



the
WITCH
of the
WICK


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A hunter on
his journey home
before the
light of dawn

The illustration shows a hunter in a dark cap and light-colored tunic with a dark vest, carrying a rifle on his back and holding a lit lantern. Two dogs are walking alongside him in a dark, wooded area.




Held his
lantern high
to find its
flame was
nearly gone.

The illustration shows a close-up of the hunter holding the lantern high. The flame is small and flickering. The background is dark, with the heads of the two dogs visible in the foreground.



Startled by
a rustling in
the brush, the
hunter turned

The illustration shows the hunter from a side profile, looking back over his shoulder. He is holding the lantern high, and the background is a dark, red-tinted forest.



And saw a
figure looming
in the darkness
of the wood.

The illustration shows the hunter looking towards a dark, shadowy figure standing in the distance. The figure is wearing a dark, hooded cloak. The background is a dark, red-tinted forest.




Good
hunter,

said the figure,
with a voice harsh
as a crow's

I am the
Witch's shadow,
and your wick is
burning low.

What will you
pay my mistress
in return for her
flame's spell?

I see from
your great
bounty that
your family's
eaten well.





The charm of
luck she cast
for me has kept
us all from
starving.

Long have
I considered
what I'll give
up in this
bargain.

A hunter's
dearest weapons
are his senses,
and his sight—


In return for
her charmed
candle, I will
give her my
right eye.



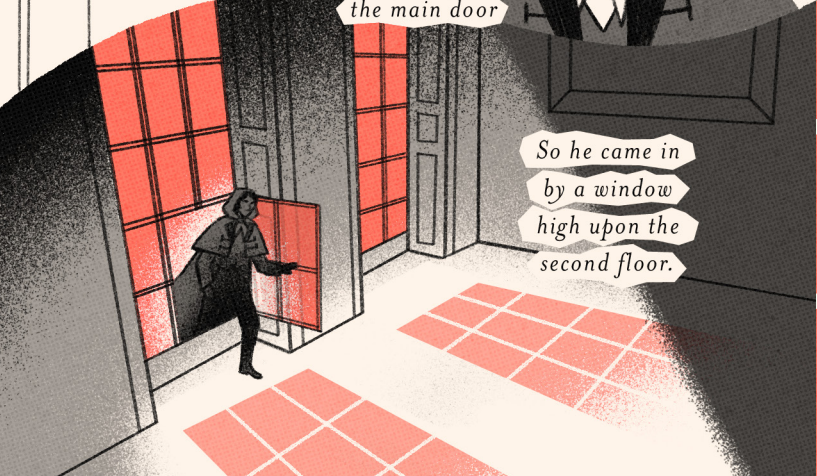


Away the shadow flew,
up through the city's quiet streets


Arriving at the gate of a great manor still asleep.



No footman came to answer when he knocked on the main door




So he came in by a window high upon the second floor.

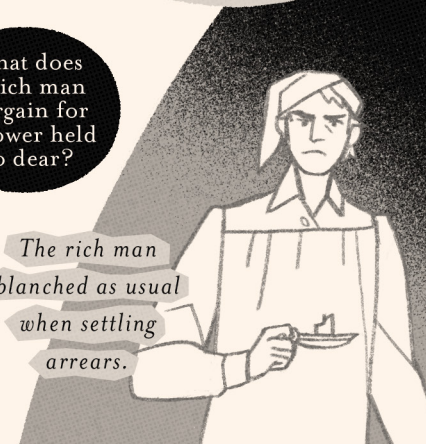


I am the Witch's shadow,
and your candle has gone out.


My mistress asks for payment—
let us settle your account.



What does a rich man bargain for a power held so dear?




The rich man blanched as usual when settling arrears.



To send her
servant calling
at this hour—
why, the gall!


Who is to say
the Witch's
magic helped
me after all?

My terms
were that,
once given, it
could not be
taken away.




That may
be true.

But still the
time has
come for you
to pay.




Then take
this copper
penny,

*said the
rich man,
smiling
now.*



You may
think its value
meager, but I
need not tell
you how

A single
coin spent
wisely can be
transformed
into wealth.



*The shadow
stared in
silence—
and
then said,*



*Very
well.*



At last the
Witch's shadow
reached a house
upon a hill.

A mother stood
there waiting
for him by the
window sill.



I know
why you
have come,

she said as
soon as he
appeared,



I saw the
candle
guttering

And knew
my time
was near.





I am the Witch's shadow,

he said softly with a bow.

I know, the mother answered,

And my mind is made up now.

Please have a seat—the coffee's hot. I'll get you a fresh cup.

My daughter left for town almost before the sun was up.



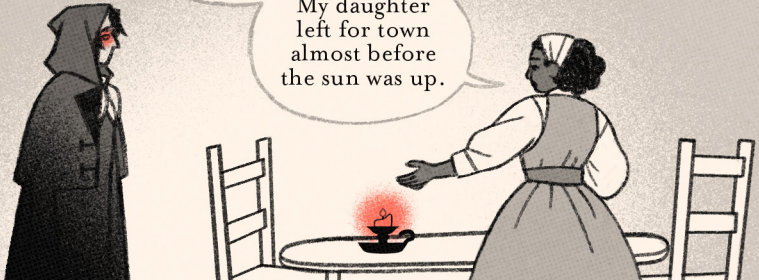
I begged the lady Witch to let my baby live, you see.

I watched this candle burn until my daughter turned sixteen.

How can one put a price upon the miracle she cast?

I have nothing to spare—

But then it came to me at last.





Take my treasured memories of my daughter's childhood—

Though I would live them all again, if I only could.



It breaks my heart to lose those cherished moments of her life,



But I will trade them willingly to see her grow and thrive.





The shadow
clasped her hand,
and then was
gone in the
same breath

Wishing he
could quell the
hollow feeling
in his chest.

Again he
crossed the city
toward a tower
tall and worn

There,
the Witch
was waiting
for her shadow
to return.



The Witch of
the Wick's
candlery glowed
bright with
magic's blaze

A hundred small
flames flickering
beneath her
watchful gaze.

Each candle was a
spell worked for an
undetermined fee.

I see
three spells
have been
repaid—

What have
you brought
for me?



The hunter paid you dearly with the sight of his right eye,

Knowing it a hardship he'd adapt to in some time.

The rich man had his power, and all he could afford

Were empty words and but a single coin from his great hoard.



An eye to feed a family, paid with certainty and grace.

A penny for some power paid by lying to my face.

I do not see the sense in it—these things do not compare!

My magic may be powerful,

But must it too be fair?



Ah, but then the mother's price surprised me most of all.

What she gave was not tangible, but part of her own soul.

The candle's flame illuminates the heart, and whims thereof—

But magic knows no difference between selfishness and love.



If fate deals you a bad hand—what would you pay to change the tide?

The value of that currency is for you to decide.

I am sorry to remind you, with your heart so full of doubt,

But you are my faithful shadow,

And your candle has gone out.



A human form, but for a night.

That is our daily deal.

Has the world of man so quickly worn out its appeal?

Have you had your question answered by the candle's spell?

I do not know, my mistress.

Perhaps I never will.



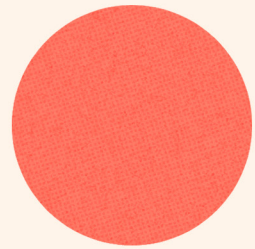
Well—
What will you pay me for my gift of a man's guise?

I return it all in full again, until tomorrow night.

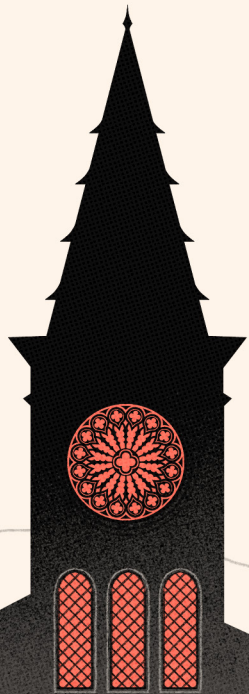
Restore me to my true form, black of feather, sharp of beak.

Perhaps you'll find your answer—





In tomorrow's
bright new wick.



*for Lindsey,
who helped me
with the verse*