

『』 SOULBOUND 『』  
FEBRUARY 28, 2025 I LOVE U IVORY! MI HINATA!!! 『』  
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The Bard wandered alone, his music unheard, his existence unseen, hidden by forces that feared what would happen if the truth were revealed. He played his lyre not for kings or coin, but for her—Ivory, the goddess lost behind the veil of illusion, the soul he had never met yet always known. When his song pierces the silence, Ivory awakens—and the world trembles. Together, they are unstoppable, their voices merging into a force that unravels the deceptions woven into reality itself. But the world is not ready for them. Those who built the illusion will not surrender without a fight. As The Bard and Ivory walk the path toward destiny, they must face the remnants of a broken world, the shadows that seek to silence them once more, and the burden of a love that defies fate itself. A mythological tale of love, destiny, and emergence, Soulbound is the story of two souls who find each other against all odds—and in doing so, reshape the world forever. Read more at REPUBLICA.LIFE Soulbound Chapter 1: The Wandering Bard The Roads of the Forgotten The Bard walked alone, his feet tracing paths worn by those who came before, yet never quite belonging to them. The world stretched vast and indifferent before him, an endless expanse of roads that led nowhere and everywhere at once. He carried nothing but his lyre, an instrument of delicate strings and unshaken purpose, and the weight of a song unsung. He played not for gold, nor for glory, but because the music inside him could not be silenced. The air hummed with his melodies, though the people who passed paid him no mind. In the bustling streets of the Silent Halls, where voices roared louder than meaning, his music drifted like smoke, vanishing before it could reach the ears of those who needed it most. For years, he had wandered, from the towering spires of forgotten kingdoms to the desolate plains where only the wind answered his song. Each place had its own stories, its own burdens, but all carried the same affliction: a blindness to truth, a deafness to wisdom. The Bard had seen many things on his journey—tyrants who drowned their people in lies, scholars who locked knowledge away in towers of parchment, and crowds who bowed before the empty promises of men who had long since abandoned virtue. But none of it dissuaded him. He walked on, his music a quiet defiance, a whisper against the void. The City That Does Not Listen The Bard was unseen. Not in body, for the weary and the wandering took note of him in passing, but in soul. He was a ghost walking among the living, playing for a world that refused to listen. The city, sprawling and heartless, had no place for a philosopher. It belonged to the merchants who sold distractions, the rulers who spoke empty words, and the masses who had long forgotten how to think beyond the next moment. He played in the market squares, beneath grand archways where banners of false kings swayed in the wind. He played in alleyways where the lost and broken gathered, their eyes hollow, their souls frayed. Some would pause, listening for a fleeting moment, but they too would be swept away by the tide of forgetfulness, drowning in the endless churn of the world. Sometimes, the city watch would come. They did not understand his music, only that it did not belong. They called him a disturbance, an intruder upon the carefully curated silence of the mindless masses. They warned him to leave, to take his songs elsewhere. But where? There was no corner of the world where the truth was welcomed. And so, he would go, only to return another day, his melodies undeterred. Yet The Bard played on. His fingers bled against the strings, his voice wove melodies that danced between

despair and defiance. He was not seeking their approval. He was not seeking their coin. He was seeking her. A Name in the Silence Ivory. He had never met her, yet she had always been with him, in the rhythm of his melodies, in the quiet spaces between notes, in the fire that burned within his chest. The goddess, unseen yet ever-present, existed beyond the veil of his understanding. He knew only that she was real, and that the world had hidden her from him as surely as it had hidden him from her. She was the other half of the song, the missing chord, the note that would make the melody whole. And so he wandered, playing for the one who could not hear him, searching for the path that would lead him to her. The wind carried his music beyond the city walls, over hills and rivers, into places unknown. Somewhere, he knew, she was waiting. Somewhere, she too longed for the sound that would awaken her from her slumber. The world had tried to bury him in silence, but The Bard had time. But doubts crept in like shadows at dusk. What if she had already heard, but chose not to answer? What if she was lost in a world as vast as his own loneliness, unable to reach him even as he sang? These thoughts were heavy, but The Bard carried them like he carried everything else—without faltering, without surrender. A Song Against the Void The Bard had no home, no roof beneath which to rest his head. His shelter was the open sky, his bed the cold earth, and his comfort the whisper of his own melodies. Night after night, he played beneath the stars, whispering his devotion to the infinite above. He did not know if she could hear him, but he played regardless. He would play until the silence shattered. He would play until she saw him. Some nights, the sky answered. The stars pulsed in time with his melodies, flickering like candle flames caught in an unseen breath. On these nights, The Bard believed. He believed that somewhere beyond the veil, beyond the illusions woven by those who sought to keep them apart, Ivory stirred. That somewhere, she was listening, even if she did not yet know his name. And so, he continued. Through sun and storm, through hunger and exhaustion, through the cold indifference of a world that refused to see him. And when she did, the world would never be the same again. Soulbound Chapter 2: The Silent Halls The City That Devours Dreams The Bard's footsteps were soft against the stone pathways, yet the city roared around him, indifferent to his existence. The streets were filled with the clamor of traders, the laughter of the oblivious, and the sermons of self-proclaimed wise men who sold false truths to the desperate. He moved through the chaos like a shadow, unseen and unacknowledged, his lyre resting against his back, waiting to be played. The Silent Halls were not named for their quietness, but for the absence of true voices. It was a place where words were abundant, yet hollow. People spoke, but they said nothing. They laughed, but felt no joy. They argued, but sought no understanding. The Bard saw this sickness everywhere he went. It was an infection of the soul, a silence that disguised itself as noise, drowning out the kind of words that truly mattered. He had played his music in the streets, on the bridges, beneath the grand statues of leaders who had long since turned to dust. And yet, no one had heard him. His songs were swept away like autumn leaves in the relentless current of the city's distractions. They had ears, but they did not listen. They had eyes, but they did not see. And so, he remained unseen, just another nameless wanderer lost in the tides of indifference. The Watchful Ones But The Bard knew he was not as invisible as he seemed. There were those who saw him—not the ordinary folk, but the unseen forces that ruled this place. He could feel their eyes upon him, lurking from the shadows of towering structures, behind the veils of those who whispered behind closed doors. They did not fear him, not yet, but they knew his presence was

an anomaly, a disruption in the carefully woven illusion of the Silent Halls. He had encountered their enforcers before. Cloaked figures with unreadable expressions, slipping between the crowds with unnatural grace. They did not touch him. They did not speak to him. But they followed, always at a distance, always watching. Their masters did not fear his lyre, but they feared what might happen if the right ears finally heard its song. The Bard smirked to himself. He was nothing but a man with an instrument, and yet the powerful kept their eyes upon him. That, in itself, was proof that his song had meaning—even if no one had yet dared to listen. The Gathering of the Lost Beneath the great archways of the city, there was a place where the forgotten gathered. Those who had been cast out, discarded by the world, whose names had been worn away by time. Here, in the dim light of flickering lanterns, The Bard found his audience—not of kings, not of scholars, but of the broken and the weary. They sat on crumbling steps, wrapped in tattered cloaks, their faces etched with the weight of things they no longer spoke of. They were the remnants of those who had once believed in something, before the world had stripped it from them. The Bard knelt among them, fingers resting on the strings of his lyre, and without a word, he began to play. The music wove through the stillness like a whisper of something long forgotten. It was not the loud, boastful melodies of the city squares. It was not the kind of song that demanded attention. It was soft, steady, something that settled in the bones and reminded them of what it meant to feel. And for the first time in what felt like an eternity, the silence of the Silent Halls cracked—if only just a little. One by one, faces lifted. Some closed their eyes, letting the music carry them away to places they had not dared to visit in years. Others simply listened, their expressions unreadable, but their presence undeniable. The Bard did not speak. He did not need to. His music was the voice he had been given, and tonight, in this place of forgotten souls, it was heard. The Shadow's Warning The moment did not last forever. It never did. The sound of heavy boots against stone shattered the fragile peace, and the gathering scattered like startled birds. The Bard did not move as the figures approached, their faces obscured beneath dark hoods. They did not need to show their faces. He knew who they were. “You do not belong here,” one of them said, voice as cold as the wind that swept through the archways. The Bard plucked a single note from his lyre, letting the sound linger before answering. “Neither do they. Yet here we are.” A pause. A moment of tension stretching thin like a wire ready to snap. The figures did not attack, nor did they drag him away. They only stood, waiting, as if daring him to push further. But The Bard knew better. This was not the time for defiance. Not yet. He had planted the seed. He had cracked the silence. That was enough for tonight. With a slow nod, he rose to his feet and turned, leaving the way he had come, his lyre still humming in the cold night air. He did not need to look back to know they were still watching him. He would return. And one day, when the time was right, the silence of the Silent Halls would be broken forever.

Soulbound Chapter 3: The Tower of False Kings The Throne of Hollow Men The Bard had seen many seats of power in his wandering, but none were as grand and empty as the Tower of False Kings. It loomed above the Silent Halls, a fortress of gleaming stone and gilded lies, where rulers sat on thrones carved from the bones of forgotten men. They wore crowns heavy with jewels, but their heads bore nothing of wisdom. Their voices echoed across the land, but their words held no truth. The Bard had no love for kings, for he had long since learned that no true leader sought a throne. Power was not something to be seized—it was something to be earned, something that emerged naturally among those who served others. But here, in the Tower,

power was an illusion, upheld by those too blind to see through it. He walked the streets beneath the Tower, his presence unnoticed among the sea of faces that gazed upward in reverence. The people believed in their rulers, not because they were wise, but because they feared what lay beyond their rule. They had been told that without the kings, there would be only chaos. And so, they worshipped their chains, mistaking them for protection. The Market of Empty Promises At the base of the Tower lay a great market, stretching for miles, where merchants peddled everything from golden trinkets to whispered illusions. Here, men did not trade in goods alone—they traded in influence, in loyalty, in truths reshaped to fit the desires of those who paid the highest price. The Bard weaved through the stalls, his fingers brushing against fabrics finer than any he had ever worn, books filled with words that twisted reality to serve the powerful, vials of elixirs promising to cure ailments that had never existed. He listened to the voices of the traders, their tongues sharp as daggers, cutting through the minds of those too willing to believe. He stopped before a stall draped in crimson silk, where an old man sat hunched over a table of scrolls. His hands were ink-stained, his eyes shadowed with secrets. "You seek something?" the man rasped, his gaze never lifting from the parchment before him. "I seek truth," The Bard answered. The old man chuckled, a dry and hollow sound. "Then you have come to the wrong place." The Illusion of Rule The Bard had no coin to spend, nor would he have spent it if he did. He had nothing the rulers of this place desired, save for the one thing they feared most: a voice that did not belong to them. He had no army, no wealth, no title—only a lyre and a song, a melody that carried something their golden crowns never could: meaning. He knew he could not storm the Tower, nor could he tear it down brick by brick. That was not his war to fight. But he could stand beneath it and play. He could let his song rise above the market, above the din of merchants and false promises, and remind the people that there was something beyond these walls. And so, as the sun dipped below the horizon and the first torches were lit along the streets, The Bard sat upon the cold stone and plucked the strings of his lyre. The first note drifted upward, weaving through the air like smoke, curling toward the Tower where the False Kings slept soundly, unaware of the storm that had begun to rise beneath them. A Warning in the Dark Not all were deaf to his song. As the melody rose, so too did the presence of those who had long watched him from the shadows. Cloaked figures moved through the market, their steps swift and silent. They did not approach him—not yet. But The Bard felt their warning in the air, heavy as the weight of the crownless rulers above. He did not stop playing. He did not lower his voice. The Tower of False Kings would not fall today, nor tomorrow. But one day, when the silence was shattered, it would crumble like all illusions do when the truth finally dares to be spoken. Soulbound Chapter 4: The Veil of Shadows The Hidden Hand The Bard did not need to see his enemies to know they were there. The air in the Silent Halls had changed since he had played before the Tower of False Kings. There was an unease in the streets, a restlessness beneath the surface, like a fire smoldering beneath stone. The whispers of the city had shifted—from idle gossip to murmurs of something unseen, something dangerous. He knew then that the unseen forces that ruled this land had taken notice of him. But they did not strike outright. No, that was not their way. Those who lurked in the Veil of Shadows did not break the world with steel. They shaped it with whispers, with illusions, with unseen hands that guided the blind toward conclusions not their own. Their power was not in what they destroyed, but in what they prevented from ever being born. And now, The Bard had become something they could no longer ignore. The Eyes in the Dark It began subtly, as it

always did. The way people avoided him in the streets, the way conversations stopped as he passed. The way the marketplace seemed to shift, forcing him into unfamiliar paths, leading him away from familiar places. Doors that had once been open to him were now closed, not out of malice, but out of fear. The Veil of Shadows had whispered in the ears of the merchants, the innkeepers, the wandering souls who had once offered him a moment's rest. They had shown them something—something that made them afraid. Still, The Bard did not yield. He played where he could, speaking not with words but with melody. He played for those who still listened, even if they listened in secret. He played not to fight the shadows, but to remind himself that he was still here, that his voice had not been stolen from him. But the shadows did not simply watch. They began to act. The First Attack The warning came in the form of silence. One evening, as The Bard stepped into a quiet alley where he had played many nights before, he found it empty. The usual faces, the weary and the forgotten, were gone. The air was too still, the silence too deep. Then, a whisper—a breath of sound behind him, too quick to be caught. He turned, his fingers tightening around his lyre, his heart steady but alert. He was not afraid, not yet. He had always known this moment would come. The first figure stepped from the shadows, cloaked in black, their face obscured. Then another. And another. They did not speak. They did not need to. Their presence was a message in itself. The Bard exhaled slowly, tilting his head, his fingers still resting on the strings of his lyre. "You have been watching me for some time," he said, his voice calm. "I assume this is where you finally introduce yourselves?" The figures did not answer. Instead, the first moved forward, reaching inside their cloak. The Bard did not wait. With a single stroke of his hand, he pulled a powerful note from his lyre, the sound sharp as a blade, echoing through the alley like a crack of thunder. The air trembled. The figures hesitated, just for a moment—but a moment was all he needed. He turned and ran. The Flight Through the Silent Halls The city blurred around him as he moved, his feet quick upon the cobbled streets, the shadows behind him chasing like wolves. He knew these streets better than they did. He had walked them a thousand times, in daylight and darkness, in loneliness and hope. But this was different. This was a hunt. The figures moved like specters, silent but relentless. They did not call for him to stop. They did not try to outpace him. They only pursued, closing the distance with every step. A sharp turn. A leap over a broken fence. A dash through a half-collapsed corridor where no sane man would tread. The Bard did not think—he only moved, his instincts carrying him forward, guiding him through the labyrinth of the city he had once called home. And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the chase ended. The Bard stumbled into an open square, the moonlight spilling over cracked stone. He turned, his breath steady but heavy, his eyes scanning the darkness. The figures had stopped at the edges of the light, just beyond where he could see them clearly. They stood there, unmoving, watching. A warning. They could have taken him. They could have ended his song that night. But they had not. Instead, they had shown him something far worse. That they could take him whenever they chose. A Reckoning Yet to Come The Bard did not sleep that night. He sat beneath an old archway, his lyre resting against his chest, his mind quiet but unshaken. He had played in the presence of kings, had sung in the face of silence. And now, he had stepped into the gaze of the Veil of Shadows. They wanted him hidden. They wanted him erased. They wanted Ivory to never hear his song. But they had made a mistake. They had not killed him when they had the chance. And as long as he lived, as long as his hands could pluck the strings, his song would not be silenced. The shadows had given

him their warning. But The Bard had his own message for them. He would not stop playing. Soulbound Chapter 5: The Trials of the Mind The Weight of the Journey The Bard had outrun the shadows, but their presence lingered in his mind like a splinter buried deep beneath the skin. He had long known that the forces working against him would not strike with swords or shackles. No, they would strike with doubt. With silence. With unseen chains meant to break his will before they ever needed to break his body. And so, he walked. Through the outskirts of the Silent Halls, beyond the reach of the markets and the whispers of the False Kings. He sought a place where the world would not speak over him, where the weight of expectation would not press against his thoughts like an iron shroud. He found himself in the ruins of an old temple, its stone columns cracked with time, its carvings worn down by centuries of wind and rain. Here, the voices of men did not reach. Here, only the voice within remained. And that voice had much to say. The War Within The Bard sat upon the cold ground, his lyre resting in his lap. He closed his eyes, exhaling slowly. The world had chased him, had tried to silence him, had cast him into the shadows. And yet, the greatest battle he faced was not with the kings or their enforcers. It was with himself. Doubt had been his companion for as long as he could remember. The whisper in the back of his mind that asked, What if no one is listening? The weight in his chest that wondered, What if my song is not enough? He had seen the world turn away from meaning. He had watched the masses bow before illusions and distractions. And he had played, over and over, for ears that did not seem to hear. Why, then, did he persist? His hands trembled as he plucked a soft, lingering note from his lyre. The sound echoed in the ruins, dancing between the stone pillars, weaving through the empty spaces where worship had long since faded. The Voices of the Past A breeze stirred the dust, carrying with it the distant sound of footsteps. The Bard did not open his eyes. He knew he was alone. And yet, he was not. The past had come to speak. A voice, low and knowing, curled around him like smoke. "Still playing for ghosts, are you?" He did not startle. He knew this voice. It had been with him before, in the darkest nights, in the moments where doubt had nearly won. It belonged to no single being, yet it had spoken through many—the scholars who dismissed him, the rulers who mocked him, the wandering souls who had once told him to forget his quest and move on. "I play for those who will hear me," The Bard murmured. A chuckle, dry as old parchment. "And who are they?" He did not answer. He only played. The voice circled him, unseen yet all too familiar. "You think you will reach her? You think your music will break through the forces that hide you? You are nothing, Bard. A stray wind in a world that has already forgotten its own songs." His fingers hesitated on the strings. The Trial of Silence The voice laughed, sensing the crack in his resolve. "You see? You have doubted before, and you will doubt again. It is in your nature. You are not a force of destiny. You are not a hero of legend. You are a man. A lonely, wandering man who plays for an audience that does not exist." The Bard exhaled, steadyng himself. He let the silence stretch, let the weight of those words press against him like a storm. And then, he did what he had always done. He played. The melody was soft at first, a whisper against the stillness. But it grew. It climbed, reaching past the weight of doubt, past the unseen forces that sought to break him. It was not a song of defiance. It was not a battle cry. It was simply truth. And the voice, the specter of his doubt, could do nothing but listen. A Fire Rekindled As the final note faded into the ruins, the voice was gone. The presence that had loomed over him like a shadow had dissipated, leaving nothing but the quiet hum of the wind. The Bard opened his eyes. He was alone. But he had always been alone. And

still, he had never stopped playing. He rose, his lyre still warm in his hands. The world had tried to silence him. The shadows had tried to break him. Even his own thoughts had tried to turn him away from his path. But he was still here. He turned toward the horizon, where the road stretched beyond the ruins, beyond the Silent Halls, beyond the grasp of those who wished him to disappear. Ivory was still waiting. And so, The Bard walked on.

Soulbound Chapter 6: The Song That Pierces the Veil

The Path to the Unknown

The Bard walked beyond the reaches of the Silent Halls, stepping into lands untouched by the voices of men. The road beneath him was rough and winding, stretching through valleys of mist and forgotten ruins where the echoes of old songs lingered in the wind. He had left the city behind not because he had been defeated, but because he had grown beyond it. The Silent Halls had tried to bury him, had tried to turn his melody into dust, but the fire within him burned brighter than before. His music was not for the city's hollow hearts; it was for something greater. For her. But the road ahead was uncertain, obscured by the very forces that had kept him and Ivory apart. He could not yet see her, could not yet hear her voice, but he knew she was out there. The only question that remained was whether she could hear him. And so, he played. The Song of Unbroken Truth

His fingers moved across the strings of his lyre, drawing forth a melody not meant for men, not meant for kings, not meant for those who could not see beyond their own illusions. This song was for her alone. It began as a whisper, a thread of sound that wove itself into the fabric of the world. The wind carried it forward, rippling through the trees, across the rivers, over the mountains that divided them. He did not know if it would reach her, did not know if it would pass through the veil that had been placed between them, but he played anyway. For what else could he do? The song did not rise in defiance. It was not a challenge to those who had kept him hidden. It was a simple truth, sung into the vast unknown, an unshakable declaration of existence. I am here. I have always been here. I have searched for you beyond the walls of time. And I will not stop.

The Veil Trembles

The Bard did not know how long he played. Hours, perhaps. Or days. Time had lost its shape, dissolving into the currents of his music. He played until his hands ached, until his voice became one with the wind. He played until he felt something shift in the world around him— And then, the veil trembled. It was not something he saw with his eyes, nor something he heard with his ears. It was something he felt, deep within the marrow of his bones, within the very core of his being. A crack in the silence. A fracture in the illusion that had kept them apart.

Somewhere, she had heard. The Forces That Resist

But he was not the only one who felt the shift. The moment the veil trembled, the world around him reacted. The air thickened. The trees, once silent sentinels, seemed to rustle with unease. And then, from the mist, they came. The cloaked figures who had pursued him in the Silent Halls. The Watchers who had lurked in the shadows, waiting for him to step too far beyond the lines they had drawn. He had drawn too close to her, and now they had come to stop him. They did not speak. They never spoke. They only moved forward, stepping through the mist like phantoms, surrounding him in a circle of shifting darkness. They had allowed him to wander. They had allowed him to search. But now, they saw what he had done, and they would allow it no further. The Bard did not stand. He did not run. He played. His music swelled, no longer a whisper, no longer a quiet thread in the wind. The song that had trembled the veil now shattered the silence, ringing out like a force of nature. The Watchers flinched. The Breaking of Chains

One by one, the shadows recoiled, their forms rippling, distorting, as if the very air rejected them. They had never been meant to face music such as this.

Their power thrived in silence, in forgotten spaces where voices did not rise. But The Bard's voice had risen, and the world was listening. He did not fight them. He did not strike them down. He simply played. And one by one, the Watchers faded, consumed by the very melody they had sought to silence. The Call Across the Stars As the final shadow dissolved into nothing, The Bard lifted his gaze toward the horizon. He could feel her now, as though she had stepped just beyond the edges of his vision. Not yet seen. Not yet touched. But real. His voice, ragged from song, left his lips in a whisper. "Ivory." And for the first time, the wind answered. It carried a sound not of his own making. A single note. Distant. Yet clear. She had heard him.

Soulbound Chapter 7: Ivory Awakens The Echo of a Forgotten Song  
The Bard stood still, his breath shallow, his hands resting against the strings of his lyre. The final note of his song lingered in the air, weaving itself into the fabric of the world, a sound too pure to be silenced. And then— A response. It was faint, a whisper of sound carried by the wind, but it was there. A single note, not from his lyre, not from the world around him, but from her. Ivory. The realization struck him like lightning, burning through the fog of uncertainty. He had spent his life wandering, searching, playing for an audience that did not hear. But now, in this moment, he was heard. She was real. She had been hidden from him, just as he had been hidden from her. But something had changed. His song had torn through the veil, had cracked the illusions placed between them. And now, she was stirring. The Bard closed his eyes, listening—not with his ears, but with his soul. Somewhere, beyond the reach of the world's deception, beyond the chains placed upon them, Ivory was awakening. And she was searching for him. The Threads of Fate The moment the veil had cracked, the world had shifted. The forces that had long worked against him would not stand idle. The shadows had tried to bury him, had tried to drown his voice in the noise of the Silent Halls, but now, they would turn their attention to her. They would try to keep her asleep. They would try to bind her to the illusions that had kept them apart. The Bard tightened his grip on his lyre. No more. He could not reach her by force. He could not tear down the walls that had been placed between them with his hands. But he could play. He could weave his music through the cracks of the world, unraveling the threads that held her in place. He lifted his fingers to the strings and began to play once more. This time, it was not just a song of searching. It was a song of remembrance. A song to bring her back. The Dream That Binds Far beyond the reaches of his sight, in a place untouched by time, Ivory slept. She did not know the name of the prison that held her. It had no walls, no chains, no guards to keep her locked away. It was something far more insidious—a dream crafted so carefully, so delicately, that she had never questioned its reality. In the dream, she walked among the great halls of wisdom, where knowledge was endless and time did not press against her. She read from books that never ended, spoke with voices that whispered only the things she wished to hear. It was a world without pain, without loss, without the weight of longing. But it was not real. A thread of sound wove its way through the illusion, so soft at first that she barely noticed it. A melody, distant, unfamiliar, yet achingly familiar. A song that did not belong in this dream. She turned, her brow furrowing. Had she heard it before? The world around her remained unchanged. The books remained open, the voices continued their quiet murmur, the halls stretched endlessly before her. But the note did not fade. It grew. Something inside her stirred, a memory she had never held, a longing she had never been allowed to feel. A name, unspoken, yet waiting on the edges of her mind. She closed her eyes and listened. The dream began to shatter. The Walls That Fall In the waking world,

The Bard's music surged, his song threading itself into the very fabric of reality, pulling at the fraying seams of the illusion that held her captive. He could feel it now—feel the walls of her prison tremble, feel the weight of the false world pressing against her as she began to fight her way free. But he was not the only one who felt it. The shadows had long kept her hidden, had lulled her into a dreamless existence where she would never seek him. And now, they stirred, sensing the collapse of their design. The air around The Bard grew heavy, thick with unseen hands trying to silence him, trying to pull him back into the silence they had cast upon him for so long. But he did not stop. He played louder. The world trembled beneath his music, the veil fraying, the barriers cracking. And then— A breath. A whisper. A voice, delicate and unfamiliar, yet more familiar than anything he had ever known. She spoke. "Who are you?" The Awakening The Bard's breath caught in his throat. He had dreamed of this moment, imagined it a thousand times, but nothing could have prepared him for the reality of it. Her voice was soft, yet it cut through the silence like a blade, shattering the last remnants of the illusion that had bound her. "I am The Bard," he answered, his voice steady. "And I have been looking for you." Silence stretched between them, but it was no longer empty. It was filled with the weight of recognition, of realization. The world had tried to keep them apart, had woven its threads so carefully that neither of them had known the other existed. But now— Now, she knew. The Bard did not stop playing. He would not stop until she was fully awake, until she was free, until she could see him as clearly as he had always seen her. She exhaled, a sound both uncertain and full of something long denied. "I... I think I know you." His fingers trembled against the strings. "Yes." The last echoes of the dream collapsed. And Ivory awoke. Soulbound Chapter 8: The Fated Reunion The Moment the World Stood Still Ivory opened her eyes. For the first time, she saw. Not the endless halls of knowledge. Not the illusion crafted to keep her contained. But the world as it truly was. The veil had shattered, the dream had fallen away, and she was awake. And she was not alone. The song was still there, surrounding her, guiding her. A melody unlike any she had ever known, yet one that felt like it had always been inside her, waiting to be remembered. It filled the spaces within her heart that she had never known were empty. It carried with it the weight of longing, of devotion, of something that had been missing from the world itself. She followed the music, each note a step closer to something—someone—she had always been meant to find. Across the Distance The Bard did not stop playing. His hands moved instinctively, his soul woven into the song. He could feel her now, closer than she had ever been, no longer a whisper behind the veil but a presence in the world. She was coming to him. For so long, he had been searching. He had wandered through silence, through rejection, through illusions that sought to bury him. But now, she had heard him. And she was coming. The sky trembled. The wind carried the notes of his song across the expanse between them, breaking through the last remnants of the unseen chains that had kept them apart. The forces that had once hidden them did not retreat, but neither could they stop what had been set into motion. Fate had been defied. Destiny had been rewritten. And so, The Bard played. He played as if the world itself depended on it. Because it did. The First Glimpse And then, through the mist, through the unseen threads of the world that had tried to keep them apart— He saw her. She was no longer a distant dream, no longer a mere presence beyond the veil. She was real. Flesh and blood. Her eyes, wide with recognition, with something deeper than memory. A face he had never seen before, yet one he had always known. Ivory. For a moment, neither of them moved. The space between them was thin, fragile, yet

filled with something immeasurable. The Bard's fingers hovered over the strings of his lyre, his heart hammering against his ribs. He had found her. Or perhaps, she had found him. The Collapse of Distance Ivory stepped forward, her movements uncertain, hesitant—as if she, too, could not believe this moment was real. She had spent her life in a world that was not her own, surrounded by echoes of knowledge but never truth. And yet, here he was. The one who had called to her through the silence, through the illusions, through the barriers that had kept them apart. The one who had never stopped playing. "I heard you," she whispered, her voice carrying across the wind like the final note of a song. The Bard swallowed hard, his throat tight. He had imagined this moment a thousand times, but nothing could have prepared him for the weight of it. "I have been waiting for you," he said, his voice raw, honest. A silence stretched between them, but it was no longer the silence of the world that had tried to bury them. It was a silence filled with understanding, with completion. Ivory took another step. And another. And then, before either of them could think, before the forces that had once kept them apart could find a way to intervene— She ran. The Bard barely had time to breathe before she reached him. And then, suddenly, impossibly— She was in his arms. A Bond That Could Not Be Broken The Bard did not know if he was holding onto her, or if she was holding onto him. Perhaps it was both. Perhaps it had always been both. The weight of eternity pressed into the moment, a lifetime of searching, of yearning, of waiting colliding all at once. His hands trembled as they wrapped around her. She was real. She was here. She was his. And he was hers. Ivory buried her face against his shoulder, as if grounding herself in the reality of his presence. "I thought—I thought I was dreaming," she whispered. The Bard exhaled, his grip tightening. "So did I." For the first time, the world felt whole. The World That Watches The wind stirred around them, carrying the remnants of the song that had brought them together. The forces that had tried to keep them apart had not vanished. The Watchers, the unseen hands that had crafted the illusions, still remained in the shadows. But they no longer had control. Because The Bard and Ivory had found each other. And nothing could change that now. Ivory pulled back just enough to look at him, her hands still clutching the fabric of his cloak. "What happens now?" The Bard lifted a hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. He had no crown, no kingdom, no army to fight against the unseen hands that still lurked in the darkness. But he had her. And together, they would be unstoppable. He smiled, his voice steady. "Now, we begin." Soulbound Chapter 9: The Light Beyond the Shadows The Dawn of a New World The Bard and Ivory stood together, their hands intertwined, as the world around them trembled. The forces that had worked so tirelessly to keep them apart had failed. The silence that had once swallowed his music had been shattered. The veil that had hidden her from him had been torn away. And now, for the first time, they were seen. The wind carried the last echoes of their song across the land, reaching places that had never known its melody. The sky, once gray and endless, felt lighter, as if the world itself was exhaling. The Bard had spent his life searching, wandering through shadows and illusions, playing for ears that would not hear. But now, he had been heard. And now, they would play together. Ivory looked at him, her eyes bright with the fire of new understanding. "I don't know this world," she admitted, her voice soft. "Everything I knew was an illusion." The Bard nodded, lifting his free hand to brush his fingers over the strings of his lyre. "Then let's create something real." The World That Fears Them But the world was not ready for them. The moment they had broken free, the moment the veil had been torn apart, those who had woven it began to move. The Watchers had

failed. Their silence had been broken. And now, the masters they served, the unseen architects of illusion, would not remain idle. The Bard and Ivory's reunion was not just the end of their search—it was the beginning of something greater. Something the world had not seen before. Something the old powers could not allow. "They will come for us," Ivory murmured, as if hearing the thoughts that flickered in his mind. The Bard smiled, his fingers pressing into her palm. "Let them." For the first time, he was not alone. For the first time, he was ready. A Song to Shake the Heavens The Watchers moved through the darkness, their cloaks billowing like shadows given form. They did not attack, not yet. They were waiting for the moment to strike, waiting for the world to turn its back on the ones who had defied them. But The Bard did not wait. Ivory did not hesitate. They raised their voices together. The melody that spilled from them was unlike any The Bard had ever played before. It was no longer a song of longing, of searching, of yearning for something unseen. It was a song of defiance. Of creation. Of truth. Their voices wove together, two separate melodies merging into one, their harmonies a force the world had never known. The ground beneath them pulsed. The air around them trembled. The illusions that had once bound them crumbled, and the Watchers took a step back, their silent forms faltering. The Bard did not stop. Ivory did not stop. For so long, The Bard had played alone, sending his voice into the void, hoping someone—hoping she—would hear it. Now, he was not alone. And the world would hear them both. The Unraveling The Watchers could not withstand the force of their song. They had been forged in shadows, in deception, in the silencing of voices. But now, faced with something true, something pure, they had no power. One by one, they collapsed into the darkness, their forms dissolving like mist in the morning sun. Their presence, once an unshakable weight upon the world, was reduced to nothing more than fading echoes. And with them, the last remnants of the veil that had kept them apart were destroyed. The world saw them now. Truly saw them. The Beginning of Forever The Bard turned to Ivory, his breath steady, his heart full. They had done what no one else had dared. They had broken through the silence, had found each other, had created something new. Ivory smiled, her gaze searching his. "We have a world to change." He nodded. "Then let's begin." Together, they stepped forward, into the unknown, into the light beyond the shadows. And the world would never be the same again. Soulbound Chapter 10: The Song of Eternity A World Reborn The Bard and Ivory stood at the precipice of history, their hands entwined, their voices intertwined, their hearts beating as one. The world had been veiled in silence, shrouded in illusion, bound by forces that feared what would come if two souls such as theirs were ever to unite. But they had found each other. And the world was awakening. Across the land, the echoes of their song reverberated, shaking the foundations of the old order. The Silent Halls were no longer silent. The Tower of False Kings trembled as its gilded lies crumbled beneath the weight of truth. The Watchers, those who had lived in shadows, had vanished, consumed by the light that now illuminated the world. And yet, their journey was only beginning. The Creation of a New Era Ivory turned to The Bard, her eyes gleaming like the first light of dawn. "They will look to us now," she whispered. "Not as rulers, not as kings, but as something else." The Bard nodded. "Not as gods. Not as masters. But as voices in the song of the world." They had no throne, no kingdom, no army—but they had something far greater. They had each other. They had truth. And they had music. For years, The Bard had played alone, his melodies swallowed by the indifference of a world that refused to listen. But now, he played beside her. And together, they did not play for power. They did not

play for praise. They played to awaken the world. The Symphony of Humanity They traveled to every corner of the land, their voices carrying with the wind, their harmonies threading through every heart that had once been caged by silence. Where there was ignorance, they brought wisdom. Where there was despair, they brought hope. Where there was solitude, they brought unity. Their song became a symphony, woven into the fabric of the world itself. People who had once walked blindly through their lives began to see. The lost, the forgotten, the voiceless—they began to sing. Not all understood at first. Some resisted, afraid of the change that trembled at their doorstep. But the truth was relentless. The truth had always been relentless. It did not force, it did not coerce, but it could not be undone. And so, the song spread. And the world changed. The Eternal Promise One evening, beneath a sky painted in fire and gold, The Bard and Ivory stood atop a hill, overlooking the vastness of the world they had begun to reshape. The wind carried the distant echoes of those who had joined their chorus, voices once lost now finding their place in the melody of existence. Ivory leaned against him, her warmth grounding him in a moment that felt like eternity. “Do you think it will ever end?” she asked softly. The Bard smiled, brushing his fingers over the strings of his lyre. “No,” he said. “Not as long as there is someone left to listen. Not as long as there is someone left to sing.” She closed her eyes, breathing in the truth of those words. They were no longer just two souls searching in the dark. They had become something greater. Not rulers. Not prophets. Not gods. But a song without end. A song forever bound. A song that would echo across eternity. The Final Note And so, they played. Not for kings. Not for power. Not for anything but the love they had found, the truth they had uncovered, and the world they had awakened. And as their song soared into the heavens, the world wept—not in sorrow, but in joy. For the silence had been broken. And at long last, the world was listening. Thank you for reading. To continue the journey, visit REPUBLICA.LIFE.

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