

Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery

Fragment of a Sorcerous Crown



Joan Marie Verba

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A Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery short story

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A plant eating a sheep had to be a sorcerous phenomenon, Serena thought. Pausing a moment to reflect on her readings at the Library of Sorcery, she could think of no cases even remotely similar, however.

"I haven't come upon any instances of such a thing in any of my readings," she told Edwina, the High Sorcerer of Briarhill, who had contacted her through the sorcerous channels.

"There's nothing in our spell books, either," Edwina said. "That's the reason we wanted to ask you."

"You're sure the account from the shepherd is accurate?"

"Our truth spells detected no exaggerations."

"Is this the first occurrence or were there others?"

"No one else reported anything similar."

"You say this happened at night? Shadows may distort an appearance."

"There was a full moon," Edwina said.

Serena considered this. "Can you take me there? I'd like to see the place this happened."

"Of course," Edwina said. "Though we didn't see anything when we walked through the area. A fresh pair of eyes would be welcome."

"I'll be there shortly." After closing the channel, Serena walked to the High Sorcerer's suite. Goldenvally's High Sorcerer, Marlys, sat behind her desk. Rochelle, another sorcerer at the fortress, stood next to her.

"With your permission," Serena said, "I wish to go to Briarhill to investigate an account of a plant eating a sheep."

Rochelle raised an eyebrow. "I haven't heard of anything like that before."

Marlys looked from Rochelle to Serena. "Neither have I. I agree that such a thing bears examination. It could be nothing, or it could be something that can escalate into something more serious."

"I take it they called you because you have the most extensive knowledge of the Library of anyone in the regions," Rochelle said.

"And the most powerful sorcery," Marlys said.

Serena smiled at Marlys. "Next to you, of course."

Marlys returned the grin. "Of course you can go. Call if you need help."

Serena nodded.

"Mind if I tag along?" Rochelle asked. "This sounds interesting."

"I'd be glad for the company," Serena said.

As Librarians—sorcerers who had been at the Library of Sorcery and enhanced their magical powers there—Serena and Rochelle were able to use a transportation spell to arrive at Briarhill almost instantly. Edwina then used a more common distance-shortening spell to take them to a grassy field.

There they met a young man holding a shepherd's crook.

"This is Austen," Edwina said. "Austen, this is Serena and Rochelle from the Goldenvalley region."

Austen bowed politely.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Serena said.

Austen gestured to a stone bench, inviting them to sit.

"This must be a field in common use for centuries for someone to have set up a bench here," Rochelle said.

"Aye, and I'm glad for it." Austen waved his crook southward where a large flock of sheep grazed. "That there's the sheep." He waved the crook westward where they saw a rough stone enclosure with a wooden gate. "And that there's the pen."

"Can you tell us what happened?" Serena asked.

"I had put the sheep in the pen, and making sure they were settled down for the night before going home," Austen said. "All of a sudden, I heard this tearing sound and saw this big stem coming up from the ground." He raised the crook to illustrate the rising. "Leaves sprouted from the side, waving like arms. A bulb grew out of the top, and then split. It looked like a jaws and teeth. Must've been the height of a tree. Then the head reached down and just chomped on one of the sheep. Poor sheep was ate in one gulp. Then the plant shrunk back down into the ground and was gone."

"Can you show us where?" Serena asked.

Austen rose and led the way to the stone wall, which was about waist-height. Just outside the wall, they saw a rough circle of sickly white vegetation, which stank. Austen pointed the crook. "Right here."

"Fungus? Mildew?" Rochelle guessed.

"Don't know," Austen said. "I've stayed clear of it."

"And this was last night?" Serena asked.

Austen nodded. "Lucky for me, High Sorcerer Edwina here was passing through this morning and I told her about it."

Rochelle and Edwina turned to Serena.

"What do you think?" Rochelle said.

"We could dig, I suppose," Serena said.

"I don't want to touch it," Austen said.

"You don't have to," Serena said. "We have excavation spells."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd rather steer clear," Austen said.

"You should," Serena said. "Thank you for your help."

"I hope you can do something," Austen said. "I don't want to lose any more sheep. I'll miss little Fluffy."

"We don't want you to lose another sheep, either," Serena said. "We'll do all we can so that it won't happen again."

"Much obliged." Austen strode away toward the flock.

Rochelle turned to Serena. "Do you want to cleanse the ground or shall I?"

"I'll do it." Serena raised her arms and cast the spell. The magic penetrated the ground, and the surface of the ground rolled like the surface of a cauldron of water set to boil.

A thick green stalk shot up from the ground. On each side of the stalk, they saw two long, narrow leaves waving like arms. The top of the stalk was a green bulb, split in two, and open like a maw. A shredding sound accompanied it.

"What in the Universe is that?" Edwina exclaimed.

The stalk bent toward the sorcerers. Serena changed her magic focus from the ground to the stalk, fending it off. "Get the trident!" she shouted at Rochelle.

Rochelle immediately disappeared into a transportation spell.

Edwina joined Serena in shoving the stalk away.

The stalk waved from front to back, up and down, pushed by the magical forces, but continued to attempt to bite one of the sorcerers.

Rochelle emerged from the transportation spell, holding a trident. Serena had called for the magical artifact because it had the ability to corral an opponent.

Raising the trident, Rochelle used a circular motion to surround the stalk with a magical force. She pulled the trident toward her to tighten the perimeter. The stalk let out a louder shredding noise.

“Step back,” Serena instructed Edwina, and canceled her own spell.

The stalk vibrated forcefully from side to side as if trying to break free from the sorcerous bonds, but failed. As Rochelle maintained the pull, the stalk withered.

Serena, at the same time, renewed her spell on the ground, hoping to uproot the stalk.

The shredding sound reached a crescendo as the stalk exploded, sending green fragments everywhere. Each sorcerer deflected those by magic.

At the same time, a small shiny object shot up from underground. It landed close to where they stood.

Edwina leaned over for a closer look. “Now, what in the Universe is this?”

“Don’t touch it,” Serena advised.

“Don’t worry. I won’t,” Edwina said.

Serena and Rochelle crouched, but made no other move to get closer.

“Looks like a red jewel embedded in a shard of silver,” Rochelle said.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Serena said.

Rochelle stood and sighed. “Another unknown magical artifact? Left over from the sorcerous wars? I thought we’d found them all.”

Serena rose as well. “Maybe we didn’t. Or maybe this is something else.” She turned to the other two sorcerers. “I’ll cocoon it magically and head for the Library. Rochelle, tell Marlys where I’ve gone.”

“Of course.” Rochelle pulled the trident and disappeared into a transportation spell.

Edwina knelt to place her hand on the ground. Turning to Serena, she said, “You seem to have healed the soil, at least.”

Serena nodded. “Good. You can reassure Austen and the villagers.”

“I’ll do that. Thanks for coming and good luck with whatever-it-is.”

After cocooning the artifact, Serena cast a transportation spell and emerged at the entrance to the Library of Sorcery, an old, magnificent stone building set on the side of a tall mountain.

Since she was a regular visitor, with a standing invitation to come any time, she walked through the front door and proceeded to the main reading room.

Blair spotted her immediately and walked over. "Good to see you again, Serena. What do you have there?" Since the cocoon was transparent, Blair could see the artifact clearly.

"That's the question," Serena said. "Do you have any insulated boxes to put a dangerous magical artifact in while we discuss this?"

"Just follow me," he said.

As they walked along, Serena gave Blair an account of how they found the artifact.

Blair stopped at a closet, pulled out a suitable box, and held it open as Serena set the artifact into it, still encased in the magical cocoon.

He closed the box, tucked it under one arm and extended the other arm. "Let's find a place where we can sit and talk."

The Library had several anterooms and small meeting chambers. After stopping briefly in the kitchen to grab mugs of tea, they sat at opposite ends of a small table with the box on the top between them.

"I wanted to consult you because you have read every book in the Library," Serena said.

"Except the forbidden books, and you've read all of those," Blair said.

"Have you ever seen any mention of anything like this?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Not that I can think of."

"I can't recall anything, either," Serena said. "Not even in the forbidden books."

"It's possible that this isn't a relic of the sorcerous wars. A single sorcerer could have made this and then abandoned it."

"But then why would it activate now?"

"I don't know. Let's rest and consider for a while."

Serena nodded. "Yes, I've had barely time to think since I've heard about this."

They spent a time sitting there, quietly, sipping tea.

Eventually, Blair finished his mug and put it on the table with a sigh. "I've thought of something."

“What?” Serena said, interested.

Blair leaned in her direction. “You and I have read every book the Library has. But there are books elsewhere in the building. Sorcerers have kept personal collections through the years. Well-worn and well-loved books carried since childhood. Family histories. Folk tales. Local legends. Books like that.”

“Yes, I have shelves of books like that in my room at the Goldenvalley fortress.”

“I was thinking particularly of Annie’s room.” At Serena’s querying expression, Blair continued, “Annie was a sorcerer who lived a couple of centuries ago. While on her sorcerous errands, she also collected tales from the communities she helped and wrote them down. After she passed, her room was preserved. The books are still there, though rarely read. Perhaps rumor of this artifact passed into local legend.”

Serena put her mug on the table. “Let’s try it.”

Blair led the way to a bedroom which was neat, clean, and dust-free. The wall was lined with bookshelves full of volumes, large and small.

“Since both of us are speed readers,” Blair said, “I was thinking that we could breeze through these by the end of the day.”

In addition to the bed and chests of drawers, Annie’s room also contained two small reading desks with chairs.

Blair pointed to the bookshelves. “I’ll start on this side, and you start on that side and we’ll meet in the middle.”

Serena nodded and reached for a volume. Her magically-enhanced ability to read quickly served her well. She had gone through sixteen books when a passage in the seventeenth book drew her attention.

“Oh, yes,” she said aloud as she read.

Blair pulled his chair over and sat next to her at an angle where he could see the writing himself.

“The Legend of Tarru-syn,” Serena said, underlining the writing on the page with her finger. She looked up at Blair.

He met her gaze. “Have you read it?”

“Yes. It seems to fit. Read it yourself and tell me what you think.”

Blair took the book in hand and finished the reading quickly.

Placing the book back on the table, open to the starting page, he said, "I agree. This may be it."

"What we have seems to be a piece of a sorcerous crown that Tarru-syn ordered to be made," Serena said, "Each piece created by magic in a different area of Tarru-syn's realm, with sorcerous properties distinctive to the area. Tarru-syn assembled the pieces into a crown, but when the empire was overthrown, the crown came apart. But the pieces survived, still retaining strong magic."

"... with unpredictable effects."

"Disappearing from one place, reappearing at an entirely different place."

"...or even an entirely different world." Blair sat back in his chair. "If this artifact is a piece of the legendary crown, what do we do with it?"

"I don't want to keep it around," Serena said, "even though the legend says it may disappear again on its own."

"I'm not waiting around for that, either," Blair said. "So, what do we do?"

"The only other worlds we know we can connect with are the Island Worlds," Serena said, "but I'm not inclined to dump it there for our sorcerous colleagues to have to deal with."

Blair let out a sigh. "Based on what you found, burying it wouldn't work, either."

"I have a feeling someone did," Serena said, "if I'm reading the legend correctly, it might be able to sit a long time before doing anything."

"I still think it's risky to wait," Blair said. "I'd rather be rid of it now, if we can."

"What about the void?" Serena said. "We've pushed ash into the void before."

"The void between here and the moon, you mean," Blair said.

Serena nodded. "We'd use the same sorcery. Create a vortex to suck the artifact into the upper air, open an end point into the void, and push the artifact into the end point."

"As I recall, that took quite a bit of power," Blair said, "and a solid piece such as the artifact we have here may not be as easily manipulated as ash. It may resist our efforts."

“With Genevieve, Marlys, and I...,” Serena said, “...Genevieve is here, isn’t she?”

“The Head Librarian is off visiting relatives at the moment,” Blair said, “but she can be summoned, and I doubt that she would refuse a task such as this. Such an effort would need the three most powerful sorcerers on this planet.”

“Plus the rest of the Librarians here to aid in keeping the artifact on its path,” Serena added.

“I can confidently say we’d all be willing to help,” Blair said.

A conference through the sorcerous channels was all it took to gather the parties needed on the Library grounds. Marlys and Genevieve arrived through respective transportation spells. Serena and Blair called everyone at the Library together to explain their plan of action.

All agreed there was no need to wait. They assembled outside on the Library grounds away from the building. The sky was clear, the sun shone brightly, and a half moon appeared above the horizon.

“You’ll have to release the cocoon in order for our magic to affect it,” Marlys said as Serena opened the box.

“I had in mind that you would create the vortex first,” Serena said. “Then, when I release the cocoon, I can push it into this end of the vortex. It should be sucked through immediately into the end point that Genevieve,” Serena nodded at the Head Librarian, “creates. I’ll take charge of guiding the vortex to keep it steady, and the rest of the Librarians can watch the artifact and push it on course if it strays.”

“We’re ready,” Blair said. He stood among a group of Librarian-sorcerers watching the skies.

“Everyone anchor yourselves and cast your far-seeing spells,” Serena said.

When the sorcerers had complied, Marlys created a vortex. Hair splayed out and clothes flapped in the cyclone’s violent wind.

Genevieve opened a sorcerous end point into the void.

Serena opened the box, removed the cocoon, and sorcerously pushed the artifact into the center of the vortex. Immediately it was sucked in and pushed through.

The vortex, however, wavered.

“The artifact is resisting,” Serena said, “everyone, push!”

The assembly stretched their abilities to the limit as the top of the vortex moved back and forth.

“I’m extending the vortex,” Marlys shouted over the wind.

“I’m bringing the entry point to meet it,” Genevieve said.

“Keep working,” Serena shouted to Blair’s assembly. “It’s almost at the right point...there!” Serena extended the fullness of her magical power. The artifact reached the end point entrance and disappeared.

“I’ve closed the end point!” Genevieve said.

Marlys dispersed the vortex. The air became still again.

Serena let out a breath. “It’s gone.”

“I can’t see it, either,” Genevieve said, “and I’m sighting at the top of the air layer.”

Blair walked over. “Do you think it will ever come back?”

“I hope not,” Serena said, “but I’m going to write down the account of this event and put it in the archives in case it does.”

Genevieve smiled. “That’s what a library is for.”

THE END

“Fragment of a Sorcerous Crown” is a short story in the Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery series.

For more information about the
Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery series, go to:

<https://libraryofsorcery.com>

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Joan Marie Verba is an autistic author, publisher, and web developer with a bachelor's degree in physics. She was an associate instructor of astronomy for one year. She has worked as a computer programmer, web developer, editor, publisher, and social media manager. An experienced writer, she is the author of fiction and nonfiction books plus numerous short stories and articles. Her novels have received the Mom's Choice Award® and the Scribe Award. She is a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association and the International Association of Media Tie-in Writers.

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About the *Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery*

The Chronicles of the Library of Sorcery is a fantasy series by Joan Marie Verba

The introduction to the series is the short story, “Revenge, Denied.” This is free for subscribers to Joan’s newsletter (sign up on her website, joanmarieverba.com).

“Revenge, Denied” can also be purchased on Joan’s Ko-Fi sales page: <https://ko-fi.com/s/16fcf8d7f7>

The Library of Sorcery trilogy consists of these three novels:

Secrets of the Sorcerers

Clash of the Sorcerers

Shadows of the Sorcerers

“Fragement of a Sorcerous Crown” is set after *Shadows of the Sorcerers*

Complete information can be found at:
<https://libraryofsorcery.com>