

A decorative border of stylized leaves and small flowers surrounds the text. The border is composed of dark grey silhouettes of leaves and stems, with small white dots scattered throughout. The text is centered within this border.

THE
CITY
OF
LOST
DREAMERS

Also by Lisa Lueddecke

A Shiver of Snow and Sky
A Storm of Ice and Stars
The Forest of Ghosts and Bones

THE
CITY
OF
LOST
DREAMERS

LISA LUEDDECKE

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For my sisters,
Cynthia, Rebekah, Diana and Heidi.





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“The words ‘far, far away’ had always
a strange charm.”

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

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Prologue

From A History of Shard
by Lyuba Genova, 3A 96

*And the city, in its glory
Sat by two crossing rivers
Turrets high among the clouds
Windows silver slivers.
And from a hundred miles far
In hills that stood as guards,
One could see its lustrous form,
Saying, "There sits mighty Shard."*

So wrote Nedda, one of the Great Enchanters, describing the gem of Sarsova that is the City of Shard. A beacon of hope and trade to the kingdom, its existence burned hot and bright, before its light was extinguished.

When a number of dreygas, the vampire-like creatures known to feed on magic, were found to be roaming the city, the most powerful enchantress of us all, Baba Yaga, used her boundless magic to tie the city's essence to a map, which she then tore into three pieces and flung into the wind. And with it went the city, wandering invisible and ripped away from the world. Cursed to roam about Sarsova without ever being seen.

The dreygas should have been no match for the Guild. An issue easily dealt with. No one knows why Baba Yaga decided to banish the city rather than leave the Guild to vanquish the dreygas. It remains one of the great mysteries of Shard.

But the magic of the curse could not be undone, and only if those pieces of the map find their way back to one another can the city ever return to Sarsova.

In the days that followed, the queen of the City of Shard, Queen Ulyana, together with her husband, retreated into the palace with their young daughter, never to be seen again. The Guild settled into their place as the rulers of the city, mapping old gardens and empty plots into fields where grain could grow. Settling unrest when and where it flared to life. Working, always, to save the city. To undo a curse that ripped hope away from entire generations.

To return us all to Sarsova.

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Before the city had been cursed to wander, people said the wind would whistle down the streets like a giant whistling on its way home. Loud and sharp and inescapable. I tried to imagine it each day as I traipsed down the busy streets, thinking about the before. The old days, before our city was ripped away from the rest of the kingdom. When we were still a part of the world outside – ten years before I was born. I would imagine I could feel the wind hastening from distant mountains, bringing snow and ice and darkness with it.

But those days were as gone as the dead. There was no wind in Shard any more. No snow or ice or stars to beat back the darkness. There was just the city, and then nothing. If you opened the gates and looked out at the beyond, you'd be greeted by an endless swathe of brownish

grey that looked remarkably like dishwater. Not a single discernible object to be seen anywhere. Not a hint of a blue sky. Not a scrap of green. Just a colourless maw of emptiness, stretching away for ever.

I pulled open the doors of the Guild and slipped inside, the bustle of the city streets dying suddenly away.

I had heard that when you entered the Guild headquarters – the Mappers’ Guild, officially, but no one called it that – you could *feel* the map magic simmering in the air. That it clung to your senses like a candle had just been blown out. I always took a moment when I first arrived, to take it in, to breathe, to close my eyes and see if I could feel it too. To see if I had somehow missed that magic lurking somewhere deep inside me. But I never felt a thing.

I let out a sharp breath and stomped across the grand foyer. Hanging above me, in an ornate frame, was a tiny scrap of the map. The Guild had found this piece of Baba Yaga’s curse map many years ago, and had kept it safe here in the Guild, displaying it to anyone who passed through. They were always on the hunt for the other two pieces, so they could return the city to Sarsova. Scouts and hunters silently scoured the city for any sign of them, but so far, to no avail.

I didn’t bother glancing up at it.

Instead, I made my way to the side room where my little dusty desk sat waiting for a day of unimaginable boredom. Already, a stack of citations sat waiting to be filed, and

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letters that weren't for me sat waiting to be delivered. A small sign that said *Clerk* hung askew outside the door.

The crooked sign wasn't even mine. *I wasn't even a Clerk*. I was a trainee who did the jobs that the Clerks found too dull. I fancied ripping the sign off the wall and stomping it to pieces for the way it looked at me – taunted me – but no need to make a scene so early in the day. That could at least wait until lunch.

I took a step forward. Stopped. Tried again.

No. No. No. No. No. I couldn't face the day just yet. I turned on my heel and made my way down the hallway with long, slow steps. The filing could wait. If I kept my pace slow, I could wander up and down every hallway on the ground floor of the Guild and circle back to the office having killed half an hour.

In the world outside the small room where I spent most of my day, life buzzed. Guild members – all deliciously full of magic that I would never get to know – moved about the various floors. Classes full of Charges wound on, teachers' voices bursting forth from partially closed doorways, some students running late and scurrying through the doors with armfuls of books from the Atheneum – the expansive library that took up half of the Guild and housed the entrance to the mysterious Sanctum. There were rooms with closed doors, muffled voices emanating from within and beckoning for me to listen, cloaked Magisters going in and out and hastily closing the door again.

Back in the Very Old Days, long before the city was sent wandering, there were many more types of magic than just map magic. But, as wars broke out, and magic and magicless people began to clash, it was eventually decided that magic must be governed by language and words. Sketched out and designed on paper before ever being spoken to life by an incantation. If you wanted a new building, you had to sketch it out and match it with words. If you wanted to make a door disappear, you had to draw the wall without the door. It helped to keep magic very precise, but it still left enough room for mistakes.

The older types of magic were deemed unsafe. Sometimes people still whispered about them – curse magic, or medical magic – but over time, they had all been washed away. Memories of how to perform them faded with time. Map magic was useful. Helpful. Mostly safe, and with many uses. It was good and right, and everything that magic was meant to be. Or that's what everyone said, anyway.

Outside my tiny office, the world of map magic flourished.

Inside the room, the wilted plant in the corner was a fitting illustration of how I felt: withered. Faded. Dull. Every day I left feeling empty and exhausted. I would go to bed feeling a small spark of optimism that tomorrow, something would change. Tomorrow, my true life would start. The life I dreamed was mine, rich and alive. I would learn that I truly *did* have map magic, perhaps; or I would

stumble upon an adventure while out on an errand for the Guild. Gods, if only. I needed something to change. *Needed it.* I had read enough books in my stolen moments in the Atheneum to know that anything was possible. But *likely* was another story entirely.

My walk through the Guild ended all too soon. My small office stood before me again. As did the dead plant, and the cluttered desk, and the stack of citations.

Dust rose on the thick air when I sat down heavily. I sneezed.

Perhaps I should just go home now. The day had started poorly, and if I was being honest, was it likely to improve?

“Siya.”

My head snapped up. Official Fredek stood in the doorway, a copy of *Map Magic and the City of Shard: An Official City Code* tucked under one arm. I stood quickly, sending the stack of citations fluttering on to the floor. Frustration seared through me, and came out in a snarled smile.

“Good morning.” I tried in vain to catch a few of the fluttering citations before they reached the ground.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to do your filing later.”

Oh no. That’s too bad.

“I need you to accompany me and a Charge on a house call. This one can’t wait.”

A house call! Going outside! Now I was interested.

“What happened?” I asked.

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“An unauthorized cellar enhancement has ended with the owner stuck inside. No door. Could leave him down there a while longer to teach him a lesson, but best not to. Don’t want to upset the higher-ups.” His eyes darted upwards, to the upper levels of the Guild, where eminent Magisters worshipped the rules of magic as though deities themselves.

The rules were *everything* to them. That was understandable. When people didn’t follow the rules, it could have catastrophic results. Unauthorized map magic that had ultimately failed in some way usually required cleaning up by the Guild. I rarely got to attend those visits, but occasionally when the other clerks were busy, I would get to go.

“Of course not.” Disappearing doors were a common issue in the city. If the door was gone, the wall was sealed by magic, and there was no way out until someone like Official Fredek or one of the highly skilled Magisters came and freed the unlucky party. A hefty fine and a slap on the wrist was the best-case scenario. Being stuck there for ever was the worst.

Although that rarely happened. There were stories of the occasional magician vanishing, lost in a botched mapping attempt that saw them never return home – but they might have just been stories. Mapping required careful time and attention. Drawing out the plan on parchment and matching it to an incantation. One wrong step, and a whole lot could go wrong.