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# Echoes of the Blighted King

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## Introduction

Liora had always faded into the background of Eldoria's grand tapestry, not by choice, but by circumstance. Born without title or notoriety, she had found sanctuary among the unending rows of parchment and dust in the kingdom's great library. Day after day, she copied the manuscripts of long-dead kings and chronicled the whispers of faded legends, seen by few and noticed by even fewer. Sheltered by candlelight and the silent companionship of ancient scrolls, she quietly observed the world around her—both the new tales whispered by passing scholars and the old wounds that lingered in Eldoria's troubled soil.

But in Eldoria, obscurity offers a peculiar kind of freedom. While nobles traded secrets and soldiers marched against unseen enemies, Liora listened, absorbed, and learned. There she heard, in fragments and footnotes, the legend of the Blighted King. Once a ruler beloved by all, he was said to have gazed too deeply into forbidden magic, succumbing to a malign force that withered his heart and blackened his reign. His curse endured, a silent blight festering beneath the kingdom's gilded surface, waiting to resurface in a generation unprepared for such darkness.

Few believed the old stories in their entirety; fewer still dared speak of the prophecy. It was said that when shadows stretched across Eldoria and the blight threatened all life, one hidden among the forgotten would rise to challenge fate. The tale, half-myth and half-warning, was mostly dismissed—until the day Liora uncovered a worn, unmarked tome, sealed behind layers of dust untouched for centuries.

Something in its faded script spoke directly to her soul, drawing forth a power she never knew slept within her veins. Dreams blurred with reality; words shimmered with meaning. And in that moment, the world shifted imperceptibly, setting her on a path from which there would be no return. Her simple existence as a scribe fell away, replaced by the weight of destiny and the inescapable call to act where others had failed or fallen.

No great journey begins with certainty. Liora had doubts—about her worth, her lineage, and the perilous truths buried by faded ink. Yet as shadows lengthened and echoes of betrayal haunted the halls, she clung to a whisper of hope: that her story, spun from ashes and longing, might become the key to breaking the kingdom's terrible cycle. In seeking the end of the Blighted King's curse, she would forge unexpected bonds, face deceptions that cut deeper than any blade, and be forced to reckon with the nature of power itself.

Thus begins the tale of the scribe and the curse she was born to challenge. As the

echoes of the Blighted King resound through the land, the fate of Eldoria now depends on a quiet girl stepping decisively from the margins into legend's embrace.

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## CHAPTER ONE: The Scribe in the Shadows

The Grand Library of Eldoria was a cathedral of quiet reverence, its vaulted ceilings disappearing into dusty twilight, its air thick with the scent of aged parchment and beeswax. Liora, hunched over a colossal ledger in a secluded alcove, felt a peculiar kinship with the silence. Her quill scratched a steady rhythm against the vellum, a counterpoint to the distant rustle of turning pages and the occasional muffled cough from a sequestered scholar. She was twenty years old, yet felt a hundred, her youth leached by endless hours of transcription, her spirit sustained by the stories she copied.

Her current task involved meticulously updating the kingdom's agricultural records – a testament to the annual grain yields of some long-forgotten northern province. It was mind-numbingly dull work, the kind that made her eyes blur and her thoughts drift to more exciting prospects, like the prospect of a hot meal that wasn't stew. But it was her livelihood, and the library, for all its drudgery, was also her haven. Unlike the bustling markets of Eldoria City or the opulent halls of the royal palace, no one here truly noticed a humble scribe.

This suited Liora. She had a knack for observation, a quiet habit of absorbing details others missed. The nervous tics of Lord Theron, who often visited the restricted archives, always brushing his silver ring before touching a scroll. The hushed, urgent tones of the High Chancellor's private conversations near the eastern windows. The way the light, even on the brightest days, seemed to dim inexplicably in the section dedicated to ancient curses and forbidden lore.

It was this latter section that truly captivated her, a forbidden fruit she only dared to gaze upon from a distance. The legends of the Blighted King weren't officially suppressed, but they were certainly discouraged. No royal decree banned them, but librarians had a way of making certain texts inconveniently placed, covered in an extra layer of dust, or simply "misfiled" deep within the labyrinthine shelves. The official narrative was simple: a glorious king, a tragic fall, a curse that ended with his demise. But Liora had read enough footnotes to know that history rarely had such clean edges.

Sometimes, after her assigned duties were done and the last of the senior librarians had departed, Liora would linger. She'd move with a practiced stealth through the towering shelves, her lamp casting dancing shadows that seemed to lengthen and twist with each step. Her usual destination was a small, often-overlooked section on ancient medicinal herbs, an area so obscure even the resident mice rarely bothered it. But occasionally, her gaze would drift.

Tonight was one such night. The library was truly empty, save for Liora and the faint glow of the moon filtering through the high arched windows. The silence was profound, almost sacred. She finished a late entry in her ledger, carefully capped her ink, and extinguished her small candle. The darkness, though intimidating, was also a familiar comfort. It allowed her to shed the persona of the diligent, unremarkable scribe.

She drifted towards the forbidden section, a pull she couldn't quite articulate. It wasn't curiosity alone, but something deeper, a sense of unease that had been growing within her for weeks. Whispers from the city had grown bolder – accounts of unexplained illnesses, crops failing in defiance of healthy soil, a pervasive gloom that seemed to settle over the kingdom like a shroud. These were small things, easily dismissed by the complacent, but Liora knew the tales of the Blighted King began with just such insidious creepings.

Her hand, as if guided by an unseen force, ran along the spines of dusty, leather-bound books. Most were dense historical analyses, or theological treatises on the nature of good and evil – dull beyond measure. But then, her fingers brushed against something different. It wasn't leather, but a rough, dark wood, strangely warm to the touch. The book was wedged deep between a treatise on dwarven mining techniques and a collection of ancient Eldorian lullabies. It was almost perfectly camouflaged.

She tugged gently. The book resisted, as if rooted. Liora pulled harder, gritting her teeth. With a faint pop, it dislodged, sending a cloud of centuries-old dust billowing into the air. She coughed, waving a hand to clear it, and brought the tome closer to the moonlight filtering through a nearby window.

It was unlike any book she had ever seen. There was no title on the spine, no author listed. The wooden cover was dark, almost black, and intricately carved with symbols Liora didn't recognize. They looked like tangled roots, or perhaps veins, weaving around a central, empty circle. The wood felt smooth beneath her fingertips, despite its rugged appearance. And it hummed, faintly, a vibration she felt more in her bones than heard with her ears.

A shiver traced its way down her spine. This was not a book for casual reading. This felt ancient, powerful, and profoundly... significant. Her heart hammered against her ribs, a frantic drum in the hushed expanse of the library. Every instinct screamed at her to return it to its hidden alcove, to pretend she had never found it.

But another instinct, one far more insistent, urged her to open it. It was the thrill of the unknown, perhaps, or a premonition that this unremarkable night was about to become anything but. With trembling fingers, Liora pushed at the wooden clasps. They clicked open with surprising ease, releasing another puff of dusty, earthy air.

The pages within were not parchment or vellum. They felt like thin sheets of polished stone, or perhaps exceptionally smooth obsidian, cool to the touch. And they were not blank. Instead, intricate glyphs, glowing with a faint, internal luminescence, covered them. The light was soft, almost imperceptible, but it was undeniably there, pulsing with a slow, steady rhythm.

Liora traced one of the glowing symbols with her finger. It felt strangely familiar, as if she had always known its shape, its meaning, its very essence. A warmth spread from her fingertip, up her arm, and into her chest, igniting a sensation she had never experienced before. It was like a dormant fire suddenly stirring, a deep-seated hum awakening within her.

The glyphs on the page seemed to shift, to rearrange themselves, almost as if responding to her touch. Images flickered in her mind's eye, not as clear visions, but as faint impressions: a towering fortress, wreathed in shadow; a single, gnarled tree standing on a windswept plain; a crown, dark and twisted, surrounded by whispering specters.

It was overwhelming, yet oddly serene. The usual mental chaos of her day – the endless lists, the mundane facts – dissolved, replaced by a clarity of thought she hadn't known she possessed. She could almost *feel* the meaning of the glyphs, not just intellectually understand them. It was a language spoken directly to her soul.

And then, as she focused on one particularly intricate symbol, a brilliant flash of emerald light erupted from the book, brief but blinding. It was as if the ancient power contained within had finally decided to fully reveal itself. The light enveloped Liora, not burning, but permeating every fiber of her being.

She gasped, stumbling backward, the book falling to the dusty floor with a soft thud. Her head swam, filled with a cacophony of echoing whispers and fleeting images – faces she didn't know, landscapes she'd never seen, a profound sense of loss and then, a surge of defiant power. When the emerald glow faded, the library was plunged back into its quiet gloom, the only difference being the faint, residual shimmer around Liora's hands.

Her hands. They were trembling, but not from fear. They felt... different. As if charged with a latent energy. She stared at them, flexing her fingers, bewildered. The air around her still crackled with an unseen force. The ancient tome lay open on the floor, its obsidian pages now glowing with a more pronounced, steady light.

This was no ordinary book. This was no ordinary night. The mundane existence of Liora the scribe, the girl who faded into the background, had just been irrevocably shattered. The whispers of old magic, of forgotten prophecies, were no longer distant tales. They were real, and they were stirring within her.

A profound sense of destiny, terrifying and exhilarating, settled upon her. The book on the floor, pulsating with a silent rhythm, seemed to call to her. The Blighted King, once a distant legend, now felt closer than her own shadow. The future of Eldoria, she instinctively knew, now hinged on a quiet girl and a book found in the shadows of a forgotten shelf. And it had all just begun.

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