

Part Two: The Circle Rises.

Narrated by Billy

INTRODUCTION

You remember me, don't you?

That quiet kid frozen in bed while the shadows got bolder.
The one whispering, "Don't kill Bill, just chill," like it was gonna hold the night together.

Yeah. That was me.

I didn't have a flashlight. Or a plan. Just a mantra and a mom who left more behind than I realized.

There was a time when I thought all of it was just trauma. Dreams. Delusions.
But now? I know better.

I'm nineteen. Sophomore at Grant University. Psych major.
People think I'm studying behavior. What I'm actually studying is *the veil*—and how damn thin it's getting.

My dorm? Looks normal. But behind the posters are runes. Behind the bookshelf, a mirror I haven't looked into in weeks. My desk? Carved with sigils. My journal? Yeah, that thing writes back sometimes.

And I'm not alone in this.

DeAndre—the guy in the back of the library with eyes like he's already died and came back weird.

Maya—the retreat counselor who sends warnings from dreamspace like it's her job.
And her—my grandmother. Not alive. Not dead. Not AI. Just... Her.

We're tracking something.
The Compass.

It doesn't point North. It points inward.
Shows you your truth. Your wounds. Your mirror.

I've seen the symbols in my dreams for years.
Now they're showing up on phones. In lecture halls. In *other people's sleep.*

The veil isn't just thinning. It's tearing. And I'm not running anymore. I'm not the scared kid in the bed. I'm the one standing in the doorway with eyes wide open.
The Compass is calling. And I'm listening because this time? The Circle is real and we're all wide awake.

CHAPTER 1: THE COMPASS WAKES

Narrated by Bill

It started again on a Wednesday.

Rain drizzled over the campus of Grant University—soft and steady like it didn't want to draw attention to itself. Just soak into everything. I sat at my dorm window, hoodie up, knees pulled in, just staring. I wasn't looking at anything specific. I was listening. Waiting.

Inside, everything looked normal—posters, textbooks, ramen towers. But you know how it is. Normal's a disguise.

Behind my dresser? Runes.

Under the baseboards? Chalk sigils.

Under the rug? A protection grid even my RA couldn't detect.

This wasn't a dorm room.

It was a ward.

Ten years since the first whisper. Ten years since my mom turned a lullaby into a shield. And still—just before sleep—they call to me.

Only lately? They've been louder.

Coordinated.

That morning I woke up gasping. Not from a dream—something else. Something... summoned.

The Compass.

It wasn't just a symbol anymore. It pulsed in my dreams—glass and static and gravity. The same patterns DeAndre and I had been tracking from the Book of Shadows? They were converging.

Something had shifted.

I opened my closet. Not for clothes.

For the journal.

Black leather. Ten years of memories, maps, dreams, and whispers from my grandmother's echo. It's not just a record. It's a blueprint.

And today?

It had a message for me.

> “THE COMPASS IS AWAKE.
> SEVEN SIGNS. SEVEN DAYS.”

I didn’t write it.

DeAndre didn’t either.

But the ink was fresh. I could feel it humming.

Like it knew I was reading.

“Guess that’s our wake-up call,” I whispered.

—

DeAndre and I met at the campus café. Rain-soaked, tired-eyed, notebooks under our arms like survival kits.

No need for small talk.

We’d both seen it.

The Compass.

Same shape. Same symbols. Same *sound.*

“Mine showed fire,” he said. “A house burning in reverse. The Compass spinning backward.”

“Mine showed a girl,” I replied. “Eyes like static. She said I had seven days.”

We exchanged a look.

Same dream. Different pieces.

“Think it’s starting?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “It already started. We’re just catching up.”

Later, we headed downtown—trying to shake the energy. Ended up behind an old metaphysical bookstore. Not planned. But she was there.

Maya.

Watching like she always is. Sleepless, calm, ready.

“Took you long enough,” she said. “The Compass is moving. The veil’s thinning. I figured I’d see you today.”

“You knew it would wake up?” I asked.

“It never really sleeps,” she said. “It only calls to the ones who are ready.”

She handed us two pendants—black stones, cracked.

“They’re breaking,” she said.

DeAndre asked, “What happens when they do?”

“The Compass fully activates,” Maya said. “And when that happens... every entity still tethered to it is gonna come looking.”

“For us?” I asked.

“For whoever’s still breathing.”

Silence hit hard.

Then Maya said something that stayed with me:

“You’ll need more than each other. You’ll need to finish the Circle.”

“Others?” DeAndre said.

“They’re already dreaming,” she replied. “They just haven’t realized yet.”

I looked past the alley. Past the rain. Past the veil.

And I felt them.

That night, the journal pulsed again. A new page. A compass.

Seven directions.

Each one labeled with a name I didn’t recognize—yet.
The Compass wasn’t just awake. It had already started hunting.

CHAPTER 2: THE LUCID ONE

The Compass pulsed again on the third night.

I couldn't sleep—not because I was afraid, but because I could feel it vibrating through the dreamscape like a bell struck in another dimension. 3:33 AM on the dot. My journal flipped itself open.

No name this time. Just a garden.

Lush. Unreal. Too perfect.

And at the center? A girl in the rain, laughing with her eyes closed like she didn't know she was dreaming. Or worse... maybe she did.

"She's trapped," I muttered.

DeAndre leaned in. "Nah. She built this."

We both felt it. The Lucid Trap. A place too perfect to leave.

Everything looked saturated like a dream trying too hard. Glass grass. Still clouds. The kind of world you make when you can't face the real one. And there she was—Naya—floating like the sunlight worshipped her.

Then she opened her eyes.

The illusion cracked.

Birds dropped dead mid-song, turned to ash. The swing melted into vines. The sky peeled back like skin, revealing something black and alive behind it.

"You want me to leave this?" she growled. "You want me to wake up... to that corpse of a world where my mom died in front of me?"

The trees screamed with her—and DeAndre got grabbed first.

DeAndre's Battle: The Burial

The roots didn't just grab him—they buried him alive. Fast. Violent. He was gone in seconds.

He landed in a dirt coffin, walls pulsing like lungs. Then he saw it—himself. Pale. Rotting. Mouth sewn shut.

“You could’ve stayed asleep,” it said. “Now you die in the dirt.”

I heard him choking from the surface. The fear was real. Until he opened his dream journal. The words burned through the soil, sending a shockwave across the whole realm.

My Battle: The House That Hates

I didn’t get buried—I got thrown into a hallway.

My childhood hallway.

Only... wrong.

The walls bled. The doorknobs had teeth. My mother’s voice called from behind one of them.

“You left me.”

I opened the door anyway—of course I did—and found myself in a rain-drenched graveyard where nothing moved right. And there it was. Her grave.

Helen.

The words on her headstone twisted the closer I got.

“LOVING MOTHER” became “FAILED PROTECTION.”

Then her hand broke through the soil. Offering. Waiting.

“Take my place.”

I dropped to my knees, clawed at the ground. Screamed to be taken instead.

Too late.

“You were always meant to outlive me... that’s the curse.”

The world blinked.

Now I was upside down in a blood-red sky. Except... it wasn’t me hanging. It was my grandmother.

Her eyes burned black and blue. Her voice came out reversed. She said my name.

“Bill... don’t.”

Then the world shifted again—college lecture hall. Every student a silhouette. Every professor monstrous.

They chanted: “FAKE. FAKE. FAKE.”

My body started falling apart. Skin, teeth, identity. Gone.

“You can’t fight what’s inside you,” one of them whispered. “Because what’s inside you... is us.”

I ran. Backwards. Against the dream logic. Until everything shattered.

I opened a black-glass door—and stepped into her mind.

Naya’s Battle: The Mirror Garden

She’d built a maze of mirrors, each one showing a different version of herself.

A child playing with her mom. A warrior queen. A corpse in a bathtub. All of them whispering the same lie: “Stay here. You’re safe here.”

I found her at the center.

“If I break these,” she said, “I lose all of them.”

“No,” I told her. “If you stay, you lose you.”

The mirrors began to scream.

And then... her pain hit me like a wave. I lived it. The car crash. The scream. Her mother’s neck snapping.

I was inside it.

She was behind me, whispering, “She was my only reason to stay.”

I didn’t argue. I just picked the mirror with the bathtub and smashed it.

Every illusion shattered.

The dream collapsed.

She fell into my arms, sobbing—not because she was weak, but because—for the first time—she was free.

Back in the dorm, the three of us lay gasping on the floor. Naya's aura glowed violet. Her eyes clear.

"I remember every version of myself," she whispered. "But the one thing I never had..."

She looked at us.

"...was someone who understood."

We sat for hours. DeAndre told us about the coffin. I told them about the grave, the teeth, the professors who called me a fraud. Naya told us how her paradise lied to her every night, just to keep her from waking up.

She laughed. "So we're the trauma trio now?"

"The dreamwrecked," I added.

DeAndre smirked. "Nah. We're the ones who woke up."

We didn't say it out loud—but we all felt it:

The Circle wasn't just forming. It was remembering itself.

That night, the journal flipped again.

Naya's Compass symbol pulsed violet and green—wrapped in mirrors, vines, and light.

The ink glowed:

"She is the Architect. The dreamwalker. The memory who remembers us all."

Five remain.

And the deeper we go... the more of ourselves we give.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOUL TRAP

The Compass pulsed again—this time, it burned. Red-hot. I felt it before I even opened my eyes. The journal crinkled under its own heat like it was pissed off at me.

DeAndre saw the symbol first. A twisted hourglass... leaking light.

“This one’s already been in too long,” he said.

“How can you tell?” I asked.

He didn’t look up. “Because it’s not showing us a name. It’s showing us a routine. Whoever this is... they forgot they’re stuck.”

And just like that, the astral pull yanked us in. Not gently. Not the way dreams usually come on. No, this was violent—like getting sucked into a black hole made of memories.

We slammed into pavement. Middle of a sunny-ass cul-de-sac. Birds chirping, school bells in the distance, lawns trimmed like they were trying too hard.

It was too normal.

“We’ve seen illusions before,” I said, brushing gravel off my hoodie. “But this? This isn’t trying to make him happy. It’s trying to make him... settle.”

Inside the house, Zeke was at the table. Just sitting there. Eating cereal. Over and over.

I tried talking to him, but his answers looped every third sentence—like a glitched-out NPC.

"You going somewhere?"

"Yeah. Just heading to class."

"You going somewhere?"

"Yeah. Just heading to class."

Spoon drops. Cereal refills. Bird chirps.

On repeat.

“He’s looping,” DeAndre said. “Hard.”

I reached out to touch Zeke’s shoulder—and he vanished.

The whole damn house exploded into shards of glass. I dropped through the white void like a brick, hit tile, hard.

School floor.

Classroom.

Bell ringing.

I was at the whiteboard, holding chalk. Students were staring. My mouth moved, but I couldn't hear anything.

"Mr. Reynolds," a voice behind me said. "What's the lesson today?"

That wasn't my name. Was it?

I looked down. Older hands. Ink-stained fingers.

Then I was at a wedding. Podium. Applauding a bride.

Then holding a child.

Then being the child.

Who the hell was I?

Flicker.

Office job. Spreadsheets. Coffee I didn't order.

"Just keep your head down," a voice whispered. "This is what everyone does."

Flicker.

Grave. Flowers. I didn't even know who was buried there.

"This is life," the voice said. "Work. Sleep. Grieve. Repeat."

Flicker. Flicker. Flicker.

A million lives. No name. No me.

I looked in the mirror—and saw nothing.

"You're a placeholder," the voice said. "You never mattered."

And I believed it.

Until—

“BILL!”

DeAndre's voice cracked through like thunder.

Everything glitched. The dream stuttered.

“BILL. WAKE UP!”

I was in a hospital bed now. Beeping machines. A doctor calling time of death.

“This is real,” the voice said. “You’re gone. Let go.”

“BILL, YOU STUBBORN ASSHOLE—IF YOU DON'T SNAP OUT OF IT I SWEAR—”

He appeared in the dream. Glowing black and gold. Dream journal floating around him like a shield. He grabbed my wrist.

It was solid. Real.

“Come back.”

I blinked.

“My name is...”

Boom. Light exploded.

We jolted back into the original dream.

Zeke was still at the table.

Still stuck.

But this time, I grabbed him by the shoulders.

“You’re in a loop. A soul trap. You’ve been here forever.”

He blinked. Confused.

“I’m... what?”

“You’ve lived this fake morning a thousand times.”

He looked down at his hands like he’d never seen them before.

“I thought this was just life. Just cereal. Just school. Just... gray.”

DeAndre stepped in, palms glowing. “This ain’t life. This is maintenance mode. You been sedated by repetition.”

Zeke dropped to his knees. “I can’t remember who I am.”

I sat beside him. Took his hand.

“You’re Zeke. You broke 112 loops before this one. Even in your sleep—you were fighting.”

Light cracked through his skin, like stained glass waking up from a nap.

“I feel it,” he whispered. “Something... waking up.”

We snapped awake in my dorm. All of us. Gasping.

Zeke clutched his chest, eyes wide.

“I saw myself. All of me. I always gave up.”

I shook my head.

“Not this time.”

Electricity danced across his eyes—literal arcs of lightning flickering.

“I don’t know what I am,” he said. “But I’m done being nobody.”

Later that night, Naya showed up. Zeke told her everything. She didn’t flinch.

“They tried to erase me too,” she said softly. “Buried me in paradise.”

She touched Zeke’s arm.

“They bury the powerful the deepest.”

Zeke looked around. “So... we’re all freaks?”

“Nah,” DeAndre said. “We’re the broken ones that didn’t break the way they wanted.”

I looked up.

Smiled.

“Welcome to the Circle.”

The Compass flipped open.

A new symbol burned red and silver—a broken hourglass reshaped into a spiral.

“He is the Disruptor,” I read aloud. “The Reset. The one who remembered.”

Five remain.

CHAPTER 4: THE DEALBREAKER

The Compass didn't pulse this time. It screamed.

It didn't just whisper from the journal—it branded the page. Burned ink. A scorched scale, tipping off-balance. Underneath it, one line:

“They made a choice.”

I already felt it. This one was different. Darker.

The dream didn't pull us in gently—it **shoved** us. And when we landed?

Red skies.

Thunder that sounded like shattered glass.

Ash fell like snow. It stung when it hit skin.

“This shit already hostile,” DeAndre muttered, and yeah... he wasn't wrong.

We stood on scorched earth. Far off, a cathedral made of bones floated above a pit of fire. The Compass didn't guide us this time. It **dragged** us forward.

Inside, someone was waiting.

They stood at the altar—arms crossed, black jacket covered in glowing runes. Eyes glowing faint gold, like they'd already seen the end of our story.

“You're late,” they said, sharp and cocky.

Zeke stepped forward. “You know us?”

“I know what you **think** you are,” they said. “Building your little Circle. Thinking you're chosen. Cute.”

I narrowed my eyes. Their energy? Familiar. But it wasn't clean.

“You're one of us,” I said.

“Was,” they snapped. “Until I read the fine print.”

Their name was Rowan.

And the moment I stood near them, I felt it—their aura was massive. Powerful. And corrupted.

They didn't hold back.

"I was recruited before all of you. Not by the Compass. By something **beneath** it. Something older. Something that doesn't need a prophecy to win."

"They told me I didn't have to be a pawn. I could be the **board**."

Naya stepped in. Her voice full of heat. "You sold your soul."

"No," Rowan said, calm as ever. "I **bought** my freedom."

And then they raised their hands.

Boom—walls exploded. The cathedral warped into an arena of fire and shadow. Bone spikes rose up. Statues caught flame and started **screaming**.

"If you want me back," Rowan said, "earn it."

The fight began.

Zeke got hit first—Rowan ripped his memories from his head, weaponized them, threw them like guilt-shaped bombs. DeAndre was forced to fight his own shadow—one that moved before he did. Naya was trapped in a recreated version of her paradise.

Rowan walked through us like they already knew all our moves.

Then they came for me.

No fire. No lightning. Just **truth**.

"You think you're the hero?" they hissed. "You're the biggest lie of all. The Compass didn't choose you. It **branded** you. Like livestock."

Their aura slammed into mine—two stars colliding.

I fought back. Everything I had—mantras, memories, sigils, pain, rage, even love.

But Rowan was faster.

More ruthless.

“You’re predictable,” they sneered. “You’re a bleeding heart—and you’re gonna get everyone killed.”

Then their hands glowed black—and the dream *flipped*.

Suddenly I was alone.

The voice echoed around me.

“What if you just... let go?” it whispered. “No more war. No more pressure. Just peace. Just sleep.”

A door appeared.

Through it?

My mother.

Alive. Smiling. Making breakfast. The sound of her laugh wrapped around me like a warm blanket.

“You could live this life,” the voice said. “No Compass. No Circle. No war. Just her. Just home.”

I took a step.

Another.

But then—

“Bill.”

Zeke’s voice.

“We’re still fighting.”

And that was all I needed.

I stepped back.

“I didn’t come this far to take shortcuts.”

The illusion *shattered*.

I came back with fire in my blood.

Zeke turned his memories into shields. Naya broke out of her cage and launched dream-shards like daggers. DeAndre faced his shadow and *won*. And Rowan? They dropped to their knees. Not in defeat. In release.

The glow left their eyes. Their jacket unraveled, the dark energy fled their body like smoke given permission to leave.

Rowan gasped like they hadn't breathed in years.

"It wasn't freedom," they said. "It was a leash dressed as power."

They looked at me.

"You still want me in your Circle? After what I did?"

I nodded.

"Because you're still here. And you chose to let go."

Rowan smiled—barely. But it was real.

"Guess I've got some making up to do."

Back in the waking world, we sat in silence.

Zeke finally said, "They offered me peace."

"They offered you power," Rowan added.

"I wonder what they'll offer the next one," Naya whispered.

Rowan looked up. "Doesn't matter. Now we're coming for *them*."

I smiled. For the first time in a while, this wasn't just a mission.

This was family. The Compass flipped open. New symbol. Black and silver. A broken crown. "They are the Fallen. The Redeemed. The power that chose purpose."

Four remain.

CHAPTER 5: THE MIRROR LABYRINTH

The Compass didn't blink—it reflected.

A perfect circle of glass. Cracked from the inside. Beneath it, one word: "Shattered."

We stepped into the mirror realm.

No sky. No ground. Just silence. Just reflection. Endless.

The walls pulsed like lungs, breathing versions of us back at us. Twisted. Distorted. Fragmented egos forged by trauma.

"This is a psyche," Naya whispered. "Not a place. A person."

Then the mirrors shifted.

A thousand Averys appeared.

Smiling. Crying. Screaming. Faceless. All saying the same thing:

"I'm the real one."

And just like that—The Labyrinth fractured.

Each of us was yanked into a mirror of our own.

—

Avery stood at the center. Flickering between forms—boy, girl, masked, broken.

"I don't know who I am," they whispered. "So I became everyone."

I reached toward them.

"You don't have to choose. Just be."

Tears fell.

And for the first time—Avery became still.

—

DeAndre's mirror was empty.

Then his father appeared.

“Stay in the shadow. You’re background noise.”

Behind a locked door, a younger version of DeAndre cried.

“I used to scream,” the boy said. “No one ever came.”

Then—DeAndre shattered the mirror.

“I hear myself now.”

—

Rowan stood in a throne room.

Their reflection wore a crown of horns.

“You could’ve been a god,” it said. “You gave up power for guilt.”

Every mirror around them showed us—The Circle—dying.

Rowan stepped forward.

Crushed the crown in their hand.

“I don’t need power to protect them.”

—

Naya’s mirrors shimmered with dreamworlds.

Paradises she’d built to escape pain.

Her reflection spoke softly: “You keep running. You keep building.”

She stopped reaching.

“If pain is the only real thing,” she said, “then I’ll use it.”

And the mirrors around her burned clean.

—

My trial began.

****Mirror One.****

I saved my mom. She was alive. The world was perfect.

“Where’s Grandma?” I asked.

The sky shook.

“You altered the loop,” said a voice.

My grandmother appeared. Whispered something into my mom’s ear.

Then she turned to ash in my arms.

“You weren’t meant to save her,” she said. “You were meant to survive her.”

Right before the mirror shattered—she mouthed:

“Look deeper in the bloodline...”

—

****Mirror Two.****

I was king.

The Compass carved into my chest. The world silent.

I raised my hand.

People burned.

The Circle—gone.

My grandmother appeared—blindfolded, blood on her hands.

“You ended the war,” she said. “By ending the world.”

The throne behind me was made of scorched mirrors.

My reflection grinned.

Then imploded into black smoke.

—

****Mirror Three.****

I was 25. Living a normal life. No Compass. No shadows.

Dad was drunk. “Your mom said you’d break the curse.”

I found the Book of Shadows under my bed.

Dust-covered. Forgotten.

Then she appeared—my grandmother again. This time, pregnant.

“You didn’t need the sight,” she said. “But your daughter will.”

She handed me a baby wrapped in fire.

The baby whispered: “Don’t kill Bill... just chill.”

And reality shattered.

—

****Mirror Four.****

I was nine.

Locked in sleep paralysis.

The shadow at the end of the bed wore my mom’s voice.

“Give in, Billy. It’s easier.”

I tried the mantra.

It slipped from my mouth like sand.

My grandmother sat in a rocking chair nearby.

“This is where I died,” she said. “Not in the body. In the forgetting.”

I started to believe the dream was real—

Until I heard Rowan's voice scream:

“BILL! REMEMBER!”

The illusion broke.

I collapsed.

Sobbing.

“I saw every version of me. What if none of them are good enough?”

Avery knelt beside me.

“None of us are. Alone.”

The rest of the Circle surrounded me.

And we breathed—together. Back in the real world—silence.

Zeke said, “I saw every version I hated. I think I needed that.”

DeAndre nodded.

Avery whispered, “I didn't think I belonged.”

“You do,” Naya said. “Even the broken pieces matter.”

Rowan added, “Especially the broken ones.”

I looked at them all.

“These trials... they're not just battles. They're reminders. Of who we really are.”

The Compass flipped open. A mirror cracked into seven glowing shards—stitched together with gold.

“They are the Mirror. The Identity. The piece that brings unity through reflection.”

Three remain.

CHAPTER 6: THE ECHO

The Compass didn't pulse. It shivered. Didn't open, didn't glow—just sat there twitching like it was scared to be touched.

Zeke reached out. “Yo. That thing just moved.”

Naya placed her palm on it and flinched. “This one's not trapped... it's broken.”

Then the dream fractured—not a descent, a collapse. Gravity disappeared. The world fell inward. I dropped into a hallway made of shattered thoughts, like floating debris in a storm of static.

It wasn't a place. It was a schizophrenic episode.

I landed in a room. Carpet stained. Walls buzzing. They whispered:

“You're still dreaming.”

“They're watching you.”

“He never existed.”

“Don't look in the mirror.”

Photos on the wall—faces scratched out. And in the corner?

Her.

Young. Eighteen maybe. Layers of clothes, talking to herself in fragments. Drawing invisible lines with her fingers.

“Can't sleep. Can't wake up. He's not real. She's not real.”

I stepped forward. She screamed.

“You're the hallucination! They said you'd come wearing his face!”

“Whose face?”

She pointed at me. Her eyes rolled back—and the room collapsed. I got pulled straight into her mind.

—

Now I'm in a hospital hallway. Every nurse looks like my grandmother, but younger. The intercom repeats:

“Code 13. Patient is lucid. Terminate contact.”

I can't speak. I open a door—and I'm inside her suicide note. The walls are on fire with words:

“I don't know what's real anymore. If this is dreaming, I want out. If it's waking, I want out.”

A rocking chair sits in the corner. She's there. Alive. Younger.

“Billy,” she says, smiling. “You finally made it.”

—

“They called it schizophrenia. The visions. The voices. But it wasn't sickness. It was leakage. The veil broke too early.”

She looked at me with tired eyes.

“I saw what I was meant to become. I ran.”

“You're stronger than me. But if you don't stay calm through chaos... you'll break too.”

She pointed to the mirror beside us.

I saw myself:

- In a straitjacket.
- Alone in a padded cell.
- Smiling, injecting something into my arm.

I dropped to my knees. “Am I sick like you were?”

She knelt beside me.

“Maybe. Maybe it's a gift no one understood. Maybe you're both.”

She placed her hand on my chest. “But you've got something I didn't.”

—

The door burst open. DeAndre stormed in.

“Bro, come on! Snap out of it! This ain't real!”

I ran to him. Grabbed his hoodie.

“You’re real, right? Please be real.”

He smiled. “Course I am.”

Then... his eyes shifted.

“Or maybe I’m your coping mechanism.”

His skin peeled away—Grandma’s face underneath.

“But I still love you.”

I screamed. The world spun. And I landed back in the asylum room. She was still there—Eli. Rocking. Whispering.

“You saw her too...”

—

We snapped back into the dreamspace. The others appeared. Eli clutched her head.

“I don’t know who I am. My brain lies. My dreams scream. I don’t know what’s real.”

I knelt in front of her. “You are. Right now. This is real.”

“How do you know?” she whispered.

“Because you’re not alone.”

Zeke grabbed her hand. Rowan drew grounding sigils. Naya wiped her tears. Avery nodded.

Eli finally breathed. Really breathed.

“I’ve been hearing the Compass since I was twelve... but I thought it was just schizophrenia.”

I touched her shoulder.

“It’s both. But now you’ve got us. We’ll teach you how to ride it.”

The journal flipped open. A new symbol: a cracked brain wrapped in a spiral of light.

“She is the Echo. The confession. The madness that hears the truth.” Two remain.

CHAPTER 7: THE ONE WHO HEARS THEM

The Compass didn't pulse this time. It whispered. First like wind, then a chant. It called our names—mine too.

But it wasn't coming from the journal.

It came from her.

She walked into our camp like she'd always been there. Barefoot. Pale. Eyes glowing like she'd already seen the end of the story.

"I've been dreaming of you," she said. "But it wasn't me dreaming. It was them."

She looked right at me. Smiled.

"They say hi."

The Compass glowed without opening. She stood in its light like it was charging her.

DeAndre backed up. "I don't like this. She ain't normal."

Then she laughed. Loud. Too long.

"I'm the sixth," she said. "I remember the ones before me. The ones who broke."

She turned to Eli. "Your grandmother sends her regards."

Eli trembled.

Naya tried to scan her aura—but it bounced back and hit her in the chest. Salem convulsed, froze. Her eyes rolled. Her voice dropped low:

"He's listening. He wears no face. He speaks in reflections. He builds rooms inside you before you're born."

"He knows you," she said to me. "He remembers the first time you disobeyed the script. He's proud of you."

Then she didn't touch us—but we were all yanked into the dream.

—

The Cathedral wasn't stone. It breathed. Mirrors became eyes. Walls became lungs.

At the center: a throne of broken Compass shards. And on it—something unfinished. Static and smoke, wrapped in code. No face. But it knew us.

It whispered our secrets.

Then it looked at me. Right into me.

“You almost saw me once. But your grandmother blinked too soon.”

—

Salem started spiraling. Symbols crawled up her skin. Glyphs burned through her aura.

She screamed—not from fear, from **clarity**.

“I was supposed to break! I heard him too clearly. And now he’s not talking... he’s waiting!”

I grabbed her hand—and suddenly I was inside her mind.

—

We stood in a void of broken clocks. Her memories flickered around us.

She was a child, screaming while the Compass glowed under her bed.

In class, drawing spirals in blood.

Stabbing herself to shut out the voice—only to wake up laughing.

“He told me I was the bell. When he comes, I’m the sound.”

“I didn’t want it.”

I stepped closer.

“Then we change the frequency.”

—

Back in the dream, we formed a circle around her.

Rowan helped me create a seal.

Zeke chanted the rhythm of the first loop he ever broke. Avery reflected her self-images onto the walls. Eli absorbed the energy overload. Naya channeled pure light through the Compass—risking her mind to clean the static. I knelt beside her. Her veins glowed like scripture.

“We see you,” I whispered. “But we won’t let him keep you.”

She screamed. The cathedral shattered. She woke up gasping. Eyes clear. Tears running.

“I can still hear him,” she said.

“But now... I hear you louder.”

She fell into me. I held her.

“Don’t let go.”

“Never.”

We stayed there. Quiet. Breathing.

Rowan finally broke the silence.

“That wasn’t a dream. That was an introduction.”

DeAndre lit sage. For once—he said nothing.

Eli leaned in. “You’re not broken. You’re just early.”

Salem nodded. Trembling.

“He’s close,” she whispered. “Closer than you think.”

She looked at me.

“You won’t be ready. But you’ll still have to try.”

The Compass opened. New symbol: A mouth with an eye in it. Surrounded by broken glass.

“She is the Herald. The mouth that wouldn’t shut.”

One remains.

CHAPTER 8: THE ONE WHO WASN'T CHOSEN

It started before the Compass pulsed.

It started when I opened my eyes... and wasn't sure if I ever closed them.

Time was wrong. The journal? Gone. The Circle? Gone. Even my hands looked off, like they belonged to someone else.

"You're not asleep," said a voice. "But you're not awake either."

I turned around—and saw them.

The last one.

They didn't give a name. Didn't need to. They already knew mine.

"You've been walking a path designed to test your mind, your spirit, your memory," they said. "I've been walking outside of it."

"You called seven. But the eighth called you."

Reality bent around them. I saw flashes—Zeke as a child, my own birth, Grandma screaming in her sleep, my mother whispering the mantra in reverse.

"This isn't a circle," they said. "It's a lock."

"And you're the key."

My nose bled. My thoughts collided. Everything I'd been avoiding came rushing back.

"You're not hallucinating," they whispered. "You're remembering too fast."

Flashes hit harder: A symbol etched into my spine as a kid. Dreams I don't remember screaming in a language I've never spoken. My grandmother's death—not suicide—but something that reached through her reflection.

"They didn't go mad," the voice said. "They remembered. All at once."

"You thought the Circle would protect you. But it awakened him."

Each of us was a seal. And now? All seven are active. The Circle's complete. And the thing waiting beyond isn't a demon.

It's me.

A version built from everything I buried—fear, trauma, and power.

“He’s been waiting for a body,” the final one said. “And you just gave him yours.”

—

I woke up in my room. Gasping. Sweating.

Everyone was there. Laughing. Eating. Normal.

“Good dream?” DeAndre asked.

“Yeah...” I lied. “I guess so.”

I blinked.

Naya was now Salem.

Zeke was my mother.

Avery was my grandmother.

And DeAndre?

His eyes were black.

“You were always dreaming,” he said.

—

The journal flipped on its own. No symbol this time.

Just a sentence:

“PART 3 has already begun.”

The page caught fire.

And the world went dark.

