

## A Journey Through Shadows

Lucy tumble through the shimmering portal that burst open in front of her. The known warmth and comfort of her village were gone; instead she found herself in a dark fiery land, where shadows danced and the rough terrain hurt her foot.

"Welcome to the Underworld," a voice echoed, smooth and haunting. From the mists stepped a figure in dark robes, their face shrouded in a hood. "I am Morwen, guide of lost souls. Few come here this early."

Lucy's heart raced. "I am not lost! I was meant to-" She stammered, remembering the ritual she had done. A desperate plea to the Spirits of the Ancients gone wrong had pulled her into this shadowy abyss, the underworld.

Morwen closed in on her with a big smile across his face. "The Underworld is not just a place of death but a realm of knowledge . What is it that you seek?"

"I seek knowledge," she replied, her voice clear and steady. "I want to communicate with the spirits, to learn about the past and the future."

"Knowledge comes with a price," Morwen said, murmuring low as she gestured to the fog that swirled. "You must face the Trials of the Shadow Realm. Only then will you see what you seek. Lucy nodded then, fuelled by a sense of determination. "I will face whatever challenges await."

### **\*\*Trial of Regret\*\***

The landscape shifted, and she was standing in front of a mirror that rippled like the surface of water. Reflected within were memories from her past-failures and regrets. She saw herself as a child, scared and alone after losing her mother and later as a young woman who had turned away from those who loved her.

"Face your regrets," Morwen ordered. "Acknowledge them."

Lucy stepped closer to the mirror; her heart was heavy. "I regret not appreciating the time I had with my mother... and the friends I pushed away." With each word, it felt like some weight had been taken off, and with every acknowledgement, the mirror began to shimmer and fade.

Acceptance is the first step to freedom," Morwen said, her voice softer now. The mirror dissolved into mist, revealing a dark forest ahead.

### **\*\*Trial of Fear\*\***

As she ventured deeper, the trees began to twist and contort, their branches reaching out like skeletal hands. Whispers filled the air, chilling her to the bone. Shadows merged, forming nightmarish figures-creatures born from her deepest fears.

"Face us!" they screamed, the sound of their voices like a choir. "You cannot escape!"

Lucy clenched her fists, remembering why she had come. "You are not real! You are only manifestations of my fear!" She inhaled deeply, and found the courage to keep going. "I will not be stopped by you!

With a battle cry, she burst forward, running through the shadows. The creatures shrieked loudly and dissolved into wisps of smoke; she was shaking but felt victorious.

"Well done," Morwen said, materializing beside her, below the treetops. "You have overcome your fears."

### **\*\*Trial of Truth\*\***

Before her, the final test lay in a large room with eerie lighting. There, at its centre, an orb glowed on its pedestal. "To know anything," Morwen said, "you have to face the fact of who you are.

As Lucy drew nearer to the orb, it surrounded her. She was standing at the head of roads, each one leading into a different possible future. Some were dark and disappointing, while others flared brightly, offering promises.

"To find your truth, you must make a choice," Morwen said. "What is most precious to you?"

Lucy closed her eyes. "I choose binding," she whispered, and in that instant, clarity swept over her. "I want to heal, be a bridge between the living and the spirits.

Light burst out of the orb, illuminating the chamber. Lucy felt a wave of warmth as knowledge coursed into her, filling her with wisdom and realization. Visions of ancient rituals and healing lore merged with her experiences, showing her the way to go.

When the light finally died away, Morwen stood before her, her face inscrutable. "You have passed the trials. The knowledge you sought is now yours to use."

Lucy felt like a weight was lifted off her shoulder. "Thank you, Morwen. I won't forget this gift." As she turned to leave, the Underworld shimmered back, and the shadows fell away. "Remember, Lucy, called Morwen after her, the Underworld is always at hand. You carry its lessons in your heart.

As a last flash of brilliance surrounded her, Lucy found herself whisked back to her village, all the familiar sights and sounds tumbling upon her. It was over. She had been changed by the experience, and she no longer felt like an outsider from the world around her; she had a new sense of purpose-to bridge the worlds of the living and of the spirits.

And thus, from the wisdom of the Underworld, she was guided to heal her community, and as a protector of life and death, forever bound with shadows that had been given to her and once frightened her.