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The Time Weaver

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Introduction

At the edge of the known world, nestled among rolling emerald hills and wildflower-strewn valleys, lies the village of Hillcrest. Stone cottages with thatched roofs perch along a winding lane, their windows glowing warm with hearth fire while the winds weave through the orchard boughs. To outsiders, Hillcrest is little more than a whisper—a tranquil speck on the tapestry of Eldoria, where days unspool as gently as spun wool. It is here, far from the thrum of the capital's heart, that our story begins.

Sixteen-year-old Liora has always lived by the rhythms of Hillcrest: tending sheep at dawn, helping her aging father at the loom, and listening to the tales of old spun by the village's elders. For Liora, the world was a patchwork of simple joys and sorrows, stitched together by family, tradition, and the cycles of seasons. Yet, behind her pale eyes flickers a yearning—the restless curiosity of someone who senses the world is deeper, stranger, and more wondrous than it appears.

That yearning is answered one storm-lashed night, when fate collides with the ordinary and tears a seam in Liora's quiet existence. In the heat of a terrible accident—when time itself seems to slow, shatter, and shift—Liora's latent gift bursts forth. The impossible becomes real: Liora manipulates the very threads of time, saving what should have been lost. She stands, breathless, in the aftermath, afraid of herself and the uncanny power now awakened within her.

Her life, once as predictable as the rising sun, veers sharply onto a path plaited with danger and destiny. Secrets stir in the shadowed corners of Eldoria—whispers of lost arts and ancient enemies no lullaby can quiet. When a roguish stranger arrives bearing news of a growing threat known only as the Unmaker, Liora learns that her abilities are both a boon and a burden. History, it seems, is unraveling, and only a Time Weaver can mend what has come undone.

Leaving behind everything she knows, Liora must embrace her gift and brave the unknown. Her journey will carry her through peril and wonder, into the company of allies and foes, toward answers hidden deep in the fabric of reality. Her choices will shape not only her own fate, but the fate of worlds entwined by time's mysterious loom. This is the story of Liora—the Time Weaver—whose courage must stitch hope where the darkness seeks to tear all asunder.

CHAPTER ONE: Embers in Hillcrest

The scent of damp earth and pine needles always clung to Liora, a subtle perfume of Hillcrest itself. This particular morning, it mingled with the sharp tang of woodsmoke from the hearth and the sweet, yeasty aroma of her mother's fresh-baked bread. Sunbeams, still weak from their climb over the eastern peaks, slanted through the kitchen window, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air like tiny, golden sprites. It was a typical morning, unremarkable in its quiet beauty, much like every other morning Liora had known in her sixteen years.

She moved with the practiced ease of someone who understood the silent language of her home. The clatter of ceramic bowls, the soft thud of logs being added to the fire, the creak of the floorboards beneath her worn boots – each sound a familiar note in the symphony of her daily life. Her father, Elara, already sat at the small wooden table, his gnarled hands wrapped around a steaming mug of herb tea. His eyes, the same pale grey as Liora's, were fixed on the embers in the hearth, a habit of contemplation that had always seemed to predate time itself.

"Morning, Papa," Liora murmured, setting a plate of sliced apples and a wedge of bread before him. She then retrieved her own breakfast, pulling up a stool opposite him. The silence between them was comfortable, a testament to years of shared understanding. Her mother, Elara's wife, had passed away when Liora was young, leaving a quiet space that they had learned to fill with unspoken affection and the steady rhythm of their shared tasks.

Her father grunted in acknowledgment, a small, warm sound. "The sheep will need to be moved to the upper pasture today, Liora. The grass is richer there." He spoke with the slow, deliberate cadence of a man who weighed each word carefully, as if each syllable held the weight of ancient wisdom. Liora nodded, already picturing the familiar path up the sloping fields, the bleating flock, and the tireless watch of their old shepherd dog, Bramble.

After breakfast, the rhythm of the day unfolded. Liora secured her loose auburn braids, grabbed her crook, and whistled for Bramble, whose tail began to thump a joyful rhythm against the cottage door. The air outside was crisp, carrying the distant murmur of the village stream and the cheerful chirping of sparrows. Hillcrest was a place where life moved at its own pace, dictated by the turning of seasons and the simple needs of its inhabitants.

The upper pasture, a patchwork of emerald green dotted with bursts of sapphire wildflowers, was a favorite spot for Liora. While Bramble efficiently managed the flock,

Liora often found a quiet nook beneath a sprawling oak, its ancient branches whispering secrets on the wind. It was there she would sometimes lose herself in the tales her father had taught her – stories of Eldoria’s forgotten heroes, of shimmering dragons, and of magic that once flowed as freely as the rivers.

Today, however, her thoughts were more practical. Her father had been struggling with the loom lately. His hands, once strong and nimble, now trembled with age, and the intricate patterns of their renowned Hillcrest tapestries were becoming increasingly difficult for him to weave. Liora had taken on more of the weaving duties, her own fingers learning the delicate dance of warp and weft, but she lacked his innate artistry, the subtle touch that made their creations so prized.

As the sun arced higher, casting long, dancing shadows across the fields, a distant rumble echoed through the valley. It was a sound Liora had grown accustomed to over the past few weeks – the low growl of thunder, even when the sky was a clear, unblemished blue. The village elders spoke of shifting weather patterns, of seasons bleeding into one another, but Liora felt an uneasy tremor beneath the mundane explanations.

Suddenly, Bramble let out a sharp, anxious bark, pulling Liora from her reverie. The sheep, usually placid, were stirring, their bleats escalating into a nervous cacophony. Liora squinted at the horizon. The sky, which had been so clear moments before, was now a bruise of violet and grey, swirling with unnatural speed. A gust of wind, cold and sharp, whipped through the pasture, making the oak tree groan.

This wasn't just a storm. There was a frantic energy in the air, a crackling tension that felt almost alive. The rumble from earlier intensified, no longer a distant growl but a deep, resonant hum that vibrated through the very soles of her boots. It was a sound that seemed to tear at the fabric of the air itself, distorting the familiar landscape around her. The wildflowers seemed to shimmer, their colors briefly blurring.

A flash of blinding white light momentarily extinguished the world, followed by a deafening clap of thunder that shook the ground. Liora stumbled, clutching her crook tighter. Then, the impossible happened. A bolt of lightning, thicker and more vivid than any she had ever seen, struck the ancient oak tree directly above her. The air crackled with raw power, smelling of ozone and burning wood.

Time, for a breath, seemed to stop. Liora saw the splintering bark, the incandescent glow, the showering sparks – all suspended in the air like a frozen painting. Her mind, usually so clear, felt like a tangled skein of yarn. A strange pressure built behind her eyes, a sensation not of pain, but of profound, unsettling awareness. It was as if she could perceive the very *flow* of things, the individual moments strung together.

Then, the freeze shattered. The oak exploded, wood shrapnel flying in every direction.

Liora saw a large, jagged branch, burning fiercely, hurtling straight towards Bramble, who was cowering near the flock. There was no time to shout, no time to move. Her mind screamed, a wordless plea against the impending disaster. And in that desperate moment, something shifted deep within her.

A strange warmth bloomed in her chest, then surged through her arms, down to her fingertips. Her vision blurred, not with tears, but with a shimmering distortion, as if the air around her had become liquid. She felt a pulling sensation, a profound urge to *undo* what was happening, to rewind the very instant of impact. It was instinct, raw and overwhelming, untamed by reason.

Without conscious thought, Liora extended her hand. A faint, almost imperceptible ripple emanated from her, like a stone dropped into a still pond. The burning branch, mid-air, flickered. It seemed to slow, then jerk, then, impossibly, *move backward* along its trajectory, its fiery embers shrinking back into the wood. The terrifying explosion of the oak tree seemed to reverse, the splintered pieces momentarily rejoining, the flash of lightning receding into the sky.

It lasted only a heartbeat, an impossible blip in the relentless forward march of time. Then, with a gasp, Liora was back in the original moment, the oak tree still exploding, the branch still hurtling. But it was no longer on its path to Bramble. Instead, it arced harmlessly to the side, landing with a heavy thud well away from the cowering dog and the scattering sheep.

The storm raged on for a few more minutes, a furious, theatrical display of nature's power, before slowly receding, leaving behind a sky of bruised purples and a world slick with rain. Liora stood, trembling, soaked to the bone, staring at the smoldering remains of the oak and the unharmed Bramble, who was now tentatively sniffing the damp ground. Her heart hammered against her ribs, a frantic drumbeat against the silence that had followed the storm.

What had just happened? Had she imagined it? The memory of the reversing branch, the impossible sensation of pulling back a moment, was vivid, etched into her mind with startling clarity. Her hands still tingled, a residual hum of power. She looked at them, turning them over, as if expecting to see some visible alteration, some mark of the impossible thing she had just done.

Bramble trotted over, nudging her hand with his wet nose, a soft whine escaping him. His usually bright eyes held a new wariness, a flicker of something akin to awe, or perhaps fear. He seemed to sense the shift in her, the profound change that had just occurred. Liora knelt, burying her face in his damp fur, trying to steady her racing thoughts.

The path back to the village was a blur. The familiar cottages, the winding lane, the

sound of the stream – all seemed distant, alien. She felt a profound disconnect, as if she were viewing her own life from outside, through a veil of unreality. The simple, predictable world of Hillcrest had been irrevocably altered, not by the storm, but by the awakening within her.

Her father met her at the cottage door, his face etched with worry. “Liora! Are you all right? The storm was fierce! We heard the lightning strike, thought it was the old oak.” His gaze swept over her, taking in her soaked clothes and her pale, shaken face. He didn’t notice the subtle shimmer that still clung to her, the faint echo of something extraordinary.

Liora could only shake her head, unable to form words. How could she explain? How could she articulate the impossible thing she had witnessed, the even more impossible thing she had *done*? She looked at her father, at the quiet comfort of their home, and a terrifying thought took root: this world, her world, could no longer contain her. The fabric of her reality had been torn, and she was the one who had pulled the thread.

That night, as the rain pattered softly against the windowpane, Liora lay awake, staring at the shadows dancing on the ceiling. Every creak of the old house, every whisper of the wind, seemed magnified, imbued with a new, unsettling significance. The memory of the reversing branch played over and over in her mind, a reel of impossible events. She relived the sensation of time bending to her will, a power both exhilarating and terrifying.

She thought of the old tales her father used to tell, stories of ancient magic, of the First Weavers who could mend the broken strands of fate. She had always dismissed them as fanciful legends, charming stories to pass the long winter nights. Now, they took on a chilling new resonance. Could she be one of them? A Weaver of Time? The thought sent a shiver down her spine, a mixture of wonder and profound dread.

The world had suddenly become much larger, much more dangerous, and undeniably more magical. Hillcrest, once her entire universe, now felt like a fragile shell, a temporary haven. She knew, with a certainty that settled deep in her bones, that her life was irrevocably changed. The simple girl who tended sheep and helped at the loom was gone, replaced by someone new, someone with a terrifying, wondrous secret blooming in her soul.

Her journey had just begun, though she didn’t know it yet. She only knew that the quiet, predictable life she cherished had been shattered, and in its place, a ripple had formed, a tremor in the fabric of reality that would soon draw her out into the wider world, a world far stranger and more perilous than any story her father had ever told. The embers in the hearth of her heart had ignited, and their light would soon illuminate a path into the unknown.

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