CHAPTER ONE
MOTHER SENDS A SURPRISE

17 DECEMBER, 1906

I Don't Trust Clive Fagenbush.

How can you trust a person who has eyebrows as thick and black as hairbrushes and smells of boiled cabbage and pickled onions? Besides, I'm beginning to suspect he's up to something. What's worse, I think he suspects *I'm* up to something. Which I usually am.

Not that anyone would take the word of an eleven-year-old girl against that of the Second Assistant Curator – even if that girl just happens to be the daughter of the Head Curator of the museum and is rather cleverer than most (or so I've been told; oddly, I don't think they meant it as a compliment). As far as I can tell, it doesn't make any difference to adults how clever children are. They always stick together. Unless you are sick or dying or mortally wounded, they will always side with the other adult.

That's certainly the case here, anyway. My father oversees the Museum of Legends and Antiquities, the second largest museum in London. As a result, I spend most of my time

clattering around this old place. I don't mind. Really. Well, not much anyway. Though it would be nice if Father remembered I was here once in a while . . . However, I've got plenty to do. The museum's got loads of secrets, and I've discovered I'm very good at ferreting out secrets. And curses. You'd be surprised at how many things come into the museum loaded with curses – bad ones. Ancient, dark, Egyptian-magic ones.

Take this morning, for example, when a crate arrived from Mum.

At the sound of the buzzer, I hurried down to Receiving. Dolge and Sweeny, the museum's two hired hands, were just opening the doors to the loading area. Yellow fog began oozing into the room like a runny pudding. Outside, I could make out the drayman, blowing on his fingers and stamping his feet, trying to stay warm as he waited next to his cart. His carriage lanterns were lit and looked like two fuzzy halos in the thick fog. Sweeny hopped off the dock and together they lifted a crate from the back of the cart and carried it inside. As they made their way past me, I craned forward to read the label. It was from Thebes! Which meant it had to be from Mum. Her first shipment from the Valley of the Kings! The first of many, most likely.

Once they'd placed the crate on an empty worktable, the drayman tipped his cap and hurried back to his cart, anxious to be on his way. Dolge closed the door behind him with a resounding clang.

By this time, the curators had arrived, and we all gathered round to watch Father open the crate. As I inched

closer, I saw that, once again, he wasn't wearing any gloves. My own gloved fingers twitched in dismay.

'Um, Father?'

He paused, his hands hovering over the crate. 'Yes, Theodosia?'

'Aren't you afraid you'll get splinters?' Everyone turned to stare at me oddly.

'Nonsense,' he said.

Of course, I didn't give a fig about splinters. They were the least of my worries. But I didn't dare tell him that.

With everyone's attention once again focused on the crate, I shuffled closer to Father's side, trying to reach him before he actually touched whatever it was that Mum had sent. I made it past Dolge and Sweeny with no problem, but I had to hold my breath as I sidled past Fagenbush. He glared at me, and I glared back.

When I reached Father's side, I dipped my hand into the pocket of my pinafore just as he plunged his hands into the crate. As unobtrusively as possible, I slipped a small amulet of protection out of my pocket and into his. Unfortunately, my action did not go unnoticed. He paused and scowled at me. 'What on earth are you doing?'

'I just wanted to get a good look, Father. I am the shortest one in the room, you know.' To turn his attention from me back to the crate, I leaned forward and peered in. 'What do you think she's sent us this time?'

'Well, that's what I'm trying to find out.' His voice was tinged with exasperation. Then luckily he forgot all about

me as, with great ceremony, he reached into the crate and lifted out an absolutely fetching black statue of a cat: Bastet, the Egyptian fertility goddess.

The moment I laid eyes on it, I felt as if a parade of icy-footed beetles were marching down my spine. My cat, Isis, who'd been skulking under the workmen's bench, took one look at the statue, meowed loudly, then streaked off for parts unknown. I shuddered. Once again Mother had sent us an artefact positively dripping with ancient, evil curses.

'Are you all right, Theo?' Nigel Bollingsworth, the First Assistant Curator, asked. 'You're not taking a chill, are you?'

He studied me in concern. Next to him, Fagenbush stared at me as if I were something nasty that Isis had dragged in. 'No, Mr Bollingsworth. I'm fine.'

Well, except for the black magic rolling off the new cursed object.

Of course, Mother never realised it was cursed. Nor did Father. Neither one of them ever seemed able to tell.

None of the assistant curators seemed to notice anything, either. Except for that rat Fagenbush. He eyed the statue with his face aglow and his long, bony fingers twitching. The problem was, he looked like that half the time, so it was hard to know if it was his reaction to the artefact or he was just being his own horrid self.

As far as I knew, I was the only one able to detect the black magic still clinging to the ancient objects. Therefore, it was up to me to discover the nature of this statue's curse and how to remove it.

Quickly.

When Mother arrived tomorrow, she was sure to have loads of new artefacts with her. Even more crates would trickle in over the next few weeks. Who knew how many of those items would be cursed? I could be busy for months! The only good thing was that it would keep me out of Mother and Father's way. They tend to get annoyed when I'm underfoot, and then begin talking of sending me off to school. This way, at least I'd be able to spend some time with Mum.

Still, while hunches and gut instinct were all well and good for a First Level Test, I had to be logical and scientific about this. I needed to conduct a Second Level Test as soon as possible.

My chance came when everyone had cleared out of the receiving bay and returned to their duties. Since I didn't have any duties to return to, I was able to hang back unnoticed.

I went over to one of the shelves that lined the receiving area and took down a small, battered canopic jar. It had come in badly damaged, and since it wasn't particularly valuable, no one had taken the time to restore it. I had begun using it for collecting wax (old candle stubs, sealing wax, that kind of thing), which I used extensively in my Second Level Test. Wax is very good at absorbing *heka,* or evil magic.

I removed some of the wax bits from the jar and carefully set them in a circle around the base of the statue.

By dinnertime, the entire circle of wax bits was a foul

greeny-black colour. Drat! I don't think the wax has ever turned dark that quickly before. Now I had to come back and conduct a Third Level Test. Unfortunately, in order to do that, I needed moonlight. Moonlight is the only way to make the inscribed curses visible to the human eye.

Of course, the only way to view something in moonlight is at night.

And I *loathe* the museum at night.

CHAPTER TWO
THE MOONLIGHT TEST

As luck would have it, it turned out to be another one of those nights when Father became so absorbed in his research that he forgot all about going home. It was the fourth night in a row, and for a change, it worked well with my own plans.

Just before midnight, I ventured out of the staff room into the museum. The gaslights had been turned low so that just a tiny blue bead glowed along the dark hallway at regular intervals. The feeble light from my oil lamp barely made a dent in the cavernous darkness, but I didn't let that deter me. I reached up and clutched the three protective amulets that hung around my neck. Father says I let my imagination run away with me, but the truth is, in the darkest hours of the night, if you look very closely (which I try not to) you can see the dangerous dead – the *akhu* and *mut* – rise up out of their urns and sarcophagi like a thick, choking mist. The ancient magic and words of terrible power ooze out of the arcane texts and inscribed objects. They hover in the corners and lurk in the shadows. How could I possibly venture out into that without *some* protection, I'd like to know?

Not wanting to make any noise that might draw the spirits' attention, I padded along in my stockinged feet, which were soon numb with cold.

Of course, Father had moved the wretched statue from the receiving area up to his workroom on the third floor. I hugged the wall as I crept up the polished wooden stairs, careful to avoid the ones that creaked.

No matter how quiet I was, the deep, gaping shadows around me seemed to grow larger and more forbidding. I was painfully aware of the last earthly remains, bones, coffins, and sacred relics of old, long-forgotten religions surrounding me. In the light of my oil lamp, the shadows bobbed and weaved like leering demons.

At last I reached the third floor and entered Statuary Hall. Enormous Egyptian sculptures lined the walls like ever-watchful guardians. The majestic faces of pharaohs stood side by side with mysterious sphinx heads, the smallest of which towered twenty feet high and cast harsh puddles of blackness on the floor.

I hurried past the looming statues until I reached the doorway that led into the Ancient Egypt Exhibit. I paused, bracing myself. Even though I patrolled this exhibit as often as possible, I could never be too sure what might be waiting for me in there. Magic is a tricky business, and the Egyptians were masters of it. Some spells seemed to regenerate themselves after a full moon or on specific unholy days. Others were only visible during certain seasons or when the stars and planets were aligned just so. All in all, ancient

Egyptian magic is a horrid jumble of sinister possibilities, and I never take anything for granted when dealing with it.

With one fortifying breath, I made a mad dash through the room, scurrying past the exhibit cases, looking neither to the right nor the left. With one last shiver, I reached the workroom door, yanked it open, and slipped inside.

This room was dark, too, but pale, silvery moonlight shone in through the windows. And in that pale moonlight sat the statue of Bastet, an intricate, malevolent pattern of sacred words and symbols writhing across its surface like a nest of restless vipers.

Sometimes I really hate being right.



As I drew near the statue, I caught the symbol of Anubis, god of the underworld, as well as one for Seth, the god of chaos. There! Another symbol floated by, one I hadn't seen much but I think represented the demonic spirits of the restless dead. Any hopes I'd had of a rather small curse disappeared. I was dealing with an artefact positively steeped in vile, Egyptian black magic.

I needed a closer look, which meant I would have to pick the horrid thing up.

I glanced around the workroom. Wearing gloves wasn't protection enough when the hieroglyphs were swarming like this. The symbols had a way of trying to poke their way through the gloves and into my hands. I wasn't very keen on those words and symbols of evil power running along *my* skin, if you please.

I found an old rag on Father's worktable and wrapped it around my hand like an extra glove. Then I picked up the statue and carried it over to the window to have a better look.

The symbols slowed a bit once the statue was in my hand. I felt them probing at the rag, trying to get past the cloth barrier and worm their way into my flesh. I had to hurry.

The symbol of Apep, the serpent of chaos, floated by, followed by Mantu, the god of war. How odd. I'd never seen him on a cursed object before. There were more symbols: symbols for armies and destruction and—

There was a creak on the floorboards just outside the workroom door. Jolted into action, I scurried across the room, thrust the statue back on its shelf, and frantically searched for a hiding place. There were lots of shadowy corners, but I wanted something more substantial than that.

Spying an old packing crate in the corner, I hopped inside and covered myself as best I could with bits of packing material. I hunkered down, averted my eyes from the door, and waited.

You may wonder why I didn't look up to see the intruder. I can assure you, I wanted to. But I've lived alongside the restless, ancient spirits long enough to know that when you look at things, you focus your whole *ka,* or life force, on them, which causes their power to grow even stronger. If this nighttime visitor was of the supernatural variety, focusing my life force on it was as good as shining an oil lamp in its face.

My oil lamp! I peered through a crack in the side of the crate and saw my discarded lantern off to the side of the shelves. Luckily, the flame had gone out.

The door swung open, creaking slightly on its hinges. The footsteps paused in the doorway, as if the person or thing were surveying the room. Then the floorboards creaked again as someone – or something – stepped inside. I risked a glance through the crack again, just long enough to see a black hooded shape moving across the floor.

I wrenched my gaze away and tried to still the beating of my heart. It sounded like thunder to my ears – surely the intruder would hear it!

The footsteps came to a stop in front of the shelves, mere inches from where I was hiding. Risking another peek, I saw the large black shape studying the middle shelf, where I'd put the statue of Bastet back in its place. As my eyes swept downward again, I noticed two black shoes poking out from under the figure's long cape.

My heart calmed a bit. Supernatural beings don't wear shoes. Whatever it was – whoever it was – it must be human. Which I greatly preferred to the alternative.

Although, anyone skulking around a museum in the dead of night was probably up to no good. Except for me, of course – I had only the noblest of motives.

Slightly more confident now, I risked another glance and saw a long, black arm snake out from underneath the cloak. The movement sent a slight current of air toward me and I caught a whiff of boiled cabbage and pickled onions.

Clive Fagenbush!

Before I could sort out this puzzle, there was another squeak of the floorboards outside the workroom door. With a hiss of indrawn breath, Fagenbush snatched his empty hand back, then stepped around the shelves and flattened himself against the wall so that he was hidden from sight.

He now faced directly toward me. I scrunched down as small as I could in the crate and wished I were invisible.

The new intruder fumbled loudly with the doorknob, not even trying to be quiet. A quick, sure step came into the workroom, accompanied by a tuneless whistle.

I slumped in relief. It was only Father, on one of his midnight ramblings. He turned up the gas and flooded the workroom in soft yellow light.

Wondering if Father could see him, I glanced over at Fagenbush's hiding spot, only to find he'd disappeared.

I craned my neck, trying to see where he had gone, but he was nowhere in sight. Then I glimpsed a flutter of movement near the door as he slipped out of the workroom. Bother! He'd got clean away. But at least he hadn't conked Father over the head or discovered my whereabouts.

As I crouched in the crate, I realised I needed to come up with a plan to get my hands on that statue before someone else did. I considered taking it back to my room, but I couldn't bear the thought of those loathsome curses anywhere near me as I slept. I finally settled on hiding it that night, then returning it first thing in the morning while Father was having breakfast.

It took ages for Father to find whatever it was he was looking for, but he finally left, turning out the lights and closing the door behind him. I waited a few minutes more to let him get safely out of the way. Once my eyes readjusted to the darkness, I climbed out of the crate and went over to the shelf. Using the rag, I lifted the statuette and placed it in the crate where I'd been hiding. I tossed some packing material over it, then grabbed my oil lamp, now uselessly dark, and made my way to the door. I peeked out into the exhibit room.

The museum seemed unusually restless. The creaks and groans had grown louder and more frequent. With my hand clutched firmly around all three amulets, I raced back through the display rooms. I felt disgruntled dead things rustle as I passed, the shadows growing longer as they reached out toward me. I put on an extra burst of speed.

Now do you see why I loathe the museum at night?

THEODOSIA
AND THE
STAFF OF OSIRIS

R. L. LaFevers

Theodosia Throckmorton is in a fix. While attending a reception given by one of the directors of her parents' museum, she stumbles across an old foe in the most surprising circumstances! His reappearance could mean only one thing: the Serpents of Chaos are back. Once again Theodosia will have to take on secret societies, evil curses, and dark magic too sinister to imagine, especially if it falls into the wrong hands. Blocked at every turn, Theodosia must rely on her own skill and cunning – along with a little help from her friends.

'Clever and exciting'
Booklist

'The plot is quick and multi-layered like a well-wrapped mummy'
School Library Journal

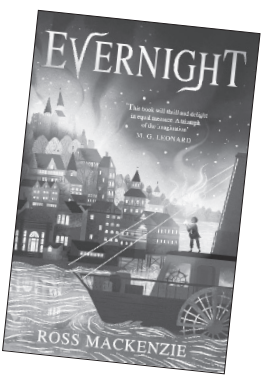
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EVERNIGHT

ROSS MACKENZIE

THE EVERNIGHT
HAS BEEN UNLEASHED ...

As far back as she can remember, orphan Larabelle Fox has scraped together a living treasure-hunting in the sewers. In a city where emotionless White Witches march through the streets and fear of Hag magic is rife, Lara keeps her head down. But when she stumbles upon a mysterious little box in the sewers, Lara finds herself catapulted into a world of wild magic – facing adventure, mortal danger and a man who casts no shadow.



'Epic good-versus-evil fantasy'
Guardian

'Beautifully cinematic, *Evernight* is a spellbinding tale'
The Scotsman

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SEASON OF SECRETS

SALLY NICHOLLS

On a wild and stormy night Molly runs away from her grandparents' house. Her dad has sent her to live there until he Sorts Things Out at home now her mother has passed away. In the howling darkness, Molly sees a desperate figure running for his life from a terrifying midnight hunt. But who is he? Why has he come? And can he heal her heartbreak?

'A stand-out story . . . exciting [and] profound'
Guardian

'A wonderful, evocative, lively book'
Literary Review

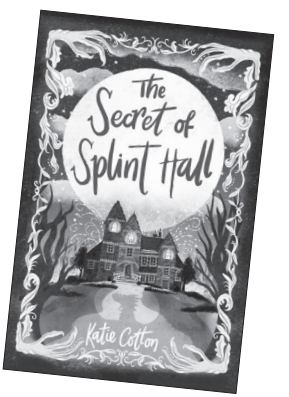


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The Secret of Splint Hall

KATIE COTTON

1945. War has ended, but for sisters Isobel and Flora, the struggles continue. They've lost their father and had their home destroyed in a bombing raid, and now they must go to live with their aunt and her awful husband Mr Godfrey in their ancestral home, Splint Hall. From the moment of their arrival it seems that this is a place shrouded in mysteries and secrets. As the girls begin to unearth an ancient myth and family secret, the adventure of a lifetime begins.



9781839131967