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Chronicles of the Broken Crown

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Introduction

Elara had always found solace in the silent halls of the Elarion Archives. Beneath vaulted ceilings etched with constellations, the city's past whispered from every weathered scroll and gilded tome. She had never craved adventure or conflict, preferring the quiet comfort of dusty history rather than the roiling politics just outside the palace gates. To Elara, the stories of ancient kings and crumbled dynasties were a world unto themselves—worlds that felt safer, easier to understand than the chaos of the present.

Her days unfolded in peaceful routine—cataloging relics, transcribing faded ink, piecing together the puzzles of time. Yet, Elarion, with its soaring spires and tranquil gardens, had always seemed a place apart, a sanctuary shielded from the wild frontiers and old grievances that plagued the outer provinces. Elara's only ambition was to preserve the knowledge that others had forgotten, to shine a gentle light on the truths that lay buried beneath centuries of dust.

It was in these quiet moments, deep within the labyrinth of archives, that fate took note of her. When Elara stumbled upon a hidden alcove—a forgotten section long sealed after a fire decades before—she discovered a scroll bound in blackened leather, its symbols shimmering faintly in the torchlight. The parchment, brittle with age, contained the stuff of legend: a tale scrawled in runes no scholar had deciphered in living memory. The words echoed of a kingdom lost to time and a crown forged from the remnants of the primordial world—a relic of immense power, shattered by its own legacy.

From that moment, her life unraveled into myth. Each secret the scroll divulged seemed to thrum with urgency, as if ancient eyes now watched Elara's every move. Whispers of the "Broken Crown," once dismissed as mere children's tales, took on chilling new meaning as she unearthed forgotten truths. And with her discovery, shadows stirred—figures lurking at the periphery, hungry for the secrets Elara now possessed.

Haunted by riddles and pursued by those who would seize power for themselves, Elara faced a crossroads. The life she'd always known—the scholar's peace, the city's sanctuary—slipped quietly away, replaced by questions with no easy answer. What responsibility did she bear in restoring or concealing the past? And at what cost would she pursue the truth behind the legend of the Broken Crown?

Thus began a journey that would take Elara far beyond the gilded libraries of Elarion. Guided by curiosity, compelled by duty, she was swept into a tapestry of hidden

kingdoms, dangerous alliances, and forgotten powers—each step drawing her closer to the heart of a mystery that could reshape the fate of all the realms.

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Chapter One: Shadows in the Stacks

The scent of aged parchment and beeswax always calmed Elara, a familiar balm against the bustling cacophony of Elarion outside. Her office, tucked away in a less-traveled wing of the Royal Archives, was a sanctuary of hushed whispers and forgotten narratives. Dust motes danced in the lone shaft of sunlight that pierced a grimy window, illuminating the towering stacks of scrolls and codices that were her constant companions. Today, however, even the comforting quiet felt laced with an unfamiliar tension.

Her fingers, usually nimble and precise, fumbled slightly as she re-shelved a collection of treaties from the Second Age. The scroll, the one she'd found just yesterday, still pulsed in her mind, a vibrant, unsettling note amidst the usual hum of historical minutiae. She'd tried to dismiss it, to categorize it as some obscure, perhaps fraudulent, relic, but the symbols... they were unlike anything she'd ever encountered in her decades of study.

Elara sighed, running a hand through her neatly coiled brown hair. She was a woman of logic, of documented fact. Fantastical tales of primordial power and shattered crowns belonged in the bards' taverns, not the hallowed halls of the Archives. Yet, the scroll had felt *old*, impossibly old, and the faint glimmer she'd seen radiating from its surface was not a trick of the torchlight. She was certain of it.

Her colleague, Master Theron, a stoic man whose face seemed permanently etched with the weight of forgotten kings, shuffled past her alcove. He merely nodded, his eyes already lost in the spine of a massive tome he clutched to his chest. He would not understand. Theron dealt in proven lineage and verifiable dates, not the swirling, untethered mysteries that now occupied Elara's thoughts.

Later that afternoon, as the library began its slow descent into twilight, Elara found herself back at her desk, the forbidden scroll carefully unrolled before her. She had cleaned it meticulously, revealing more of the intricate runes that snaked across its surface like veins of dark lightning. Each symbol seemed to vibrate with a latent energy, defying the brittle dryness of its ancient form.

She pulled out her oldest deciphering guides, thick volumes bound in worn leather, their pages filled with the painstaking work of generations of scholars. But the runes on the scroll mocked her efforts. They didn't conform to the Elder Tongue, nor the Elven script, nor even the crude markings of the northern barbarians. They were something else entirely, something primal and utterly alien.

A chill snaked up her spine, despite the warmth of the flickering oil lamp. This wasn't just an old text; it was an artifact. The very act of touching it now felt like brushing against a current of raw magic, a sensation she, a non-practitioner, had only ever read about in the most embellished historical accounts. Had she truly stumbled upon something dangerous?

Her mind raced, piecing together fragments from obscure myths she had previously dismissed as charming fables. The "Broken Crown," a relic of immense power... a kingdom lost to time... forged from a shard of the primordial world. These were the very words that shimmered faintly on the scroll, now almost impossibly clear to her inner eye, even when they remained undeciphered to her academic brain.

A floorboard creaked in the dimly lit corridor outside her office. Elara froze, her hand instinctively hovering over the scroll. The Archives were usually empty at this hour, save for the occasional night watchman, whose heavy footsteps were always easily identifiable. These were not heavy. These were light, furtive, almost stealthy.

She held her breath, listening. The silence that followed was oppressive, broken only by the frantic thumping of her own heart. Had she imagined it? Her nerves, usually as steady as the Elarion clock tower, felt suddenly frayed. She had never been one for flights of fancy, but the scroll had awakened a prickling sense of unease she couldn't shake.

Carefully, Elara rolled up the scroll, securing it with its blackened leather ties. She placed it inside a false bottom in her desk drawer, a secret compartment usually reserved for her most personal notes. It wasn't paranoia, she told herself, merely precaution. After all, a historian's most valuable asset was often discretion.

The creaking sound came again, closer this time, just outside her door. Elara's hand instinctively reached for the heavy brass letter opener on her desk, a ridiculous defense against an unknown threat, but a defense nonetheless. The shadow that passed beneath her door was too tall, too broad, to be a member of the Archives staff.

She extinguished her lamp, plunging the office into near-total darkness, save for the faint moonlight filtering through the dusty window. Her breath hitched in her throat. Someone was here. Someone was looking for something. And a terrible, cold certainty settled over her: they weren't looking for a misfiled tax record. They were looking for what she had found.

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