# **The Forgotten Manor**

## **Prologue: The Sleeping King's Dream**

Sleep came like a shroud, thick and suffocating, woven from threads of nightmare and despair. When consciousness finally clawed its way back through the murk of dreams, you found yourself sprawled upon cold stone that bit through cloth and flesh alike, drawing what warmth remained from your bones. The darkness was absolute, save for thin slivers of pale moonlight that crept through ancient glass like fingers of the dead.

Your breath misted in the chill air, each exhale a ghostly reminder that you yet lived, though where and how remained mysteries as impenetrable as the shadows themselves. The scent of damp stone mingled with something else... something older. Decay, perhaps, or the lingering essence of lives long extinguished. It clung to your nostrils like a funeral shroud.

*"Where..."* The word died upon your lips, swallowed by the oppressive silence of this place that felt carved from the very bones of the earth.

To the north, a door of blackened steel loomed like a giant's shield, its surface scarred by time and etched with symbols that seemed to writhe in the uncertain light. The handle, if it could be called such, was wrought in the shape of a serpent devouring its own tail, cold as winter's heart beneath your trembling fingers. It would not budge. The lock was old and through its ornate keyhole came only the whisper of deeper darkness beyond.

To the east, tall windows of diamond-paned glass filtered the moon's harsh gaze, casting everything in shades of silver and shadow. Through the ancient panes, you glimpsed the skeletal branches of a dead wood, their fingers clawing at clouds that raced across the star-drunk sky like fleeing spirits.

But it was to the south that your eyes were drawn, where wooden doors of rich auburn stood slightly ajar, their surfaces carved with the heraldry of a house whose name had been lost to the turning of the world. The scent of old wax and forgotten feasts drifted from beyond, and with it, the faintest suggestion of... sanctuary.

## **The Great Hall of Three Rings**

The doors opened at your touch as if they remembered the weight of welcome, their hinges singing a mournful song that echoed through the vastness beyond. What lay within stole the breath from your lungs and set your heart to hammering like a war drum.

The Great Hall stretched before you like the throat of some primordial beast, its vaulted ceiling lost in shadows that no torchlight had disturbed for countless years. Moonbeams slanted through high windows, illuminating dust motes that danced like tiny spirits in the ethereal light. At the hall's heart stood a table of black oak, its surface worn smooth by the passage of centuries, surrounded by high-backed chairs that seemed to wait for lords and ladies who would never again take their seats.

But it was the three figures that commanded attention—statues carved from stone with such skill that you half-expected them to draw breath. Each stood sentinel over the hall, their stone eyes bearing witness to secrets that died with the last king to grace this forgotten realm.

The first knight stood wreathed in shadows, his armor rendered in perfect detail down to each rivet and plate. At his feet, a bronze placard bore words etched in the old tongue:

*"Sir Bailey of the Bronze Heart, who served the realm in war and peace alike. To His Grace, he presented the Ring of Common Faith—brass that never tarnished, bright as the hope of farmers and craftsmen who looked to their king for justice. 'Let this remind you,' spoke he, 'that a crown's true weight is measured not in gold, but in the trust of those who bow beneath it.'"*

The second knight bore himself with the rigid posture of one born to command, his stone face stern with noble purpose. His placard read:

*"Sir Stanley the Silversworn, Marshal of the Royal Guard and Keeper of the King's Justice. His gift was the Ring of Sharp Decision—silver bright as moonlight on naked steel, never dulling, never wavering. 'A king must cut clean,' were his words, 'lest doubt fester like a wound untended, and the realm bleed for his hesitation.'"*

The final statue towered above its companions, carved from stone so pale it seemed to glow with inner light. Gold leaf still clung to portions of its armor, though time had claimed much of its gilded glory. The placard bore the longest inscription:

*"Sir Godfrey the Golden, Lord Paramount of the Western Reaches and Master of Coin. To the Crown he offered the Ring of Royal Dominion—gold so pure it captured light itself, bright as the sun that shines upon all lands under the king's dominion. 'Power without radiance is mere tyranny,' declared he. 'Let this remind you that a true king's authority shines so bright that none can deny its brilliance, and all are warmed by its glow.'"*

At the base of all three statues, carved into the stone floor itself, ran a final inscription in letters deep as grave marks:

*"Three rings for the King Under the Moon,* *Three gifts from knights of old:* *Bronze for the people's faithful love,* *Silver for the will to be bold,* *Gold for the power to command.* *Only when united do they make the hand* *That rules with wisdom, strength, and grace—* *The trinity that rules this place."*

## **The Weight of History**

As you stood in that hall of sleeping stone, the weight of centuries pressed down like a physical thing. What king had ruled from this place? What became of his kingdom, his knights, his three precious rings? The very air seemed thick with the ghosts of feasts and councils, of judgments passed and oaths sworn beneath these vaulted arches.

Somewhere in this manor—for manor it surely was, though grander than any you had seen—lay the answers. And perhaps, if the ancient words spoke true, the key to your escape. For you began to understand, with the cold certainty that comes in the deep watches of the night, that you were not here by chance.

The three rings called to you across the centuries, their power still echoing in this place where time itself seemed to hold its breath. To find them would be to unravel the mystery of this forgotten realm—and perhaps to discover why you had been chosen to wake in the shadow of its sleeping king.

The hunt begins...