



The Spark of Aethelgard

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The four travelers emerge from the mist of the Great Falls, their clothes heavy with river water and the grime of the road. Before them rises the majestic city of Aethelgard, a vertical wonder of glowing bridges and ancient stone that promises safety, yet feels cold and imposing.



They push open the heavy oak doors of the Gilded Anchor, a luxurious inn where golden lanterns cast long, moody shadows across polished wooden beams. The warmth of the hearth is a sharp contrast to their shivering frames, but the opulence of the hall makes them feel like intruders in a world of wealth.



Mason leads his siblings toward the massive dark wooden counter, his boots leaving damp prints on the wet stone floor. Behind the desk stands Silas, the innkeeper, whose slicked-back hair and embroidered tunic mark him as a man of status and little patience.



Silas leans over the counter, his eyes narrowing as he surveys the ragged group with deep distrust. The air in the room grows heavy and still, the flickering candlelight catching the sharp, dangerous lines of his face as he demands to know their business.



Under the pressure of the innkeeper's interrogation, a blue-white magical energy begins to crackle across Mason's skin like liquid lightning. The glow illuminates the intricate carvings of the counter and casts dancing shadows against his sister Elara's anxious, determined face.



The younger brother, Leo, clings to Elara's cloak with wide, nervous eyes while Mia stands behind them, her arms crossed in a defensive glare. The scent of ozone fills the air as the sparks from Mason's arms drift upward, reflecting in the polished wood of the grand lobby.



Silas freezes, his hand hovering near a bell as he stares at the raw power manifesting before him. The tension is a physical weight, a silent battle of wills between a man who has seen too much and a boy who is carrying the weight of his family's survival.



Through the towering arched windows behind them, the magical city glows with a thousand blue lights, waterfalls plunging into the depths between skyscrapers of stone. The breathtaking view serves as a silent witness to the small, desperate drama unfolding within the golden-lit walls of the inn.



Elara speaks softly but firmly, her voice cutting through the hum of Mason's magic to plead for a single night of rest. Mason struggles to breathe, his eyes locked on Silas, his body a map of glowing branches that pulse with the rhythm of his racing heart.



After a long, agonizing silence, Silas sighs and slides a heavy iron key across the dark wood toward Mason's sparking hand. The energy begins to recede into a soft shimmer as the siblings turn toward the stairs, finally finding a moment of peace in a city that feels like a beautiful, dangerous dream.