



# THE VEIL WEAVERS

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# CONTENTS

Chapter 1	TRICK OR TREAT	1
Chapter 2	THE ROCKIES AT DAWN	12
Chapter 3	THE GATHERING	23
Chapter 4	THE ANCIENT ONES	36
Chapter 5	BROX AND VIVIENNE	51
Chapter 6	BUFFALO TRAVEL	64
Chapter 7	TO THE ROCKWALL	78
Chapter 8	THE WEAVERS	90
Chapter 9	CROW BY CROW	103
Chapter 10	IN THE VEIL	115
Chapter 11	DREAMING	131
Chapter 12	THE ANCIENT BOY	132
	AUTHOR'S NOTES	139



CHAPTER ONE

# TRICK OR TREAT

**J**OSH,” MOM CALLED FROM THE KITCHEN, “could you and Maddy get the pumpkin ready?”  
“Sure,” I yelled. The biggest, ugliest pumpkin we’d ever carved was waiting in the hall. I carried it out to the front steps while Maddy bossed me about where to put it.

We’d carved it to look like Gronvald the troll, the scariest thing we could think of for Halloween. Small eyes and wide slanting eyebrows framed the stem of the pumpkin, turning it into a fat, crooked nose. His mouth opened in a bellow, wide on one side but twisted tight and low on the other.

Once Maddy and I agreed on the perfect spot to set the pumpkin to scare everyone coming up the walk, I lit a candle and placed it inside. It looked just

like Gronvald.

A crow glided into the garden and landed on the sidewalk, black against the fresh snow. There were always crows watching me, now. He inspected the pumpkin and then hopped away with a sharp caw. He must have recognized Gronvald.

Last summer, after Maddy found a green stone ring, we'd discovered a magic world separated from the human world by a veil of magic. The ring, the nexus ring, made it easier for magic folk to travel between the worlds. But each time it crossed the veil it left a hole, a tear in the veil, and magic was leaking out.

Gronvald had used the ring to steal gold in the human world; gold was all he cared about. Aleena, a water spirit, loved the ring too. It made it easier for her to visit back and forth between worlds, and she liked to torment Gronvald by keeping it from him. They both desperately wanted the ring back, but we fought to get it to Keeper, the giant at Castle Mountain, who smashed it so it couldn't damage the veil again.

While we were in the other world I'd absorbed a lot of magic. Maddy doesn't have any but Keeper says she doesn't need it – she just fits in naturally. I'm the odd one, except it feels perfectly normal to me.

We left the crow on guard duty and headed to the upstairs bathroom to get Maddy into her costume. She pulled her long blonde hair into a ponytail while I got out the face paint. As soon as I started I could feel

magic, only a flicker, but at least it was still there. I drew a hairline in a vee down her forehead, and made it look like fur by drawing thin lines in shades of brown. Then I drew a dark triangle on her nose, and lined her eyes with black to make them look round and dark. When I was done, I handed her the fur hat and fake-fur cape she and Mom had found at a thrift store.

Maddy was dressing as an otter-person, but no one else knows about them so we told people she was an otter. Because she's only eight, Dad was taking her halloweening. I was meeting friends from my grade seven class, if I could transform myself into a crow. At least I was thin and not too tall, and I had shiny black hair. The mask I'd made would cover my freckles and pale skin.

Once Maddy was ready, she ran downstairs to help Mom with the Halloween treats, and I went to my room and started a drawing. As I worked, magic flowed through me. This was the only time I could feel magic in the human world, when I was making art. I loved it – it made my work so much better, and it helped me feel connected to the magic world, a reminder we hadn't imagined it. Soon Gronvald glared back at me, nasty and snarling.

The doorbell rang. "The first one!" Maddy called out. "I bet it'll be a really cute little kid." I could hear her follow Mom to the front door and plunk down a bowl of candy. Then Maddy yelled, "Josh, you have to see this."

I ignored her and kept drawing.

"Josh! You really need to come!"

I sighed. “Just a sec.” I put down my pencil, and walked down the stairs.

Maddy stood near the front door, staring past Mom. I stopped beside her; my mouth slowly opened. Two otter-people stood on our doorstep. Not kids dressed as otter-people, although that would be strange enough. Real otter-people. Greyfur and Eneirda had come to call.



MOM REACHED INTO THE BOWL OF HALLOWEEN candies, grabbed two handfuls and held them out to the otter-people. “Where are your bags? Do your parents have them?”

The otter-people stared at her with round, dark eyes. Behind Mom, Maddy shook her head and held a finger to her lips.

I stood there, stunned. What were they doing here? What if Mom realized they weren't kids?

When they didn't answer, Mom said, “Well, hold out your hands.”

Maddy held out her own hands, palms up and touching to form a bowl. They copied her, and Mom filled each pair of cupped hands with little chocolate bars and boxes of raisins.

“We want to talk to them, Mom,” said Maddy, pushing past her.

“Great costumes,” Mom said as she headed back to the kitchen.

I squeezed past Maddy and moved them to the far end of the porch, away from the house light. I couldn’t believe Mom thought they were kids – no one could make costumes that good.

They were exactly what Maddy was trying to be, part human, part otter. Their fur reached down their foreheads towards their dark pointy noses, and gleamed in the light in a way that Maddy’s face paint never could. Their eyes were round and almost black in the shadows. Their mouths and ears were small, their feet flat and wide at the toes.

Greyfur was a little taller than me, with deep brown fur shading to grey on his head and across his shoulders, and amber skin on his face and hands. Eneirda was smaller, about Maddy’s height, with auburn fur and soft tan skin.

Maddy and Eneirda greeted each other, Maddy’s small hand reaching out to touch Eneirda’s four fingers. Eneirda smiled as she studied Maddy’s costume.

“What are you doing here?” I whispered.

“You must come with us, *tss*,” said Greyfur, his voice deep and firm.

“Shhhh!” I said, too loudly. I lowered my voice. “If anyone looks closely, they’ll see you can’t possibly be kids. So speak quietly. Please!”

Greyfur nodded and continued in a softer voice.

“Giant at Castle Mountain sent us. You must come to Gathering. Tears in veil are not healing. *Sssst!* You must help.”

“Keeper said they’d heal,” I said, shocked.

“They are not,” said Eneirda. “Tears are getting worse. *Sssst!* Magic is leaking.”

*No!* I thought. *No!* Humans caused enough damage, through changes so large they reached into the magic world, like mines and tunnels and even rising temperatures. Holes in the veil were extras the magic folk didn’t need.

“What can we do?” I asked. “Why do you need us?”

“Maddy because she sees clearly. Josh because he is... Greyfur struggled for the right word. “*Tss.* Because he is strange.”

*What?*

Greyfur shook his head and tried again. “Josh has magic that is unusual. *Sssst!* Our magic is not...it is not enough. We hope Josh’s will be.”

Magic was strong in me the last time I was in the magic world, but I had no idea how to fix the tears. I felt confused and a little scared by what they wanted from me, but desperate to help, too. “I want –” I glanced at Maddy. “*We* want to help, but we don’t know anything about healing the veil.”

“Nevertheless, you must come,” said Greyfur. “We will wait until you are ready, *chrrr.*”

We stared at each other. For a moment, Greyfur

reminded me of Keeper, solid and immovable.

Eneirda said, “Giant at Castle Mountain sent for you. *He* believes you can help.” I could tell she wasn’t so sure.

“We have to try, Josh,” said Maddy, in her most determined voice.

*We have to try*, I told the knot in my stomach. I nodded. “Wait for us in the garden. We need to get ready.”

“*Chrrr*,” purred Eneirda. “We will wait.” As they walked down the porch steps they paused at the pumpkin.

“Come on!” I hurried them into the garden. “Stay in the shadows,” I whispered, as a group of witches and wizards turned up our front walk.

Quickly, they slipped into the darkness where the porch light doesn’t reach.



MADDY AND I RACED INSIDE.

“Layer up in your warmest clothes,” I said. “Long johns, heavy socks, a warm shirt. Warm pants – not jeans. Are you wearing your ring?”

She lifted her hand so I could see her silver band, the elven ring Keeper had given her when we brought back the nexus ring.

I nodded. “Hurry.” I dashed into my bedroom,

yanked off my clothes, and pulled on warmer layers. We were going back to the magic world! I felt a wave of joy and then I immediately felt guilty. The tears weren't healing – and I had caused some of the damage, although I hadn't meant to. I could still feel what it was like when magic was strong in me, when I could breathe the world. I would do anything to protect it.

I ran through a mental list as I leapt down the stairs. Winter boots, fleece, jacket. Hat, mitts. What else? Firestone! I needed my firestone!

I spun around and raced back up the stairs. I pulled open a drawer and groped under my T-shirts, sure I'd hidden it there. Finally I found it, snug in a back corner. It looked like an ordinary black stone, a smooth, flat oval. I slipped it into my pocket and ran downstairs.

As I joined Maddy at the back door, I glanced out the window – three crows were sitting on the fence. They seemed restless, shifting back and forth, watching the house. Waiting for me.

“Josh is going to take me,” Maddy announced as Dad picked up his jacket.

He paused. “Are you sure?” He looked disappointed.

“Yes,” I said. “We want to go together.”

Maddy zipped up her jacket over a fleece, and flung her cape over her shoulders. I was pretty sure she wouldn't want to keep wearing a fur hat, so I grabbed a red wool hat and shoved it into my pocket.

Dad hung up his jacket. “Okay. Be back by eight.”

And don't go too far.”

I nodded, but didn't say anything. We'd be going much further than he could imagine, and be gone for much longer. But we could cross time when we crossed the veil, and be back before Mom and Dad knew we were missing.

Dad handed us pillowcases for the candy we wouldn't be collecting. “Watch out for trolls,” he said. “And ghosts and goblins and, well, whatever's waiting out there.”

Maddy shivered.

I struggled not to. “We'll be fine,” I said. “C'mon, Maddy.”



AN ALMOST FULL MOON WAS RISING, HUGE AND orange in a deep blue sky. The crows circled overhead, dark against the moon.

As we walked past the gate, Eneirda and Greyfur studied the Halloween treats in their hands, puzzling over them. Maddy giggled and held out her pillowcase.

“Humans,” muttered Eneirda, as they dropped in their candy. But she smiled when Maddy grinned back. They walked together, talking quietly.

“Where are we going?” I asked Greyfur.

“To the creek, *chrrr*,” he said softly, as we passed a group of small creatures with their parents.

It was the perfect night for Halloween – maybe too perfect. It felt eerie, walking down the street to the park with an escort of crows.

“Did you come for us because your magic is stronger on Halloween?” asked Maddy.

“Of course not,” said Eneirda. She used her “humans are so foolish” voice. “Because of costumes. Only now can we safely walk in city, *hnn*.”

Still, magic seemed stronger to me, maybe because the magic folk were near. It felt like the magic world was a little closer tonight.

Greyfur and Eneirda walked swiftly, straight north and then down into Confederation Park, away from the houses and streetlights and kids in costumes. We didn’t have far to go. The otter-people led us to the stone water fountain that drained into the creek. Then they stood, waiting.

“The crows will open doorway,” said Greyfur.

“I can do it,” I said.

“No. *Tss*. It is arranged. Your magic must be preserved.”

I shook my head in frustration. Opening doorways never tired me like it did magic folk. But no one ever believed me.

The crows circled the pond below us. I could feel their restlessness again, a need to hurry that was edging into irritation.

I heard voices and saw a human couple walking

through the park. One crow followed them, a second continued circling the park, and the third, the smallest, returned to us.

She landed on my shoulder, looked at Maddy and trilled in what sounded like laughter. Eneirda smiled and turned her head away.

“What?” asked Maddy.

“*Chrrr*. She thinks your clothes are funny,” said Eneirda, struggling to hold back a laugh.

I glanced down at Maddy. Her otter costume suddenly looked silly, like we were little children pretending to be powerful magic folk.

Maddy slipped off her cape and I helped her wipe off the face paint. The little crow perched on a low branch and watched, head tilted to one side, as if we were putting on a show just for her. We filled our pockets with Halloween candy, and hid the cape and our pillowcases in the bushes near the creek.

Once the couple had left the park, the other crows joined us. They lined up on the grass and began to mutter softly. Slowly, mist formed. It was hard to see at first, white against the snow, but gradually the mist thickened, obscuring the trees and pond beyond it.

A doorway opened in the mist, and Eneirda pushed us forward. Maddy and I walked into a fog so thick I could see nothing in it. The mist thinned and we stepped into the magic world.