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Eclipse of the White Moon

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Introduction

On the farthest edge of the known world, in a valley the maps had long since abandoned, lay the village of Halvendale—a place where the sky always seemed a little closer, and the worries of the greater kingdoms rarely trespassed. Here, moonlight wove silver paths along ancient stone walls, and each seasonal festival was marked by songs as old as the hills themselves. For Arin, a young man more adept at mending wheels than weaving dreams, there was a comfort in the predictable rhythms of village life, and the world's mysteries felt content to pass him by.

But destiny seldom asks for permission. On the night of the rare white moon eclipse—a celestial event whispered about by the village elders but seen by none in living memory—the world shifted. Arin, seeking shelter from a sudden unraveling of shadows, stumbled upon something hidden beneath the gnarled roots of a fallen oak. It was an amulet, strangely cold in his hands, inscribed with runes that pulsed softly beneath the moon's veiled light. The discovery, as accidental as it was profound, would unravel the threads that had quietly bound both Arin and his world.

In the days that followed, hints of change crept into Halvendale. Strange visitors whispered of old grievances, lights flickered in distant woods, and the air throbbed with an unexplainable magic. Arin found himself at the heart of stories he had only half-listened to as a child—legends of lost kingdoms, banished gods, and ancient prophecies buried beneath layers of forgetfulness. The amulet, once dormant, began to reveal secrets not just about the world, but about Arin himself, stirring abilities that frightened as much as they awed.

Yet with answers came greater peril. Far away, in a tower shaped from midnight shadows, a sorcerer awakened to the amulet's return. Driven by a terrible vision of eternal night, he summoned legions and bent the wild magics to his will. As darkness crept ever closer, Arin realized that escape was impossible; the amulet chose him as surely as the moon chose the night. Halvendale, no longer a sanctuary, became a doorway through which the past threatened to claim the future.

Faced with these gathering storms, Arin's quiet courage would be tested beyond anything he had ever known. To protect those he loved and the world lying unsuspecting beneath the looming eclipse, he would need to step beyond the safe bounds of the valley, forging alliances among peoples lost to legend and discovering strengths within himself and others. For as the shadow lengthened and the white moon dimmed, Arin was no longer just a spectator in a tale—he was its reluctant hero. And beyond the edge of the map, the adventure of a forgotten age was about to begin.

CHAPTER ONE: Under a Quiet Moon

The scent of woodsmoke and damp earth was Arin's constant companion in Halvendale, a comforting embrace that clung to his worn tunic. His days were a rhythmic cycle of tasks: mending the creaking gate at old Master Elara's cottage, helping Jorick the baker with his stubbornly rising dough, or, more often than not, wrestling with the recalcitrant axle of a farmer's cart. He was good with his hands, better than he was with words, and the villagers valued his quiet competence. They left him mostly to his work, and Arin, in turn, found solace in the tangible results of his labor.

Tonight, however, the usual quiet hum of Halvendale was laced with an unusual tension. The air felt thick, expectant, as if the very trees were holding their breath. Children, usually boisterous even after sundown, huddled closer to their parents, their eyes wide with a mixture of fear and fascination. The elders, gathered in their usual spot by the communal fire pit, spoke in hushed tones, their weathered faces upturned to the sky. Tonight was the white moon eclipse, a phenomenon not seen in generations, and the whispers of old prophecies had resurfaced, carried on the evening breeze.

Arin, though outwardly unconcerned, felt an unfamiliar prickle of unease. He had dismissed the tales as childish fantasies, but the sheer weight of the village's apprehension was hard to ignore. He had spent the late afternoon securing the last of the harvest wagons, a task that had kept him busy enough to mostly avoid the growing chatter. Now, with twilight bleeding into night, he found himself drawn, almost against his will, towards the ancient standing stones on the western edge of the village - a place he usually avoided, rumored to be a haunt of mischievous sprites and forgotten spirits.

He wasn't sure what compelled him, perhaps a strange curiosity stirred by the eclipse, or simply a need to escape the stifling atmosphere of the village square. The path to the stones was overgrown, winding through a cluster of ancient oak trees that looked like gnarled, shadowy giants in the dim light. The air grew cooler here, and the earthy scent was stronger, mingled with the metallic tang of an approaching storm. He pulled his collar tighter, wishing he'd brought a heavier cloak.

As he neared the clearing where the stones stood sentinel, a low, guttural rumble echoed through the earth, vibrating in his very bones. The sky, which had been a canvas of deep indigo, began to shift. A silvery hue, unlike any moonlight he had ever witnessed, started to bloom around the edges of the single, pale moon. It wasn't the warm, familiar glow, but something colder, more ethereal, almost predatory. The

rumbling intensified, and a gust of wind, sudden and fierce, tore through the trees, making the branches thrash like angry serpents.

Then, the true eclipse began. The pale moonlight, instead of being simply obscured, was devoured. A creeping shadow, impossibly dark and absolute, began to consume the moon, not from an edge, but from its very heart. The silver light receded, swallowed by an encroaching void. Arin felt a shiver trace its way down his spine. This was no ordinary eclipse. This was something ancient, something alive. The air grew heavy, oppressive, and a primal fear clawed at the back of his throat.

He stumbled, his foot catching on a root, sending him sprawling amidst a tangle of ferns and damp soil. His breath hitched as a sharp pain shot through his ankle. He cursed under his breath, pushing himself up, but his attention was immediately drawn to the ground where he had fallen. The roots of the massive, fallen oak tree, upturned during a long-forgotten storm, had created a shallow, dark hollow. And within that hollow, something pulsed.

It wasn't light, not precisely, but a subtle hum, a shimmer of barely perceptible energy. Curiosity overriding his fear and discomfort, Arin reached out, his fingers brushing against something smooth and cool. He fumbled for a moment, the ground soft and yielding beneath his touch, until his fingers closed around a solid, heavy object. He pulled it free, holding it up, and the last sliver of the white moon's light, before it was entirely consumed, illuminated it with an unearthly glow.

It was an amulet, a disc of dark, polished stone, unlike anything he had ever seen. Its surface was etched with intricate symbols - geometric patterns that seemed to shift and writhe, almost alive, under the fading light. A central stone, a deep, unsettling obsidian, gleamed with an inner fire, mirroring the encroaching darkness of the sky. As he held it, a faint warmth spread through his palm, then a surge of energy, like a jolt of lightning, shot up his arm, making him gasp.

The moment the energy surged, the world around him intensified. The scent of pine and damp earth sharpened, the distant hoot of an owl sounded impossibly close, and for a fleeting second, he felt as if he could hear the heartbeat of the very ground beneath him. The darkness of the eclipse seemed to deepen, but it was no longer menacing; it felt like a heavy blanket, a silent witness to his discovery. The amulet, once merely an object, now felt like an extension of himself, thrumming with an inexplicable power.

He stared at the intricate carvings, a strange sense of familiarity washing over him, though he knew he had never encountered anything like it. The symbols seemed to whisper forgotten words to him, ancient names and places that danced on the edge of his understanding. He felt a burgeoning realization, a sense that this wasn't just a pretty stone, but something profound, something that held secrets older than

Halvendale itself. He felt the weight of history in his hand.

Suddenly, the eerie silence of the eclipse was broken by a distant, piercing shriek – a sound that was not of this world, nor of any creature Arin knew. It echoed through the valley, sending a fresh wave of fear through him, a cold dread that had nothing to do with the strange amulet in his hand. This shriek was pure malice, a declaration of intent that promised only devastation. It seemed to emanate from the shadowed peaks beyond the Gloamwood, far to the north.

He clutched the amulet tighter, its warmth now a comforting anchor against the growing chill of the night. The village, usually a beacon of flickering hearth fires, was now almost entirely dark, swallowed by the unnatural gloom. The shriek came again, closer this time, and Arin knew, with a certainty that chilled him to the bone, that the world had changed. And he, the quiet mender of wheels, held the key to whatever was coming.

With a final, desperate surge of adrenaline, Arin scrambled to his feet, ignoring the throbbing pain in his ankle. He had to get back to the village, to warn them, though he didn't know what he would say, or how he would explain the impossible artifact now radiating a faint, dark glow in his hand. The path back seemed longer, darker, each rustle of leaves a potential threat. The air hummed with the unknown, and Arin, for the first time in his life, felt utterly, completely alone.

He moved as quickly as his injured ankle would allow, the amulet pressed against his chest. Its pulsating warmth spread through him, a strange, comforting heat that pushed back against the creeping fear. He glanced back at the standing stones, now barely visible against the inky blackness. They seemed to loom, ancient guardians watching his hasty retreat, their silence heavier than any sound. The shriek did not come again, but the lingering echo of it was enough to propel him forward.

As he limped back towards the first scattered lights of Halvendale, a new sensation settled over him. It wasn't the fear that had been his companion since the eclipse began, but something akin to resolve. The amulet, nestled in his hand, felt less like a burden and more like a purpose. He didn't understand it, didn't comprehend the forces it represented, but he knew, deep in his gut, that his life had irrevocably changed. The quiet moon of Halvendale had set, and something vast and ancient had awakened in its place.

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