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Eclipse of the Forgotten Kingdom

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Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1:** The Whispers in Valorin
- **Chapter 2:** The Mysterious Scroll
- **Chapter 3:** Shadows in the Library
- **Chapter 4:** A Veil Lifted
- **Chapter 5:** The Prophecy Unsealed
- **Chapter 6:** The Thief in the Alley
- **Chapter 7:** The Brooding Knight
- **Chapter 8:** The Seer's Warning
- **Chapter 9:** A Pact of Unlikely Friends
- **Chapter 10:** Echoes in the Dark
- **Chapter 11:** The Shaded Path
- **Chapter 12:** Masks and Mirrors
- **Chapter 13:** The Fire Beneath
- **Chapter 14:** Bonds Tested
- **Chapter 15:** Storm over Valorin
- **Chapter 16:** The Map of Whispers
- **Chapter 17:** Caves of Memory
- **Chapter 18:** Guardians of the Threshold
- **Chapter 19:** The Temple of Lost Light
- **Chapter 20:** Revelations in Stone
- **Chapter 21:** Shadows Gather
- **Chapter 22:** The Broken Seal
- **Chapter 23:** Eclipse Rising
- **Chapter 24:** Legacy Awakened
- **Chapter 25:** The Dawn Beyond the Eclipse

Introduction

To those who live in the city of Valorin, the world is defined by the sweep of its golden spires and the relentless hum of its marketplaces. Under a sky streaked with the white trails of merchant kites, its people chase dreams, barter fortunes, and whisper their hopes into the cobbled night. For Adira Verenthia, one among many, ordinary days are filled with ink-stained fingers and the familiar scent of parchment, tucked away in the quiet archives where forgotten stories sleep. Yet, within the hush of those shadowed halls, destiny lingers—waiting.

Adira's life is one of routine necessity and quiet longing. Orphaned early, she has learned to depend only on herself, eking out a meager existence copying decrees and translating chronicles that no one else bothers to read. Yet, beneath her outward composure, a hunger for adventure pulses—an unyielding curiosity about tales of magic and realms lost to time. She does not know it yet, but it is this private yearning that will thrust her into the heart of legend.

It begins with a scroll. Ancient, brittle, sealed with sigils none have seen in generations, it arrives one twilight with no sender. The script shivers with a prophecy—of an eclipse soon to shadow the land, of a kingdom long erased from charts and memory, and of a bloodline meant to awaken when the sun is devoured by darkness. The message is forbidden, dangerous, and its revelation stirs old forces concealed beneath Valorin's luminous veneer.

Pulled inexorably into mystery, Adira is soon entangled in conspiracies older than Valorin itself. Whispers haunt her steps. Figures in hoods prowl the candlelit streets, seeking more than just answers. A clandestine order watches from afar, and shadowy threats press closer each night. Yet, amid peril, unexpected friendship flickers to life—a thief with secrets of his own, a loyal knight exiled by choices, and an enigmatic seer who knows too much. With them, Adira discovers new strengths and old vulnerabilities as the prophecy's grip tightens.

What follows is a journey not just across lands forgotten by maps, but into the labyrinth of Adira's own heart. Ancient magics, tested loyalties, and the heavy question of legacy gather force as the eclipse nears. Shadows stretch across the world, promising not only doom, but the chance for hope reborn—if Adira can unravel the riddle of her lineage and protect all she loves from powers both wondrous and wicked.

Thus, the tale begins: in corridors of dust and parchment, among unlikely companions, and beneath a sky bracing for darkness. The eclipse is coming, and with it, the

forgotten kingdom waits to be found.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Whispers in Valorin

The morning sun, usually a cheerful golden brushstroke across Valorin's famed spires, struggled to break through a persistent haze. It wasn't the usual early mist that clung to the river before burning off by noon; this was thicker, almost industrial, smelling faintly of damp stone and something vaguely metallic. Adira Verenthia, with her hair pulled back into a practical braid and smudges of ink already decorating her fingertips, barely noticed. Her world was usually confined to the hushed corners of the Grand Archives, a sprawling edifice of knowledge that dwarfed even the Royal Palace in sheer volume.

Today, however, a low hum of unease seemed to ripple through the city, even reaching the insulated quiet of the Archives. Usually, the only sounds were the rustle of parchment, the soft scrape of quills, and the occasional muffled cough from an aging scholar. But today, the murmurs from the streets below were louder, carrying snippets of hushed conversations that hinted at more than just the usual market gossip. Adira, meticulously cross-referencing a set of land deeds from the Ironwood Barony, found her concentration wavering.

"Another protest, Adira?" asked Master Elara, her voice a dry rasp, without looking up from her own work. Elara, a woman whose face was a roadmap of wrinkles carved by decades of scholarly pursuits, rarely acknowledged the world outside their hallowed halls. Yet, even she seemed to sense the shift in the city's mood.

Adira peered through a narrow archway that offered a sliver of a view down into the bustling thoroughfare. A knot of people had gathered near the Great Fountain, their voices rising and falling like a restless tide. "Looks like it, Master Elara. Something about the grain prices, perhaps? Or the new tax on imported silks?" She knew it was unlikely; Valorin's citizens were generally complacent, their occasional grumblings rarely escalating to anything more than a spirited debate in the taverns.

But this felt different. There was an edge to the murmurings, a thread of apprehension she couldn't quite place. She returned to her desk, the faint scent of aged paper a comforting presence. Her job as a junior archivist was hardly glamorous, consisting mostly of copying legal documents, transcribing historical records, and occasionally tracking down an obscure tome for a visiting dignitary. Yet, it suited her quiet nature, providing a steady rhythm to her days and a secure roof over her head.

Adira had arrived at the Grand Archives almost a decade ago, a small, frightened orphan whose only possessions were the clothes on her back and a fierce determination to survive. The scholars, more accustomed to dusty scrolls than living

children, had grudgingly taken her in, recognizing her sharp mind and industrious spirit. She learned to read before she could properly tie her shoes, and by her tenth birthday, she was already more efficient than many of the senior scribes.

As the day wore on, the whispers intensified. Even inside the Archives, the normally stoic porters exchanged hurried words, their faces etched with concern. Adira overheard snippets: "the shadow," "the old prophecies," "a sign of ill omen." She dismissed them as superstitious nonsense. Valorin was a city of reason and trade, not of ancient fears and forgotten lore. Or so she had always believed.

Her task for the afternoon was to reorganize a section of the restricted collection – texts deemed too sensitive or too esoteric for public consumption. It was a tedious job, requiring meticulous care and a strong stomach for dust mites. This part of the Archives was rarely visited, a labyrinth of dim corridors and towering shelves that stretched into the gloom. Only a flickering lantern guided her way, casting dancing shadows that played tricks on her eyes.

As she moved a heavy, leather-bound chronicle, her fingers brushed against something unexpected behind it. Not another book, but a small, intricately carved wooden box, hidden from plain sight. It felt warm to the touch, almost pulsing with a faint, internal energy. Her heart gave an unbidden thump. Archivists were not supposed to find hidden objects; everything was cataloged, accounted for. This was an anomaly.

She carefully extricated the box, its surface smooth and cool beneath her fingertips. It was made of a dark, unfamiliar wood, inlaid with shimmering flecks that caught the lantern light like trapped starlight. There were no visible seams, no obvious lock or clasp. It was a perfect, seamless cube, about the size of her palm. Her curiosity, a trait she usually kept tightly reined, surged.

Master Elara had always warned her against "idle curiosity," a weakness that could lead to "unnecessary complications." But this wasn't idle; this felt important, like a secret waiting to be discovered. She turned the box over in her hands, searching for a mechanism, a hidden catch. Nothing. It remained obstinately closed.

A faint, almost inaudible whisper seemed to emanate from the box, a sound like rustling leaves in a forgotten wind. Adira froze, her breath catching in her throat. She looked around the deserted corridor, convinced she was imagining things. The Archives were utterly silent, save for the distant creak of the building settling.

She tucked the box inside her smock, feeling a strange mix of exhilaration and apprehension. It was against every rule she had ever learned, every principle of archival integrity, but she couldn't leave it. It felt as though it had been waiting for her, specifically. She would examine it later, in the privacy of her small, spartan room in

the archivists' quarters.

As the sun began its descent, painting the western sky in hues of fiery orange and bruised purple, the city's unease seemed to deepen. The hum of conversation had grown into a worried drone, and even from the heights of the Archives, Adira could see more people congregating in the squares, their faces upturned, as if searching for something in the darkening sky.

She finished her work, ensuring every scroll was in its place, every ledger accounted for, a meticulousness born of habit and a desire to appear unremarkable. With the wooden box still a comforting weight against her side, she made her way through the dimly lit corridors, past the sleeping stacks of ancient knowledge, and out into the cool evening air.

The air outside was thick with whispers. Not the quiet, rustling whispers of the box, but human voices, laced with fear and a strange kind of excitement. "Did you see it?" someone muttered. "A shadow, even before sunset." Another replied, "The old ones speak of the coming darkness."

Adira quickened her pace, pulling her cloak tighter around her. She didn't want to be drawn into the growing panic. She had always prided herself on her rationality, her ability to sift through rumor and find truth. But tonight, truth felt elusive, shrouded in the strange, persistent haze that now clung to every building, every person.

When she reached her small room, barely larger than a storage closet, she lit a single candle, its flame flickering nervously in the still air. She placed the wooden box on her worn wooden table, its dark surface absorbing the meager light. It still felt warm, and that faint, almost imperceptible hum continued, a silent song meant only for her.

She sat on the edge of her cot, staring at the box, her mind racing. What was it? Why was it hidden? And why did it feel so... significant? The logical part of her brain told her it was just an old curiosity, perhaps left behind by a forgetful scholar. But a deeper, more primal instinct suggested otherwise. It felt like the beginning of something.

The city outside her window, usually a symphony of evening sounds, was strangely subdued. The cheerful cries of street vendors were absent, replaced by the hushed tones of worried citizens. Adira peered out, past the narrow window frame, and saw that the haze had thickened, turning the horizon into an indistinct blur. And then she saw it.

High above the tallest spires of Valorin, a faint, ethereal shadow was indeed beginning to creep across the sun. It was barely visible, a smudge against the vibrant sky, but it was there. And as it grew, even infinitesimally, the whispers in the city seemed to

coalesce, rising to a chilling, collective murmur. The eclipse, it seemed, was already beginning. And Adira, with a mysterious wooden box now in her possession, was about to be pulled into its long shadow.

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