parlor. He winked. She ought to have raised her eyebrow or rolled her eyes, but the mention of Lionel Salt had turned her stiff and wooden. Balthazar was gone before she’d managed to react.

Last call came soon after. Charlie wiped down the counter. Filled a dishwasher with dirty shakers and glasses. She counted out her drawer, peeling the money for Doreen’s drink off her tips and slipping it in with the rest of the bills. Rapture might exult in its strangeness, might have its walls and ceiling coated in Black 3.0, paint so dark it stole light from a room, and might have air thick with incense. Might be the kind of place locals came to glimpse magic, or kink, or if they got tired of sports bars with kombucha on tap. But the rituals of closing were the same.

Most of the rest of the staff had already left by the time Charlie got her coat and purse out of Odette’s office. The wind had kicked up, chilling the sweat on her body as she walked out to her car, reminding Charlie that it was already late autumn, barreling toward winter, and that she needed to start bringing something warmer to work than a thin leather coat.

“Well?” Doreen asked. “I’m freezing out here. Will you find him? Suzie Lambton says you helped her out, and you barely even know her.”

The job probably wouldn’t be too hard, and then she’d have Doreen off her back. If Adam was blissed out somewhere, she could always steal his wallet. That would send him back home fast. Take his car keys too, just to show she could. “Your brother works at the university, right? Office of the bursar.”

Doreen narrowed her eyes. “He’s a customer service representative. He answers phones.”

“But he has access to the computers. So can he fix it so my sister has another month to pay her bill? Not asking him to cancel the debt, just delay it.” Orientation fees, student technology fees, and processing fees were all due before the loan money showed up. That wasn’t even counting the junker Posey would need to get back and forth to campus. Or books.

“I don’t want to get him into trouble,” Doreen said primly, as though she wasn’t trying to persuade a criminal to find her criminal boyfriend.

Charlie folded her arms across her chest and waited.

Finally, Doreen nodded slowly. “I guess I could ask.”

Which could mean a lot of things. Charlie opened the trunk of her janky Toyota Corolla. Her collection of burner phones rested beside a tangle of

jumper cables, an old bag of burglary supplies, and a bottle of Grey Goose she'd bought wholesale off the bar.

Charlie took out one of the phones and punched in the code to activate it. "Okay, let me try something and see if Adam bites. Tell me his number."

If he answered, she told herself, she'd do it. If he didn't, she'd walk away.

She knew she was just looking for an excuse to get into trouble. Wading into quicksand to see if she'd sink. She texted him anyway: *I've got a job and I heard you were the best.*

If he was worried about not being good enough, then the flattery would be motivating. That was the nature of con artistry, playing on weakness. It was also a bad way to train your brain to think about people.

"Let's see if he responds and—" Charlie started to say when her phone pinged.

Who is this?

Amber, Charlie texted back. She had several identities that she'd built for con and never used. Of them, Amber was the only gloamist. *Sorry to bother you so late, but I really need your help.*

Amber, with the long brown hair?

Charlie stared at her phone for a long moment, trying to decide if this was a trick.

You really are as good as they say. She added a winking emoji and hoped ambiguity would allow her to sidestep any of his questions.

"I can't believe he's texting you. What is he saying?"

"Take a look," Charlie told Doreen, handing over the phone. "See? He's alive. He's fine."

Doreen bit her fingernail as she read through the messages. "You didn't say you were going to flirt with him."

Charlie rolled her eyes.

On the other side of the parking lot, Odette, swathed in an enormous cocoon coat, made her way to her purple Mini Cooper.

"You really think you can get him to tell you where he's staying?"

Charlie nodded. "Sure. I can even go there and hog-tie him, if that's what you want. You'll have to do me a better favor for that, though."

"Suzie says asking you for help is like summoning up the devil. The devil might grant your wish, but afterward, you're out a soul."

Charlie bit her lip, looked up at the streetlight. "Like you said, I barely know Suzie. She must be thinking of somebody else."

“Maybe,” Doreen said. “But all that stuff you did—even back in the day, the stuff people said—you’ve got to be angry at someone.”

“Or I could have done it for fun,” Charlie said. “Which would be pretty messed up, right? And since I am doing you a good turn, it’d be polite not to mention it.”

Doreen gave one of those exhausted sighs that mothers of little kids seemed to have welling up in them at all times. “Right. Sure. Just bring him home before he winds up like you.”

Charlie watched Doreen go, then got into her Corolla. Buckled her seat belt. Tried not to think about the job Balthazar was offering, or who she used to be. Thought instead of the ramen she was going to boil when she got home. Hoped her sister had fed the cat. Imagined the mattress waiting for her on the floor of her bedroom. Imagined Vince, already asleep, feet tangled in the sheets. Shoved her key in the ignition.

The car wouldn’t turn on.