

---

Gallery  
of  
Nightmares

---

Copyright © 2021 by Doug Hoppes Studio, L.L.C.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

For permissions, contact: [doug@shadowmyths.com](mailto:doug@shadowmyths.com)

Some characters and events in this book are fictitious.  
Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Cover Design and Illustrations by Doug Hoppes

Editing by Robin L. at [dragoneditingservices.com](http://dragoneditingservices.com)

First Edition, First Printing 2024

ISBN 979-8-9865871-7-2

[www.ShadowMyths.com](http://www.ShadowMyths.com)

---

Gallery  
of  
Nightmares

---

Short Stories by  
DOUG HOPPEs



# The Note

---

---

My father went missing.

And I didn't care.

The day started just like every other weekday for the last ten years—since my mom had passed away. My father and I had a quiet breakfast. We weren't really talking or looking at one another, just the clinking of silverware or the sizzling of bacon.

Sometimes, he would break the silence with a brief question. "Do you want some juice or milk?" Something, or anything, to make himself better about being my father. I generally didn't respond. He would then drink his coffee and stare at his breakfast, mindlessly eating.

Afterward, he always headed off to his private study while I got ready for school. No goodbyes. No, have a nice day. For a while, I would let him know when I'd be home, but he'd only grunt and say, "Okay."

It was not like I wanted to go to school anyway, but he insisted I get a college education, and since I had nothing better to do, I signed up at the local community college. It was nothing fancy like the bigger state ones most of my friends went to, but we couldn't afford those. Besides, it was just four blocks down the road, and I'd gotten a small scholarship to help pay

for it. Also, I wanted to get him off my back.

Most of the time, I didn't even attend class.

Near the front door, a large, twisted tree casts a foreboding shadow over our house. It had been like any other tree in our neighborhood, but when my mom passed away, I watched it twist in pain. The rustling leaves had been like cries in the night.

When I was much younger—not that being seventeen meant I was old—my parents and I would have a picnic beneath that old tree. I imagined we were in a remote valley, the tree was a fort, and I was a fierce warrior guarding my family against wicked monsters.

Now, it was just an old tree with a broken swing.

“Hey, Jonathan!” a voice called out. “Jonathan!”

It was Lars, my best bud. He was like the little kid brother I never had, even though we were the same age. I waited on the sidewalk as he caught up to me.

“Hey! You headin’ over to the abandoned house later today? I might not be able to. My old man said that if I didn’t start looking for a job, he’d find one for me. Something that I wasn’t gonna like. He says that every so often. Never means it.”

“Nah. Not today,” I replied. “I gotta get some homework

done. Ms. Lyle said that if I didn't bring my grades up, she'd work on pulling my scholarship. You gonna listen to your dad?"

He kicked rocks before him and said, "I don't know. He seemed pretty serious this morning. But it's my life, not his. I can do whatever I want. I just wished I could get out of this hole of a town. I keep thinking about getting on a bus and leaving, living life how I want. It's gotta be fun traveling all over the place. Checking out girls in different towns. Bet they are just aching to meet someone like me!"

Lars. All talk, no action. Ever since I'd known him, I would hear all about the great things he wanted to do, but he never did anything about them.

He'd been pretty obsessed with the girls since high school, always talking about which ones he would ask out or how he would impress one with his knife juggling. First of all, he wasn't very good. He'd cut himself so many times that the teachers thought his dad was doing it. Also, he never talked to any of the girls. Always made an excuse. It was never the right time, or they were too busy.

Lars would end up exactly like everyone else: old and tired. No grand adventures. No tours of the world. No great love affairs. He'd have his little fantasies and, eventually, blame everybody else for how his life turned out, just like everyone else in this town.

“Yeah,” I said offhandedly. “It would be fun to leave.”

A block from the college, we ran into Mikhail, the jerk we’d both known since high school. He picked on Lars and the other kids back then and was still doing it now.

As he approached Lars, Mikhail bumped his shoulder. Lars ignored him and kept walking, but he knew what was going to happen. He tried walking faster, but Mikhail rushed and tripped him, and when Lars’ books scattered across the lot, he laughed.

“What’s the matter, Lars?” he asked. “You can’t walk straight today? Those skinny legs of yours can’t hold up your big head?”

A crowd gathered around as Lars brushed off his books and tried to get up. Even though his eyes moistened, he didn’t cry in front of everybody. We both knew that would make matters much worse.

“Let me help you up,” Mikail said. As he grabbed Lars’ arm, he acted like he slipped and pushed Lars back down again. “Sorry!” His laugh grew even louder.

I went over and helped Lars up. Then, facing Mikail, I just stared. No emotion. No movement. Just made sure I was between him and Lars. Staring.

Now, Mikail was much bigger than I was, and he also was a lot stronger. We’d never fought before, but he knew I wouldn’t



back down when it involved my friends. It always came down to us staring at each other while the crowd around us waited. But one day, we both knew *something* would happen.

It wasn't that day, though.

"Knock it off, Mikhail," one of his buddies said. "We gotta go."

"Bah!" He went off, presumably to his classes.

"Thanks, Jonathan," Lars muttered. He was quiet for the rest of the walk. He'd spent more time looking down; whenever I tried to ask him something, he'd give simple "Yes" or "No" answers. I knew he was scared. He always got quiet when he was.

School—what a waste of time. I already knew everything I needed to, yet I still listened to whatever nonsense the professors were trying to drive into my head. The same boring topics every day—stuff I would never use. Those teachers acted like they were helping us, but they were just trying to fit us into some job in town.

I needed to leave this small town full of old people who didn't know how to live. Most of the younger people just cared about what the older people thought. Not me and Lars, though. We had a future that those others had never dreamed could be achieved. It all started with being far away from here.

The best part of the day was when I was done with my last

class and could head out and do whatever I wanted. Most of the time, I headed to the abandoned house at the edge of town. The grass was overgrown, and the building looked like it would fall at any minute, but Lars and I loved that place. We would crawl through the back window and hang out for the day.

Nobody bothered us—no Mikhail. No parents. Just us, the house, and the quiet.

According to the rumor mill, it used to be a gallery owned by a strange woman. When we first entered the place, we tried to check all the rooms, but everything was locked. We couldn't break down the doors or wedge them open, so we eventually gave up and only hung out in the foyer.

Today was not one of the days I could go, though. I had to finish some homework for Ms. Lyle's Creative Composition class. As my class ended, I gathered my books, talked to some friends, and made my way home. The last two classes of the day were boring, so I decided to skip them.

“Jonathan! Jonathan!” Lars called out. He ran up to me just behind the building of my Creative Composition class and gasped for breath. “I've been looking for you! The professors are on a witch hunt. They're asking everybody where you are. I don't know what it's about, but they don't look happy. Well, they're more unhappy than what they look like when they're usually looking for you. You better get out of here!”

They seemed to blame me for everything wrong around here. Not sure why.

In the distance, the dean and a couple of professors were already walking toward me. There was no use in hiding.

So, I waited.

Whatever they wanted, I could convince them they were wrong. It was easy to fool them because I had done it before.

As the dean walked over, he was definitely not happy. However, this wasn't his usual look when he was trying to find me. There was a sadness in his eyes, and the other two professors had the same look.

"Jonathan, have you got a minute? I need to speak with you," the dean said quietly. "You're not in trouble. Just something I need to talk to you about. Something's happened."

"Uh... sure." I looked around, and the other professors avoided my gaze. This wasn't like them at all. There was no yelling, just the quiet voice of the dean. I didn't like how this was going. On the outside, I appeared calm but had an unsettling feeling in my stomach.

"It's your dad," he said when we stepped over to the other side of the corner. "There's been an accident near Cedar Bog. He was helping some searchers look for a small child when he was...he was attacked by something. Nobody knew what it was, but he'd been dragged under the water before they could

get to him. They tried searching but didn't find anything. We're...we're pretty sure he's gone." He hesitated. "I'm so sorry. I wish this hadn't happened."

I froze. Numb.

I didn't know how to respond. Although my father and I no longer had a good relationship, he was still my father. I should have felt...anything. But I didn't.

"If there's anything we can do, please let us know," the dean said.

"Thanks," I said, leaning against the building. "I'll be okay."

Numbingly, I turned around and started walking home.

Lars soon joined me. "You okay? What did they say?" he asked in a worried tone.

"My father's gone," I said in a steady tone. "Something dragged him under the water at Cedar Bog. Look. I don't want to talk right now. I need to get home. I'll see you tomorrow."

I left Lars just standing there.

When my house stood before me, it felt different—lifeless. The old tree and broken swing seemed to mock me, reminding me that life had a way of changing—and never for the good.

Fine. I could handle it just like I had handled everything when my mom passed. It was not like my father did anything for

me.

Inside, it felt cold.

On the way to my bedroom, I noticed a red and black envelope on the dining room table—the same table where I ignored my father every morning. It was from the Gallery of Nightmares and addressed to me. I had no idea what the gallery was since my father always changed the topic when anyone talked about it. All I knew was that it was someplace I wasn't allowed to go.

Inside, the note read, *“In accordance with your mother’s wishes, Dahlia Stromberg, you, Jonathan Stromberg, are to take immediate ownership of the Gallery of Nightmares at 101 Theon Lane. Her wish is that you restore the gallery to its glory and aid the community through its artwork. When entering the building, please bring this note. It will grant you access to the rooms you never could have entered.”*



## Gallery of Nightmares

---

---

What a weird note. It didn't look like any legal document I'd ever seen. At 101 Theon Lane? That was the abandoned house! But... access to the other rooms? I didn't find a key in the envelope, so I wasn't sure how to get into those locked rooms.

I wondered if this was even legal.

Still, I grabbed the note and headed over there only to discover that... it was no longer decayed. The parking lot on the side and the walkway toward the house were newly paved, and the grass had been recently mowed. All the windows were fixed, and a new wrought iron gate now surrounded the entire gallery.

“What the... ?”

How did it get repaired so quickly? I was just here several days ago. Did someone buy the place and start renovating it? If so, why did I get the letter saying I was the new owner?

Caw.

Caw.

A small raven cried out as it sat on the ornate, tall, black, closed gate in front of the gallery.

Just beyond the gate, I thought I saw shadows of people among the trees surrounding the gallery and the front door. Tall, thin people with extremely long arms and hands. They looked like emaciated gorillas, their arms dragging on the ground, and they constantly moved and melded with one another. It must have been my imagination.

Caw.

The raven cried out one more time and flew off.

With a soft click, the tall, black, ornate gate in front of me swung open.

I stared at the front door, wondering if I should go in. What did all this mean? What were those weird shadows? Would the inside be in perfect order? I wondered if I could sell the property now that it had been fixed up. I had no clue who did the work, but I was sure it would go for a good price in today's market.

I could then start over in a new town. Naturally, Lars would want to come with me.

I opened the door and realized... that nothing had changed inside. The windows were repaired, but that was all. The main entryway was as decayed as before. Random spiders scurried near the baseboards or on their cobwebs that covered holes in the walls. Gothic wallpaper peeled away from some walls, and paint was cracked or faded on others.



The chandelier, though, looked more ominous but I loved it. Every time I came here, I couldn't help staring at it. It was made of skulls that shed a dull light over the entire entryway. Small points of light within the eye sockets twinkled, and I got the impression that it was watching me and deciding if I should be allowed to stay.

I only realized I was still carrying the note when my fingers tingled as it evaporated into a black mist. The mist flowed throughout the foyer, under the doors of many first-level rooms, and then up the staircase. The clicking of opening doors reverberated throughout the whole gallery. Then silence.

Excitement and fear grabbed a hold of me. Lars and I had talked about what could be in the rooms. Mostly hidden treasures, dead bodies—we *were* in a decayed gothic building full of cobwebs, spiders, and who knows what—or, more realistically, nothing: just dust, spiderwebs, and torn wallpaper.

Of all the locked rooms in the building, we were especially curious about one on the second floor, which had a broken sign that said “Shadow Nook.” With a shaking hand, I stepped up the stairs and turned the doorknob on the door to the Shadow Nook.

Inside the room, there were three paintings on the wall and a soft red velvet-covered bench in the center. The walls were already painted, and no cobwebs were present. The ceiling glowed with a soft white light that lit up the paintings and the

bench. The room felt cool as if warmth had never really taken a foothold. Unlike the main foyer, this room needed no work and another note was on the cushioned bench.

I carefully picked up the note and read, *“Welcome to the Shadow Nook. Concentrate on the first painting, and you will enter the world of Caelith. You cannot be harmed when you are in the paintings. Once your story is complete, you will be returned to this bench safe and sound. Be warned that expectations and reality are rarely the same.”*

I took a deep breath and focused on the first painting...





## A Wish Fulfilled

---

---

I don't remember everything that happened, but I do remember a calmness as air raced around me. The brief look of horror on my friends' faces at the top of the cliff told me everything I needed to know.

That handstand at the cliff's edge wasn't one of my better ideas.

You know... you would think that falling off a cliff would be fast but it wasn't. It felt like an eternity.

No panic. No urgency. Just calmness.

My life didn't flash before me.

I remember the sensation of falling and wondering why it was taking so long to hit the bottom. Was I flying? Did I have powers that I didn't know about? Would I survive this fall?

Darkness eventually surrounded me, and I was no longer falling, but I wasn't touching the ground either. It was like I was floating in an ocean of black water—except I couldn't feel the water. As I moved my hands down to feel my body, there was no sensation of movement or even touch. Only a coldness permeated my soul.

I hoped that this wasn't death because I didn't believe I could

survive that long with only my thoughts. Would I be stuck here? Is this like a standby area before I entered heaven, hell, or another form of the afterlife? I didn't believe in any of those places. Is this my life now?

I tried screaming, but no sound came out. How long had I been here? Hours? Days? Years? No way to tell. But there was a good chance that, eventually, I'd go mad and secretly pray that I hadn't already done so.

With a bright flash, the darkness became lighter. Shades of gray replaced the inky darkness, and muffled sounds lingered in the distance. They were faint but present. Actual light and sound! Soft blankets curled beneath my hands! I could feel my body again!

I slowly opened my eyes—I could feel them opening!—and looked around. The white room was still a bit blurry and dark, but it wasn't like the darkness where I had been floating. It appeared as if light bathed the room, but I knew that wasn't so.

A female glared at me in the corner of the room with her arms crossed. Her skin was slightly dark green with patches of blackness and broken wings. Tattered skin hung from the stubs of her wings and disappeared into the darkness. Scars covered her face and body, and she was *not* happy to see me. Yet, as I focused more on her face, she disappeared.

I wonder who she was.

“You’re awake! You’re awake!” the healer cried as she entered the room. “Don’t worry. The confusion is to be expected. You’ve been in a Death State for five months! We were hoping but never thought you would wake this soon!”

She called to the next room near my bed, and two other healers rushed in.

I tried to look around, but my body didn’t respond. “Where... am..... I?” I croaked out.

“Shh... Don’t talk. You’re at the Medini Infirmary in Edlowe. You were brought here after your fall. Just rest now, and we’ll get you in better shape.”

I looked into the healers’ faces and saw their teeth rot and fall out. *No! Not again!* Their hair became brittle and straggly, and large clumps dropped onto the floor. The longer I looked, the more their soft skin turned into grey ash and dust.

The visions had returned, but I couldn’t stop them. I closed my eyes abruptly and slowly opened them. Everything returned to normal.

“Are you okay?” The nearest healer asked while checking my vitals.

“Yeah,” I said. “Just thought I saw something. I’m fine. Just tired.”

She laid a glowing ShadowMyths card on my chest, recited a

couple of inaudible words, and the card melted into my body. I'd seen street performers using similar cards, but it never occurred to me that healers would also use them. Made sense. I could feel my body getting warmer as the card melted.

“Just relax. This will help you sleep more easily. We'll be back in a little bit to check up on you.”

As everything faded once more, the green-skinned woman appeared again. Nobody else seemed to notice her, though. Probably my imagination.

For the next month, the scarred woman reappeared in the corner of my room every night and she always stood there, glaring at me as black ooze dripped out of the scars on her body and face. I had gotten used to her look, but not that she kept showing up. Whenever I asked an attendant about her, they never saw the scarred woman. They kept repeating that it must be just a side effect of the medication—nothing to worry about.

Eventually, they released me and sent me home with an in-home caregiver. I was hopeful that the scarred woman would only be in the hospital and would now leave me alone.

I was wrong.

At night, she appeared at the foot of my bed, and every time I screamed, my caregiver would burst into the room, look around, and tell me nothing was there. Eventually, my calls for help were ignored. I guess I had cried wolf too many



times.

On the nights when my caregiver didn't show up, the woman at the foot of my bed spread her broken wings, and an inky shadow washed over me. The same nothingness I had felt before I woke up in the hospital. It was cold and made me feel more alone than anything I'd ever known.

One night, she was at the edge of my bed, like usual, but this time, I didn't scream. Just waited for the darkness to take over. I don't know how many times my screams had been ignored, and the cold nothingness had taken over, but it barely registered anymore. Instead of the shadows covering me, her claws scraped against the bed frame as she climbed onto it.



---

---

She perched on the edge of the bed frame as if she were a bird deciding whether to eat a helpless worm. The thick tattered wings unfolded, and razor-sharp feathers glinted in the light. Occasionally, a feather scraped against the bed frame's wood, and I could easily imagine how she could tear me apart.

I tried to move away towards the bed's headboard, but fear froze my body. All I saw was her scarred face, the edges of her wings, and the ooze that dripped onto the bed.

After tilting her head from side to side, she crawled onto the bed—towards me. Her mouth opened impossibly wide, and insects of every form flowed out! Caterpillars. Ants. Roaches. Centipedes! The insects mixed in with the ooze that still dripped from her wings and scars.

Large taloned hands formed out of the sides of my bed. Hands! Where did they come from? They held my arms and legs down. Even more hands appeared from the edges of my pillow and held my head down. Some clamped over my mouth, and others forced my eyes open. I fought against their holds and tried to scream, but it was too late. There was nothing I could do other than watch her crawl toward me, vomiting insects and dripping black ooze.

When she finally got close enough, she spoke in a hoarse voice that smelled of decayed earth and rot. "Why have you

summoned me every night? What do you want?”

With a flick of her finger, the hands around my mouth dissolved into thick oily smoke and flowed off the sides of my pillow.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, my voice shaky. “I have no idea who you are! I didn’t summon you!”

Sniffing the air around her, she glared at me. “I’m the angel of mercy. In the middle of the night, *you* always summon *me*. Why? What do you want?”

“Angel of mercy? You’re not her! She is supposed to be beautiful and kind-looking! Bathing the room in her glorious light! You’re a demon!”

“I am who I am.” Her voice stayed calm. “Answer my question, or I will rip the answer out of you. Slowly. So very slowly.”

“A friend told me about you,” I muttered, slowly putting what I knew about her together. “All my life, I’ve seen things decay. Not a lot. Just enough. But ever since I came out of the Death State, it’s been getting worse. *Everything* is decaying. When I see babies, I see them grow, age, and die. Same with every person I look at. Their eyes fall out. Their skin grows sallow and cracks. Open sores erupt from their bodies. Flowers. Plants. Buildings. Everything. All I see is death and decay. You’ve got to help me!”

The hands around my eyes dissolved as tears fell from my

eyes.

“Please! You have to help me. I don’t want to see that anymore.”

She simply stared at me for a long time. “I can help you,” she muttered after a while. “However, there is a price for my services. Are you willing to pay?”

“Absolutely! I’d do anything!”

With a smile, she gently leaned over and kissed my forehead. The kiss burned like nothing I’d ever felt, and the smell of charred flesh filled the room. The insects, ooze, and hands all dissolved in an instant.

She returned to the edge of the bed. “Shall we begin? Remember. You agreed to this.”



---

---

She looked up to the ceiling and began to chant.

*Naloth Neek Sect Shibach*

*Naloth Neek Sect Shibala*

*Tok Seth Noch*

The words repeated over and over again

*From the heart of darkness, Shibach, show yourself.*

*Payment shall be made. Payment shall be given.*

*This for me. Next for you.*

*Naloth Neek Sect Shibach*

*Naloth Neek Sect Shibala*

*Tok Seth Noch*

Black ooze erupted from her eyes, body, and wings, and the thick ichor flowed toward the ceiling and clung to every inch of it. Once complete, the ceiling looked like a lake of darkness.

As her chanting continued, the room grew dimmer and dimmer. Ice formed at the ceiling's edges and worked its way

down the walls. The slight crackling sound got louder and louder, and I could see my breath. Uncontrollably, I shivered.

A giant skull emerged from the ceiling pool overhead, and with a quick flap of her wings, she flew up and clung to it. Her wings held her in place as she kissed the forehead of the skull.

She screamed as the ooze flowed off of her body and into the skull's eye sockets. The more she melted into the ceiling, the more human she appeared. Her sores and scars disappeared, and her body decayed.

Then, she was gone.

After some time, she crawled out of the skull's left eye socket with fully formed wings and no scars. From what I saw with her back to me, her body was as black as ever but fully healed. Still clinging to the skull on the ceiling, she twisted her head like an owl and fully faced me.

Her face had a wicked grin as black ooze fell from her eyes and hair. It was thick as oil and smelled of carrion, and the first droplets fell onto my chest, neck, and face. Intense pain burned those areas as more and more ichor dropped to cause even more agony. The smell of charred flesh was sickening, but the sores healed as quickly as they appeared.

It felt like heavy, concentrated rain, and I tried to move my head out of the way, but hands appeared from the edge of my pillows again and held me in place. More hands appeared from the edge of my bed and held the rest of me down.



The ooze flowed down my throat and coated my eyes, and my vision blurred as I tried to spit it out of my mouth. I couldn't even close my mouth because taloned hands forced them open. Sensations of gagging, pain, and burning overwhelmed me.

Eventually, everything stopped.

The angel of mercy dropped from the ceiling, or at least, I was pretty sure it was her. Things were getting harder to see. She landed beside my bed, and the hands holding my head and body dissolved. The skull on the ceiling and the ice on the walls receded while an intense darkness covered most of the room.

Something was wrong. No more ooze coated my mouth, but... Something... My stomach! There was something in my stomach! Whatever was in there forced it to grow bigger and bigger. Tighter and tighter. Under my skin, I could see the outline of hands and... Was that a face? What was happening!?

I tried to scream, but all I could do was gag. And the gagging wouldn't stop. The thing in my stomach was coming up, and I couldn't stop it. Ooze poured out of my mouth, burning me, and fell onto the bed beside me. Whatever came up was mixed with dead roaches and other insects.

The room got even more blurry.

My jaw dislocated as I vomited. A cry came from somewhere

in front of me. A tiny baby about the size of my fist: it was perfectly formed but smaller than usual.

From the side of my bed, a dark shape I was sure was the angel of mercy, picked up the baby and cradled them in her arms. “It’s okay, little one. You’re going to be okay. Shhhh... I’m here for you.” Her eyes then landed on me. “I have fulfilled your wish. You will no longer see dead and decaying things. And I will be back for three more children.”

She laughed as she faded into the darkness.

At this point, the entire room was pitch black. The coldness and smell of dirt were gone. But why was it still black? I felt my eyes. The burning ooze was no longer there. My hand reached out to the light ball on my nightstand, but it was already warm... the light ball was already on!

Nothing.

She fulfilled her promise. I no longer saw death and decay. I no longer saw anything.

## Back in the gallery...

---

---

What the...!

As I sat on a bench in the Shadow Nook, I last remembered the angel of mercy had blinded me. But as I glanced around, everything looked the same—except the frames of the paintings were empty. And the room was colder than before. I wasn't sure if that last part was because of what I had just gone through or because the temperature dropped. The soft lights above did nothing to warm me.

I had no idea how long I had been in the paintings. I barely noticed parchment papers and cards on the bench beside me as I scrambled to leave the room.

At the door, I looked back and could have sworn a tall, thin female was partially visible in the room's shadowed corner. Her smooth dark skin melted in and out of the shadows, and her slight grin unnerved me.

Before, I would have said it was my imagination. However, after all the weird things I had seen today, I wasn't so sure.

I stepped out of the room and into the hallway and glanced at my watch. Very little time had passed. Minutes. Not days or months since I had fallen into the void... Wait... Was that where I was?

I tried to recall what had happened, but my mind muddled. There was a woman with wings... Some black...ichor... I think. Maybe a child? No. That wasn't right... The woman... Wait. Was it a woman?

The more I tried to focus on what had happened, the less I remembered. Like thick oil slipping through my fingers. The memories only left a residue of feelings.

I should have finished checking out the rest of the gallery, but I couldn't. My mind kept thinking about what happened when I was in the Shadow Nook.

Curiosity got the better of me, and I opened the door again. The frames were still empty, but this time, I focused on the parchment papers and cards on the bench. The room was still so cold. I could see my breath as I walked over to pick the items up.

On the parchment, I read the title "A Wish Fulfilled." Below it, in dark red text, it read "Jonathan. You're the only one who can remove your pain."

Jonathan? How did it know my name... And what pain? My life was just the way I wanted it to be. My father was no longer around, and once I sold the gallery, I would have the funds to leave this town. Do whatever I wanted. My life was now my own.

Next to the parchment were three cards, the size of playing cards, and they showed the same images that were previously

in the frames. The room was too cold to hang out in, so I gathered them and returned to the hallway.

Walking the hall, I quickly scanned through the bundles of parchment. They told a story of the Angel of Mercy and darkness, which felt familiar. Very familiar. Was it from...? I turned back and tried to return to the room, but the door wouldn't budge. No matter how hard I turned the handle, I couldn't get back in.

Was that the only time I could have ever gotten into that room?

Rather than checking out the rest of the gallery, I stood still, too unsettled and didn't know why. A shadow near the end of the hallway sent a shiver down my spine, and for a moment, I thought it would jump out and get me. I suspected this discomfort had something to do with what had happened in the Shadow Nook. And possibly the long-armed shadows outside the gallery.

I couldn't explain it well, but I had to get out.

On the way back to my house, I was so distracted by my thoughts that I almost drove off the road. Just too many things had happened today that I didn't understand. My father was gone. The house I grew up in was now cold and empty. I inherited a gallery. I saw shadows that looked like people. I had missing memories of whatever had happened to me.

It was as if I had been swept up into a river current and had

no control over where I would end up.

At a stoplight, I checked my phone and saw several texts from Lars. He was wondering where I was and if I was okay.

I wanted to talk to him, but now wasn't the time. I had to sort out what was going on. And it had been a long day. Late. I was too tired to think. I just wanted to get home, crawl into bed, and sleep.

I stepped inside my house, dropped the parchments and cards on the dining room table, and headed to bed. Barely keeping my eyes open.

As I drifted to sleep, I saw my dad's sullen face, eating his breakfast at the dining table. The vision then shifted to my mom writing in her journal in the middle of the night. Finally, all of us were in front of our house. I was running around, fighting monsters. My dad laughed and chased me while my mom told us lunch was ready. As he tackled me, we both fell to the ground, and black mist flowed out of the base of a tree and covered me in darkness. I couldn't see my mom or dad anymore.

I was alone.

And I cried.

The last time I cried was when my dad told me that my mom was no longer with us. Ever since that day, I don't remember him ever smiling or laughing. It was obvious that she was the

only joy in his life.

Soon, the darkness within my nightmare faded like a fog clearing, revealing the images of the parchment and the red text. I grabbed my robe and headed toward the dining room. I stared at the parchments on the table, but I couldn't will my hand to pick up the first page.

The parchment cover read, "You're the only one who can remove your pain."

The words burned into my eyes as more tears flowed. A new darkness inside clouded my vision and threatened to swallow me. I felt colder and more detached from life than I had ever been.

*I'm the only one that can remove my pain.*

I'd been so cold to my father and most people for so long that I didn't know who I was. The more I thought about it, the more I realized this coldness was a coping mechanism. I'd seen the same thing in the many movies I had watched. I never realized that those people I tried to imitate were hiding something, too.

I needed to think more about it.

I grabbed a glass of water, crawled back into bed, and slept.

The following day, exhaustion weighed on my bones, but I felt better than I had in a long time. But there was no way I

could concentrate on my classes today. I skipped breakfast, dressed, grabbed a jacket, and drove to the gallery again.

As I easily opened the gate, I realized I hadn't locked up before I left, and now that I thought about it, I didn't even have a key... I'd have to get new locks installed. Once I got some paintings for the gallery, I wouldn't want anyone to steal them.

Upon entering the gallery, I ran up the stairs to the Shadow Nook and tried the doorknob once more. To see if—

It opened.

On the wall in front of the sofa hung three new paintings: a large monster with tendrils hanging from its mouth, a couple hugging with a large creature behind them, and, most disturbing, a dripping skull with eye sockets that brought chills to my spine. The room light illuminated them and the bench like before.

Should I sit and see what happens or check out the rest of the gallery?

My curiosity got the best of me once again. And I sat and focused on the new paintings...



## Sacramancy Cards



Everything that happened to Jonathan in *The Shadow Nook* was created using the Sacramancy Cards. The cards are used for Tarot/Oracle reading, DnD campaign idea generator, writing prompts, and therapy tools. The stories in this book were created by laying down cards in random order and seeing what happened.

## Biomagy Cards



The monsters Jonathan encountered in *The Shadow Nook* inhabit my fantasy world, Caelith (the world Jonathan enters). The Biomagy deck contains each creature's descriptions, interactions, combat, and attributes. Biomagy is the study of the world's creatures and how other races learn to communicate with one another.

Visit Gallery Gift Shop at [shadowmyths.com](http://shadowmyths.com)