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Chronicles of Emberwood

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Table of Contents

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: Whispers in the Hearth
- Chapter 2: Beneath the Ashen Roots
- Chapter 3: Relics of the Forgotten
- Chapter 4: Shadows Stirring
- Chapter 5: The Awakening Sigil
- Chapter 6: The Wanderer's Compass
- Chapter 7: Tales of the Fallen Crown
- Chapter 8: The Gilded Outcast
- Chapter 9: Echoes of Loyalty
- Chapter 10: Secrets Unveiled
- Chapter 11: Crossing the Veiled Mire
- Chapter 12: The City of Silent Clocks
- Chapter 13: Guardians of the Last Flame
- Chapter 14: The Mirror Grove
- Chapter 15: The Mapmaker's Legacy
- Chapter 16: Chains of Illusion
- Chapter 17: The Broken Oath
- Chapter 18: Masks in Moonlight
- Chapter 19: The Abyssal Gate
- Chapter 20: The Withered Throne
- Chapter 21: Embers Rekindled
- Chapter 22: The Storming Host
- Chapter 23: The Reckoning Song
- Chapter 24: The Shattered Seal
- Chapter 25: Crown of the New Dawn

Introduction

In the tranquil village of Elderglen, life ebbed and flowed with the gentle rhythm of the Everwood forests. To its residents, each day was like the last—tending crops, gathering water, and spinning tales by the fireside as the seasons ripened and waned. Yet, for Arin Evercrest, existence was a collection of unanswered questions and half-told stories. He moved through his modest world as if a visitor among legends, his mind ever drawn to the mysteries whispered in old songs and etched on moss-covered stones beyond the village paths.

Arin was not born of heroes or kings. He was a scholar's son, albeit in a place where books were rarer than dragon's tears and knowledge was passed down in riddles and lullabies. What little lore remained was guarded by the elders—snatches of ancient dialects, tales of lost kingdoms and magics that once danced like fireflies in the dusk. Arin devoured every fragment, spending countless hours in the shadowed corners of Elderglen's humble chapel, hunched over tattered scrolls and faded maps, searching for proof that magic was more than embers in the hearth of memory.

It was on one such evening that the air turned strange, alive with a restlessness that crackled beneath the ordinary. Unseasonal winds swept down from the mountains and the village animals began to act queerly. Rumors rustled like dead leaves: flickers of light near the ruins of Emberwood, strange footprints along the riverbank, foresters muttering of unseen eyes in the gloom. For Arin, it was as if the boundaries between legend and life had thinned—and he found himself irresistibly drawn to the forgotten stones on the edge of the wild.

Beneath the moon's pale gaze, with nothing but curiosity and a lantern to arm him, Arin crept into the ruins that had haunted his dreams since childhood. The crumbled archways and ancient carvings seemed to breathe as he approached, each shadow inviting him deeper, promising secrets long untold. There, hidden beneath root and rubble, he would unearth a forgotten library—a chamber filled with dust-laden tomes, cryptic runes, and the echoing silence of centuries. It was a discovery to awaken the realm's sleeping history—and Arin's own destiny.

But there was more beneath Emberwood than wisdom and wonder. In the deepest alcoves, bound by spell and shadow, lay secrets best left undisturbed. As Arin's trembling hands brushed across old leather and glyphs pulsed at his touch, ancient magic shivered awake. Darkness, stirring in distant corners of the world, would soon taste the spark of opportunity, sending ripples of dread through both the known and the hidden. In that moment, under stone and starlight, Arin Evercrest became the bearer of a truth that could either restore the realms—or see them drown in shadow.

So began an adventure shaped by courage, betrayal, and hope—where the fate of kingdoms would rest on a scholar's thirst for knowledge, and the light of Emberwood would burn anew, for those brave enough to heed its call.

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CHAPTER ONE: Whispers in the Hearth

The air in Elderglen always smelled of pine sap and hearth smoke, a comforting, unchanging scent Arin had known his entire life. But tonight, a new aroma mingled with the familiar: the damp, earthy tang of something ancient disturbed. It clung to the night breeze, a subtle herald of the shift he felt brewing. The unseasonal winds that had plagued the village for weeks had escalated into an insistent howl, rattling the shutters of his small cottage. His mother, a woman of practicality and gentle skepticism, attributed it to a harsh winter coming early. His father, lost in ledgers and the quiet hum of commerce, barely noticed. But Arin noticed everything.

He sat by the flickering firelight, not reading—a rare state for him—but listening. The whispers weren't audible words, but a sensation, a vibration against his skin that spoke of dormant power stirring. The village dogs had been barking incessantly at shadows that weren't there, and old Elara, the village's unofficial keeper of wisdom (and its most prolific gossip), had been seen muttering to herself at the crossroads, claiming the Veil between worlds was thinning. Most dismissed her as addled, but Arin couldn't. Not after what he'd seen.

Just last week, while searching for a lost sheep near the perimeter of the Emberwood ruins, he'd glimpsed it: a faint, ethereal glow emanating from within the tumbled stones. It had pulsed once, twice, before fading, leaving him breathless and questioning his sanity. He'd told no one, knowing the incredulous looks it would garner. Magic was a fairytale, a comforting fiction for children and fools. Yet, the memory of that light was a persistent ember in his mind, refusing to be extinguished.

Tonight, the wind's insistent lament was too much to ignore. He rose, his movements deliberate, trying not to disturb his sleeping parents. He pulled on a thick wool cloak, its rough fabric a familiar weight against his shoulders. In his satchel, he tucked a small, oil-burning lantern, a flint and steel, and a length of sturdy rope—precautions that felt both practical and ridiculously inadequate for confronting forgotten magic. A moment's hesitation, a fleeting thought of the comfortable bed and the quiet safety of Elderglen, was quickly overridden by the relentless pull of curiosity.

He slipped out into the biting night, the village hushed save for the wind's mournful song. The moon, a thin crescent, offered little light, forcing him to rely on the lantern's hesitant beam. The path to Emberwood was well-trodden at first, used by foresters and the occasional brave mushroom-gatherer, but soon it narrowed, giving way to overgrown brambles and gnarled roots that clawed at his ankles. The air grew colder, heavy with a primeval stillness Arin had never encountered before.

As he drew closer to the ruins, the scent intensified, a mingling of damp stone and something vaguely metallic, like old blood or rust. The ethereal glow he'd seen before was absent tonight, replaced by a profound, almost oppressive darkness that seemed to swallow the meager light of his lantern. The crumbling walls of Emberwood loomed like skeletal giants against the bruised sky, their ancient stones imbued with a silent weight, a history whispered by the wind.

Arin moved cautiously, his boots crunching on fallen debris. He remembered the old legends of Emberwood: a grand kingdom, once vibrant with magic, brought low by a cataclysmic event. The specifics were vague, distorted by centuries of retelling, but the core truth remained—something immense and powerful had occurred here. He reached the central courtyard, a gaping maw of fallen masonry and resilient ivy. The main archway, still standing despite the ravages of time, bore faded carvings of a celestial map and symbols he didn't recognize but felt instinctively were important.

He navigated through the debris, following the sense of *wrongness* that hummed beneath his skin. It led him not to the grand structures, but to a less conspicuous area, tucked away behind a crumbling stable wall, almost swallowed by a particularly ancient, gnarled oak tree. Its roots, thick as serpents, embraced the stone, weaving through cracks and fissures. It was here, at the base of the oak, that the air felt thickest, almost vibrating with an unseen energy.

A section of the stable wall appeared to have collapsed inward, not from age, but as if struck by a powerful force. Moonlight, filtering through a gap in the cloud cover, glinted off something dark and polished within the rubble. Arin approached, his heart pounding a frantic rhythm against his ribs. He knelt, pushing aside loose stones and clumps of earth. What he found was not a natural fissure, but a remarkably well-preserved, albeit partially obscured, stone archway, intricately carved with symbols that mirrored those on the main archway.

It wasn't a collapse at all, he realized with a gasp. It was a doorway, deliberately hidden, buried beneath centuries of forgotten earth and rubble. The air flowing from within was cool and still, carrying that same peculiar, ancient scent. He felt a profound sense of awe, tinged with a nervous tremor. This wasn't merely a broken ruin; it was a sealed tomb, a forgotten entrance to something extraordinary.

With renewed purpose, Arin set to work. He used his hands, then a sturdy fallen branch, to clear away the remaining debris, uncovering more of the archway. The carvings pulsed faintly under his gaze, as if responding to his presence. He noted one particular symbol—a stylized eye, radiating lines like sunbeams—that was repeated frequently, almost like a sigil. It felt oddly familiar, though he couldn't place why.

After a good hour of arduous labor, he had cleared enough space to reveal a dark

opening, barely wide enough for him to squeeze through. He lit his lantern, its small flame sputtering against the encroaching darkness. A cold draft sighed from within, carrying a whisper that seemed to curl around his ears, a soundless invitation. He took a deep breath, steeling himself, and peered into the abyss.

The passage sloped gently downwards, the air growing heavier, yet oddly breathable. The walls were smooth, unlike the rough-hewn stone outside, and gleamed faintly with residual magic, or perhaps merely the reflection of his lantern. He squeezed through the opening, his cloak catching on the rough edges of the stone, and began his descent into the unknown. Each step echoed in the profound silence, magnifying the thrumming anticipation in his chest.

The passage twisted and turned, leading him deeper beneath the earth, past roots that writhed like petrified serpents embedded in the stone. He imagined ancient trees, their branches once reaching for the sun, now providing silent sentinels to this buried secret. The temperature dropped further, a chill that wasn't just physical but seemed to seep into his very bones, a sensation of time itself slowing, freezing around him.

Finally, the passage opened into a vast chamber, far larger than he could have imagined. His lantern's beam, no longer swallowed by a narrow corridor, struggled to illuminate the expanse. Dust motes danced in the limited light, ancient and undisturbed. And then he saw them. Row upon row of towering shelves, each laden with volumes of every conceivable size and material. It was a library, hidden beneath the ruins of Emberwood, preserved against the ravages of time.

Arin took a step, then another, his boots muffled by a thick carpet of dust. He reached out, his fingers trembling, to touch the spine of a book. The leather was aged, cracked, but the golden glyphs emblazoned on its cover shimmered with a faint, internal light as his touch connected. It was then that he felt the artifact, not saw it, but felt its presence, a distinct warmth radiating from a pedestal at the very center of the chamber, beckoning him forward. This was more than knowledge; this was a doorway.

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