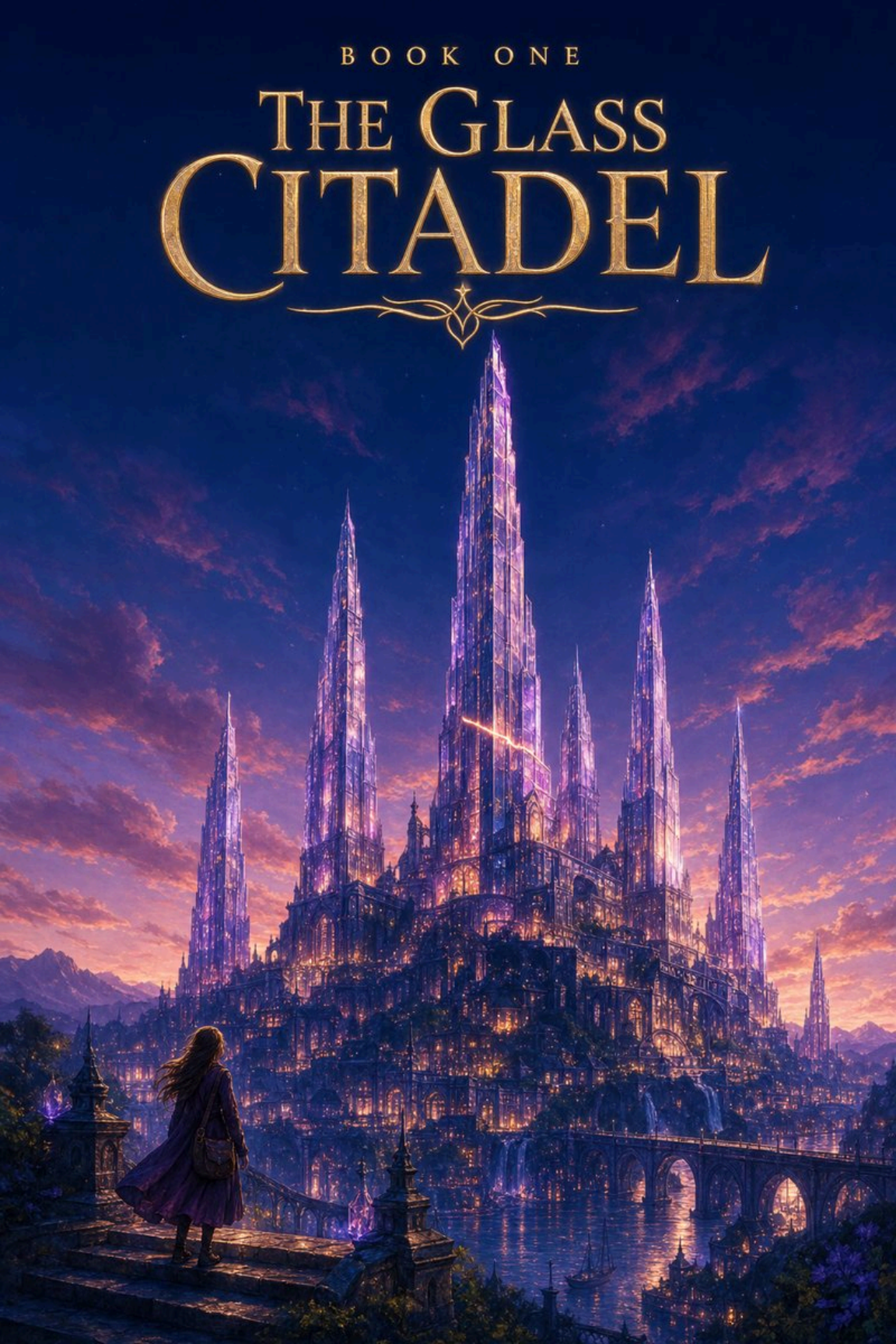

BOOK ONE
THE GLASS CITADEL

The Glass Citadel

YOUR NAME

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CHAPTER ONE

The Crack in the Seventh Spire

In Aurel, they said the citadel had been singing for nine hundred years, and that nobody had heard it but the glass-tenders.

Wren Callow heard it every morning. It was not music, exactly. It was the sound a wet finger makes on the rim of a wineglass, multiplied by ten thousand rooms and folded into itself, so faint that you only noticed it when it stopped. She had been tending the glass since she was twelve. In six years it had never stopped.

She climbed the Long Stair at first light with her satchel of soft cloths and her little silver hammer, the way she always did, counting the landings without needing to. Below her the city woke in layers: the bakers first, then the bells, then the carts on the bridges and the gulls fighting over the river. Above her the citadel caught the sun.

There were seven spires, and every one of them was made of memory.

That was the first thing apprentices were taught, and the last thing visitors believed. When someone in Aurel had a memory

worth keeping, a wedding, a first word, the last sight of a ship leaving harbour, they came to the furnace halls and breathed it into molten glass. The glass-tenders shaped it, cooled it, and set it into the citadel, pane by pane, where it would hold that moment for as long as the glass stood. Hold your palm against any pane and you would feel it: a warmth, a voice, a scrap of a summer that had ended before your grandmother was born.

The six outer spires belonged to the people. The seventh, the oldest, belonged to nobody. Its door had been sealed for three hundred years, and the tenders only cleaned its outside, from the narrow walkway that ran around its base like a ring around a finger.

It was on that walkway, an hour after dawn, that Wren found the crack.

. . .

SHE ALMOST MISSED IT. It was no longer than her thumb, a thin pale line running across one of the lower panes, and at first she took it for a scratch in the dust. She wet her cloth and wiped it, and the line stayed.

Glass did not crack in Aurel. That was the second thing apprentices were taught. Memory glass was poured at a heat that would melt iron and cooled for a full year in the deep kilns, and it was harder than any stone in the city. She had seen a cart wheel strike a pane on the bridge spire and bounce off. She had seen the great storm of her eleventh winter tear the roofs off half the lower town and leave the citadel without a mark.

She knelt on the walkway and touched the crack with one finger.

The singing stopped.

It did not fade. It simply was not there any more, the way a held note is not there when the singer runs out of breath. In the silence Wren could hear her own heart, and the wind in the

gutters, and a dog barking somewhere far below on the river steps, all of it suddenly very loud and very ordinary.

Then, from inside the glass, someone laughed.

Wren knew the laugh. She had not heard it in six years, but she would have known it in a crowd, in the dark, at the bottom of the sea. It was a low, surprised laugh, the kind that escapes when someone is trying very hard to be serious and fails. It was the laugh her mother made when Wren, aged five, had tried to carry the cat up the stairs by its front legs.

"Mam?" she said, and her own voice sounded stupid and small against the glass.

The laugh came again, fainter. Under it, so quiet she had to press her ear to the pane to hear it, her mother was saying something. Not to Wren. To someone else, someone standing close, in a room Wren could not see.

"—not for ever. Only until she is old enough to keep it safe. Promise me, Aldous. Promise me you won't let them open it before then."

Then the voice was gone, and the singing came back all at once, as if it had never stopped, and Wren was kneeling on a cold stone walkway with her cheek against a cracked pane of glass and tears running into her collar.

. . .

HER MOTHER HAD BEEN a glass-tender too. Her mother had died in the furnace fire when Wren was twelve, and the master of the halls had come to the house himself to say so, and had taken Wren on as his apprentice that same week, out of kindness, everyone said.

The master of the halls was called Aldous Fenn.

Wren sat back on her heels and made herself breathe the way she had been taught to breathe at the furnace, slow and even, so that the glass would take only what you meant to give it. She looked at the crack. It had grown. Not much. The width of a hair,

perhaps. But it had reached the edge of the pane and found the lead that held it, and now there was a second line, branching off the first, like a river finding its delta.

There were rules about this. She knew them by heart. Any fault in the glass was to be reported at once to the master of the halls, who would decide what was to be done. Nobody else was to touch it. Nobody was to speak of it outside the furnace halls, because a city that believed its memories could break would not sleep easily.

Wren took out her little silver hammer, the one every tender carried to tap the panes and listen for flaws, and held it for a long moment over the crack.

Then she put it back in her satchel, laid her clean cloth over the pane so that nobody passing on the walkway would see, and stood up.

Promise me you won't let them open it before then.

She was eighteen. She did not know how old her mother had meant. But she knew, standing on the walkway of the seventh spire with the whole city shining below her, that somebody had kept a promise to a dead woman for six years, and that the glass had just decided the promise was over.

She went down the Long Stair to find Master Fenn. She did not run. Running, in the citadel, made people ask why.