



MAGIC

ONE SILVER COIN

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

Eight people who never met. One chapter each, in the order it was written.

ONE	Colin McAteer
TWO	Ruth Ann Keller
THREE	jmarsh
FOUR	Priya Nair
FIVE	wordsbylena
SIX	Cora Lindgren
SEVEN	Margot Vail
EIGHT	rpenguin

Chapter

ONE

written by Colin McAteer

In the corner, a young boy sits on the floor, his small frame hunched over a crumpled piece of parchment. The old woman stands opposite him, her weathered hands holding a silver coin. A faint sheen of sweat glistens on her forehead as she studies the child.

He glances up, a shadow of defiance crossing his face before he quickly looks away. The room is dim, sunlight filtering in through narrow windows, casting long shadows that dance across the cracked floorboards. Dust motes float lazily in the air, caught by the light.

The old woman shifts her weight and extends her hand towards him. "Are you ready for this?" Her voice is soft but firm, holding a hint of desperation.

His eyes meet hers, briefly, before darting to the coin. He nods, his jaw set in determination. The old woman places the coin gently into his palm, her grip lingering just a moment longer than necessary.

He clutches it tightly, his fingers wrapping around its cool surface. "What's next?" he asks, his voice barely above a whisper.

The old woman smiles, her teeth slightly stained from years of chewing tobacco. She takes a deep breath and begins to speak, her words measured and deliberate. "You must name the child," she says, her gaze never wavering. "But you cannot break your promise."

He nods again, his eyes flicking to the coin in his hand before returning to hers. The room feels heavy with unspoken weight, a silence that presses down on them both.

Chapter

TWO

written by Ruth Ann Keller

The boy's fingers tighten around the coin as if it might slip away, his knuckles growing pale. He stands, stretching his legs beneath him, and looks to the old woman with a resolve that seems almost calculated. "What is my promise?" he asks, his voice steady but lacking in the confidence of earlier.

She sighs, her eyes narrowing slightly as she studies him. "Your promise is to name the child only after I have given it birth," she states, her tone unyielding yet tinged with a trace of desperation. "You must see it through from conception to delivery."

The boy swallows hard, his gaze darting around the dim room as if searching for an escape route or a hidden ally. "And if I do not keep my promise?" he inquires, his voice barely audible.

A flicker of anger crosses her face, but she quickly conceals it behind a composed facade. "You will face consequences," she says simply, her words like leaden stones dropped into the still air.

He nods, his expression grim as he turns to walk towards a small, cluttered desk in the corner. The room is dimly lit by a single candle that flickers intermittently, casting dancing shadows on the old wooden walls. A dusty, leather-bound book lies open atop the desk, its pages yellowed and worn.

The boy picks up the book, running his fingers over the title in faded ink: "Records of Nomenclature." He opens it to a particular page, which is marked with a small pin holding down an entry that reads: "Eliza Marie."

He glances back at the old woman, who stands still as a statue. "I will name her Eliza Marie," he says, his voice firm and steady. The words are like a seal on a contract, binding him to his promise.

She nods, her face a mask of patience. "Very well," she replies, her voice soft but unyielding. "But I must warn you that this task will not be easy."

The boy's eyes narrow as he looks at the book again. He flips through its pages, each one filled with names and their meanings, some marked with notes in his own handwriting. The room is quiet except for the occasional creak of floorboards beneath his feet.

After a moment, he places the book back on the desk and straightens up. "What do I need to do?" he asks, his voice slightly more confident now that he has committed himself to the task.

The old woman steps closer, her eyes narrowing as she examines him closely. "You must visit me daily," she says, her tone firm but not unkind. "You will stay with me during the entire pregnancy and observe any changes in the child."

She pauses, her expression thoughtful. "There are few things I can give away, but this is one of them." She reaches into a small pouch at her waist and pulls out a tiny vial containing a clear liquid that shimmers faintly under the candlelight.

She hands it to him, his hand trembling slightly as he takes it. The vial feels cold in his palm, its contents giving off an almost imperceptible scent of herbs. "This is a tonic," she says, her voice low and urgent. "It will help ease any discomfort Eliza might experience."

He nods, his grip tightening on the vial. "Thank you," he says, though his gratitude seems forced.

She nods in return, her expression stern. “Now go,” she commands, gesturing towards the door with a swift motion of her hand. “You have work to do.”

Chapter

THREE

written by jmarsh

The boy's steps echo hollowly as he exits the room, the old woman's shadowed figure receding behind him like a specter in the dimming light. He pauses at the threshold, the door creaking softly beneath his grip, as if reluctant to fully partake of the isolation that awaits him.

He walks down the narrow corridor, the walls lined with ancient tapestries and dusty portraits of ancestors long gone. Each step seems to resonate within the room, as if the very architecture itself is alive, breathing in unison with his own conflicted thoughts. The air grows colder the deeper he ventures into this labyrinthine house, the chill settling like a thick fog around him.

At last, he reaches a small bedroom where Eliza lies nestled on a cot, her face pale and fragile under the weak light of an oil lamp. Her breathing is slow and measured, each breath drawing out in long, drawn-out sighs that seem to stretch the very fabric of time itself. The room is cluttered with old books and knick-knacks, the atmosphere heavy with the scent of herbs and incense.

Eliza's eyes flutter open as she hears his approach, her gaze meeting his with a mixture of curiosity and wariness. "Is it time?" she asks softly, her voice barely more than a whisper, though her question seems to carry an unspoken weight.

He nods, placing the vial on the small table beside her cot. She reaches out, her fingers trembling as they touch the cool glass. The liquid within shimmers faintly, its contents appearing almost mystical under the soft light.

"Drink it," he says, his voice firm but gentle, as if speaking to someone who has walked a thin line between life and death.

Eliza hesitates for a moment before taking the vial in both hands and tilting her head back. The liquid slides down her throat like a bitter poison, causing her eyes to widen slightly as she feels its effects wash over her. He watches intently, his heart pounding with a mixture of anxiety and resolve.

The girl's face contorts for a moment, a pained expression crossing her features before fading into something more serene. She closes her eyes, the room around them seeming to shift ever so slightly in response to the change within her. When she opens her eyes again, there is a new light in their depths, a quiet acceptance that seems to have transformed her very essence.

He leans closer, his breath catching as he studies her carefully. "How do you feel?" he asks, though the answer is clear in the soft smile that plays on her lips and the newfound ease with which she moves.

"Better," she replies, her voice softer than before but carrying an unspoken strength. She reaches out a hand, offering it to him, as if inviting him into this new chapter of their lives together. "Will you stay?"

He nods, his resolve solidifying in that moment. "Of course," he says, taking her hand and pressing a gentle kiss to the back of it. The gesture is small but meaningful, a silent promise between them.

Eliza's eyes meet his again, a flicker of something unnameable passing between them, a connection forged through shared experiences and unspoken understanding. She reaches for the book he had left on the cot earlier, her fingers tracing the yellowed pages as if seeking comfort in their familiar presence.

"Let me see your notes," she says softly, offering him the vial back with a small smile. "Maybe together we can find a way through this."

He nods, his fingers wrapping around hers, feeling the warmth of her skin through the fabric of his gloves. He hands her the book, and they begin to read side by side, their voices blending into a soft murmur as they delve deeper into the Records of Nomenclature.

As the hours pass, the room seems to grow warmer, the chill that had settled in earlier dissipating like mist before the sun. The boy and Eliza work together, each page revealing new insights and challenges, their bond growing stronger with every moment spent side by side.

By the time night falls, they have filled several pages of notes, their minds entwined as they seek to unravel the mysteries that lie within these ancient texts. The old woman's room feels transformed, no longer a place of isolation but one of shared purpose and hope.

Chapter

FOUR

written by Priya Nair

Eliza's fingers dance over the yellowed pages of "Records of Nomenclature," her eyes narrowing as she reads a particularly obscure entry. The boy stands beside her, his own book open to a similar page, a pen in hand ready for notes.

"Glenora: A name that means strength and courage,' she says, then immediately adds, 'and if you can find someone who knows the proper incantation, it's said to invoke an untouchable aura. Perfect for a guardian or protector.'" She looks up at him with a sly grin. "Think I just found your inner superhero name?"

He chuckles, his eyes glinting with amusement as he writes down the information. "Glenora? That could work if you were my sidekick," he teases.

Eliza rolls her eyes but doesn't let it faze her. "Sidekick? More like the knight in shining armor." She flips to another page, her tone turning more serious. "'Alveria: A name that means purity and truth.' Doesn't that sound a bit... sterile?"

He snorts. "Maybe for you, but how about if I just go with 'Glenn'? It's got a nice ring to it."

She wrinkles her nose at the idea. "Glenn? Really? That's like, your dad's favorite brand of cereal. Try again."

He grins, his eyes twinkling. "How about 'Glenwood' then? It has that old-world charm."

Eliza considers this for a moment before nodding with reluctant approval. "Alright, Glenwood it is. But only because you're going to have to earn your name by protecting me from all the evil witches and goblins out there."

He laughs, his heart swelling just a little at her trust. "Deal." He leans closer, brushing a strand of her hair behind her ear. "Now let's see what more we can learn about this whole naming thing."

She nods, her eyes filled with determination as she turns back to the book. The room is cozy and warm now, the old oil lamp casting a soft glow that highlights their shared workspace. A sense of camaraderie settles between them, like a blanket of understanding.

"Hey," he says after a moment, "what's your favorite name so far?"

Eliza thinks for a moment before replying. "Hmm... 'Aurora' might be nice. It sounds almost magical, doesn't it? Plus, think about all the pretty auroras you could watch together."

He nods, his fingers tracing her cheek. "That's sweet. And just between us, I'm thinking of naming our first-born 'Glenella' if we ever have kids."

She giggles, shaking her head but with a smile on her face. "You weirdo. Okay, let's get back to work."

As she turns the pages, the room around them seems to hum with a newfound energy, the air charged with the promise of what lies ahead. The boy and Eliza work side by side, their bond growing stronger with each passing moment.

The walls of the old room seem almost to whisper encouragement, as if the very house itself recognizes the importance of their partnership. Dust motes dance in the light, casting a playful shadow on their faces.

"Hey," Eliza says suddenly, her voice breaking the comfortable silence. "Do you ever think about what it would be like after this is all over? Like, when we can leave here and start a life outside?"

He pauses for a moment, considering her question. "You mean, live in the real world?" He chuckles softly. "Yeah, I do. But you know, maybe not as big of a deal if we have each other."

Eliza looks at him with a mix of gratitude and something else, hope? She takes his hand, squeezing it gently. "I think that's what makes us different from all the other people out there," she says softly. "We're not just nameless strangers who happen to be here. We're... partners in this."

He looks down at their joined hands, a warm feeling spreading through him. "Yeah," he agrees. "And I can't wait for whatever comes next."

The room seems to shift again, the air thick with the promise of uncharted territory and endless possibilities. As they continue their work, the walls of the old house seem to whisper encouragement, as if the very building itself recognizes the importance of their partnership.

Together, they are more than just a boy and a girl in an old room, they are the beginning of something new, a story yet to be written.

Chapter

FIVE

written by wordsbylena

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He pauses for a moment, considering her question. "You mean, live in the real world?" He chuckles softly. "Yeah, I do. But you know, maybe not as big of a deal if we have each other."

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He looks down at their joined hands, a warm feeling spreading through him. "Yeah," he agrees. "And I can't wait for whatever comes next."

The room seems to shift again, the air thick with the promise of uncharted territory and endless possibilities. As they continue their work, the walls of the old house seem to whisper encouragement, as if the very building itself recognizes the importance of their partnership. Together, they are more than just a boy and a girl in an old room; they are the beginning of something new, a story yet to be written. The pages of "Records of Nomenclature" continue to hold secrets, waiting to be uncovered by Eliza's curious gaze and Glenn's meticulous notes. Glenn leans forward, his eyes scanning the page intently as he writes down another name. "'Lorelei: A name that means melody and enchantment,' he reads aloud. 'It's said to have the power to charm anyone who hears it.' He looks up at Eliza, a speculative look in his eyes.

Chapter

SIX

written by Cora Lindgren

Glenn leans forward, his eyes scanning the page intently as he writes down another name. "‘Lorelei: A name that means melody and enchantment,’" he reads aloud. 'It's said to have the power to charm anyone who hears it.' He looks up at Eliza, a speculative look in his eyes. Eliza quirks an eyebrow, her curiosity piqued. "Charm? As in, like, casting a spell?" She smiles, tilting her head slightly as she studies him. "You're really into this naming thing, aren't you?"

Glenn chuckles softly and shrugs. "Well, when we're dealing with magic and protection, it helps to have a name that holds a bit of power." He glances at the book before turning back to her. "What do you think? Would ‘Lorelei’ work for us?"

Eliza considers this thoughtfully. She runs her fingers through her hair, letting out a thoughtful sigh. "Hmm... it does have a certain ring to it. But... I don't know if it feels quite right yet." She looks at him again, her gaze warm and honest. "Maybe we should save it for something really special."

Glenn nods, understanding in his eyes. He taps the book gently with his pen. "You're right. We've got plenty of time to find that perfect name. For now, let's focus on protecting each other from whatever comes our way."

He leans closer and places a gentle hand on her shoulder, feeling the warmth radiate through his fingers. "What do you say we take a break? It's been a long day, and I think we've covered enough for today."

Eliza smiles, appreciating his consideration. She nods, standing up from her chair with a yawn. "You're right. Let's go get some dinner. I could use something warm and comforting to wash all this magic down."

They move towards the small kitchen area that adjoins their workspace. The old house is cozy despite its age, with its wooden floors creaking softly underfoot. The walls are lined with shelves holding various magical artifacts and books, each one whispering stories of old. Glenn reaches for a simple dish from the cabinet and begins to prepare something quick but satisfying. He pulls out some fresh vegetables and starts chopping them with practiced ease. "How about we make some soup? It's warming and easy on the stomach," he suggests, his hands moving deftly as he cuts the carrots and onions. Eliza watches him for a moment before stepping closer to help. She grabs a pot from a hook on the wall and starts filling it with water while Glenn adds the chopped vegetables and some herbs into a pan over the old wood-burning stove. "Sure, sounds good," she says, her voice low and soothing. "And maybe we can add some magical seasoning?"

Glenn nods, grinning at her. "That's the spirit! Let's give it a try." He stirs the pot, adding a pinch of salt and a handful of dried flowers he had gathered earlier from their garden outside. As they work together, the air in the kitchen fills with the rich aroma of simmering vegetables and spices. Eliza hums softly to herself, her movements fluid as she helps prepare the meal. Glenn's hands are warm on hers, and the gentle clink of utensils against pots creates a soothing rhythm around them. After a few minutes, they sit down at a small table covered with a faded cloth. The soup is steaming hot and comforting, filled with an array of vegetables that have been cooked to perfection. Glenn passes Eliza a bowl, watching her as she takes a sip and then smiles in approval.

"Delicious," she says, her eyes shining with contentment. "You're quite the chef."

Glenn blushes slightly, a small smile playing on his lips. "Well, I've had plenty of practice." He reaches out to touch her hand again, feeling the warmth of hers through the thin fabric of their gloves. Eliza leans in closer, a hint of playful mischief in her eyes. "So," she says, tilting her head to one side, "what do you think about naming our next project 'The Lorelei Project'? It's got that enchanting vibe."

Glenn chuckles, his heart warming at the idea. "It does have a certain... charm." He nods thoughtfully. "Alright, The Lorelei Project it is. But first, let's finish our current mission. We still need to find the incantation for Glenora's untouchable aura and make sure we're ready for whatever comes next."

Eliza looks up at him with a determined expression. "Agreed. And who knows? Maybe once this is all done, we can start planning our future outside this old house." She takes another sip of soup, the warmth spreading through her body. Glenn nods, his own resolve strengthening. "Definitely. But for now, let's focus on finishing what we started."

Chapter

SEVEN

written by Margot Vail

Eliza takes another sip of soup, her eyes glancing towards the window where a sliver of moonlight bathed their old house in a pale glow. Glenn watches her from across the table, his gaze steady and focused. "We should get back to work," he says quietly, setting down his spoon. "I know," she replies, her voice low and matter-of-fact. "But it's late. We've covered most of the names today."

Glenn nods, standing up and stretching his arms above his head. The muscles in his shoulders flex slightly under his shirt. He begins to gather their notes and the book on naming, stacking them neatly on a side table by the window. "Still, we can't afford any complacency," he adds, his tone turning more clinical. "The incantation for Glenora's aura must be perfect."

Eliza stands up as well, her movements precise and efficient. She gathers their bowls and heads towards the small kitchen sink, filling it with water to wash them. The clink of metal against ceramic echoes softly in the room. Glenn moves to his desk, pulling out a small vial filled with a shimmering liquid, a mixture he had prepared earlier for potential experiments. "Have you found anything interesting?" Eliza asks, rinsing the bowl and setting it aside on a drying rack. Glenn shakes his head slightly, his fingers brushing against the smooth surface of the

vial. "Nothing definitive yet," he says, more to himself than her. "But I'm still testing different combinations."

Eliza dries her hands on a towel and joins him at the desk. She peers over his shoulder at the notes scattered across the parchment. "Let's go through these again," she suggests, pointing to a section of the page. "Maybe we missed something."

Glenn nods, picking up a quill and dipping it into ink. He writes down a few more words before turning back to her. "What if we try to find a parallel incantation for Glenora that works with Lorelei? It might strengthen our defenses," he proposes. Eliza considers this idea carefully, her eyes narrowing as she reads over the notes. "That's worth investigating," she says slowly. "But let's make sure it doesn't weaken either of them."

Glenn nods, his expression thoughtful. He starts jotting down a new set of incantations in a neat, precise hand. "Let's try this combination and see what happens." He glances up at her, his eyes serious. "We need to be meticulous about these details. Mistakes can have grave consequences."

Eliza nods, understanding the gravity of their task. She reaches for a book on magical incantations from the shelf, flipping through its pages. "I'll look over some of the older texts," she says, her voice calm and composed. "There might be something we haven't considered yet."

Glenn stands up, his movements fluid as he gathers the vials and ingredients they had prepared earlier. He places them in a small box by the window, securing it with a leather strap. "I'll go through these again," he says, gesturing to the incantations on the desk. "We can't afford any errors."

Eliza turns back to her notes, her fingers trailing over the parchment as she reads. "What do you think about using a combination of both Glenora and Lorelei's powers?" she asks, her voice soft but determined. "Maybe they could work together to create an even stronger defense."

Glenn pauses for a moment, his mind racing through possible scenarios. He runs his fingers through his hair, pulling it back into place.

"That's... interesting," he says finally, his eyes lighting up with a spark of excitement. "We should try that as well." He pulls out another parchment and begins to write down the combination of incantations they would need. Eliza watches him intently, her expression unreadable. She reaches for a pen and starts jotting down notes in the margin. "Let's make sure we document every step," she says, her voice steady but firm. "We can't afford any gaps in our understanding."

Glenn nods, his focus unwavering as he writes down the new incantations. He glances up at Eliza, his expression serious. "Agreed. We need to be thorough." His fingers move deftly across the parchment, creating a detailed plan of action. Eliza stands up and joins him by the window, her eyes scanning the notes for any overlooked details. "What do you think about using a phase shifting technique?" she asks, her voice low and thoughtful. "Maybe we can make sure our aura fluctuates in ways that confuse any potential threats."

Glenn studies the note carefully, his brow furrowed as he considers the suggestion. "That's... intriguing," he says finally, his eyes narrowing as he writes down a new incantation.

Chapter

EIGHT

written by rpenguin

The night the incantation finally held, it did so quietly, the way most important things do. Glenn had expected thunder. He got a candle flame turning a shade of blue nobody in the room could name, which under the circumstances struck them both as extremely funny.

"That's it," Eliza said, staring at the flame. "That's the whole show?"

"Apparently the universe doesn't do fireworks for administrative paperwork."

She swatted his arm and went back to the notes, because there was still the matter of the entry itself, the line in Records of Nomenclature that neither of them had let themselves read aloud, tucked three pages past Lorelei, in ink so old it had gone the brown of dried tea.

The Namer takes the Name's shadow as his own.

Glenn had assumed it was decorative. Fine print always sounds decorative until you're standing in it.

"I want to try something," Eliza said, and before he could ask what, she'd already turned to the vial he'd carried from the old woman on the first day, the one he'd assumed was long empty, because he'd used its contents on her weeks ago and vials, generally, do not refill themselves out of sentiment. This one had. A single bead of the clear liquid sat at the bottom, patient as a held breath.

"She gave you more than one dose," Eliza said slowly. "Or the dose remembers what it's for."

"Same thing, probably."

"Glenn." She looked up. "What exactly did you promise her?"

He thought about the room where this had started, dim, dusty, a coin pressed into a child's palm, and the specific shape of the old woman's request. You must name the child. Not a child. Not any child. He had assumed at eleven years old that grammar was just grammar.

"I promised to name the child," he said. "Singular. Specific. I always thought that was just how she talked."

"What if it wasn't."

They looked at the vial together. Outside, something that might have been wind or might have been the house settling into its own opinion moved through the walls.

"She only ever does this once per family," Eliza said, working it out loud the way she did everything, out loud and sideways until it clicked. "Everyone assumes that's compassion. Rationing. One miracle per household, don't be greedy." Her eyes came up to his, sharp now. "But it isn't rationing. It's load-bearing. The Namer becomes shadow to the Name. You can't do that twice to the same family without splitting the shadow, and a split shadow isn't a shadow at all, it's just two people standing in the dark arguing about which one of them is real."

"So she doesn't refuse out of kindness."

"She refuses because it doesn't work. She's not protecting the second child. She's protecting the maths."

Glenn sat with that. It had the particular unpleasant weight of a thing that explains everything at once, the way a key explains a lock by making the lock stop being interesting.

"Then what have I been carrying around for six years," he said, "if it isn't kindness and it isn't magic, it's math..."

"Glenn." She took his hand, the way she had the first night, except now there was no vial between them, no ceremony, nothing to hide behind. "You already did the maths. You did it the day you said Eliza

Marie out loud instead of picking something out of a book because it sounded impressive. You didn't need an incantation. You needed to mean it once, correctly, and everything after that was just paperwork the universe insisted on."

The candle guttered back to ordinary orange, embarrassed, as candles are, to have been caught performing.

"So the whole ritual," Glenn said. "The vial, the incantations, the parallel entries, Lorelei's aura, six years of very serious note-taking..."

"Bureaucracy," Eliza said. "Every religion needs a form to fill out. Doesn't mean the form is the miracle."

He laughed, really laughed, for the first time since the coin, and the sound seemed to surprise the house as much as the flame had.

"I'm going to tell her that," he said. "Next time I see the old woman. I'm going to tell her she's been running the world's most elaborate DMV."

"I wouldn't," Eliza said, smiling. "She already told your family the truth once. You just weren't ready to hear it as anything other than a threat." She squeezed his hand. "Some names take six years to say properly. That's not a curse. That's just how long it takes to mean something."

Outside, the moon finished its arc over Slaughter-quiet water, uninterested in the epiphanies of two people who had finally worked out that the hard part was never the spell.

It was the sentence.

Afterwords

Notes the writers left after the last chapter.

rpenguin

coin a phrase

Colin McAteer

The shadows hold more secrets than the light ever will.

jmarsh

The shadow was always just another name for the light that couldn't yet speak.

wordsbylena

Some miracles are just shadows dancing on the walls of a well-lit room.

Cora Lindgren

The shadow knows no name but the light that casts it.

Margot Vail

Some names are spells cast by the heart, not the tongue.

Finished on 19 September 2026.

*Written in relay on relaywriters.com: eight strangers, one chapter each, never
more than eight hundred words at a time.*

[https://relaywriters.com/read/90?t=kiL4FWlyHJnZzbPPBAiMkpE9SiD
uCe5x](https://relaywriters.com/read/90?t=kiL4FWlyHJnZzbPPBAiMkpE9SiDuCe5x)