

Prompt - "Write the opening scene of a fantasy novel where a reluctant hero discovers they have the power to control time." TOOL Gemeni

The flickering torchlight cast long, dancing shadows across the cavern walls, illuminating dust motes swirling in the stale air. Elara, shivering despite the oppressive heat, huddled deeper into her furs. Her breath hitched, a ragged gasp against the suffocating silence. This wasn't the life she'd envisioned. She'd dreamt of exploring the emerald forests beyond the village, of becoming a renowned healer like her grandmother, not of being smuggled into some forgotten underworld by a gruff, one-eyed smuggler named Silas.

"Almost there, kid," Silas rasped, his voice a gravelly whisper. He nudged her forward with the butt of his rifle, his gaze wary. The air grew thick with the smell of damp earth and something metallic, a coppery tang that made Elara's stomach churn.

Suddenly, Silas froze, his hand tightening around the rifle. Elara felt a jolt, a strange sensation of the air around them thickening, becoming impossibly heavy. The flickering torchlight seemed to stutter, then extinguished altogether, plunging them into absolute darkness.

Panic clawed at Elara's throat. She reached out, her fingers brushing against Silas's arm, but he didn't respond. She called out, her voice a thin thread in the suffocating silence, but only the echo of her own fear answered.

Then, just as suddenly as it began, the darkness receded. The torch flickered back to life, casting a sickly yellow glow. But something had changed. Silas stood frozen, his eyes wide with a terror that transcended mere fear. He stared at Elara, his lips moving silently, as if trying to speak but no sound would come.

Elara, confused and terrified, took a hesitant step back. In that moment, she saw it. A single, perfectly formed tear traced a path down Silas's grizzled cheek, then vanished. It was as if time itself had reversed, the tear un-forming, the skin smoothing over seamlessly.

Silas, still frozen in a silent scream, began to crumble. His body, once rigid with terror, seemed to dissolve, his form fading into thin air like mist. He was gone, vanished without a trace, leaving only the lingering scent of dust and the echoing silence in his wake.

Elara stared at the empty space where Silas had stood, her mind reeling. What had just

happened? How? Fear gave way to a strange sense of exhilaration, a thrill that sent shivers down her spine. She had somehow... undone him. Un-made him.

This was no ordinary cavern. And she, Elara, the village healer's granddaughter, was no ordinary girl.