



## A QUIET MORNING — ARIA OF RAVENCREST

Before the others woke—before Avalon shimmered into song—Aria stood beneath the World Tree alone.

She carried no staff today, no bow. Just a satchel with parchment, ink, and a simple wooden stool she'd carved herself in her youth. She set it down at the tree's base like a ritual, placing her hand against the bark first.

"Morning," she whispered. Not to the tree exactly. But to everything.

The tree responded with a flicker of pollen-light. Not dramatic. Just a blink of breath.

She opened her journal. The one no one else saw. The one she never showed her father, not even Izack.

The first page read:

*Dear Mother,*

And though Elenwen Luminara had long passed from this world, Aria had never stopped writing to her.

Today's letter was short.

*There's a new student with green flame hair. She swears she's part phoenix. We'll see. I keep the scrolls by the lake now. Father laughs more. Izack built a greenhouse inside a memory bubble. I'm not sure if it's for research or if he's hiding his snacks again.*

She paused, chewing on the pen's wooden grip.

*It's good here, most days. I know I don't say that enough. I miss you. I still hum that song you taught me whenever I mend a torn cloak or cool a fever. I think it works better than most spells.*

The wind picked up. One leaf fluttered down from the World Tree. She caught it gently, then tucked it between the pages like a reply.

Behind her, students began to stir. The bell above the Spiral Spire hadn't rung yet, but it would. Soon.

Aria stood. Brushed dew from her skirt.

Then turned back and bowed—not deep, just enough—for the tree, and for the silence.

"Thanks for listening," she said.

And walked toward the dawn.