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Eclipse of the Forgotten City

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Introduction

Before the world ever knew her name, Lia was simply a bookkeeper, her life mapped in tidy ledgers and quiet routine among the wind-swept docks of Halcyon. The town bustled with trades and tides, but to Lia, its heart beat with a steadiness that forewarned neither destiny nor danger. In these early days, her greatest adventures came bound in leather: the rare books she cataloged, the ink-stained ledgers she balanced, the whispered tales traded between merchants at dusk. She believed herself content—until fate, hidden in the fragile pages of a forgotten manuscript, began to rewrite her story.

Halcyon itself, perched where restless ocean met rocky shore, seemed an unlikely birthplace for legends. Fisherfolk hauled nets thick with silver scales, merchants bartered wares in a symphony of shouts, and the echoes of old magic slept soundly beneath cobblestone streets. Lia moved through these rhythms unnoticed, savoring moments of stillness in her modest quarters above the shop, yearning only for the comfort of familiarity. But the estate sale—and the odd, dust-swirled tome she rescued there—would unravel every certainty she had ever known.

The manuscript—a relic, by all appearances, and riddled with indecipherable glyphs—called to Lia with a voice she could not explain. Its presence awakened long-buried fragments of song and story, snatches of lost history she had dismissed as fable. Obsession bloomed where curiosity had lived, compelling her hands to trace each glyph, her mind to chase meanings half-remembered in dreams. She could not know that these markings were pieces of Eldoria—fragments of a city consigned to myth, now opening its eyes through her.

Soon enough, Halcyon's shadows grew deeper, filled with rumors of strangers and a city awakening in the far-off wilds. When Lucian arrived, bearing the scars and secrets of a forgotten realm, Lia's world tilted. He spoke of danger gathering in the east—of prophecy and legacy, and the high cost of lost magic found. For the first time, the line between her quiet, ordered existence and the restless world beyond collapsed, thrusting Lia into a gauntlet of intrigue, peril, and possibility.

In the days and nights that followed, the bounds of friendship, courage, and self-reliance would be tested. As tides of old magic and ancient enemies threatened to surge again, Lia faced choices that echoed through centuries. The story that unfolds from these pages is more than a tale of cities risen and fallen; it is a chronicle of the ordinary refusing to be forgotten, of hidden power yearning for dawn, and of one woman's refusal to let either fate or fear dictate the end of her story.

So begin the chronicles of Eldoria—the city in eclipse, the magic reawakened, and the journey of the unlikeliest of heroes.

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CHAPTER ONE: Whispers on the Tide

The coastal town of Halcyon was a symphony of salty air and ceaseless activity, a place where the rhythmic crash of waves against the docks was as constant as the shouts of the fishmongers. Lia, however, found her rhythm in the quiet hum of the Silver Quill, the town's oldest and most respected purveyor of books and curios. Her days were a meticulous dance with ledgers, cataloging new acquisitions, and dusting the ancient spines of volumes that predated Halcyon itself. Her slender fingers, though often ink-stained, moved with a surprising grace born of endless practice.

From her perch at a scarred oak desk tucked away in the shop's rear, Lia watched the world beyond her window. Fishermen, their faces weathered like old parchment, mended nets the color of dried seaweed. Children, their laughter bright as polished shells, chased seagulls along the shore. Merchants, with their booming voices and elaborate tales, haggled over prices for ambergris and exotic silks. It was a comfortable, predictable world, and Lia, with her preference for certainty, had always believed herself perfectly suited to it.

Her life was a neatly organized shelf of expectations. Marriage to Thomas, the amiable baker's son, was a foregone conclusion. A small house, perhaps with a garden, filled with the scent of fresh bread and old books. A future as smooth and predictable as the tide's ebb and flow. She harbored no grand ambitions, no secret desires for adventure beyond the pages of the tales she curated. The closest she came to rebellion was occasionally reading a particularly juicy romance novel under the counter during slow afternoons.

Yet, a subtle disquiet had begun to stir within her, a faint, almost imperceptible tremor that belied her outward calm. It manifested in restless dreams, fragmented images of crumbling stone and emerald light, dissolving upon waking into frustrating wisps of memory. She dismissed them as the lingering effects of too much strong tea or perhaps an overly elaborate dinner from the tavern next door. Halcyon was not a place for phantoms, and Lia was certainly not the type of person to entertain them.

Her employer, the kindly but eccentric Master Thorne, a man whose spectacles always seemed perched precariously on the tip of his nose, noticed nothing amiss. He valued Lia's diligence and her uncanny ability to find exactly the right book for even the most obscure request. His world revolved around the musty scent of ancient paper and the hushed reverence for forgotten knowledge, a world Lia had comfortably inhabited for the better part of a decade.

One blustery afternoon, a grizzled old sailor named Silas, his face a roadmap of sun-

creased wrinkles, ambled into the Silver Quill. He wasn't a regular, preferring the raucous atmosphere of the Salty Dog tavern to the quiet solemnity of a bookstore. Lia looked up from a treatise on ancient fishing techniques, surprised. Silas usually only came in when he needed a particularly durable rope or a new compass, never for reading material.

"Lia, lass," Silas grunted, his voice like gravel scraping on stone, "heard anything about the old Blackwood estate? They're clearing it out, finally. Proper estate sale, they say. All sorts of forgotten things." He leaned closer, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, "Heard tell old Blackwood had a library that'd swallow a kraken. Filled with strange stuff."

Lia's interest, usually reserved for illuminated manuscripts and first editions, piqued. The Blackwood estate was a local legend, a sprawling, decaying manor on the cliffs overlooking the sea. Its reclusive owner, a man known only as Old Blackwood, had passed away years ago, and the property had remained untouched, shrouded in tales of dusty relics and locked rooms. A library of that size, however, was a treasure trove for any book lover.

"A library, Silas?" she asked, a genuine smile gracing her lips. "What kind of strange things?"

Silas shrugged, running a calloused hand through his sparse grey hair. "Don't rightly know. Just whispers. Things not from around here, they say. But there's a lot of fuss about it. Folk saying it's a good omen, or a bad one. Depends on who you ask."

The whispers, it turned out, were not confined to Silas. Over the next few days, a subtle undercurrent of excitement and trepidation rippled through Halcyon. Merchants spoke of unusually good catches, while farmers fretted over unexplained blights on their crops. Seemingly disparate events, yet all contributing to a growing sense that something significant was stirring, something beyond the usual ebb and flow of town life.

Elderly women, their eyes sharp with years of observation, exchanged knowing glances at the market. Children, usually oblivious to adult anxieties, stopped their games of tag to point at the strangely colored sunsets. Even Thomas, usually consumed by the intricacies of sourdough, mentioned a feeling in the air, a hum that wasn't quite the wind, not quite the sea.

Lia, initially dismissing these notions as mere superstition, found herself unconsciously collecting these fragmented pieces of information. The way a fisherman described a strange, shimmering light far out at sea. The hushed conversation between two women about a traveler passing through, asking odd questions about ancient ruins. The recurring motif of an ancient city, whispered in tales she'd thought long forgotten.

She would be at her desk, meticulously categorizing a collection of shipbuilding schematics, when a fragment of a hushed conversation from the street below would drift through the open window. "...the city... waking..." or "...old magic..." These phrases, disjointed and seemingly nonsensical, began to resonate with the hazy images from her dreams, forming a subtle, unsettling pattern.

The disquiet deepened. The predictability she cherished in Halcyon now felt almost stifling. She started staying up later, tracing the obscure glyphs in the margins of old texts, searching for any echo of the whispers she heard. The stories of Eldoria, once relegated to fanciful children's tales, now seemed to leap from the pages with a newfound urgency.

One evening, as the last rays of sunlight painted the sky in fiery hues, Lia sat by her window, a half-eaten supper forgotten on the table beside her. The sounds of Halcyon faded, replaced by the insistent whisper of the tide. And amidst that natural symphony, she swore she heard a new sound, faint but clear: a distant hum, a resonance that vibrated not just in the air, but in her very bones.

It was a call, she realized, though from where or to what, she couldn't say. A call that stirred a dormant longing she hadn't known she possessed. The Blackwood estate sale, once merely an interesting diversion, now felt like a pivotal point, a threshold she was meant to cross. The forgotten city, Eldoria, seemed to be reaching out, its spectral fingers brushing against the mundane fabric of her life, ready to unravel it entirely. And Lia, the unassuming bookkeeper, was poised, unknowingly, on the precipice of a story far grander than any she had ever read.

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