



ESMERALDA OF LUMINARA

— AND THE SEVEN LIGHTS —

BOOK ONE: THE CHILD OF THE ECLIPSE

— by —

Younes ELMA

Esmeralda of Luminara and the Seven Lights

Book One: The Child of the Eclipse

By Younes ELMA

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Chapter 1 — The Day the Sun Was Born

On the day Esmeralda was born, the sun disappeared.
Not behind clouds.
Not behind mountains.

Not behind the tired smoke of village chimneys.

It vanished as if a great black hand had covered the sky.

For seven minutes, the world forgot how to breathe.

In the valley of Luminara, where green hills rolled gently toward the silver river and houses wore roofs of red clay, people stopped whatever they were doing and looked up. Bakers abandoned their ovens. Farmers dropped their tools in the fields. Children, who had been chasing one another between the olive trees, fell silent with their mouths open.

But the birds stopped singing first.

That was what frightened the villagers most.

People could fall silent from fear. Dogs could crawl beneath carts. Chickens could lose all dignity and run into walls. But birds belonged to the sky, and when the sky's own children stopped singing, even the bravest men in Luminara felt something cold move beneath their ribs.

At the edge of the village, in a small stone house surrounded by lavender bushes and wild thyme, Elara gripped the old midwife's hand and tried not to scream.

"I cannot do this," she whispered.

Mother Nima leaned over her, small, round, and old enough to remember three kings, two wars, and one donkey who had once been elected mayor by accident.

"You can," the midwife said firmly. "Women say they cannot do this, and then they do it. That is how babies and history arrive."

Elara might have laughed.

Then another pain seized her.

Outside, the light did not fade like sunset. It was stolen. The golden fields turned gray. The red roofs darkened. The silver river became black as iron. In the village square, the clock tower struck noon.



Then midnight.

Then noon again.

No one understood it.

Far above the valley, the sun had become a ring of pale fire around a black circle.

And somewhere far away, beneath a mountain where no bird had ever dared to sing, a sealed door heard the silence and began to wake.

Inside Elara's house, the baby began to arrive. Mother Nima looked toward the window. Darkness pressed against the glass.

"Strange," she muttered.

"What is strange?" Elara asked, breathless.

"The world," said Mother Nima.

"That is not helpful."

"No," the midwife admitted. "But it is true."

A cold wind slipped under the door.

The fire in the hearth bent sideways. The lavender hanging from the ceiling trembled. On the wooden table near the bed, a bowl of water began to ripple, though no hand had touched it. Elara turned her face toward the window.

"What is happening?"

Mother Nima did not answer immediately.

She had lived long enough to know that some moments could not be explained while they were happening. Some moments had to finish becoming themselves before the world could name them.

Outside, the villagers had gathered in the streets. No one moved. Even Bardo the spice merchant had stopped complaining, which several people later claimed was the first true miracle of the eclipse.

Then, from the northern ridge, an eagle cried. The sound cut through the darkness like a blade through cloth. Every head turned.

High above the valley, a great eagle circled the blackened sun. Its wings were wider than any eagle the villagers had ever seen. Its head was white as mountain snow, its beak curved and golden, and



its dark wings caught the pale ring of the hidden sun until every feather seemed edged with bronze.

Once.

Twice.

Three times it circled.

Then it flew toward Elara's house.

Inside, Elara cried out. Mother Nima leaned close. "Now," she said. "Now, child." "I am not a child," Elara gasped. "All women become children for one breath before becoming mothers."

The wind grew stronger. The blue candle on the table went out. The fire in the hearth went out. The village lamps went out. And for one terrible instant, there was no light anywhere in Luminara.

Only the black sun.

Only the silent birds.

Only Elara's breath.

Then the baby cried.

It was not a loud cry. It was not the mighty cry of a king or the angry cry of a child already disappointed by the world. It was small, thin, and trembling.

But the moment it touched the air, the darkness broke. Light burst over the valley. Not the normal light of day. Not the reasonable light that knew its place and entered politely through windows.

This light came like a wave. It poured over the hills, flooded the fields, flashed across the river, climbed the chapel tower, filled every crack between every stone, and turned every roof in Luminara bright as flame.

People covered their eyes. The dogs crept out from under the carts. The chickens, who had made very poor decisions during the darkness, stared around as if offended by reality.

Every bird in the valley began singing at once.

Not one bird.

Not ten.



Thousands.

The sound rose from trees, fields, riverbanks, and rooftops. Sparrows, swallows, finches, doves, larks, blackbirds, and birds no one had names for all sang together until the air itself seemed alive. The old priest dropped his blue candle. The blacksmith lowered his hammer. Bardo the spice merchant picked up his cinnamon, looked around, and quickly decided that if the end of the world had been avoided, he might still sell it at a higher price.

Inside the stone house, Mother Nima held the newborn girl in her arms.

The baby had dark brown hair, closed fists, and skin warm with the strange light that filled the room. For a moment, Mother Nima thought she saw something above the child's forehead: not a mark, not a crown, but the faintest shimmer, as though a tiny star had hidden beneath her skin. Then it was gone.

The midwife blinked. At her age, she trusted her hands more than her eyes. "She is a girl," Mother Nima said softly.

Elara began to cry. "Is she well?"

The midwife smiled.

"She has just shouted the sun back into the sky. I would say she is doing rather well."

Elara laughed through her tears. Mother Nima placed the baby against her chest. The child stopped crying almost immediately.

Outside, the great eagle landed on the roof. Its claws touched the red tiles without making a sound.

Mother Nima heard it anyway. She looked up.

"What is it?" Elara whispered.

"Nothing," said the midwife.

But she crossed herself in the old way, the way people had crossed themselves before kings, before chapels, before the valley had a name. Elara looked down at her daughter. The baby opened her eyes. They were green. Not ordinary green. Not leaf green or riverweed green. They were the deep green of emeralds held against sunlight.



“Elara,” Mother Nima said carefully, “have you chosen a name?” Elara touched the baby’s cheek.

She had thought of many names during the long months of waiting. Soft names. Old names. Names from her mother’s songs and her father’s stories. But now, looking into those green eyes, only one name remained.

“Esmeralda,” she said.

Mother Nima nodded. “Esmeralda.”

Outside, the eagle cried again.

This time, every bird in the valley fell silent for one breath, as if answering a command.

Then the singing began once more.

By sunset, the village of Luminara was no longer afraid. Fear, after all, is difficult to maintain when the sun has returned and the bread has not burned. People are practical creatures. They can survive miracles if there is soup afterward.

So the villagers did what villagers always do after witnessing something impossible.

They argued about it.

“It was a warning,” said the priest.

“It was a blessing,” said the baker.

“It was weather,” said the blacksmith, though no one believed him, including the blacksmith.

“It was an opportunity,” said Bardo the spice merchant, who began selling small bags of “eclipse cinnamon” before evening prayers.

“Was it not the same cinnamon you dropped in the square?” asked a farmer.

“Exactly,” said Bardo. “That is how you know it is authentic.”

That was enough argument for one miracle.

Luminara slowly returned to itself. The baker remembered his ovens. The farmers remembered their tools. The children remembered that being frightened was less interesting than chasing one another through the lanes. And by the time evening smoke rose from the chimneys, most of the village had decided that whatever had happened, it had happened somewhere above them,



which meant it could not possibly need sweeping, feeding, or repairing before morning.

But in Elara's house, there was no argument.

There was only the soft breathing of a newborn child.

Night came gently.

The sky cleared. Stars appeared one by one above the valley, quiet and watchful. The strange eagle remained on the roof until the first moonrise, then lifted itself into the air and vanished toward the northern ridge.

Mother Nima stayed until the fire was warm again and Elara had eaten broth with trembling hands.

Before leaving, the midwife stood in the doorway and looked back at the baby.

"She was born during the dark," Mother Nima said.

Elara looked up.

"And?"

"And she brought light with her."

Elara smiled, exhausted.

"She is only a baby."

Mother Nima's face grew serious.

"All great troubles begin by underestimating babies."

Then she left, closing the door softly behind her.

Elara was alone with her daughter. For a long time, she simply watched her sleep. There are silences that feel empty, and there are silences that feel full. This was the second kind. The house seemed to hold its breath around the child, not in fear, but in wonder.

Elara reached for the small silver-thread bracelet she had woven during the last month of waiting. It was too large for the baby's tiny wrist, so she placed it beside her instead.

"For when you are older," she whispered. The baby moved one hand, caught Elara's finger, and held it with surprising strength.

Elara felt a sudden ache in her heart. Love, she discovered, was not soft at the beginning.

It was fierce. It frightened her more than the eclipse had.



“What will become of you, my little Esmeralda?” she whispered.
The baby slept. Elara closed her eyes.

She did not mean to sleep. Mothers of newborns often do not mean to sleep. Sleep simply finds them, usually in the middle of worry, and takes them by force.

That night, Elara dreamed.

In the dream, she stood barefoot in a field she did not recognize.

The grass was silver. The sky was black. There was no moon and no sun, yet she could see everything clearly. Far above her, the stars were moving.

Not falling.

Moving.

They gathered slowly in a circle, turning around a single point in the sky. Elara looked up and felt both fear and peace, which is a strange combination and usually means the dream is telling the truth.

Then she heard a child laughing.

“Elara,” said a voice.

It was not loud. It seemed to come from the grass, the stars, and her own bones at the same time.

“Who is there?” she asked.

No one answered.

The stars spun faster.

At the center of the circle, a small light appeared.

At first, Elara thought it was a star.

Then she saw it was a child.

Her child.

Esmeralda rose into the sky wrapped in white-gold light. She was no longer a newborn in the dream, but a young girl with emerald eyes and dark hair moving as if underwater. Above her head burned a flame that was not fire. It was light shaped like a crown, gentle and terrible at once.

Elara tried to run toward her, but the silver grass held her feet.

“No,” she cried. “She is mine.”



The voice returned.

“She is yours first.”

“First?”

“And then she is the world’s.”

The stars opened.

Below Esmeralda, the earth appeared. Elara saw mountains, forests, deserts, seas, cities with shining towers, villages smaller than seeds, ships crossing black water, children asleep in beds, soldiers marching under dark banners, and people looking upward as if waiting for dawn.

Then a shadow moved across the world. It began in the east, at a mountain blacker than night. From that mountain, darkness spread like ink poured into water. It covered fields, swallowed roads, entered windows, and wrapped itself around the hearts of men and women.

People stopped singing. Doors closed. Kings knelt. Children forgot how to laugh.

At the top of the Black Mountain stood a woman in a cloak of living shadows.

Elara could not see her face clearly, but she felt her hunger. Not hunger for food, or gold, or praise. This was a hunger to command all things. To silence all voices except her own. The shadow rose toward Esmeralda.

Elara screamed.

But Esmeralda lifted one hand. The light above her head spread outward. It crossed the mountains first, then the seas, then the deserts, then the sleeping cities. It touched every roof, every river, every tree, every frightened heart. Wherever it passed, the shadow retreated.

The whole world became covered in light. Then the light gathered again into seven bright sparks.

One burned red like venom.

One shone silver like a blade.

One glowed blue-white like snow that refused to melt.



One flickered black and wild like an animal's mane.

One blazed clear as a diamond.

One shimmered gold like sand under morning sun.

And the last was not a spark at all.

It was a door.

A door made of light.

Elara reached toward it. Before her fingers could touch it, the woman on the Black Mountain turned.

This time, Elara saw her eyes.

They were beautiful. And merciless.

The woman smiled.

The dream shattered.

Elara woke with a cry.

The house was dark. The fire had burned low. Esmeralda slept peacefully in her cradle, one tiny fist resting beside her cheek. For a moment, Elara could still see the seven sparks behind her eyes.

Red venom.

Silver blade.

Unmelting snow.

Black hair.

White diamond.

Golden sand.

The Door of Light.

She did not know what they meant. Not yet. But she knew the dream had not been an ordinary dream.

She rose from the bed, wrapped herself in a shawl, and went to the cradle. Esmeralda opened her eyes. The room brightened. Only a little.

Only enough that Elara might have blamed the moon, if the moon had been shining through the window. But the window faced the wall of the neighboring house. No moonlight could enter there. Elara covered her mouth with one hand.



The baby looked at her calmly, as if waiting for her mother to understand something very simple.

“My little star,” Elara whispered.

Outside, somewhere in the darkness, the great eagle cried for the third time.

And far away, beyond the valley, beyond the silver river, beyond the green hills and the old roads and the kingdoms that still believed morning would always come, the Black Mountain awakened.

It stood alone in a land where nothing grew. No grass softened its slopes. No birds nested in its cliffs. No river dared approach its roots. The mountain rose like a broken tooth from the earth, jagged and enormous, its peak hidden inside a crown of storm clouds.

Within the mountain, behind gates of black iron, a woman opened her eyes. She had been dreaming too. Her name was Morvanna. Once, long ago, she had been called princess, sister, daughter, student, child.

Now she allowed only one title:

Queen of the Black Eclipse.

She sat on a throne carved from stone older than language. Around her, shadows moved across the walls, though nothing burned in the chamber. They slid like servants, waiting for her command.

Morvanna lifted one pale hand.

The shadows froze.

For many years, she had felt the world bending slowly toward her. Kingdom by kingdom.

Fear by fear.

Bargain by bargain.

People were so easy to rule once they became afraid of one another.

But today something had changed.

During the eclipse, she had reached into the dark between worlds and touched the sealed door. It had almost opened. Almost.



Then the light had come. Not from the sun. From somewhere smaller. More dangerous.

Morvanna stood. Her long black hair spilled beneath a crown of dark gold and cold green jewels, and her black cloak dragged behind her without touching the floor.

A servant made of smoke knelt near the throne.

“My queen?” it whispered.

Morvanna looked toward the west, though stone walls and leagues of wilderness lay between her and Luminara.

“A child has been born,” she said.

The smoke servant trembled.

“Shall I send soldiers?”

“No.”

Morvanna’s eyes narrowed.

“Not soldiers. Not yet.”

She walked to a mirror hanging on the chamber wall. It was round and dark, made not of glass but of something deeper, something that seemed to drink the room around it.

Morvanna placed her hand against its surface.

“Show me,” she commanded.

The mirror remained black.

For the first time in many years, the queen of the Black Mountain felt resistance.

A slow smile touched her lips.

“So,” she whispered.

Behind her, the shadows pressed themselves flat against the walls, afraid of her pleasure.

Morvanna lowered her hand.

“Hide while you can, little light.”

In the mirror’s darkness, one tiny spark appeared. Green as an emerald. Then it vanished.

Morvanna’s smile disappeared with it. For a breath, the chamber was silent. Then every torch in the Black Mountain went out.

Morvanna stood alone in the dark, and in that darkness, she



whispered one word.
“No.”



Chapter 2 — The Girl Who Listened to Birds

Thirteen years later, Esmeralda of Luminara was late for breakfast because a sparrow had lost an argument with a window.

This was not unusual.

In Esmeralda's life, birds were always losing arguments with things: windows, chimneys, buckets, laundry lines, the baker's hat, and once, very memorably, Bardo the spice merchant's nose.

The sparrow in question sat on the edge of Esmeralda's bedroom table, ruffled, offended, and pretending the whole event had been intentional. "You flew directly into the glass," Esmeralda said. The sparrow chirped sharply.

"Yes, I saw the sky reflected there," she replied, tying her dark hair into a loose braid. "But that does not make the window responsible." The sparrow chirped again. Esmeralda narrowed her emerald-green eyes.

"That is a very rude thing to say about windows."

From the end of the bed, Miro opened one green-gold eye. Miro was Esmeralda's cat, though he preferred the term *household guardian* and accepted *cat* only in legal documents, of which he owned none. He was black from nose to tail, with thick fur, long whiskers, and the offended dignity of a king forced to live among furniture. He yawned.

The yawn seemed to say that sparrows, windows, mornings, and Esmeralda's conversations with winged fools were all beneath him.

"You could help," Esmeralda told him.

Miro closed his eye.

"I know you understand me."

His tail flicked once. "That means yes."

The cat rolled onto his back, exposing his belly in a way that suggested trust, comfort, and a willingness to attack any hand foolish enough to approach.

Esmeralda sighed.

"You are the least useful creature in this house."

At this, Miro sat upright so quickly that the sparrow nearly fell off



the table. He gave Esmeralda a look of deep moral injury.

“Oh, now you listen.”

A voice called from downstairs. “Esmeralda! Breakfast!”

“Coming, Mama!”

The sparrow chirped.

“No, you may not have my bread.”

It chirped again.

“Because yesterday you invited twelve cousins.”

Another chirp.

“Yes, twelve. I counted.”

She opened the bedroom window. Morning entered soft and fresh, carrying the smell of wet leaves, lavender, chimney smoke, and bread from the village ovens. The valley of Luminara stretched beyond her small room, green and golden beneath the early sun.

Luminara was not the largest village in the world, nor the richest, nor the most famous. It had no palace, no harbor, no university, and no statue of a general pointing dramatically toward somewhere he had probably never been. But it had a silver river that curved through the valley like a ribbon. It had hills bright with thyme and olive trees. It had red-roofed houses, narrow lanes, stubborn goats, loud markets, and a chapel bell that rang five minutes late every morning because the bell-ringer believed punctuality encouraged pride.

To Esmeralda, it was simply home. And she loved it. She loved its noise, its stubborn goats, its late bells, its gossiping windows, and every bird that thought her bedroom was a public inn.

Yet sometimes, when the old road shimmered beyond the northern ridge, Esmeralda felt something tug gently inside her — not enough to make her leave, only enough to make her wonder whether the world was larger than everyone said.

The sparrow hopped to the window frame.

“Carefully this time,” she warned.

The sparrow lifted its head, gave a final indignant chirp, and flew out into the sky. Immediately, it nearly hit a passing swallow.



Esmeralda leaned out.

“I saw that!”

The sparrow vanished into a fig tree.

Behind her, Miro jumped down from the bed and stretched one paw at a time, as though preparing for a journey of historic importance instead of breakfast.

“Hurry,” Esmeralda said. “Mama made honey cakes.”

Miro froze. Then, without sacrificing any dignity whatsoever, he ran.

By the time Esmeralda reached the kitchen, Miro was already seated beside his bowl, pretending he had arrived by royal appointment. Elara stood at the stove, turning flatbread on a clay pan.

Thirteen years had touched her gently. There were thin lines beside her eyes now, and a silver thread or two in her dark hair, but her face still carried the warmth of someone who had learned to smile even when life asked difficult questions.

She looked over her shoulder.

“You are late.”

“A sparrow had an emergency.”

“The window again?”

“It was a different window.”

“That does not make it better.”

Esmeralda sat at the small wooden table, where a plate of bread, olives, cheese, and honey cakes waited.

Miro placed one paw delicately on her knee.

“No,” she said.

The paw remained.

“You have your own breakfast.”

Miro glanced at his bowl, then back at her, as if to say that what had been placed there was not breakfast but an insult with fish in it.

Elara set a cup of warm milk in front of Esmeralda.

“One day,” she said, “you will be late because of a normal reason.”

“What is a normal reason?”

“Oversleeping. Losing a shoe. Forgetting chores.”



"I forget chores all the time."

"You remember them immediately after I mention them."

"That is still a kind of remembering."

Elara tried not to smile and failed.

Esmeralda tore a piece of bread and dipped it in honey. The sun from the kitchen window fell across her face. Her eyes, always bright, seemed brighter in morning light. Elara watched her for a breath too long.

Esmeralda noticed.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"You have the face."

"What face?"

"The face you make when you are thinking about something and deciding not to tell me."

Elara turned back to the stove.

"That is simply my face."

"No. Your normal face is kinder. That face has secrets in it." Miro gave a soft meow.

"See?" Esmeralda said. "Miro agrees."

"Miro agrees with anyone holding honey cakes."

Miro did not deny this.

Elara placed the last flatbread onto a plate and sat across from her daughter. For a moment, the kitchen was peaceful: bread warm between them, the kettle whispering on the stove, sunlight resting on the clay tiles.

Then a flock of swallows flew past the window in a sudden silver blur.

Esmeralda turned her head before the sound reached the kitchen. Elara saw it. She always saw it.

"You heard them?"

"Not heard exactly."

"What, then?"

Esmeralda thought about this. She had tried many times to explain what happened with birds, but language was built mostly for



people, and people were clumsy with things that did not behave like people.

"It is like... knowing where a song is going before the next note comes." Elara was quiet.

Esmeralda took another bite of bread.

"It does not happen all the time."

"No?"

"Only when they are frightened. Or excited. Or lying."

Elara raised an eyebrow. "Birds lie?"

"Constantly. Especially magpies."

"That explains many things." Esmeralda grinned. But Elara's smile faded quickly.

For thirteen years, she had told herself that strange did not mean dangerous. A child who calmed crying babies by touching their hands was not dangerous. A girl who could lead lost goats home by whispering to them was not dangerous. A daughter whose laughter made flowers lean toward the kitchen window was not dangerous. And yet, every year on Esmeralda's birthday, Elara remembered the dream.

The silver grass.

The seven sparks.

The woman on the Black Mountain.

She had never told Esmeralda all of it.

She had wanted to.

Many times.

But how does a mother tell her child that the world may someday come knocking at their door?

So Elara had kept the dream folded inside her heart like a letter she feared to open.

"Mama?" Esmeralda said.

Elara blinked.

"Yes?"

"You are doing it again."

"The face?"

"The secret face."



Elara reached across the table and brushed a loose strand of hair from Esmeralda's forehead.

"You were born during an impossible day," she said.

"I know."

"You know some of it."

Esmeralda leaned forward.

"There is more?"

Before Elara could answer, a goat screamed outside. Not bleated. Screamed.

Both of them turned toward the window.

Miro immediately ran under the table, which he later would have insisted was a tactical position, if anyone had been able to understand him at the time.

Esmeralda jumped up. "That sounded like Pippa."

Elara caught her wrist. "Breakfast first."

"Mama, goats do not scream like that unless there is danger."

"Pippa screams when a leaf touches her unexpectedly."

"She is sensitive." "She is dramatic."

The goat screamed again. Esmeralda gave her mother a look.

Elara sighed. "Go."

Esmeralda kissed her cheek and rushed out the door.

Miro emerged from beneath the table only after confirming that no one expected bravery from him.

Outside, Luminara was awake.

Morning had begun in full noise: shutters opening, carts creaking, women calling from doorways, children racing barefoot through lanes, merchants arranging goods, and old men gathering near the fountain to discuss the weather as if they personally managed it.

Esmeralda ran past the baker's shop, where Master Tovin was pulling round loaves from the oven.

"Late again?" he called.

"Goat emergency!"

"Third this week!"

"Goats live complicated lives!"



She turned down a narrow lane lined with hanging laundry and nearly crashed into Bardo the spice merchant, who was carrying a tray of small jars.

“Careful!” Bardo cried. “This is saffron!”

“It is turmeric,” Esmeralda said without stopping.

Bardo clutched the tray to his chest.

“Only to the untrained eye!”

“To the trained nose too!” she called back.

Several nearby villagers laughed.

Bardo frowned after her.

He was a middle-aged man with brown hair, watchful eyes, and the solemn expression of someone who believed every jar, bottle, pouch, and spice in his possession had a destiny — preferably one that ended in profit. His shop smelled of cinnamon, pepper, mint, cumin, dried roses, and exaggeration. He liked money, secrets, and being the first to know things. Unfortunately for him, he was rarely the first to understand them.

Esmeralda found Pippa behind the well.

The goat stood on top of a barrel, trembling with all the dignity available to a goat standing on a barrel. Below her, three geese circled like angry white boats.

“Oh,” Esmeralda said. “This again.” Pippa bleated desperately.

“Yes, I understand they are frightening.” The largest goose hissed.

Esmeralda pointed at him. “Don’t start, Captain.”

The goose hissed again, but with less confidence.

Several children had gathered nearby. Among them was Tomas, the baker’s son, a freckled boy who had once tried to ride Pippa and discovered that goats were not built for ambition.

“Can you make them stop?” he asked.

“I cannot make anyone do anything,” Esmeralda said. “But I can ask.”

“You ask geese?”

“It works better than ordering them.”

“My father orders geese.”

“And how many times has your father been bitten?”



Tomas considered this. “Many.”

“Exactly.” Esmeralda crouched in front of the geese.

The villagers passing through the square slowed, because nothing improved a morning like watching someone negotiate with poultry. The largest goose lifted his wings. Esmeralda lowered her voice.

“Captain, Pippa did not steal your corn.” The goose made a doubtful sound.

“She has many faults,” Esmeralda continued, “including cowardice, greed, and a terrible sense of balance. But she does not like corn.” Pippa bleated from the barrel.

“Yes, I am defending you. Do not interrupt.” The children giggled. The goose tilted his head.

Esmeralda pointed toward Bardo’s shop. “Ask the merchant’s donkey.” At this, the goose turned sharply.

Across the square, Bardo’s donkey stood beside a cart, chewing with the slow confidence of a criminal who knew the law did not apply to him.

A single grain of corn clung to his whiskers. The goose honked. The donkey froze. Then the geese charged. The donkey bolted down the lane, kicking up dust, while Bardo shouted, “That donkey is innocent!” No one believed him.

Pippa remained on the barrel.

“You can come down now,” Esmeralda said. The goat refused. Esmeralda held out her arms. Pippa leapt.

This was unfortunate, because Pippa was not a small goat, and Esmeralda was not prepared to receive her with the full force of panic. They both landed in a heap. The children cheered. From the rooftops, three sparrows chirped what sounded suspiciously like laughter.

Esmeralda lay on her back, Pippa standing over her triumphantly. “You are welcome,” she said.

Above the village, a shadow crossed the sun. For a moment, everyone looked up. A great eagle circled high over Luminara. Its white head flashed against the blue, its golden beak caught the



light, and its dark wings moved with such power and silence that even the children stopped laughing.

Esmeralda sat up slowly. She had seen the eagle before.

Everyone in Luminara had, at least once. Some said it lived in the northern cliffs. Some said it had followed the valley since before the first houses were built. Bardo claimed he had once sold it a packet of dried figs, but Bardo also claimed his pepper could cure shyness, so opinions varied.

Esmeralda did not know where the eagle came from. But she knew when it watched her. And it watched her often.

The eagle circled once.

Twice.

Three times.

Then it turned toward the northern ridge. Esmeralda shaded her eyes. "What do you want?" she whispered.

The eagle gave no answer. At least, not in words.

But somewhere inside her chest, Esmeralda felt the faint pull of distance. Roads. Wind. Something coming.

She stood. Tomas looked at her. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"You have hay in your hair."

"That is because I am a person of the earth."

"You fell under a goat."

"That too."

She brushed herself off and helped Pippa back toward her owner's yard. As she passed Bardo's shop, the spice merchant was arguing with his donkey, the geese, and three customers who had stopped shopping entirely because the argument was better than cinnamon. "This village has no respect for commerce!" Bardo declared.

A goose bit his sleeve. "Or sleeves!"

Esmeralda smiled and continued walking.

By midday, the valley had grown warm.

Esmeralda finished her chores: carrying water, helping Elara hang herbs to dry, delivering bread to Mother Nima, and returning Pippa



to her yard twice more because Pippa considered fences a personal challenge.

After lunch, she escaped to her favorite place.

It was a hill just beyond the village, where grass grew high and wildflowers bent in the wind. From there, Esmeralda could see all of Luminara: the red roofs, the chapel tower, the silver river, the market square, the fields, the olive groves, and beyond them, the blue line of distant mountains.

A fig tree grew at the top of the hill.

Its branches twisted low enough to climb and high enough to hide in.

Esmeralda had spent half her childhood in that tree, reading, dreaming, listening, and occasionally avoiding chores with excellent commitment.

She climbed to her usual branch.

A small golden bird waited there.

He was unlike the other birds of Luminara.

His crest shone like sunlight caught in honey, while warm red feathers glowed beneath his wings and along his chest. Dark, delicate markings curved around his face and neck, giving him a serious expression, as though he had important opinions about kingdoms and rarely approved of them. His wings shimmered faintly when he moved, and his song, when he chose to sing, sounded almost like words heard through water.

Esmeralda had found him three years earlier after a storm, lying beneath the fig tree with one wing twisted badly. She had taken him home, wrapped him in cloth, fed him drops of water from her finger, and stayed awake beside him all night. By morning, he had looked at her with eyes too clever for any bird. She had named him Solen.

“You are early,” she said, settling beside him.

Solen chirped.

“No, I am not late. I was delayed by geese.”

He tilted his head.

“Yes, again.”



A breeze moved through the fig leaves.

Below, the village noise softened into a distant hum.

Esmeralda took a small piece of honey cake from her pocket. "I saved you some."

Solen hopped closer but did not take it immediately.

He looked at her instead.

"What?" she asked.

He gave a low, quiet note.

Esmeralda frowned. "You feel it too?"

Solen looked toward the road beyond the northern ridge. The old road. No one used it much anymore except traders, pilgrims, and people who did not know better. It curved down from the mountains and entered Luminara through an arch of cypress trees. Esmeralda had always liked that road. It seemed to arrive from stories rather than places.

Today, a figure moved upon it.

At first it was only a dark speck against the pale dust. Then it became a traveler, walking slowly and leaning on a staff.

Esmeralda watched.

He was still far away, but even from the hill, she could sense an unusual weight around him. Not danger. Not exactly. He walked like someone carrying a heavy past.

And yet, as he passed beneath the cypress arch, something around Esmeralda's wrist warmed.

She looked down. The silver-thread bracelet her mother had woven for her long ago glimmered once in the sunlight. Then it became ordinary silver again. Beside her, Solen had gone completely still.

Solen's feathers lifted.

Esmeralda glanced at him. "You know him?"

The bird was silent.

From very high above, the great eagle cried.

Esmeralda looked up. The eagle circled the sky.

She did not know his name yet, of course. Names are powerful things, and many creatures do not give them away quickly. But the



eagle had watched her for so many years that she had begun to think of him as a question with wings.

Today, the question seemed sharper.

The traveler reached the cypress arch.

A wind moved through Luminara.

It came suddenly, cool and bright, carrying the smell of rain though the sky was clear. It passed over the fields, lifted laundry from clotheslines, rattled shop signs, turned the pages of the priest's prayer book, and sent a hundred birds rising from the rooftops.

In the market square, Bardo the spice merchant looked up from weighing pepper.

"Fresh wind," he muttered.

Then he saw the traveler.

Bardo's eyes narrowed.

A stranger with a staff was always interesting.

A stranger with a staff, a cloak, and boots covered in the dust of many roads was more than interesting.

He might be profitable.

The traveler entered the village.

He was tall, though age had bent him slightly. A pale hood framed a deeply lined face, thick white brows, and eyes that looked as if they had watched too many roads end badly. His long white beard fell over his chest like winter that had learned to speak. His cloak was the gray of mountain rain, worn at the edges. In one hand, he held a staff of pale wood, smooth as bone, crowned with a small stone that looked dull until the light touched it. Then it flashed gold.

The market quieted. Only a little. Villages do not become silent easily. But conversations thinned. Hammers paused. A woman stopped choosing tomatoes. Two children stared openly until their grandmother pinched them for bad manners, then stared herself. The stranger looked around the square. His eyes were not young, but they were very alive.

Bardo stepped forward before anyone else could steal the opportunity. "Good afternoon, honored traveler!" he called,



spreading his arms. “Welcome to Luminara, jewel of the valley, cradle of hospitality, and home of the finest saffron west of the seven bridges.”

Master Tovin the baker leaned toward his wife. “It is turmeric.” “I know,” she whispered.

The stranger turned to Bardo. “I seek someone.”

“Everyone seeks someone,” Bardo said wisely. “Some seek family, some seek fortune, some seek spices.”

“I seek a child.”

This made several villagers stiffen. Bardo noticed.

Bardo noticed everything that might later become leverage.

“A child?” he repeated. “We have many. Loud, expensive, and mostly sticky.”

The stranger’s hand tightened slightly on his staff.

“A child born thirteen years ago. On the day of the eclipse.” Now the square truly quieted.

From the hill, Esmeralda saw the change before she understood it. The villagers turned their faces toward one another, then away. Mother Nima, who had been buying onions, slowly lowered her basket. Master Tovin stopped pretending not to listen. Bardo’s expression changed too. Only for a moment. But Esmeralda saw it. His eyes sharpened. He smelled importance. And Bardo, like certain rats and all tax collectors, could smell importance through walls.

“A child of the eclipse,” Bardo said slowly.

The traveler watched him.

“Yes.”

Bardo placed a hand over his heart. “Then fortune has guided your noble steps to the correct man.” Several villagers made small noises of disagreement. Bardo ignored them.

“You know such a child?” the stranger asked.

“Know her?” Bardo said. “My dear traveler, I am practically family.”

Mother Nima opened her mouth.

Bardo spoke louder. “My niece was born during that very eclipse.”



Esmeralda frowned from the hill. Bardo had many things, including jars, lies, and an impressive collection of unpaid debts.

But as far as Esmeralda knew, he did not have a niece born during the eclipse. Solen gave a sharp chirp.

“Yes,” Esmeralda whispered. “That sounds wrong.”

The stranger looked at Bardo for a long moment.

“What is your name?”

“Bardo of the Seven Spices.”

“You sell more than seven.”

“A poetic title, honored sir. Accuracy kills wonder.”

“And your niece?”

“Ah,” said Bardo. “Sweet child. Rare child. Unusual child. Very eclipse-like.”

The stranger’s face did not change. “Take me to her.”

Bardo bowed so low that one of his jars slid from his pocket and broke on the stones. A cloud of yellow powder burst around his boots. Master Tovin coughed. “Turmeric,” he said. Bardo straightened, smiling tightly. “This way.”

The stranger followed him through the square.

As they passed the fountain, Mother Nima stepped forward. “Traveler.”

He stopped. The old midwife studied him with eyes that had seen too many births to be impressed by cloaks.

“What do you want with the eclipse child?”

Bardo laughed nervously. “Mother Nima, please, important matters are being handled by people of commerce.”

“Then heaven help us,” she said.

The traveler bowed his head respectfully. “My name is Aurelion.”

At the name, Solen went completely still.

Esmeralda felt the bird change beside her.

Aurelion.

The name moved through the air like a key turning in an old lock.

Mother Nima looked at him for a long breath.

“What do you want?” she repeated. Aurelion’s face grew tired. “To know whether hope has been hiding in this valley.” No one



answered. Even Bardo seemed uncertain what price to put on such a sentence.

Then Aurelion continued after him, and the two disappeared into a narrow lane.

The village began speaking all at once. Esmeralda remained in the fig tree.

Her heart had begun beating faster.

She did not know why.

Below her, Luminara looked the same as it had that morning: red roofs, silver river, market square, olive trees, smoke from chimneys, goats preparing future crimes.

And yet, something had changed.

The air felt like the moment before a storm, when leaves turn their pale undersides to the sky.

Solen hopped onto her wrist.

His tiny claws pressed lightly against her skin.

“You know that name,” she said.

The bird did not answer.

But his golden eyes remained fixed on the lane where Aurelion had vanished.

Above them, the great eagle circled lower.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Then it cried out so fiercely that every bird in the fig tree burst into flight.

Esmeralda stood on the branch, one hand against the trunk.

At the edge of the village, the cool wind returned.

It wrapped around the hill, lifted her braid, and filled her chest with the strange feeling that the road had not brought a stranger to Luminara by accident. It had brought an answer. Or perhaps a question.

And somewhere deep inside Esmeralda, in a place she had never known was waiting, something opened its eyes.



Chapter 3 — Morvanna of the Black Mountain

The Black Mountain did not appear on most maps. This was not because mapmakers had forgotten it. Mapmakers forgot many things: small bridges, old wells, villages that refused to pay taxes, and occasionally entire islands when lunch was more interesting than geography. But no mapmaker forgot the Black Mountain. They avoided it.

Some drew clouds where it should have been. Others placed decorative dragons over the region and hoped no one asked questions. One famous royal cartographer marked the area with the words *Unpleasant Hills*, then retired the next morning and became a beekeeper.

The mountain stood in the eastern wastelands, far beyond the green valleys, beyond the last farms, beyond the forests where wolves still remembered the taste of kings. It rose alone from a plain of cracked black earth, jagged and enormous, as though the world had once tried to grow a tower and regretted it halfway through.

No trees softened its slopes.

No birds crossed its peak.

No rain washed its stones.

Storm clouds circled it day and night, not because the weather wished to be there, but because something inside the mountain held them prisoner.

At the foot of the mountain, an army waited. It covered the plain in rows of iron, leather, smoke, and silence. There were soldiers in dark armor with helmets shaped like snarling beasts. There were riders mounted on creatures that looked almost like horses, except their eyes burned red and their hooves left ash instead of prints. There were tall figures wrapped entirely in gray cloth, who moved without sound and never turned their heads unless someone whispered a secret.

And there were shadows. They were the worst. Not ordinary shadows that knew their place under feet and furniture. These shadows stood upright. They slipped between

tents. They crawled along walls where there was no light to cast them. Sometimes they wore the shape of people. Sometimes they forgot and became long, thin things with too many arms. Even Morvanna's soldiers avoided them when they could.

The army waited. Armies are not good at waiting. Soldiers complain. Horses stamp. Captains shout. Cooks burn stew. Someone always starts a card game that ends in an argument about cheating. But this army waited without noise. Because above them, in the fortress carved into the Black Mountain, their queen was awake.

Morvanna stood before a window cut directly into the stone. The window had no glass. It did not need any. No wind dared enter her chamber without permission. From there, she looked down upon the army she had built over many years. Kingdom by kingdom. Bargain by bargain. Fear by fear.

Some had joined her because they wanted power. Some because they feared her more than they loved freedom. Some because she had promised them safety in exchange for obedience.

People were strange, Morvanna thought. They feared chains, yet offered their wrists whenever chaos frightened them enough.

Behind her, the throne chamber stretched long and cold. Its floor was black marble veined with silver. Tall pillars rose into darkness above, where the ceiling could not be seen. Along the walls hung banners of deep violet and black, each marked with the symbol of an eclipsed sun.

At the far end of the chamber stood Morvanna's throne. It had not been built. It had been uncovered. Long before Morvanna, long before the kingdoms of men, long before language had learned to lie, something had carved that throne into the mountain's heart. It was made of dark stone that drank candlelight. Anyone who sat upon it felt taller than mercy. Morvanna had sat there for the first time when she was young. She had never again wanted any other chair.

"My queen." The voice came from behind her.

Morvanna did not turn. "Speak, Veyr."



A man knelt near the first step of the throne. He was thin, elegant, and dressed in black robes fastened with silver hooks. His face was pale, his hair perfectly combed, and his smile had the careful quality of a knife placed on a dinner table.

Veyr was Morvanna's chief minister. He had survived in her service for eleven years, which meant he was either very useful, very clever, or not quite human. Most people suspected all three.

"The western captains report that three towns have surrendered," Veyr said. "The gates were opened before dawn. No resistance."

"Names?"

"Marrowfen, East Dalen, and Saint Oris."

"Saint Oris had a library."

"It did."

Morvanna turned then. Veyr lowered his eyes at once.

"Had?" she asked. The chamber seemed to grow colder. Veyr swallowed. "The local commander burned part of it. He believed the books might contain rebellious songs."

Morvanna's expression did not change. That was the dangerous thing about her. Anger made some people shout. Morvanna became quiet. The quieter she became, the more people remembered urgent business elsewhere.

"Bring him to me," she said.

Veyr bowed his head. "Yes, my queen."

"Alive."

Veyr hesitated. "Of course."

Morvanna walked away from the window. Her cloak followed behind her, though no hand lifted it and no wind moved it. It seemed less like cloth than a piece of night trained to behave.

"Fear is useful," she said. "Ignorance is not. A frightened kingdom kneels. An ignorant one makes mistakes."

Veyr kept his head low. "The commander will be corrected."

"He will become a correction." The minister wisely decided this sentence required no reply.



Morvanna ascended the steps of her throne and sat. The shadows in the chamber leaned toward her. “How long?” she asked. Veyr lifted one hand. A strip of parchment unrolled itself in the air before him.

“Seven weeks until the eclipse.” At the word, the shadows along the walls trembled. Morvanna noticed. She noticed everything. “Seven weeks,” she repeated.

For thirteen years, she had waited. Thirteen years since the first eclipse had betrayed her. Thirteen years since the sealed door beneath the mountain had almost opened. Thirteen years since light had burst across the world from some unknown cradle in the west.

She still remembered the humiliation of that first eclipse. She had stood in the chamber below the mountain, where the ancient Door of Darkness slept behind seven locks of forgotten magic. She had spoken the old words. She had offered blood, fire, memory, and a crown taken from a king who had begged very badly.

The Door had answered. It had begun to open. Beyond it, she had felt them waiting. The old forces. The first dark. The power before kingdoms, before laws, before weak hearts dressed fear in the pretty clothes of goodness. Then a child had cried somewhere in the world. And the Door had closed in her face.

Morvanna’s fingers curled around the arm of the throne. Stone cracked beneath them. Veyr pretended not to see. He had become excellent at not seeing things.

“The preparations continue?” she asked.

“Yes, my queen. The lower chamber has been cleared. The obsidian circle is restored. The thirteen braziers are ready. The prisoners from the northern revolt have been selected.”

“Good.”

“The eclipse must be complete for the spell to begin.”

“I know what must be complete.”

Veyr went very still. Morvanna allowed the silence to stretch just long enough to remind him that breathing was a privilege. Then she leaned back.



“And the old seals?”

“Six have weakened. The seventh remains resistant.”

At that, Morvanna’s eyes narrowed.

“The seventh.”

“The Seal of Knowledge,” Veyr said carefully. “It is still beyond our reach.” The shadows hissed. Veyr wished they would not do that while he was speaking. It made his teeth hurt. Morvanna rose again. The silver veins in the marble floor glimmered under her steps.

“The Door of Knowledge,” she said, almost softly. “Still hiding its path.”

“Yes, my queen.”

“How loyal of it.”

Veyr said nothing. Everyone in the Black Mountain knew the old tale, though no one told it loudly.

At the beginning of the age, when light and darkness were first separated, two doors had been hidden in the world.

The Door of Darkness was buried beneath the Black Mountain, sealed behind ancient locks.

The Door of Knowledge was hidden elsewhere, protected by riddles, paths, and a guardian so old that even legends spoke of him with respect.

One door opened the way for darkness to enter the world. The other held the light that could close it forever. Morvanna had found one. She had not found the other. Not yet.

“Search parties?” she asked.

“Still moving through the southern ranges and the old ruins. None have returned.”

“That is because they failed.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“If the Door of Knowledge cannot be found, then the child must never find it either.”

Veyr looked up despite himself. “The child.”

The word moved through the chamber like a small flame. The shadows drew back. Morvanna smiled.



“You dislike saying it.”

“I dislike what we do not yet understand.”

“A rare intelligent sentence, Veyr.”

He bowed. “I treasure it, my queen.”

Morvanna walked to the mirror of black fire hanging between two pillars. Its surface was dark and still, but deep within it, red sparks moved like thoughts.

On the day of the first eclipse, it had shown her a single green spark. Only for a moment. Only enough to insult her. Since then, the mirror had shown nothing.

Morvanna lifted her hand. “Show me the child of the first eclipse.” The mirror remained black. Veyr lowered his gaze.

Morvanna’s voice sharpened. “Show me.”

A crack of red light appeared in the mirror. Then another. For one breath, something formed inside it: hills, a river, red roofs, birds rising suddenly into blue sky. Then the image broke. The mirror spat sparks. Veyr stepped back. Morvanna did not move. A faint burn marked her palm.

She looked at it with curiosity rather than pain. “Protected,” she said.

“By whom?” Veyr asked.

The queen was silent.

Far beneath that silence, something old and angry stirred. There were only a few powers left in the world that could resist her sight. One was dead. One was hidden. And one had betrayed her. Veyr saw the change in her face and regretted being present. “My queen?”

Morvanna turned from the mirror. “My brother is moving.” Veyr’s expression tightened. “Aurelion.” The name was spoken carefully.

In the Black Mountain, some names had weight. This one had teeth. Morvanna’s gaze moved to the window. The storm clouds beyond it twisted around the mountain peak.

“He has searched for thirteen years,” she said. “I wondered when desperation would finally make him useful.”



“You believe he has found her?”

“I believe he has found something.”

Veyr chose his next words with the precision of a man stepping across thin ice. “If he has found the child, should we not strike with full force?” Morvanna looked amused.

“Full force is for enemies who understand they are in a war. A child does not. Not yet.” “She may be guarded.” “She is guarded.”

“By Aurelion?”

“Perhaps.”

“Then he remains dangerous.”

For the first time, anger touched Morvanna’s face. It was brief, but it changed the room. The shadows flattened themselves against the walls. Veyr’s breath caught.

Morvanna stepped closer to the mirror, and the red sparks inside it dimmed, as if afraid of being seen. “My brother,” she said, “was always dangerous because he believed mercy made him strong.”

Veyr did not answer. He knew some of the story. Everyone knew some of it. No one knew all.

Once, Aurelion and Morvanna had stood together in courts of light. Once, their names had been spoken in the same songs. Once, before the Black Mountain claimed her, Morvanna had laughed. There had been a time when Aurelion had called her Vanna, and she had thrown apples at him from the palace orchard for using it in public.

Morvanna remembered this sometimes. She punished the memory whenever it came. Then came the breaking. Morvanna had discovered the ancient door. Aurelion had discovered her plan. Brother had stood against sister. The mountain had burned for three nights. Aurelion had escaped wounded. Morvanna had remained.

After that, no one in the eastern kingdoms spoke of the family they had been. Not unless they were tired of living.

Morvanna turned back to Veyr. “Send a whisper.” The minister bowed. “To whom?”

“To the roads. To the markets. To every greedy ear between here



and the western valleys.”

Veyr smiled faintly “Greedy ears are easy to employ.”

“Find the old wanderer. Find the village he entered. Find the child he seeks.”

“And when we find her?”

Morvanna walked to the window again. Below, her army stretched across the plain like a dark sea. The eclipse was seven weeks away. Seven weeks, and the world would finally stop pretending it knew how to govern itself.

“Do not bring her to me,” Morvanna said.

Veyr looked surprised. “No?”

“No. Children are noisy, fragile things. They cry. They ask questions. They develop attachments.” Her voice became cold.

“End her story before it learns to speak.”

Veyr bowed deeply. “As you command.”

He turned to leave.

“Veyr.” He froze.

“Yes, my queen?”

“If my brother stands in the way, do not kill him.”

The minister looked back. Morvanna’s eyes were fixed on the western horizon.

“Bring him home.”

Veyr hesitated. “Alive?”

Morvanna smiled. “Mostly.”

Veyr bowed again and withdrew from the chamber.

As the great doors closed behind him, Morvanna remained by the window. For a long time, she watched the army below. She did not see soldiers. She saw order. That was what no one understood. They called her cruel. They called her hungry for power. They called her witch, tyrant, monster, queen of darkness. Some of those names were even accurate. But names were small things.

Morvanna had seen the truth of the world. People lied when they were free. Kings made wars because they could. Merchants sold hunger back to the hungry. Crowds cheered heroes in the morning and abandoned them by nightfall. Families broke.



Promises rotted. Love became a knife the moment fear sharpened it.

Freedom, Morvanna had decided long ago, was simply chaos with a prettier name. She would end it. Under her rule, no kingdom would rise against another. No child would starve because a lord wanted another silver cup. No crowd would burn a village because someone whispered the wrong prayer. No brother would betray his sister in the name of mercy. The world would be peaceful. Silent, perhaps. Afraid, certainly. But peaceful. And if darkness was the price of order, then the world had been overcharged for light.

Morvanna lifted her hand, and one of the upright shadows detached itself from the wall. It crawled toward her, taking the shape of a kneeling servant.

“Go,” she whispered.

The shadow raised its head. Its face had no eyes, but somehow it looked at her.

“West,” Morvanna said. “Find Aurelion. Find what he has found. Do not be seen by him if you can avoid it.”

The shadow opened a mouth that was only a cut in darkness.

“And if the child sees me?”

Morvanna’s smile returned.

“Then smile back.”

The shadow shivered with pleasure.

Then it flattened itself across the floor, slipped under the chamber door, and vanished into the fortress.

Morvanna waited until it was gone. Then she turned from the window and walked toward the back of the throne chamber, where two black pillars guarded a narrow staircase descending into the mountain. No servant followed her. No guard dared ask where she was going. The staircase spiraled down for a long time. It passed below the throne room, under the soldiers’ halls, past the kitchens where the cooks spoke in whispers, and deeper still, beneath the prisons where even screams grew tired. It descended into the oldest part of the mountain, where the walls were not carved by tools but shaped by pressure, heat, and ancient will.



At last, Morvanna reached the lower chamber. It was vast and circular. Thirteen iron braziers stood around its edge, unlit for now. The floor was marked with an enormous obsidian ring, polished so perfectly that it reflected nothing. And on the far side of the chamber stood the Door of Darkness.

It was taller than any castle gate and narrower than any door had a right to be. It rose from the stone without hinges, handles, or frame. Its surface was not wood, metal, or rock. It looked like a vertical piece of night, pressed flat and sealed by seven ancient locks. Six of those locks were cracked. The seventh remained whole. Morvanna approached it. The air thickened with every step. Whispers stirred behind the door. They were not voices exactly. They were promises trying to remember language.

Queen.

Open.

Soon.

Morvanna placed her burned palm against the seventh lock. Pain shot through her hand. She welcomed it. Pain was honest. Unlike people, it never pretended to be anything else.

“Seven weeks,” she whispered.

The whispers grew louder.

Soon.

The lock glimmered faintly, resisting her touch. Not much. Less than before. But enough. Morvanna leaned closer.

“Whatever light was born thirteen years ago,” she said, “it is still only a child.”

Behind the door, something vast shifted in the dark. The chamber trembled. Dust fell from the ceiling in thin streams.

Morvanna did not step back.

“I have waited through thirteen years of dawns,” she said. “I can wait through seven more weeks.”

The whispers gathered into one low sound. A laugh.

Far above, on the surface of the Black Mountain, the storm clouds opened. No rain fell. Only darkness. It rolled down the slopes like smoke, crossed the army camps, slipped between the



tents, and spread outward across the wasteland toward the roads of the west.

Toward rivers.

Toward villages.

Toward Luminara.

And in the lower chamber, standing before the sealed door, Morvanna closed her eyes and saw again the spark from the mirror.

Green as an emerald. Small as a child's eye. Bright enough to trouble the dark. Her fingers tightened against the ancient lock.

"Burn while you can," she whispered.

Behind the Door of Darkness, something whispered back.

Soon.



Thank you for reading this Preview of **Book One: The Child of the Eclipse**

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

You have taken your first step into Luminara.

But Esmeralda's story has only just begun.

The Door of Darkness is waking. Morvanna has already completed her seven dark trials. And before the next eclipse returns, Esmeralda must leave everything she knows and begin the Seven Missions that will decide the fate of light and darkness.

If you enjoyed this preview, you can continue the adventure in:

Esmeralda of Luminara and the Seven Lights
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Thank you for entering the world of Luminara.

The eclipse is coming.

The light is waiting.

And Esmeralda's journey has only just begun.



On the day Esmeralda was born, the sun disappeared.

For seven minutes, the world forgot how to breathe. Then a newborn child cried, light returned to the valley of Luminara, and far away, beneath the Black Mountain, an ancient darkness opened its eyes.

Thirteen years later, Esmeralda is only a girl who loves birds, argues with geese, and believes her village is the whole world. But when a mysterious wanderer named Aurelion arrives searching for the child of the eclipse, everything she knows begins to change.

A hidden door is waking. A queen of shadows is preparing for the second eclipse. And somewhere beyond Luminara, seven lights wait to be found before darkness reaches the world again.

With a proud black cat, a golden bird, a great eagle, and companions as strange as destiny itself, Esmeralda must take her first step toward a journey larger than fear, older than memory, and brighter than any dream.

But the road has already heard her name.

And the Black Mountain is listening.

Book One: The Child of the Eclipse begins an epic fantasy adventure about courage, friendship, mystery, and the light we carry before we understand its power.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Younes ELMA is a writer and storyteller with a passion for fantasy, mystery, and meaningful adventures. Through Esmeralda of Luminara and the Seven Lights, he invites readers into a world of courage, friendship, destiny, and light, where even the smallest voice can awaken hope against great darkness.

The Child of the Eclipse is the first book in the Esmeralda of Luminara and the Seven Lights saga.

