

THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

THE SHADOW MYSTERY

The last thing that George Archer had said to Eddie was: 'Don't touch anything.' But obviously, this didn't count.

Eddie and George had been sorting through an unmarked crate in the vaults of the Department of Unclassified Artefacts. Or the cellar of the British Museum, as Eddie reminded George it really was. The huge underground storage area extended beneath the Great Court of the imposing Museum building. Very few people even knew it existed - but then very few people knew anything about the Department itself.

The Department of Unclassified Artefacts was where the authorities of the British Empire sent anything they did not understand, or that they wanted hidden away. No one knew quite what was there - even Sir William Protheroe, the Curator. That was why George spent most of his time working in the department opening unmarked crates and cataloguing their contents.

There were many catalogues already - large, dusky books of handwritten lists compiled by Sir William's mysterious predecessor Xavier Hemming. These needed checking too.

Eddie should have been at school. Since he had moved from the streets to George's spare room, he had also started at school. But as he reckoned he could now read and write reasonably well and he'd always been able to do sums (sort of), he didn't see any need to keep going. He was pretty sure that his teacher was just as happy for Eddie not to attend. So Eddie had told George that there was no school today and made some excuse. He had hoped to bunk off with some of the Workhouse kids, but George told him that no school didn't mean no work, and so here Eddie was.

Sitting on his own in the whitewashed vaults, watching the new electric lights that didn't shimmer and gutter like the old gas ones. Sir William had called George away 'for a few moments' - which could mean minutes or hours - and Eddie had been left behind and told: 'Don't touch anything.'

Not that Eddie intended to touch anything. He was a curious boy, but he knew from experience what dangers might be nailed up inside the crates and boxes. But 'Don't touch anything' surely did not mean he couldn't push that book back on to the shelf...

The book had been annoying Eddie ever since he noticed it. Just one more leather spine on a shelf packed with old, dusty books. The gold print had faded so that it was impossible to read. But one book - the annoying book - was sticking out. It was sticking out so far, it looked like it might actually topple off the shelf. It would probably have fallen already if it were not so tightly jammed between the other volumes.

So, certain in the knowledge that it could do no harm and didn't really count as 'touching', Eddie went over to the shelf, and pushed the book back into place. It slotted back with a satisfying 'thunk', and Eddie sat down on an old tea chest nearby.

It wasn't quite the same sound, but similar. There was no 'thunk' as it met the back of the shelf, but Eddie knew it was the sound of a book sliding. He looked back at the shelves - and saw that the book he had just pushed back in was sticking out again.

'What's up with you?' he said out loud. There must be something jammed behind the book - something that had pushed it forward again like a spring. Crumpled paper, or another book being crushed, or...

Eddie pulled the book from the shelf and pushed his fingers in between the books either side. He couldn't feel anything. So he pushed the book back once more. He watched it carefully, but it seemed settled in place. He was about to turn away again, when the book moved.

It slid very slowly, very evenly out. Frowning, Eddie pushed it back. This time he felt the pressure against his hand, as if the book was trying to escape. He let go - and the book slid right off the shelf and fell.

The book opened as it dropped, and lay on the stone floor. Several pages flapped and turned as if caught in a breeze. Except there was none.

'Stop it!' Eddie said.

He crouched down beside the book, about to close it and pick it up. But before he did, he let his eyes wander over the open page.

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**The Book of Shadows
LEgEnd tells of a book wherein could be
traPPed the very soul and essence of a
person.**

This is that book.

I am the Book of Shadows.

**Read within My pagEs the plight of the
trapped. See the letters that form the
names of the wrong-doers, the murderers
and assassins who have been trapped,
their very essence reduced to the dark-
ness of the printed word.**

**Read their names. Read them often. For
if their names be not read at least once
a Century, they may break their paper
bonds and rise as shadows from the page
prisons. If a shadow of a dark soul
shOuld eScapE, binD it again quickly. Or
else, it will be free to visit death and
destruction upon the world once more.**

Eddie shivered as he read the page. He was about to pick up the book, when a mist seemed to rise from the paper - a dark mist, like smoke curling up from the yellowed page. It hung in the air, just in front of Eddie, as if watching him.

Nervously, Eddie reached out a finger and poked at the mist. It swirled away at his touch, like rippling water. Then it seemed to gather itself once more - coalescing, solidifying...A shadowy figure stood in front of Eddie.

He grabbed the book, and backed away.

'What are you?' Eddie gasped. 'Where did you come from?'

He turned suddenly, startled by a noise from behind. Sir William Protheroe was standing there, together with George. Both of them were looking past Eddie at the dark, shadowy form.

'I didn't touch anything,' Eddie said quickly. 'Well, nothing much. Just a book.' He held it up for them to see.

'What is that?' George asked in a hushed voice.

The answer came from the shadow itself - a deep rumble of laughter. The sound of it chilled Eddie to the bone. Nothing that hadn't come from the depths of Hell itself could make a noise like that.

George grabbed the book from Eddie and scanned the page. 'We have to banish it,' he said. 'And to do that, we need to know the thing's name.' He looked up at Sir William. 'How can we ever guess its name?'

Sir William shook his head, sending his mass of white hair into a frenzy. He took the book from George. 'Let me see what it says.'

'I am free again,' the smoky shadow intoned in a deep, booming voice. The laughter rumbled again like thunder. 'Free to destroy, to kill. Free!'

'It's not my fault,' Eddie said quickly. 'It was the book.'

'I told you not to touch anything,' George told him. 'Now look what you've been and gone and done. I can't leave you alone for five minutes, can I?'

Sir William held up his hand for silence. 'Nothing is remedied by arguing,' he said quietly.

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'No remedy!' the shadowy form boomed. It was getting darker, deeper, more solid. 'You cannot banish me back to the pages of that prison.'

'Oh I wouldn't be so sure of that,' Sir William said. Eddie hoped he was as confident as he sounded. 'There's a standard banishing incantation here, and we just need to add your name. Now, are you going to tell me what it is, or do I have to work it out for myself, hmm?'

Laughter rolled again, echoing off the whitewashed brick walls. Arms of deep darkness reached out towards Eddie and his friends.

'Yes,' Sir William said, apparently unperturbed. 'That all seems simple enough.' He held out the book, and said in a voice steeped with authority: 'Begone, creature of darkness. I banish you, once more to the realm of shadows.'

The laughter was getting louder. The darkness closed round Eddie, and he could feel it dragging his strength from his body.

Sir William's voice was muffled and distant: 'Return to the page of your prison, bound forever within this Book of Shadows by your secret name...'. The laughter echoed all through Eddie's body. He twisted and struggled but could not break free of it. Until he heard Sir William say the creature's name - the name of the man it had once been.

Then, abruptly, the darkness was gone. Eddie fell gasping to his knees. 'How did you know?'

In answer, Sir William held the book out for Eddie and George to see.

**The Book of Shadows
LEgEnd tells of a book wherein could be
traP ed the very soul and essence of a p
rson.**

This is hat book.

I am the Book of Shadows.

**R ad within My pagEs the plight of the t
apped. See the letters that form the
names of the wrong-doers, the murderers
and assassins who have been trapped,
their very essence reduced to the darkne
s of the printed word.**

**Read their na es. Read them often. For
f their names be not read at least once a
Century, they may break their paper bonds
and rise as shadows from the page pris-
ons. If a shadow of a dark souL shOuId
eScapE, binD it again quickly. Or else,
i will be free to visit deat and de-
struction upon the world once more.**

The print seemed to shimmer. A dark mist coated the paper for the briefest moment. Then it was gone, leaving the page again as Eddie had first seen it.

Sir William snapped the book shut and returned it to the shelf. Eddie thought he saw the book tremble, as if something trapped inside it were trying desperately to break free. He reached out towards it, hesitant and afraid.

His hand stopped. Sir William had caught hold of Eddie's wrist. 'Best to leave it well alone, I think.'

'Like I said, don't touch,' George told him.

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They all turned at the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs. Liz Oldfield stepped into the vault.

'I thought I might find you all down here,' she said. 'You are supposed to be waiting for me in your office, George. And then taking me to the theatre to see *The Mikado* at the Savoy Theatre.'

George was at once apologetic. He hurried to escort Liz back up to the Museum, leaving Eddie and Sir William to smile knowingly at his hasty departure.

'What it is to be young,' Sir William said, clapping Eddie on the shoulder. 'Make the most of it, won't you, Eddie.'

But Eddie wasn't listening. He was watching George's shadow as it hesitated in the doorway. It hesitated for just a second, in a way that George himself did not. Then, like smoke, it was gone.

THE QUESTION – CHALLENGE QUESTION/PUZZLE

MAIN QUESTION: WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE SHADOW CREATURE?

SECONDARY QUESTION: WHAT OTHER CLUE IS THERE ON THE PAGE OF THE BOOK THAT MIGHT HAVE WARNED EDDIE OF DANGER?

PRIZE!

- 1 - SIGNED COPIES OF SEVERAL OF JUSTIN'S BOOKS.
- 2 – AN INTERVIEW WITH JUSTIN – EITHER BY EMAIL, OR IN PERSON IF A SCHOOL VISIT CAN BE ARRANGED.

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