

Shadow Keys

I was always a bit jealous of my stepmother. Her classic, cool blonde looks. On the other hand, I could never suppress a shiver when she passed by. In our daily associations, I can't ever recall her saying more than five words to me. Not that she was any more forthcoming with her own children, and she certainly had a brood of them. When she took over the house, the decor starkened into black and white. She decorated with her own photographs, which were pretty good, but not as good as mine. Not that she was interested.

So it was something of a coup when I ran amok of the Shadow Man. If anything I merely wanted her to appreciate me. I should have known that was unlikely, but I tried and she was the first person I approached with my secret.

So now the tale of what led me to recognize the shadow keys. One has to know the right shape and size of them. They require careful handling and the placement can be tricky. Just the right spot or the door won't open. I can tell you, it's quite a shocking thing to see appear. A musty, scratched up fold down door. Just the kind we have going to the attic. And indeed that's where this led. Whose attic is a bit more difficult to explain. Let's get on to my visiting the park.

When I first saw *him*, I thought he must be a magus—dressed a bit like a Victorian undertaker, a perfect Mr. Vogler. He was studying the ground closely; I thought that he might be looking for a coin or a cigarette. However, his quarry turned out to be a near perfect circle about six inches in diameter. It was a shadow cast by a child's balloon. To my amazement he pinched it up allowing it to dangle between his thumb and forefinger. He strode over to the gazebo and lifted the shadow to the ceiling, which lapped it up like milk. There was a queer distortion and suddenly a door appeared. He pulled the cord and unfolded a ladder. He scampered up and the ladder promptly refolded, the door closed and there was nothing left of this bizarre spectacle.

From that day onward I haunted the park. I tried my best to pick up shadows but to no avail. I was picking at one I thought beautifully cast by a baby's head when long fingers pushed mine aside. It was he! He glanced at my face and then adroitly pinched the shadow. He promptly put it back and let me follow his example. I was able to do it! I invited him to my house. We have such lovely wide ceilings and for what better use?! And so I took my first journey through to the other side. It wasn't at all what I was expecting. When the door shut behind us, my eyes had to adjust to the gloom and cobwebs. It was an ancient space, wooden and vast. And it seemed to be full of piles upon piles of antiques, junk, and curious scientific instruments. One couldn't see far enough in any direction to find an end to it. My friend immediately plundered a nearby stack and pulled out something resembling an oscilloscope. Then he grabbed what appeared to be an old draft horse harness. As he took them both into his hands, they fused into one startling object. Securing this he picked up a handful of dust, patterned a curious symbol onto the floor, set it on fire and a door appeared. He motioned me through; I was back in my house, alone.

I was terribly excited and I immediately ran to my stepmother. I told her nearly everything. She barely batted an eye. The next day I caught her pinching shadows. By that evening she had disappeared, so I imagine she had succeeded. The only trouble was that she never returned. For you see, I hadn't told her how to get back.

Really, we were much happier without her.

It was only sometime later while strolling through a flea market that I noticed a strange exhibition of sculptures. One in particular caught my eye. If you can imagine a tricycle, a

Blickensderfer and a woman all fused together—that's awfully close to it. It was the woman I recognized.