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Through the Iron Veil

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Introduction

In the heart of Eldoria, where dawn scatters gold across dew-laden fields and twilight whispers secrets through ancient canopies, magic is not a distant memory, but the living breath of the land. Here, the villages are built among the roots of trees older than legend, their stones thrumming with quiet power. For generations, the people of Eldoria have been both wardens and children of the enchantments that shape their world. It is a place where wonder and danger are threaded together, close as the warp and weft of a tapestry.

Kyra Ashford has never wondered about the nature of destiny; her days, until now, have been hemmed with simplicity. As a novice enchantress in the quiet hamlet of Ashenwood, her world is measured by morning lessons, evening rituals by candlelight, and the gentle guidance of her mentor, Maelin. The boundaries of her life have been as comforting and predictable as the familiar woods surrounding her home. Deep within her, however, stir questions—of family lost to mystery and of magic she scarcely understands.

But when a sudden, uncontrollable surge of magic devastates her village, Kyra's world is irrevocably changed. The catastrophe strips away the illusions of safety and summons shadows older than any tale whispered around village fires. In the turmoil's wake, Kyra finds herself haunted by visions she cannot explain, tugged by a force as ancient as the Iron Veil itself—a barrier of legend, said to separate light from darkness, hope from despair.

It is in the aftermath of loss that Kyra's journey takes its first hesitant steps. When an enigmatic traveler appears, drawn by the scent of wild magic and ruin, Kyra learns that the disaster is no isolated tragedy but part of a far greater storm gathering over Eldoria. Her latent power, once a quiet ember, threatens to become a conflagration. Reluctant though she is, Kyra soon discovers the fate of her wounded community may hinge on her own struggle to understand, control, and ultimately accept the gift and burden she carries.

As the world beyond Ashenwood reveals itself—a land brimming with hidden wonders and deadly perils—Kyra is thrust into a journey that will test every conviction, every bond she holds dear. The looming threat entwined with her own history compels her forward, past the boundaries of fear and doubt, toward a destiny both terrifying and luminous.

Through the Iron Veil, the odyssey of magic, destiny, and redemption begins. The journey will demand everything Kyra has to give—and, perhaps, more than she knew

she possessed. In Eldoria, the lines between savior and destroyer, curse and blessing, will blur, and Kyra's quest will shape both her own soul and the fate of the realm itself.

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CHAPTER ONE: Embers Over Ashenwood

The air in Ashenwood usually carried the scent of pine and damp earth, a comforting aroma that was as much a part of home as the creak of old floorboards or the murmur of Maelin's spells. But on that particular morning, an acrid tang of ozone mixed with something charred, something sickly sweet and cloying, hung heavy. Kyra, already awake, felt it first as a prickle on her skin, a shiver that had nothing to do with the pre-dawn chill. It was the whisper of uncontrolled magic, a chaotic current in the otherwise placid flow of Eldoria's enchantments.

She threw off her rough spun blanket, her bare feet meeting the cool, packed earth of her small room. The single window, usually framing a tranquil view of the towering ash trees, now shimmered with an unsettling, purplish light. It pulsed, a silent heartbeat of raw power, growing stronger with each throb. Dread, cold and sharp, pierced through Kyra's nascent morning calm. This wasn't Maelin's disciplined, nurturing magic. This was something else entirely.

She scrambled into her simple tunic and breeches, her fingers fumbling with the ties. A low hum vibrated through the ground, rising in pitch until it felt like a thousand cicadas singing inside her skull. The purplish light outside intensified, washing the room in an alien glow. Through the window, she could glimpse the silhouettes of her neighbors' homes, usually so solid and familiar, now wavering as if seen through heat haze. Panic, a cold snake, coiled in her belly.

"Maelin!" Kyra called out, her voice thin against the rising crescendo of the hum. She rushed out of her room, down the short hallway that led to Maelin's chamber. The air in the main living space crackled, small motes of light dancing wildly. Books on the shelves vibrated, threatening to tumble, and the herbs hanging from the rafters swayed as if caught in an unseen gale.

Maelin was already there, standing by the largest window, her back to Kyra. Her silver hair, usually meticulously braided, had come loose, shimmering in the strange light. Her hands were outstretched, palms facing the window, as if trying to push back an invisible tide. Kyra saw the lines of strain etched around Maelin's eyes, the set of her jaw. This was not a ritual or a lesson. This was a battle.

"Maelin, what is it?" Kyra asked, her voice trembling despite her efforts to keep it steady. She felt drawn to the window, to the source of the chaotic energy, a morbid fascination warring with her fear.

Maelin turned, her eyes wide, reflecting the purple luminescence. "The Veil, Kyra.

Something is... tearing at it. It's too much. The magic is unstable, raw." She coughed, a dry, hacking sound, and clutched at her chest. Even as she spoke, the hum intensified, shifting into a low growl that vibrated through the very foundations of the cottage.

Suddenly, a blinding flash erupted from the direction of the village square. A deafening roar followed, shaking the cottage violently. Kyra stumbled, catching herself on a sturdy wooden chair. Through the window, she saw a grotesque distortion in the air, a shimmering vortex of purple energy that swallowed the light and twisted the familiar landscape into a nightmare. Trees bent at impossible angles, their leaves shriveling and turning to ash mid-air.

"No!" Maelin cried, her voice filled with anguish. She lunged forward, pressing her hands against the window as if to shield the village. But the power was too immense, too wild. The vortex pulsed, spitting out bolts of raw energy that struck homes, turning wood to splinters and stone to dust in an instant. The screams started then, a chorus of terror rising from the heart of Ashenwood.

Kyra felt a surge of something she couldn't name - not fear, not exactly, but a deep, resonant ache that settled in her bones. It was a recognition, a faint echo of the chaotic energy swirling outside, as if some part of her understood its language. She saw Maelin falter, her knees buckling. The older enchantress was trying to weave a protective barrier, Kyra realized, but her magic was a controlled flame against a raging inferno.

One particularly violent bolt struck the neighboring cottage, an old, beloved structure that belonged to Elara, the village baker. In a terrifying instant, it disintegrated, leaving only a smoking crater. The screams intensified. Kyra felt a hot tear track down her cheek, but it wasn't from sadness, not yet. It was from the sheer, overwhelming force of what she was witnessing, the raw, unbridled power.

Then, a wave of energy, cold and sharp, washed over her. It wasn't a destructive wave, but a probe, seeking something. It brushed against her, and Kyra gasped. For a fleeting second, the chaos outside seemed to quiet, to *listen*. The hum lessened, the purple light flickered, and the vortex seemed to waver. Maelin, struggling to stand, looked at Kyra with wide, startled eyes.

"Kyra... did you feel that?" Maelin whispered, her voice hoarse.

Before Kyra could answer, the silence shattered. The vortex erupted with renewed fury, spitting out a torrent of fire and shadow. It was as if the brief moment of calm had angered it, made it stronger. A blast of heat struck the cottage, shattering the window and throwing Kyra backwards. She hit the wall hard, the breath knocked out of her.

When she managed to gasp for air, the world was a whirlwind of smoke, dust, and the agonizing scent of burning wood. She pushed herself up, coughing, her eyes stinging. Maelin lay still amidst the debris, a thick beam from the ceiling pinning her leg. Her face was pale, her eyes closed.

“Maelin!” Kyra cried, scrambling over broken furniture and shards of glass. She reached her mentor, her hands already glowing faintly with the inexperienced healing magic she had only begun to learn. But the damage was severe, the bone twisted at an unnatural angle.

Maelin’s eyelids fluttered open. Her gaze met Kyra’s, and for a moment, the overwhelming terror of the moment receded. There was a profound sadness in Maelin’s eyes, but also a flicker of something else—a recognition, a grim certainty. “It’s too late for Ashenwood, child,” she rasped, her voice barely audible over the crackling of flames outside. “The Veil... it’s a wound. It needs more than just a mending hand.”

The sounds from outside were unbearable now—the screams had died down, replaced by the roar of the inferno. Ashenwood, her quiet, beloved village, was burning. A pillar of dark smoke, streaked with that horrifying purple light, rose into the morning sky.

Maelin gripped Kyra’s hand, her touch surprisingly strong despite her weakness. “You felt it, didn’t you? That power... it calls to you.” Her eyes, though clouded with pain, held a fierce intensity. “You are connected to this, Kyra. To the Veil. More than I ever knew.”

Kyra shook her head, tears blurring her vision. “No, Maelin, I don’t understand. I can’t...”

“You must,” Maelin interrupted, her voice gaining a desperate urgency. “There is a path, Kyra. A secret. Seek out the Whisperwind Monks. They will know what to do, what you are. And they will guide you.” She struggled to pull something from beneath her tunic—a small, intricately carved wooden bird, dark as ebony, with eyes of polished jade. “Take this. It will serve as your... guide. And a sign.”

Just then, the ceiling groaned above them, weakened by the heat and structural damage. More debris began to rain down. “Go, Kyra! Now!” Maelin urged, pushing the bird into Kyra’s hand. Her eyes were pleading, filled with a love that transcended the immediate chaos. “Live. For Eldoria. For all of us.”

Kyra hesitated, her heart tearing. To leave Maelin, her mentor, her only family, felt like an impossible betrayal. But Maelin’s gaze was firm, demanding obedience. Another crack echoed, closer this time, and a section of the wall crumbled.

With a choked sob, Kyra kissed Maelin's forehead, the faint light of her healing spell still flickering uselessly on her mentor's injured leg. "I'll come back for you, Maelin. I swear it."

Maelin offered a weak smile, her eyes already glazing over. "Go."

Driven by Maelin's final command and the imminent collapse of the cottage, Kyra stumbled out into the devastation. The world outside was a nightmare of twisted trees, smoking ruins, and the lingering, acrid smell of burnt magic. The air hummed with a malevolent energy that pressed down on her, stealing her breath. She didn't look back. She couldn't.

She ran, her bare feet pounding on the scorched earth, past the smoldering remains of homes, past the unmoving figures that lay scattered like fallen leaves. The wooden bird, clutched tightly in her hand, felt impossibly heavy, a small anchor in a world that had tilted violently off its axis.

As she reached the outskirts of what had once been Ashenwood, the roar of the fire seemed to recede, replaced by the sickening silence of utter destruction. She risked a glance back. What remained was a scar on the land, a blackened expanse where a vibrant village had once stood. The purple vortex still swirled in the distance, though it seemed to be shrinking, drawing its foul energy back into itself.

Kyra gasped, collapsing against the gnarled trunk of an ancient oak that, miraculously, still stood, its leaves singed but not consumed. She pulled her knees to her chest, burying her face in them, the reality of what had just happened crashing down on her. Ashenwood was gone. Maelin was... she couldn't even form the word.

A cold dread seeped into her bones, deeper than the fear of the destruction. It was the knowledge that Maelin's last words, her desperate plea, meant something profound. *"You are connected to this, Kyra. To the Veil."* The raw magic, the way it had seemed to react to her presence, however briefly. It was a terrifying thought, a burden she never asked for.

The wooden bird in her hand felt warm now, throbbing faintly with a gentle energy, a stark contrast to the destructive power she had just witnessed. It felt like a small, fragile beacon in the vast darkness that had enveloped her world. She lifted her head, her eyes scanning the horizon, a raw, desperate resolve hardening in her heart. The Whisperwind Monks. That was where she had to go. Whatever this connection to the Iron Veil was, whatever destiny Maelin had glimpsed for her, Kyra had to understand it. And she had to make good on her promise. For Ashenwood. For Maelin. For Eldoria. The journey had begun.

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