

# THE WHISPERING GATE



Shadows of Blackwood Manor

CHRISTINE LORENZ

SALEM

ROWAN



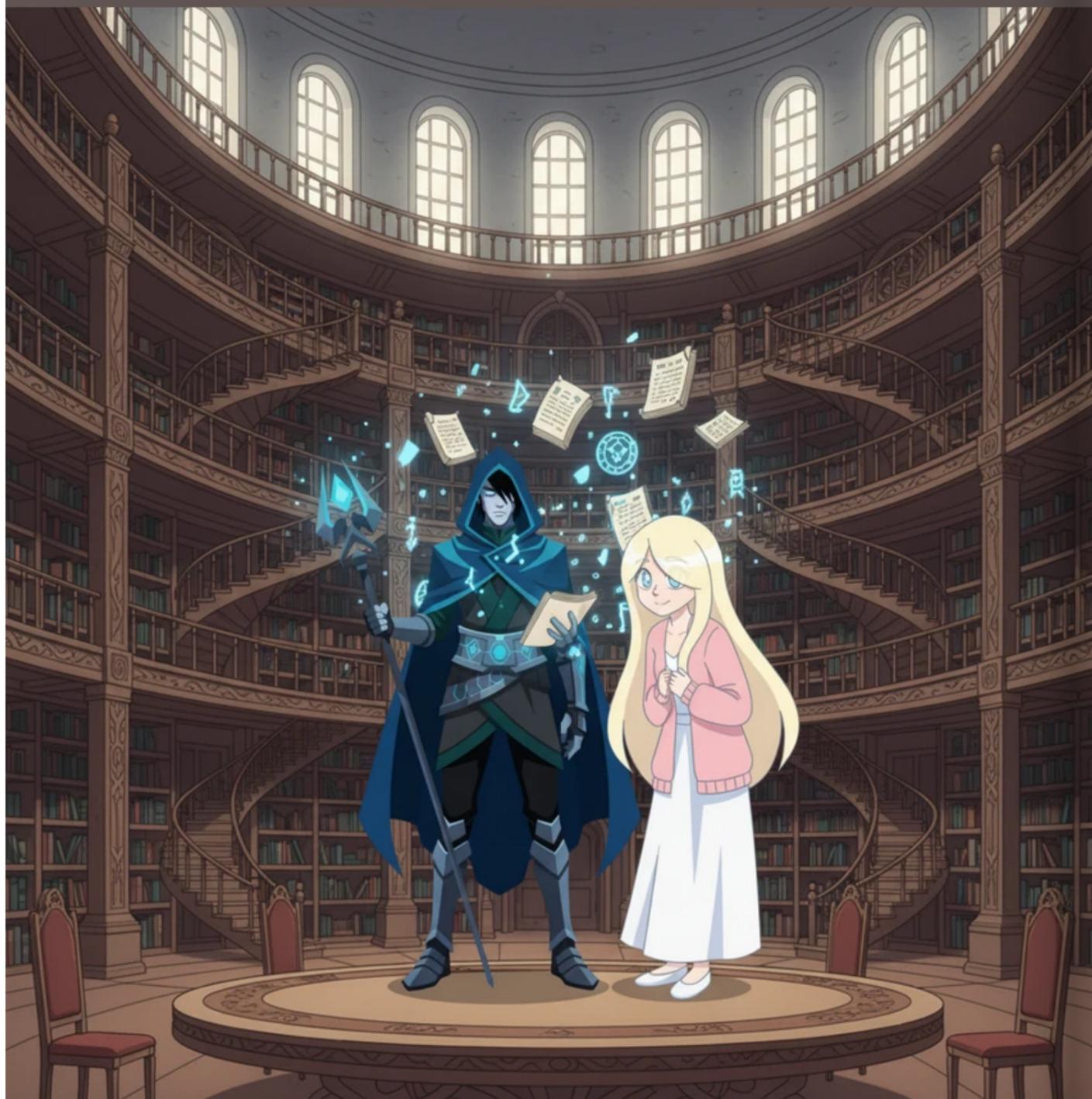
Salem and Rowan stand before the massive, rusted iron gates of Blackwood Manor, their breath hitching in the cold air. Salem adjusts her black headphones over her bun, while Rowan's blonde hair flutters in the unsettling breeze as they gaze at the looming estate.



The heavy gates creak open with a piercing groan, revealing a path choked with overgrown weeds and gnarled trees that seem to reach out for them. The girls walk side-by-side, Salem's sturdy Nike shoes crunching on the gravel while Rowan clutches her pink cardigan tightly against the sudden chill.



Inside the foyer, the air is thick with dust and the smell of ancient wood, illuminated only by a single, flickering chandelier. Shadows dance along the walls, making the grand, sweeping staircase look like the spine of a sleeping giant waiting to wake.



While exploring the vast, circular library, Salem finds an old, leather-bound ledger resting on a velvet pedestal, its pages filled with cryptic notes and dates. Rowan looks over her shoulder, her blue eyes wide with a mixture of intense curiosity and growing dread.



A sudden, sharp chill sweeps through the long hallway, causing the girls to stop in their tracks near a row of stern, life-sized portraits. Salem turns up the volume on her headphones to drown out the whispering wind, but the feeling of being watched by the painted eyes remains.



In one of the forgotten upstairs bedrooms, Rowan discovers an ornate silver music box that begins to play a haunting, slow melody the moment she touches it. The tinkling notes echo through the empty house, sounding far too loud in the oppressive, heavy silence of the manor.



The girls descend into the dark, stone-walled basement, where the air is damp and the walls are marked with strange, faded symbols. Salem's goth punk belt catches the light of their flashlight as they uncover a hidden door tucked behind a stack of rotted wooden crates.



As a violent thunderstorm erupts outside, the mansion groans and creaks under the pressure of the wind and lashing rain. Huddled together in the grand parlor, the girls realize they are not just caretakers, but witnesses to the house's restless and forgotten history.



## THE FIRST MEETING

Behind the hidden basement door, they find a forgotten sunroom filled with glass-encased roses and a beautiful, glowing locket that pulses with a soft, warm light. The eerie tension finally breaks as they realize the mansion was simply waiting for someone to acknowledge its lost and lonely stories.



When the sun finally rises, casting golden light through the stained-glass windows, Salem and Rowan share a tired but relieved smile. Though the house remains mysterious, their bond has proven stronger than any shadow lurking within the walls of Blackwood Manor.