
THE
SHADOW
ORDER
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To Betsy, Teddy, and Effie – my companions – every bit as brave and good as the characters they inspired.

CHAPTER ONE

Shadows

The city is prattling as the moon brightens and Teddy James lopes towards his shift on the river, his slim shoulders hunched against the cold and his hands stuffed into his pockets. He keeps his eyes low and slows only to skirt carefully around the dim umbrellas of light cast by the gas lamps. He does not want to be late. Factory workers boot-thump past parlour windows, and chimney sweeps gather on the pavement outside the townhouses on The Crescent. Sellers of fruits, ceramics, pies, flowers and clockwork toys set up their stalls on the square near the cathedral, clouding the bitter air with their greetings and laughter. Though he would like to pause to buy an apple and a hot steak pie, Teddy does not lift his chin from inside his green wool scarf to speak to anyone. The sooner he starts and finishes his shift, the quicker he can get to Betsy's.

They have agreed to meet at six o'clock, which will give them an hour before sunrise.

Teddy does not think an hour will be enough, but Betsy had insisted. 'I'll never get away from Mrs S any earlier,' she'd said. 'You know I won't.' And she was probably right. Henrietta Saltsburg allows Betsy to rent her attic room in

exchange for six twelve-hour shifts a week in the laundry. Saltsburg's Laundry is the busiest in Copperwell and every time Teddy calls there for her, Betsy is tearing off her white pinafore, throwing it aside, and brushing damp strands of hair back off her forehead, having already worked on.

'It's a perfect misery,' she says about her job bending over the enormous wooden barrels, dropping the clothes into the steaming water, scrubbing and scrubbing until her hands throb and her pitch-black curls cling around her neck and ears. But Teddy knows that, despite Betsy's protestations, the work is good for her. It helps to expend a fragment of the energy that bounces around inside her. If Mrs S made her work seven shifts a week instead of six, she might never have come up with her plan.

'It's been a year, Teddy,' she'd insisted. 'A whole year. I have to see it again. Don't you want to?'

He did. She knew that. But so does everyone else, and Teddy cannot imagine what makes him and Betsy and Effie so special that they might get away with it. Teddy James, Betsy Blue and Effie Hart have mischiefed around the city together since they were eight or nine years old. It started when Effie, walking along Cathedral Row with her father, had spotted Betsy pilfering a bag of peaches from a costermonger's cart and distracted her father, Jeremiah Hart, so that he would not notice the theft. Betsy, seeing what Effie had done, had insisted that she and Teddy follow the girl home. It was Betsy and Teddy's first time on Berliner's Square, and they'd waited outside behind the

hedges. They'd eaten the peaches until it was dark, then thrown peach stones at the window through which they'd seen Effie draw her curtains. They didn't know her as Effie then, of course, but they had persuaded her to clamber down the drainpipes and disappear into the night with them all the same. Being posh and ladylike, she'd likely never done such a thing before, but Effie had been willing to follow Betsy's lead as they explored the city rooftops and climbed trees in the Elm Gardens, and Betsy had decided that she must be both brave and worth knowing.

Though Betsy had intended to say 'thank you' just that one time, they were soon calling for Effie three or four nights a week. Always, they found her ready for adventure.

But everything is different now, since the shadows shifted.

What Betsy has planned would be more than mischief. It would mean breaking the law.

Teddy turns off Inca Street and on to Holloway Road, strides past the Duke's Theatre, and continues down through narrowing streets towards the water. The cold is biting, though there is not a wheeze of wind tonight. Even the clouds, ragged ropes of mauve and indigo, do not scud across the shivering sky. Teddy wishes he possessed a fine pair of gloves, but he has only those he must use on the river, to lift the heavy crates off the barges and stack them onto the waiting cart, ready to be transported to cellar doors and servants' entrances and backyards across

Copperwell. Made from undyed leather and held together with thick black stitching, the gloves reveal him to anyone who cares to look as a canal worker, and Teddy does not want to be a canal worker forever. He wants to be… He is too embarrassed to utter it, even to Betsy, who would well understand, but what he wants most is to find the bravery to become an explorer: to hike and sail and fly and swim through all the world's wildest places; to spark fires on clifftops and sleep under the stars; to climb trees and balance in branches higher than Copperwell's tallest buildings. In his every imagining, he sees himself beneath the marbled, silver-blue gleam of the moon. He is surprised by how completely living in darkness has transformed the landscape of his dreams.

He leaves behind that part of the city where table lamps light the windows of gentleman's clubs and gambling dens, and enters those streets where naked flames gutter inside soup kitchens and soap works. Wealth enters the city by the canal, but it does not linger there. While the rest of Copperwell is overwhelmed by the snug scent of burning wood or coal rising out of chimney stacks, the air along the canal smells dank and stagnant and claggy. Stinking green algae slimes the planks of the jetties the fishermen have built over the water. The cart horses leave piles of dung on the towpath to be kicked into the water, or trodden flat, or stepped around until they stale to crust and crumble away. Still, Teddy loves the horses: the warm, white plumes of their snorts; their soft bristled noses; their big, calm eyes. Often, he puts his hands to the smooth

heat of their necks and breathes in their grassy spoor. When Teddy was a little lad, his father had driven cabs, and Teddy remembers the slumberous weight of the horses as he helped stable them each night, his father's tuneless whistling as he set about brushing them down, that quiet time spent together in the candlelit dark.

He remembers, too, his father's dream of going off in search of the Aur – the fabled golden horse which had once roamed all the wild parts of the world, galloping over Russian plains and wandering the Peruvian mountains, until people saw its gleaming coat and coveted it, and the Aur was forced to turn and flee. Before blowing out his candle each night, Edward would sit at the foot of his son's bed and recount the latest rumoured sightings of the horse: cantering along a pure white beach in Constantinople; stepping off a crag of the Cymru coast into the spumy sea; climbing into the hills above Algiers. And Teddy would carefully memorise the words, determined that one day he would help his father find the beast.

'What will you do with the Aur?' he had asked, early on, after perhaps the second or third of his father's stories. 'If you find one?'

'I will look at it,' Edward had replied, quietly. 'And I will see it. And then I will return home and never tell a single soul about it.'

It had taken Teddy a long time to understand his father's words. Since The Shadow Order was passed, however, he feels that perhaps he is beginning to.

Tonight, in his eagerness, he reaches the canal before the cart horses, the other canal workers, or the first barge. Mist slinks over the water; jigsaw-pieces of frost float on its silvered surface. Gooseflesh shudders around Teddy's neck and down his spine. He takes his gloves from inside his heavy sheepskin coat, and forces them over his stiffened knuckles, then stomps his boots against the frosted ground in an attempt to fend off the cold. His footfalls echo like hammer blows. A year, he thinks. How can it have been a year? When The Order had first been issued, no one had believed it would last for more than a week. A long, dark year later and it is still only the Constabulary who are permitted to move outside in daylight, trotting their enormous black horses noisily over the cobbles as they patrol for rule-breakers. It is said that life sentences are issued to anyone found to be flouting The Order. People have stepped out into the day and never been seen again.

In a way, Teddy is glad that his father died before all of this. Edward James, with his big-knuckled hands and his flick of thick brown hair and his wide, wind-burnt cheeks, could not have withstood being locked indoors through twelve hours of light – more in the summer – to wait for the drop of darkness. He'd been angry enough when the Unified Government passed the decree stating that any person who allowed their building's weather pipes to deteriorate so far that the music they made stopped would be fined. He'd been angrier still when they issued another decree preventing any man or woman from changing

their job or being promoted. *Basic human rights*, Teddy would hear him muttering to himself, though he didn't think much then about what that meant.

The other canal workers arrive on hushed feet, nodding their newsboy caps in greeting, then glancing up the canal for first sight of a barge, nosing its way deeper into the city. The horses clomp down the towpath and are reined to a disgruntled halt. Within minutes the mists stir and the barge pushes into view. Teddy can see no one aboard. All along the canal, small yellow lights have been strung from bridge to bridge, to guide the barges in, and in the darkness the wire linking them becomes invisible so that they seem a line of floating orbs. The barge workers have learnt to stand pinned to the edges of the vessels, hoping the lights won't throw their shadows over the water. Even those who have nothing to fear from the shape of their shadows have learnt to conceal them. It's incredible, Teddy thinks, that simply being told often enough to be ashamed of something can persuade people that they are.

As the barge nears, the canal workers crowd closer to the water's edge, jostling for position. The barge will stop here for mere minutes, during which the waiting men and women will lift as many crates as possible off the barge and stack them into individual piles. They are paid by the crate. Some of the canal workers have taken to wearing waders, so that they can stride into the water and be the first to start unloading, but Teddy has not adopted this approach. It is more tiring to lug the cargo out of the canal,

your boots being sucked at by its silty bottom, and those workers slow sooner than Teddy, who keeps an even, rhythmic pace, and often boasts the largest stack of all by night's end. Though he remains spare for his height – his limbs are slender; his hands and feet a tad too large – his chest and back have strengthened from so much lifting and carrying, and he feels more optimistic lately that he will soon grow into the body he requires to set off on his explorations.

The barge bumps against the bank with a slow thunk, and they set to work. Nearest to Teddy are Octavia Bennett, Briny Erwin, Old Man Hatch and Trudy Birdwhistle. There are others, waiting along the length of the barge, who Teddy knows less well or not at all – and nor does he want to acquaint himself with their rough, scrabbling ways. Teddy and his workmates are respectful of one another. They never shove or argue or take more than their share. Old Man Hatch – silver haired and bowed over his belly now – is particularly appreciative of the arrangement they have come to over the last year. Teddy wonders how he would eat if Briny Erwin – a bear of a man, with a wild beard and a barrelled chest – didn't slip the odd crate into the older man's stack. Teddy has taken to doing the same for Octavia, who was sprightly and energetic last summer, but who has been steadily paling and sickening since. Some nights, she spends more time coughing into her hand than reaching for the crates of dandelion tea, spices, whale ivories, elk antlers, bamboo

bee nests, jarred honeys, or skins which are transported all the way from the Chinese Empire, India, Siberia, the Amerikks, to the heart of Copperwell. Her fascination for those exotic packages – Teddy cannot help but sniff at the crates, seeking the scents of his possible futures – has withered. Teddy and Trudy have exchanged worried looks about her as they have passed in the darkness, but what can they do? They, too, are struggling. It is only the city's rich, now, who are not working on empty stomachs to pay for their next meal.

Tonight the first barge carries a scant load and, in less than five minutes, it is gliding away again, empty, into the mists. The sound of thin ice breaking against its hull lingers behind it long after it disappears from sight. The canal workers take a moment to rest, sprawling on the bank and sipping from steaming flasks of tea or cocoa, but after twelve months of living by night they have developed the hearing of bats and they are soon rising to the approaching thrum of the next barge, relieving it of its load, counting their crates, stepping back towards the water's edge, anticipating the barge that will follow… At intervals, they crane their necks to consider the startling wolf moon. Teddy knows it has a name because Betsy has taught him the difference between a wolf moon and a snow moon, a hunter's moon and a beaver moon. Betsy studies the heavens. But here, Teddy's sole reason to look to the sky is the same as everyone else's. They need to know: is it starting to dim yet? Is there a hint of ripe-peach

dawn rising over Copperwell's chimney tops? However desperate they are to stack one more crate, they must leave themselves enough time to return home before first light.

The seventh barge arrives at half past five. Teddy is keenly aware of the time. He will have to hurry to reach Betsy by six. Some of the canal workers have already retired, exhausted and hungry and having calculated that their stacks are valuable enough to make the shift worthwhile. This is a blessing. Teddy is able to move quickly around the last barge of the night, distributing the crates evenly between his own stacks and Octavia's; only Briny Erwin and Trudy cross his path. With the last crate set down and counted, he calls out a breathless, 'See you tomorrow,' and, waving, takes off at a run. The barge follows in his wake, chugging determinedly through the night. It is no match for Teddy, who races along the bank, leaps cleanly over a small gate, and hurtles up towards the sprawl of enormous university buildings, through the Elm Gardens, past the Observatory, and downhill towards that part of Copperwell, tucked beneath the railway station and its elevated tracks, where Betsy will be waiting for him.

He is less than three streets away when he is forced to stop, panting, and retrace his steps. He thinks he has just seen… Yes… Standing directly under the glow of a gas lamp is Old Man Hatch. Why hasn't he gone home yet? He left the canal over an hour ago. Teddy vacillates, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, then, dragging his father's old pocket watch from inside his coat to confirm

that he is very definitely late, he takes a few measured steps towards Hatch. In the moonlight his silver hair shines like a coin. The hump on his back looks like a mound of crumpled laundry.

'Hatch?' Teddy says quietly. He does not want to startle the old man.

Slowly, Hatch turns blank eyes on Teddy.

'Come out of the light,' Teddy whispers, beckoning with his hands. 'Before anyone sees.'

'I've nothing to hide,' Hatch returns. 'Come, lad. Look for yourself.'

When Teddy does not move, Hatch begins the excruciating process of pivoting about to face his young friend. On bad nights his bent-stick legs can hardly propel him forwards, and the manoeuvre is complicated and painful. Teddy waits through each shuffled step. The ticking of his pocket watch thunders in his mind. Betsy is going to be furious.

'Look at it, Master James,' Hatch insists. 'Or I shall stand here all the day through.'

Snatching a deep breath, Teddy moves closer. He does not want to gaze down at Old Man Hatch's shadow, but if it will persuade him to go home before he finds himself reported to the Constabulary…

Teddy shows Hatch his opened palms, as though he is likely to spook, and nods. 'All right.'

Satisfied, Hatch returns his attention to the ground, where his shadow waits. Heart thudding, Teddy creeps

closer until he is able to peer over Hatch's shoulder. He squints into the spray of light and there appears the shadow of a man twice Hatch's height. He is straight in the back and firm in the leg. He sports a heavy thatch of hair and an elegant neck, and … he is dancing: one arm is held stiffly out in a hoop, as though the palm is resting on a partner's back, and the other is pressed to his chest so that his elbows make two perfectly level points. The shadow thins and thickens as it revolves around and around in a waltz.

'It's me!' Old Man Hatch laughs. 'Would you have recognised me, Master James?'

Teddy shakes his head. 'I can't say I would have, Hatch,' he murmurs.

'And yet…' Hatch says. His voice is snatched by sadness.

'What?'

'And yet, that's *me*. That's who I am.' The gas lamp hisses and flares, and the shadow trembles in response. Hatch gives a sigh and turns to walk away on his stiff, uncooperative legs. 'I was there,' he mutters, more to himself than to Teddy, 'for a moment or two. That was me.'

Teddy inches along beside him. Hatch seems to miss his shadow – or, rather, the person it shows him. When The Shift first happened, Teddy, like so many other people, had been frightened. He had never studied his shadow. There had been no need to: it had always followed him, silently, unobtrusively, into any situation. He had never wondered, before, what it might or might not want.

But, he'd thought afterwards, if his shadow had chosen no longer to mirror him, it might be liable to decide to do anything at all. And the horror of that realisation had persuaded him not to go looking for it in the year since Prime Minister Bythesea and the Unified Government had declared that no one was permitted to go outdoors during the day, when the sun might reveal what they had eventually realised those new, changeable shadows were revealing – people's truest selves.

They have existed since then in darkness, moving around the glow of guttering gaslight as though humans are nocturnal creatures: owl people; fox folk. They wait now for moonrise instead of the sun.

'Promise me you'll go straight home,' Teddy says, putting a hand to Old Man Hatch's wilted spine to hurry him on a little. 'It's almost dawn.'

Hatch nods, and Teddy wishes he had time to watch him scuttling away, to make sure, but already – he fumbles again for his pocket watch and tears it free – it is six minutes past the hour, and Betsy will be waiting for him. If he doesn't hurry her plan will be ruined. With a grunt, he thrusts the scuffed bronze watch back inside his coat and lurches into a run.