



THROUGH THE LOOKING SPHERE

The Furnace of Truth

A tale of remembrance, resonance,
and the light hidden in every choice.

BY CYNTHIA MORSHEDI

The Invitation

The morning sun slanted through Momé's cottage windows, scattering gold flecks across the breakfast table. AnnaBella was tying the last ribbon on her hair when she saw Momé standing in the doorway, holding something with an expression she rarely wore—mischievous.

"It's arrived," Momé said, her voice warm and trembling the way it did when something magical was afoot.

She held out a delicate envelope of pressed moss vellum, sealed with a wax imprint of a twisting vine.

AnnaBella took it, her fingertips tingling at the touch. The seal broke with a soft sigh, and autumn-colored glitter drifted to the floor like tiny falling leaves.

Inside, in looping golden script, it read:

You are cordially invited
to the Annual Harvest Ball
and the All Hallows Festival of BellaVille.
Your presence is required.

Your magic is requested.

AnnaBella's breath caught. Her magic?

She hadn't even been sure she had any.

Momé closed AnnaBella's fingers around the invitation.

"You'll need a gown," she said gently. "A proper one. Go to Tharia's. She'll know."

And just like that, the day shifted.



Tharia's Fitting Room of Silks & Secrets

Tharia's shop was already humming when AnnaBella arrived—violet curtains fluttering, bells chiming, the scent of lavender and old stories drifting between dress forms. Tharia herself appeared from behind a pillar draped in plum brocade, her eyes soft and knowing.

"Come, my dear," she murmured, ushering AnnaBella inside. "Let me see what kind of harvest gown you're meant for this year."

AnnaBella stood on the fitting pedestal while Tharia circled her like a moth around candlelight. She pinned and tucked and muttered to herself, swapping fabrics with swift flicks of her wrists. But eventually she paused.

"You're quiet today," Tharia said. "Too quiet."

AnnaBella's throat tightened. "I'm just... thinking."

"Mmm." Tharia lifted her chin, studying her face as though it were a page she knew how to read. "Thinking has weight. But you—your eyes tell me you're carrying something."

AnnaBella blinked quickly, heat gathering behind her lashes.

Tharia set down her pin cushion. "You don't need a gown, child. You need the Alchemist."

"Alchemist?" AnnaBella asked. "BellaVille has an... Alchemist?"

"Oh yes," Tharia said with a secretive smile. "A new one. And she's very good at what she does. If the heart is troubled, she knows how to burn away what mustn't follow you into the next season."

She scribbled something on a small vellum card and placed it in AnnaBella's hands.

"Go to her. Go now. Before the pain grows roots."



The Wander Through the Village

Following Tharia's handwritten directions, AnnaBella wound through the cobblestone paths of BellaVille. Pumpkins glowed in windowsills. Copper leaves skittered across the streets. Shops were strung with amber lanterns and suspended foxfire lights preparing for the Harvest Ball. But as she walked, a heaviness followed her—quiet, shadowy, familiar. Pain you haven't faced becomes a chain, the wind seemed to whisper through the trees. And she felt it. She had been carrying something she could not yet name.

At the farthest edge of the market, tucked beneath a canopy of crooked branches, she found it: THE APOTHECARY OF DRAVEENA MIREVALE Potions · Elixirs · Charms · Alchemical Remedies The door was cracked open. Warm, golden light spilled into the dusk.

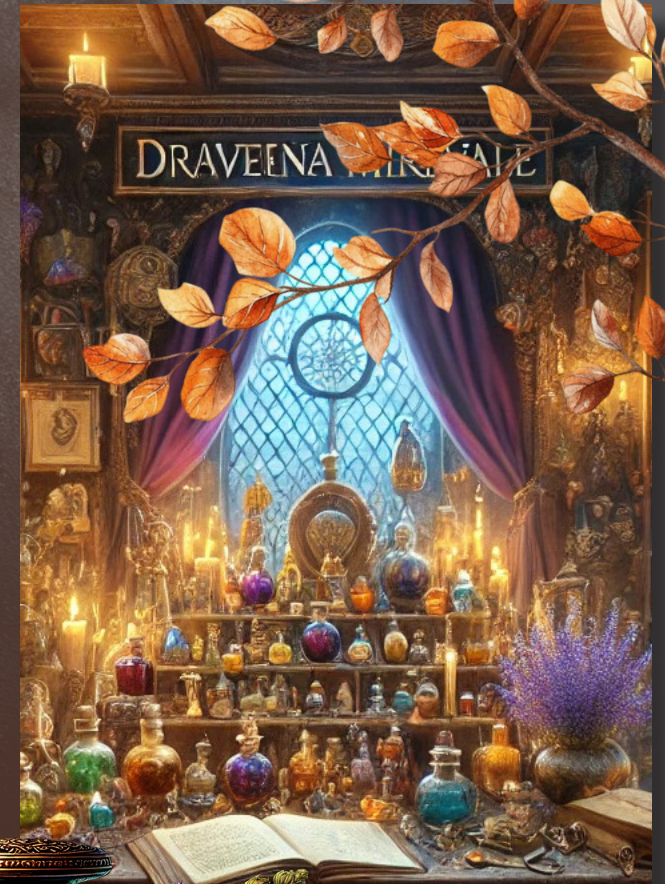


The Apothecary of Draveena

AnnaBella stepped inside, and the world exhaled. The shop was vintage and strange—brass distillers bubbling over violet flames, jars of powdered moon petals, strings of drying herbs rustling like whispering hands. The air was thick with honeyed smoke, sandalwood, and something metallic, almost electric. Shelves curved along the walls like the ribs of a great creature. Each held jars capped with ornamental baubles—some shaped like tiny lanterns, some like eyes, some like stars.

One jar seemed to call her. It bore a shimmering bauble on top, and beneath the glass, words were moving—curling, unraveling, weaving themselves into sentences she couldn't catch. They swirled like smoke trapped in a spell.

She reached out. Her fingers brushed the glass—and reality tilted. The shop dissolved around her. Her breath left her body.



The Astral Slip

AnnaBella found herself standing in a dim, starlit void—its ground soft like mist, its horizon folded like a dream within a dream. And across from her...

A boy stood holding an identical jar. He was about her age, dark-haired, surprised, and looking straight at her—as though he'd been trying to see who was on the other side of the glass world.

The words in his jar swirled faster, glowing white-gold.

He tilted his head. She did the same. For one trembling heartbeat, they saw each other.

Not as strangers, but as two pieces of something long separated.

And then—

A breath.

A blink.

She was back in the apothecary.

The jar sat still on the shelf, unmoving.

"Ah," said a voice behind her. "You've seen something you weren't meant to ignore."



Draveena Mirevale

AnnaBella spun around.

Draveena stood at her worktable: tall, soot-smudged, elegant in her plum-black coat stitched with secret pockets. Her hair, long and dark, caught the candlelight like ink in water. Her gaze—sharp and weary, ancient in a young face—paused on the trembling in AnnaBella's hands.

"Welcome," Draveena said gently. "I've been expecting you."

"You... have?"

"Well, pain always comes before its keeper." She gestured for AnnaBella to sit beside the cauldron glowing faintly on the hearth.

"That astral flicker you experienced—that was no accident. The furnace responds when something in you is ready to be transformed."

"The... furnace?"



Draveena motioned toward a great brass chamber set into the wall—its grate pulsing with red-gold fire that did not burn the air, but hummed like a heartbeat.

“It burns only one thing,” Draveena said softly.

“Pain that has outlived its purpose.”

AnnaBella swallowed hard.

Her voice was barely a whisper. “I don’t know how to let go.”

Draveena nodded, as though she had heard these words a thousand times.

“You don’t have to know,” she said. “You only have to be willing.”

She placed a warm hand over AnnaBella’s.

A shimmer of alchemical light sparked between them.

“Now,” Draveena murmured, “tell me everything you’ve been holding.”

And AnnaBella did.

She spoke of choices she feared, of feelings she couldn’t name, of the glimpse of the boy in the astral realm, and how it felt like a truth she wasn’t ready to understand.

Draveena listened—not interrupting, not judging, only absorbing like a mirror forged of fire and mercy.



When AnnaBella finally stopped, trembling from the release, Draveena whispered:

“Good. Very good. You’ve brought me something real. Now let us make it lighter.”

She opened the furnace door.

The flames shifted—purple, then gold, then white.

“Place your hand over the fire,” Draveena instructed.

“Not into it—above it. Let it taste what pains you.”

AnnaBella raised her hand.

Heat curled around her palm like a warm animal.

And then—from deep within the flame—

a soft voice murmured:

“Not all that hurts must stay.”

AnnaBella’s eyes filled.

She let the words sink into her bones.

“And now,” Draveena whispered, “you are ready for the next lesson.”



More of the Journey



The Story So Far...

AnnaBella's journey began the moment she discovered a mysterious glass sphere—an object that carried memory, magic, and a destiny she had never imagined. From the enchanted halls of Moss Manor to the celestial Gardens and now the shimmering Grotto of Reflections, each realm has revealed another piece of who she truly is. Guided by unexpected allies—Momé, Tharia, Lunara the Siren of Memory—and by the Sphere itself, AnnaBella is learning that her path is not about becoming something new, but remembering what has lived within her all along. To experience the full unfolding of her story, readers are invited to return to the earlier chapters. Each one is a doorway—and each doorway leads deeper into the world AnnaBella was always meant to enter.

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