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# SHADEBORN

THE BOOK OF SHADE

1  
VOLUME



# PROLOGUE

All she knew was earth. Earth crumbling in to make the black dream blacker. Earth between her toes, enveloping them, pulling her sinking body into the shadows beneath her feet. Earth that surrounded her, turning her light brown hair to the colour of the grave. The dirt grew damper, freezing where it caked her skin, like she was falling into some great, dark sinkhole. The way back to the surface moved farther and farther from her as she strove for it. Her hands wouldn't move in the way that she commanded, fingers failing to scoop or climb or even push the dirt from gathering at her face. It always gathered there to cloud her view. To choke her. To fill her senses until there was nothing left to feel but earth.



The worst part of the nightmare was the moment where she realized that it *was* a nightmare, and tried to make herself wake up. She had had this dream before, and it always finished the same way. The earth would make it to her throat and clamp it shut, leaving her to wake in the fleeting seconds before her dream-self died. She fought it every time, knowing that there was a real world out there that she was part of, and every time she lost. She lost to those thoughts of being swallowed whole by those great black mounds of terra firma, even though they were nothing but a disturbed fantasy that she somehow couldn't shake.

In the darkness of the dream, something white flashed. It wasn't unusual for her to see apparitions in the earth before it killed her, but this one was more of a blur than usual. A spectrum of other colours rotated in the flash – white, then black, then blue – but none of them had any real shape. The flash was there, for a



few seconds at a time, until the earth finally forced its crushing pressure to her trachea, claiming her for her inevitable, terrifying fate. But then a hand took her shoulder, a firm contact she'd never felt before. That was something new. The dream was changing.

Her body shook, in that blurred unfeeling way that it does in dreams, until the earth had crumbled away to leave her floating in a wide, black space. The sensation of gentle waves arrived, rising from her feet until she was swimming in the nothingness. It was strange, but better than before. At least now, she could swim until she woke. The white something flashed again, as bright as lightning, and she swam towards it, her dream-weight so feather-light that she chased it with ease. As she closed on the light, the waves grew bigger, crashing into her from strange angles that didn't make sense to the tide. Soon the water was all



around her, the weight of it far greater than the heavy earth that had been its predecessor.

It was happening again. The crush of the new element took her by surprise and her mouth fell open, only to be filled with the cold and somehow thick volume of liquid. She tried to spit it out, but her jaw now refused to obey. Her hands and feet flailed uselessly as the water took its own path, coursing like a river down her windpipe to overflow her lungs. The heavy throbbing of her chest was unbearable, her ribs groaning and fit to buckle. The white something flashed once final time, as distant as a star now. She floated in the dark, her eyes struggling to stay open as the dream once again claimed her for dead.

She woke with a gasp. It made the other people sitting around her turn their heads, and the girl shrunk deeper into her seat. She clamped a hand over her heart, timing the rapid thuds from the ridiculous



nightmare. The fluorescent lights overhead and the monotonous chug-a-chug motion below told her that she was not in the blackness any more. She was on the train, where she'd been when sleep had gripped her. She dipped her head and rubbed her temples with a thumb and forefinger, the other hand still pressed to her chest.

*Get it together, Lily.*

*You're here, you're alive and you're fine.*

*Stop being such a chicken.*

*It was just a dream.*

Lily's heart gradually slowed to its regular rhythm. She took herself in by the reflection in the dark train window with a groan. Her light brown hair was a total bird's nest, one that she instantly set to work calming down. Her cheeks were more plump and rosier than ever from her impromptu nap, her



almond eyes narrow and puffed up. Lily rubbed her face all over with cold, clammy hands, trying to push the nightmare out with every touch. She reapplied her smudged lip gloss and fluffed up her hair, hoping to get away with a ‘hot mess’ kind of look if she happened to meet any of her future classmates when she reached Piketon Station.

She checked herself out again, sighing. The ‘mess’ part was accurate, at least.





## **Freshers**

She'd had a tenner in her pocket, courtesy of Mum, to save herself the hassle of lugging a suitcase and several bags through the new town. But the taxi to her dormitory had cost nearly fifteen quid, and the driver had still dumped her at the back entrance to the building instead of the front. It was a heave to take her things to the reception desk of the dormitory block, only to be told that her room wasn't ready and she'd have to leave everything downstairs in storage for now. That was overflowing, and Lily could only hope that her stuff would still be there, and in one piece, by the time she got back later.

*In the red already. Good start.*



Lily grumbled as she stomped out of the block, her yellow dolly shoes scratching like sandpaper against the cheap lino floor. She emerged into a cloudy afternoon, and onto a patch of grass between a hell of a lot of similar-looking buildings. The ache from pulling all her gear around shifted into her neck as she craned and twisted to scan them. Lily's head spun as she gazed around, so she centred herself and pulled her phone from her pocket.

Maps were not usually her friend, much less computerized ones. The phone itself was perfectly capable of loading the street-map service and, for any other person that tried it, it usually did. But when Lily touched the screen, it always flickered and fitted like it had suddenly forgotten how to perform all basic functions. She shook the mistreated phone, like she always did when it wouldn't play ball, eventually letting loose a wave of abuse, pent up from the



daylight robbery of the rip-off merchant who had driven her taxi.

“Stupid thing!” She gave the flickering screen another shake. “All I want is to know the way to West Park Hall. But that’s too hard for you, isn’t it? Piece of junk!”

There was a little gasp nearby. Lily’s lips clamped shut, her cheeks warming.

“West Park Hall? I have a map somewhere!”

Lily looked up to see that a girl about her own age had joined her on the grass during her rant. She was about to say, “No, that’s okay”, so that she could escape before her face turned totally Man-United red, but this new girl was already fumbling in her bag for the information. Lily watched the process of her cheerful-yet-frantic search, and it calmed her own frustrations to watch someone else’s. Slowly, a small



smile crept into the corner of Lily's lip as the new girl tore away into her bag with ever-increasing enthusiasm.

She was Indian, with curly black hair to her shoulders that was enviably shiny. The ringlets fell about her heart-shaped face, swaying to and fro as she explored the unreachable depths of her brand-new Vans backpack. She peered into it with brown eyes far darker than Lily's own, and they were framed with a pair of stylish Gok Wan glasses. But on the girl's wrist was a tatty old sweatband bearing the anarchy 'A' of the punk movement, and she wore denim on denim, a jacket and jeans. According to every magazine Lily had read in high school, that was a cardinal sin, yet the silky top underneath the jacket was seriously cute. Lily had just reached the sight of the girl's battered red Converse sneakers when she finally pulled a handful of crumpled paper from her



bag. The girl beamed, proffering the map, and Lily beamed back automatically.

“I’m Jazzy, by the way. Jazmine Dama.”

“Lily Coltrane.” She gave the other girl a nod.

Jazzy’s mouth dropped open a little. “No way. Hang on a tic.”

She was suddenly back in her backpack, only this time her previous upturn had left the rest of her ruined papers on the surface. Jazzy fished out a green sheet and waved it at Lily until she took hold of it.

“Look, look!” Jazzy pointed at the sheet. “L. Coltrane. That’s you right? We’re roomies! Did you just drop your stuff off?”

She was still asking multiple questions as Lily scanned the paper. Jazzy had all the registration details that Lily herself needed to get, but at least now



she knew her room number for when she got back to the luggage store.

*Lucky 13. Aren't you starting off well?*

Okay, so some of her typical bad luck had followed her to campus so far, but Jazzy was a good omen. Lily wasn't alone any more, and that made a lot of difference to the shaking in her chest. There was only so long she could play it cool, when this was literally the first day of the rest of her life. Lily looked up at Jazzy and smiled. She kept it up until the other girl stopped talking.

“Sorry.” Jazzy tucked back a curl, grinning. “I get nervous.”

Lily put one hand to her hip. “Really? I hadn't noticed.” Jazzy's smile wavered, so Lily clapped a hand on the other girl's shoulder, and in a moment the grin was back. Lily returned the green sheet. “We're



going to be cool, you and me. Best roommates ever. Come and help me find this hall to register.”

Jazzy was visibly calmer as she uncrumpled the map.

During the endless line of boring queues at registration, Lily became more and more impressed with the cheerful bag of nerves that made up Jazzy Dama. She waited in line with Lily again, even though she'd already done her details and got all her forms, talking her head off about all the possibilities that the University of Piketon offered. Most of the ones Jazzy mentioned were academic – she was clearly not the sports and recreation type – but she was a warm, kind girl who admitted that she didn't know much about making friends the casual way. Lily preferred that in a roomie to some crazed party girl who'd be bringing a different bloke back every night, and hanging her bra on the bedroom door. All the



nightmarish visions of what her roommate might have been had slowly faded away, leaving her this short, shy girl with a winning smile and a mouth that didn't stop moving.

*It's getting better.*

Jazzy was wickedly indecisive about pretty much everything on the planet, so Lily made the move and demanded that they go straight to the Freshers' Fair to check out all the allegedly-amazing opportunities that awaited them. With the help of Lily's pristine new version of the campus map, they were able to walk with ease into what felt like a huge marketplace full of colourful banners and people shouting over others to be heard. There were a lot of sports teams in the first section, which the girls agreed to avoid, weaving through a herd of sweaty basketball players until they came upon the social section.



“Coming to Guttersnipes girls?” Someone shouted at them from a nearby table. “Best student club in town, and a permanent drink discount for Pike U cardholders.”

They stepped up to take a card each, if only to get the guy shouting to shut his mouth. Guttersnipes wasn't the most appealing name, but the photo-board next to the hawker did show a pretty nice-looking club with various shots of happy students, drunk out of their minds, filling the foreground.

“Are you much of drinker?” Jazzy asked as they looked at the board. Her nerves were back again, each word trembling as her eyes darted around the busy scene.

Lily shook her head. “Not with my mother.” She rolled her eyes. “She's proper strict. I haven't really got the taste for booze.”



“Yet.”

The man minding the stall winked at Lily, and for the first time, she really took in his slimy smile and dodgy eighties jacket. Taking Jazzy by the arm, Lily backed away casually with the idea of looking at another stall. They bypassed the free STD testing without anyone handing them a plastic bottle, and giggled all the way to the academic section. Here, Jazzy broke free of Lily’s grip to suddenly point at everything at once, like an excited toddler at the zoo. The collection of academic pursuits was fairly impressive, and much bigger than the other sections. The stall-minders here were working really hard to drum up interest and get people involved, and there were no dodgy winks or eighties jackets in sight. Neon-coloured leaflets were being distributed all over the place with short simple titles to grab you before



you could escape: **Chess Team, Book Club, Bridget Jones Society, Harry Potter Nerds Unite.**

“This place has everything.” Jazzy’s eyes were magnified in her lenses, and just as bright as her voice.

Lily laughed, punching a fist at the air. “Let’s go then, head first into the middle of the fray!”

As soon as they were into the mass of students and tables, a series of lime green leaflets filled Lily’s vision. Usually Lily ignored leaflet givers, largely because it meant not having to clean out her handbag quite so often, but the owner of these luminous sheets was worth a second look. And a third. Tall and tanned from a summer spent somewhere that was definitely not England, the young man’s shaggy blonde hair fell into his sea-green eyes with a carefree flop. He grinned with spotlessly white teeth, and there was a



cheeky quirk in his lip as his large, masculine hand passed Lily one of the garish flyers.

“Do you like books. girls?”

“Actually, I do.” Lily heard the surprise in her own voice, and she hoped the guy wouldn’t be insulted that he didn’t exactly look like a reader.

He opened his mouth, lips shaping a reply, but got cut off a millisecond later.

“I love books!” Jazzy stepped forward and took the flyer from him. She flipped it up like a newspaper, blocking the view of his face as she fanned it for Lily to examine with her. “Ooh! The Illustrious Minds Literary Society.”

Lily scanned the fancy title font, then took a sidestep. She looked up to find that the good-looking boy was still eyeing her with the same toothy smile as before. A strand of hair fell down into her face and



she pulled it back slowly, letting only the smallest of smiles creep onto her lips. The guy didn't stop grinning, his eye contact even with hers.

*Expert flirtatious move executed there, even if I do say so myself.*

“Sounds posh, this club.” Lily felt her words coming out breathy, her smile spreading despite her will to play it cool.

“Oh, it's proper posh.” The boy nodded, tipping her a wink. “Been going over a hundred years. We've got a budget and everything.”

“How about that?” Lily shot Jazzy a look. “A boy on a budget.”

The cute guy grinned again. “No, I mean we get socials, like trips and stuff. It's not just sitting in a room talking about books, although we do that too, once a week up at the Tower Block.”



He pointed to a very tall building, the roof of which poked out from behind some others in the middle distance. Lily glanced in the direction briefly, not entirely sure what she was looking at, but when she looked back, she found the boy had shifted a little closer to her. He handed her another leaflet, this time from the bottom of the pile. The motion of handing it over was specific and slow, so much so that Lily raised an eyebrow at him.

“You should come along to the Newbie Meet tomorrow.” He flicked his perfect hair away from his face with a little jerk. “Tell them Michael sent you.”

Lily put on a little pout, though her insides were tingling.

“I might do. Come on Jaz, let’s see what else there is to join.”



Jazzy followed in silence, still engrossed in all the other text on the society's leaflet. When they were far enough away, however, the girls both paused to glance back at the studly Michael, who was now handing out more leaflets to other girls passing by.

“He well fancied you.” Jazzy giggled. Lily mulled the fact over for a moment. They did seem to be vibing off each other, but maybe he was just like that with all the girls. Jazzy frowned. “Do you not like him?”

“We'll see.”

Lily tried to keep it casual again, but she broke into a wide grin as they walked away.



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