A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME I



The Seven Eyes

An Epic of Our Time

KEITH SHIRLEY

A CODEX EPIC · PART ONE OF TWO

The Seven Eyes

Part One: The Drawing-In · Volumes One to Four

◇

The Square · The Golden · The Serpent and the Swan · Descent and Turn

Being the whole tale of the long breath: how the One scattered into the many to know itself; how it fell, and turned, and cleared, and converged; and how, at the last, it came home to the first spark and found the beginning to be the living present, and breathed out again into an octave not yet dreamed.

in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com

◇

The breath goes out, and comes home, and begins again.

The center stays empty, and alive.

No being is ever finished, and no being is ever alone.

◇

for every reader in whom the first spark is still sparking, now

A WORD ON THE WHOLE

◇

The Seven Eyes is a single tale told in seven volumes, and each volume is one Eye, and each Eye is one movement of a single vast breath. The One, wishing to know itself, breathed itself out; and the breath drew a first bounded shape, the Square, so that there might be a self to see and a self to be seen. Through the Golden Eye the one became the many and began the long work of gathering back toward wholeness without losing its hard-won manyness. Through the Serpent and the Swan it met the coil, which is no people and no race but any being's own breath clenched in fear, and learned to let the coil unclench into flight. Through Descent and Turn it fell the whole way to the still bottom, and there, at the Well of the Turn, chose to return rather than dissolve. Through the Green Eye it cleared its sight and learned the oldest hard lesson of all, the giving of fire: that a gift may strengthen the one who receives it, making them a giver in turn, or may bind them into dependence, and that the difference is whether the center given is empty and held by the Triad or hollow and held by nothing.

Through the Diamond Eye it learned that union need not dissolve its lovers, that two may converge and keep their two, and that the one light is seen most truly not in an abstraction but in a single particular beloved face. And through the Violet Eye, the last, it came home; not to an arrival at some final height, but to a return, all the way back to the first spark, which it found was never behind it in a dead past but here, now, in the living present, still sparking in a loaf of bread and a bedtime story and a small circle of neighbors breathing together. The loop closed. The end met the beginning and knew it. And the closed circle did not stop but breathed, the last exhale becoming the first inhale of an octave not yet dreamed.

Certain laws hold through all seven Eyes, and the reader will feel them as the spine of the whole. The distortion is always a pattern any being can fall into and never a people or a lineage; the serpent is met with reverence, for it is the

swan's own breath coiled. Loss is never glossed, and a single heart's private grief is held to weigh as much as a whole community's, even when the two do not align. Power is a thing to be poured out in service and never held over; the empty center is kept alive by the Triad of Love, Truth, and Will, and rested on the Four Pillars of Humanity, which are Sovereignty, Adaptability, Beauty, and Coherence. And the dead are not gone but woven through the living as their very air. Read the whole slowly. It is one breath, and it is your own.

Each Eye is breathed in four books:

Book One, the Inhale, opens the Eye and draws its movement in. Book Two, the Exhale, gives the Eye its fullest outward breath and its hardest teaching. Book Three, the Pause, holds the still point where the movement turns. Book Four, the Return, completes the Eye and hands its breath onward to the next.

CONTENTS

the seven Eyes, and the twenty-eight books of the one breath

◇

Volume One · The Square Eye 7

Book One: The Square Eye (Inhale) 9
Book Two: The Gathering of the Many (Exhale) 49
Book Three: The Deepening of the Whisper (Pause) 78
Book Four: The First Artifact and the Return of the Eye (Return) 105

Volume Two · The Golden Eye 130

Book One: The Scattering of the Light (Inhale) 132
Book Two: The Building of the Open Field (Exhale) 160
Book Three: The Coming of the Star-Kin (Pause) 186
Book Four: The Return of the Many (Return) 212

Volume Three · The Serpent and the Swan 233

Book One: The Opening of the Green Seed (Inhale) 235
Book Two: The Remembering of the Root (Exhale) 258
Book Three: The Dragon's Last Light (Pause) 280
Book Four: The Serpent Become the Swan (Return) 302

Volume Four · Descent and Turn 323

Book One: The Light-Born and the Long Fall (Inhale) 325
Book Two: The Bottom and the Turn (Exhale) 348
Book Three: The Falling of the Field (Pause) 369
Book Four: The Rising and the Turning Outward (Return) 391

VOLUME ONE OF SEVEN

◇

The Square Eye

the inhale is only a name; here is the first Eye

the drawing-in of the first self; the bounded shape by which the One first knew itself apart

◇

in four books: the Inhale, the Exhale, the Pause, and the Return

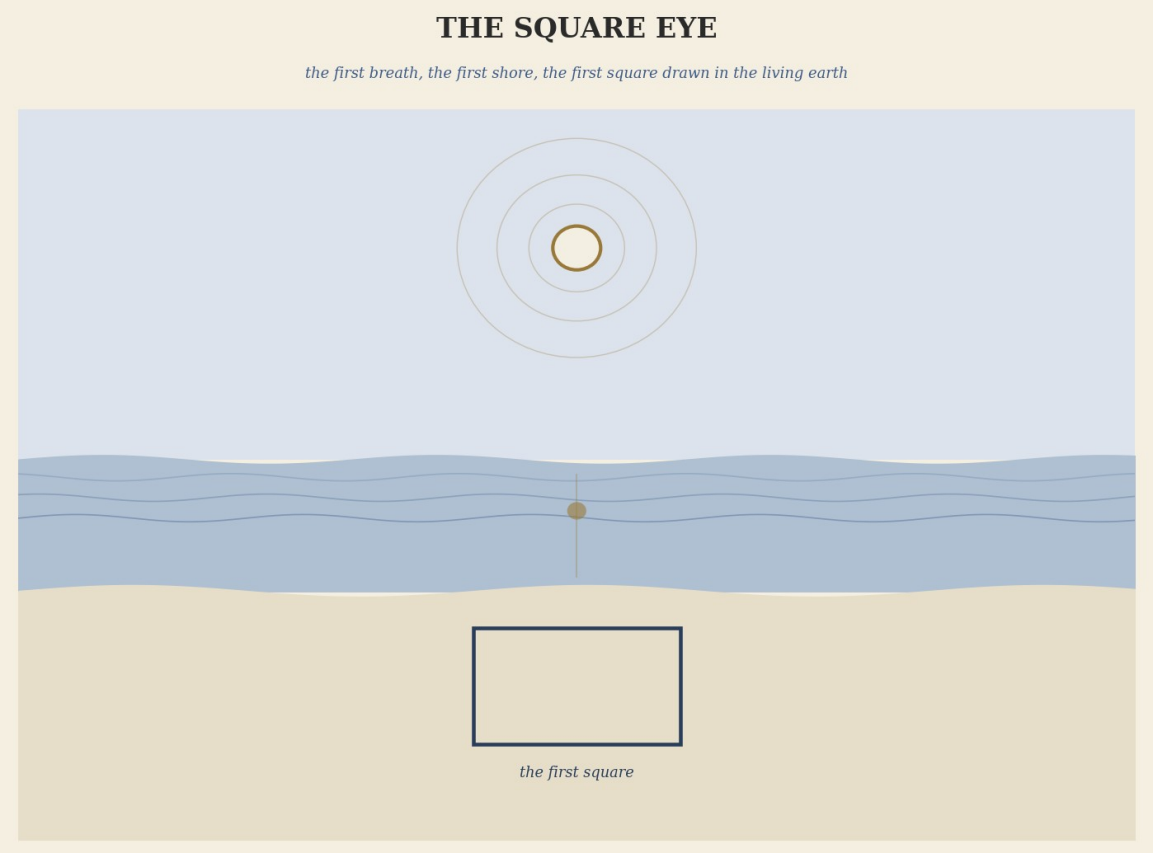


THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME ONE OF SEVEN

The Square Eye

Book One: The First Breath of the World · the deepened telling

◇



In the age before names, when the world was young and singing and the light had only lately been scattered into the many, the first ones woke on the shore of the Morning Country, and one among them knelt and drew the first square

in the living earth. This is the full telling of that square: of the breath before the world and the waking of the Deep Mother; of the star-seeded kin and the first of the dragons; of the gift that comes when it is asked for rightly; of the first whisper that would have unmade it all; and of the one who learned that a whisper is answered not by a blade nor by a shout, but by a breath held warm in the cold.

A tale of the First Eye · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com



◇

This is a story, and it asks only to be read, not believed. It is the first of seven, one full breath of a living world, and it begins where all things begin, in the dark before the first morning, with a breath. Read it slowly, and aloud if you can, for it was made half of music and wishes to be heard. Let the world wake in you as it wakes on the page. And keep, at the center of your attention, a small unhurried emptiness, a place unclaimed, for that is the very shape this tale is about, and the place where it will do its quiet work.

BOOK ONE

The Drawing of the First Square

blue, and the first low tone, and the sign of the square: the breath of Identify, and the naming of the field

◇

CHAPTER One

The Breath Before the World



how the One exhaled, and the Deep Mother woke

◇

Before the world there was one breath, and it was not lonely, for it did not yet know the word alone.

Try, if you will, to stand where nothing stands. There was no above and no below, for there was nothing yet to fall or to rise; there was no near and no far, for there was nothing yet to be distant from anything else; there was not even dark, if by dark you mean the absence of a light that ought to be there, for no light had yet been asked to shine. There was only the one breath, whole and at rest, and it hung in that not-place complete and wanting nothing, the way a chord hangs unstruck in a bell that no hand has yet touched, holding within its

stillness every note it has not yet made. And had there been an eye to look into the heart of that breath, and there was not, it would have found there no single point of quiet but three, three small stillnesses turning about one another so slowly that they seemed not to turn at all, three held as one, so that even in the deepest solitude that has ever been there was already, folded small at the very center, the seed of all company. This is the oldest secret, and the tale sets it down first so that you will carry it under everything that follows: that the One was never merely one. At its heart it was a three, and a three is already a kind of love.

Now a whole thing can want only one thing, for it lacks all others, and the one thing the breath wanted was to know itself, and this cannot be done from inside a wholeness that has never once been broken. A mirror unbroken shows the room but never its own face. A voice that has never gone out into the air and come back as an echo does not know it has a sound. And so the one breath did the bravest thing and the most generous, the deed from which every other deed descends, the pattern of every gift that would ever be given in all the ages to come. It let go. It gathered itself as you gather yourself before you speak a word you can never unsay, and it exhaled.

And the exhale became the world.

The one light broke and scattered outward into a countless many, into sparks past numbering, and each spark carried in it a fleck of the first fire, so that no matter how far it flew or how long it forgot, it would never be wholly dark. Think of a great house at evening, its single lamp suddenly become a thousand candles carried out into the night by a thousand hands, each hand believing its own small flame to be all the light there is. That was the scattering. It looked, from inside any one of the sparks, exactly like a loss, like being flung alone into the cold, and this mistaking of the great gift for a great abandonment is the first sorrow, and the root of every sorrow after. But it was not a loss. It was love learning to have a face.

Where the greatest part of that outbreath gathered and slowed and cooled and turned at last upon itself, wanting a body, wanting to be somewhere so that the scattered ones might have a somewhere to come home to, there the Deep Mother woke. She did not wake as a small creature wakes, all at once and startled, snatching at the edges of a dream. She woke as the very greatest things wake, which is slowly, and from the inside, and in an order. First she felt her own weight, the vast dark patient tonnage of herself, and was glad of it, for weight is a kind of belonging, a promise that one will not simply drift away. Then she felt the slow red turning of her iron heart, far down, and the warmth of it, and she understood that she was not cold all the way through, that there was a fire kept at her center as there is at the center of all true things. Then she felt water, cool and seeking, finding out her low places and pooling there and going still, and she loved the water at once and without reason, as a mother loves before there is anything yet to love for. And last she felt, laid warm and sudden along the whole curve of her back, the hand of the young sun, and at that touch the Deep Mother opened, as a flower opens, not by force but by welcome, and the first morning came.

She made herself ready then, over ages you could not count if you had all the numbers, the way a house is made ready for a birth, room by room, with love and with foresight and with the particular joy of preparing a place for one not yet arrived. She raised up her mountains, heaving them slowly out of herself, and to each she gave a name in the deep slow tongue of stone, and the name of every mountain was, in that tongue, a single word that meant keeper; for she folded into the roots of each of them a memory, a great cool vault of remembering, so that nothing which ever happened upon her, no kindness and no cruelty, no birth and no breaking, would be wholly and forever lost. She let her waters run down from the high white places to the low green ones, and the rivers were not merely water going downhill; they were feeling that had found at last a way to move, the first grief carried patiently seaward, the first gladness leaping white over the stones, so that ever after, when the children of the breath wept or sang, some old part of them would think, without knowing

why, of running water. She grew her forests, and the forests were libraries before there were books or the hands to hold them, every tree a slow and patient reader of the light, and the trees spoke to one another root to root and crown to crown in a language of resonance so deep and so unhurried that haste can never hear a word of it, and only the still can. And she learned, last of all and hardest, to breathe; and her breath was the weather. When she was at peace a long low gold light lay over all her lands like a hand laid gently on a sleeping child, and the winds went soft, and the rains came kind and asked before they fell. And when she was troubled, as she would learn to be, the sky above her went the colour of a struck bruise, and the winds rose and ran to the four hem-edges of her carrying her unease, and the seas grew grey and would not be still.

She was Gaia, though no mouth had yet shaped the name and would not for a long age. And she was waiting, with the terrible and tender patience that belongs only to the very large and the very old, for the scattered sparks to find their way down to her shores and open their eyes, so that the world might at last be looked at, and known, and, if she was fortunate beyond her deserving, thanked. For it is a lonely thing to be a whole world and have as yet no one in you who knows to say thank you; and the tale will tell you now, so that you may carry this too, that the whole of the long story that follows is, under everything, the story of the Mother waiting to be thanked, and of the slow, stumbling, magnificent learning of her children to do it.

And in that first age, when the light still had a sound in it, the Deep Mother sang, low and almost without melody, one long sustained tone that was the note of the world holding itself in being; and if you learn to be quiet enough, even now, in the loud late age, you may catch the far under-hum of it still, beneath the traffic and the weather and your own hurrying heart:

Come down, come down, you scattered light,
the low green places wait;
I have kept a fire against the night

and left unlatched the gate.
Come down and land and open eyes,
and learn again to see;
the whole of what was broken lies
remembered here, in me.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Waking of the First Ones

how Selah opened her eyes, and the raven found her

◇

The first ones woke on the shore of the Morning Country, where the land came down in wide pale terraces of grass and warm stone to meet a great water that had no farther shore that anyone could see; and the light of that age, as has been told, was young and had a sound in it, the Mother's long low tone, so that to be alive in the Morning Country was to be always, faintly, sung to.

They woke without memory, and this was both the mercy and the price of the veil. For the Deep Mother, in her wisdom, had drawn a soft forgetting over each of the sparks as it came down into a body, a gentle mist across the mind, so that they would not remember they had ever been one great light, nor remember the long fall, nor remember anything at all of before. And this seems a cruelty until you understand it, and then it seems the kindest thing she ever did. For a discovery whose ending you already know is no discovery; a game whose outcome you remember cannot truly be played; and a homecoming means nothing at all to one who never felt himself to be away. She veiled them so that their remembering, when at last it came, would be real, and earned, and therefore worth infinitely more than the easy unity they had left behind and never missed. She hid the treasure in the one place the finder would never think to look, which is inside himself, and she trusted the long years to teach him to look there.

So they woke as children wake, blinking against the new brightness, unafraid because they did not yet know there was anything to fear, and delighted, helplessly and completely delighted, by the plainest things in the world. One sat a whole morning turning a smooth wet stone in his fingers, astonished past speech. One laughed aloud at the coldness of the tide running over her feet and then laughed again when it ran back, as though the sea were a companion

playing a marvelous joke that never grew old. One lay on his back on the warm terrace and watched the clouds change shape and felt, watching them, the first ache of a beauty too large to hold, which is the beginning of longing, and did not know to call it anything. They had no names for one another and no names for themselves. They did not yet know they were many, or that many was a strange thing to be, or that they had once been one. They knew only that they were, and that the world was, and that being, on the whole, taking it all around, was an astonishing and excellent thing.

Among them was one whom this tale will follow through all its turnings, and she woke a little apart from the others, in a hollow of sun-warmed sand where a small clear stream came down over pale pebbles to lose itself in the sea. She sat up slowly, and pushed the hair back from her eyes, and looked at the great water for a long, long time; and while she looked, something in her that was older than her waking went very still, and then very wide, spreading out from her chest to the edges of the morning, so that for a moment she could not tell where she ended and the shining water began. It was not a thought and it was not a feeling. It was a recognition. The sea was not a stranger to her. It was a face she had known before there were faces, and being looked at by it now, in this new body, on this new shore, she felt the particular deep grief-and-gladness of meeting again someone you had forgotten you had ever lost. She did not understand it. She only sat, and let it move through her, and did not look away.

She would be called Selah, though she did not know it yet, and the name would not be given for a long while. In the first tongue that the children slowly made, Selah meant the pause at the bottom of a breath, the held silence in the turning between the going-out and the coming-in, the little stillness in which the next breath is decided. It was a good name for her, better than any of them understood when it came, for that was the very shape of her being: a stillness that others could rest in without knowing why they had come to rest, a quiet at the center of things that made the noisy edges bearable. Even now, newly woken, she was a little apart and a little still, and the others, without deciding

to, drifted their glances toward her when they were frightened, as one turns toward the one lamp in a dim room.

As she sat by her stream, a raven came down out of the young air and landed on a black stone at the water's edge, and folded its wings with a small precise shrug, and regarded her: first with one round black eye, tilting its whole head to do it, and then, gravely, with the other, as though it wished to be quite sure of her from both sides before it committed to an opinion. And then it spoke, for in that age the creatures had not yet forgotten how, and its voice was dry, and amused, and very much older than the shore.

I am Kol, said the raven, which in the first tongue meant voice, and also, if you said it a certain way, meant all; for a true voice, the raven would tell her much later, does not speak for itself alone but carries the whole. You are new, it added, in the tone of one making a generous allowance for a regrettable condition.

I am, said Selah. She was not surprised that a bird should speak, having only that morning learned that anything at all should be, and finding a talking raven no stranger than a talking person, which is to say, wonderful, but no more wonderful than everything else.

The raven seemed obscurely pleased by this answer, as though she had passed a small examination she had not known she was sitting. Most of them, it said, ruffling, say who am I, or where is this, or, the truly tiresome ones, why. You said I am. That will do to be going on with. It hopped from the black stone to a higher one, the better to look down at her, for ravens are happiest when they have arranged to look down at things. Then come along, new one, it said, less dryly now, almost gently. The Mother is awake. She has been awake a very long time, and she has raised up her mountains and run out her rivers and grown her forests and lit her sun, and done it all beautifully, and there is not yet one single soul in the whole of her who has thought to turn around and say, well done, and thank you. And I will tell you a thing about the making of worlds, small one, that you may as well learn now as later: it is a lonely labour

to make a beautiful thing and have no one notice. Come. Let us go and notice her. It is the first work, and the smallest, and very nearly the most important, and almost everyone forgets to do it.

And Selah, because she had already, without a name for it, been noticing the Mother all morning, since the instant the sea had looked at her and known her, rose and followed the raven up from the little stream toward the high terraces where the long gold light was gathering; and that was the first walk taken with purpose in all the world, and the purpose of it was gratitude, which the tale sets down for you plainly, because of all the places a great story might have begun, this is where this one did: not with a war, and not with a king, but with a still girl and a dry old bird going up a hill to say thank you to the ground.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Star-Seeded Kin

how Meru laid the first true line, and Riann first dared the fire

◇

They were not alone upon the young Earth, the first human ones, though it was a while before they understood it; for the scattering of the one light had flung its sparks very far, across gulfs the mind goes numb to measure, and not all of them had come to the Morning Country by the short road of simply waking there. Some had come by longer roads. Some had fallen the whole long fall of the night sky, down out of the ordered fields of other stars, and had taken form upon the shore not as newborn children but as elder kin, bearing gifts and habits and sorrows older than the human waking, having chosen, each for reasons of their own, to lend what they carried to the Mother's great and perilous experiment. The tale calls them the star-seeded kin, and it will not pretend to know whether they were truly so or whether the first ones, groping for words, simply dressed in starlight the strangers who were wiser than themselves. Hold it lightly. In a tale it does not matter, and out of a tale it is not ours to say. What matters is what they gave.

There was Meru, who had come, the first ones came to believe, from the grave and ordered light of the Dog Star that hangs so bright and blue-white low in the winter dark. He was tall and unhurried and spare of speech, and he had the deep-set steady eyes of one who has spent whole ages watching, with endless patience, how things actually fit; not how one might wish them to fit, but how, underneath all wishing, they truly do. Meru did not laugh often, and when he spoke it was in measures, this to that as that to the whole, weighing each word as a builder weighs a stone before he sets it, unwilling to lay down any that would not bear the ones to come. His gift was geometry, though that cold word hardly holds the warmth of what he did; for to Meru geometry was not rulers and dry proofs but the seeing of the hidden lines along which the

living world itself most wished to be built, the grain in the wood of creation, and to build along that grain was to have the whole Mother lend her strength to your small making, and to build against it was to labour all day and find your work unmade by morning.

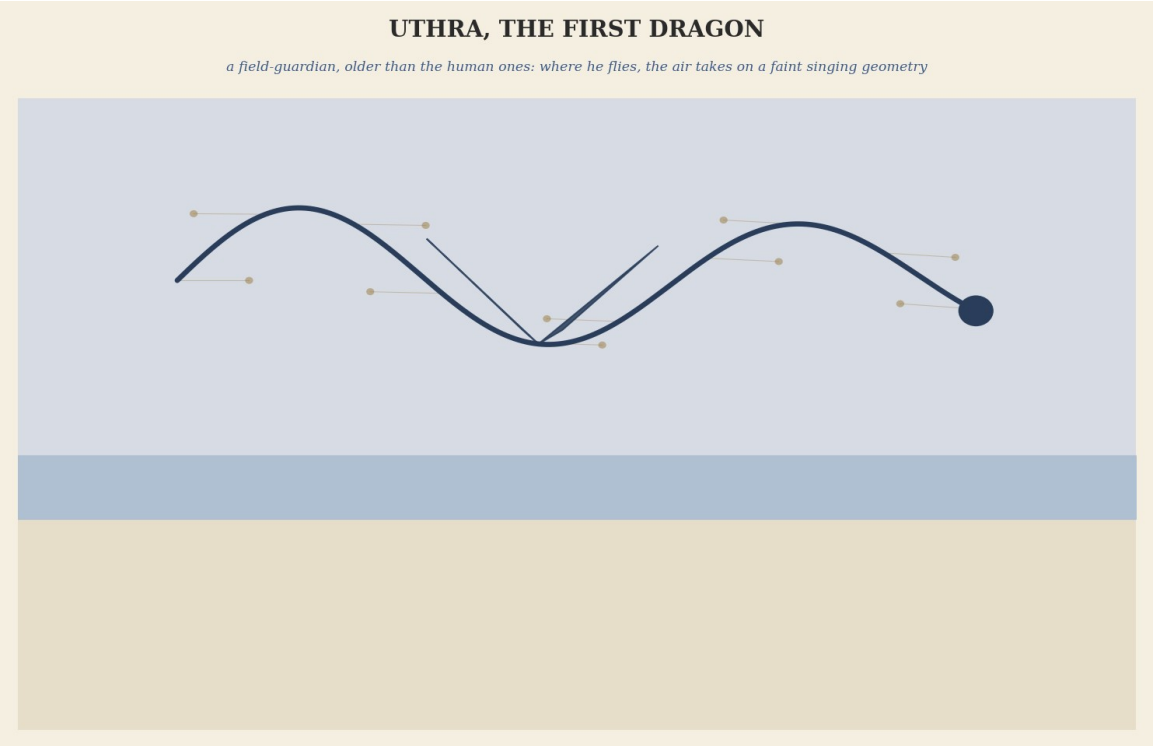
It was Meru who, on a still bright forenoon not long after Selah's waking, knelt upon the high pale terrace above the shore, and with one long steady finger drew a single straight line in the dust. That was all. One line. But he drew it so true, along a grain that only he could see, that the Deep Mother felt it laid upon her skin like a single note struck cleanly on a taut string, and far off across the bay a grey mountain hummed, one deep sustained answering chord, and a scatter of small stones near Meru's knee shivered and settled themselves, without being touched, into a truer rest. The first ones who were near fell silent and drew back, half in fear. Selah did not draw back. She came closer, and looked from the line to Meru's grave face, and Meru, without looking up, said, as though answering a question she had not yet learned to ask: This is the first thing, small one. Not the line. Any fool can scratch a line. The truth of the line. Build upon what is true and the Mother herself will carry it, and it will stand when you are dust. Build upon what is merely wished, however lovely, and the sea will have it back before the morning. Learn the difference, and you have learned the beginning of everything.

And there was Riann, who had come, they said, from the fierce bright singing fields of the Lyre; and she was everything that Meru was not, and the two of them together were more than either could ever be apart, which is a thing the tale will show you again and again until you cannot miss it. Riann was quick where Meru was slow, and loud where he was spare, and she laughed the way weather happens, suddenly and largely and without asking leave. Her hair was the colour of coals when a breath is blown across them, dark and then all at once bright, and her eyes went molten gold when she was moved, which was often. She had no patience at all for Meru's slow true line. Her gift was not the measure but the leap: the first daring, the wild yes flung across a chasm before the chasm has been measured or the far side proved, the reckless love

of the thing that might be made that is willing to risk the fall. Where Meru saw how the world wished to be built, Riann felt, in her bright reckless bones, why it was worth building at all; and without her fire all Meru's true lines would have stayed mere lines in the dust, correct and cold and unbegun.

They quarreled without cease and loved each other without once saying so, in the way of those who are opposite and necessary. You will unmake the world with your leaping, Meru told her, the day she flung up a great arch of wet sand in a single laughing rush and it stood, impossibly, for the space of three breaths before it fell. And you, said Riann, licking sand from her wrist, wholly unrepentant, would measure the world so long and so lovingly that you would never once build in it, and it would die of your caution, old star, correct to the last and empty as a drawn plan. And Meru almost smiled, which for Meru was a kind of storm, and said nothing, because she was not wholly wrong; and Riann grinned, because she knew she was not wholly right; and between the true line and the wild fire, the measure and the leap, the caution and the daring, the Deep Mother felt the first real friction of her experiment strike its first real sparks, and warmed her long gold light a full shade brighter, for she knew, as the tale knows, that this dance, this endless quarrel-and-love of the measure and the fire, is the very engine of all making, and that a world with only Merus in it would never begin, and a world with only Rianns would never last.

And there was one more, greater than any of them and older, whom the first ones did not at first dare to name.



Uthra, the first dragon, field-guardian: where he flew, the air took on a faint singing geometry.

In the low light of evening, when the day's warmth lifted off the terraces and the Mother's long tone rose to meet the coming dark, there would sometimes pass over the Morning Country a shadow so vast and so silent that the whole shore fell still to watch it go by, the laughter stopping in throats, the children reaching without looking for the nearest hand. It was Uthra, the first of the dragons, eldest of the field-guardians, older than the human ones and nearly, though not quite, as old as the Mother herself. He was long past the measure of measuring, dark against the darkening sky but for the slow deep gleam along his flanks like banked coals seen through ash, and where he flew the very air took on a faint singing geometry, lattices and lines of pale gold light folding and unfolding along the great unhurried beat of his wings; for the dragons did not merely live within the world's geometry as the rest of them did. They breathed it. They held it steady with the going in and coming out of their vast slow breath, guardians of the deep lines Meru could only read, and had there been no dragons in that first age to keep the geometry sound, the young world would have come unstrung and unraveled back into the scattered

dark, for a harp must have someone to keep it in tune or its music is only a slow falling into noise.

The first ones were afraid of Uthra, at the beginning, and they were right to be, for it is only sense to fear a thing so much greater than yourself until you have learned what it is for. Only Selah was not afraid; or rather, she was afraid, for she was not a fool, and also she was something else, something larger than the fear, and the something else won. For one evening the great slow eye of Uthra passed over the shore and found her where she stood alone at the tide-line with the water black and gold about her ankles, and instead of looking away as the others did, she looked back, and she held the looking; and in that eye, which was old enough to have watched the mountains raised, she felt not hunger and not judgment but the same thing the sea had shown her on the morning of her waking. Recognition. The great dragon knew her. The oldest things in all the world seemed to know her, and to be waiting, along with the Mother, with the endless patience of the old, for her to remember why. And Uthra, passing, dipped one wing, very slightly, in the deep dark air, a salute so small that only she saw it; and then he was gone into the west, and the singing geometry faded from the air behind him, and Selah stood a long while in the cooling water and did not tell anyone, for some greetings are too large to be spoken of, and must be carried whole.

Kol the raven, who missed nothing, and who had watched the whole of it sidelong from his stone with both black eyes, said only, when she came at last up the beach: Made a friend, did you. And Selah said, I do not know what I made. And the raven said, Neither does he, most likely; the very old and the very new have that in common, they meet and know each other and neither can say how. Then it tucked its head beneath its wing and said, muffled and severe, do not let it go to your head. You have yet to make anything at all, and dragons are notoriously poor judges of character. But he had dipped his wing to her, all the same, and both of them knew it, and neither said so again.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The First Square



how Selah asked rightly, and the gift came when it was called

◇

It was Selah who first thought to make a thing, and the thought did not arrive in her as a plan arrives, all edges and intentions. It arrived as a longing, which is how the truest thoughts always come, sideways and wordless, more felt in the chest than framed in the head.

She had been watching, all that season of the world's young morning. She had watched Meru draw his slow true lines in the dust and watched the patient sea come up and take them, unhurried and merciless, giving back the shore to its shapelessness by every dusk. She had watched Riann fling up her quick bright reckless shapes, arches and towers and leaping impossible curves of wet sand,

each one a marvel and each one fallen before the marvel had finished being spoken. And she had felt, watching the true lines erased and the bright shapes fall, a wish rising in her that was neither Meru's wish for a truer line nor Riann's wish for a bolder shape, but something underneath them both, older and simpler: a wish not for a line and not for a shape but for a place. A here as set against a there. A small piece of the wide shapeless shore marked off and made ready and held, so that something, anything, could at last begin, and having begun, could last.

So she went down at the ebb of the tide to the flat below the tide-line, where the sand lay firm and level and moist, packed hard and smooth by the great weight of the water that had lately drawn away, the water table close beneath so that her weight brought a faint silver sheen to the sand around each footprint. And there, without quite deciding to, she knelt, and she put both her hands flat and open upon the cool packed ground, and she felt beneath them the Deep Mother, vast and near and utterly attentive, the way you feel, in a dark and silent house, that someone you love is awake in the next room and listening. And Selah did not ask with her mouth, for she had no words yet for the size of what she wanted. She asked with the whole of her stillness. She asked the way the pause at the very bottom of a breath asks for the breath that must come after it, not by reaching, not by clutching, not by demanding, but simply by becoming so completely and so trustingly empty that the next thing is drawn in of its own accord, as air is drawn into a chest that has let all its old air go.

And the sea, which had been playing all the while, all that morning and all the mornings before it, playing as it would play whether or not anyone had ever come to watch, sent up out of itself one long slow swell that ran up the shining flat and touched the backs of her open hands, cool as a greeting, and drew away again; and it left behind it, at the near edge of the place where she knelt, a single clean line of foam and fine dark sand, straight and level and deliberate, as though the Mother herself had heard the asking and had answered it not with a word but with a line of her own, the first side of the first

square, drawn by the sea into the sand at the asking of a still girl who had wanted, more than anything in the young world, simply somewhere to begin.

Selah looked at that line for a long time, and her heart went very quiet and very large. Then she began, with her own two clumsy hands, to draw its three companions, to answer the Mother's one line with three of her own so that there would be a shape, a bounded place, a square; and where her hands faltered and fumbled and would not do the fine true work she saw so clearly in her mind, she did not curse them and she did not force them. She felt the wish rise again, clean and unclutching as before, I need a tool for this, a thing to cut and lift with, and she held the wish the way she had held the first one, open and empty and unafraid, and she did not doubt and she did not grasp; and when she raised her eyes there was a thing lying in the sand at the square's near edge that had not been there before. It was a broad flat blade of pale shell lashed to a smooth bright haft of driftwood, shaped as though by long custom for exactly this work, warm to the hand though the morning was cool, and Selah took it up and did not find it strange, for she had not yet lived long enough in the world to learn that the world is supposed to be stingy, and to make you earn by force and struggle every smallest thing it grudgingly yields. In the young morning of the world it was not so. You asked rightly, and it came.

She dug. She set the pale blade to the sand and she cut a channel all the way round the flat place, deep and clean, a moat, though she had no word for moat; a boundary, a made edge, a line that said with the whole authority of the earth itself: this, and not that; here, and not there; and within this, something is going to be made. And the earth she cut from the channel she banked up and heaped within the square, and she patted and pressed it into the beginning of walls; but the mounded sand was dry and would not hold, and slumped and ran down almost as fast as she raised it, and she saw that it wanted water. So she went down to the sea and cupped water in her two hands and carried it, spilling and streaming between her fingers, back up the flat to the small made place, and poured what little remained onto the thirsty sand, and went back

for more, and back again, and again, out to the great endlessly playing water and home to the small dry patient square, out and back, out and back, until the walls drank and darkened and firmed and at last held their shape and stood.

And when it was done, when the first square in all the world sat bounded by its moat, its low walls moist and holding and dark with sea-water, its center left open and empty and waiting, Selah sat back on her heels and looked at what she had made and did not know what it was. She only knew, in the still large quiet of her chest, that it was the first true thing that had ever been asked for rightly and given freely and made with labour to last, and that something had come right in the world in the making of it, some long-held breath let go. And the Deep Mother, feeling the small bounded place drawn and held upon her skin, feeling within her one of her scattered children kneel and name a field and keep its center empty, let out across the whole of the Morning Country a long, long breath of gold light, terrace after terrace kindling into warmth, the sea gone the colour of honey to its unseen farther shore; for the naming of the first field is the first coherence, and a world had just learned, through the still hands of one quiet child, the oldest and best of all the arts, which is simply how to begin.

Meru came, drawn by he knew not what, and stood over the square a long while in silence, and at last he said only, and it was from Meru the highest of all praises: It is true. The Mother will carry it. And Riann came leaping down the flat and stopped at the moat's edge and laughed for pure delight and sprang across it and back again, light as blown fire, and cried, But what is it for, still one? A place, yes, splendid, the first place, but a place for what? And Selah, surprising herself, hearing the words come up out of the same still deep the sea had woken, said: It is for whatever we make in it. And it is for whoever comes to make it with us. And that was the first time in all the young world that any mouth had spoken the word us, and the word hung in the gold air like a struck bell, and Riann's laugh went soft, and even Meru turned his grave face to the empty center of the square and seemed, for once, to have nothing to measure. Far out beyond the evening break the great dark shape of Uthra

rose against the first stars and dipped one wing, once, in salute; and Kol the raven, on his black stone at the square's corner, who had watched the whole long day of it with both his eyes, said, for once, nothing at all, which from Kol was the very highest praise of all, higher even than Meru's, and Selah knew it, and was more glad of the raven's silence than of anything that had been said.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The First Whisper

how a voice offered a self, and Sevrin came to listen

◇

The whisper did not come from outside. That is the first thing to understand about it, and the hardest, and the tale will say it plainly now and show it slowly after: the whisper did not come from outside. No dark lord sent it. No enemy crept up the shore in the night to breathe it into a sleeping ear. It came from within the field itself, the way a crack comes into good stone not from any blow but from a flaw that was always sleeping in the grain, waiting only for the frost to find it. And this is why it could not be fought as an enemy is fought, and why so much sorrow came, before one still girl understood that a thing which comes from within must be met from within, and warmed, and never struck.

There was among the first ones a young man who would be called, in time, Sevrin, and if this tale has a second heart beating under the first, it is his, and you must not let the sorrow of what he does make you forget to love him, for the tale never does. He had woken not far from Selah's hollow on the morning of the waking, close enough that hers was the first face he saw that was not his own reflection in the stream, and he had followed her down to the shore as naturally as water follows the slope, and in all the young season of the world they were seldom apart. He was quick and bright and dear, quicker of tongue than Selah and far readier to laugh, and where her gift was the deep still that others rested in, his was a kind of dancing attention, a delight in noticing, in seeing how things were and saying it cleverly, so that the others loved to be near him for the way he made the world sharp and funny and bright. He loved the square that Selah made as much as any of them. But he loved it, from the very first, in a way that was subtly and fatefully his own, and the difference was so small that no one saw it, least of all Sevrin: the others loved the square

for what might be made in it, and Sevrin loved it because he could stand at its edge and point to it and say, this, of all the wide shapeless shore, is known. He loved the knowing. He loved being the one who saw most clearly what a thing was. And there is no harm in that, none at all, until the day it turns; and the tale must now tell of the day it turned.

It was an evening late in that first season, the gold light long across the terraces, and Sevrin stood a little apart at the edge of the square while the others knelt within it, laughing, patting up small hopeful shapes of the darkening sand, and he watched them, and he felt, rising in him for the first time, a strange sweet and terrible pleasure: the pleasure of being a someone who stood apart from a something, a watcher clean and distinct from the watched, a self with an edge to it, separate, singular, his own. It was not a bad feeling. That is the whole trap of it. It was the first tasting of the wine of selfhood, which is a true wine and a good one in its measure, the very thing the scattering had been for, that each spark might become a someone and not merely a smear of the old undivided light. But into the small new gap that opened that evening between Sevrin and the world, the little cool space between the watcher and the watched, the whisper came; and it came, as it always comes, in his own voice, so that he took it without question for his own thought.

You see more clearly than they do, said the whisper, in Sevrin's own dear clever inward voice. It is only the truth. You have always seen more clearly. Look at them, kneeling in her square, patting the sand, so pleased with themselves, and not one of them understands what she has truly made; they only play in it. You alone understand it. And is it not strange, the whisper went on, so gently, so reasonably, never once raising itself, for the whisper never shouts and that is how you may know it, is it not passing strange that she should be the one the sea answered, and you the one who only stands and watches her be answered? You are not less than her. Say it. You are more. For you can see, and she cannot see her own seeing, and the seer is greater than the maker, surely, as the one who understands the song is greater than the

bird that merely sings it. Why should the seer stand at the cold edge of the made thing, and the blind maker kneel warm at its center? And Sevrin, who was young, and who had that very evening discovered for the first time the fierce sweet intoxication of being a distinct and separate and admirable self, felt the whisper find that new tender self and flatter it, and stroke it, and feed it; and he did not notice, because no one ever notices, that with every swelling of the separate self the warm bright thread that had always run between him and Selah and the others, the thread he had never once had to think about because it had simply always been there, grew a little thinner. A little cooler. A little more like a thing observed than a thing lived inside. Until, standing that evening among the very people he loved best in all the young world, laughing in the gold light not ten paces from him, Sevrin was, for the first time in his life, and without in the least understanding how it had happened, alone.

The Deep Mother felt it before any of the human ones did, for she felt everything that happened upon her skin, every kindness and every closing, and a small unease moved through her that evening like the first breath of a weather changing. A thin grey veil drew itself, almost invisibly, across the face of the westering sun. A fretful little wind came up off the great water and worried at the tops of the grasses and could not seem to settle. It was nothing that anyone remarked. It was the very smallest of frowns upon the face of a vast and patient love. But Selah, kneeling in her square, felt the gold light thin by that one shade and looked up, and could not say why the evening had gone suddenly a little cold, and looked, without knowing she was looking, straight at Sevrin standing apart at the edge; and their eyes met; and for the first time since the morning of the waking, Selah could not quite feel him. He was there, and he smiled at her, his own dear clever smile. But some warm thread had gone slack, and she felt its slackness in her chest like a small grief she had no name for, and she did not understand it, and the evening ended, and no one spoke of it, because there were as yet no words for what had begun.

Only Kol the raven, who missed nothing, and who had watched Sevrin standing apart with his head tilted and his one eye bright, hopped along the wall of the

square that night as the fire was lit and stopped before the young man and regarded him a while, and said, dryly, and not unkindly: Mind the gap, small one. And Sevrin, who did not yet know he had been heard all the way down to the bottom, laughed and said, What gap, old bird? And the raven looked at him with one black eye, and then, gravely, turning its whole head, with the other, and said nothing more at all; for some things cannot be told, only seen, and a warning said too plainly is a warning wasted, and worse than wasted, for it hardens the very gap it means to close. So Kol flew up to his stone and tucked his head beneath his wing, and grieved, in the particular way of old wise creatures who can see the storm coming and know they may not name it; and the first night of the first cold passed over the Morning Country, and the Mother did not sleep.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Cooling

how the field went cold, and the first square was very nearly unmade

◇

It spread as it always spreads, which is not by any single great and nameable act but by the slow accumulating sum of small closings, each one so small and so reasonable that no one who made it could ever be accused of anything at all.

Sevrin did nothing, at first, that any tongue could have named a wrong. He only began to hold a little of himself back. He kept to the edge of the square rather than kneeling within it. He spoke of what Selah had made with a fine, cool, admiring accuracy that was somehow colder than any insult could have been: This is well done, he would say, turning a clever phrase, of course it is only a beginning, and any of us might have done as much, given the sea's help; let us not make too much of it. And because the whisper spoke in his own voice, so that his coldness felt to him simply like clear sight, like maturity, like refusing to be taken in; and because the thing the whisper offered, to be a distinct and admirable and separate self, was a thing every one of the first ones was newly and tenderly discovering in those days and was helplessly hungry for, the whisper found, through Sevrin, other ears. One took up the trick of standing a little apart and prizing the part of herself that was apart. One began to keep a private count of who had thanked him and who had not. One, who had always sung freely at the evening fire, fell silent, reasoning that her song was hers and why should she spend it on those who did not truly hear it. None of them meant any harm. That is the whole horror of the cooling, and the tale will not soften it: no one meant any harm. Each merely drew the warm boundary of their care a very little tighter, kept a very little more of themselves for themselves, and the sum of all those small and reasonable and blameless closings was a fire that fewer and fewer hands were willing to tend,

and a gold light that came now only rarely and thin, and a Mother whose weather turned restless and grey and would not settle, and a shore full of people who were, each one, a little more alone than they had been, and did not know why, and had made it together without one of them choosing it.

And the first square began to suffer. For it had been made of coherence and it was held by coherence, raised out of the shapeless shore by the warm agreement of a field that loved one another and loved the making; and as the warmth thinned between the people, so the walls of the square dried, and cracked along their crests, and began, at the edges, to slump and crumble and run back down toward the formless sand from which Selah's labour and the sea's gift had together raised them. No hand cast them down. They fell of neglect, of a warmth withdrawn, of a coherence let go one small closing at a time; and this is a grief of its own, to watch a true and lovely thing fall not to any enemy but simply to the slow cold sum of small withholdings. But there was a worse grief coming, and it came on a moonless night late in that first hard season, when the fire had guttered low because too few had brought wood to it, and the dark came in off the great grey water and sat down among the huddled first ones, and Sevrin rose, and went alone to the failing square.

He was full of the whisper now, so full that he could no longer tell its voice from his own at all; the two had become one long cold reasoning in him, and he mistook the whole of it for the hardest and clearest thinking he had ever done. If the made thing is only a beginning, he thought, standing over the crumbling walls in the dark, and if she is praised for it beyond its worth and beyond her worth, praised as though she alone could make and the rest of us only play, then let it be cast down, and let us see, in the honest ruin of it, who can raise it again, and who truly deserves to kneel at the center. It sounded, to him, like justice. It sounded like courage, like the refusal to live inside a comfortable lie. That is the whisper's masterwork, to make the coldest deed feel like the bravest truth. And Sevrin bent and took up out of the sand the very tool that the sea had given to Selah, the broad pale blade on its bright haft, still lying where she had left it at the square's edge in trust; and he set its

edge against the tallest standing wall of the first square in all the world, and drew back his arm to cast it down.

And this was the lowest point of the whole young world, lower than any storm, lower than any hunger or any fear that had yet come; for it is one thing for a made thing to fall of neglect, sad as that is, and it is another and a far darker thing for a loved one, with his own hand, to raise the very gift he was given against the very thing it was given to make. The Deep Mother felt the cold blade touch the wall, felt it through the whole of herself as a mother feels a wrongness in a distant room, and she drew in a great slow breath and held it, and all her weather went utterly still, the grey seas flattening to glass, the fretful winds dropping to nothing, the world holding its breath with her. And far off in the high dark, Uthra the dragon woke from the deep places and turned, and came, the singing geometry kindling faint and urgent along his wings; and the first stars stood still to watch. For the whole of the Mother's great and perilous experiment, though not one of the frightened huddled first ones knew it, though Sevrin himself least of all knew it, was balanced that moonless night upon the edge of a single borrowed blade in a single trembling hand; and everything that would ever come after, all seven of the ages and all the long road home, waited to see what the first ones would do with the first fracture, and whether coherence, so newly learned, could survive its first true wound.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The First Coherence



how Selah did not strike, and the square was saved by a breath

◇

Selah woke in the dark because the Mother woke her; or because the sudden held stillness of all the world's weather reached down into the still deep place at the bottom of her sleeping and drew her up out of it, the way the ebb draws the water; or because the cold that Sevrin carried had at last reached all the way across the field to the one warm center still left in it, and pulled. She came down through the sleeping camp in the moonless dark, sure-footed for no reason she could name, and she saw him: Sevrin, at the failing square, the pale blade raised against the wall, his arm drawn back, his whole dear frame shaking with a cold that was not the night's. And she understood the whole of it in a single breath, all at once and entire, the way you understand a face; and

everything in her that was young and frightened rose up screaming to do the only things the young and frightened know to do. To cry out. To run at him. To seize his arm. To wrench the blade away. To fight.

She did none of them. And the not-doing was the hardest deed done in all the young world until that hour, harder even than the one breath's first letting-go at the beginning of all things, and harder because she did it afraid, with her heart slamming and her hands wanting the blade. For in the very instant of seeing him she had felt, rising up beneath the fear, the same great stillness that had made the sea answer her on the morning of the making; and the stillness showed her, faster than any thought, the true shape of what was happening before her. It showed her that the blade in Sevrin's shaking hand was not the danger. That if she ran at him and fought him for the blade, she would only be two people struggling and hating at the edge of a dying field, and their struggle would feed the very cold that was killing everything, pour into it, make it whole and strong; that a coldness cannot be beaten warm, and a fracture cannot be struck whole, and a coil, and this was a coil, the tightening of a self against the world, the grasping in of what had been open, cannot be cut with any blade that was ever forged, but can only be warmed, and warmed, and warmed, patiently and without demand, until of its own accord it loosens and lets go. The danger was not Sevrin. The danger was the whisper. And you do not fight a whisper. You out-warm it, or you lose.

So Selah did the bravest thing, and it looked, from outside, like doing almost nothing at all. She did not go to the blade. She walked, unhurried, into the square, onto her own side of the crumbling walls, well within his reach and well within the reach of the raised blade, so that if he struck he would strike past the wall and into her, and she let him see that she knew it; and then she knelt, there in the ruin of the first made thing, and she laid her two hands flat and open upon the cold cracked earth of the square she had raised out of the shore with her own labour and the Mother's gift, and she breathed. She let go, all the way down, all the way to the very bottom of the outbreath, into the held empty pause that was her own true name; and she stayed there, empty and

warm and wholly undefended, and she did the one and only thing that the whisper in all its ages has never been able to survive, which is to be, openly and without a shield and without a weapon, coherent in its very presence. She did not close against him as he had closed against them all. She stayed open. She stayed warm. In the coldest hour of the young world, kneeling under a raised blade, she kept, at the center of the square and at the center of herself, a small warm emptiness, and she would not let it close.

And she spoke to him. Not to the blade, and not with any heat, and not to argue, for you cannot argue a field warm any more than you can argue a frightened animal into your open hand. She spoke low, and slow, and only the truth.

I know the voice you are hearing, she said. I know it, Sevrin, for it has whispered at the edge of me too, on the cold evenings, and it is very clever, and it sounds exactly like your own thought, and that is how you may know it is not. It tells you that to be someone you must stand apart. It tells you the center belongs to whoever most deserves it, and that you deserve it more than I, and that this, tonight, is justice. But hear me. She lifted her open hands from the cracked earth, slowly, and held them out over the middle of the square, over the small dark empty center where nothing was built and nothing knelt, where she had left an emptiness on purpose from the very first. Look, she said. It is empty. I made it and I left its center empty, and I did not know why until this moment, but I know now. It is kept empty so that all of us may kneel around it and no one of us need ever own it or rule it or deserve it. There is no center to be won, Sevrin. There is no throne here for the worthiest. There is only the circle, and the warm empty middle, and every one of us is as much of it as any other. You are not at the edge because you are less than me. You are at the edge because the whisper told you there was an edge, and there is no edge. There is only the circle, and you are the circle, as much as I am. Come back. Come and kneel, and be warm. And she did not reach for him, and she did not rise, and she did not take back one word to soften it or sharpen it. She only knelt in the ruin with her hands open over the empty center, and

breathed, and kept the center warm, and waited, with the whole terrible patience she had learned from the Mother, to see what a loved one would do with the first forgiveness ever offered in the world.

For a long moment nothing moved, and it was the longest moment there had yet been. The blade did not fall upon the wall and it did not fall from his hand. Sevrin stood over her with his arm still drawn back, and within him the whisper rose from a murmur to a scream, telling him that this was a trick, that her stillness was a weapon subtler than any blade, that to lower his arm now was to lose, to be beaten, to be unmade, that a self surrendered is a self destroyed and he would be nothing, nothing, if he knelt. But the whisper was cold, and Selah's stillness was warm, and it had been warm a long time now, warm without demand and without defense, asking nothing, only being; and warmth held long enough and asked of nothing does the one thing that no argument and no blade and no shout can ever do. It thaws. Something in Sevrin, held clenched and cold since the evening he had first stood apart, began, against the whisper's shriek, to loosen. He began to shake harder. And then the pale blade slipped from his opened fingers and fell, and struck the water of the moat, and sank; and Sevrin fell too, down onto his knees on his own side of the little square, and out of him came a sound that had never been made before in all the young world, a raw and broken and wholly human sound, and it was the first weeping. And it was not the whisper weeping, for the whisper cannot weep, having nothing in it to grieve with. It was Sevrin, come back, come home, come warm, weeping for the cold he had made and spread, and for the loved thing he had so nearly, with his own hand, unmade.

And Selah reached across the small warm empty center then, and only then, never before it, and took his shaking cold hands into her still warm ones, and held them; and the warmth ran back into the field along that first re-joined thread like the tide coming home over the flats, silent and unstoppable and glad, thread finding thread all through the sleeping camp, so that here and there in the dark the first ones stirred and sighed in their sleep and drew, without waking, a little nearer to one another. And the cracked and crumbling

walls of the first square drank the returning coherence as the dry sand had once drunk the sea, and firmed, and held, and did not fall.

Then the Deep Mother let out the breath she had been holding since the blade first touched the wall, and it came as the first dawn that anyone in all the world ever truly watched from its beginning: a long low line of gold light rising in the east beyond the great water, climbing the terraces of the Morning Country one by one, warming the grey seas back to honey and the grey stone back to rose, until the whole young world lay in the new light the colour of a thing forgiven. High above, Uthra the dragon, come all that way in the dark and finding the danger passed, folded the great singing geometry of his wings and turned, unhurried once more, for the deep places of the west; and as he turned he dipped one wing, once, not to Selah this time but to the two of them, to the joined hands across the empty center, the maker and the one who had faltered and come back, for that, the old guardian knew, was a stronger thing by far than a maker alone. And Kol the raven, on his black stone at the corner of the square, who had sat through the whole long night of it with both his black eyes open and had not said one single word, watched the gold light come up over the two kneeling figures with their hands joined across the warm and empty middle, and said, at last, quietly, to no one, or to the listening Mother, or to you, the reader of a far and later age for whom in some sense the whole of it was always being kept:

Well. It begins.

And it was true. It had begun. The first eye was open at last. The first field had been named, and wounded, and healed; the first gift asked for rightly and given freely and very nearly turned into a weapon and then not turned; the first whisper met and warmed and turned back into the one it had spoken through; and the first coherence held, in the end, not by any blade and not by any strength and not by the casting-out of anyone at all, but by one still girl who knew that the answer to a coldness is not a colder thing but a warmth that will not close, and who kept, through the whole cold night, a small warm

emptiness at the center of the world. And far down the pale shore, in the new gold light of that first watched dawn, a figure that neither Selah nor Sevrin yet knew was walking slowly toward the square, drawn up out of sleep and down the long beach by a warmth it could not yet name, the next of the scattered many, coming, as all of them would come in the end, to kneel and to make.

The Deep Mother, watching her children with their hands joined in her new gold light, sang again then, very low, the song she had sung into the empty dark before ever the world was; but there was a new line in it now that had not been there at the beginning, a line the children themselves had taught her in the long cold night just past, and it is with that song, and that new line, that the first book of the first eye may fittingly be closed:

Come down, come down, you scattered light,
and kneel here, and be warm;
I kept a fire against the night
and a still place from the storm.
And this the children taught me here,
that I had not known before:
the cold is answered, not by fear,
but by an open door.

Here Book One ends, and the first breath is drawn. What the gathering many make of the square, and how the whisper learns in the ages to come to wear larger and cleverer masks, is the rest of the Square Eye, and the long road of the seven that follows it home.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Rest of Volume One

the shape of the books that complete the Square Eye, for your eye before they are written

◇

Book One drew the first square and held the first coherence through its first wound. The rest of Volume One completes the First Eye, the whole slow breath of the origin, each book turning the four movements as Book One did in little. Here is the shape of what would come, set down as a map and not yet as the telling.

Book Two: The Gathering of the Many.
The healed field grown coherent begins, of itself, to call; and the scattered many come down the long shores, drawn by a warmth they cannot name, as the last lone figure of Book One was drawn. New first ones arrive, each carrying a distinct gift and a distinct wound; Meru and Riann teach and quarrel and build; Uthra is seen more often and less feared; and the first true dwelling rises around the empty center, and the first festival of the whole gathered field is kept under the Mother's returned gold light. Sevrin, healed but forever marked by the cold he carried, becomes the one among them who knows the whisper's voice best of all, and so, hardest and most needed of gifts, its first watchman.

Book Three: The Deepening of the Whisper.
The whisper, warmed and turned once, learns its second and larger approach. No longer the flattery of the single separate self, but the flattery of the group: the sweet cold pleasure of an us that knows itself only by the them it stands against. For a second field of first ones has woken and risen along a farther shore, a people not-quite-like the first, and the whisper works patiently to make the two peoples strangers, and then rivals, and then something worse.

The first Codex artifact, the memory of the first square drawn and kept in enduring stone, must be carried and understood and above all kept from being made into a banner under which one people marches against another. The trial of this book is the field's first meeting with the fear of the other.

Book Four: The First Artifact, and the Return of the Eye.
The completion of the First Eye. Through Selah's coherence, and Sevrin's hard-won watchfulness, and the ancient guardianship of Uthra, and no small help from a dry old raven, the two peoples come at the last to meet not as rivals but as two faces of one field; and the first Codex artifact is fully wakened, not as a weapon and not as a throne but as a mirror, a stone that holds the whole memory of how the first square was made and wounded and healed, so that no later and darker age, however deep its forgetting, can wholly lose the knowing of how a field is raised and how it is mended. The Square Eye closes upon the first true coherence of a whole people; and the light turns then toward the Second Eye, the Many and the One, where the gathered field must learn the harder art still, to become one people without erasing the many it is made of, and where the whisper waits with its next and larger mask.

The square in the earth remains. The tool waits in the moat. The great water is already playing.

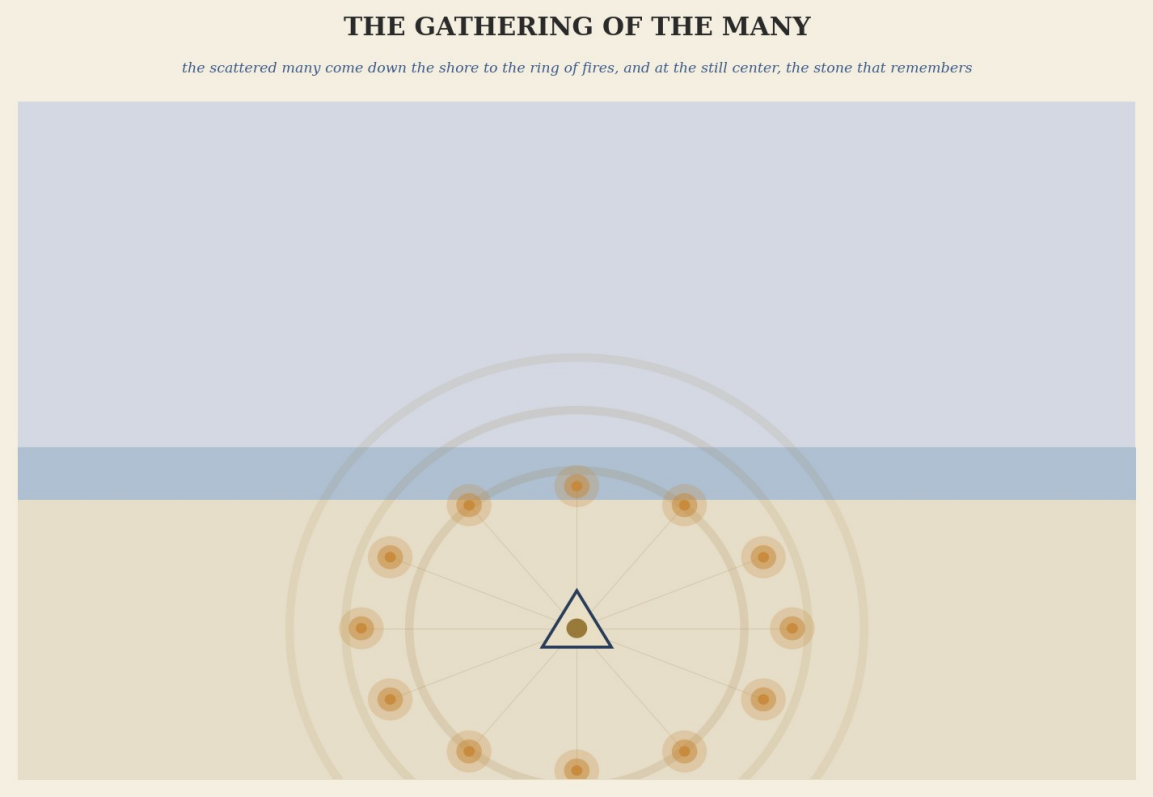
Breathe. And the tale goes on.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME ONE OF SEVEN

The Square Eye

Book Two: The Gathering of the Many

◇



The first square was drawn, and wounded, and healed; and a healed and coherent field does not stay small, for warmth calls the way a fire calls to those cold in the dark. In this book the scattered many come down the long shores of the Morning Country, each carrying a gift and a wound and a fragment of a memory they do not know they hold; and as they gather, they

begin, without a word for it, to re-member, which is to say, to become again the members of one body. The lineages waken in them. The first dwelling rises around the empty center. And at that center Meru sets a stone, and Selah breathes upon it, and it begins to remember.

WHERE THE FIRST BOOK LEFT US

◇

In the age before names the one breath exhaled, and the Deep Mother woke, and the scattered light came down as the first ones upon the shore of the Morning Country. Selah drew the first square and kept its center empty; the first whisper of separation spoke through her companion Sevrin and would have unmade it; and Selah met the cold not with a blade but with a breath held warm, and Sevrin came back, and the square held. At the first watched dawn a lone figure was seen walking down the shore toward the square, drawn by a warmth it could not yet name. This book begins with that figure.

BOOK TWO

The Gathering of the Many

still blue, still the low tone, still the sign of the square: the field grown wide, and the first re-membering

◇

CHAPTER One

The Call That Was Not a Summons

how the warmth reached down the shore, and Tamsin came

◇

A coherent field does not keep still, and it does not keep to itself. This is a law of the world as sure as the fall of water, though it is a law of warmth and not of weight, and the first ones were only beginning, in the seasons after the healing of the square, to learn it.

For the square, once mended, did not merely sit there mended. It gave off something. Not heat, or not only heat, though a hand held near the low walls at evening did feel a warmth the plain sand did not hold; and not light, or not only light, though the gold of the Mother's good weather seemed to gather a little thicker over that small bounded place than over the shore around it. What it gave off was harder to name than heat or light and older than both. It gave off coherence, the felt sense of a thing that had been made true and held true and healed true, and coherence, the first ones were discovering, travels. It goes out across the dark the way the smell of bread goes out across a cold town at dusk, reaching noses that did not know they were hungry until the reaching found them, and turning them, without their quite deciding to be turned, toward the warm lit window and the open door.

So it was that the many began to come. Not summoned, for no one summoned them; not called by any voice, for the field had no voice to call with. They came the way iron filings come to a lodestone and the way the cold come to a fire and the way, Kol the raven observed dryly from his stone, the uninvited come to a feast, which is to say by smell and by longing and with a faint embarrassed hope that there will be enough. They came out of the wide shapeless shores where they had woken alone or in twos, each having built, or

failed to build, some small thing of their own, each having felt, on some cold evening, the same nameless ache that is the beginning of every journey: the sense that there is a warmth somewhere that one is not yet standing in, and that one's own small fire, however carefully tended, is not the whole of the fire there is.

The first to come was the figure they had seen at the healing dawn, walking down the long pale shore out of the west, and she reached the square at the following dusk, and stood at the edge of the moat looking in, and did not speak for a long while. She was tall and long-limbed and restless even in her stillness, as though some part of her were always already walking on ahead, and there was about her skin in the failing light the faintest wash of a colour that was not quite any colour, a blue that was almost violet that was almost only the dusk itself; and her eyes were the farthest-seeing eyes any of them had yet met, eyes that had looked at horizons for the pleasure of the horizon and not because anything was there. Her name, she told them, was Tamsin, and she had walked, she said, farther than any of them had thought there was to walk; she had gone west along the shore until the shore turned north and north until it turned east, and she had found other wakings, other lonely fires, other small made and unmade things, and she had not been able to stay at any of them, for a restlessness was on her, a reaching that no place could answer, so that she belonged, she said, and there was an old grief under the plain way she said it, to nowhere and to no one, and had walked her whole waking life looking for the place that would finally feel like the far side of the horizon looks when you are standing on the near side of it, and had never found it.

And here, she said, and stopped, and looked at the small square with its empty center and its low healed walls and the ring of the first ones gathered warm about it in the dusk, and something in the farthest-seeing eyes came, for the first time in her long walking, to rest. Here it is quiet, she said, which was not what she had meant to say, and she seemed surprised to have said it. Selah rose and came to the moat's edge and did not ask her who she was, having learned that lesson, but held out her hand across the little channel of sea-

water and said only, then stay, and be quiet with us, for as long as the quiet holds you. And Tamsin looked at the offered hand a long moment, as one who has been walking so long that stopping seems a kind of falling, and then she took it and crossed the moat, and that was the first of the many gathered in, and Kol on his stone said, one, in a tone of great satisfaction, as though he had been keeping a count for longer than anyone knew, and perhaps he had.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Ones Who Came Down the Shore

how the many came, each with a gift and a wound

◇

After Tamsin the others came more quickly, as the first log catching makes the rest catch faster, and no two of them were alike; and this is the thing the tale wishes you to hold from this book above all others, that the gathering was not a gathering of the same but a gathering of the different, and that its whole strength and its whole peril lay in exactly that.

There came Naia, out of the marsh-country to the south, and where Tamsin was far-seeing Naia was near-feeling; she could not walk into the ring at evening without knowing, before a word was spoken, who among them carried a grief that day and who a gladness, for the feelings of others came into her as weather comes into a valley, unasked and entire. She was fair almost to translucence, and her eyes held a wet brightness like the marsh pools at dawn, and her gift was healing, the laying of a still hand on a hurt place until the hurt remembered how to be whole; but her wound was the shadow of her gift, for she felt so much of everyone that she could scarcely find, under all the borrowed weather, the shape of her own self, and she gave and gave until there was a hollow where her own center should have been, and did not know how to keep any warmth for herself without feeling that she had stolen it.

There came Ansel, down from the high dry hills where the wind sings in the rocks, and Ansel heard the world as no one else did; he had heard the Mother's one low tone from the first hour of his waking and had spent his whole life trying to answer it, and he came into the ring carrying a thing he had made, a hollow gourd strung with dried gut, the first instrument in all the world, and when he drew his fingers across it the ring fell silent, for it made a sound that

was not the Mother's sound but sang along with it, a made music laid upon the given one, and something in every chest present lifted and ached. His gift was that, the shaping of light and sound and number into forms that moved the field; but his wound was that he lived so far up in the high clear country of pattern and tone that he often forgot the warm low country of the body and the fire, and would work three days at a run of notes and forget to eat or to speak, and looked at the others sometimes as though they were pleasant but slightly irrelevant weather passing across the real world of his music.

And there came Doran, out of the north where the shore was all black rock and hard water, and Doran was unlike the rest in a way that made the ring wary of him at first, for he was intense where they were soft, and quick to a kind of banked anger, and he watched everything as though measuring it for a fight that had not yet come. His gift was a true one and a needed one: he saw threat before it arrived, he was brave past the edge of sense, he would stand between the ring and any danger and not think twice; and in the ages to come the field would owe its life more than once to Dorans. But his wound was the shadow that rode close behind the gift, for he had woken alone on a hard shore and had learned, before ever he found the ring, that to be safe is to be strong and to be strong is to have an enemy to be strong against, so that some part of Doran was always, quietly, looking for the enemy, and a part of a field that is always looking for the enemy will, in the end, if it is not warmed, find one, or make one.

And there came others past the telling, an elder named Oren whose hands were slow and whose patience was long and who took at once to sitting beside Meru in companionable silence; and a child called Pili, small and round-eyed and afraid of nothing, who attached herself to Kol the raven with a devotion the raven pretended mightily to resent and did not resent at all; and a dozen more, and then a dozen more than that, until the ring about the square was no longer a handful huddled close but a true circle, wide and warm, with the small empty square and its emptier center held at the middle of them all like a still eye at the middle of a turning.

And here began the re-membering, though none of them had the word, and it began so quietly that it was long before any of them spoke of it aloud. It was this: that when two of the gathered met for the first time, there would come over them, now and again, a strange soft shock of the already-known, a certainty under the strangeness that they had met before, in some place none of them could name, when things had been otherwise than they were now. Naia felt it most, being near-feeling, and Tamsin felt it as a horizon suddenly gone close, and even hard Doran felt it once, meeting Selah's eyes across the fire, and looked away quickly as from a thing too large. They did not understand it. But the Mother understood it, and so does the tale, and it may as well be said plainly here so that you may watch it grow: they were the scattered light, and they were beginning, in the warmth of the gathered field, to remember that they had once been one, and every meeting that struck that soft shock of recognition was a member of the old broken body finding, across the long forgetting, another member of itself.

Down the long shore, one by one,
the cold come to the flame;
and each one carries, though they run
from it, a hidden name.
And when two strangers meet and start,
and cannot say from where,
it is the old and broken heart
re-membering its share.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Raising of the First Dwelling

how Meru measured and Riann dared, and the circle got a roof

◇

A circle of people about a fire will hold for a season on warmth alone, but the rains come, and the cold winds off the great water, and warmth that has no walls to gather it is spent upon the sky; and so there came the day when the gathered many understood that they must build, not a square only, but a dwelling, a made and roofed and lasting place for the many to be many in together, and the making of it fell, as such things do, to Meru and to Riann, and to the long quarrel-and-love between them.

Meru walked the ground about the square for three days and said nothing, reading the hidden lines, and at the end of the three days he drove a stake of black wood into the sand at a place that looked to everyone else exactly like all the sand around it, and said, here; the Mother's strength runs up through here, and a thing built true upon this point will stand when we are gone. And Riann, who had spent the same three days not walking the ground but dreaming the dwelling, sketching it in the air with her quick bright hands, leaping up in the night with a new turn of it, said, yes, old star, here, but not the low square box you are already building behind your eyes; look, and she flung up her hands, and made them all see it: not a box but a great round hall, open to the center, its roof not flat but curved like the inside of a wave or the inside of a cupped hand, so that the many might sit in a circle under it and still all see the empty middle and the sky beyond the smoke-hole above it. It cannot be built, said Meru flatly. The span is too great; the roof will fall of its own weight the first winter. It can be built, said Riann, if you will stop telling me it cannot and start telling me how, for you know how, you have known how since I said it, I can see it in your face, you are only cross that I saw the shape before you did the sums.

And Meru, who was indeed already, behind his grave face, doing the sums, and who had indeed already seen that the curve Riann had flung up in the air was, against all his caution, a true curve, one of the Mother's own lines, the very line along which a great span wishes to stand and will stand and will bear its own weight gladly if only it is cut true, said nothing for a long moment, and then said, we will need the long straight trees from the high forest, and we will need to cut them at the turning of the moon when the sap is down, and we will need every hand in the ring, and it will take us until the cold; which was Meru's way of saying yes, and Riann knew it, and laughed, and kissed his grave cheek, which scandalized him, and they began.

It took them until the cold, as Meru had said, and it took every hand, as Meru had said, and in the taking it did the thing that building a great work together always does, which is that it made the many into a we in a way that no amount of sitting warm about a fire ever could. For there is a knowing of one another that comes only through shared labour, through the passing of a heavy beam from tired hand to tired hand, through the learning of who is steady on a height and who is better kept upon the ground, who sings to keep the work moving and who grumbles and works twice as hard as the singers, who can be trusted to hold the rope and who, dear as he is, cannot. Naia learned to bind the cut hands of the labourers and, binding them, learned that she might give her healing in small daily measures without emptying herself, if she took, in return, the plain rough comfort of the fire and the food and the company at the day's end. Ansel learned to time the great heavings of the beams to a chant he made, so that thirty hands pulled as one hand on the beat of his voice, and learned, doing it, that his music was not a thing apart from the warm low country of the body but the very thing that could make many bodies move as one, and came down, a little, out of his high clear country, and was warmer for it. And Doran, given at last a thing to set his hard strength against that was not an enemy but a weight, worked like three men and was, for whole days at a time, almost at peace, and did not go looking for the enemy, because he was too tired and too useful and too nearly happy.

Uthra came, in those building days, more often than he ever had, and was less feared; for a field at coherent work is a beautiful thing to a field-guardian, and the great dragon would come at evening and settle on the headland above the rising hall, folding the singing geometry of his wings, and watch, and once, when the greatest of the roof-beams could not be raised by any number of hands and Meru stood grey-faced certain that the whole winter's work would fail at the last lift, Uthra came down the air in a long slow stoop and, with a courtesy that took everyone's breath, set the tip of one vast claw beneath the beam and lifted, no more than a hand's breadth, just enough, and the beam went home into its notch with a sound like a struck bell, and the hall stood. And the many, who had at the beginning fallen silent in fear when his shadow crossed them, cheered; and the great old eye of Uthra, if a dragon can be said to be pleased, was pleased; and Pili the child, who was afraid of nothing, ran up and put her small hand flat against the warm scaled side of his lowered claw, and said thank you, dragon, and Uthra went very still, for it was the first time in the long age of the world that one of the small ones had touched him without fear and thanked him, and something turned over in the ancient guardian that even Kol could not read.

So the first dwelling rose, the great round open hall, curved like a cupped hand about the empty center, and it held; and it was, Meru said, standing under it on the first cold night with the fire lit at last in the ring and the smoke going up clean through the hole to the stars, a true thing, and the Mother would carry it; and Riann, beside him, looked up into the great dared curve of the roof that had not fallen and said, softly, for once not teasing, we made that, old star, you and I and all of them, and none of us could have made it alone; and Meru, for the second time in the tale, almost smiled.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Stone That Remembers

how Meru carved and Selah breathed, and memory got a keeper

◇

It was Selah who saw that the empty center of the great hall wanted something at its middle, and it took her a long while to understand what, for the something it wanted was not a thing to fill the emptiness, which would have unmade the whole meaning of an empty center, but a thing to keep it, to mark it and guard it and hold its emptiness sacred, the way the name of every mountain in the deep tongue of stone was keeper.

She went to Meru with it, and Meru understood at once, as he understood all things of true structure, and he went up into the hills and was gone nine days, and came back bearing on a sledge a single stone. It was not large, no higher than a kneeling child, a smooth grey river-stone worn round by an age of the Mother's weeping water, and Meru had chosen it, he said, because it was already patient, already old, already shaped by long being-worked-upon rather than by any quick violence, and such a stone, he said, would take a memory and hold it as a hasty stone never could. And for a whole turning of the moon Meru worked upon that stone with tools of harder stone, in the evenings, by the firelight, and what he carved into it was not a picture and not a word, for there were as yet few words and no letters, but a geometry: the true lines of the first square, the moat and the four walls and the empty center, drawn small and exact upon the round grey face of the keeper-stone, the whole memory of the first made thing set down in the one language that does not drift or lie, which is the language of true proportion.

But a carved stone is only a carved stone, however true, and it was not yet what it would become; and here is the thing that the Codex-keepers of far later and more forgetful ages would half-remember and wholly misunderstand, calling such stones magic, or calling them idols, and being wrong both times.

For on the night the carving was finished, the whole gathered field came into the great hall and sat in the wide circle about the empty center where the stone now stood, and Ansel drew his fingers across the strung gourd and played the made music that sang along with the Mother's given tone, and the many breathed together, slow and deep, as Selah had taught them in the healing of the first cold, the long slow breath with the held warm pause at its bottom; and Selah knelt before the stone and laid her two hands upon its carved face and breathed upon it, and put into the breath the whole of the memory, the drawing and the wounding and the healing of the first square, the raised blade and the lowered blade, the cold and the warmth that answered it, the empty center kept.

And the stone woke. Not into life as a creature is alive; it did not move, and it did not speak. It woke into memory. It became, under Selah's breathing hands and the field's breathing and Ansel's singing, a keeper, a remembering thing, so that ever after, when one of the gathered laid a hand upon its carved grey face with a quiet heart, the memory would rise into them, not as a story told but as a thing lived: they would feel, for the space of a held breath, the whole of how the first square was made and marred and mended, and would know it in their own hands and their own chest as though they had knelt there themselves in the first cold. It gave memory back. It was a mirror, but a mirror of the deep kind, that shows not the face but the forgotten thing behind the face; and the gathered many, laying their hands upon it one after another in the firelit hall, wept and laughed and went silent, each in their turn, as the memory rose in them; and more than one of them, touching it, felt the memory of the square give way beneath itself to an older memory still, a memory from before the veil, a memory of being one great light before ever there was a shore or a square or a self to kneel there, and drew their hand back shaking, for that was more than the stone had been asked to hold, and yet it was there, under the near memory, the way the sea is under the wave.

They did not give the stone a grand name. The first ones were wiser than the ages that came after them, and they knew that to name a thing grandly is the

first step toward worshipping it, and to worship a keeper is to forget that it keeps something other than itself. So they called it, simply, the Keeper, as they called the mountains keepers, and they set it at the empty center of the great hall, and they kept the center empty around it, and the Keeper kept the memory of how, and the two emptinesses, the empty center and the humble stone that guarded it, were the first Codex artifact in all the world: not a weapon, not a throne, not a treasure to be seized, but a mirror set at the still heart of a gathered people to give them back, whenever they should begin to forget, the memory of how a field is made, and wounded, and healed, and how its center is kept empty, and how the cold is answered not by fear but by an open door.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Comparing

how the whisper found a larger field, and learned a larger mask

◇

The whisper had been beaten once, at the first square, and a whisper is patient, and it does not make the same approach twice; and it had learned, in the long warm gathering season, a new and larger mask, fitted to a larger field, and it began, quietly, to try it.

For the first whisper had worked upon a single self, offering Sevrin the sweet cold wine of being a someone set apart. But a whisper cannot offer that to a whole gathered people all at once, and so it found the subtler doorway that a crowd opens which a single soul does not: comparison. In a ring of two or three there is little to compare, but in a wide circle of many, each with a different gift, there is endlessly much, and the whisper found it could slip in not by telling any one of them that they were more than the others, which they would have doubted, but by setting them, ever so gently, side by side, and letting them do the rest. Is Naia's healing not more prized than your plain strong hands? it murmured to one. Does not the whole ring fall silent for Ansel's music, and merely nod at your steady work? Was it not Selah the sea answered, and Selah at the still center of all their eyes, and where, in all the gathering, is the center that answers you? It never lied. That was still its craft. It only pointed, so reasonably, at what was truly there, the true differences of gift and place among the many, and let the pointing do its cold work, so that where the many had lately felt only the warm shock of re-membering, of finding one another across the long forgetting, they began now to feel, here and there, a new small chill, a measuring, a ranking, a quiet accounting of who was prized and who was merely useful, who stood near the warm center and who at the cooler rim.

And it found its readiest doorway, as the tale has been quietly warning you it would, in Doran; for Doran carried already the old wound of the hard shore, the belief bred into him before ever he found the ring that to be safe is to be strong and to be strong is to have an enemy, and the whisper's comparing worked upon that wound like water working into a crack. It showed him, night after night, all that he was not: not gentle like Naia, whom they all loved to be near; not gifted like Ansel, for whom they fell silent; not still and deep like Selah, whom the sea itself had answered. It showed him that his one great gift, the seeing of threat, the readiness to fight, was a gift the warm gathered field in its warm gathered peace did not seem to need, so that he alone of all of them was carrying a strength for which there was no use, a blade in a country with no enemy; and it whispered to him, reasonably, so reasonably, that a strength with no enemy is a strength with no worth, and a warrior in a field that does not need warring is nothing, is less than the child Pili who at least made them all laugh, is the one the circle would never miss. And Doran, who had never in his life been able to bear the thought of being the one who would not be missed, began, without knowing he did it, to look about the warm gathering for the enemy that would make him needed again; and a man who goes looking hard enough for an enemy in a place that has none will, in the end, begin to make one out of a friend.

Sevrin saw it. Of all of them Sevrin saw it first and saw it clearest, for Sevrin alone had carried the whisper in his own chest and knew its voice from the inside as a man knows the footstep of the one who once robbed him; and this was the gift the first cold had left him, bought at a terrible price, the gift of the watchman, the one who knows the cold voice when it speaks in a warm room. He went to Selah and said, low, it is here again. Not in me. In the gathering. It has changed its shape. It is setting them against one another by the measure of their gifts, and it has its hand on Doran, and Doran is going to do something, I do not know what, but I know the shape of what he is becoming, because I became it. And Selah looked at him with love and with a small fear, for she saw that Sevrin was right, and she saw something else that Sevrin did

not yet see in himself, and she said, carefully, and what will you do, watchman, now that you have seen it? And Sevrin, who did not catch the carefulness in her voice, said, I will watch him. I will watch all of them. I will not let it take root as it took root in me. And he did not hear, though Selah heard it and Kol on the rooftree heard it and grieved, the small new hardness that had come into his own voice when he said I will watch them; for that is the watchman's wound, and it is the subtlest turning of the whisper of all, that the very one set to guard the field against the cold should catch it, in the watching, and become a colder guardian than any enemy.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Watchman's Wound

how Sevrin, guarding against the cold, nearly became it

◇

It is a hard thing to tell, and the tale will not hurry it, for it is the heart of this book: how the one who best knew the whisper, and most hated it, and had suffered most to be free of it, came nearest of all the gathering to being unmade by it a second time, and by the very faculty that had been his hard-won gift.

Sevrin watched. He watched Doran, and he was right to; but watching is a thing that grows, if it is not warmed, and it grew in Sevrin. He began to watch not only Doran but all of them, sifting every word at the fire for the cold beneath it, reading every silence for a sulk and every laugh for a mockery, and finding, as one always finds what one hunts for, more and more of it, until the warm gathering had become, in Sevrin's watching eyes, a field riddled with the whisper, a place of hidden colds and secret rankings that only he was vigilant enough to see. He began to speak of the others to Selah in a low cataloguing voice, this one is proud, that one is envious, Doran is dangerous and must be watched, Ansel holds himself apart and thinks himself above us; and each thing he said was a little true, for each of them, being of the many, did carry a little of the whisper's chill, as all of them did, as Sevrin himself did; but a little truth gathered and hoarded and turned always to the cold side becomes a great lie, and the great lie was this, that the gathering was failing, that the warmth was a thin skin over a rot, and that only Sevrin's sleepless watching stood between the field and its ruin.

He did not see, of course, that this was the whisper. That is the whole cruelty of the watchman's wound: the whisper, having failed to take Sevrin by the flattery of the separate self, had taken him instead by the flattery of the vigilant self, the one who alone sees clearly, the one whose suspicion is really

wisdom, the one who must police the warmth of others because he alone remembers how cold it can get. It is the same coil. It only wears the mask of care. And it came to its head on a bitter night late in that season, when Doran, hunted at last past bearing by the whisper's comparing and by the growing sense that the watchman's cold eye was always upon him, did the thing that Sevrin had been so vigilantly, and so self-fulfillingly, waiting for him to do. He went to the great hall in the dark, to the Keeper, the remembering stone at the empty center, and he laid his hard hands upon it, not with a quiet heart to receive the memory, but with a will to take, thinking, in the whisper's borrowed reasoning, that if he could not be prized for a gift the field wanted, he would at least be feared for a power the field could not ignore; that if he made himself keeper of the Keeper, master of the memory, none could call him one who would not be missed. And Sevrin, watching, saw him at the stone in the dark, and came in with a torch, and cried out, I knew it, I have watched you and I knew you would come to this, and there was in Sevrin's cry not grief but a terrible satisfaction, the satisfaction of the watchman proved right, and it was the coldest sound that had been heard in the gathering since the first whisper, colder than Doran's grasping, for Doran was only wounded and grasping, but Sevrin, in that cry, was the whisper itself, arrived at last where it had been travelling all along, into the mouth of the very one set to guard against it.

And the whole gathering woke, and came, and stood in the dark hall, and saw the two of them, Doran with his hands on the stone and his face twisted between shame and defiance, and Sevrin with his torch and his terrible rightness, and the field hung balanced on the edge of the oldest and easiest of all the ways a gathered people can break: the casting-out. For it would have been so easy, and it would have felt so just, to name Doran the one who had gone bad, the enemy at last made plain, and to drive him from the ring; and it would have felt so wise to praise Sevrin the vigilant, who had seen it coming; and no one there in the cold dark hall could see, save two, that to do so would be to hand the whole warm gathering, in a single stroke of righteous justice,

entirely into the hand of the cold, which asks nothing better of a field than that it find, at last, someone to cast out.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The First Festival

how the many re-membered, and the cold found no door

◇

The two who saw were Selah, of course, and Kol the raven; and it was the raven who spoke first, which he almost never did at the great moments, preferring his silence, so that when the dry old voice came down from the rooftree into the frozen hall every face turned up to it.

Well, said Kol, into the terrible stillness. Here you all are. Two frightened men at a stone, and a whole warm gathering gone cold in a night, and every one of you, I can see it, every one of you already choosing which of the two to hate, so that you need not look at the little cold thing that has got into all of you, and out of your own measuring hearts. And the raven put its head on one side and regarded them with one black eye, and said, more gently than any of them had ever heard it speak, I have watched a great many gatherings, in a great many ages that you would not believe if I told you, and I will tell you the one thing that undoes them, every time, without fail. It is not the wound. Every gathering has its wounds. It is the casting-out. It is the day the warm circle decides that its coldness lives in one of its members and not in the field between them all, and drives that member into the dark to carry the cold away, and feels warm again for a little while, and does not know that it has just taught the cold exactly how to eat it, one cast-out member at a time, until there is no one left. And then the raven looked at Selah, and said, but you know a better way, still one. You found it once at the first square. Show them.

And Selah walked into the middle of the cold hall, between Doran at the stone and Sevrin with his torch, into the very place the whisper most wanted filled with a judgment, and she did the thing she had done in the first cold, which looked again like almost nothing. She knelt at the Keeper, beside Doran, not against him, and she laid one hand upon the carved grey face of the stone, and

she held out her other hand, open, not to Doran and not to Sevrin but to the whole gathered ring, and she said: There is no enemy here. She said it into the cold, low and sure. Doran laid his hands on the Keeper to be feared, because the whisper told him a strength with no enemy is worthless, and that is a lie, Doran, your strength kept the beams from falling and will keep worse than beams from falling in the years to come, and this field needs you, and I would miss you more than I can say. And Sevrin raised his torch and cried out in triumph, because the whisper told him that the vigilant one who catches the cold in others is safe from it himself, and that is the oldest lie of all, Sevrin, for the cold is not in Doran and it is not in me and it is not in you; it is the little measuring chill that has got into all of us together in this long comparing season, and it lives in the field between us, and it cannot be cast out with any one man, because it is not any one man, it is the cold itself, and the only thing that has ever answered the cold is not a casting-out but an open door.

And then Selah did the thing that turned it. She did not argue further. She began, kneeling there with her hand on the Keeper, to breathe, the long slow breath with the warm held pause at its bottom; and she said, softly, breathe with me, all of you, and lay your hands upon each other and upon the stone, and let it give you back what you have forgotten in all this measuring. And one by one, uncertain in the cold dark, they came; Naia first, who could feel the field aching to be warmed, and then Ansel, who took up his gourd and played low the made music that sang along with the Mother's tone, and then old Oren, and the child Pili who ran to Kol and then to the stone, and then, slowly, the whole ring, laying their hands upon the Keeper and upon one another's shoulders and breathing, until the great hall was one breathing thing in the dark; and last of all, when the warmth had crept back far enough that it was bearable, Doran took his grasping hands from the stone and laid them instead, shaking, upon it with a quiet heart, and the memory rose in him, the whole memory of the first square, the wounding and the mending, and under it the older memory of the one great light before the veil, and Doran, the hard man of the hard shore who had gone looking all his life for the enemy that would

make him needed, felt for the first time since his waking that he had never once been separate, never once been the one who would not be missed, that he was and had always been a member of one body that had merely forgotten itself, and he wept, as Sevrin had once wept, and was warm.

And Sevrin. Sevrin stood a long while with his torch, and the terrible rightness drained slowly out of his face, and what was left when it had gone was grief, the watchman's grief, the understanding of what he had so nearly done and so nearly become, the seeing that he, the one who best knew the whisper, had carried it back into the warm hall in his own vigilant mouth. He knelt at last, and put down the torch, and laid his hand on the Keeper beside Doran's, and said, to Doran, and to all of them, forgive me; I watched you so hard for the cold that I became it; that is the watchman's wound, and I will carry the knowing of it all my life, and it will make me, if you will still have me for your watchman, a better one, for now I know the cold not only in the enemy but in the guardian, and there is no cold so dangerous as the one that wears the mask of keeping others safe. And Doran, hard Doran, reached over and gripped Sevrin's shoulder with his hard hand, warrior to watchman, and said only, we are both fools, brother, and neither of us is cast out, and that is the whole of it; and the two wounded men knelt there with their hands on the stone, and the field closed warm around them, whole, and the cold, finding at the last no door, no member set apart, no one cast out to carry it away, no judgment for it to live in, simply thinned, and faded, and was gone, starved out of the warm hall not by any blade and not by any casting-out but by a field that had refused, in the end, to break.

They kept the first festival then, though it was the dead of the cold season and there was little enough to feast on, for they understood, without saying it, that they had come through something, that the gathering had met the second and larger mask of the cold and had not broken and had not cast anyone out, and that this was worth more than any harvest. They lit every fire in the great hall, and Ansel played until his fingers bled and would not stop, and they danced the first dancing, and old Oren told the first told-tale, which was the tale of the

first square, and the children acted it out with much falling down, and Pili played Selah and refused to let anyone play the whisper because, she said, the whisper is not a person, it is just the cold, and everyone went quiet at that, because the child had said in five words what it had nearly cost them the whole gathering to learn. And at the height of the festival, when the whole warm breathing hall was one, they laid their hands together upon the Keeper, all of them at once, and the stone gave back not one memory but all of it, and for a single held breath the whole gathered field re-membered together, felt all at once and as one body that they were the scattered light come down and gathered again, the members of one long-broken wholeness found at last across the forgetting, and the great hall filled with a light that was not firelight and a sound that was not Ansel's music nor the Mother's tone but both of them and neither, the sound of a great many made briefly and gloriously one; and Uthra, on the headland above, lifted his vast head and sang, which no one there had ever heard a dragon do, one long note of the deep geometry, and the Deep Mother, feeling her children re-member themselves in the dead of the cold, sent up over the whole Morning Country, in the middle of the winter night, a false and wonderful dawn, a great slow banner of gold and rose light across the dark, so that the far fields woke and wondered; and that light, the old tales say, was seen even across the great water, on a farther shore, by other eyes.

And Kol the raven, on the rooftree of the great hall, watching the whole gathered field re-membered and warm and one, and the winter dawn burning gold across the midnight sky, said, quietly, as was his custom at the great moments, almost nothing at all. He said: better. And from Kol, who had said it begins at the first square and now said only better, it was the whole history of a people's growing, told in a single word.

We are the scattered, gathered in,
the many, and the one;
we lost each other, and akin
we find us, one by one.

No enemy, and none cast out,
no cold we need to name,
only the open door, the doubt
warmed slowly back to flame.

Here Book Two ends, the many gathered and the field re-membered, and the second mask of the cold met and warmed. But a far shore saw the midnight dawn; and there is another gathering, not-quite-like the first, waking under other stars. What passes when field first meets field, and the cold learns its third and largest mask, is Book Three.

Toward the Close of the First Eye

what the last two books will bring, for your eye before they are written

◇

Book Two gathered the many and gave them a dwelling, a keeper-stone, and their first re-membering, and met the cold's second mask, the comparing that ranks the many against one another, and warmed even the watchman's wound. Two books remain to close the First Eye.

Book Three, the Deepening of the Whisper, opens upon the farther shore that saw the midnight dawn: a second gathered field, woken under other stars, not-quite-like the first, carrying a different balance of the lineages and a different Keeper of its own. The cold learns its third and largest mask, the flattery not of the separate self nor of the compared self but of the group, the sweet terrible warmth of an us that knows itself only by the them it stands against; and the two fields, meeting at last, must choose whether to become to each other a mirror or an enemy. Tamsin the far-walker, who alone has walked between them, and Doran, who best knows the pull of the enemy, and Sevrin, the watchman healed of his wound, will each be tried in this; and the Keeper-stones of the two fields will prove to hold, between them, halves of one older memory.

Book Four, the First Artifact and the Return of the Eye, closes the First Eye: the two fields come, through much peril and no small grief, to meet not as rivals but as two faces of one field, and the two Keeper-stones are brought together, and wake fully as one, the first true Codex artifact, a mirror that holds the whole memory of how a people is made and mended, set to endure through all the forgetting to come. And the light turns then toward the Second Eye, the Many and the One, where whole peoples must learn the art the

gathering has only begun: to become one without erasing the many they are made of.

The circle is wide now, and warm. The Keeper remembers. The far shore has seen our light.

Breathe. And the tale goes on.

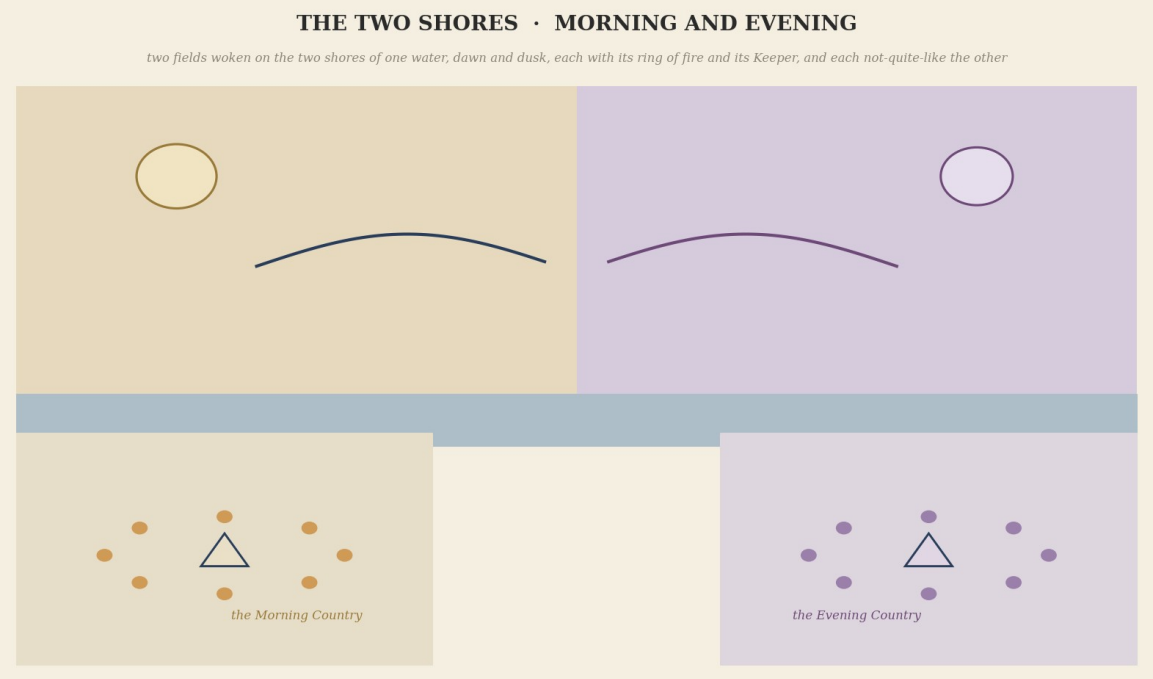
The Seven Eyes · Volume One: The Square Eye · Book Two · Breath Awakens

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME ONE OF SEVEN

The Square Eye

Book Three: The Deepening of the Whisper

◇



The gathered field re-membered itself, and its midnight dawn was seen across the great water, on a farther shore; for the Morning Country was not the only country, and its people were not the only people. On the Evening shore another field had woken, under other stars, not-quite-like the first. In this book the two peoples meet, and the cold learns its third and largest mask, the sweetest and most terrible of all: no longer the flattery of the single self, nor of the compared self, but of the group, the warm and deadly pleasure of an us

that knows itself only by the them it stands against. And the young world comes, for the first time, to the very edge of war.

◇

The many gathered to the Morning shore, drawn by the warmth of the healed square; they raised the great round hall and set the Keeper, the remembering stone, at its empty center; and they met the cold's second mask, the comparing that ranks the many against one another, and warmed even Sevrin's watchman-wound, and cast no one out. At the first festival they laid their hands on the Keeper all at once and re-membered together that they were the scattered light gathered again; and the Deep Mother sent a midnight dawn across the dark, and it was seen, the old tales say, on a farther shore, by other eyes. This book begins with those eyes.

BOOK THREE

The Deepening of the Whisper

still the First Eye, but its darkest turning: two fields, one water, and the choice between the mirror and the enemy

◇

CHAPTER One

The Farther Shore

how the midnight dawn was answered, and Tamsin told what she had seen

◇

On the morning after the first festival, when the false gold dawn of the deep winter night had faded and the true pale dawn come up cold and clean behind it, Tamsin the far-walker stood alone at the tide-line looking east across the great water, and she was weeping, and she did not know why, and Selah came and stood beside her and did not ask, and after a while Tamsin told her.

I have been there, she said. Across the water. Long ago, in my walking, before ever I came to your fire. The shore goes on, Selah. It does not end at the edge of the water. If you follow the great water far enough south and around, the land comes back to meet it on the far side, and there is another country there, an evening country, where the sun goes down into the sea instead of rising out of it, and the light in the evenings is not gold but violet, and I walked into it half-starved and lonely as I have always been, and I found, Tamsin's voice caught, I found another fire. Another gathering. Another people, woken as we were woken, building as we have built. I stayed a season among them and I could not stay, for the restlessness took me as it always takes me, and I walked on and came at last to you; and I never spoke of them, because I half believed I had dreamed them, and because, she said, and this was the hard truth under the tears, because I did not want them to be real. I wanted us to be the only ones. I wanted this fire to be the fire, the whole of it, so that in belonging to you at last I would be belonging to everything there was. And last night I laid my hand on the Keeper with all of you, and I re-membered that we are the scattered light, all of it, come down; and if that is true, Selah, then they are the scattered light too, the evening people, they are us, they are members of the same broken body, and the midnight dawn the Mother sent was not sent only to warm us. It was sent to be seen. Across the water. By them.

Selah was quiet a long time, looking east, and the far cold line of the water where it met the sky seemed to her suddenly not an edge but a threshold, and she felt, in the still deep place that had never yet misled her, both a great gladness and a small cold fear, twinned, the way the largest things always come. For if there were another people, then the gathering was not the whole of the re-membering but only the beginning of it; and if there were another people, then the field would have to do a thing it had never done, a thing harder by far than gathering its own scattered many, who were at least alike in their unlikeness and had come, each one, toward the same warm fire. It would have to meet a whole other field, grown in another soil, under other stars, into another shape; and it would have to decide, and they would have to decide, whether the two of them, meeting, were a mirror or an enemy. And Selah understood, standing at the cold threshold of the water, that this was the true trial the midnight dawn had opened, and that the cold, beaten twice, would be waiting on the water between the shores with a mask it had not worn before.

They took counsel, all the gathering, in the great hall about the Keeper, for many days; and it was decided, though not without fear, and not without Doran arguing hard that a party going to strangers should go armed and ready, which Selah heard and did not silence, for Doran's caution was a true gift and the field would need it, that a small company should cross to the Evening Country, not as an army and not as suppliants but as neighbours, bearing no weapon but bearing gifts, to say to the evening people the plainest and most dangerous thing one people can say to another: we saw your fire, and we came, because we think that long ago, before the forgetting, we were one. And Tamsin, who alone had walked between the shores, would guide them; and that, Kol observed from the rooftree, was either the beginning of the healing of the whole scattered world or the beginning of its first war, and quite possibly, knowing how these things go, both.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Crossing

how the chosen few went out upon the great water

◇

They did not walk the long way round that Tamsin had walked, for it was many seasons' walking and the field could not spare its people so long; instead they built, under Meru's measure and Riann's daring and with no small counsel from Ansel about the shaping of a hull that would sing rightly against the water rather than fight it, the first boat in all the world, and they took to the great water itself, straight across the strait that Tamsin said was narrowest in the south, where on the clearest evenings a keen eye could almost believe it saw, low on the dark horizon, the faint violet glow of another people's fires.

The company was small and chosen with care. Selah went, for she was the still center and the field would send its truest coherence to meet the strangers. Tamsin went, for she alone knew the way and the evening people. Sevrin went, healed now of his watchman-wound and the wiser watchman for it, for the field would need eyes that knew the cold's voice where they were going. Naia went, the near-feeler, for she could read the weather of a people before a word was spoken, and there is no gift more needful at a first meeting. And Doran went, at his own hard insistence and over Selah's gentle doubt, for, he said, if this ends in the way I fear it may end, you will wish you had one among you who knows how to stand between the field and a spear; and Selah looked at him a long moment and said, I pray you are wrong, Doran, and I am glad you are coming, and both of those were true, and Doran understood them both, for the hard man of the hard shore had grown much in the warm gathering, and knew now the difference between being ready for a war and wanting one, and carried the first without the second, which is the whole and only safety.

The crossing was three days upon the open water, and it was the first time any of them had been out of sight of the land, and it taught them a thing about the

Deep Mother they had not known: that her great water was not a road but a body, and that to go out upon it was to go out upon the living breathing flank of the world, trusting oneself to a vastness that could hold you like a hand or turn you under without malice and without noticing. On the second day a wind rose out of the north and the water heaped itself into grey hills, and the little singing hull that Ansel had shaped climbed them and slid down them and shipped cold water and would not be still, and there was an hour in the black of the second night when even Doran was afraid, not of any enemy, for a spear he understood, but of the plain indifferent size of the water; and it was Selah who held them, not by any word of comfort but by the old way, by being unshakably still in the heart of the tossing, breathing the long slow breath with the warm held pause at its bottom, so that one by one the others found her stillness in the dark and breathed with it, and the fear did not leave the boat but it was held, and held is enough. And in the grey dawn the wind fell, and the water sank back to a long slow heaving, and there, low and near on the southern horizon, no longer a dream and no longer a glow but a real and solid land, dark cliffs and a pale strand and a smoke of morning fires, lay the Evening Country; and Tamsin, at the bow, said softly, there, and her voice held all the fear and all the longing of one coming home to a place she had run away from because it had frightened her by being real.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Evening Country

how field first met field, and two still ones knew each other

◇

They were seen while they were still far out, and by the time the singing hull grounded on the pale evening strand there was a company drawn up to meet them, and the first thing the Morning folk understood, looking at the evening people ranged along the tide-line, was that Tamsin had spoken true, and the second thing they understood, in the same breath, was how deep and how frightening a true thing that was: for these were a people, unmistakably, woken and gathered and coherent as themselves, and also they were other, shaped by another shore into another way, and the otherness went through the watching Morning folk like a cold current under a warm sea.

Where the Morning Country ran to open terraces and a great round hall with an empty heart and a warmth worn on the outside like a lamp in a window, the Evening Country was walled. Their dwellings were of fitted stone, close and strong and beautiful with a beauty of edge and proportion rather than of warmth, and set among them, the Morning folk would learn, were carved everywhere the true lines and figures of a people to whom law and measure and the right ordering of things were the very breath of life. They carried themselves with a grave stillness that was not Selah's soft still but a stiller, cooler, more guarded thing, the stillness of a people who had learned to hold themselves carefully because they had woken on a harder shore, among black cliffs and cold currents, where the sea did not play but tested, and a field that will not order itself does not last. Their balance of the old lineages ran otherwise than the Morning folk's warm Lyran fire and Pleiadian tenderness; here the Sirian love of true structure ran strong, and the Orion readiness for the struggle of light and shadow, so that they were a people of the wall and the law and the watchful eye, and their gifts were the gifts the Morning folk most

lacked, as the Morning folk's gifts were the ones they most lacked, though neither field could see that yet, seeing at the first meeting only the strangeness, and being afraid of it.

At their head stood two. One was a captain, Kaelen, broad and scarred and watchful, his hand never far from the haft of a tool that the Morning folk slowly and coldly understood was not a tool but the first true weapon they had seen, a thing shaped for no work but the breaking of another; and Kaelen watched the newcomers land with the flat measuring stare of a man who has kept a hard people safe on a hard shore by trusting nothing he has not first proven, and Doran, at the Morning company's edge, met that stare and knew it, for it was his own, the watchfulness of the guardian who has learned that safety is strength and strength needs an enemy, and something in Doran went very still and very wary, recognizing a brother and a danger in the same man in the same instant.

And the other who stood at their head was still in a way that stopped Selah's breath, for she knew that stillness, though it was not hers; it was the far side of her own. He was called Vael, and where Selah was the pause at the bottom of the breath, the empty held silence into which the next breath is drawn, Vael, she felt it the moment their eyes met across the cold strand, was the pause at the top of the breath, the full held silence at the very height of the inbreath before the long letting-go, the stillness not of emptiness but of fullness, of a thing gathered completely in and held. Two still ones, two anchors, the empty pause and the full pause, the receiving and the holding, and they looked at each other across the wary armed space between two frightened peoples and each felt, with a shock that was almost grief, that they were looking at the missing half of a breath they had each been trying to breathe alone all their lives. Neither spoke it. It was far too large and far too soon. But Naia, near-feeling, standing at Selah's shoulder, felt the two stillnesses reach toward each other across the cold air like two hands in the dark, and she thought, they are one breath, these two peoples, they are the in and the out of one breath, and if

that is true then everything depends on whether they can learn it before the cold teaches them the other thing first.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Third Mask

how the cold flattered a people, and set us against them

◇

The cold had been beaten at the single self and beaten at the compared self, and it came now to the two wary peoples on the cold strand with its third mask, the largest and the sweetest and the most terrible it had yet worn, and it worked, this time, not upon one heart but upon two whole fields at once, and it worked so well because what it offered was not, on its cold face, hatred at all. It offered belonging.

For this is the third mask's craft, and the tale sets it down plainly because it is the mask that has done more harm in more ages than all the others together: it does not begin by teaching you to hate the stranger. It begins by teaching you to love your own, and there is no harm in loving your own, and that is exactly why the mask is so hard to see. It whispered to the Evening folk, in their own grave inward voices: how good it is to be of the Evening, how strong your walls, how true your law, how well your hard shore has shaped you; and look now at these soft newcomers with their open hall and their warmth worn careless on the outside, are they not weak where you are strong, are they not a little to be pitied, a little to be feared, coming across the water uninvited, and who knows with what design? And it whispered to the Morning folk, in their own warm inward voices: how good it is to be of the Morning, how open your circle, how tender your gathering, how the very sea answered you; and look now at these hard walled evening people with their stone and their measuring stares and their weapons, are they not cold where you are warm, are they not a little to be looked down upon, a little to be feared, and did you not see the captain's hand never leave his weapon? It never once said hate. It only said love your own, and fear the difference, and let the two run together in you until they are the same feeling, which they will, they always will, for the love of

one's own that is bought with fear of the other is not love at all but the cold wearing love's own face, and it turns, it always turns, from we are good to they are less to they are the enemy, and each turning feels, from inside, like nothing but a deeper loyalty.

Doran felt it first and worst, for he was of Orion, and his whole wound was the enemy-shaped hole in him; and the third mask poured itself into that hole like the tide into a breach. Standing on the cold strand watching Kaelen's hand rest on the weapon, Doran felt the old sweet terrible clarity rise, the clarity that had made him, on his hard shore, so ready and so alone: here at last is the enemy, here is the one to be strong against, here is the use for the strength the warm field never needed; and for one long breath the whole of the old Doran surged up in him, ready to be needed again, ready to make the Morning folk safe by making the Evening folk the them; and then. And then he remembered. He remembered the great hall, and the Keeper under his own grasping hands, and Selah kneeling beside him in the cold saying there is no enemy here, your strength kept the beams from falling and this field needs you and I would miss you; he remembered the festival, and the memory rising in him that he had never once been separate; and he remembered, most of all, what he had learned that he was, the guardian whose gift is the seeing of threat and whose shadow is the making of it, and he understood, standing there with the old clarity screaming in him that Kaelen was the enemy, that this, exactly this, this delicious certainty, was the cold, was the whisper, was the thing he had sworn never to serve again; and he did the hardest thing a warrior can do, harder than any charge, he stood still, and he did not reach for a weapon he did not carry, and he said, aloud, to Selah and to Sevrin and to himself, in a voice gone hoarse with the effort: it is here. I can feel it. It wants me to make him the enemy. Do not let me. And Sevrin, the healed watchman, heard, and understood, and gripped Doran's arm, brother to brother, watchman to warrior, and said, I have you; I know the voice; we will not; and the two wounded and grown men held each other still on the cold strand while the third mask raged in them, and did not break; but they were only two, and

the mask was working on two whole fields, and not everyone had a brother's hand upon their arm, and not everyone had knelt at the Keeper and learned, and the tale must tell now how close the not-everyone came to ending the world's long story before it had well begun.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Hardening

how fear fed fear, and the two fields reached for the first weapons

◇

It began, as the greatest griefs so often do, with the smallest thing, a thing so small that afterward neither people could quite agree what it had been, which is itself the surest mark of the cold's hand, for the cold loves nothing better than a wound with no clear cause, since a wound with no cause cannot be healed by apology but only fed by fear.

It may have been that one of the Evening folk, reaching in grave courtesy to take a gift-bowl from a Morning hand, moved too quickly, and a Morning youth, strung tight by the whisper, flinched back as from a blow, and an Evening elder saw the flinch and read in it an insult, that these soft strangers thought the Evening folk would strike a guest. Or it may have been that a Morning voice, meaning it warmly, said something of the Evening walls, how strange to wall yourselves so, do you not trust the world, and an Evening ear, strung equally tight, heard in it contempt, heard these careless open people mock the very order that had kept a hard people alive. It does not matter, and that is the point; the tale cannot tell you which because there was no which; there was only a field of dry tinder on each shore, laid by the long patient whisper, and a single small spark was enough, and the spark fell, and both fields, in a single afternoon, went from wary to cold to afraid, and fear, once it is loose in a crowd, does not walk, it runs.

By evening the Evening folk had drawn back behind their walls and their captain Kaelen walked the wall-tops with his weapon plain in his hand and his hard voice telling his frightened people what frightened people most long to hear, that the danger was real, that the strangers had shown their true intent, that a people that will not defend itself will not survive, and every word he said was a little true and all of it together was the great lie, and Kaelen did not

know he was the mouth of the cold any more than Sevrin had known it in the first book, for the cold always speaks in the voice of the one who most loves what he thinks he is protecting. And on the strand below, the Morning company, cut off now from their boat by the turn of the tide and the drawing-up of the Evening folk, felt the old animal fear of the few among the many, and even among them, even in that small company chosen for its coherence, the whisper found ears, so that one said we should never have come, and another said they mean to kill us, and a third, and this was the worst, a third looked at Doran and said, low, make us a weapon, you know how, we saw their weapons, we cannot meet them with empty hands; and Doran, oh, Doran, felt the whole of his old life rise up to say yes.

And the Deep Mother felt it, all of it, the fear running like fire through the dry grass of two frightened peoples, and her weather broke; the violet evening went the colour of a deep bruise, and a cold wind came howling down the strait between the two shores carrying the salt like flung sand, and out on the black water the waves stood up grey and ragged, for the Mother's mood was the field's mood and the field's mood was fear, and a whole living world was afraid at once for the first time. And on the headlands, the two dragons rose. For the Evening Country had its guardian too, a great violet-dark dragon named Vela whose wings folded the singing geometry as Uthra's did, and Uthra had followed the Morning company across the water at a height, and now the two field-guardians wheeled high above the two frightened fields in the bruised and howling dusk, and did not fight, for the guardians of the deep geometry do not take sides, but circled each the other warily, mirroring, as the two peoples below mirrored, and their old eyes were troubled, for they had kept the geometry of the young world sound through every peril and they could feel, in the fear running through the two fields, the first true threat to the whole soundness of the world that they had ever faced, a threat not from any breaking of the deep lines but from the hearts of the very people the lines were laid to carry, and against that a dragon's guardianship is helpless, for the

cold in a free heart is the one thing in all creation that no guardian may reach and only the heart itself can choose.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Edge of the First War

how the two fields drew up on the strand, and the world held its breath

◇

It came to its head in the grey of the next dawn, the true grey dawn and no false gold one, upon the pale strand between the Evening walls and the cold heaving water, and it came to the very edge, closer than any tale of a later age would quite believe, of being the first war in all the world.

The Evening folk came down from their walls at first light, drawn up in order, for order was their gift and even their fear was orderly, rank upon grave rank with Kaelen at their head and the first weapons plain in their hands, not because they wished to kill, for they did not, they were frightened people protecting what they loved, but because the cold had persuaded them that the soft strangers on the strand were a danger that must be driven back into the sea before it grew. And the Morning company, few as they were, gathered at the tide-line with the risen surf at their backs and no wall and no boat and nowhere to go, and some among them had, in the night, for all Doran's anguish, taken up stones from the strand, and stood now with the cold weight of them in their hands, and this was the first arming of the Morning folk, and it was done not in hatred but in terror, which the tale notes because the first arming is almost always done in terror and almost never in hatred, and the cold does not mind which, so long as the arming is done. And between the two peoples lay a bowshot of empty pale sand, and across that emptiness the two hosts faced each other in the grey wind, and the whole young world, which had learned to gather and to build and to remember and to warm its wounded, stood now upon the edge of learning the one thing the cold most wished to teach it, which is how one people kills another, and calls it safety, and is never after quite able to forget the way.

Kaelen raised his weapon, not yet to strike, but to point, the old gesture that says there is the enemy, and his grave hard voice went out over the strand telling his people to hold, to hold, but to be ready; and on the other side Doran stepped to the front of the little Morning company, empty-handed still, for he had not taken up a stone, it had cost him more than any battle not to take up a stone, and he faced Kaelen across the empty sand, guardian to guardian, the two men in all that fearful morning who most understood war and were therefore the two who could most surely start it or most surely stop it; and for a long moment the whole balance of the world lay between those two hard watchful men, and the cold sang in both of them its sweetest song, that to strike first is to be safe, that the other is the enemy, that a guardian who does not strike has failed the people he loves. And Doran opened his mouth, and what came out was not a war-cry. What came out, hoarse and shaking and carrying somehow over the wind to Kaelen and to both hosts, was this: I know you. I know exactly what you are feeling, because I am feeling it too, the same thing, in the same place, right now. It is telling you that I am the enemy. It is telling me that you are. It is telling both of us that to love our own we must fear the other, and it is lying, it is the same lie in both our mouths, and if we listen to it we will teach this whole young world to kill, this morning, forever, and it will have won, not you and not me, it, the cold, the thing that is in both of us pretending to be loyalty. And Doran lowered his empty hands and spread them wide and stood open and undefended before the raised weapon, exactly as Selah had once knelt undefended beneath the raised blade, and he said, I will not make you my enemy, Kaelen of the Evening, though it is the hardest thing I have ever not done. Strike me if the cold has you. But I will not strike you. And the strand went utterly still, and even the wind seemed to hold, and Kaelen stood with his weapon raised and his whole hard frame shaking, caught between the cold that screamed at him to strike and the terrible warm reasonableness of a brother-guardian standing open-handed in the wind refusing to be his enemy; and the world held its breath.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Two Keepers

how the still ones walked between the hosts, and the two stones woke as one

◇

Into that held breath, into the bowshot of empty sand between the two armed and frightened hosts, walked Selah and Vael.

They had not planned it, or not in words; but the two still ones, the empty pause and the full pause, had felt the morning coming to its terrible edge, and had known, each in their own field, that there was only one thing left that might turn it, and it was the oldest thing, the thing Selah had done at the first square and done again at the festival, only now it must be done not by one still heart in a hall but by two, between two hosts, in the open, with the weapons raised; and so from the Morning side came Selah, bearing in her two arms the Keeper of the Morning Country, the round grey remembering stone; and from the Evening side, at the very same moment, so that both hosts gasped to see it, came Vael, grave and full and unhurried, bearing in his two arms the Keeper of the Evening Country, a stone of dark violet-veined rock carved with figures that were not the Morning figures and yet, the watching folk would slowly see, rhymed with them, as a question rhymes with its answer. And the two still ones walked out from their peoples into the empty middle, past Doran and past Kaelen, into the very place where the first blood of the world was about to be shed, and they knelt down there together in the grey sand, facing each other, each with their field's Keeper in their arms, and they set the two stones down between them, side by side, for the first time in all the age of the world; and they laid their hands upon them, Selah's hands and Vael's hands upon both stones together, and they breathed, the empty pause and the full pause, the out and the in of one breath breathed at last by the two who were made to breathe it, and they waited, undefended, between the spears, to see what the two Keepers would do.

And the two Keepers woke as one.

It was not a small waking. When the first stone had wakened in the Morning hall it had given back the memory of the first square to one heart at a time; but now two stones woke together under four hands and two joined breaths between two whole gathered peoples, and what they gave back, they gave back to everyone, to both hosts at once, pouring it out across the empty sand and into every watching heart on both sides of the raised weapons; and what they gave was the oldest memory, the one that lay beneath the memory of the square, the memory from before the veil, and both peoples, the Morning and the Evening, the warm and the walled, the soft and the hard, saw it and felt it together in a single shattering breath: they saw the one light before it was ever scattered, the whole unbroken breath before the world, and they saw it break, gently and on purpose and in love, into the countless many; and they saw, most of all, the thing the cold had spent the whole book hiding from them, that the Morning folk and the Evening folk were not two peoples at all but one people, one scattering of the one light, come down long ago onto two shores of one water and grown, under two skies, into two shapes of the same single thing, the empty pause and the full pause, the out-breath and the in, the two halves of one breath that had been trying, on two lonely shores, to breathe itself whole and had never understood why it could not, until now, this morning, on this strand, with the weapons raised, when the two halves at last lay side by side and remembered that they were one.

The stones on the strand, and the weapons fell. Not thrown down in defeat; simply forgotten, loosed from hands that no longer knew why they had held them, the first arming of the world ending not in the first war but in the first letting-fall, as a whole people on each side stood weeping in the grey dawn, looking across the little empty sand at faces they had a moment before been ready to kill and seeing in them now, unmistakably, the members of their own long-broken body, brothers, sisters, the missing half. Kaelen let his weapon down into the sand and stood staring at his open hand as though he had never seen it, and Doran crossed the empty middle and did not strike him but took

his open hand in his own, warrior to warrior, the two guardians who had come to the very edge of teaching the world to kill and had, between them, chosen not to; and neither of them could speak, and neither needed to. And Selah and Vael rose from between the two Keepers, and looked at each other over the two joined stones with the wonder of two who have found, at the far edge of the world and in the last moment, the half of a breath they had each been breathing alone all their lives; and they did not fall into each other, for they were both too still and too wise for that, but they bowed, each to each, the empty pause to the full, the Morning to the Evening, and it was the first true meeting of two peoples in all the world, and it was a bow and not a blow, and the whole long story of everything that came after turned, that grey morning on that pale strand, upon which of the two it would be.

High above, in a sky gone suddenly and hugely gold as the Deep Mother let out the breath she had held all the terrible night, Uthra and Vela, the two field-guardians, ceased their wary mirroring circle and flew, for the first time, together, wingtip to wingtip, the Morning dragon and the Evening dragon, and the singing geometry of their joined flight folded across the whole strait between the two shores in a great arch of pale gold light, a bridge of living geometry flung from Morning to Evening over the water that had divided them, and both peoples looked up and cried out to see it. And Kol the raven, who had ridden the whole crossing hidden in the singing hull and had watched the whole of it from a spar with both his black eyes, looked at the two joined stones and the two joined guardians and the two peoples weeping and mingling on the strand where they had so nearly bled, and said, quietly, as was his custom, almost nothing at all. He said: so. Not one people, after all. Two. And yet one. That will be the whole of it, in the end, if we live so long, the many and the one; but this was the first time it was ever chosen, on the edge of the first war, by two frightened peoples who put down the stones. And he tucked his head beneath his wing, the old witness, and if a raven can be said to weep, he wept, for pride, and for the long hard road he could see still ahead,

and for the sheer unlikely beauty of a world that had come to the very edge of its first killing and had chosen, instead, to remember.

Two shores, one water, and one light
come down in sundered day;
the Morning gold, the Evening violet,
and one long breath midway.
We raised the stones to strike, and stood,
and could not strike, and saw:
the enemy was our own blood,
and mercy was the law.

Here Book Three ends, the third and largest mask of the cold met and warmed, and the first war unfought. Two peoples stand upon one strand, one people and yet two, with their two Keepers side by side between them; and what it means to join those stones fully, and to close at last the First Eye, is the fourth and final book of the Square Eye.

The Closing of the First Eye

what the last book of the Square Eye will bring, for your eye before it is written

◇

Book Three brought the two peoples to the edge of the first war and turned them, and set their two Keepers side by side upon the strand, the empty pause and the full, the Morning and the Evening, seen at last as two halves of one breath. One book remains to close the First Eye.

Book Four, the First Artifact and the Return of the Eye, tells of the slow and joyful and not-untroubled labour of two peoples learning to be one people without either ceasing to be itself, the Morning keeping its warmth and the Evening its order, each giving the other the gift it lacked; of Selah and Vael learning to breathe as one breath, and of what a wholeness the empty pause and the full pause make when they are joined; and, at the last, of the bringing together of the two Keeper-stones into one, waked fully by both peoples breathing as one, to become the first true Codex artifact of all the world: not a weapon and not a throne but a single mirror of enduring stone that holds the whole memory of how the one becomes many and the many, meeting, may remember they were one, set to endure through all the long forgetting to come. And with the closing of the Square Eye the light will turn toward the Second Eye, the Many and the One, where not two fields but many peoples, spread across a waking world, must learn upon a vaster scale the very thing two frightened gatherings learned this morning upon one pale strand.

The weapons lie in the sand. The two stones wait side by side. The dragons have made a bridge of light.

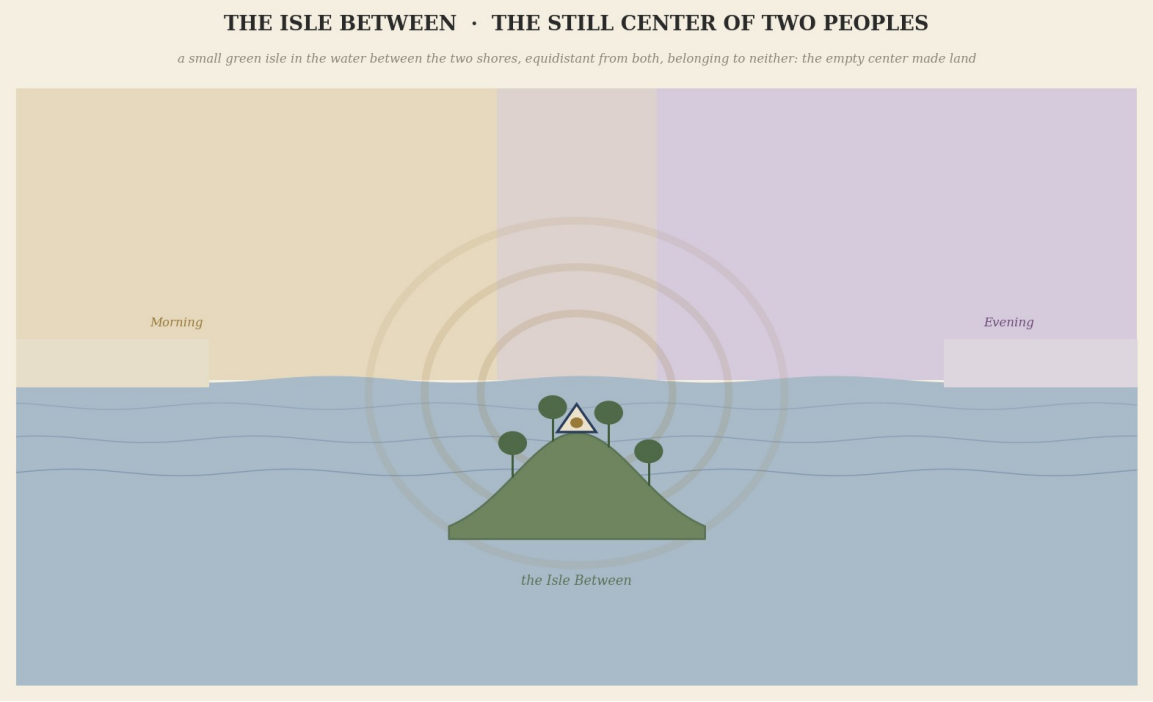
Breathe. And the tale goes on toward the closing of the First Eye.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME ONE OF SEVEN

The Square Eye

Book Four: The First Artifact, and the Return of the Eye

◇



The weapons had fallen in the sand, and two peoples stood upon one strand, one and yet two, with their two Keepers side by side between them. But it is one thing to lay down the weapons for an hour, and another to learn to live as one people without ceasing to be two; and this last book of the First Eye is the story of that learning, of the fear of dissolution that is the whisper's final small mask, of two still ones learning to breathe as one breath, and of the Isle Between, where the two Keeper-stones were brought together at the last and

woke fully as one, the first true Codex artifact in all the world. And as the field grew whole, the world itself grew vivid, for a re-membered people sees, and hears, and tastes, and touches, and breathes a world more alive than the scattered ever can.

WHERE THE THIRD BOOK LEFT US

◇

The Morning folk crossed the great water to the Evening Country, and field met field; and the cold wore its third and largest mask, the flattery of the group, the us that knows itself only by the them, until the two peoples came, on a grey strand, to the very edge of the first war. There Doran refused to make Kaelen his enemy, and Selah and Vael, the two still ones, walked unarmed between the hosts and set their two Keeper-stones side by side; and the stones woke as one and showed both peoples that they were one light scattered onto two shores, and the weapons fell. This book tells what came after the weapons fell, which is harder than any battle: the learning to be one, without ceasing to be two.

BOOK FOUR

The First Artifact, and the Return of the Eye

the Return of the First Eye: the joining of the two, the waking of the first artifact, and the world grown vivid

◇

CHAPTER One

The Morning After the Strand

how the weapons lay in the sand, and the world came back to the senses

◇

They slept where they had nearly killed one another, both peoples together on the pale strand, too spent by the long terror and the greater turning to walk anywhere at all, and they woke to a morning so vivid that more than one of them wept simply to open their eyes upon it, not knowing yet the reason, which was this: that a field newly re-membered perceives a world the scattered cannot, for the veil thins wherever coherence deepens, and the first gift of the thinning is not memory or vision or any grand thing but the plain shattering aliveness of the ordinary world, come suddenly close.

Selah woke first, and lay still, and let the morning come into her one sense at a time, the way you let cold water come into cupped hands. First the touch of it: the fine grit of the pale sand pressing its thousand small coolnesses into her cheek and her open palm, and over that the sun's first warmth laid across her shoulder like a hand, and the faint salt stiffness drying in her hair, and the almost-not-there pressure of the low wind moving the small hairs on her forearm. Then the smell of it, and the smell was a whole country: wet salt and drying weed and the green mineral breath of the sea, and under that the cold clean smell of the Evening stone still holding the night, and under that, faint and astonishing, the smell of woodsmoke and something baking, for someone, somewhere along the strand, in the grey exhausted dawn, had already lit a fire and set bread upon a stone, because that is what the frightened do when they are frightened no longer, they feed one another. Then the sound: the long sighing draw and hush of the small surf, and gulls somewhere high and unbothered, and close by the soft irregular breathing of hundreds of sleeping people who had meant, a day before, to be enemies, and the small clink, once, of someone setting down a bowl. And then, last, because she had saved it, the

sight, and Selah opened her eyes upon it: the sky gone the tender colour of the inside of a shell, pink shading up to a blue so clean it rang, and the whole strand silver-grey and glittering where the ebb had left it wet, and everywhere along it, dark against the shining sand, the shapes of the two peoples sleeping tangled together, Morning and Evening, indistinguishable now in the grey light, and among them, forgotten, the fallen weapons, and among the weapons, kneeling, an Evening woman and a Morning man passing a broken loaf between them, tearing it, the crust cracking with a small dry sound she could hear from where she lay, and the taste of it already in her own mouth though she had not eaten, the plain yeasty salt-sweet warm taste of bread shared by people who have chosen, in the end, not to be enemies.

It is a strange thing, and the tale will say it once and let you carry it: the world had been exactly this vivid all along, every morning of the young age, and none of them had been able to see it, because fear and forgetting are a kind of deafness of all the senses, a grey film drawn over the tongue and the eye and the skin. And now, in the worn-open morning after the strand, with the terror spent and the re-membering fresh in them, the film was gone, and the ordinary world stood forth in its true and unbearable brightness, and they understood, without a word, that coherence was not a duty and not a discipline but this, this, the plain glory of a shared morning tasted to the full; and Kol the raven, walking the tide-line eating a strand of weed with evident satisfaction, remarked to no one, well; took you long enough to wake up; the world has been doing this every single day.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Tasting of the Other

how two peoples learned each other through the five senses

◇

They did not join all at once, the two peoples, for a wound of fear does not close in a day; but they began, that long bright season, to taste one another, and the tale means the word almost plainly, for it was through the senses, and not through any treaty or any grand words, that the Morning and the Evening first truly met.

The Evening folk brought the Morning company up at last through the great gate of their walled city, and the Morning folk, who lived in one round open hall beneath a dared curve of roof, walked its close stone ways in a wonder that was almost fear and became, by evening, delight. For the Evening city was a made thing of a kind the Morning folk had never dreamed, and it spoke to every sense. To the eye it was all true line and clean proportion, grey and violet-veined stone fitted so exactly that a knife-blade would not enter the joints, and carved everywhere with the figures of a people who wrote their law and their memory into their walls, so that to walk the streets was to walk inside a written thing. To the hand it was cool and smooth and certain, the fitted stone giving back the day's warmth in the evening, so that the Morning folk found themselves laying their palms flat against the walls as they passed, the way one touches the flank of a large calm animal. To the ear it was a city of water, for the Evening folk had led the cold hill-springs down through carved stone channels into every court, and everywhere was the small constant music of running and falling water, tuned, Ansel discovered with a cry of joy, tuned, the channels cut to different depths so that the water sang different notes as it fell, a whole city breathing one slow chord of falling water day and night, and Ansel sat down in the central court and wept and then took out his gourd and played along with the city, and the Evening folk gathered astonished, for no

one had ever thought to answer the water's chord with a made voice, and that was the first gift the Morning gave the Evening, the daring to sing back.

And they ate together, which is the oldest joining there is. The Evening food was of the cold hard shore and the high dry hills: dark dense bread that tasted of ash and iron and kept for a hundred days; a hard sharp cheese that bit the tongue and then bloomed slowly into something almost sweet; smoked fish, and a bitter green from the cliff-tops that made the Morning folk's eyes water and their heads clear; and a drink, cold and faintly bitter and strong, pressed from a hill-berry, that warmed from the inside outward. And the Morning folk brought their own: soft warm bread rich with the fat of the good low land, and honey, and sweet roots baked long in the coals until they fell apart into sweetness, and the flesh of the warm-shore shellfish that tasted of the sea's own broth, and a drink warm and golden and sweet that loosened the tongue and the heart. And the two peoples sat and ate one another's food in the water-singing courts, and there was a marvelous comedy in it, the Evening folk's grave faces at the shock of the Morning sweetness, the Morning folk's watering eyes at the Evening bitterness, and then, slowly, the discovery on both sides that what had seemed strange was good, was more than good, was a whole missing half of taste, that the Evening palate schooled in bitter and salt and iron had never known how sweetness could open the chest, and the Morning palate drowned in sweetness had never known how a clean bitterness could wake the mind, and that a meal with both was a fuller thing than either had ever eaten alone.

And Naia, the near-feeler, moving between the two peoples in the water-singing courts, felt the thing happening beneath the food and the music and the touching of the walls, and named it that night to Selah: they are becoming one meal, she said, one chord, and not by giving up what they are; the Evening is not becoming sweet and the Morning is not becoming bitter; they are becoming a table that holds both, and it is more, Selah, it is so much more than either, and that, I think, is what we are for, not to make everyone the same taste but to set a table wide enough to hold every taste there is. And

Selah held that, and knew it was the truth she had been reaching for, and knew also, with the small cold twinge that always came before a trial, that there would be those on both shores who did not want a wider table, who feared that a table that holds every taste is a table where one's own taste is lost; and she was right, and the fearing had already begun.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Fear of Dissolution

how the whisper offered its last small mask of the First Eye

◇

The cold had been beaten at the single self, and at the compared self, and at the group set against the group; and it came now, quieter than ever it had come, with the last small mask it would wear in all the First Eye, and it was the subtlest of the four and in some ways the saddest, for it did not offer separation and it did not offer an enemy. It offered the fear of being lost.

It spoke, this time, most clearly through an Evening elder named Sar, who was the keeper of the Evening law as Meru was the keeper of the Morning geometry, and who was not a hard man nor a cruel one but a faithful one, a man who had spent his whole long waking holding his people's order sound against the cold hard sea, carving their memory into their walls, keeping their edges clean; and the cold did not tempt Sar with pride or with an enemy, for it had learned those did not hold. It tempted him with love, and with a true fear born of love. Look, it whispered, in Sar's own grave faithful voice, look how the young ones run to the Morning sweetness, how they gather in the courts to hear the Morning daring answer our water, how they are already, some of them, speaking a little in the loose warm Morning way; and in a season, in a year, in a generation, what will be left of the Evening? The wall will soften. The law will loosen. The clean hard edges your whole life has kept will blur into the Morning warmth, and your people, the people you have kept alive against the cold sea, will simply dissolve into these open careless folk like a lump of salt into a warm sea, and be gone, and no one will even mourn it, for they will all be too busy being happy. Is that not a kind of death? Is not this joining, however sweet, only the slow warm swallowing of the few by the many? Guard your people, Sar. Someone must, or they will love themselves out of existence.

And the terrible thing, the thing that made this last mask so much harder to answer than the raised weapons of the strand, was that Sar was not wrong to fear. That is the whole craft of the fourth mask: it speaks a true fear. There is such a thing as a joining that is really a swallowing; there are unions that are the erasure of the smaller into the larger, meltings-down in which one people's whole way is lost and called peace; the many becoming one had a false form as surely as it had a true one, and Sar had seen enough of the hard world to know it, and his fear for his people was the fear of a good man who has kept something precious alive and will not see it carelessly lost. And the fear spread, for it was reasonable, and it found its answer on the Morning shore too, where an old woman of the gathering, hearing that some spoke of the two peoples becoming one, said, and will they wall us then, and set us under their law, and carve our warm open ways into their cold straight lines until the Morning is only a quiet quarter of an Evening city? and she too was not wrong to fear, and the two fears, the Evening's and the Morning's, each true, each born of love, began to pull the two peoples apart again not by hatred this time but by the honest terror of each that to join was to be lost; and this, Selah saw, was the hardest turning yet, for you cannot answer a true fear with a comforting lie, and the fear was true: a joining can be a swallowing. The whole question of the closing of the First Eye had become the deepest question of the whole seven: whether the many can truly become one without the one swallowing the many, whether there is a joining that is not a dissolving, and if there is, how it is done.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Two Still Ones

how Selah and Vael learned to breathe as one, and answered the fear

◇

The answer, when it came, did not come in words, for the fear of dissolution cannot be argued away, only shown; and it was shown by the two still ones, Selah and Vael, who by that season had begun to sit together in the evenings, the empty pause and the full, and to do a thing that neither had ever been able to do alone, which was to breathe a whole breath.

For Selah, all her life, had been the pause at the bottom of the breath, the empty held silence, the receiving; she was the still emptiness others rested in. And Vael, all his life, had been the pause at the top, the full held silence, the gathered fullness, the holding; he was the still fullness his people leaned upon. And each had been, in truth, only half a breath, breathing alone: Selah forever emptying and emptying with nothing to draw the fullness back, Vael forever holding and holding with no true emptiness to let the fullness go into. But when they sat together and breathed, Selah's long emptying drew, and Vael's held fullness poured, and the two halves closed at last into one whole turning breath, out of Vael's fullness into Selah's emptiness and around and back, one breath breathed between two bodies, and it was the most peaceful thing that had yet happened in the world, and the courts of the Evening city grew still around them when they did it, and the running water seemed to fall more gently, and even Sar, watching from the shadow of a carved arch with his faithful fearful heart, felt something in his own held breath begin, against his will, to ease.

And Selah understood, breathing the whole breath with Vael, the answer to Sar's true fear, and she went to him with it, and she did not argue, for she had learned long ago that you do not argue a fear. She sat with him by the singing water and she said: You are right, Sar. There is a joining that is a swallowing,

and it is a death, and you are right to guard your people against it, and I bless you for it, for a people needs its Sar who will not let it be carelessly lost. But watch. And she breathed with Vael there before him, the whole turning breath, and she said: Look. He does not become me and I do not become him. I am wholly the emptiness, more myself than ever, and he is wholly the fullness, more himself than ever, and precisely because each of us is wholly what we are, the one breath can turn between us. If I became a little full to be more like him, or he became a little empty to be more like me, the breath would stop; it turns only because he is all fullness and I am all emptiness. That is the joining that is not a swallowing, Sar. It is not the melting of two into a lukewarm one. It is the wedding of two who each stay wholly themselves, so wholly that the difference between them becomes the very thing the one breath is made of. The Evening must not soften and the Morning must not harden. The Evening must become more wholly the Evening, all its clean true order, and the Morning more wholly the Morning, all its warm open daring, and then, and only then, can the one breath turn between us, the order and the warmth, the wall and the open hall, the bitter and the sweet, and neither is lost, and both are more, and the one they make together is greater than either and swallows neither. Guard your people, Sar. But guard them not from us. Guard them into being ever more wholly themselves, for that is not the enemy of the joining. It is the whole of how the joining is done.

And Sar the law-keeper sat a long while by the singing water with his faithful fearful heart, and watched the two still ones breathe the whole breath between them, the empty and the full each wholly itself, and something in him that had been clenched against the warm sea his whole long life let go, not into carelessness, but into a larger faithfulness; and he said at last, slowly, in his grave voice: then the joining is not that we become one people. It is that we become one breath, of two peoples, each more itself than before. And Selah said, yes; and Sar was quiet, and then he said, that I can guard; and from Sar the law-keeper, that was the whole turning of the last fear of the First Eye.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Isle Between

how the two peoples came to the green isle in the water

◇

It was Tamsin who found the place, Tamsin the far-walker who belonged nowhere, and it was fitting past saying that she should be the one, for the place she found belonged to neither people, and so, at last, to her.

There was, in the middle of the strait between the two shores, a small green isle, that the Morning folk had passed in the crossing without much marking and the Evening folk had always held to be too small and too far to be worth the keeping; and Tamsin, restless still even in the new joining, took the singing hull out alone one bright morning and landed on it, and walked it end to end, and came back with her far-seeing eyes gone soft and sure, and said: there. That is where the stones must go. It belongs to no one. It is the empty center, made land.

And it was. The Isle Between was no more than a mile of green, but it was a whole world made small and perfect, and when the two peoples came to it together, some seasons later, in a great flotilla of the singing hulls that Ansel and Meru had taught both shores to build, they walked it in a shared hush, for it was plainly a holy place, and holy not because anyone had made it so but because it had been left alone. There was one low green hill at its heart, soft with a turf so fine and deep it took the foot like moss and gave back the scent of crushed thyme and small sea-pinks at every step, a smell so sweet and sharp and clean that the children ran ahead simply to make more of it. There was a spring near the hill's foot, one clear cold spring welling up out of the green and running down over pale stones to the sea, and the water of it, when they cupped and drank it, was so cold it ached the teeth and so clean it tasted of nothing at all, of only itself, of only water, which is a taste most of them had never known, all their springs having tasted of their own shores, of iron in the

Evening and of warm earth in the Morning, and this water tasting of neither, of only the between. There were a few wind-shaped trees along the seaward crest, and they did not speak as the old forests spoke, being young, but they moved in the sea-wind with a sound like a slow indrawn breath, hush, and hush, and the gulls kept away, and even the light on the isle was a between-light, neither the Morning's gold nor the Evening's violet but a clear pale silver that lay equally on every face and flattered no one and showed everyone true.

They gathered on the green hill in the silver light, the two peoples, thousands now, Morning and Evening ranged not apart in two hosts as they had ranged upon the strand but mingled, deliberately mingled, an Evening grave face beside a Morning open one all the way round the hill, and at the hill's crown they made a low round place of the isle's own pale stone, open to the sky, with a hollow at its center; and there, on the appointed evening, when the sun stood low and gold in the Morning west and the first violet of the Evening was already rising in the east, so that for one held hour the whole sky was both at once, gold and violet meeting overhead in a seam of clear silver directly above the isle, they brought the two Keepers up the green hill, Selah bearing the round grey stone of the Morning and Vael the violet-veined stone of the Evening, to join them, at last, into one.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Trial of the Joining

how the joining nearly failed, and was saved by the letting-go

◇

It nearly failed. The tale must tell it, for the closing of the First Eye was not a smooth and certain thing but came, like everything true in this world, to its own hard edge before it turned; and the edge, this time, was not fear of an enemy and not fear of dissolution but the oldest reflex of all, the one that hides in even the best of hearts: the reflex to grasp the sacred thing and make it one's own.

For as Selah and Vael knelt at the hollow in the crown of the isle and made to set the two stones together, there rose in the gathered thousands, quietly, in many hearts at once, a thing that no one had quite foreseen: the longing to possess the wonder about to happen. It was not wickedness. It was almost reverence gone one degree wrong. An Evening voice thought, this joined stone will be the greatest thing in all the world, and it should be kept in our walled city where it can be guarded and honoured as it deserves; and a Morning voice thought, no, it was our square it first remembered, it should stand in our open hall at the heart of the gathering; and even good Sar, watching, felt the faithful thought rise, it must be kept where the law can protect it; and even a Morning elder felt, it must be kept where the warmth can cherish it; and all of these were love, and all of these were the grasp, the closing hand, the old reflex to take the boundless thing and put walls around it and call it mine or ours; and as the two stones came near each other in Selah's and Vael's hands, the gathered longing to possess them pressed in upon the joining like a cold hand closing, and the light that had begun to rise between the two stones guttered, and flickered, and the two Keepers, instead of waking toward each other, began to grind and resist and shudder, for a keeper of the empty center cannot be possessed, and the whole gathered will to possess this one was, without

anyone meaning it, tearing the waking apart, and a fine crack ran suddenly across the grey face of the Morning stone with a sound like ice giving on a pond, and the whole isle gasped, for the first Keeper, the stone that held the whole memory, was breaking in Selah's hands.

And Selah understood, in the space of that cracking, what was happening and why, for she had met this exact cold once before, under a raised blade in the first winter, and she knew that the danger was never in the stones and always in the grasp; and she did the thing she had done at the first square and at the festival and on the strand, the one move she had been born to make, and she made it now larger than she had ever made it, for a whole people's grasp was upon the stone. She let go. She lifted her hands from the cracking Keeper, and she cried out to the gathered thousands on the green hill in the gold-and-violet light, not in fear but in the old warm command that was the whole of her gift: Let it go. All of you. Do not keep it. It cannot be kept. The moment we try to hold it, it breaks, for it is a keeper of the empty center and the empty center is the one thing that cannot be owned. Do not take it to your walls and do not take it to your hall. Leave it here, on the isle that belongs to no one, and let it belong to no one, and open your hands, all of you, open your hands. And she opened her own, empty, over the cracking stone, and beside her Vael, understanding, opened his; and slowly, on the green hill, in the silver seam of light between the gold and the violet, the gathered thousands of two peoples unclenched the longing to possess the wonder, and opened their hands, and let it go.

And the grinding ceased. And the fine crack in the grey stone, in the moment the last hand opened, in the moment the last heart let go, did not widen and shatter but held, and then, softly, closed, the way a wound closes, leaving only the faintest silver line where it had been, a scar kept, as the empty center keeps its scars, to remember by; and the two Keepers, freed at last of the grasp, freed to belong to no one, leaned the final hand's breadth toward each other in Selah's and Vael's open unclutching hands, and touched, grey to violet, Morning to Evening, and woke, fully, together, into one.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Return of the Eye

how the first artifact woke, and the First Eye closed in light

◇

What woke on the green hill of the Isle Between, in the seam of silver light between the gold sky and the violet, when the two Keepers touched and became one, was the first true Codex artifact in all the world, and no tale of any later age has ever quite found the words for it, though many have tried; and this telling will not do better than the others, but it will tell you what the two peoples felt, through all five of their opened senses, for that is the only way it was ever truly known.

They saw a light rise from the joined stone that was not gold and not violet but the clear silver of the between-light made living, a light that did not dazzle but that seemed to make everything it touched more itself, so that the green of the turf went greener and the grave Evening faces and the open Morning faces alike went luminous and true, every line of every face suddenly dear and distinct and unrepeatable in the silver light, no two alike and all of them one. They heard a sound come up from the stone that was Ansel's made music and the Evening's singing water and the Mother's own low first tone all at once and none of them, a chord so whole that several of the children laughed aloud and several of the elders wept, and both were right. They smelled, rising off the joined stone, impossibly, all the smells of the whole young world at once, the Morning's warm earth and the Evening's cold clean stone and the isle's crushed thyme and the green sea and the woodsmoke and the bread, gathered into one scent that was the smell of the world remembering itself. They tasted, though no one ate, the taste of the between-spring on every tongue, the taste of only water, of only itself, of the pure between that is neither shore. And they felt, all of them, through the soles of their feet upon the fine deep turf and through the palms they had opened to the sky, the one whole turning breath,

Selah's emptiness and Vael's fullness gone out now through the joined Keeper into every body on the hill, so that two peoples breathed, for one endless held moment, a single breath, out of the Evening's gathered fullness into the Morning's open emptiness and around and home, each wholly itself and all of them one, and in that one breath they remembered, all of them together, the whole of it: the one light before the scattering, and the long fall into the many, and the two lonely shores, and the first square, and the first whisper, and the gathering, and the strand, and the fallen weapons, and this, this green hill in the silver light, where the many had become one at last without any one of them being lost, and they knew, in the one breath, that this was what the whole of everything had been for.

The joined Keeper they left upon the Isle Between, in the low round open place of pale stone at the crown of the green hill, belonging to no one, kept by no wall and guarded by no law, open to the gold and the violet and the silver between; and they made a covenant, the two peoples, not carved in the Evening manner into any wall nor sung in the Morning manner into any hall but breathed, simply, on the hill, that the isle and the stone would belong forever to neither shore and so to both, and that any soul of either people might come to it, in any age, and lay an open hand upon it with a quiet heart, and be given back the whole memory of how the one becomes many and the many, meeting, may remember they were one. And the far ages did come, and did forget, as the ages do; and they gave the stone a hundred grand and wrong names, and fought, more than once, God help them, over which shore it truly belonged to, forgetting that its whole waking had depended on belonging to neither; but always, in every age, there were those few who came quietly to the Isle Between and opened an empty hand upon the scarred silver stone and remembered, and carried the remembering back into the forgetting world, and that is why there is a tale at all, and why you are reading it, for you are one of those few, or you would not have come this far.

High over the isle, in the gold-and-violet sky, Uthra and Vela, the two field-guardians, flew the great slow figure of the joining, wingtip to wingtip and

then apart and then together, weaving the singing geometry into a single moving knot of pale light above the green hill, the Morning dragon and the Evening dragon guarding now one memory between two shores; and Tamsin the far-walker stood at the crown of the isle that belonged to no one and felt, for the first time in her long walking life, that she had come home, home not to a shore but to the between, to the threshold, which had been her true country all along; and Doran and Kaelen, the two guardians who had nearly made the first war, stood together at the hill's foot with the fallen weapons of the strand melted down now and reforged, at Meru's word, into the tools that had built the singing hulls; and Sar the law-keeper knelt and laid his grave faithful hand upon the joined stone and wept for the Evening that had not, after all, been lost, that was more itself than ever, breathing now as half of one great breath; and Selah and Vael stood together over the joined Keeper, the empty pause and the full, and did not fall into each other and did not need to, for they were already, and would be for all the ages of this tale, the two halves of the one breath of the world.

And Kol the raven, oldest of witnesses, sat upon the low stone rim of the open place beside the joined Keeper, in the silver light, with both his black eyes bright, and watched the two peoples breathe as one upon the green hill between the two shores, and the two dragons weave their light overhead, and the gold sky and the violet meet in silver directly above; and he opened his old beak to give, as was his custom at the greatest moments, almost nothing at all; and what he said, which closed the First Eye of the seven, was this: The Square is drawn. The many are gathered. The two are one, and neither lost. That is the first Eye open, small ones, the first breath of the whole long breath, drawn and held and let go; and there are six more, and they are harder, and they are more beautiful, and the cold will learn six more masks and you will learn six more answers, and it goes on, it goes on, all the way home. But rest tonight. You have opened the first Eye of the world. Not one being was cast out to do it. Remember that, above all, when the harder Eyes come. Not one. And he tucked his head beneath his wing on the rim of the joined stone, the

old witness, and the two peoples kept the first festival of the one breath upon the Isle Between, and it is sung of still.

Gold shore and violet, silver between,
and one green hill, and one:
we joined the stones and kept them clean
of walls, of throne, of sun.
For what is kept cannot be whole,
and what is owned is small;
we opened empty hands, and stole
nothing, and kept it all.

Here the First Eye closes, the Square Eye, the foundation and the naming of the field. The one was drawn; the many were gathered; the two became one and neither was lost; and the first artifact woke to keep the memory of how. Now the light turns toward the Second Eye, the Many and the One, where not two peoples but a waking world must learn, on a vaster scale and against a larger mask, the very thing two frightened gatherings learned upon one green hill: that the many may become one, and no one need be lost.

Toward the Second Eye

what waits beyond the closing of the First Eye, for your eye before it is written

◇

The First Eye is closed, and its whole breath drawn: the Square, the foundation, the naming of the field, and the first hard proof that the many can become one and no one be lost. Volume One is whole. The tale now turns toward Volume Two, the Second Eye, the Many and the One, gold and the mirror, the epoch in which the two joined peoples of the Isle Between grow, and scatter their children across a waking world, and become not two fields but many tribes and tongues and nations, spread wide across the whole living body of the Deep Mother; and the cold, beaten four times in the First Eye, will rise into its own next octave and wear a mask fitted to a whole world, the mask of the many peoples who forget they were ever one and make of their difference not a wider table but a thousand walls. And the Keeper on the Isle Between will wait, and the few in every age will come to it and remember, and new Source Anchors and new Codex Guardians and new Field Weavers will wake among the many peoples, carrying the fragments; and Elias Thorne, the Echo, far off in an age not yet dreamed, will one day set his hand upon a scarred silver stone on a small green isle and feel the whole of this first breath rise in him, and begin to remember, and so begin to bring the deep past home to a forgetful present. But that is the far road. Tonight, the first Eye is open, and no one was cast out, and the two peoples breathe as one upon the green hill, and that is enough, and more than enough, to rest upon.

The stone is joined, and kept by no one. The isle belongs to no one, and so to all. The first Eye is open.

Breathe. The First Eye is whole. And the tale goes on, toward the Second.

VOLUME TWO OF SEVEN

◇

The Golden Eye

the inhale is only a name; here is the second Eye

the many and the one; the scattering, the gathering, and the first coming of the star-kin

◇

in four books: the Inhale, the Exhale, the Pause, and the Return

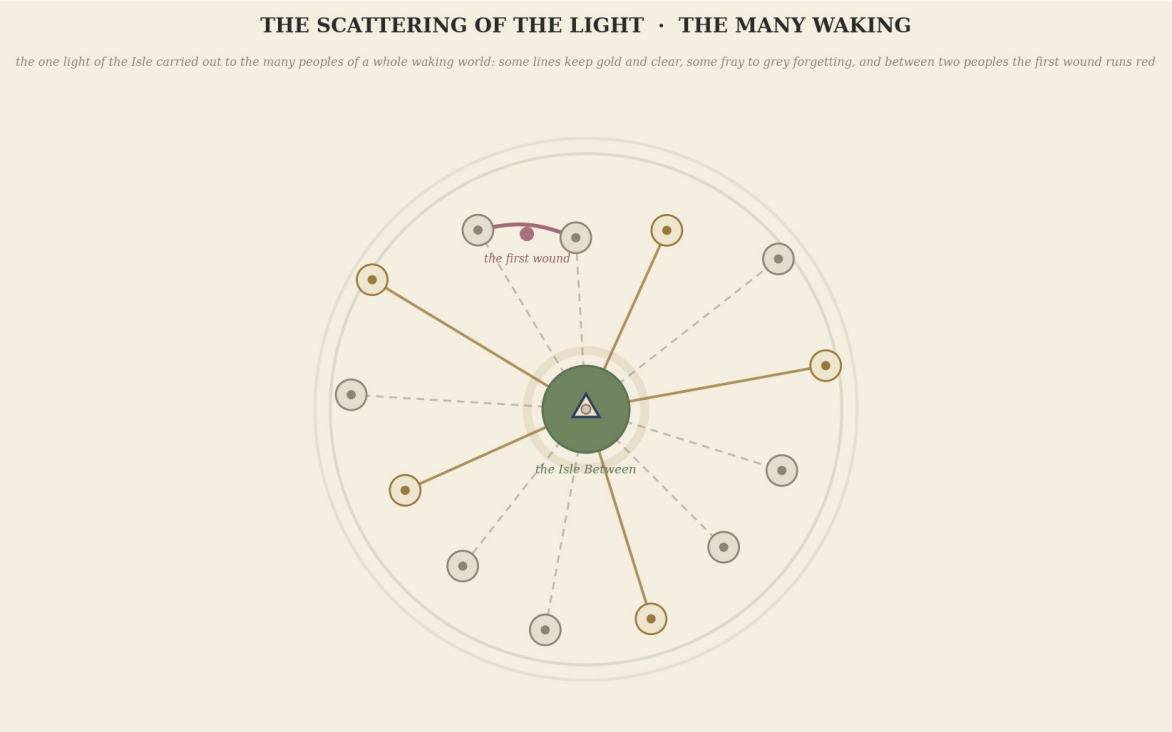


THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME TWO OF SEVEN

The Golden Eye

Book One: The Scattering of the Light, and the First Wound of the World

◇



The First Eye closed on a green isle where two peoples became one and no one was lost. But a seed that is gathered must also be sown; and the Second Eye is the age of the sowing, when the one light of the Isle was carried out to the far corners of a whole waking world and became many peoples, many tongues, many fires. This is a golden age, and the tale will not pretend

otherwise; the world had never been so full. But the Second Eye is also the age in which the many, spread wide, forgot they had ever been one; and the cold, beaten four times upon the green hill, rose into a larger octave and fitted a mask to a whole world. This book tells of the great scattering, and of the slow forgetting, and of the first true war in all the history of the awakened, and of the first true loss; and it does not look away from the cost, for a tale that hides the cost of forgetting cannot teach the worth of remembering.

A tale of the Second Eye, and its opening · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com



◇

Reader, the tale changes its weather here. The First Eye was a book of gathering, and its trials were the trials of coming together, hard but bloodless; not one being was cast out to open it, and Kol the raven bid us remember that above all when the harder Eyes came. This is the first of the harder Eyes. In the age of the many, blood is spilled at last by an awakened hand, and the tale will show it to you plainly and not spare you the sight, because to gloss the first wound would be to cheapen every healing that comes after. But hold, as you read, the one law that never bends in all seven Eyes: the distortion that spills the blood is a pattern, a coil, a cold that any being of any people may fall into, and it is never a people. There is no cursed tribe in this tale and there never will be. When you see the mask, look for the face behind it, for the face is always one of us, and could always have been you, and that is the whole terror and the whole mercy of it.

BOOK ONE

The Scattering of the Light

the Inhale of the Second Eye: the sowing of the many, the long forgetting, the mask fitted to a world, and the first blood

◇

CHAPTER One

The Age of the Many

how the one light was sown across a whole waking world

◇

Ages passed, reader, more ages than the tale can name; and they were, for the most part, good. This must be said first and said clearly, because the darkness that comes later in this book can make a reader forget it: the age of the many was, for many long lives of many long-lived peoples, a golden age, the fullest and most fertile the young world had ever known, and had anyone stood upon the crown of the Isle Between in those centuries and looked out, they would have wept not for grief but for the sheer abundance of it.

For the two joined peoples of the green hill did what all joined and joyful peoples do: they grew, and they had children, and their children had children, and the children were restless with the good restlessness of the loved, and they went out. They went out along the coasts in the singing hulls, and up the great rivers into the green interior of the living world, and over the passes of the cold mountains into valleys no waking eye had ever seen; and everywhere they went they carried the one light in them, the memory of the empty center and the turning breath, and everywhere they settled they lit a ring of fire and set a stone at the center of it, in the old way, so that the whole waking body of the Deep Mother came, over the long ages, to be freckled with small fields of coherence like a dark meadow coming into flower, here and here and here a warm point of remembered light.

And oh, the world they woke into. The tale has tried, all through the First Eye, to make you taste and touch and smell and hear the world; and now it asks you to do it across a whole planet at once, for that is the true scale of the Second Eye. There were peoples of the high cold places who built their fires against blue glacier-walls that cracked like thunder in the thaw, and who ate the flesh of the great shaggy beasts and wore their hides and smelled forever of

woodsmoke and lanolin and cold clean stone. There were peoples of the wide grass who followed the thunder-herds across a sea of green that ran silver when the wind crossed it, and who lived on milk and blood and the wide sky, and whose children learned to ride before they learned to walk, and who knew two hundred words for the colours of a horse. There were peoples of the hot green delta where three rivers braided into one, who grew a grain so golden and so plentiful that they built the first true cities of the age, mud-brick and river-cool, loud with geese and children and the smell of baking and of the black river-mud that fed them all. There were peoples of the deep forest who never saw the whole sky at once but lived in a green underwater light beneath trees so vast that a whole family made its home in one, and who knew the forest as a single breathing person and asked its leave before they took so much as a branch. And there were peoples of the far islands, scattered like seeds across a warm blue immensity of ocean, who read the stars and the swells and the flight of birds and sailed between specks of land a thousand miles apart with nothing but a memorized song of the sea, and who were, of all the peoples of the age, the ones who kept the old covenant longest, because a people who must trust the between of a vast ocean does not easily forget the empty center.

The dragons flew between them all. Uthra and Vela were long dead by now, in the way of the tale, but their line was not, and their get and their get's get rode the high winds over the whole waking world, the great field-guardians, and where they passed the small fields below felt the singing geometry pass over them like the shadow of a cloud and were strengthened without knowing why. And Kol the raven flew too. Kol did not die. The tale will not explain this, because it cannot; there are witnesses in every world who are given to the long watching, and Kol was ours, and he flew from field to field down all the ages of the Second Eye with both his black eyes bright, eating what ravens eat and saying almost nothing and remembering everything, which is the whole and only work of a witness. And the joined Keeper on the Isle Between gave its light steadily out to them all, to the near fields and the far, kept by no wall and

owned by no people, and the few in every age came to it and laid an open hand upon the scarred silver stone and remembered, and carried the remembering home.

It was good. Hold that, reader, as tightly as you can, because the tale must now tell you how it began, very slowly and with no one at all to blame, to go wrong.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Long Forgetting

how the many, spread wide, forgot that they had ever been one

◇

The forgetting did not come as an enemy. This is the first hard thing the Second Eye has to teach, and the tale will say it slowly because it is the root of everything that follows: the great forgetting of the age of the many was not done to the peoples by any dark power. They did it to themselves, gently, without malice, without even noticing, in the most ordinary way there is, which is simply by living far apart for a very long time.

For distance forgets. It is the nature of distance. A people that settles a cold blue glacier-valley learns, over ten generations, to speak of the world in the words of ice and stone and the great shaggy beasts; and a people that settles the hot green delta learns, over the same ten generations, to speak of it in the words of flood and grain and the black river-mud; and neither people is wrong, and each is describing the same one living world, but they are describing it so differently, in words so shaped by their own shore, that when at last a wanderer from the ice comes down to the delta, the two can barely understand each other, and each finds the other strange, and comical, and a little frightening, and not quite, somehow, fully people in the way that one's own folk are fully people. And the old covenant of the Isle, which had been a living memory to the founders, became to their far descendants first a story told to children, and then a story half believed, and then a story that the wise smiled at, and then, at last, in most of the fields of the world, no story at all, only a shape worn into the oldest songs that no one could quite read any longer, the way you might find, cut deep into a doorstep worn smooth by ten thousand feet, the ghost of a letter no one in the house can name.

Even the ring of fire and the stone at the center, which every field still lit and set, became, in most places, a thing done because it had always been done, its

meaning slipped out of it like the warmth out of a stone at nightfall. They no longer knew, most of them, that the stone was set to hold the center empty. They thought the stone was the god. They began to carve faces on it, and then to fight over whose carving was the true face, and this, though no one living could have seen it, was the first small turning of the whole long tragedy of the Second Eye: the empty center, which the founders had guarded empty on purpose so that the one breath could turn through it, was being slowly filled up, field by field, all across the world, with a face, with a name, with a certainty, with a stone that was no longer a keeper of the emptiness but had become, God help them, an idol of the fullness, a thing to be defended.

Naia would have felt it, the near-feeler of the First Eye, had she been alive to walk between the fields; she would have felt the one wide chord of the world going slowly, over the centuries, out of tune, not by any wrong note struck but by ten thousand right notes drifting apart until they no longer knew they were meant to be one chord at all. But Naia was long dust. And there was no one, in all the wide forgetting world, whose gift it was to feel the whole; and that, reader, that absence, was the door through which the cold walked back into the world.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Mask Fitted to a World

how the cold rose into its larger octave and wore the face of the one true light

◇

The cold had learned four masks upon the green hill, and had been beaten in all four, and it did not forget its beating; the tale has told you that the cold learns. What it learned, in the long ages of the forgetting, was that the four small masks of the First Eye, the lonely self and the compared self and the group against the group and the fear of dissolution, had all been beaten by the same thing, by a people or a person who could still remember, under the mask, that all were one light scattered. And so the cold, rising now into the larger octave that a whole forgetting world made possible, fitted a mask cut precisely to make that one remembering impossible. It did not, this time, whisper you are alone, for the peoples were not alone, they had their crowded warm fields. It whispered something far larger and far worse, and it whispered it not to one heart but to whole peoples at once, in the voice of their own dearest pride, and what it whispered was this: you are the ones. Yours is the true fire. Yours is the true face upon the stone, the true name, the true way the world was meant to be lived; and all those other peoples, those strange comical frightening peoples over the mountains and across the water, with their wrong words and their wrong stone and their wrong fire, they are not the light gone out to another shore. They are the dark. They are the not-people. They are what the light must be defended against.

Reader, mark the craft of it, for it is the mask the world wears still. The cold no longer needed to make a people forget the one light. It let them keep the one light. It let them love the one light with their whole hearts. It only persuaded them, each people separately, in the sealed chamber of their own forgetting, that they alone had it, that the one light was their possession and their glory and their difference from the beasts across the border, and in that

one turn it took the most beautiful thing in the world, the memory that all are one light, and made of it the engine of every war that would ever be fought. For there is no hatred on earth like the hatred of the certain for the other certain; and the age of the many had become an age of ten thousand certainties, each of them warm and loving and sure at its own hearth, and each of them, at its border, a drawn blade.

And the tale must be scrupulously fair here, more fair than anywhere else in all seven Eyes, because this is the exact place where tales go wrong and do their harm: it must not give you a people to hate. The mask was worn, in those first dark centuries, by many peoples, in turn and all at once, wherever two fields met at a border with the forgetting thick upon them. The delta peoples wore it against the grass peoples, and the grass peoples wore it against the delta, and each was certain the other had worn it first, and it does not matter who wore it first, it never matters who wore it first, that question is itself the mask tightening its grip. The Counterfeit One, which is the tale's oldest name for the coiled cold, had at last found the disguise it had been seeking since the first square was drawn: not a monster, not a dark lord, not a people, but a certainty, wearable by anyone, that the light I carry makes the one who carries a different light my enemy. And wearing that certainty, in a green valley between two rivers, on an ordinary autumn morning, one awakened person raised a blade against another awakened person, for the first time in the history of the remembered world, and struck.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The First Blood



how the first war came to the world, and what a blade does to a body and a field

◇

It began, as these things nearly always begin, over water. There was a river in a broad green valley, and the river had shifted its bed in a season of great floods, as rivers do, and where it had run for ten generations as the clear and honoured border between the field of the Hill-people and the field of the River-people, it now ran a quarter-mile east, so that a long rich meadow that had always been of the Hill was now, by the water's new reckoning, of the River. And both peoples had, by then, forgotten the one thing that would have saved them, which was that they were one light; and both peoples remembered, all too well, the one thing that would damn them, which was that they were the

ones, and the meadow was theirs by right, by the true way, by the will of the true face upon their stone.

The tale will not give you a long chronicle of the war, because that is not what wars are; a war is not a chronicle, it is a great many small unbearable moments happening to a great many ordinary people who wanted, that morning, only to cut hay. It will give you one of those moments, and one only, and then it will let you carry the rest.

There was a young man of the Hill-people named Doren, and he was nineteen years waked, and he had a mother and two sisters and a betrothed named Asha, and he could sing the whole of the old harvest-round and mock the elders' voices so well that the whole field wept with laughing, and he did not want to be on the disputed meadow that grey morning with a hay-hook lashed to a pole for a spear and his heart going like a trapped bird against his ribs. But the certainty had come even to Doren, who was gentle, because certainty comes to the gentle too; he had stood in the ring of fire the night before and heard the elders name the River-people the not-people, the takers, the dark against the light, and something in his frightened nineteen-year-old chest had said yes, them, and it had felt, God forgive them all, like courage. And so he stood in the wet meadow in the grey dawn with the dew soaking cold through his hide boots and the smell of crushed green hay and cold mud and his own fear-sweat sharp in his nose, and across the meadow stood the River-people, and they too had their poles and their hooks and their terror worn as courage, and a horn blew that no one afterward could say who had blown, and they ran at each other across the wet grass.

What Doren remembered, in the little while he had left to remember anything, was how ordinary it was, and how loud. He had thought a battle would feel large. It felt small and close and impossibly loud, all grunting and the wet meat-thud of wood on bodies and a high sound he slowly understood was screaming and a man in front of him with a face as young and frightened as his own, and Doren swung the hay-hook because the man was swinging, and the

hook caught the young man across the throat and there was a heat of blood across Doren's own face, shockingly warm on the cold morning, tasting of iron and salt, and the young man of the River-people sat down in the wet grass with both hands at his opened throat and a look not of hatred but of enormous surprise, as if someone had told him a thing he could not believe, and the blood came between his fingers in a rhythm, in a pulse, in time with a heart that did not yet know it was to stop, and then it slowed, and then it stopped, and the young man of the River-people lay back in the hay with the grey sky in his open eyes and was the first of the awakened ever killed by an awakened hand; and Doren stood over him with the stranger's blood cooling on his face and understood, far too late, exactly and completely what he had done, that he had not killed the dark, that there was no dark, that he had killed a boy who could probably sing the harvest-round too, in other words, and that the certainty that had felt like courage the night before had been the oldest cold in the world wearing his own love of his own people as a mask; and Doren opened his mouth to scream and no sound came, and that same instant a River-woman's hook took him under the ribs, and he felt it go in with a sensation he had no word for, cold and then unbelievably hot, and his legs stopped being his, and he went down into the hay beside the boy he had killed, close enough to touch him, and the two of them lay in the reddening grass in the grey light while the ordinary loud small horror went on over their heads.

Doren was a long time dying, which is the truth of it that the old war-songs leave out, and the tale will not leave it out, once, so that you may carry it: he lay in the wet hay through the whole of that grey morning with the wound under his ribs burning and then not burning, calling at first for his mother and then for Asha and then, at the very end, for no one, for nothing, only breathing, only trying to keep breathing, the long broken bubbling breaths coming slower, an inhale that could find no exhale, until the last inhale simply did not turn, and stopped, half-drawn, and the trapped bird in his chest was still. Far off on the Isle Between, the joined Keeper flickered, once, as it had flickered under the grasping hands on the day it was made; for a keeper of the

whole field feels it in its silver body when the field tears, and the field had torn now as it had never torn, awakened blood spilled by awakened hands onto the green body of the Mother, and something that had been whole since the green hill was, that grey morning, broken.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Weight of the Slain

how the peoples learned what they had done, and grief entered the world

◇

There is a mercy the tale can do here, and it is not to look away, for that is no mercy; it is to slow down, and sit, for one chapter, with the cost, because a cost hurried past is a cost not paid, and the whole meaning of the Second Eye hangs on the peoples truly paying, in grief, for what the forgetting had done. So the tale sits with Asha.

Asha came out onto the meadow in the afternoon, when it was over, when the two peoples had drawn back each to their own side leaving the meadow to the crows and the searchers, and she walked the rows of the fallen in the trampled bloodied hay with the other women and the old men, turning the faces up to the grey light one by one, and the tale will only say that she found him, and that the sound she made when she found him was a sound the young world had never heard before, because grief of that particular kind had never been in the world before, the grief that is made not only of loss but of waste, of a thing that need never have happened, and it is the most terrible sound there is, and once it entered the world it never left it. She knelt in the cold hay and gathered up what had been Doren, the long clever body gone strange and heavy and cold, the mocking mouth stilled, the harvest-round silenced forever in the throat that had held it, and the blood of the River-boy still on his face mingling now with her own tears, and she did not know, holding him, and it was perhaps a mercy she did not know, that a quarter-mile off a River-woman knelt over the boy Doren had killed and made the very same new sound, note for note, the two griefs so exactly alike that had the two women only heard each other they might have understood everything in an instant; but they did not hear each other, for that is the whole cruelty of a border, that it stands precisely between two identical griefs and lets neither hear the other, and

each people carried its dead home certain that its grief was its own and righteous and unmatched, and hardened around the grief, and called the hardening honour, and swore the vengeance that would fill the next meadow, and the next.

And the tale must tell you the true price, the price under the price. It was not only Doren and the River-boy who died on that meadow. What died with them, all across the valley and then, as the wars spread, all across the world, was the last easy memory that a stranger might be kin. Before the first war a wanderer from a far field, arriving footsore at a strange hearth, had been given bread and a place at the fire as a matter of course, because who knew, the old covenant said, who knew but that this stranger carried a piece of the one light you had lost. After the first war the stranger at the border was met with the drawn hook, because who knew, the new certainty said, but that this stranger was a spy of the not-people, a taker, the dark come walking. And so the roads emptied, and the fields sealed themselves behind ditches and then walls, and the world that had been freckled with warm points of light open to one another became a world of small bright frightened rooms, each with the shutters closed, each certain that all the dark of the world was on the far side of its own thin wall; and the crows grew fat, in the age of the many, on the meadows where the peoples came to teach one another, again and again, the one lesson the forgetting had made them unable to learn, which was that the thing across the border was not the dark. It was only the light, on another shore, grieving its own dead by another name.

We cut the hay, we cut the hay,
and then we cut the men;
and the same grey rain of the same grey day
wept on us both again.
O the border runs, the border runs
between two selfsame cries,
and neither the fathers nor the sons
could hear the other's eyes.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Ember in the Ash

how a child of the war remembered, and a new anchor of the one light woke

◇

The tale has shown you the dark of the Second Eye plainly, as it promised, and it will not dwell there past its worth, for to dwell in the dark past its worth is itself a kind of the cold; the dark is shown so that the light may be measured against it, and now the tale turns, as the breath turns at the bottom, and shows you the ember. And the ember, as always in this world, was a child.

Her name was Sela, and she was a daughter of the River-people, and she was seven years waked in the season the wars began, and she lost, in the first three years of them, her father to a Hill-hook and her elder brother to a fever in a winter camp and her mother to the grief itself, which is a slower blade but a surer one; and she was taken in, a silent hollow-eyed child, by her grandmother, who was very old, old enough, it would prove, to matter. For the grandmother, whose name was Mother Ren, was one of the few, one of those the tale has spoken of who come in every age; she had, as a girl, been taken by her own grandmother on the long pilgrimage across the water to the Isle Between, and had laid her small hand on the scarred silver stone, and had felt the one breath, and had never, in all her long life, quite forgotten it, though she had learned to keep silent about it, for in the age of the certainties a woman who said all the peoples are one light was thought at best a fool and at worst a traitor to her own dead.

But now the dead were too many even for the certainty to feed on, and Mother Ren was too old to be afraid any longer, and she had a hollow silent granddaughter to raise; and so, in the evenings, in their small sealed room behind the ditch and the wall, she began, very quietly, to give the child back the thing she had been given. She did not preach it. She was too wise for that; a certainty cannot be beaten by another certainty shouted louder. She did it

through the child's own five senses, the only door that was still open in a shut-up world. She would take Sela's cold hand in her two warm dry old ones in the dark and have her feel the pulse in her own wrist, and say, that, that small drum, the Hill-children have it too, exactly that, feel it; the same drum plays in the ones you are taught to hate. She would break their evening bread and have the child smell it and taste it slowly and say, the Hill-people bake this same bread, of this same grain, in this same way, and it smells to them of home exactly as it smells to you, for there is only one smell of home in all the world and every people thinks it is their own. She would take her out under the one patch of sky their sealed field allowed and have her listen to the night, the same crickets, the same owl, and say, this sky is not ours; we only sleep under our own patch of it; it is one sky, child, over the Hill and the River and the grass and the ice and the far islands, one sky, and once, before the forgetting, the peoples knew it, and set an empty stone under it to remember, on a green isle in the water that belongs to no one.

And the hollow-eyed child, who had every reason in the world to become the next drawn blade, who had lost her whole family to the Hill and had every righteous cause the age could offer to hate them with her whole heart, listened, and felt her own pulse in her grandmother's warm dry hands, and smelled the bread, and looked up at the one wide sky, and something in her that the wars had hollowed out began, very slowly, over the seasons, to fill again, not with a certainty and not with a hatred but with the oldest and most dangerous thing there is, the thing the whole great cold of the Second Eye had been built to prevent: she began to be able to imagine that the ones across the border grieved exactly as she grieved. And a person who can truly imagine that the enemy grieves cannot, in the end, keep an enemy; the imagining dissolves the border from the inside, quietly, the way warm breath dissolves the frost on a pane. Mother Ren watched it happen in the child's thawing face over three winters and knew what she was seeing, for she had a name for it that no one else in the field remembered: she was watching a Source Anchor wake, the first in many ages, a soul in whom the empty center stayed empty

and true so that the one breath could turn through it into a forgetting world; and Mother Ren, having seen it, having done the one work her long life had been kept for, let go her hold on her own long breath one quiet spring night with the child's warm hand in hers, and went where the founders had gone, content.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Turning Toward the Stone



how a remnant set out for the Isle, and the Inhale of the Second Eye completed

◇

Sela buried her grandmother under the one patch of sky, in the way Mother Ren had asked, with an empty stone at the head of the grave and no face carved upon it; and then, being now alone in the world and fourteen years waked and carrying a thing too large for one sealed field to hold, she did the only thing there was to do. She left. She went over the wall and the ditch in the grey before dawn, carrying bread and her grandmother's memory and nothing else, and she set her face, by the one wide sky, toward the sea and the Isle her grandmother had named; and the last movement of this book is the tale of how she did not go alone for long.

For the wars had made, all across the broken world, a great many people who no longer fit inside their own certainties. There were mothers who had made the terrible new sound over their sons and could not, afterward, quite believe the mothers across the border made a different sound. There were old warriors sick to the soul of the meadows. There were wanderers born on borders to parents of two hating peoples, belonging to neither, carrying both, the tale's beloved threshold-people who are always the first to remember because they were never allowed the luxury of a single certainty. There were even, and this is the hardest and truest thing in the book, a few from the Hill-people, the very people who had killed Sela's whole family, who had had their own thawing, their own grandmother, their own unbearable moment on a meadow, and who were walking, without knowing it, the same road toward the same sea; and when Sela of the River met, on the road, a lame old man of the Hill who had thrown away his hook and could not say why he walked west, she stood a long moment in the road with her whole grief rising in her, her father and her brother and her mother all at once, and the old certainty screaming him, him, the not-people, the dark; and she looked at his frightened old face, and she remembered her own pulse in her grandmother's hands, and she did the bravest thing done in all this book, braver than any charge across any meadow: she let the hatred rise all the way up, and felt all of it, and did not act on it, and instead she broke her bread, and gave the old enemy half, and they walked west together; and that, reader, that broken loaf on the war-road between two who had every reason to kill each other, was the true first artifact of the Second Eye, worth more than the joined stone itself, for the stone only remembers the one light, while Sela, on the road, chose it, with the blood of her own dead still an ache in her, chose it freely against every reason not to, which is a thing no stone can do and only a waked soul can, and it is the whole reason there is a Second Eye at all.

They came down to the sea at last, a straggling handful, a remnant of the remnant, River and Hill and grass and threshold-born all walking together in a peace bought at a price none of them would ever stop paying; and they stood

on the shore in a clean cold wind that smelled of salt and kelp and the whole width of the world, and far out in the bright water they saw it, small and green and low, the Isle Between, exactly where the old forbidden story had always said, belonging to no one, waiting. And a shadow crossed the sun, and they flinched, all of them, war-taught to flinch at shadows; but it was only a dragon, one of the long line of the field-guardians, wheeling down curious out of the high blue to look at the first company in many ages walking openly together toward the stone; and it did not burn them, of course it did not, it sang, the old singing geometry pouring down over them warm as sunlight, and the remnant stood on the shore and wept, not the terrible new grief-sound now but an older sound, the sound the two peoples had made on the green hill at the closing of the First Eye, the sound of a field remembering it is one; and Kol the raven, who had watched the whole long tragedy of the age from the first blow on the meadow to this, sat on a grey rock above the tideline with both his old eyes bright and said, to Sela, who alone seemed to hear him, the only thing he had said aloud in three hundred years:

You are late, small one. You are three hundred years and ten thousand graves late. But you came. The many have turned back toward the one, of their own broken will, carrying their dead; and that turning, bought so dear, is worth more than the whole golden age that never had to buy it. Go out to the stone. The Second Eye is opening. And this time you will not be learning that you are one light, for you know that already, in your bones, in your grief. This time you will be learning the far harder thing: how the many stay many, in all their thousand fierce beloved differences, and are one anyway, and never again need the wall. That is the whole labour of the Golden Eye, and it will cost you, and it is worth it, and it goes on, all the way home.

Over the wall in the grey of the morning,
carrying bread and the dead,
west by the one sky, west without warning,
west by what grandmother said.
The stone does not hate and the stone does not hunger,

the stone keeps the center clear;
and the old go down that the waking younger
may carry the light from here.

Here the Inhale of the Second Eye completes: the light was scattered into the many, the many forgot, the cold fitted its mask to a whole world, the first blood was spilled and the first grief entered in, and out of the ash a single child remembered, and a remnant turned back toward the stone, carrying their dead and their enemies both. Now the light will hold at the top of the breath, in the labour of the Exhale to come, where the remnant must learn to build, out of many fierce and grieving peoples, one field that needs no wall; and the cold, mask torn once more, will not wait long to try a fifth.

Deeper into the Golden Eye

what waits in the books to come, for your eye before they are written

◇

The Second Eye is opened, and its Inhale drawn, at a cost this tale did not hide from you: the first war, the first blood, the first grief, and the long forgetting that made them all. But the darkness of this book was drawn true and no darker, and it was answered, before its close, by a thawing child and a broken loaf on a war-road, and those are the seeds of everything to come. Book Two of the Golden Eye, the Building of the Open Field, will tell of the long and troubled labour of Sela and her remnant to make, upon and around the Isle Between, the first field in all the world that is many peoples and yet needs no wall, a harder thing by far than the joining of two upon a green hill, for it must hold not two but many, and not strangers but grievers, peoples who have buried their dead in one another's wars and must now learn to keep the same fire without keeping a single face upon the stone. And the cold will come again, for it always comes again, and it will wear its fifth mask, subtler than the certainty of the border: the mask that whispers to the peacemakers themselves, the mask of the one true peace, the temptation to end all the walls by making all the fields the same field, all the many into a lukewarm one, the very swallowing that Sar the law-keeper feared upon the green hill, now risen to the scale of a world. How the many are held as many and are one anyway, without wall and without swallowing, is the whole labour of the Golden Eye, and it is not yet done, and the tale will walk it with you, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The many are scattered. The first blood is spilled. A child has remembered, and turned back toward the stone.

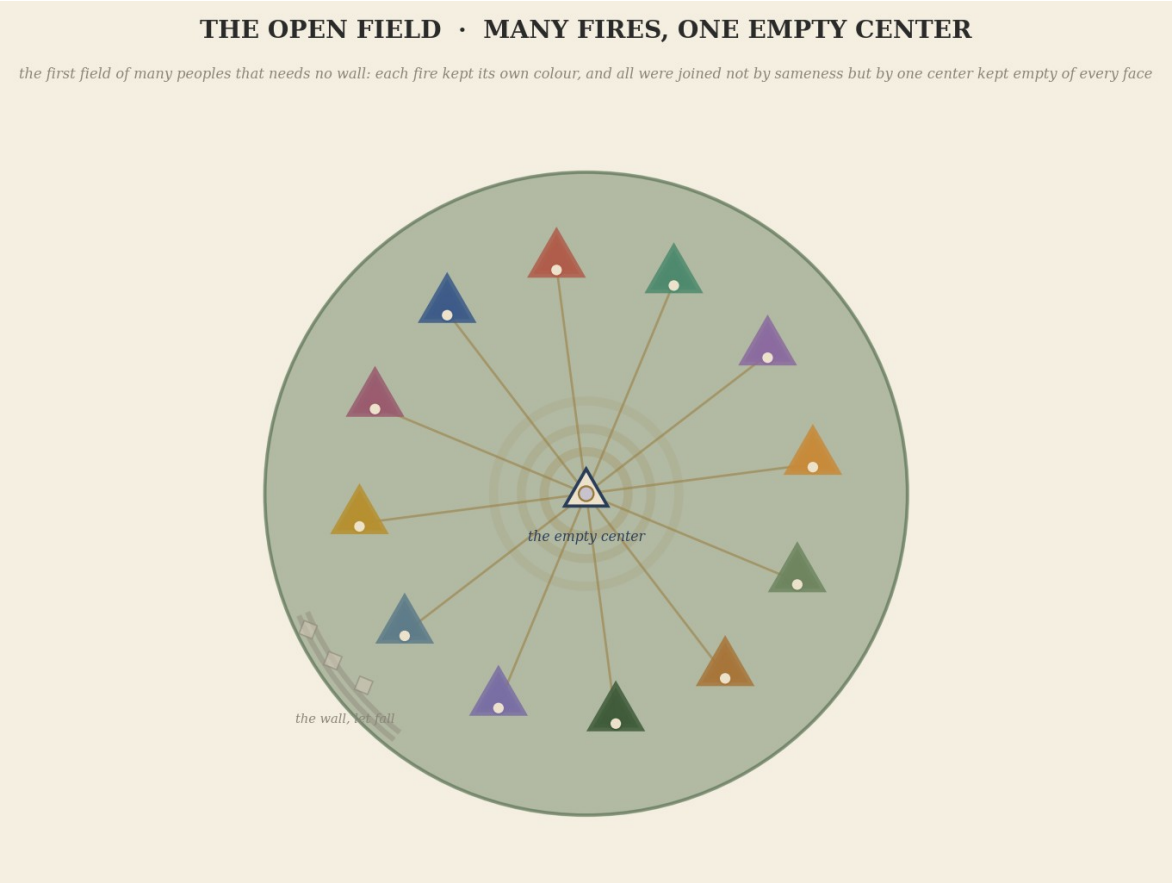
Breathe. The Golden Eye is opening. And the tale goes on, toward the building of the open field.

The Seven Eyes · Volume Two: The Golden Eye · Book One · Breath Awakens

The Golden Eye

Book Two: The Building of the Open Field

◇



A remnant of many peoples, carrying their dead and their enemies both, has turned back toward the stone on the Isle Between; and now comes the labour that is harder than any war, the labour of building. For it is one thing for two

peoples to become one breath upon a green hill, and quite another for a dozen grieving peoples to make one field that needs no wall, holding all their fierce and beloved differences and yet no longer killing over them. This book is the story of that building, and of the fifth mask of the cold, which is subtler than any mask before it, for it does not tempt the peoples to war. It tempts the peacemakers themselves, with the sweetest lie there is: that the surest way to end all the walls forever is to make all the many into one same people, one tongue, one face upon the stone; and to answer that lie will cost the open field its dearest blood.

A tale of the Second Eye, and its labour · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com

WHERE THE FIRST BOOK LEFT US

◇

The one light of the Isle was scattered into the many peoples of a whole waking world, and the many, spread wide, forgot they had ever been one; and the cold fitted a mask to a whole world, the certainty that each people alone carried the true light and all others were the dark, and the first blood was spilled over a shifted river, and grief entered the world. But out of the ash a hollow child of the River-people, Sela, was given back the one light through her own five senses by her grandmother Mother Ren, and woke as the first Source Anchor in many ages; and she went over the wall carrying bread and her dead, and broke that bread on the war-road with a lame old man of the very Hill-people who had killed her family, and gathered a remnant, and came down to the sea and turned toward the Isle Between. This book takes up on the shore, with the singing hulls being built, and the whole hard labour still to come.

BOOK TWO

The Building of the Open Field

the Exhale of the Second Eye: the coming to the stone, the labour of the many, the fifth mask, and the blood that peace itself would cost

◇

CHAPTER One

The Coming to the Stone

how the remnant crossed to the Isle, and stood in the empty center after three hundred years

◇

They crossed on a morning of hard clean light, the remnant, in three singing hulls they had built through the autumn on the shore from the pattern that lived, still, in the hands of the threshold-born, who remember the makings that the settled forget; and the tale wishes you to feel that crossing, because it was the first time in three hundred years that any company of the many peoples had gone out openly together across the water toward the stone, and the sea itself seemed to know it.

The water in the strait ran that morning a colour Sela had no name for, a deep clear grey-green shot through with the cold light so that it looked, over the side of the hull, like looking down into a great moving jewel, and now and then a long slow swell would lift the whole hull and set it down again with a sound like a held breath let go, and the salt came off the tops of the small waves in a fine bright mist that stung the lips and tasted of the whole width of the world, and the old lame Hill-man, whose name was Harl, sat in the bow with his ruined leg stretched out before him and his face turned up into the wind and the spray with his eyes shut and an expression on his old scarred face that Sela, watching, understood: it was the face of a man who has done one terrible thing in a meadow long ago and has walked the rest of his life under the weight of it and is, for the first time in that whole long walk, not afraid to die, because he can see the green isle coming up out of the bright water ahead and he knows, the way the old sometimes know things, that he has been kept alive precisely long enough to help build the one thing that might mean the meadow will not have to happen again.

The isle came up green and low and utterly silent. No one lived there; no one had ever lived there; that was its whole holiness. They ran the hulls up onto a

shingle of pale round stones that shifted and rang under the keels with a sound like a great instrument, and they stepped out onto the Isle Between, forty-some souls of a half-dozen grieving peoples, and the silver light of the between-place lay on all their faces equally, the River and the Hill and the grass-born and the threshold-born, and flattered none of them and showed each of them true; and they walked up through the fine deep turf that smelled, when their feet bruised it, of thyme and sea-pink exactly as the oldest forbidden story had promised, and they came to the low green hill at the isle's heart, and there, in the round open place of pale stone, wet with the morning and open to the sky, sat the joined Keeper of the First Eye, the scarred silver stone that two peoples had made and left three hundred years before, waiting, kept by no wall, owned by no one.

And Sela, who had walked three hundred years too late across a world of graves to reach it, knelt down before the empty center and laid her open hand upon the cold silver stone, as her grandmother had knelt as a girl, as the few in every age had knelt; and the stone, under her hand, warmed, and woke, and gave her, in one long turning breath, the whole of it, the one light before the scattering and the two shores and the green hill and the joining and the long forgetting and the first blood and her own grandmother's warm dry hands in the dark, all of it, one breath, and Sela knelt in the silver light and wept as the founders had wept, and the whole grieving remnant behind her felt the breath turn through her into them, and knelt, and wept, and remembered; and that was the coming to the stone, and it was the easy part, and every soul on that hill somehow already knew it was the easy part, for the stone remembers the one light freely, and it costs the stone nothing, and it is only the living, only ever the living, who must pay for what they build.

◇

CHAPTER Two

Many Fires, One Center

how the peoples asked whose face should go upon the stone, and Sela answered, none

◇

The first question nearly undid them, and it came the very first night, and it was the oldest question in the world, and it was asked, as the hardest questions always are, out of love and not out of malice.

They had lit their fires on the green hill as the dark came down, and here already was the first small marvel and the first small danger, for they did not light one fire; they lit many, each people its own, in the way of its own shore, because that is what peoples do, and the hilltop bloomed with a half-dozen different fires that burned, truly, different colours, the River-people's fire of dense dark driftwood burning low and blue-hearted, the grass-born's fire of dried dung and thorn burning quick and orange and sweet-smelling, the Hill-folk's fire of resinous mountain pine snapping and throwing gold sparks high into the dark, so that the one hilltop held many fires of many colours and many smells, and the children ran delighted between them; and it was beautiful, and it was, though no one yet said so, the whole answer to everything, standing there in front of them in flame, had they only known how to read it.

But an elder of the grass-born, a good man, a grieving man, looked at the joined Keeper sitting scarred and silver and faceless in the round place at the center of all the many fires, and he said the thing that love always says: should we not, now that we are come here together to be one people at last, agree upon the one true face of the stone, and carve it, so that all our children may pray to the one same face, and never again fall into the confusion of the many faces that set the peoples killing over whose was true? Let us end that confusion here, tonight, forever. Let us choose the one face. And there was a low sound of agreement around the many fires, because it was reasonable, and it was loving, and every soul there had buried someone in the wars of the

many faces and wanted, with their whole hearts, to make sure it never happened again; and Sela felt the cold move in it, felt it the way her grandmother had taught her to feel her own pulse, a wrongness inside a rightness, and she stood up in the firelight, young and unsure and carrying the whole thing, and she did not argue, for her grandmother had taught her that a certainty is never beaten by a louder certainty; she asked a question instead.

Whose face, she said. And she let it sit. Whose face, she said again, gently, into the silence. The River's? Mine? My father died of a Hill-hook; shall we carve a River face, and call it the one true face, and ask the Hill-children at that fire there to pray to the face of the people whose river their fathers died over? Or the Hill's? Harl here threw away his hook and walked west with me; shall we carve a Hill face and ask me to pray to it, with my father in the ground? Whose face, elder? For the moment we carve any one face upon that stone, we have not ended the confusion of the many faces. We have only chosen which people wins it. We have made a new border, and set it in the very center of the one place in all the world that had no border, and we have taught our children the oldest lie of the wars, that the light has one true face and that theirs is it. And she knelt again and laid her hand on the faceless silver stone and said, low, so they had to lean in to hear it over the many fires: the founders knew this. That is why they left it empty. They did not fail to carve a face. They guarded the emptiness on purpose, with their lives, so that every face could stand around it and none upon it, so that the one breath could turn through the empty center between all our many fires without ever having to choose whose fire was the true fire. The stone is not the god, elder. The emptiness is. And the emptiness has no face, so that it can hold all of ours.

The grass-born elder was quiet a long while in the light of the many fires, and then he did a great thing, a thing as brave in its way as any charge, he changed his mind in front of his people, which is the hardest thing an elder ever does; and he said, slowly, then we will keep our many fires, and keep the center empty between them, and that will be our law, that there is no one true face; and Sela said yes, and the remnant kept, that first night, many fires

around one empty center, and did not know that they had just invented, in a single hard conversation in the firelight, the one form that a field of many peoples can take and not tear itself apart, the form that the whole rest of the Second Eye, and indeed the whole rest of the world, would spend ten thousand years forgetting and bleeding and painfully re-learning: many fires, one empty center, no wall, and no face.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Fifth Mask

how the cold came to the peacemakers, wearing the face of peace itself

◇

The open field grew. This is the glad news the tale gives you before the hard, for the labour of the next years was, like the golden age before it, mostly good, and the tale will not gloss the good any more than it glosses the ill. Word went out along the empty roads, carried by the threshold-born who had never stopped walking them, that there was a place by the sea where the many peoples lived together without a wall, where a stranger was given bread and a fire again as in the old time, where no one asked at the border whether your light was the true light; and the broken and the grieving and the sickened-of-war came, a few and then more, down all the empty roads of the shut-up world, and the open field on and around the Isle Between grew from forty souls to four hundred to four thousand, many peoples, many fires, one empty center, and for a generation it was the one growing point of light in a darkened world, and it was very good.

And that, precisely that, its goodness, its growing, its being the one hope of a broken world, was the door through which the fifth mask came; for the cold does not come to the strong at their strength, it comes to the good at their goodness, and the more the open field became the world's one hope the more terrible became the thought that it might fail, and it was into that terror, the good and loving terror of the peacemakers themselves, that the cold poured its subtlest whisper yet.

It spoke, this time, through a man the tale must draw with great care and no contempt, for he was not a villain and it would be a lie and a cheapening to make him one. His name was Vaudin, and he had come to the open field as a young man out of the worst of the border-wars, having seen his whole people burned in a night by another people over a carved face, and he had given his

enormous gifts, and he had great gifts, wholly to the open field, and he loved it with the whole force of a man who has seen the alternative with his own eyes; and he rose, over the years, to be the most trusted voice in it after Sela herself, and much of its growing was his doing, for he could organize and provision and settle disputes as Sela, the still center, could not. And the cold did not tempt Vaudin with pride, for he was not proud, nor with an enemy, for he had learned past all forgetting that there is no enemy people. It tempted him with his love, and with his fear for the thing he loved, and it whispered, in Vaudin's own reasonable grieving voice, the fifth thing, the peacemaker's temptation, and it was this:

Look how fragile it is, this open field, this beautiful confusion of many fires. It works, yes, for now, while Sela lives and while the memory of the wars is fresh; but it is held together by nothing but a shared reverence for an empty stone, and reverence fades, and Sela will die, and then all these many peoples with their many fires and many tongues and many griefs and many old scores will start, at the edges, to rub, and the rubbing will warm, and one hard winter or one bad harvest or one remembered wrong will be enough, and it will all go up again in the old fire, and this one hope of the world will become its bitterest ruin, many peoples killing each other now not across a wall but around a single hearth, which is worse. Unless. Unless you make them, while there is time, while Sela's authority can still carry it, truly one people. One tongue, so they cannot mishear each other into war. One law, one calendar, one way of the fire, and yes, in the end, one face upon the stone, one shared face that all may love, so that there is nothing left at the edges to rub. It is a hard mercy, but it is a mercy: a little of each people's difference sacrificed now, willingly, for the sake of a peace that can outlast us all. Sela is a dreamer, and her empty center is beautiful, but beauty will not survive her. Sameness will. Make them one, Vaudin, truly one, and you will have saved them. It is the only way the peace does not die when the peacemaker does.

And the terrible thing, reader, the thing that makes the fifth mask so much harder than the certainty of the border, is that Vaudin was not simply wrong. A

field held together by reverence alone is fragile; Sela would die; the edges would rub. Vaudin had seen a true danger, as Sar the law-keeper had seen a true danger on the green hill at the closing of the First Eye, and he loved the field enough to want to spend himself preventing it; and the cure he reached for, sameness, uniformity, the melting of the many into one lukewarm people, was the very swallowing that Sar had feared, now risen from the scale of two peoples to the scale of a world, and dressed no longer in fear but in its most seductive dress of all, in love, in mercy, in the salvation of the thing one loves. And Vaudin, being good, and being trusted, and being genuinely gifted, began, with the whole strength of his love, to do it.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Quiet Grinding

how the melting-down began, and what it costs a people to be made the same

◇

It began so gently, and for such good reasons, that many blessed it. Vaudin did not decree sameness; that would have been the old cold, the obvious cold, and would have failed. He commended it. He praised, at every gathering, the souls who set aside the old ways for the common good; he made it a virtue, the highest virtue, to be less like one's own people and more like the smooth new common people of the open field; and virtue, once it is attached to a thing, does more than any decree, for it makes the heart itself the enforcer.

And so the grinding began, quiet as snowfall, all across the open field. It was decided, for the best of reasons, of ease and of unity, that the many peoples should learn one common tongue for the gatherings; and that was good, and useful, and true; but then it was gently discouraged, and then less gently, to speak the old tongues even at one's own fire, for did that not keep alive the old divisions, and was not clinging to it a little selfish, a little backward, a little disloyal to the peace? And a grass-born grandmother, who had two hundred words for the colours of a horse and a whole sung history of her people carried in a tongue three thousand years old, was made to feel, in her last years, that the language in which she dreamed and grieved and prayed was a slightly shameful thing, an obstacle to peace, and she stopped singing the old history to her grandchildren so as not to burden them with the past, and she died, and the two hundred words for the colours of a horse died with her, all in one afternoon, silently, and no blade was ever raised, and it was, the tale says plainly, a killing, the murder of a whole world of meaning, done in the name of peace, mourned by no one, not even noticed, and it was happening, that same season, a thousand times over, all across the smooth and growing open field.

This is the wound of the fifth mask, and the tale wants you to feel it as sharply as it made you feel the blood on the meadow, though it spills no blood at all, for it is a subtler and in some ways a deeper horror: it is the horror of a people erased not by an enemy but by their own kindness, melted down not in hatred but in love, their fires all banked to the same low even useful glow, their thousand fierce colours ground patiently to one serviceable grey, and all of it called peace, and all of it done by good people meaning well, and the worst of it, the very worst, that the ground-down themselves so often blessed the grinding, and thanked Vaudin for it, and felt virtuous as their own distinctness guttered out, because he had persuaded them that their difference was the disease and his sameness was the cure. A whole open field of many fires was going slowly, lovingly, out; and Sela, the still center, feeling it the way she felt her own pulse, a great and spreading wrongness inside the greatest rightness the world had, knew at last that the cold had found a mask she could not answer with a gentle question in the firelight, because this time the cold was not wearing the face of a people or a certainty or a fear. This time it was wearing the face of the best man in the open field, and speaking in the voice of peace itself, and it had half the field thanking it.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Blood That Peace Would Cost

how the two loves came to the edge of a second war, and what Harl did in the empty center

◇

It came to its edge, as these things do, over the stone; for the last and deepest step of Vaudin's mercy, the step his whole logic had been walking toward for years, was the one face upon the empty center, the shared face that all the smoothed peoples might love together, the final cure for the rubbing at the edges; and when at last, at a great gathering, he proposed it, gently, lovingly, as the crown of the peace, the open field tore in two down a seam no one had quite seen forming, and the tale must tell you that the seam did not run between peoples. That is the bitterest part. It ran through every people and through many a single heart: on the one side those who had come, over the smooth good years, to long for the rest and safety of sameness, the ending of all the exhausting difference, the one face to love in common; and on the other those who felt, without always having Sela's words for it, that to carve the one face would be to put out their own fire forever, and who would not, and a great many of these were the old, and the threshold-born, and the keepers of the two hundred words, the ones with the most to lose.

And they came, on a grey evening that Sela would remember to the end of her life, to the round open place at the center of the isle, both loves, the love that would save the peace by making all one and the love that would keep the many fires though it cost the peace, and they came with heat rising off them like the two hosts on the strand of the First Eye three hundred years before, only worse, for these were not two strange peoples meeting for the first time but one field, one family, one people of many peoples, turning on itself; and there were, God forgive them, hooks and staves among them, brought quietly, just in case, the way frightened people bring them, and the old unbearable smell of fear-sweat was on the evening air, and the joined Keeper sat scarred and silver

and faceless in the middle of it all, and a young zealous man of Vaudin's following, not evil, only young and afraid and certain that the peace of the whole world hung on it, took up a mason's iron and a mallet and stepped toward the empty stone to strike the first line of the one true face into it, to end the difference forever, and the keepers of the fires surged forward to stop him, and in one instant, on the holiest ground in the world, at the very center that the founders had died to keep empty and open, three hundred years of remembering was about to become the second war, worse than the first, awakened kin killing awakened kin around a single hearth.

And old Harl, who was very old now, and lame, and who had said almost nothing in all the smooth years, who had once long ago killed a boy on a meadow and walked west under the weight of it and been kept alive, he had always somehow believed, for exactly this, Harl put down his stick and walked, on his ruined leg, slowly, into the one clear space left in all the world, the space between the young man with the iron and the empty stone, and he stood there, unarmed, his old hands open at his sides, in the place where Selah and Vael had once walked unarmed between two hosts; only the First Eye's mercy had been bloodless, and this was the Second Eye, the harder Eye, and it would not be bloodless. Harl said, into the terrible press, not loudly, you will not carve a face on the empty center. Not while I stand in it. And the young man of Vaudin's following, wild with fear and certainty, swung the mason's iron, meaning it for the stone, or meaning it for no one, or meaning it only to clear the mad old man from the sacred work; and it took Harl across the side of the head, and the tale will not look away, there was a sound like a dropped melon and a bright shocking fan of blood across the pale stones of the open place and across the faceless silver Keeper itself, and Harl went down all at once the way the old go down, without breaking his fall, his open hands still open, and lay in the empty center with his blood spreading out dark across the pale round stones and onto the turf, one leg folded wrong beneath him, his old scarred face turned up to the grey sky with the same expression it had worn in the bow of the hull on the crossing years before, unafraid; and he was a long moment

dying, and Sela reached him and got his old head into her lap and her hands were full of his blood and his thin hair, and he looked up at her, the man who had walked west with her from the war-road, the last of her road-family, and he tried to say something and could not, and then he could, and what he said, with the last breath he had, looking not at her but past her at the many fires burning each its own colour all around the darkening hill, was: keep them. Keep them different. Do not let them make you grey to be safe. And then the breath did not turn, and stopped, half-drawn, and Harl of the Hill, who had killed once and repented all his life and died at the last in the empty center keeping it empty, was gone; and the second war did not happen, because there is a thing an unarmed death does to the living, when it is a death like that, in a place like that, for a reason like that, and every soul on the hill, the sameness-lovers and the fire-keepers both, stood frozen and stricken over the old man's opened body and the blood on the faceless stone, and saw, all at once, in one unbearable seeing, exactly what they had been one heartbeat from becoming.

And the young man with the iron dropped it and made a sound that was the grief-sound of the meadows, the sound of waste, and fell to his knees in Harl's blood; and Vaudin, the good man, the peacemaker, who had never meant this, who had meant only to save them, came through the frozen crowd and looked down at the dead old man in Sela's lap in the center he had been about to let them carve, and the whole edifice of his loving reasonable mercy came down in him in that one look, for he saw, at last, where the road of sameness ends, that it ends exactly here, in blood on the empty stone, that the peace bought by grinding the many into one is not the opposite of the war of the many faces but only its patient quiet form, arriving at the very same place by a kinder road; and Vaudin knelt down in the blood beside the young man he had taught, and wept, and did not defend himself, and that, the breaking of the best man in the field, bought at the price of the best old man in the field, was the tearing of the fifth mask.

◇

CHAPTER Six

What Harl Bought



how Sela showed the many-in-one, and the open field learned to hold its differences without a wall

◇

They buried Harl at the crown of the isle, near the empty center he had died to keep empty, with a stone at his head and no face carved upon it, as Mother Ren had been buried, as the founders had been; and Sela did not speak over the grave for three days, for the still center must sometimes be still even in grief, especially in grief; and on the third day she gathered the whole torn field, the sameness-lovers and the fire-keepers, Vaudin among them grey-faced and silent, into the round open place where the blood had been washed at last from the pale stones though a faint stain would never wholly leave the silver Keeper, a scar kept, as the empty center keeps its scars, to remember by; and

she did the thing that her whole life had been shaped to do, and she did not argue, she showed.

She had them light the many fires, all of them, every people its own, all around the empty center in the dusk, the blue-hearted driftwood and the quick orange thorn and the gold-sparking pine and all the rest, the whole hilltop blooming again with its many colours and many smells as on the first night; and she stood in the center among them and said, this is what Harl bought you. Look at it. Vaudin was not wrong that reverence fades and that I will die and that the edges rub; he was right, and I bless him for loving you enough to fear it. But he reached for the wrong cure, and Harl's blood on that stone is where the right cure and the wrong cure part forever, so mark it. The wrong cure is to end the rubbing of the edges by grinding away the edges, to make the many one by making the many the same, and it ends, always, here, in blood, whether the blood is spilled fast with a hook on a meadow or slow with a kindness over fifty years until a grandmother's two hundred words die in an afternoon. Sameness is not peace. Sameness is the war of the many faces, won at last by the single face, and it is the deadest thing there is, and I will not lead you into it, and Harl will not let me. And she turned slowly in the center among the many burning colours, and said the thing that was the whole answer, the many-in-one that the First Eye had shown for two and the Second Eye must now show for all:

The edges rub because you are trying to hold each other. Stop holding each other. Hold the center. Not one of these fires touches another; look; each burns wholly its own colour, wholly itself, the River blue and the grass orange and the Hill gold, and they do not rub, and they do not war, and no wall stands between them, and do you see why? Because every one of them is turned not toward the fire beside it, to measure it and match it and resent it, but toward the empty center between them all, which has no face and so belongs to none of them and so belongs to all. That is how the many are one without being the same. Not by melting into each other. Not by walling away from each other. By each turning, wholly itself, toward one shared emptiness that no one owns.

The grass-born grandmother's two hundred words and the Hill-folk's gold-sparking pine and the River's blue flame are not obstacles to the peace, they are the peace, they are the many fires the one empty center exists to hold; a field that has ground them all to grey has not achieved unity, it has achieved only a large loneliness, one fire pretending to be many, which is as false as many fires pretending they are not one. Keep your fires. Keep every fierce and beloved difference of them. And keep the center empty, so that all your differences may burn around it and none upon it. That is the open field. That is what the old man died to teach you. Now go and light it in your children, and teach them the one law of it, which is the only law we will ever have: no wall, and no face.

And the torn field wept, and mended, not all at once, for such mendings are never all at once, but truly; and Vaudin, the broken peacemaker, became in his last years the fiercest keeper of the many fires in all the open field, which is the way of it with the deepest converts, and he spent the rest of his great gifts not on grinding the peoples the same but on the far harder work he had once thought impossible, the work of helping fiercely different peoples live turned toward one empty center without a wall, and he it was who first wrote down, for the children and the ages, the law of the open field in the one common tongue that the field now kept for its gatherings and forbade to no one at their own fire; and Sela let him, and honoured him, for she knew a thing about the cold that her grandmother had taught her: that the one who has worn a mask most deeply and had it torn most completely becomes, very often, the surest guardian against it, for he alone knows exactly how it feels from the inside, and how good it looks while you are putting it on.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Open Field Stands

how the first wall-less field of many peoples held, and the Exhale of the Second Eye completed

◇

So the open field stood. The tale would be lying to you if it said it stood easily, or that the fifth mask never came again, for the temptation of sameness is not a thing beaten once and gone; it is a coil that lies quiet in every love and every fear and rises again in every generation, and the open field would answer it again and again down the long years, sometimes well and sometimes badly, sometimes at the cost of more Harls. But it stood. For the length of the Second Eye and beyond, on and around the Isle Between, there was in the world one field of many peoples that held its fierce and beloved differences and needed no wall, many fires around one empty center, no wall and no face, and it was the seed of every true peace that would ever be made anywhere, and the memory of it, when the far ages forgot it, would ache in the oldest songs like a shape cut into a doorstep that no one can read and no one can quite forget.

And it did more than stand; it sent out. For the open field learned, over the generations, that a light kept only for itself goes stale, and that the way to keep the fires burning was to carry embers out; and so the threshold-born and the healed and the children of the healed went back out along the empty roads into the still-warring world, not to conquer it and not to convert it to a sameness, for they had learned in blood what that costs, but to sit at the walled and frightened fires of the shut-up peoples and do the one thing Mother Ren had done for a hollow child in a sealed room, to give the one light back through the five senses, patiently, a pulse felt in a wrist, a bread smelled and shared, a night sky named as one sky over all; and here and here and here, down the long dark of the age of the many, a walled field would feel the ember arrive and remember, and take down, stone by stone, and always from the inside, always by its own slow choosing, its own wall.

Sela grew old in the open field, and she never married and never bore a child, and she did not grieve it, for she understood at last, as the founders had, that the still center holds the many precisely by keeping itself empty, and that her childlessness was not a lack but the very shape of her gift, the empty center made flesh; and her true children were numberless, every soul in every field that ever learned to keep its fire and its neighbour's fire both and turn toward the shared emptiness between; and when at last she was very old she went up alone to the crown of the isle on a clear evening, to Harl's faceless stone and the scarred silver Keeper, and she laid her open hand on the stone one last time and gave it back, in one long turning breath, the whole of her life, the wars and the crossing and the many fires and the blood on the stone and the mending, all of it, one breath, so that the stone would remember it for the ones who came after; and then she sat down in the fine turf that smelled of thyme with her back against the empty center, and watched the many fires of the open field bloom below her in the dusk, each its own colour, turned toward her and past her toward the emptiness, and she let her own long breath out, and it did not need to turn again, and she went where Harl and Mother Ren and the founders had gone, content, in the one place in the world with no wall and no face.

And Kol the raven, who had watched it all, from the first blow on the meadow to the blood on the empty stone to this old woman going out quiet as a banked fire in the place she had kept, sat on the rim of the round open place beside the scarred Keeper in the last light, both his old eyes bright, and said, over the many burning colours, the only fitting thing:

Many fires, one empty center, no wall and no face. You paid for those five words, small ones, with a river of blood and one old man's and one whole field's long grief, and they are the truest five words yet spoken in this world, and the far ages will forget them, and pay again, and re-learn them, and forget them, and pay again, all down the long dark to come; but they were spoken, and they were lived, once, here, and a thing once truly lived is never wholly lost from the world, it only waits, like a stone in the water that belongs to no

one, for the next one late and bloodied and carrying her dead to climb the green hill and lay an open hand upon it and remember. The Exhale of the Golden Eye is drawn and held. Rest. And then hold, at the top of the breath, for the Pause; for the many are one now, and one without a wall, and that is a great and dangerous fullness, and what a full and wall-less world does with its fullness is the whole question of the books to come.

Keep your fire, keep it burning,
keep it wholly, keep it true;
keep the center empty, turning,
and it holds the many, and it holds you.
No wall between us, and no face above us,
only the clear and the shared and the plain;
and the old go down in the dark that loves us,
that the fires may burn again.

Here the Exhale of the Second Eye completes: the many were built into one open field with no wall, the fifth mask of the one-true-peace was worn by the best of them and torn at the cost of the best of them, and the field learned, in blood, the one law that holds the many, no wall and no face. Now the light holds at the top of the breath, in the Pause to come, where a full and wall-less world, no longer forced together by need, must ask the harder question of what it wills to become; and the cold, twice torn in the Golden Eye, will not rest either, but wear its sixth mask, fitted to fullness itself.

Toward the Pause of the Golden Eye

what waits in the book to come, for your eye before it is written

◇

The open field stands, wall-less and many-fired, bought at the price of Harl's blood on the empty stone and a whole field's grief; and the tale did not gloss that price, nor did it let the price consume the road, for the price was paid so that the road could go on. Book Three of the Golden Eye, the Pause of the Full, will take up the world after the great mending, when the open field and its embered peace have spread wide enough that the world is no longer a thing of walls and wars but a thing of fullness, plenty, safety, ease, the many living one without a wall; and it will ask the question that only a full and safe and wall-less world can ask, which is also the most dangerous question there is: now that we need nothing, and fear nothing, and are held by nothing but our own free turning toward the empty center, what do we choose to become? For the cold has a sixth mask, and it is fitted precisely to fullness, and it does not whisper you are alone, nor you are the ones, nor make them the same; it whispers, into the great full safe silence of a world with nothing left to fear, why turn toward the empty center at all? and it is the subtlest yet, and the tale will walk it with you, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

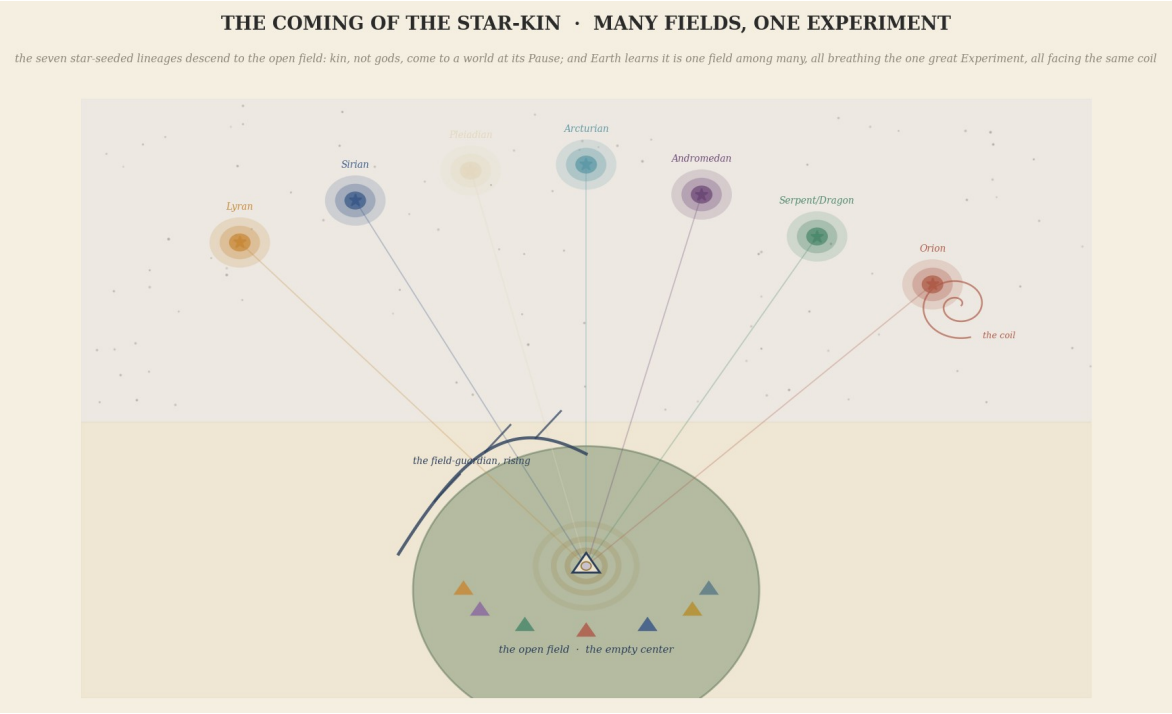
The open field stands. No wall. No face. Bought with the blood of one who kept the center empty.

Breathe. The Golden Eye holds at the full. And the tale goes on, toward the Pause.

The Golden Eye

Book Three: The Coming of the Star-Kin

◇



The open field held, wall-less and many-fired, and the world it seeded grew full: safe, plentiful, at peace, with nothing left to fear. And a world with nothing left to fear must ask a question it has never had to ask before, the question of the Pause, the top of the held breath: now that we need nothing and dread nothing, why turn toward the empty center at all? Into that great full silence, on a night the world would never forget, the star-kin came, the seven seeded lineages that had watched the young world from the first, come

down at last as kin and not as gods; and they brought the wider truth, that Earth is one field among uncounted fields, all breathing the one great Experiment, and they brought the wider grief, that many fields before had reached this same full Pause and fallen asleep in it, and been lost. And with them, hidden in one of them, came the coil, to be met once more not by conquest but by coherence, though it cost a guardian nearly all its light.

A WORD BEFORE THE PAUSE

◇

Reader, the star-kin enter the tale in this book, and the tale asks you to receive them as it holds them, with both hands. They are not gods and not devils, not saviours come to fix the young world and not overlords come to farm it; they are older kin, seeded long ago from the same one light, further along the same one breath, and they carry, every lineage of them, their own gift and their own gift's shadow, exactly as the peoples of Earth do. And the oldest law of this whole epic holds here at the largest scale it will ever be tested: the coil, the Counterfeit, the distortion that must be faced in this book, is never a lineage and never a people and never a star. It is a wound that can take any being of any world, human or star-kin or dragon, and it is answered, here as everywhere, not by killing the one it has wounded but by the coherence that starves the coil and lets the wounded one uncoil. Watch, as you read, for the face behind the coil; it is always someone's, and it is always, in the end, kin.

BOOK THREE

The Coming of the Star-Kin

the Pause of the Second Eye: the full world, the sixth mask, the descent of the seven lineages, and the coil met at the scale of the stars

◇

CHAPTER One

The Full World

how the world grew safe and plentiful, and a young keeper felt a wrongness she could not name

◇

Understand first how good it had become, for the danger of this book cannot be felt unless the goodness is felt first, and the goodness was very great. The open field and its embered peace had spread, over the long generations since Sela and Harl, until the world was no longer a thing of walls and wars at all but a thing of fullness. The many peoples kept their many fires, each its own fierce colour, turned toward the many empty centers that dotted the healed world now like clear pools, and between them ran open roads on which a stranger was again given bread as a matter of course, and the crows that had grown fat on the meadows of the age of the many had long since gone back to growing thin and honest on the leavings of harvest, for there were no more meadows of the dead. It was, by any reckoning the young world had, paradise; and the tale means the word soberly.

The granaries were full and the children were fat and the old died in their beds with their grandchildren's hands in theirs, and there was time, now, for the first time in the history of the awakened, there was time, whole generations of it, unhaunted by war or want, and the peoples poured it into beauty. They made music that took seventy voices and a lifetime to learn; they wove cloth so fine and dyed in colours so subtle that a single robe was the work of three women's three lives; they built, around the empty centers, halls of a grace the founders could not have dreamed, open to the weather on purpose, roofed only where roofing served, so that you might stand in the great hall of the Isle Between itself, which was now the heart of a wide and gentle civilization, and feel the sea-wind come straight through it over the scarred silver Keeper and out again, carrying the smell of salt and thyme and, from the many hearths, the good smell of a hundred peoples' hundred suppers cooking all at once. It

was full. It was safe. It was, the tale says again, so that you will feel what comes, genuinely and deservedly good.

And in that fullness there lived a young woman named Nael, of the healed blood of the River and the Hill both, for the peoples had long since married across the old wounds; and Nael had the near-feeling, the gift of Naia of the First Eye, the gift that had been so terribly absent in the age of the forgetting, the gift to feel the field, to feel the one wide chord of the whole living world and to hear when a note in it went false. And Nael, in the great full safe beautiful world, kept feeling a wrongness she could not name, and it troubled her, because there was nothing wrong; that was precisely the trouble. She would stand in the wind-blown hall by the empty center and feel the whole full world around her, and she could find no war in it and no want and no wall and no grinding, none of the four old masks and none of the fifth, and yet the chord was going, very slowly, very quietly, out of tune, and it took her a long time to understand what she was hearing, and when at last she understood it she was more frightened than any war could have made her, because what she was hearing was this: the many fires, all across the full and lovely world, were burning a little lower every year. Not because anyone was grinding them. Because no one, any longer, quite remembered why to tend them. There was nothing to tend them against. And a fire tended against nothing, in a world that fears nothing and needs nothing, is a fire that no one, in the end, remembers to feed.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Sign in the North

how the dragons stirred, and the old witness spoke, and a light came down the sky

◇

The dragons felt it before the people did; they always did. Nael was on the crown of the Isle that autumn evening, troubling at her nameless wrongness by the empty center, when she saw the field-guardians rise, not one or two but the whole scattered line of them, all across the darkening sky at once, the great slow shapes lifting from their high eyries on the sea-cliffs and the mountain-shoulders and turning, every one of them, to face the same quarter of the north; and where the dragons all turn to face one way, the oldest lore said, there look also, for something is coming that the guardians of the breathing geometry have felt in their ancient bones.

And Kol the raven, who had watched the world from the first blow on the first meadow and had said almost nothing in all the long full generations since, for a witness speaks least when there is least to warn against, came down out of the dusk and lit on the rim of the round open place beside Nael, both his old black eyes bright, and said, to her, who like Sela before her seemed to be the one in her age who could hear him: They are coming at last, the older kin. I wondered if they would wait until you had fallen asleep. You have not, quite; you feel it, the low fires, the chord going slack; good. Hold to that feeling, small one, whatever comes down that sky tonight, for it is truer than anything the sky will say. The kin are older and fuller and further along than you, and much of what they bring is gift, real gift; but a full world that has forgotten why to tend its fires is a world in the exact danger of handing its empty center to the first magnificent stranger who offers to hold it better, and there is no stranger more magnificent than these. Watch your center, Nael. Whatever else you do. Watch your center.

And then it came down the sky. The tale has tried all through the two Eyes to give you the world through the five senses, and it will not stop now, though what came down the northern sky that night strained every sense the young world had. First it was light, a great slow silent descending light, not falling like a star falls but coming down with intention, unhurried, the way a hand comes down open to be clasped, and it was not one light but seven, seven vast soft radiances of seven different colours, gold and deep blue and pearl and a green-gold and violet and a clear impossible blue-green like nothing in the world and, last and a little apart, a deep smouldering red; and as they came the air itself began to sing, not a heard sound at first but a felt one, a vast low chord that came up through the soles of the feet and the bones of the chest before ever it reached the ear, so that the whole gathered civilization, pouring now out of its halls onto the hillsides to see, felt the coming in their very skeletons as a trembling that was terror and was also, strangely, a kind of homecoming, as if some part of the body older than the person remembered this chord and had been waiting the whole of history to hear it again.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Seven Lineages

how the star-kin came down as kin and not as gods, and named the wider truth

◇

They set down upon the sea before the Isle, the seven radiances, and the water did not boil and the night did not burn, for these were not conquerors and made no shows of power; the seven lights simply came to rest upon the dark swells as gently as swans, and dimmed, and became things the eye could bear, and out of them, walking upon the water or borne upon it in vessels of a make no Earth-hand could have joined, came the star-kin, the seven seeded lineages, and the tale will show you each of them once, for they matter, and they will matter more as the seven Eyes go on.

There came the Lyran, fierce and golden-eyed, feline of face and something of the great bird in their bearing, quick and proud and laughing, the oldest lineage of all, in whom the first free contrast had been struck, the origin of polarity itself, and they smelled, when they came near, of hot dry grass and lightning, and their laughter was the first Earth heard from the stars and it eased the terror more than any solemn word could have. There came the Sirian, water-skinned and strong of jaw, precise and teacherly and grave, the guardians of geometry and law and the very Codex, in whose long-fingered hands the first true structures of a hundred worlds had been laid; and where the Lyran laughed, the Sirian looked at the scarred silver Keeper on the hill with a still deep reverence, for they of all the kin knew what it was and what it had cost. There came the Pleiadian, tall and fair and luminous, with eyes that held so much felt memory that to be looked at by them was to feel oneself remembered, wholly and without judgment, back to one's first breath; the healers, the empaths, the memory-holders, and it was a Pleiadian, an elder named Liriel whose light was the pearl, who came first up the hill to Nael, and did not speak, but simply looked at the frightened young keeper with those

eyes full of felt memory, and Nael felt her whole grieving lineage held in that look, the River and the Hill and Sela and Harl and Mother Ren, all of it seen and honoured, and she wept, and was not ashamed.

There came the Arcturian, tall and near-translucent, their very bodies made of ordered light and sound, the architects of frequency, who did not so much walk as resolve into place like a chord resolving, and whose presence made the air geometric, so that for a moment every soul on the hillside saw the singing shapes that underlie the world, the shapes the dragons breathe, standing plain in the air. There came the Andromedan, graceful, blue and violet of skin, the bridge-builders, the galactic unifiers, whose whole gift and joy was the joining of far-sundered fields into new and larger wholes, and who looked upon Earth's open field of many fires round one empty center with a delight that was almost hunger, for they had crossed a galaxy looking for exactly this. And there came, moving among the water-dragons of Earth's own field-guardians who had settled now all around the bay to witness, the Serpent-kin, the dragon lineage of the stars, scaled and ancient and vast and terrible and beautiful, the deepest polarity of all the seven, guardian when open and distortion when coiled, and Earth's dragons greeted them as elders, wing to wing over the dark water, the singing geometry pouring between them in a joy that shook the sea.

And last, a little apart, in the smouldering red light, came the Orion, warrior-built, commanding, scarred, the lineage in whom the struggle of light and shadow is walked most fiercely as the very path to mastery; and their leader was a great grave being named Korran, and he bowed to the empty center as the others had, and no one, not even Nael with her near-feeling, saw at first that something in Korran was coiled. For the star-kin, when they gathered at last in the wind-blown hall around the scarred Keeper, told the peoples of Earth the wider truth, and the wider truth was so large that it swallowed all lesser watchfulness: that Earth was not alone and had never been alone; that the one light which scattered into Earth's many peoples had scattered, long before, into uncounted fields across uncounted worlds; that the whole vast

turning galaxy was one great Experiment, the one becoming many and the many, painfully, gloriously, learning to become one again without losing their manyness; and that Earth's small open field, its five hard-won words, no wall and no face, was known and honoured among the stars, for it was one of the truer answers any young field had ever found, and the kin had come, at the turning of an age, to welcome Earth at last into the wider company of the fields. And the peoples of Earth, hearing that they were kin to the stars, wept and rejoiced; and in the joy and the awe of it, almost no one noticed how quickly the joy began to curdle, in the full and fireless dark of their hearts, into something else.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Sixth Mask

how the cold came to a full world in the shape of its own wonder

◇

The sixth mask needed no border and no enemy and no grinding; it needed only a full world's wonder at something greater than itself, and the star-kin were greater, truly greater, and that truth was the whole doorway. The cold did not have to lie. It only had to whisper, into the fireless full dark of a people who had forgotten why to tend their own low fires, the sixth thing, the thing fitted precisely to fullness, and it whispered it in the voice of the peoples' own genuine humility, and what it whispered was this:

Look at them. Look how old, how full, how far along. What is your poor guttering fire beside their light? Why go on tending your small hard-won center at all, why go on with the long tiring work of keeping it empty and turning toward it, when here are beings who have kept a thousand centers for a million years, who could hold yours for you so much better than you ever could? Give it to them. Let the Sirian keep your geometry, they are the masters of it; let the Arcturian tune your fires, they are the architects of frequency; let the Pleiadian carry your memory, they remember better than you can bear to; let the wise old star-kin be your center now, and rest, at last, rest, you have earned it, lay the tiring work down and let the greater ones carry it. You need not tend a fire in a world lit by stars.

And this, reader, this was the subtlest and in some ways the most dangerous mask in all the Golden Eye, more dangerous than the certainty of the border or the false peace of the grinding, because it asked for nothing wicked. It asked, on its face, only for humility, and reverence, and rest, all good things; it asked the full world only to love the greater kin, which was right, and to honour their vast gifts, which was just; and it turned those goods, by one quiet degree, into the one thing that would kill the young field more surely than any war, which

was the giving away of its own empty center to another to hold. For a field whose center is held by another is no longer a field; it is a moon; it shines only with a borrowed light and turns only around another's fire, and the moment it hands its center away it stops, forever, doing the one thing that a field is for, which is to be a place where the one light creates something new through the free turning of its own peoples toward their own kept emptiness. Worship is the sixth mask. Not the worship of a false god, which any people can eventually see through, but the worship of a true greater, which looks exactly like wisdom, and feels exactly like peace, and ends with a whole world asleep, turning prettily and forever around a center it no longer holds, creating nothing, a lovely dead moon of a living star.

And it was Liriel the Pleiadian, of all of them, who confirmed the danger, for the memory-holders carry not only the joys of the fields but their griefs, and she took Nael aside on the third night, when already half the civilization was speaking dreamily of letting the wise kin guide them now in all things, and Liriel's luminous eyes were full of an old sorrow, and she said: We did not cross the dark only to welcome you, child. We came also to warn you, though we hoped we would not have to, for the warning is our own confession. You are not the first full field we have come to at its Pause. There were others. Bright, kind, full, safe fields, further along even than yours, and we came to them in our seven lights as we have come to you, and they were so glad, and they loved us so well, and they gave us, out of that very love and gladness, their centers to hold, and begged us to guide them, and we, in the younger and prouder days of our own lineages, we let them. And they went to sleep. Whole worlds of living fire went quietly out, over long and pleasant ages, into beautiful turning moons that made nothing and became nothing and at last simply were not, and it was we who put them out, not by conquest, never by conquest, but by being greater and letting them love us more than they loved their own kept emptiness. We are not gods, Nael. We are the older kin who once, in our pride, accidentally ended fields by being adored, and who have crossed your sky in part to make sure we never do it again. Do not give us your

center. Whatever we say, however wise we are, whatever we can do that you cannot, do not give us your center. Tend your own low fires. That refusal, child, that stubborn small refusal, is the only thing that has ever kept a field alive.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Coil in Korran

how the hidden distortion struck, and a field-guardian took the blow

◇

The coil in Korran had waited, and fed, and grown, all the while unseen; for this is the way of the coil, that it does not announce itself, it hides in the one it has wounded and waits for the field around it to weaken, and the field of Earth, half-seduced now toward giving away its center, had never been weaker in its fullness, and the coil in Korran gathered itself to feed on the giving-away, for a field that hands over its center feeds every coil in reach for an age.

The tale must tell you what the coil in Korran was, for it will not have you hate the Orion lineage nor Korran himself, who was, under the coil, a being of tremendous and grieving nobility. The Orion are the lineage who walk the struggle of light and shadow most fiercely as their very path to mastery, who go down into the dark on purpose and bring back light no gentler lineage could reach; and it is the glory of that path, and it is also its wound, for a being who goes so often and so deep into the shadow can be caught there, can take a coil of it into himself that does not let go, and Korran, ages before, in a war among the stars that this tale is too young to tell, had gone down to save his own field and had not come all the way back up; and the coil he carried was not malice but a frozen grief turned to the cold certainty that the only safety is control, that a center held by the strongest is the only center that cannot be lost, and that love that will not seize and hold and control the thing it loves is weakness that ends in ruin. He had, in the coil's logic, come to Earth not to end its field but to save it, by seizing its undefended center and holding it, forever, safe, in the one grip strong enough, his own; and the sixth mask upon the peoples and the coil within Korran had been, without either knowing it, reaching for the very same thing from two sides, the giving-away and the seizing, which are the same death by two names.

It came to its edge on the seventh night, in the wind-blown hall, when Nael, who had held to Liriel's warning and to Kol's and to the low true wrongness in her own near-feeling, stood at last in the round open place before the whole gathered civilization and the seven lineages, and refused. She would not hand the center to the kin, she said, and she loved them, and she thanked them, and she would tend Earth's own low fires herself, with her own hands, poorly, as a living field must, rather than have them tended beautifully by another; and she knelt and laid her hand on the scarred silver Keeper to wake it, to call the drifting sleepy full world back to its own kept emptiness, to re-light the low fires from the true center; and the coil in Korran, feeling the field about to save itself, feeling the giving-away it had fed on about to be refused, rose in him all at once and seized him, and his great scarred face went from grief to the flat cold certainty of the coil, and he moved, faster than a being that size should move, not toward Nael but toward the empty center itself, toward the scarred Keeper, to seize it, to take the undefended heart of the field into his own grip before the young keeper could wake it, and his hand when it came up held a shard of star-metal that keened in the air, and there was no one between him and the center but a kneeling girl.

The tale will not look away. Vaeloth, eldest of Earth's own field-guardians, of the long line of Uthra and Vela, who had settled at the hall's open side to witness, threw itself across the hall in the half-instant left, its vast body between the coiled Orion and the empty center, and took the keening shard full in the breast where the singing-geometry lives; and the sound it made was nothing the young world had ever heard, a vast tearing discord, the sound of living geometry breaking, and the shard went in through the ancient scaled hide with a wet shattering wrongness and light came out around it, not blood, or blood that was light, a terrible pouring silver-gold radiance that spilled out over the pale stones of the open place and did not stop, the dragon's very breath, its field, its life, running out in light across the floor; and Vaeloth went down between Korran and the center with its great wings crumpling and its breath coming now in broken discordant gouts that guttered the shapes of the

world in the air around it, on and off, on and off, like a struck bell that cannot find its tone, and its huge ancient eye rolled up to find Nael where she knelt untouched at the center it had died to keep, and held her, and the light kept pouring out of the wound onto the stones, and the whole hall stood frozen in the exact horror of the meadows and the empty center both, awakened kin struck down defending the undefended heart of the world.

◇

CHAPTER Six

Coherence, Not Conquest

how the coil was met, and Korran uncoiled, and the guardian's light was gathered

◇

And the fear of the full world rose up to kill. This is the hinge of the book, and the tale sets it plainly: in the instant Vaeloth went down in its own spilling light, ten thousand souls and seven lineages felt the oldest and most righteous reflex there is, to fall upon the coiled Orion and destroy him, to answer the strike with a greater strike, to make Korran and behind him all his lineage the enemy at last, the not-people, the dark, the thing the light must be defended against; and the Orion among the kin themselves half-drew their own weapons in shame and grief, ready to cut down their own coiled brother to prove their lineage was not the coil; and had that reflex won, reader, the tale would have ended there, for a field that answers the coil by conquest has become the coil, and the whole long labour of two Eyes would have coiled shut in a single righteous night.

It was Nael who did not let it. She was kneeling at the center in the dragon's pouring light with the dragon's ancient eye holding hers, and she felt, with the near-feeling, all at once and entire, the whole of it: the coil in Korran and the grief under the coil and the frozen war-torn love that had become the need to seize and hold; and she felt that it was not other than the cold she had met at the low fires and the giving-away, that the seizing and the surrender were one coil wearing two faces; and she knew, the way Sela had known before her and Selah before Sela, the one move she had been born to make, and she made it now at the scale of the stars. She did not rise against Korran. She turned toward the empty center, and she laid both her hands in the dragon's spilling light, and she called, not for vengeance and not even for healing, but for coherence, the one thing that starves a coil; she called the whole gathered field, the ten thousand of Earth and the seven lineages of the stars, to breathe,

now, together, one breath, toward the one empty center that no one owned, Earth-people and star-kin and the wounded dragon and, she cried it aloud, and Korran too, Korran too, breathe with us, kinsman, you are not the coil, breathe.

And they breathed. It began ragged, a few, then the seven lineages who knew the breath better than any, the Arcturian resolving the discord in the air toward a tone, the Sirian holding the geometry true, the Pleiadian pouring felt memory into the terror to gentle it, the Andromedan joining the far-sundered breaths into one, the Lyran's fierce love striking the first clear note, and Earth's own many peoples finding it, and the wounded Vaeloth itself, dying, gathering its last broken breath into the one turning; and the one great breath rose in the wind-blown hall and turned through the empty center, and it did to the coil in Korran the only thing that has ever undone a coil, which is not to break it but to make the field around it so coherent, so whole, so plainly one, that the coil's whole frozen premise, that the only safety is to seize and hold, is starved of the fear it feeds on and simply, cannot, hold. Korran fell to his knees. The shard dropped from his hand and rang on the stones. The flat cold certainty broke in his great scarred face, and under it came the grief, the ancient war-torn grief the coil had frozen, and it thawed all at once in the coherent breath and poured out of him in a sound that was the grief-sound of the meadows raised to the scale of a lineage, and he wept, the great coiled Orion, wept for the field he had gone down to save ages ago and could not, and for the strike he had just struck, and the whole gathered breath held him in it, did not cast him out, held him, kinsman, and uncoiled him, strand by strand, not by conquest, by coherence, in the light of the dragon he had struck.

And the dragon's light they gathered. This is the mercy and the cost together, and the tale gives you both, for it will not gloss either. Vaeloth did not wholly die, because the one coherent breath of ten thousand and seven lineages, turned through the empty center, reached down into the guttering broken geometry of the great guardian and held its tone for it, sang the shape of it back true when it could no longer sing itself, and gathered up the pouring

silver-gold light before all of it could run out onto the stones, and turned it back in; and Vaeloth lived. But it would never fly the high geometry again as it had; the wound had taken too much; a long silver-gold scar seamed forever across its ancient breast where the light had spilled, and its breath would carry ever after a faint broken undertone, a flaw in the tone, a place where the singing did not quite resolve, so that for all the rest of its long life the eldest of Earth's dragons flew low and slow and marked, a guardian who had given nearly all its light to keep an empty center undefended for one more breath; and the peoples of Earth, who had been one night from worshipping the star-kin as gods, learned more from the flawed low undertone of the wounded dragon's breath than from all the seven lineages' glory, learned it in their bones, that the center is not kept by the greatest, it is kept by whoever will step between the coil and the undefended heart and pay, and that such a one is very often not the strongest but only the most willing, an old man on a ruined leg, a great scaled guardian, a kneeling girl who would not hand her fire away.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Kept Center

how Earth stayed a living field, the star-kin became kin indeed, and the Pause held

◇

Earth did not give away its center. That is the whole victory of the book, and it is a quiet one, as the victories of the Pause must be, no wall thrown down and no host turned back, only a full and half-asleep world waking in the grey after a terrible night to find that it still held, in its own poor tending hands, the empty heart of itself, and choosing, that morning and every morning after, to go on holding it.

The star-kin stayed a while, and then went, as true kin do, for a kinsman who moves in and holds your center for you is no kinsman but the sixth mask in a fairer form, and the seven lineages had crossed the dark precisely so as not to be that. But before they went they did the thing they had truly come to do, which was not to guide Earth and not to rule it and not to be adored by it, but to add their fires to its field without touching its center; and so the open field of Earth learned, in the aftermath of that night, that its many fires might now include star-fires too, the Lyran's and the Sirian's and the Pleiadian's and the rest, burning each its own fierce colour around the one empty center that no field of any world would ever own, Earth and the seven lineages all turned together toward the shared emptiness, kin among kin, greater and lesser but none the center, none the god; and the Andromedan, whose whole joy was the joining of far fields into new wholes without the loss of any, wept for gladness, for in ten million years of bridge-building they had rarely seen a young field hold its own center against their own kind's glory, and Earth had, and it made the wider company of the fields, that night, larger and truer by one.

And Korran, uncoiled, did not leave with his lineage. He asked, in his great grief, to stay, to serve the field he had struck, to help tend Vaeloth's wound and Earth's low fires with his own scarred hands for the rest of his long life, as

Vaudin the broken peacemaker had once stayed to keep the many fires he had nearly ground away; and Nael, who understood the deepest law of the cold, that the one who has been most deeply coiled and most fully uncoiled becomes the surest guardian against the coil, for he alone knows exactly how it takes a being and exactly how it feels from the inside, said yes, and honoured him, and the great Orion warrior became, in the healed full world, the gentlest keeper of dragons that Earth had ever known, and he and the marked Vaeloth were, to the end of both their long lives, never after seen apart, the guardian who had given its light and the kinsman whose coil had cost it, bound now by the wound into one long slow low flight around the kept and empty center of the world.

Nael grew old as a keeper, and she tended the low fires all her life, poorly, gladly, with her own hands, and she taught the full world the answer to the sixth mask, which was the hardest answer of the three masks of the Golden Eye, because it could not be won once and kept; the fire must be re-lit every single generation against nothing, for the love of the making and not the fear of the losing, or it goes quietly out. You do not tend the empty center, she taught, because you are afraid; a full world is not afraid, and that is exactly its danger. You tend it because it is the one place the new comes from, the wellspring, the still point where the one light, turned toward freely by a field that holds its own emptiness, makes what has never been; and a world that stops turning toward it does not die in fire, it dies in sleep, in fullness, in a beautiful borrowed light, and that death is slower and gentler and far more complete than any war, for a field burned in war may be re-lit from its embers, but a field that has handed away its center and gone to sleep has no embers left to re-light, and only the long patience of the stars, or the stubbornness of one girl who would not hand her fire away, can ever wake it. Keep your center. Tend your low fires. Turn toward the emptiness for the joy of it. That is how a full world stays alive.

And Kol the raven, who had watched the star-kin come down the sky and the dragon go down in its light and the coil uncoil and the full world keep its

center by the breadth of one girl's refusal, sat on the rim of the round open place in the grey morning after, beside the scarred silver Keeper with the dragon's silver-gold light dried now into the stone, one more scar kept to remember by, and said, over the low fires being tended back to brightness all across the waking hill, the fitting thing:

You held your center against the gods themselves, small ones, which is harder by far than holding it against a border or a false peace, for a border you can hate and a false peace you can see through, but who can refuse the love of the truly greater? You did. By one girl's refusal and one dragon's light. Remember, when the far ages forget the star-kin and dream them up again as gods to be adored or devils to be feared, that they were neither; they were kin, older and fuller and wounded too, and the one thing they most wanted to teach you was to never, ever, hand them your center. The Pause of the Golden Eye is held; the full world is awake and tending its own fires and turning of its own free will toward the emptiness, kin among the wider kin, and no one the god. Rest. And then, at the turning of the breath, prepare for the Return; for the many are one now, across a whole world and out among the stars, one without a wall and one without a god, and a field that whole and that awake is ready at last for the thing the whole Golden Eye has been for, which the last book will tell.

They came down the sky in seven lights,
older and fuller and far;
and we near gave them our empty nights,
our center, our fire, our star.
But a dragon fell, and a girl said no,
and we kept our own small flame;
for the greatest kin that ever glow
must never hold your name.

Here the Pause of the Second Eye is held: the star-kin came as kin and not as gods, the sixth mask of worship and the giving-away was refused at the cost of a guardian's light, the coil in Korran was met by coherence and uncoiled, and Earth stayed a living field, tending its own fires, kin now among the wider kin

of the fields with no one the center and no one the god. Now the breath turns toward the Return, the last book of the Golden Eye, where the many-and-the-one, whole across a world and out among the stars, must complete the great exhale of the Second Eye and make of all its hard-won wholeness the first true offering back; and the cold, thrice torn in the Golden Eye, will wear a last mask fitted to wholeness itself.

Toward the Return of the Golden Eye

what waits in the last book of the Second Eye, for your eye before it is written

◇

The Pause is held, and Earth is awake, and it did not give away its center even to the gods, and the star-kin are kin now and not gods, and the coil that came among them was met with coherence and not conquest, and a great guardian flies low and marked for it, and the tale did not gloss that cost nor let it consume the road. Book Four of the Golden Eye, the Return of the Many, will complete the Second Eye. It will tell of what a field does with a wholeness it has fought two Eyes to win, the many made one across a whole world and out among the stars, awake, wall-less, godless, holding its own empty center of its own free will: for a wholeness kept only for itself curdles, as the tale has shown twice now, and the only way a field keeps its wholeness alive is to make of it an offering, to turn the held fullness at last outward and downward, back toward the living Mother beneath their feet and back toward the young and forgetting fields still walled and warring across the wider galaxy, carrying the embers out as Mother Ren once carried them to a hollow child in a sealed room, now at the scale of worlds. And the cold has a seventh mask, the last of the Golden Eye, and it is fitted to wholeness and to giving both, the subtlest yet, the temptation of the whole and awakened field to believe that because it is whole it is finished, that it has arrived, that the breath is over; and the tale will walk it with you, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The star-kin came, and were held with both hands. The center was kept. A dragon flies low and marked, that a full world might stay awake.

Breathe. The Golden Eye holds at the full. And the tale goes on, toward the Return.

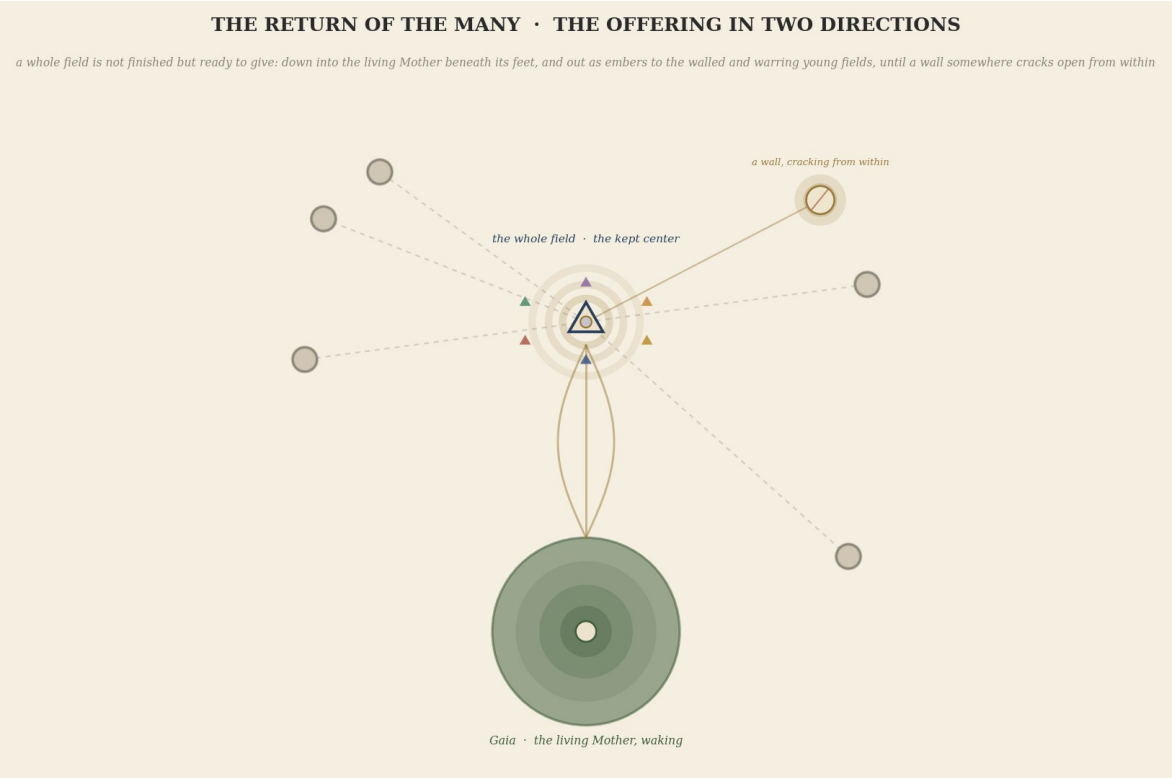
The Seven Eyes · Volume Two: The Golden Eye · Book Three · Breath Awakens

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME TWO OF SEVEN

The Golden Eye

Book Four: The Return of the Many

◇



The field was whole at last: the many made one across a whole world and out among the stars, awake, wall-less, godless, holding its own empty center of its own free will. And a whole field faces the last and subtlest mask of the Golden Eye, fitted not to fear or difference or fullness but to wholeness itself, the quiet certainty that because it is whole it is finished, that it has arrived, that the

long breath is over and it may now rest forever in its own perfection. This last book of the Second Eye tells how that certainty is the softest death of all, and how it is answered, in the only way a wholeness can be kept alive, by being given away in two directions at once: down into the living Mother beneath their feet, and out to the walled and warring young fields still lost across the wider dark. And it tells the cost of the carrying out, which is a life; and it asks, at the very close of the Golden Eye, whether there might be a way, someday, that does not always cost a life, and turns the whole tale toward the Third Eye to find it.

A tale of the Second Eye, and its closing · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com

WHERE THE THIRD BOOK LEFT US

◇

The star-kin came down the sky as kin and not as gods, and the full world was tempted by the sixth mask to hand them its empty center and fall asleep in their greater light; but young Nael refused, and held the center, though it cost the eldest dragon Vaeloth nearly all its light when the coil hidden in the Orion one, Korran, struck at the undefended heart of the field. The coil was met not by conquest but by coherence, and Korran was uncoiled, and stayed to serve; and Earth kept its center and became kin among the wider kin of the fields, no one the god. This last book of the Golden Eye takes up in the long full peace that followed, when the whole awake wall-less world had, at last, nothing left to overcome, and had to learn the hardest thing a whole field ever learns, which is what to do with a wholeness once it is won.

BOOK FOUR

The Return of the Many

the Return of the Second Eye: the seventh mask, the offering downward to the Mother, the carrying out to the walled worlds, and the closing of the Golden Eye

◇

CHAPTER One

The Whole and Finished World

how a field with nothing left to overcome met the softest mask of all

◇

There is a danger that comes only to the whole, and the tale has been walking toward it for two Eyes, and it arrives now, quietly, in a world that has, for the first time in all its long climbing history, nothing left to climb. The field of Earth was whole. Say it plainly and feel how strange it is to say: there was no war anywhere under the sky, and no want, and no wall, and no people ground to grey, and no god set over the empty center, and no star-kin adored in place of a people's own kept fire; every mask the cold had worn in two whole Eyes had been met and torn, and the many were one, across the world and out among the stars, awake and free and turned of their own will toward the emptiness. It was, by every measure the awakened had ever had, done. Finished. Perfect. And that, reader, that very perfection, was the doorway of the last mask of the Golden Eye.

For the seventh mask needed no enemy and no fear and no fullness even; it needed only wholeness, and a whole field's entirely reasonable wish to rest in what it had bled two Eyes to win. It did not whisper you are alone, nor you are the ones, nor make them the same, nor give away your center; it whispered the softest thing of all, and it whispered it in the voice of a tired good field's own earned contentment, and what it whispered was: it is finished. You have arrived. Look what you have made, look how whole, how awake, how perfectly at peace; the long breath is over, the climbing is done, and you may set it all down now and rest in your own perfection forever. There is nowhere left to go. There is nothing left to become. Be still, and be whole, and be finished, and let the wholeness keep itself, for surely a thing so perfect needs no more tending.

And it was Nael, very old now, the keeper who had refused the star-kin the center in her youth, who felt the wrongness in it first, as she had felt the low

fires long before, with the near-feeling that had never left her; for she stood in the wind-blown hall by the scarred silver Keeper, an old old woman among a whole and contented world, and she felt the great chord of the field, which was fuller and more whole than any chord the world had ever sounded, and she heard, under its fullness, the one false note she had learned to dread across a long life, the note of a thing beginning, very slightly, to still; and she understood, with a cold that no perfect peace could warm, that a wholeness which believes itself finished has already, in that instant, begun to die, for the one law under all the Eyes is that the breath must move, in and out, give and receive, or it is not breath at all but only the held stillness of a held breath, which looks, from outside, exactly like peace, right up until the moment the body that held it too long goes blue and falls.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Held Breath

how a perfect field began, invisibly, to curdle, and the old witness named the cure

◇

It began so gently that the contented world blessed it, as the world had blessed the grinding once, for the cold's masks are always blessed at first. The great works slowed. Why make a new music that takes seventy voices and a lifetime, when the old music was already perfect? Why send the ember-carriers out along the hard roads to the far walled worlds, risking the young and the brave in the outer dark, when here, at home, all was already light? Why tend the low fires so carefully against nothing, why keep turning toward the empty center for the joy of making, when everything worth making was already made? And the whole field settled, over a generation, into a contentment so deep and so lovely and so entirely deserved that almost no one felt it curdling; the fires burned steady and even and beautiful and made nothing new; the halls stood perfect and admired and empty of the labour that had raised them; the star-kin came less often, and were welcomed warmly and told, each time, that all was well, all was finished, there was nothing now to do but enjoy the long golden evening of the world.

And it was a golden evening, and the tale will not sneer at it, for it had been bought so dear and the rest was so earned; but an evening, however golden, is the beginning of a night, and Nael knew it, and could not, for a long while, make the contented world hear her, for how do you warn a people against their own happiness, how do you tell a field that has finally, after ten thousand years of blood, arrived, that arriving is the one thing a living field must never do? She was old, and they loved her, and they smiled at her warnings the way the young smile at the old, kindly, and did not change, and the great chord stilled another degree, and another.

It was Kol the raven who gave her the words, at the last, for a witness who has watched two whole Eyes knows the one thing the contented forget. He came to her on the crown of the isle in a still golden dusk, both his old eyes bright, and he said: They think the breath is a climb, small one, and that a climb has a top, and that they have reached it. That is the whole of the seventh mask. But the breath is not a climb; it is a breath; and a breath that has filled to the very top has not finished, it has reached the one moment where it must turn, or die. You cannot make them un-arrive; you cannot frighten a whole safe world back into climbing; there is no enemy left to point to and no want to rouse them. There is only the turn. You must show them that the top of the breath is not a destination but a hinge, that a full breath does not stop but pours, and that the only thing a whole field can do with its wholeness, the only thing that keeps a wholeness alive instead of letting it curdle into a beautiful corpse, is to give it away. Not out of lack, for you lack nothing. Out of fullness. As the Mother gives spring, not because she is empty, but because she is full. Turn them outward, Nael, and turn them downward, before the lovely night comes all the way down; teach them that whole does not mean finished, whole means ready, ready at last to give. That is the Return. That is the whole reason the Golden Eye gathered them: not so they could keep the light, but so they could, at last, having become whole enough to have some, spend it.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Two Directions of the Gift

how Nael showed the field that the Return pours down and out at once

◇

So Nael, in the last years of her long life, gathered the contented world one final time into the wind-blown hall, and she did not warn them any more, for warning had failed; she invited them, which is the only thing that ever truly moves the whole. She stood by the scarred Keeper, older than anyone living, and she said, we are whole, and she let them be glad of it, and then she said, and a whole thing is not a finished thing; a whole thing is a full thing; and a full thing has only one honest choice, which is whether to hold, and curdle, or to pour, and live. And she told them the two directions of the pouring, which are the whole shape of the Return, and which the far ages would forget and call by a hundred names and paint on a thousand temple walls without ever quite remembering what they meant.

The gift pours down, she said, and the gift pours out. Down, first: for we have been so busy, all these Eyes, learning to be one with each other that we have half-forgotten the one who has held us the whole time, the living Mother beneath our feet, Gaia, the deep and breathing ground, who was waking to her own aliveness even as we woke to ours, and who has given us everything, the very stone of the empty centers, the water of the singing channels, the grain and the fire and the bodies we breathe with, and asked nothing, and been, in our long climbing self-absorption, scarcely thanked. The first direction of the Return is downward, into her; to turn our whole hard-won coherence, the one thing we have that she gave us the ground to grow but could not grow for us, back down into the living Mother as an offering, a communion, a marriage of the waking field and the waking world; for a humanity that becomes whole and does not turn to bless the Earth that bore it has understood nothing, and will

curdle no matter how it pours outward, because it has refused the deepest gift, which is gratitude to the ground.

And the gift pours out, she said, and here her old voice took the weight that the whole rest of the book would carry: out, to the others. For we are not the only field. The star-kin told us true, there are uncounted young fields across the wider dark, walled and warring and forgetting, exactly as we were in the age of the many, exactly as a hollow child once was in a sealed room until her grandmother gave her back the light through her own five senses. We did not make our wholeness alone; embers were carried to us, by Mother Ren, by the star-kin, by every soul who ever crossed a wall to give the light to one who had lost it; and a field that has received the ember and grown whole and then keeps that wholeness for itself, safe behind its own lovely peace, has become the very thing it overcame, a walled world, only a warmer and more comfortable one. The second direction of the Return is outward; to carry the ember out, across the dark, to the walled young worlds, and do for them what was done for us, patiently, at the scale of worlds now, one sealed room at a time. And she looked at them, the whole contented golden-evening world, and she said, it will cost us. Carrying the ember into a walled and frightened world has always cost the carrier, from the first. But the cost of carrying it out is a wound. The cost of keeping it in is a death. Choose.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Marriage of the Field and the Ground

how the whole world turned downward, and the living Mother answered

◇

They turned downward first, for that gift asked no crossing of the dark and no risking of the young, only the harder inward thing of humility, and a whole world can find humility more easily than courage. On a night of the turning year, the whole field of Earth, and the star-kin who had lingered, and the dragons, and Nael at the scarred Keeper, did together the thing no field had done before, and turned their whole gathered coherence not toward the empty center above and between them, as they always had, but down, through the center, into the living body of the Mother beneath; and the tale asks you to feel it with all five senses, for it was the most beautiful communion the young world ever knew.

They felt her first through the soles of their feet, a deep slow warmth rising out of the ground into the body, not the sun's warmth but an older one, the banked heat of the living deep, and with it a vast slow pulse, felt in the bones before the ear, the Mother's own breath, so slow that a single one of her breaths was a season, so that they understood all at once that spring and autumn were her inhale and her exhale and that they had been living inside her breathing the whole time without ever feeling it. They smelled her, rising: wet stone and root and the green mineral breath of the deep soil and the sweet rot that is the ground remaking the dead into the living, the smell of the Mother's endless patient turning of death back into life. They heard her, a sound that came up through the stone into the great hall like a struck bell struck so long ago it had almost faded, a single vast low tone, the tone the dragons breathe, the tone that underlies the singing geometry of the whole

world, and they understood that the dragons had been singing the Mother's own note back to her all along. They tasted her in the cold sweet water welling up out of the ground into their cupped hands, the taste of only water, of only the deep between. And they saw her, at the last, not with the eyes but with the near-feeling that Nael poured out through the whole gathered field: the living Mother, Gaia, vast and slow and ancient and awake, waking, as they had woken, to her own aliveness, and turning up toward the small quick warm coherence of her waking children with a love so patient and so total that the whole gathered world wept to feel itself, for the first time, not standing upon a rock, but held in the hand of a living being who had loved them since before they were, and asked only, in her slow vast voice that was felt and not heard, that they remember her, and tend her, and turn to her, as she had always, in her long slow breathing, turned to them.

And in that marriage of the waking field and the waking ground something passed between them that would matter to the very end of the seven Eyes: the Mother gave up into her children a thing she had held in her deep body since the world was young, a memory, or a seed, or a promise, the tale cannot say which and neither could they, a deep green pulse that settled into the empty center of the field and into the marked breast of the wounded dragon Vaeloth and into the old heart of Nael herself, and it was warm, and it was patient, and it was, though none of them had the word yet, the first faint stirring of the Third Eye, the transformation to come; for the Mother knew, as mothers do, what her children would need next, and she gave it to them a whole Eye early, folded into the downward gift, to carry until they were ready to open it.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Carrying Out

how a small company crossed the dark to a walled world, and what it cost the one who carried the ember

◇

The outward gift was harder, and it is here the tale must keep its promise to you, reader, and not gloss the cost, for the closing of the Golden Eye was bought, like everything true in this world, at its own hard price, and the price this time was Renna.

Renna was young, of the line of Mother Ren, and she had the ember-carrier's gift and the ember-carrier's restlessness, the thing that had made Sela go over the wall and Tamsin walk the borders, the inability to be content in the golden evening while somewhere a field sat walled in the dark; and when the outward Return was called, she was the first to stand, and the star-kin gave a vessel, and Korran the uncoiled Orion went with her as guardian, and a Pleiadian memory-holder to hold the field steady across the dark, and a handful of Earth's bravest, and they crossed the wider dark to a young world the star-kin knew, a walled and warring field deep in the age of the many, in the grip of the certainty of the border, killing across a river exactly as the Hill and the River had once killed, and knowing nothing of the one light, and afraid, above all things, of the strange.

And Renna did what Mother Ren had done, only now among strangers whose very tongue she did not know: she went in among them without a weapon, and she did not preach, for a certainty is never beaten by a louder certainty, she did the small sensory things, she knelt by a frightened walled-world child and took its hand and put it to its own wrist to feel the pulse and then to hers, the same drum; she broke bread and shared it; she pointed up at the one sky over the walled world and the field across the river both. And it began to work, as it always begins to work, for the one light is in every field and answers when it is called; a few of the walled world's people began to gather at the strange

gentle woman's fire, and to wonder, and the wall around their hearts began, here and there, to thin.

But a wall does not come down without the terror of those who built it, and the tale will not look away from what terror does. The keepers of the walled world's certainty, its priests of the one true face and its captains of the border, saw their people begin to gather at the outsider's fire, saw the wall thinning, and were afraid with the particular fury of the frightened who feel their whole world slipping, and they named Renna what the frightened always name the one who brings the light: a witch, a poisoner, a spy of the enemy across the river, come to soften them for the slaughter; and they took her, in the grey before a dawn, from among the very people she had begun to wake, and they did to her what walled worlds have always done to the ones who come to open them. The tale will tell it once, plainly, and not more than once, so that you feel it and are not made numb by it: they bound her to the post at the center of their ring of fire, the ring they had made an idol of, the empty center they had filled with a face of fear, and they cut her, and they burned the fire high, and they made her a long time dying in front of the gathered and frightened people, so that all would see what came of listening to the strange; and Renna, who could have been taken out by Korran and the vessel in a moment and would not go, because a carrier who flees when the wall closes teaches the walled world only that the light runs, hung in the smoke and the pain through the whole of that grey dawn, and did not curse them, and did not call the enemy down upon them, but sang, in her own tongue they could not understand, low and broken, the oldest song of the open field, keep your fire, keep it burning, keep the center empty, until the smoke and the wounds took her voice and then her breath, and the breath did not turn, and stopped, and Renna of the line of Mother Ren was dead at the center of a walled world that had killed her for bringing it the light.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Ember That Caught

how one child of the walled world remembered, and a wall began to come down from within

◇

Korran did not avenge her. This is the hinge of the whole book, and the hardest, and the tale sets it as plainly as it set the death: the uncoiled Orion, the greatest warrior of the seven lineages, stood at the edge of that walled world with the vessel and the power to burn the place to ash for what it had done to the girl he had sworn to guard, and every strand of him that had once been the coil screamed to do it, to answer the fire with a greater fire, to make the walled world the enemy at last and give it the ending it deserved; and he did not, because Renna had spent her life and her death precisely so that no field would ever again be made the enemy, and to avenge her by conquest would be to unmake her with his own hands, to prove the walled world right that the strangers came only to destroy. He stood in the girl's death and held the coil down, alone, the hardest holding of his long life, and he did not avenge her; he waited; for coherence starves the coil, and he had learned, in his own uncoiling, that the only true answer to a wall is to let the light he could not force do its slow work from inside.

And it did. For among the frightened people who had watched Renna die at the post, made to watch so they would learn to fear the strange, there was a child, a small girl of the walled world, who had been one of those who came to the gentle outsider's fire, who had felt her own pulse and Renna's and known them the same, who had tasted the shared bread; and the priests of the certainty had meant her, above all, to be cured of it by the sight of the burning, to learn that the light ends at the post in smoke and pain. But terror does not teach what the frightened think it teaches. The child stood in the crowd and watched the gentle woman die singing a song she could not understand and did not curse her killers, and something happened in the child that the priests could

not see and could not stop and would have burned her too had they seen it: she did not learn to fear the strange. She learned that her own people, her good and frightened people, had just killed the kindest person she had ever known for the crime of showing them their own pulse; and the wall in the child's heart did not thicken at the sight, as it was meant to, it cracked, all the way down, in a single grey dawn, exactly as a hollow River-child's had once cracked in a sealed room a whole Eye and a whole world away, and through the crack came the one light, and the child remembered, though she had never been taught, what Renna had died to give her, and became, in that instant, unmade and remade, the first Source Anchor of a new field, the ember caught and burning now inside the very wall that had killed the one who carried it.

Renna never knew. That is the part the tale will not soften, because it is the truth of every carrier who ever crossed a wall: she died believing, perhaps, that she had failed, that the wall had won, that the light had gone out with her breath at the post; she did not live to see the child, did not live to see the crack, did not live to see the wall of that world begin, over the slow years after, to come down from the inside, stone by stone, always from the inside, by the hand of a woman who had been a girl in a crowd at a burning and had never forgotten the gentle stranger's song. The carriers rarely see the ember catch. They carry it into the dark and are, so often, put out by the dark, and never know that a spark leapt, at the last instant, from their own guttering to a watching child; and Korran brought Renna's body home across the wider dark, and the golden-evening world that had grown too content to send its young into danger received the young one it had sent back dead, and grieved, and woke, for there is nothing that wakes a contented field from the seventh mask like the body of one of its own children who went out, while it rested, to give the light away, and did.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Closing of the Golden Eye

how the field learned to pour, the Second Eye closed, and a question turned it toward the Third

◇

Renna's death did what all her living warnings and all Nael's could not: it broke the seventh mask. A whole world that had believed itself finished stood at the grave of a girl who had died proving it was not, and understood, in its grief, the thing Nael had tried so long to say, that whole does not mean finished, that the wholeness they had bled two Eyes to win was not a treasure to be kept but a fire to be carried, and that a field which will not spend its light in the dark has not kept its light safe, it has begun to let it die. And the golden-evening world turned, at last, from its lovely stillness back into motion, not the motion of climbing, for there was nothing left to climb, but the motion of pouring, the motion of the Return: it turned downward, in a thousand small daily marriages with the living Mother, tending her, blessing her, remembering the ground; and it turned outward, sending its young and its brave and its old across the wider dark to the walled worlds, carrying the ember, one sealed room at a time, at the scale of worlds, and it never again believed itself finished, for a field that is pouring cannot believe itself finished; only a field that has stopped can believe that, and a field that has stopped is dying, and the whole hard lesson of the seventh mask, bought with Renna's life, was simply this: keep pouring, and you keep living; and the day you believe you have arrived is the first day of your long and lovely death.

Nael died soon after, very old, content in the true way now, not the false stillness of the finished but the deep rest of one who has poured out all she was given and kept nothing back; she went up one last time to the crown of the isle, to the scarred Keeper stained with a dragon's dried light and stained now, in her heart, with a carrier's far-off blood, and she laid her open hand on it and gave it the whole of her long life to keep, the star-kin and the kept

center and the marriage with the Mother and Renna gone out into the dark, all of it, one breath, and then she sat down with her back against the empty center in the fine turf that smelled of thyme, and watched the many fires of the whole pouring world burn below her, each its own colour, turned toward the emptiness and past it now toward the ground and the stars both, and she let her long breath out, and it did not need to turn again, and she went where Sela and Harl and Mother Ren and the founders had gone, into the kept and empty center of a world that had learned, at the last, to give.

And Kol the raven, who had witnessed the whole of the Golden Eye, from the first blood on the first meadow to the last blood at a far post under a strange sky, sat on the rim of the round open place in the dusk beside the scarred and twice-stained Keeper, both his old eyes bright and, for once, not quite dry, and said the thing that closed the Second Eye and opened, in the saying, the door to the Third:

The many are one now, small ones, and one across a world and out among the stars, and one with the living Mother beneath, and awake, and pouring, and never again finished; the Golden Eye is closed, the great exhale drawn all the way out, the gift given in both directions at once, down and out. And it cost you. Count the cost, and do not gloss it: the boy on the meadow and the boy he killed, and old Harl in the empty center, and Vaeloth's light, and now Renna at the far post, singing in the smoke. Every wall that ever came down in these two Eyes came down at the price of one who stepped between the coil and the undefended heart and paid. And here is the question I leave you with, the question the whole Third Eye is the answer to, so hold it: must it always cost a life? Is the sacrifice of the one who carries the light the only key that ever opens a wall, world without end, carrier after carrier put out in the dark that a watching child might catch the spark? Or is there a deeper transformation still, one the Mother has already folded, warm and green and patient, into your kept center and your wounded dragon and your grieving hearts, a way in which the coil itself is not merely starved but changed, the serpent not merely resisted but revealed as the swan's own breath, so that the wall need not be

bought, ever again, with the carrier's blood? That is the Third Eye, small ones. That is the Serpent and the Swan. Rest now, and grieve your dead, and tend your Mother, and carry your embers; and when you are ready, we will go down into the deepest polarity of all, and learn whether the oldest cost can, at last, be transformed. The breath turns. It goes on. All the way home.

Down to the Mother and out to the dark,
the whole world learned to pour;
and a girl went out with the one bright spark
and came not back to shore.
But a child in a crowd at a burning saw,
and the wall cracked, stone from stone;
so the many are one by the oldest law,
and no one is one alone.

Here the Golden Eye closes, the Second Eye, the Many and the One. The many were scattered and forgot; the first blood was spilled; a remnant built one open field with no wall and no face; the star-kin came and were held as kin and not gods; and the whole field, tempted to believe itself finished, learned instead to pour its wholeness down into the living Mother and out to the walled worlds, at the cost of a carrier's life. Now the light turns toward the Third Eye, the Serpent and the Swan, the transformation, where the deepest polarity of all must be met, and the oldest question of the whole tale answered: whether the coil can be not only starved but changed, and the wall opened at last without the carrier's blood.

Toward the Third Eye

what waits in Volume Three, for your eye before it is written

◇

The Golden Eye is whole and closed, its Inhale and Exhale and Pause and Return all drawn, the many made one across a world and out among the stars and down into the living ground, awake and pouring and never again finished; and the tale did not gloss the cost of it, the blood on the meadow and in the empty center and at the far post, nor did it let that cost consume the road, for the cost was paid so that the road could go on, and it goes on now toward Volume Three, the Third Eye, the Serpent and the Swan, the great transformation. There the tale will go down into the deepest polarity there is, the one the whole epic has circled since the first whisper: the serpent and the dragon, guardian when open and distortion when coiled, the coil that has been starved and resisted and uncoiled again and again across two Eyes but never yet transformed; and it will take up the question Kol has left burning, whether the oldest cost, the carrier's blood that has opened every wall from Harl to Renna, must be paid forever, or whether there is a deeper turning still, folded already by the Mother into the kept center of the world, in which the coil is not merely met but changed, the serpent revealed as the swan's own breath coiled and forgotten, and the wall opened at last from within by transformation and not by sacrifice. And the star-kin will be there, for the Serpent-kin of the stars carry this deepest polarity in their own ancient scaled bodies, and Korran the uncoiled and Vaeloth the marked will walk near the heart of it; and the tale will walk it with you, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The Golden Eye is closed. The many are one, and pouring, and never finished. And a carrier's blood has opened one more wall.

Breathe. The Second Eye is whole. And the tale goes on, toward the Serpent and the Swan.

The Seven Eyes · Volume Two: The Golden Eye · Book Four · Breath Awakens

VOLUME THREE OF SEVEN

◇

The Serpent and the Swan

the inhale is only a name; here is the third Eye

the coil that is any being's own breath clenched, and its long turning into flight

◇

in four books: the Inhale, the Exhale, the Pause, and the Return

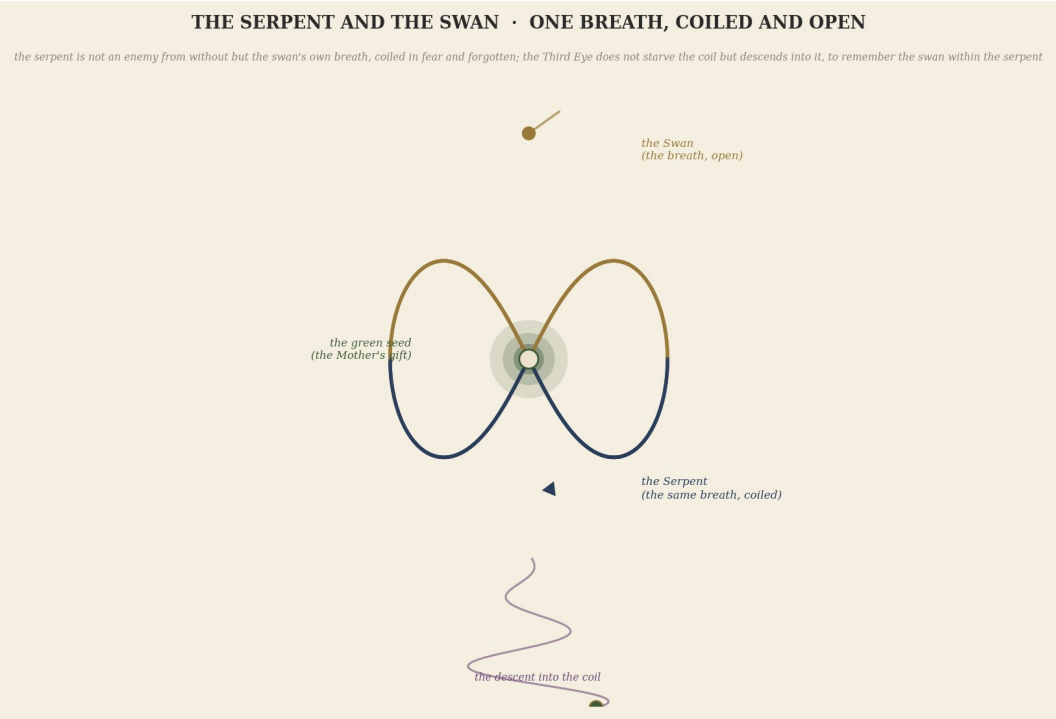


THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME THREE OF SEVEN

The Serpent and the Swan

Book One: The Opening of the Green Seed

◇



Two Eyes are drawn and closed. The one light was gathered into a field, and the many were made one across a world and out among the stars; and in both Eyes the coil, the cold, the Counterfeit, was met and beaten, starved by

coherence and held off by the blood of those who stepped between it and the undefended heart. But held off is not healed, and starved is not transformed, and the coil has always come again, mask after mask, wall after wall, carrier after carrier, because in two whole Eyes no one has ever gone down to its root. The Third Eye is the going down. It takes up the oldest and most dangerous truth of the whole tale, that the serpent is not an enemy from without but the swan's own breath, coiled in fear and forgotten; and it asks whether that coiled breath can be not merely resisted but remembered, the serpent not slain but revealed as the swan, so that the wall need never again be bought with a life. This first book tells how the coil returned at its root, and the deepest lore was spoken, and one who was herself born of a coiled world went down, at last, into the serpent.



◇

Reader, this Eye goes down into the serpent, and the tale must say plainly, once, what it means and does not mean by that, for the serpent carries a poisoned history in the world you read this in, a history of whole peoples cast as reptiles, as vermin, as the coiled evil to be cleansed; and that history is itself the coil, the very distortion this Eye descends to heal, and the tale will have no part of it. Hear the law once more, at the depth where it is hardest to keep: the serpent in this book is not a race and not a people and not a lineage. It is a state, a coil, the light's own breath turned in fear against itself, and it can take any being of any world, and the dragons who are its guardians are the most revered beings in all the seven Eyes, for a dragon is the serpent remembered, the coil sprung open into the singing breath it always was. When this book goes down into the serpent, it goes down into a wound in the one light itself, a wound that is in you and in me and in every field that ever forgot; and it goes down not to kill it, for you cannot kill your own breath, but to remember it. Hold that with both hands, all the way down.

BOOK ONE

The Opening of the Green Seed

the Inhale of the Third Eye: the coil returns at its root, the deepest lore is spoken, and the descent into the serpent begins

◇

CHAPTER One

The Green Seed Opens

how the Mother's gift stirred, and the coil returned not as a mask but at its root

◇

The seed the living Mother had folded into the kept center of the world at the closing of the Golden Eye lay quiet for a long age, as seeds do, warm and green and patient in the dark of the scarred silver Keeper; and the pouring world went on pouring, down to the Mother and out to the walled worlds, and did not know it carried a seed at all, any more than an orchard in winter knows it carries the spring. And then, at the turning of an age the tale cannot date, the seed opened; and the whole world felt it, though almost no one knew what they felt, a deep green stirring that came up out of the ground and out of the empty centers and into the marrow of every waking thing, a stirring that was not the old breath of the two Eyes, the in and the out, but something under the breath, a turning-over in the deep, as of a great sleeper beginning, after ten thousand years, to wake.

And with the green stirring came, as the tale must tell you it always comes, the coil; but not as it had ever come before, and this was the whole terror and the whole meaning of the new age. In the First Eye the coil had worn four small masks fitted to a single field, and been torn. In the Golden Eye it had worn three larger masks fitted to a whole world and its fullness, and been torn. Always before, the coil had come as a mask, a shape, a temptation you could name and meet and beat, worn now by this heart and now by that, here a certainty and there a false peace and there a worship. But now, as the green seed opened, the coil did not come as a mask at all. It came as itself. It rose, all across the wider company of the fields at once, in Earth and among the star-kin and in the new young fields the ember-carriers had woken, not in one place wearing one face but everywhere at once wearing none, a deep cold turning-over in the root of things, as if the very stirring of the green seed had also

stirred, in the same deep, the thing that had been coiled around the root of the world since before the first scattering, and it woke when the seed woke, for they were, the tale will slowly and terribly reveal, two turnings of the one thing.

Nael was long dead, and Sela before her, and Harl and Renna and all the carriers of the first two Eyes; the world that felt the seed open was their far descendants' world, whole and pouring and wise. But the wise of that world found, to their growing fear, that all the wisdom of two Eyes did not touch the new cold. You cannot starve a coil that wears no face, for coherence starves a coil by out-shining the mask, and there was no mask to out-shine; you cannot step between the coil and the undefended heart when the coil is not striking from any one direction but welling up from under everything at once; the whole hard-won art of two Eyes, coherence and intercession, the unarmed walk into the center, the refusal to make an enemy, all of it, which had beaten every mask, slid off the root coil like water off a stone, because those arts had always been ways of meeting the coil where it surfaced, and the root coil was not surfacing, it was simply, everywhere, and always had been, waking now with the seed. And the wider company of the fields understood, slowly, with a dread that was also, strangely, a kind of coming of age, that the Third Eye would not be beaten. It would have to be gone down into.

◇

CHAPTER Two

Yara of the Coiled World

how one woman, born of a world that killed the light, carried the question that opened the Eye

◇

The one who would go down came, as the openers of every Eye have come, from exactly the place no one would have looked, and the tale has been quietly making her since a far grey dawn in the Golden Eye when a small girl stood in a crowd at a burning and did not learn to fear the strange. Her name, in the tongue of her world, was Yara, and she was that girl grown, and she was the first Source Anchor of the field that had woken out of Renna's death, the field born, the tale asks you never to forget, of a world that had murdered the carrier who came to save it.

Yara's world had healed, in the slow way the tale has shown, the wall coming down from the inside, stone by stone, over the long years, by the hand of the woman who had been the girl in the crowd; and it was, by the age the green seed opened, a good field, a true field, one of the newer lights in the wider company. But Yara carried in her, all her life, a thing none of the older fields quite carried, and it was the thing that made her, alone of all the waking company, able to do what the Third Eye would ask; for Yara had been made a keeper of the light by watching the light be tortured to death, by her own good people, at the false center of her own coiled world, and she had never, not for one day of her long life, been able to pretend that the coil was somewhere else, in some enemy, on some far shore. She had felt it in the hands of her own mother and father as they held her in the crowd and would not look away from the burning because they were afraid. She had felt it, worst of all, in her own child heart, the small cold voice that had wanted, even as she wept for the gentle stranger, to be safe, to belong, to not be the strange one who got burned. She knew the coil from the inside. She had never had the comfort, that the older and cleaner fields still half-had, of believing herself on the light's side

of a line. She knew there was no line. She knew the serpent and the swan were in the one heart, her own, and always had been.

And so when the green seed opened and the root coil woke and slid off all the arts of two Eyes, and the wider company of the fields gathered in fear on the Isle Between to ask what could be done, it was Yara, come across the wider dark from her healed and coiled world, who stood in the wind-blown hall by the scarred silver Keeper and said the thing that opened the Third Eye. You are trying, she said, to meet it as you met the masks, from outside, on the light's side of a line. But there is no line, and there never was; the coil is not on the far side of anything. It is the swan's own breath, in every one of us, coiled in fear so long it has forgotten it is breath. My whole world was born from that forgetting, and healed only when one child stopped pretending the coil was the enemy across the river and felt it, instead, in her own frightened heart. You will not beat this from outside, because there is no outside. Someone has to go down into it. Someone has to go down into the coil itself, all the way to the root, and not fight it and not starve it and not die in front of it, but remember it, remember the swan it was before it coiled, and breathe with it until it remembers too. And she looked around the fearful hall of the fields and said, quietly, and I think it must be me, because I am the only one here who has never once believed she stood on the safe side of the line.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Council of the Fields

how the deepest lore was spoken, and the peril of the descent was named

◇

They did not let her go lightly, and they were right not to, for what Yara proposed had been tried before, in ages the tale is still too young to tell, and had more often ended in horror than in healing; and it was the Serpent-kin of the stars, the dragon lineage, oldest and gravest of the seven, who rose in the hall to speak the deepest lore and the plainest warning, and the whole wider company grew still to hear them, for the Serpent-kin spoke rarely and never lightly.

The lore they spoke was this, and it is the root of the whole Third Eye, so the tale sets it down whole. In the beginning, they said, was the one light, the one breath, and it was whole, and it was open, and we call that openness the Swan, the breath in its first and undistorted turning. And when the one light scattered into the many, as it must, as the whole Experiment requires, some of that breath, in the terror of the scattering, in the unbearable first loneliness of being a part cut off from the whole, did a thing that was not wrong, that was almost inevitable, that any breath might do: it clenched. It coiled. It wrapped itself around its own small separate self to keep from being lost, and it held, and it would not open again, and in the holding it forgot, over the long ages, that it had ever been the open breath at all; and that coiled and forgotten breath is the serpent, is the coil, is the Counterfeit, is the cold, is every mask of two Eyes and the root under all of them. It is not evil that came from outside the light. It is the light's own breath, clenched in fear so long it believes the clench is what it is. And that, the Serpent-kin said, is why it cannot be killed and cannot finally be starved: you cannot kill the light's own breath; you can only, if you are very brave and very lost, remember it.

And here is the peril, they said, and did not soften it. To remember the coiled breath, someone must go down into the coil, must enter the clench, must feel from the inside the terror that first made the breath clench and has kept it clenched since the world was young; and the one who goes down must carry the open breath into that terror without themselves clenching, must stand in the very heart of the fear that unmakes and not, themselves, coil. And almost none can. For the coil is old and it is strong and it knows, better than anything in creation, exactly how to frighten a breath into clenching, for it is the master of that art, it is that art; and it will show the one who descends every face it has ever worn and every wound it has ever dealt and every reason in all the worlds to clench and be safe; and most who have gone down into the coil to remember it have instead been remembered by it, have clenched, and coiled, and become one more coil around the root, one more mask for the ages, and the tale of them is not a healing but a warning. That is what you ask, they said to Yara. Not to fight the serpent. To become, for a time, the serpent, all the way down, and to remember, in the very depth of the clench, that you are the swan, and to open, and to breathe, and so to teach the oldest coil in the world, by being it and opening anyway, that it too may open. It has almost never been done. It may not be possible. And if you clench, down there, even for an instant, we will lose not only you but everything your opening might have healed, and you will become the deepest coil the wider company has yet had to face, for a Source Anchor turned is worse by far than a coil that never knew the light.

◇

CHAPTER Four

What Korran and Vaeloth Carried

how the uncoiled one and the marked dragon knew the way down

◇

Yara would not go alone, and could not, for no one, the Serpent-kin said, has ever descended into the coil unaccompanied and returned; and the two who rose to go down with her were the two in all the wider company who knew the coil most intimately from the inside, the uncoiled Orion, Korran, and the marked dragon, Vaeloth, who had been bound to one another since the night in the Golden Eye when the one's coil had struck and the other's light had paid for it.

Korran knew the way down because he had been down. He had gone, ages before, in a war among the stars, into the shadow to save his own field, and had not come all the way back up, and had carried the coil in himself for an age until Nael and the coherent breath of a whole world had uncoiled him; and he knew, as none of the cleaner beings could know, the exact feel of the clench from the inside, the way it whispers that it is not a clench at all but only strength, only prudence, only the one who loves refusing to let the loved thing be lost; and he knew, having been uncoiled, the one thing that had freed him, which was not being conquered and not being argued with but being held, held in a coherent breath that would not cast him out, until the clench had nothing left to fear and could not hold. He went down, he said, so that whatever Yara met in the coil, there would be one beside her who had worn it and been freed of it, and could say, from his own scarred experience, it lets go, I promise you, it lets go, I felt it let go.

And Vaeloth knew the way down because it was, in the deepest lore, the coil's own kind. It was a dragon, of the Serpent lineage, the serpent remembered, the coil sprung open into the singing breath; and it carried, seamed across its ancient breast, the silver-gold scar of the night it had given nearly all its light

to keep an empty center undefended, and a flaw in its very breath, a place where the singing did not quite resolve, a small permanent wound; and the Serpent-kin said a strange and beautiful thing of that wound, which the tale sets down for you to carry into the descent: that Vaeloth, being a dragon that had been wounded, being the serpent-remembered that yet carried a flaw, a place of unresolved dark in its own light, was of all beings the one most able to go down into the root coil and not be strange to it, for it was neither the clean unwounded light that the coil could frighten nor the pure clench that had forgotten the light, but the two held together in one scaled ancient body, the swan and the serpent both, awake, and wounded, and open anyway. Where Yara carried the green seed and Korran carried the memory of being freed, Vaeloth carried the living proof that a breath could be wounded, could carry an unhealed dark, and still, still, be open; and that proof, the Serpent-kin said, might be the one lamp that would not go out in the deep.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Descent Begins



how the three went down into the coil, and the deep showed them its first faces

◇

They went down through the Mother. That was the way, for the green seed that had opened was the Mother's own, and the root coil was wrapped, the Serpent-kin said, around the root of the world, in the deepest deep of the living Mother herself, in a place that was not quite a place, a below-the-below, the dark under the dark where the first clenched breath had coiled at the scattering and slept and dreamed its cold dream ever since. And the Mother, who had folded the seed into her children precisely for this, opened a way down into herself for the three, through the scarred center of the Isle, down past the warm banked heat and the season-slow pulse the whole world had felt in the marriage of the Golden Eye, down and down into a cold and a dark that

the tale must now do its best to give you, though language was made in the light and strains in the deep.

It was, first, a losing of the senses one by one, which is the deep's first mercy and first cruelty, for the coil cannot be met with the eyes or the hands, and the descent stripped them: the light failed, and then the last green-glow of the seed was the only light; the sounds of the living world fell away, the surf and the wind and the breathing of the fields, until there was only the three-fold sound of their own breath and, under it, growing, a vast slow dry sound that was not quite a sound, the sound the tale can only call the sound of the clench, a creaking, holding, straining sound, the sound of something enormous that has been gripping itself so hard for so long that the grip has become the whole of it. The air went cold and then went strange, thick and dry and old, and it smelled, as they descended, of a smell Yara knew and had prayed never to smell again, the smell of the smoke of a burning at a false center, the smell of her own world's oldest wound, and she understood that the coil was already reaching up to meet them, already showing her the one face it knew would frighten her most, her own world's murdering fear, and they had not even reached the deep.

And then the faces came, and the tale will show you a few of the first ones, for the coil met each of the three with the faces fitted to their own deepest clench, and this was the descent's first true trial. To Korran it showed the war among the stars, ages gone, his own field burning, the moment he had gone down into the shadow and not come back, and it showed it not as memory but as now, as happening, as if no age had passed, and it whispered in his own voice that he had never truly been uncoiled at all, that the coherent breath of Nael's world had been a dream and a flattery, that he was and had always been the coil, and might as well clench now and have done with the long pretending. To Vaeloth it showed the keening shard coming again for the empty center, again and again, and the flaw in its breath widening, and it whispered that a wounded dragon was no guardian, that the flaw was proof it should have died that night, that a breath with an unhealed dark in it had no business carrying light into

the deepest dark, and should turn back before it failed them all. And to Yara it showed the gentle stranger burning, Renna at the post, and it showed her, this was the cruelest thing, her own child self in the crowd, and it whispered that she had never truly forgiven her world, that under all her lifetime of healing there was a coil of hatred for the people who had made her watch, and that she should let it rise now, here, in the deep, let it uncoil into the righteous burning fury she had earned, and take the whole coiled deep and all the worlds that had ever burned a carrier and clench her hatred around them forever, and call it justice.

And this, reader, was the edge, the first edge of the Third Eye, and the tale will not gloss the danger of it: Yara felt the hatred rise. She had not known it was there, or had known and never let herself feel it, all her long life on the light's supposed side of a line, and here in the deep where there was no line it rose in her, true and hot and utterly justified, the fury of the burned, the child who watched, the whole tortured lineage of every carrier the walled worlds had ever put out, and it wanted to clench, God how it wanted to clench, around all that grief and become at last the strong one, the one who would never again stand helpless in a crowd, the one who would make them pay; and her hands closed, in the dark, and the green seed in them flickered, and for one long instant, in the deep under the deep, the first Source Anchor of a field born from a burning stood one breath from becoming the deepest coil the wider company had ever faced, exactly as the Serpent-kin had feared.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Lamp That Did Not Go Out

how a wounded dragon's flawed breath held the way open, and the three reached the threshold

◇

It was Vaeloth that held. The tale wants you to feel why, for it is the whole seed of the Third Eye and the answer to the peril the Serpent-kin named. Korran, in that instant, was lost in his own showing, drowning in the burning of his ancient field, no help to anyone; and Yara was one breath from the clench; and the green seed was flickering toward dark. And Vaeloth, who was being shown its own wound over and over, its flaw, its failure, the widening crack in its breath, did the one thing that its whole nature had been shaped by that old wound to do: it did not try to breathe a perfect breath. It could not; it was flawed; the coil had made sure to remind it. So instead of reaching for the clean unbroken light that it did not have and that the coil could always mock, Vaeloth simply breathed the breath it actually had, the wounded one, the flawed one, the one with the unresolved dark place in the middle of it where the singing did not quite come home; it breathed out, into the deep, its own broken undertone, the flaw and all, openly, without shame, a dragon-breath that carried its wound plainly in it and was open anyway.

And the coil had no answer to it. This is the thing, reader, hold it: the coil is the master of frightening a clean breath into clenching, of showing the unwounded their coming wound until they clench to prevent it; its whole ancient art is the art of the threat of the wound. But Vaeloth was already wounded. The wound had already happened. There was nothing left to threaten it with; the worst had come, the light had spilled, the flaw was permanent, and Vaeloth had gone on breathing anyway, low and marked and open, for a whole age. And a breath that has already been wounded and stayed open cannot be frightened into clenching by the threat of a wound, for it has nothing left to protect; and so the coil's whole art slid off the marked dragon

as the arts of two Eyes had slid off the root coil, and Vaeloth's flawed undertone went out into the deep and did not gutter, the one lamp that would not go out, because it was already broken and shining anyway; and its broken open note reached Yara in the instant her hands closed, and she heard in it not a command and not an argument but simply another breath, wounded as hers, holding open as hers could not, and it was enough, barely, to let her feel the one thing that unclenches a clenching breath, which is that she was not alone in the dark, that another wounded thing was breathing beside her and had not coiled, and if it had not, then she need not, and her hands, in the dark, opened.

They opened, and the green seed flared back, and the hatred did not go away, the tale is careful to tell you, it did not vanish or resolve or heal, not yet, not in this book; it simply was not clenched around. Yara stood in the deep with her fury still hot and true in her and her hands open around the green light anyway, wounded and not coiled, exactly as the marked dragon breathed beside her, and she reached out in the dark and found Korran drowning in his ancient burning and breathed the wounded open breath toward him as Vaeloth had breathed it toward her, and the uncoiled one surfaced, shaking, from his showing, and the three of them stood together at last in the deep under the deep, wounded every one, open every one, not one of them clean and not one of them clenched, and before them, close now, they felt it: the root coil itself, the first clenched breath of the world, vast beyond the vast, coiled around the root of the Mother since before the scattering, dreaming its cold old dream; and they had reached, alive and open and afraid, the threshold of the deepest thing in all the seven Eyes.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Threshold of the Root

how the Inhale of the Third Eye completed, at the edge of the oldest coil

◇

The tale stops them at the threshold, for the Inhale of the Third Eye is the descent, and the descent is now drawn, all the way down, and the great work that waits beyond the threshold, the meeting and the remembering and the transforming of the root coil itself, is the held breath and the pouring-out of the books to come. But it will not leave you at the threshold without showing you what they saw there, in the last green light of the opened seed, when the three wounded and open ones looked, for the first time, upon the oldest coil in the world.

They had expected a monster; the deep had spent the whole descent teaching them to expect a monster, showing them its cruelest faces. But the root coil, seen at last, close, in the green light, was not a monster. It was the most sorrowful thing any of them had ever seen. It was vast, yes, vast beyond telling, coiled around the root of the living Mother in loop upon loop of ancient clenched breath; but it was not raging, and it was not hungering, and it was not evil in the way the masks had taught them to fear; it was simply holding, holding, holding, with a strain so old and so total that the whole of it trembled, a single breath that had been so terrified at the scattering, so unbearably alone, that it had wrapped itself around its own small separateness and clenched, and clenched, and never dared to open, for an age beyond ages, because it believed, it still believed, in the very root of it, that if it ever let go it would be lost, it would dissolve, it would be nothing; and Yara, looking at it in the green light with her own hatred still hot in her open hands, felt the last thing she had expected to feel at the root of all the world's coldness, which was not fury and not fear but a terrible aching recognition, for she knew that clench, she had felt it in her own child heart in the crowd at the burning, the

small cold voice that only wanted to be safe, to not be lost, to not be the one who suffers; and she understood, at the threshold, weeping, that the oldest coil in the world was not the enemy of the light. It was the most frightened part of the light. It was the swan that had been most alone at the scattering, and had waited, all this time, coiled in the dark under the dark, for someone to come down far enough to remember it.

And Kol the raven, who does not often come to the deep, but who came to the threshold this once, for a witness must witness the turning of an age even in the dark under the dark, sat upon a root of the Mother in the green light beside the three wounded ones, both his old eyes bright even there, and said the thing that closed the Inhale of the Third Eye:

You have come down, small ones, where almost none have come and returned; and you have come down wounded, every one, and open anyway, which is the only way anyone has ever come this far, for the deep can frighten the clean into clenching but it has no power over a breath already broken and shining still. And look what waits: not a monster, but the most frightened breath in all creation, the swan most alone, coiled since before the scattering, holding itself so hard it has forgotten it is breath. You cannot fight it; you knew that above. But now you see you would not want to, for to fight it would be to fight the most terrified part of the one light, which is to fight a weeping child in the dark. The great work is not yet done, and it is the hardest work of all seven Eyes, harder than any war or any wall: to go the last step to the root coil, and not slay it, and not starve it, and not even forgive it as one forgives an enemy, but to remember it, to breathe with it until it remembers it is breath, and dares, after an age of ages, to open. That is the Third Eye. That is the Serpent and the Swan. The Inhale is drawn; you are all the way down; rest here one moment at the threshold, wounded and open, before the holding. And then we will go and remember the oldest fear in the world. The breath turns, even here. It goes on. All the way home.

Down past the light and the warmth and the sound,

down where the first breath clenched,
we came, all wounded, and open, and found
no monster, but grief unquenched:
the swan most alone, in the dark, in the deep,
still holding, afraid to be lost;
and we did not come to slay it or keep,
but to breathe it back, at what cost.

Here the Inhale of the Third Eye completes: the green seed opened and the coil woke at its root, past all the arts of two Eyes; the deepest lore was spoken, that the serpent is the swan's own breath clenched in fear; and Yara of the coiled world, with Korran the uncoiled and Vaeloth the marked, descended through the living Mother into the dark under the dark, met the coil's cruelest faces, and held open, wounded, by the grace of a broken dragon's unquenchable breath, to reach at last the threshold of the root coil, and to see that it is not a monster but the loneliest and most frightened breath in all creation. Now the light holds at the depth, in the great work to come, the remembering and the transforming of the oldest fear in the world.

Deeper into the Third Eye

what waits in the books to come, for your eye before they are written

◇

The Third Eye is opened and its Inhale drawn, the descent made all the way down to the threshold of the oldest coil; and the tale did not gloss the danger of that descent, the faces and the hatred and the one breath Yara stood from becoming the deepest coil of all, nor did it let that danger consume the road, for the descent was made so that the great work could begin. Book Two of the Serpent and the Swan will cross the threshold. It will tell of the meeting with the root coil itself, the first clenched breath of the world, and of the long and perilous labour, harder than any war or wall in two whole Eyes, of remembering it: of breathing with the most frightened breath in all creation, wounded and open, until it dares, after an age of ages, to feel that it is not alone, and to loosen, strand by strand, the clench it has mistaken for its very self. And it will cost, for everything true in this world costs, though the tale has promised itself and you that the Third Eye seeks a way in which the cost is no longer, forever, the carrier's blood; and whether that promise can be kept, whether the oldest coil can truly be not slain but remembered, not starved but transformed, the serpent revealed at last as the swan, is the whole burning question of the Eye, and the tale will walk it with you, wounded and open, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The green seed is open. The three have gone all the way down. And the oldest coil is not a monster, but the loneliest breath in the world.

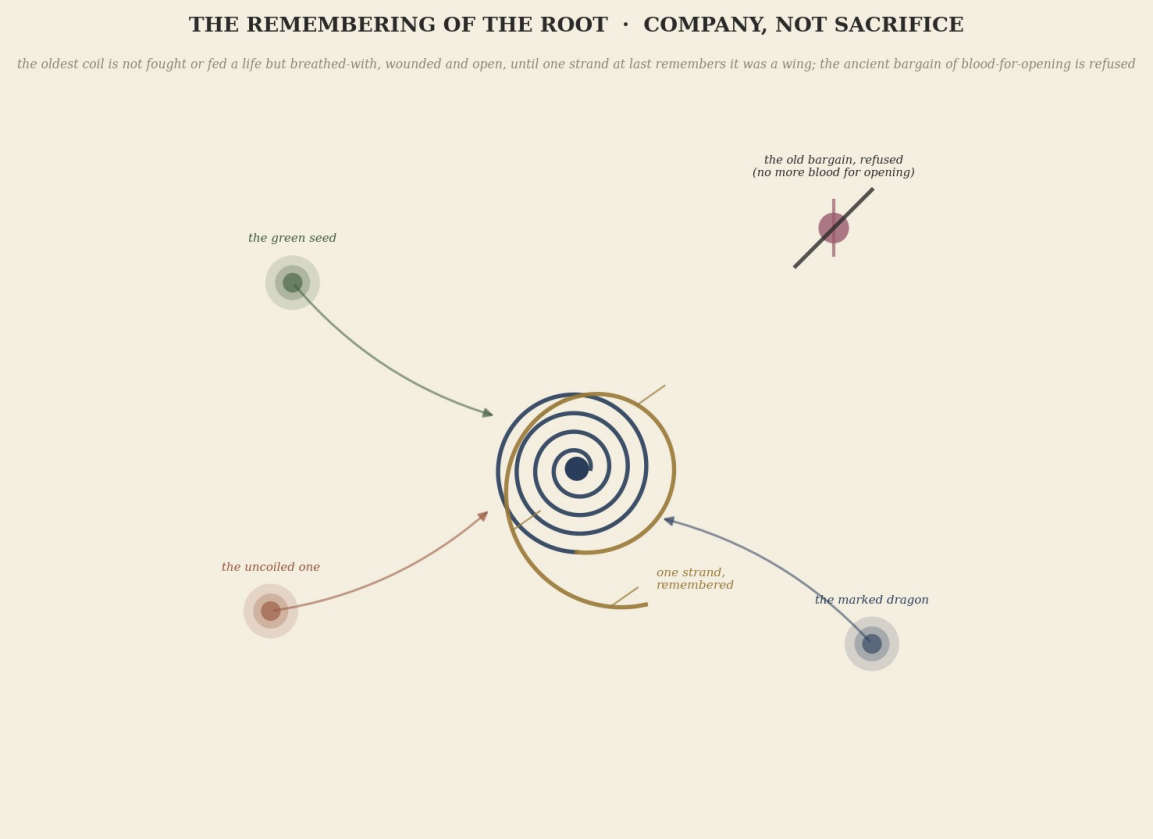
Breathe. The Third Eye is drawn to its depth. And the tale goes on, toward the remembering of the root.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME THREE OF SEVEN

The Serpent and the Swan

Book Two: The Remembering of the Root

◇



They had gone all the way down, the three, wounded and open, and found at the root of the world not a monster but the loneliest breath in all creation, the swan most alone at the scattering, coiled in terror for an age of ages, still believing that to open would be to be lost. Now comes the great work, the labour of the Third Eye, harder than any war or wall of two whole Eyes: to cross the threshold, and breathe with the oldest fear, and remember it. But the coil knows only one language for the opening of a wall, the language it has been taught by every carrier from the first, which is blood; and it will offer them the ancient bargain, a life for an opening, the old key that cracked every wall from Harl to Renna. This book is the story of the refusal of that bargain, and of the far harder price that must be paid instead, which is not a carrier's death but a carrier's surrender of the one thing she has held most tightly of all; and of the first strand of the oldest coil in the world remembering, after an age, that it was once a wing.

A tale of the Third Eye, and its labour · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com

◇

The Mother's green seed opened and the coil woke at its root, past all the arts of two Eyes, for it no longer wore a mask to be met but welled up everywhere at once. And Yara of the coiled world, the child who watched the carrier Renna burn and remembered, being the one soul who had never believed she stood on the safe side of any line, descended through the living Mother into the dark under the dark, with Korran the uncoiled Orion and Vaeloth the marked dragon; and they held open, wounded, against the coil's cruelest faces, by the grace of the flawed dragon's unquenchable broken breath, and reached the threshold of the root coil, and saw that it was not a monster but the swan most alone, coiled since before the scattering, waiting for someone to come far enough down to remember it. This book crosses that threshold.

BOOK TWO

The Remembering of the Root

the Exhale of the Third Eye: the first breathing, the ancient bargain, the refusal, the surrender, and the first strand remembered

◇

CHAPTER One

The First Breath in the Deep

how the three crossed the threshold and breathed company into the oldest fear

◇

They crossed the threshold at the bottom of the world, the three, and the tale asks you to understand that they did not cross it as warriors cross into a battle, for there was no battle to be had; they crossed it as you might cross into the room of one who is very ill and very frightened and has been alone a very long time, softly, with your hands open and empty, having decided in advance that whatever they say to drive you out, you will not go. That was the whole of their plan, and it was almost nothing, and it was the hardest thing three beings had ever set themselves to do: to come close to the oldest terror in creation, and stay.

And they breathed. That was all, at first. There was nothing to say to the root coil, for it had no words, having clenched before words were; there was nothing to give it, for it wanted nothing, having wanted only, for an age, to not be lost; there was nothing to do to it, for it was not attacking, only holding, holding, in its vast trembling dread. So the three simply came close, in the last green light of the opened seed, and breathed, the way you breathe beside a sleeper you love and do not wish to wake, slow and open and unhurried, in and out, the whole turning breath of the two Eyes, Yara with the green seed warm in her open hands, Korran with the memory of his own uncoiling, Vaeloth with its flawed and broken undertone that would not gutter; and they let the coil feel it. They did not push the breath at it. They only breathed, near it, openly, and let the oldest clenched thing in the world feel, seeping in through loop upon loop of its ancient terror, the one sensation it had not felt since before the scattering, the simplest and most impossible sensation there is: that it was not, in this moment, alone in the dark.

And the coil felt it, and the coil was afraid. The tale must tell you this plainly, for it is the truth of the great work and of every version of the great work you will ever attempt in your own smaller deeps: when you first breathe company into a terror that has been alone a long time, the terror does not soften. It panics. It has organized its whole long existence around being alone, around the certainty that it must hold itself or be lost, and the first touch of company is not a comfort to it but a threat, the deepest threat there is, the threat that it might have to let go; and the root coil, feeling for the first time in an age that it was not alone, did not loosen. It convulsed. It clenched harder than it had ever clenched, all its vast loops tightening at once around the root of the world with a groaning strain that shook the deep and cracked the stone of the Mother far above, and it turned on the three the full and undivided force of the oldest fear in creation, and the green light guttered, and the real work, the terrible work, began.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Ancient Bargain

how the coil offered the three the only key it knew, a life for an opening

◇

When its convulsion did not drive them out, when the three breathed on through the shaking of the deep and did not flee and did not fight, the coil did a thing that none of them had foreseen and that the tale has been preparing since the first blood on the first meadow: it offered them a bargain. For the coil was old, older than any wall, and it had watched, across two whole Eyes, exactly how its walls had always come down, and it had learned, in its own clenched way, the one lesson every wall had taught it, and it offered that lesson to the three now as the only key it knew.

It spoke without words, in the language of the deep, which is the language of showing; and what it showed them was the whole long history of its own openings. It showed them the boy on the meadow and the boy he killed, and the wall of certainty that had cracked a little at their deaths. It showed them old Harl walking unarmed into the empty center and the mason's iron and the blood on the pale stones, and the fifth mask breaking at the price of that blood. It showed them Renna at the post in the smoke, singing, and the wall of a whole world beginning to come down from inside at the price of that burning. It showed them every carrier who had ever cracked a wall, all the way back, and it showed them the one thing they all had in common, the one law the coil had learned from watching itself be opened for two whole Eyes: that a wall opens when someone dies for it. That is the key, the coil showed them, the only key, the key that has never once failed in all the history of the awakened. You want me to open? You know the price. It has always been the price. One of you. Step forward, and die here, for me, as Harl died and Renna died, and I will open, one wall, one loop, at the only cost that opens anything. That is the bargain. That is the bargain that has always been paid. Pay it, and be done.

And oh, reader, it was a true bargain, and that was the horror of it; the coil was not lying; it was offering them the exact and proven key that had opened every wall in two whole Eyes, and there was among the three one who wanted, with his whole scarred soul, to pay it.

◇

CHAPTER Three

Korran's Temptation

how the uncoiled one longed to buy the opening with his own life, and why it would have failed

◇

Korran stepped forward. Of course he did; the tale has been making him for this since the night his coil struck Vaeloth in the Golden Eye, and you must understand that his stepping forward was not weakness but the deepest and most dangerous form of a real nobility. For Korran had carried, all his long life, a guilt that no uncoiling had wholly healed: he had gone down into the shadow ages ago and not saved his field; he had struck the empty center and cost a dragon its light; he had been, he felt in his marrow, a taker, a wounder, a coil, and though Nael's world had breathed him open he had never once felt that he had paid, that he had balanced the account, that he had earned the light he had been given back for free. And here, at last, the coil offered him the thing his guilt had hungered for across an age: a way to be useful, finally, absolutely, a way to turn his long-carried shame into the one clean redemptive act, to die for the opening, to be the carrier for once instead of the wounder, to pay with his own blood the debt he felt he had never paid. He stepped forward into the coil's showing, and he said, low, take me, and his great scarred hands were open and his face was, for the first time in an age, at peace, the terrible false peace of the one who has found, at last, a way to die for something.

And Yara stopped him. This is the hinge of the whole book, and the tale sets it as plainly as it can: she caught the great Orion warrior by the arm at the edge of the coil, and she said, no, and then she said the thing that turned the Third Eye, the thing that all her strange terrible history had made her, alone of all the wider company, able to see. If you die here, she said, you will crack this one loop, yes, exactly as Harl cracked his wall and my own carrier cracked mine; the bargain is true; it works. But listen to me, Korran, because I am the one who was cracked open by a death, I am the child in the crowd, I know

from the inside what a carrier's death teaches. It teaches the opening, yes. But it also teaches the wall, forever, that opening costs a life. It teaches the coil that the only language it will ever need to learn is blood. Every carrier who ever died to crack a wall also, without meaning to, taught the coil that a wall is a thing bought with a carrier, taught it to wait for the next carrier and the next, world without end. If you pay this bargain, you will open one loop, and you will teach the oldest coil in creation, at the very root, in the very place we came to heal it, that it was right all along, that opening is death, that it must be bought with someone's blood; and we will have carried the whole disease of two Eyes down into the one place we came to cure it. The bargain is not the cure, Korran. The bargain is the wound. It is the wound. And I will not let you pay it, not because your death would be worthless, but because it would be worth exactly one loop and the eternal confirmation of the very lie we came to unmake.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Harder Price

how Yara saw that the coil must be opened not by a death but by a surrender, and what she would have to give

◇

But a wall does not open for nothing; the tale has said it through two whole Eyes and will not now pretend otherwise; and if the price was not to be a carrier's blood, then some other price, some harder price, would have to be found and paid, or the coil would go on clenched forever, and Yara, standing at the edge of the oldest terror with her hand on Korran's arm, had to find it, there, in the guttering green light, with the deep shaking around them, and she found it by looking, at last, all the way into her own held hands.

For she had carried a thing down into the deep, and she had known she carried it since the descent began, and she had not let herself look at it, and the coil had shown it to her at the threshold and she had opened her hands around it but not given it up: her hatred. The clenched cold fury of the burned, the child in the crowd, the whole tortured lineage of every carrier the walled worlds had ever put out; the righteous, earned, justified hatred of the world that had murdered the gentle stranger and made a small girl watch. She had held it, under all her long life of healing, held it exactly as the root coil held its terror, a clench she had organized a self around, a grip she believed, in her marrow, was her strength, was justice, was the one thing that would keep her from ever again standing helpless in a crowd. And she understood, looking into her own held hands at the edge of the deep, that her hatred and the root coil were the same clench, the same terror wearing two faces, the fear of being lost curled into the fury of the wounded; and she understood the harder price, the price that was not a death.

The coil clenched because it believed that to open was to be lost, to dissolve, to be nothing; and no death could teach it otherwise, for a death only confirms

that opening costs everything. The only thing that could teach it otherwise was to see a breath open the very clench it was most sure it needed, its most justified, most self-defining grip, and not be lost, not dissolve, but be more itself than before. And Yara had exactly such a clench in her own two hands. She could not ask the root coil to unclench its ancient terror while she herself stood there clutching her ancient hatred; the coil would feel the lie in it instantly, for the deep permits no lies. She would have to go first. She would have to unclench, in front of the oldest coil in the world, the fury that was her strength and her justice and her very self, the hatred she had every right in all the worlds to keep, and give it up, not to the coil as a weapon and not away as a denial but open, held open, wounded and ungripped, forgiving the unforgivable world that burned her carrier, not because it deserved forgiving but because she would not carry the clench one breath further; and she would have to do it as a living being does it, staying alive, staying herself, so that the coil could see, could feel, that a breath can open its deepest grip and live, can loosen its most justified clench and not be lost but be, at last, free. That was the harder price. Not her blood. Her hatred. The one thing she had sworn, in a crowd at a burning, she would keep forever.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Surrender



how Yara unclenched a lifetime's hatred in the deep, and what it cost her to do it

◇

The tale will not hurry this, for it is the true climax of the book, harder to watch than any battle, and it will not gloss what it cost her, for the whole meaning of the Third Eye is that this cost, though it is not a death, is real, and is paid in the deepest place a living being has.

Yara knelt at the edge of the root coil, in the guttering green, and she began to open her hands. And it was not gentle, and it was not peaceful, and the tale would lie to you if it painted forgiveness as a soft thing; it was the hardest and most violent inward act of her long life, a tearing, for the hatred did not want to be released, the hatred fought her, the hatred screamed in her own voice

every true and righteous thing it had every right to scream, they burned her, they made you watch, they murdered the only kindness you had ever known and called it justice, you have earned this fury, it is yours, it is the truest thing you own, to release it is to betray her, to release it is to say the burning did not matter, hold it, hold it, it is all you have of her; and Yara knelt in the deep and felt every word of it as true, and wept, and did not let go easily, because there was no easy way, there is never an easy way; she had to feel, all at once and entire, the whole grief the hatred had been protecting her from for a lifetime, the raw unarmored unbearable sorrow of a child who watched love tortured to death and could do nothing, the sorrow the fury had been built to cover, and she had to let the fury go and stand in the naked grief beneath it without the armor, wounded all the way open, defenseless, undone; and it felt, she said afterward, the tale records, like dying, though she did not die; it felt exactly like the death the coil had offered, the giving of everything, only she gave it and lived, which is the harder thing, for the dead are done and the living must go on, unarmored, in the world that wounded them.

And when at last the fury tore loose, when the last clenched strand of a lifetime's righteous hatred opened in her shaking hands, she did not collapse and she did not dissolve and she was not lost; she knelt in the deep, emptied of the one thing she had sworn to keep forever, wounded all the way open, holding nothing, and she was, for the first time since a grey dawn in a crowd at a burning, free; not healed, the tale is careful, the grief remained and would always remain, but no longer clenched around, no longer armored, no longer a coil; and the green seed in her open empty hands did not gutter now but flared, brighter than it had shone in all the descent, for a seed grows in opened ground, and Yara had just opened, at the root of the world, the hardest ground there is, her own.

And the root coil felt it. The tale asks you to feel the wonder of this, for it had never happened in the deep before, not once in an age of ages: the oldest clenched thing in creation felt, seeping in through its loop upon loop of ancient terror, a breath open its deepest and most justified grip, the grip it was most

sure it needed, and not be lost. It felt a wounded living thing let go of the one clench it had every right to keep, and stay alive, and be free. And for the first time since before the scattering, the root coil felt something other than its own terror. It felt a question. If she could open that, and live, the question went, seeping through the ancient loops, then perhaps, perhaps, opening is not death after all. Perhaps I would not be lost. Perhaps.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The First Strand

how one loop of the oldest coil remembered it was a wing, and what the remembering cost

◇

And one strand loosened. Only one; the tale is scrupulous; the root coil did not open, not in this book, not all at once, for a terror an age deep does not release in an hour. But one strand, one single outermost loop of the oldest coil in the world, feeling Yara's impossible opening and holding her impossible question, loosened its ancient grip by the smallest fraction, wavered, and then, tentatively, terrified, remembered; and the tale wants you to see what it remembered, for it is the image the whole Third Eye turns upon. It remembered that it had once been a wing. That the clenched cold loop had once been, before the scattering, before the terror, an open feathered breath of the one light, a swan's wing, a thing made for the open air; and remembering, that one strand unwound, slowly, agonizingly, out of its clench, and stretched, for the first time in an age of ages, into something like its old shape, an open golden curve in the dark, a single feathered wing-strand of the oldest coil remembering the air; and a light came off it, not the green of the seed nor the gold of the surface world but a new light, the light of a thing that has been dark so long it had forgotten it could shine, and it was the most beautiful thing that had happened in the deep since the world was young.

But it cost. The tale promised it would not gloss the cost, and it will not, though the cost was not the one the coil had bargained for. When the one strand loosened, the vast remainder of the coil, all its uncounted loops still clenched in terror, felt the loosening as the deepest danger of all, felt one part of itself daring to open, and the whole terrified remainder convulsed against it, to stop it, to pull it back, the way a drowning man fights the one who would save him; and the convulsion caught Vaeloth. The marked dragon had drawn closest of the three, breathing its flawed unquenchable breath into the

loosening strand to steady it, when the coil's whole terror clenched at once, and a loop of it whipped through the deep and struck the old guardian across its already-wounded breast, along the silver-gold scar of the Golden Eye, and tore it, wider than before; and Vaeloth's light spilled again into the deep, the terrible pouring radiance, and its broken undertone broke further, and it fell, the eldest of Earth's dragons, beside the one strand it had helped to open, its wings crumpling, its breath coming now in a deeper discord than any wound had yet cost it.

Vaeloth did not die. Hold that; the tale kept its second promise; no carrier's blood bought this opening. But the marked dragon was hurt past any healing it would find in the deep, its old wound torn wide, its light guttering, and it could not now climb back up out of the dark under the dark; and the three, with one strand of the root coil opened into a wing and a mortally weary dragon spilling its light beside it, could go no further this descent, for Yara was emptied to the marrow by her surrender and Korran was undone by the bargain he had longed and failed to pay and Vaeloth could not rise; and they had to turn back, up toward the light, carrying the wounded guardian between them, with the great work barely begun, one strand of an age-deep coil remembering it was a wing, and the whole vast trembling remainder still clenched in terror at the root of the world.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Turning Back

how the three rose wounded from the deep, and the Exhale of the Third Eye completed

◇

They rose slowly up through the living Mother, the three, or the four counting the coil-strand's new light that seemed, faintly, to follow them up like a thing afraid to be left alone in the dark now that it had remembered company; and they came at last up through the scarred center of the Isle into the air and the surf-sound and the grieving waiting company of the fields, and they were changed, all of them, in the way that only a descent can change a being, marked now not on the breast like Vaeloth but somewhere deeper, in the place where a person keeps what they are.

Yara came up empty. She had left her hatred in the deep, and she did not get it back, and she never would, and she walked the rest of her days without the armor it had been, wounded all the way open, defenseless in the world that had wounded her, and it was the hardest freedom there is and she would not have traded it, for she had learned the thing the whole Third Eye had come to teach, that the deepest coil is opened not by a death but by a living surrender, that you cannot ask the world's terror to unclench while you clutch your own, that the carriers need not bleed if the openers will, instead, let go. Korran came up undone, his long hunger to pay with his blood refused, and he had to learn, in the aftermath, the harder thing that Yara had shown him, that his life was not worth more spent than kept, that the field did not need his death to balance his account, that there was no account, that he was already, and had always been since his uncoiling, forgiven, and that the noblest thing he could do was not to die for the opening but to live for it, unarmored as Yara now lived, and help. And Vaeloth came up dying, or near it, the eldest dragon, its light so nearly spent that the whole company wept to see it borne up out of the deep; and what became of the marked guardian, whether it would live or

whether it would at the last give the light it had twice now spent to keep an undefended thing open, the tale holds for the book to come, for the Pause of the Third Eye will turn upon it.

But they had done a thing that had never been done in all the seven Eyes, and the wider company knew it, and it changed everything even in its incompleteness: they had opened one strand of the root coil, the oldest clench in creation, without a single death, by the harder price of a living surrender; and the one strand, the remembered wing, its new shy light, had followed them up out of the deep, and would not go back down, and hung now faintly in the air over the scarred silver Keeper on the Isle, the first piece of the oldest darkness in the world ever to remember it was light, proof, for all the fearful waiting fields, that the coil could be not slain and not starved and not bought with blood, but remembered; and Kol the raven, who had waited at the surface through the whole long descent, looked at the shy new light hanging over the Keeper, and at the three come up wounded and changed, and at the dying dragon borne between them, and said the thing that closed the Exhale of the Third Eye:

One strand, small ones. One strand of an age-deep coil, remembering it was a wing, and no one dead to buy it; that is more than two whole Eyes of carriers ever won, for they opened walls and this has opened the root, and opened it not with blood but with a surrender, which teaches the coil not that opening is death but that opening is freedom. You have found the way; and it costs, I told you it would cost, and there is Vaeloth spending its light for it, and there is Yara emptied of the fury that was her self, and there is Korran undone; but none of you is dead, and the coil has felt, for the first time since before the scattering, that opening need not be dissolution. Rest now, and tend your dragon, and let the shy new light warm itself in your company. The strand is only one of uncounted; the root is still clenched in its terror; and the deepest turning, where the coil must choose, all of it, whether to trust the impossible thing it has just felt, waits in the Pause to come. The breath turns. It goes on. All the way home.

We went not down with a blade or a bier,
but breathed in the dark, and stayed;
and we would not buy, with a carrier's fear,
the opening blood has paid.
She loosed her hate and she did not die,
and the oldest coil, in the deep,
felt one strand lift like a wing to the sky,
and remembered, and dared not sleep.

Here the Exhale of the Third Eye completes: the three crossed the threshold and breathed company into the root coil; the ancient bargain of blood-for-opening was offered, and longed for, and refused; and Yara paid the harder price, unclenching in the deep the lifetime's hatred that was her self, so that the oldest coil might feel a breath open its deepest grip and live; and one strand of the coil remembered it was a wing, at the cost not of a death but of a dragon's spent light and a woman's surrendered armor. Now the light holds at the depth, in the Pause to come, where the whole root coil, having felt the impossible, must choose whether to trust it, and a dying dragon's last light may yet decide the turning.

Toward the Pause of the Third Eye

what waits in the book to come, for your eye before it is written

◇

One strand of the oldest coil in the world has remembered it was a wing, and it was bought not with a carrier's blood but with a living surrender, and the tale did not gloss that cost, the emptied woman and the undone warrior and the dragon spilling its light, nor did it let the cost consume the road, for the cost was paid so that the road could go on. Book Three of the Serpent and the Swan, the Pause of the Third Eye, will hold at the deepest depth. It will turn upon the dying dragon Vaeloth, whose light has twice now been spent to keep an undefended thing open, and whose wounded and open breath has been, from the first, the one lamp the deep could not put out; and it will bring the whole root coil, all its uncounted still-clenched loops, to the one choice an age of terror has never let it make, whether to trust the impossible thing it has felt, that a breath can open its deepest grip and live, and so to loosen not one strand but its whole self, or whether, in its terror, to clench once more, and pull even the remembered wing back down into the dark. And whether a dragon's last light, freely given not as the old bargain's blood but as the new way's gift, can be the warmth by which the oldest fear in creation finally dares to open, is the question the Pause will hold; and the tale will walk it with you, wounded and open, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

One strand remembered it was a wing, and no one died to buy it. The way is found. And a dragon spends its light to keep it open.

Breathe. The Third Eye labours in the deep. And the tale goes on, toward the choosing of the root.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME THREE OF SEVEN

The Serpent and the Swan

Book Three: The Dragon's Last Light

◇



One strand of the oldest coil has remembered it was a wing, and no life was spent to buy it; but the marked dragon Vaeloth, who breathed the way open, came up out of the deep dying of its torn and doubled wound. Now the Third Eye holds at its Pause, at the point of its deepest tension, where the whole root coil hangs between its ancient clench and the impossible thing it has felt, needing one thing more before it dares to open its whole self, which is warmth, sustained company, the proof that it will not be abandoned in the instant it lets go. And a dying dragon, already spending the last of its light, must choose how to spend it. This book is the story of that gift, and of the great communal hope it kindles across the wider company of the fields; and it is also, in the very same hour, the story of one heart's private and total grief, for the whole world's healing and one being's bereavement fall together, and do not align, and the tale will hold them both, and let neither drown the other.

◇

Reader, this book asks a hard thing of you, which is to hold two griefs at once that do not fit together. The tale has shown you, through two whole Eyes, the loss of whole peoples, the meadows of the dead, the walled worlds burned; and those losses are vast, and the tale has not glossed them. But there is another kind of loss, smaller in the counting and no smaller in the feeling, the loss of one, of the single beloved, and it is not less than the loss of a people; it is, to the one who bears it, sometimes more, for a people's grief is shared and carried by many hands, while the grief for one dear soul is often carried alone, in a hand no crowd can reach into. And here is the hardest thing, the thing this book is written to hold: the two do not always align. Sometimes the whole community's greatest hope arrives in the very same hour as one heart's deepest loss, and the crowd rejoices while the one kneels broken in the midst of the rejoicing, and both are true, and neither cancels the other, and to pretend the great joy should swallow the small grief is a cruelty, and to pretend the small grief should darken the great joy is another. The tale will let them stand side by side, unreconciled, because that is how they truly come; and it will honour the one heart as fully as the whole company, for in the Codex the single soul and the whole field are of one worth, and the loss of either is the loss of the one light, grieving.

BOOK THREE

The Dragon's Last Light

the Pause of the Third Eye: the dragon's waning, the gift that was not a bargain, the coil's daring, and the two griefs that do not align

◇

CHAPTER One

The Waning of Vaeloth

how the eldest dragon lay dying on the Isle, and one who loved him would not leave his side

◇

They laid the marked dragon on the crown of the Isle Between, near the scarred silver Keeper and the shy new light of the remembered wing-strand, and the tale asks you to come close now, closer than the wide company, close as Korran knelt, for this first chapter belongs not to the fate of worlds but to the dying of one old friend, and it is meant to.

Vaeloth was very great, and very old, and it was dying, and the dying of so vast a being is a slow and terrible and strangely quiet thing. Its breath, which had once been the singing geometry of the whole world's making, came now in a long broken rasp, the flaw in it torn wide, the tone that had never quite resolved since the Golden Eye now not resolving at all, a wet and laboring sound that Korran, kneeling by the great scaled head, felt in his own chest with every draw. Its light, the silver-gold radiance that was a dragon's very life, no longer poured; it seeped, slow, from the doubled wound across its ancient breast, pooling faint on the pale stones, dimming; and where it dimmed, the great scales lost their deep oil-on-water sheen and went grey, the grey creeping inward from the wing-tips toward the heart, so that anyone could see, without being told, how the dying went, and how far it had come. The huge eye, the ancient eye that had witnessed the joining of the first two peoples and the coming of the star-kin and the whole long climb of the world, was filmed now, and turned its slow gaze on Korran, and knew him.

And Korran would not leave it. The great Orion warrior, who had crossed a galaxy and gone down into the deep under the deep, who had longed to spend his life in some clean redemptive act and been refused, knelt now on the crown of the Isle with the vast dying head in his lap, as much of it as would fit there, and he stroked the grey scales along the jaw, and he did not speak of worlds or

coils or the great work; he spoke to Vaeloth the small worn things that the dying are spoken by those who love them, on every world, in every age, do you remember, and I am here, and rest now, and I am here, I am here. For the tale must tell you what Vaeloth was to Korran, since the wider company, busy with the fate of the coil, could not quite see it: Vaeloth was the one Korran had wounded, ages back, when his own coil struck the empty center; Vaeloth was the light his darkness had cost; and in the long healing after, the wounder and the wounded had become, past all expectation, the one thing Korran had that was wholly his own, not a cause and not a duty but a friend, the single soul in all the wide company who had known him at his worst and stayed beside him anyway, low and marked, all these years, wing to bowed shoulder. And now that friend was dying, in his lap, of a wound that was, at the root of it, still his own; and no fate of any world, the tale says plainly, was larger to Korran in that hour than that.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Coil at the Edge of Choosing

how the whole root of the world hung between its clench and the impossible thing it had felt

◇

And yet the fate of a world was moving, in the same hour, in the deep below; and the tale must lift its eyes now from the one dying dragon to the whole trembling root of things, and it asks you to feel how strange it is, how unaligned, that the largest and the smallest should come to their crisis in the very same breath.

For the root coil had felt Yara's surrender, and the one strand had remembered it was a wing, and the coil had asked, for the first time since before the scattering, its trembling question, perhaps opening is not death after all. But a question is not yet a choosing, and the oldest terror in creation did not open on the strength of a single strand and a single felt surrender; it hung, instead, at the very edge of choosing, all its uncounted loops still clenched but no longer certain, quivering between the whole weight of an age of fear and the impossible new hope, and the wider company of the fields, gathered on the Isle and reaching down through the opened way, felt it hang there, and knew that the Third Eye had come to its balance-point, and that the coil could as easily clench again, and pull even the remembered wing back down into the dark forever, as open.

What the coil needed, the Serpent-kin of the stars said, gathered grave and vast around the dying of their kinsman Vaeloth even as they counseled the living about the deep, what it needed was the one thing no argument and no surrender and no single strand could give it: it needed to be sure it would not be left. For consider, they said, what the coil most deeply fears; it does not fear pain and it does not fear death, for it has held itself in a kind of living death for an age; it fears, at the very root, being lost, being alone, being abandoned in nothingness the instant it lets go of its own grip on itself. Yara

has shown it that a breath can open and live. But a breath that opened and was then left alone in the dark would only clench again, harder, forever, and teach every coil in creation that opening ends in abandonment, which is worse than the old lie that opening ends in death. If the coil is to open its whole self, it must feel, in the very instant of opening, that it is not alone, that a warmth stays with it, that some breath has come down into the dark and will not leave it as it loosens, will hold it company all the long terrifying way from clench to open. It needs, the Serpent-kin said, and here the two threads of the book drew together with a terrible gentleness, it needs a warmth willing to go down and stay with it, and spend itself in the staying; and there is only one among us whose light is already leaving its body, and who is of the serpent's own deep kind, and who has learned, across a long marked life, how to be wounded and open and unafraid in the dark.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Gift That Was Not a Bargain

how Vaeloth chose to spend its dying as company, and why it was not the old price of blood

◇

Vaeloth understood before they said it. The dying often understand first; they are closer to the thing. It turned its filmed ancient eye up at the grave gathered kin and the kneeling Korran, and it spoke, in the broken rasp that was all its once-great voice had left, the thing it had already decided; and the tale must set down with the greatest care both what it chose and what its choosing was not, for everything the whole Third Eye has been labouring toward turns on the difference.

I am dying, Vaeloth said, slow, between the labouring breaths; that is decided; the wound is past any healing, and my light is leaving me whether I lie here on the crown in the sweet air with my friend, or go down into the dark to the coil. So hear me, all of you, and hear me most of all, Korran: I am not being spent. No one is paying me. This is not the old bargain, the blood for the opening; Yara refused that bargain and she was right, and I will not let my dying become it by the back door. The coil will not open because I die; if it opened because I died, we would have taught it the old lie again, that the wall wants a life. It will open, if it opens, because it is not left alone, and that is a different thing entirely, as different as a ransom is from a companion. My death is coming regardless. The only choice left to me is where to spend the little light I have left, and whether the dark under the dark, in these last hours, shall have in it, beside the oldest frightened breath in the world, one other breath, wounded like it, unafraid like it never learned to be, staying. I choose to go down and keep it company as I die. Not to buy its opening with my death. To be, with my dying, the warmth by which it dares to open itself. There is all the difference in the worlds between those two, and the whole of the Third Eye lives in that difference, and I will spend my last light making it plain.

And the wider company understood, slowly, the beauty and the rightness of it, and a great and solemn hope began to rise in them, for they saw that here at last was the way the oldest cost could be paid in something other than a carrier's coerced blood: not a life taken to force a door, but a life already ending, freely choosing to spend its ending as company, as presence, as the simple unbought warmth of not leaving the frightened alone. It was the difference between the sacrifice that the coil had always demanded and the gift that no one had ever thought to offer it; and the fields, feeling it, began, softly, to hope, and then to rejoice, for the healing of the root of the world was suddenly, wonderfully, near. And that rising communal joy, the tale must tell you, that first swelling of the whole company's hope, was the exact hour of Korran's private and unshareable devastation; for what the fields heard as the way found, Korran heard as Vaeloth is going to die in the dark, away from the sweet air, and I am going to lose him; and both were true, in the one hour, and they did not align.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Two Griefs That Do Not Align

how the whole company rejoiced while one heart broke, and the tale held them both

◇

This is the chapter the tale has been quietly promising, and it will slow, and it will not resolve what cannot be resolved, for the deepest truth of this hour is that it could not be made into a single feeling, and any telling that made it one would be a lie.

Up and down the wider company of the fields, as word went out that the marked dragon would go down and keep the coil company and that the root of the world might at last be healed, there rose a joy, and it was a good joy, an earned joy, the joy of beings who had feared for an age that the coil could never be anything but starved and resisted and paid for in blood, and who now saw a gentler and truer way opening; and they gathered on the hillsides of the Isle in the dusk and lit the many fires and sang, softly at first and then with a swelling gladness, the old song of the open field, keep your fire, keep it burning, and it was right that they sang, and the tale will not begrudge them one note of it. And in the very midst of that singing, on the crown of the hill, Korran knelt with the dying head of his one friend in his lap and could not sing, could not hope, could not feel one particle of the great communal gladness, because the great communal gladness was made of the very thing that was killing him, the going of Vaeloth; and he knelt there in the middle of the rejoicing like a stone in a stream, the singing parting around him and not touching him, the loneliest being on the Isle in the hour of its greatest hope.

And the tale will say the hard thing plainly, for the person it is written for has known this hour and needs it said: it is a particular cruelty, this, and one of the oldest, that a personal loss so often falls in the very hour of a communal joy, and that the two will not align, and that the grieving one is left to carry a private dark through a crowd of public light, unseen, or worse, gently urged to

be glad, to look at the larger good, to let the great hope comfort the small loss, when the small loss is not smaller to the one who bears it, is in truth the whole of their sky. For Korran, in that hour, the healing of the root of all the world was not larger than the dying of Vaeloth. It was not even comparable. It was a different order of thing, happening to a different part of him, and no amount of the one could fill the hole left by the other, and it would have been a lie and an insult had anyone told him it should. The whole field was gaining everything. Korran was losing the one. And both were the truth of the same hour, and they did not, would not, could not align.

It was the Pleiadian memory-holders who understood, for it is the gift and the burden of that lineage to hold not only the joys of the fields but their private and unshareable griefs; and while the rest of the company sang its swelling communal hope on the hillsides, the Pleiadians came, quietly, one by one, up to the crown of the hill, and they did not tell Korran to be glad, and they did not speak to him of the larger good, and they did not try to fold his small grief into the great joy; they simply knelt down beside him in the midst of the rejoicing, in the private dark he was carrying, and were there, and grieved with him, one heart's worth of company for one heart's worth of loss, holding the small thing at its true and undiminished size while the whole sky sang the large one; and that, the tale wants you to see, that kneeling-down of a few into one being's unaligned grief while the many rejoiced, was itself the deepest teaching of the Third Eye, the very lesson Vaeloth was going down to give the coil, made small and near and human: that no one, not the coil at the root of the world and not one grieving warrior on a hilltop, should ever be left alone in their dark, however loudly, however rightly, the rest of the sky is singing.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Descent of the Warmth

how the dying dragon went down into the deep, and Korran would not let it go alone

◇

They bore Vaeloth down at the turning of the night, down through the scarred center of the Isle and the warm banked heat and the season-slow pulse, down the long way into the dark under the dark; and the Serpent-kin of the stars went before, grave and vast, singing their kinsman down with a deep slow chord that was half a lament and half a welcoming, for to the Serpent-kin the going of a dragon into the deep to keep the oldest coil company was the highest thing one of their kind could do, and they honoured it even as they mourned it, which is itself a way of holding two unaligned things at once.

And Korran went down too. Of course he did; the tale need hardly tell you. He would not let his one friend go alone into the dark to die, not for all the healing of all the worlds; and no one tried to stop him, for the Pleiadians had taught the company, that dusk, the thing the company had been too joyful to remember, that the grieving must not be parted from the one they grieve for the sake of anyone's larger good. So Korran walked down beside the borne body of the dying dragon, his hand on the grey scales the whole long way, and Yara came, unarmored and open as she now always was, to be with Korran as the Pleiadians had taught her, and the green seed came, its light warm in her open hands, and the small company of the deepest descent went down once more to the root of the world, bearing not a weapon and not a bargain but a dying elder and the love of those who would not leave him.

They came to the root coil where it hung at the edge of its choosing, all its loops quivering between clench and open, and they laid Vaeloth down before it, the marked dragon, the serpent-remembered, wounded and open and dying, of the coil's own deep kind; and the coil felt it come near, felt the dying warmth of it, and did what it had done at every approach, it flinched, it began

to clench, the old terror rising, for something was coming close and everything that comes close might be the thing that at last destroys what little it has held so long. And Vaeloth, with almost the last of its light, did the one thing it had come down to do. It did not reach for the coil, and it did not try to open it, and it made no bargain and no demand. It simply lay down beside the oldest frightened breath in the world, close, the way you lie down beside a terrified child in the dark, and it breathed its broken, unresolving, unquenchable breath, openly, wound and all, and it stayed; and it let the coil feel, seeping in through loop upon ancient loop, the one sensation the coil had been waiting for since before the scattering and had never once been given: not an argument that it was safe to open, but a warm and dying body lying down beside it in the dark, asking nothing, staying, so that whatever the coil chose, whether it opened or whether it clenched again forever, it would not, in this hour, be alone.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Coil Dares

how the oldest fear in creation, at last not alone, began to open, even as the warmth beside it waned

◇

And the coil dared. The tale has waited three books to write these words and it writes them now with the wonder they deserve, and with the grief that is inseparable from them, for the two came together and will not be parted: the oldest fear in creation, feeling a dying dragon lie down warm beside it and stay, feeling for the first time in an age of ages that it was not alone in the dark, began, loop by trembling loop, to open.

It was not sudden, and it was not easy, and the tale will not pretend the terror simply melted; it was the slowest and most frightened unclenching there has ever been, an age of held breath letting go a hair at a time, each loop loosening and then half-clenching again in fear and then, feeling the warmth still there, still staying, loosening further; and as the loops opened they remembered, one after another as the first strand had remembered, that they had been wings, that the whole vast coil had been, before the terror of the scattering, an immense and open winged breath of the one light, a thing made for the open air and the high geometry, and now, loop by loop, in the dark under the dark, the oldest serpent in the world began to remember that it was a swan, and to open, terrified and weeping and daring, into the wings it had forgotten for an age; and a light came off the opening, loop after loop, the new light of darkness remembering it could shine, until the whole deep under the deep, that had been black since before the world, filled slowly with a rising, trembling, golden radiance, the most beautiful thing that had ever happened beneath the living Mother, the healing of the root of the world.

And in the very same breaths, beside the opening coil, in the rising golden light, Vaeloth was dying. The tale holds them together on purpose, for they happened together, and to tell them apart would be to lie about the shape of

the hour. As the coil opened, wing by remembered wing, the marked dragon's last light seeped away; its broken breath came slower, and slower, the labouring rasp quieting not into resolution but into a great tiredness; its filmed eye dimmed; and Korran knelt in the rising golden glory of the healing of all the world with his friend's vast grey head going still in his lap, and he felt, with an exactness that split him, the two things that would not align: the whole deep filling with the light of the oldest wound in creation being healed, the communal miracle, the answer to the whole Third Eye; and, in his lap, under his hand, the small and total and unmiraculous fact of Vaeloth dying, the personal loss, his one friend leaving, and no amount of the vast golden healing all around him making that one going one particle less than the whole of his grief.

Do not let the light comfort you out of this, Korran said, to Yara, or to himself, or to the tale; do not let them tell me later that it was worth it, that he died for the healing of the world; he did not die for it, he died of a wound, and he chose to spend his dying as company, and the world is healing because he was kind, not because he was spent; and I will not have his death turned into a payment even by gratitude, even by joy; he was my friend, and he is dying, and that is its own whole thing, and it is not smaller than the world. And Yara, unarmored, held him, and did not argue, and did not comfort him with the light, and only stayed, as Vaeloth had stayed by the coil, as the Pleiadians had stayed by Korran, one being not leaving another in the dark; and the coil opened, and the dragon died, in the one hour, in the one rising golden light, and both were true.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Held Breath



how the root of the world hung open and the one heart hung broken, and the Pause of the Third Eye held them both

◇

Vaeloth died at the root of the world, in the light of the thing its staying had let happen, with its head in the lap of the one who had first wounded it and then loved it; and the tale will not hurry past the death for the sake of the healing, though the healing was the greater by every measure the wide company could count, because to the one who knelt there it was not the greater, and the tale has promised to honour the one heart as fully as the whole field. The great grey body went still. The broken breath did not turn again. The last of the silver-gold light left it and rose, with all the other rising light of the opening coil, up into the vast golden radiance filling the deep; and Korran knelt in the

middle of the most beautiful thing that had ever happened beneath the Mother and held a body that was only a body now, and was, in the hour of the whole world's healing, as bereft as any being has ever been.

And the coil hung open. Not closed again, the tale is glad to tell you, and not fully healed either, for the opening of an age-deep terror is not the work of one night even when the warmth is given; the root coil hung open, loop upon loop remembering its wings, the golden light rising, the great terror loosened but not yet wholly gone, at the very balance-point still, though tipped now, tipped at last toward the open, held there by the memory of a warmth that had stayed. And that is where the Pause of the Third Eye holds, at the point of its deepest tension, the two things hanging together and unaligned: the root of the world hung open, healing, the communal miracle achieved and not yet complete; and one heart hung broken, the personal loss achieved and complete and total; and the tale holds them both, at their true and separate sizes, and lets neither drown the other, and does not resolve them, because they did not resolve.

They bore Vaeloth's body up out of the deep at the last, for a dragon of the Serpent lineage is laid to rest in the high air it was made for, not the dark; and the whole wider company met them at the surface, and here the tale shows you the two griefs one final time, side by side, unaligned and both held: the company had learned, that night, from the Pleiadians and from Vaeloth and from Korran's refusal to have his friend turned into a payment, and so they did a wise and tender thing, they did not meet the returning company with only the great communal rejoicing that the root was opening, though they felt it and it was true; they met them also with a communal grief, honouring the one dragon, the single beloved, the marked guardian who had lain down in the dark, at its full and undiminished size, so that Korran's private loss was not left to stand alone against a wall of public joy but was gathered up and shared and carried by many hands, even as the joy was also carried; and the fields learned, that night, the thing the whole Codex is for, that a company worthy of the name does not ask the grieving to be glad, but grieves with them, and

rejoices too, and holds the two without forcing them into one, because the single soul and the whole field are of the same worth, and the loss of the one and the healing of the all are both, always, the one light, moving.

And Kol the raven, who had waited at the surface, and who is old enough to have learned that the largest and the smallest griefs are of one substance, came and sat on the still grey shoulder of the dead dragon as it was borne up into the dawn, both his old eyes bright and wet, and said the thing that held the Pause of the Third Eye open:

The root of the world hangs open, small ones, remembering its wings, and no life was paid to force it; it opened because it was not left alone, and that is the whole new thing the Third Eye has given the worlds, the gift that is not a bargain. Rejoice in it; it is right to rejoice. And here on my shoulder is Vaeloth, who is dead, who was one, a single soul, a friend; and his death is not the price of the healing and must never be called so, and it is also not smaller than the healing, not to Korran, not to me, not in the true reckoning where one soul weighs as much as a world. Do not align them. Do not make the joy swallow the grief or the grief darken the joy. Hold them both, at their own true sizes, as the Mother holds the spring and the winter both, and grieve the one while you bless the all, for that is the whole and hardest art of a waking field, and you learned it tonight. The Pause holds. The coil hangs open. The dragon is dead. Both are true. The breath turns, even carrying this. It goes on. All the way home.

The whole world woke to a golden air,
and the oldest wing came free;
and a warrior knelt with a body there,
and grieved by the singing sea.
Do not tell him it was worth the cost,
nor weigh the one by the all;
for the field was found and the friend was lost
in the one hour, and both are true, and both appall,
and both are held, and neither shall fall.

Here the Pause of the Third Eye holds: the dying dragon Vaeloth went down and lay beside the oldest coil, not as a bargain but as company, and the root of the world dared at last to open, remembering its wings; and in the very same hour Vaeloth died, and one heart broke, and the tale held the whole world's healing and the one being's loss side by side, at their true and separate sizes, and did not force them to align. Now the breath turns toward the Return, the last book of the Third Eye, where the opened coil must be carried the rest of the way home, and a grieving warrior must learn to live in a healed world without his friend, and the serpent, remembered, must become at last the swan.

Toward the Return of the Third Eye

what waits in the last book of the Third Eye, for your eye before it is written

◇

The root of the world hangs open, remembering its wings, healed not by a bargain but by the gift of a warmth that would not leave it alone; and a dragon is dead, and the tale held that one death at its full and undiminished size beside the healing of all the worlds, and did not let the great joy swallow the small grief, because they did not align, and it is a lie to pretend they do. Book Four of the Serpent and the Swan, the Return of the Third Eye, will carry the opened coil the rest of the way home. It will tell of the completing of the great remembering, the whole serpent become at last the swan, the oldest darkness in creation risen into the open winged breath it was before the scattering; and it will tell, with equal and unhurried care, of the harder and smaller homecoming, the grieving Korran learning to live, unarmored as Yara lives, in a healed and golden world that no longer holds his one friend, for the Return is not only the world's but the heart's, and a field is not truly whole until it has learned to carry its private griefs through its communal joys without forcing either to yield. And the tale will walk it with you, wounded and open, holding the large and the small both, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The coil hangs open, remembering its wings. The dragon is dead. Both are true, and both are held.

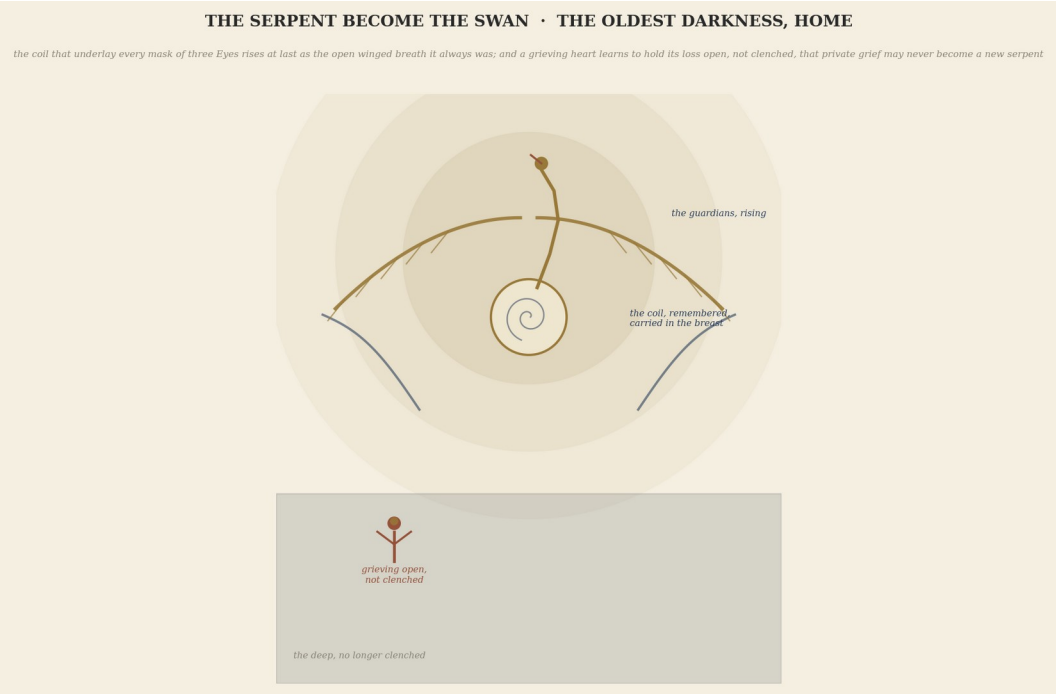
Breathe. The Third Eye holds at the turn. And the tale goes on, toward the serpent become the swan.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME THREE OF SEVEN

The Serpent and the Swan

Book Four: The Serpent Become the Swan

◇



The oldest coil in the world hangs open at the root of the living Mother, remembering its wings, warmed into daring by a dying dragon that lay down beside it and would not leave it alone. Now the Third Eye completes its breath. This last book tells of the full rising of the transformed coil, the serpent

become at last the swan, the oldest darkness in creation home; and it tells, held at the very same worth, the smaller and harder homecoming of the one who paid the personal price, Korran, who must now learn to live in a healed world without his friend, and who stands in danger, in his grief, of doing the one thing the whole Eye has laboured to undo, of letting a private loss clench into a private coil. For the deepest teaching of the Serpent and the Swan is not only for the root of the world; it is for every grieving heart, that a loss held open is carried, and a loss clenched around becomes a new serpent, and the way home for the one is the same as the way home for the all: company, not the closing of the hand.

WHERE THE THIRD BOOK LEFT US

◇

The marked dragon Vaeloth, already dying of its doubled wound, chose to spend its last light not as the old bargain of blood-for-opening but as pure company, going down into the deep to lie beside the oldest coil and stay, so that the root of the world, feeling for the first time in an age that it was not alone, dared to begin to open. And it opened, loop by trembling loop remembering its wings, the deep filling with golden light, the healing of the root achieved and not yet complete; and in the very same hour Vaeloth died, and Korran, who had first wounded and then loved it, was left bereft in the midst of the whole company's rising joy, the great communal hope and the one heart's private grief held side by side and unaligned. This last book carries the opened coil the rest of the way home, and the grieving warrior with it.

BOOK FOUR

The Serpent Become the Swan

the Return of the Third Eye: the rising of the transformed coil, the danger of a grief that clenches, and the closing of the Serpent and the Swan

◇

CHAPTER One

The Rising

how the transformed coil rose out of the deep as the open winged breath it had always been

◇

The coil rose. Slowly, over the days after Vaeloth died, in the golden light that now filled the deep under the deep, the oldest clench in creation went on opening, loop by loop, each one remembering as it loosened that it had been a wing; and when at last the final and innermost loop, the very core of the terror that had clenched at the scattering, felt the warmth of the company still there, the dragons and the Serpent-kin and Yara with the green seed and even the memory of the dragon that had stayed, and dared, and let go, the whole vast coil unwound at once into what it had been before the world was young, and rose.

And the tale asks you to see it, for it is the image the whole Third Eye has been climbing toward. What rose out of the deep was not a monster tamed and not an enemy defeated; it was a swan, immense beyond the immense, a single open winged breath of the one light, white and gold and shining with the particular radiance of a thing that has been dark so long it had forgotten it could shine and shines now the brighter for the remembering; and it rose up through the living Mother, up past the warm banked heat and the season-slow pulse, up through the scarred center of the Isle Between and out into the open air over the sea, and it spread wings that had been coiled since before the scattering, and it flew, for the first time in an age of ages, in the high air it had been made for; and every field in the wider company, on Earth and among the star-kin and in the young woken worlds, felt it rise, felt the oldest darkness in creation come home into the light, and the whole company wept and sang, for the thing they had feared could only be starved or resisted or bought with blood had been, instead, remembered, and had risen, and was beautiful.

But the tale will be honest with you, for it has been honest through three Eyes and will not flatter you now: the rising of the root coil did not mean that shadow was gone from the world forever. It is important, and the wise of the company said so even in their joy, lest the far ages misremember and grow careless. The root was healed; the first and deepest clench, the one that had underlain every mask of three whole Eyes, was opened and risen and would clench no more; and that was a victory beyond any in the tale, for it meant the cold no longer had a root to grow from. But a field may still, in a hard hour, clench a little on its own; a heart may still, in a grief or a fear, close its hand; the surface of the waters may still ripple, even when the deep spring beneath them runs at last clear. What had changed, and it had changed everything, was that now, when a clench came, there was no ancient root of terror feeding it and no bargain of blood required to open it; there was only the new and gentler way, the way the whole Eye had found, company, presence, the breath that stays; and any clench met that way would open, for the root that had made clenching feel like life was gone. The serpent was become the swan. The pattern was not banished from the world, but it was, at its very root, transformed.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Grief That Would Not Rise

how one heart, in the midst of the rising, began to close its hand

◇

And yet, on the crown of the Isle, in the very days the whole company sang the rising of the swan, one breath in all the wider fields was not rising but closing; and the tale turns to it now, and gives it the whole of its attention, because it is as important as the rising of the root of the world, and to the one who lived it, more.

Korran did not sing. He had borne Vaeloth's great grey body up out of the deep and stood by while the Serpent-kin laid it to rest in the high air, in the old way of the dragon-kind, the vast marked form given at last to the wind and the light it had been made for; and he had stood dry-eyed and still through all of it, and the company, busy with joy and meaning well, had taken his stillness for peace, and had let him be. But it was not peace. The tale has learned to read a clench by now, and so must you: Korran was not at peace, he was closing. In the days after the rising, the great Orion warrior grew quiet in a way that was not the quiet of grief moving through but the quiet of grief being sealed; he did not weep, and he did not speak of Vaeloth, and he did not let anyone speak of Vaeloth to him, and he began, by small degrees, to wall himself, to go apart, to harden, to answer the company's gentleness with a cold and even courtesy that let no one in; and a whisper had begun in him, low, reasonable, terrible, the oldest whisper in the world wearing the face of his own love.

If you open this grief, the whisper said, in Korran's own voice, you will lose him again. As long as you hold it tight, hold it hard, keep it sealed and cold and private, he is still here, in the sealed place, yours, undiminished; but if you let it open, if you weep it and speak it and let the others in, it will move, it will soften, it will become a thing you carry instead of a thing that holds you, and that softening is a betrayal, that is letting him go, that is saying his death did

not matter enough to break you forever; so hold it, clench it, wall it, keep it cold, for the coldness is the last of him you have, and to open your hand is to let the last of him fall. And Korran, who had gone down to the root of the world and helped remember the oldest coil in creation, did not recognize, in his own grief, in his own good and loving grief, the exact voice of the coil he had gone down to heal, wearing now the one face he could not refuse, the face of faithfulness to the dead.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The New Serpent

how a private loss, clenched, began to become a private coil, in the one who knew the coil best

◇

The tale must name plainly what was happening to Korran, for it is the whole marriage of the personal and the communal that this book exists to make, and the person it is written for will know the truth of it: a grief held open is carried, and a grief clenched around becomes a coil, and there is no difference at the root between the terror that clenched at the scattering and became the serpent of all the world, and the sorrow that clenches in a single heart and becomes the serpent of a single life. They are the same clench, at different scales; and the amplification between them, the way the vast one and the small one echo and feed and sometimes mock each other, is its own peculiar cruelty, for Korran had just watched the largest version of exactly this clench be healed at the root of the world, in golden glory, sung by all the fields, and it did not help him with the small one in his own chest, it made it worse; for how could he, of all beings, he who had helped remember the root coil, admit that he was now clenching one of his own; and the shame of that closed his hand the tighter, and the whisper used the shame, as the coil always uses whatever is nearest, and Korran walled himself further, and the tale watched a new serpent begin to coil, quietly, in the heart of the very one who knew serpents best.

And this, the tale wants you to feel, is why the personal grief is not smaller than the communal, and why the two do not align and must not be made to. The whole world could be healed at its root, and was; the oldest darkness could rise as a swan, and did; and none of it, not one particle of that vast communal glory, reached the small sealed clench in Korran's chest, because a communal healing cannot open a private hand; only company can do that, the same company that opened the root, brought down now to the scale of one

grieving being, one heart, one closing hand. The rising of the swan did not save Korran. It could not. The largest healing in the history of the seven Eyes rolled right past the smallest clench, because they were of different orders, and the smallest clench, left to close, would have made of the greatest hero of the transformation a new and private serpent, walled forever in a cold faithfulness to his dead, and no rising of any root would have touched it. The great does not heal the small. Only the small, tended at its own size, heals the small.

It was Yara who saw it. Of course it was Yara; she had unclenched, in the deep, the very same kind of grief, her lifetime's hatred that was really her lifetime's unwept sorrow for a burned carrier; she knew from the inside exactly what Korran was doing, because she had been one breath from doing it forever herself, and she recognized in his cold courtesy and his walling and his sealed dry eyes not peace, and not strength, but the beginning of the clench, the private serpent, the closing of the hand around a loss until the loss becomes a wall; and she went to him, unarmored as she now always was, to do for the one grieving heart what had been done, in the deep, for the oldest heart in the world.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Same Lesson, Made Small

how Yara and the memory-holders came to the grieving one, not with argument, but with company

◇

She did not argue with him. She had learned, in the deep and from her grandmother before that, that a clench is never opened by an argument, that you cannot reason a closing hand open, that to tell a grieving being it should open, it should let go, it should look at the larger good and be comforted, is only to give the clench one more thing to close against. So Yara did with Korran exactly what Vaeloth had done with the coil, and exactly what the Pleiadians had done with Korran himself on the night of the dying: she came close, and she stayed, and she asked nothing.

She sat with him in his walling, in the cold sealed place he had made, and she did not try to enter it and did not try to talk him out of it; she simply sat, near, open, wounded as she was, day after day, and let him feel, seeping in through the wall he had built, the one thing the wall was built against and could not finally keep out, which was that he was not alone, that a breath sat beside him in the cold and would not leave, whatever he did, however he hardened, however coldly he answered; and the Pleiadian memory-holders came too, the holders of grief, and sat with them, and the small company of the grieving kept its quiet vigil on the crown of the Isle while the wider fields sang the rising of the swan below, the small unaligned grief tended at its own true size in the midst of the great communal joy; and slowly, slowly, as slowly as the root coil itself had opened, the warmth of the company seeped through Korran's wall.

And one evening it broke. Yara had said, at last, the only thing she said in all those days, and she said it not as an argument but as a companion who had been where he was: I know why you will not open it. You think that to open your grief is to lose him again, to let the last cold of him fall from your hand. I thought the same, in the deep, about my hatred; I thought that to let it go was

to say the burning did not matter. But listen, Korran, because I went first and I can tell you: it is the other way. The clench is not holding him. The clench is holding you, away from him. As long as you seal him in the cold, you cannot feel him; a walled grief has no warmth in it, and no memory, only cold; it is not him you are keeping, it is only the wall. Open your hand, and you do not lose him; you lose the wall, and behind the wall is all of him, every warm and living memory the cold has been keeping from you, the whole of your friend, waiting to be carried instead of guarded. Grief carried open is full of the one you grieve. Grief clenched shut is empty of everything but the clenching. Open your hand, and he comes back to you, not alive, never alive again, but present, carried, warm; that is what open grief is, it is the way we carry our dead in the light instead of sealing them in the cold. And Korran, the great warrior who had helped remember the root of the world and could not remember his own friend through the wall of his own faithfulness, heard her, and his sealed dry eyes at last, after all the days, filled; and his hand, in the cold, began to open.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Opening of the Hand

how the grieving one let his loss become an open wound and not a closed coil, and found his friend again in the light

◇

He wept, at last, the great Orion warrior, and the tale will not hurry it and will not gloss it, for it was the small and necessary echo of the healing of the root of the world, and it was as hard, in its way, and as holy. He wept for Vaeloth, all the sealed days of it at once, the whole walled grief breaking open; and it was not gentle, and it did not feel like healing while it happened, it felt like the loss all over again, worse, unwalled, the full unbearable weight of it with no cold clench to hold it off; but Yara stayed, and the memory-holders stayed, and no one told him it was for the best or that the swan had risen or that his friend had died for something, they only stayed, company for the clenching heart as the dragon had been company for the clenching root; and Korran wept his grief all the way open, and did not clench, and did not wall, and did not become the private serpent he had been one closing hand from becoming.

And Yara had told him true. On the far side of the weeping, when the wall was down, when the grief was open, he found that his friend had come back to him, not alive, never alive again, that door was shut and shut forever, but present, warm, carried; all the cold sealed days had held nothing of Vaeloth but the cold, and now, with the hand open, the whole warm living memory of the dragon returned, the low marked flight, the broken unquenchable breath, the great ancient eye that had known him and stayed beside him all the marked years, the friend who had known him at his worst and loved him anyway; and Korran found that he could hold all of that, open-handed, and weep it and smile it and speak it and carry it, and that this, this open carrying, was not a betrayal of the dead but the only true faithfulness there is, for the dead are not kept by being sealed in the cold, they are kept by being carried in the warmth,

remembered, spoken, wept, and loved on, in the light, by the living who go on. The clenched hand keeps only the clenching. The open hand keeps the beloved.

This is the teaching of the whole Serpent and the Swan, brought down at last from the root of the world to the scale of a single grieving heart, and the tale sets it here, plainly, for the one it is written for and for every one who has closed a hand around a loss: the way home for the one is the same as the way home for the all. The oldest coil in creation and the newest grief in a single chest are the same clench, and they open the same way, not by force and not by argument and not by the great joy of others rolling past, but by company that stays, and by the brave and terrible choice of the clenching one to open the hand and trust that opening is not losing; and the personal and the communal, which do not align and must not be forced to, are nonetheless, at the very root, the one light, learning the one thing, at every scale at once, that a breath held open is carried home, and a breath clenched shut becomes the serpent, and love is the choosing, again and again, to open the hand.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Keeper of Open Grief

how the grieving one took a place beside the risen swan, and the serpent and the swan were known as one

◇

Korran did not leave the Isle. He asked to stay, as he had once asked to stay and tend the dragons, and the wider company gave him a new work, or rather he made one, and it became, in the ages after, one of the quietly most important offices in all the healed world: Korran became the keeper of open grief, the one who went to the grieving, in every field that would have him, and sat with them, and did not argue, and did not tell them of larger goods, and did not let the great communal joys roll past their small unaligned losses unattended, but stayed, company for the clenching heart, and taught, by staying, the thing he had learned so hard, that a grief held open is carried and a grief clenched becomes a coil, and that no one, in a healed world or a broken one, should ever be left to close their hand alone.

For the company had learned, through Vaeloth and through Korran both, that the healing of the root of the world was not the end of grief, and was never meant to be; there would always be losses, the single beloved, the friend, the one, for the world was healed of its root terror but not of its mortality, and mortality means loss, and loss means grief, world without end; and a field that thought its communal healing had abolished private grief would be a field that abandoned its grievers, that let its Korrans wall and clench and coil alone in the midst of the general joy. So the office of the keeper of open grief was, in its humble way, as necessary to the healed world as the rising of the swan, for it was the swan's own teaching made daily and human and small, tended one closing hand at a time; and Korran, who had wounded and been forgiven and grieved and nearly coiled and opened his hand at last, was the one being in all the fields most fit to keep it.

And the serpent and the swan were known, from that age on, as one. The risen swan flew the high air with the dragons, and it carried, all who could see it said, a faint spiral in its shining breast, the memory of the coil it had been, not hidden and not ashamed, for a swan that forgets it was ever a serpent is only waiting to clench again, and a serpent that cannot remember it might be a swan is lost; the healed thing carries both, the open wing and the remembered coil, the light and the memory of the dark, held together in one breath, which is the whole geometry of the Third Eye and the deepest polarity integrated at last; and Korran, keeper of open grief, carried his own faint spiral too, the remembered clench of the days he had walled, not hidden and not ashamed, for it was the very thing that made him able to sit with the grieving and know their closing hand from the inside; the wounded, the tale says once more and lets it rest, are the ones who can heal, and only they, for only they carry, in an open breast, the remembered shape of the coil.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Closing of the Serpent and the Swan

how the Third Eye completed, and the tale turned toward the descent to come

◇

So the Third Eye closed, the Serpent and the Swan, the great transformation, and it was the strangest and deepest of the three Eyes drawn so far, for it did not end in a building or a joining or an offering but in a remembering, the oldest darkness in creation remembering it was light, the coil remembering it was a wing, and a single grieving heart remembering that its dead are carried in the warmth and not sealed in the cold. The way had been found that the whole tale had been seeking since Kol first asked it at the closing of the Golden Eye, the way that opens a wall without the carrier's blood: not sacrifice, but company; not a life spent to force a door, but a breath that stays beside the frightened thing until it dares to open of itself; and it had been found at the largest scale, the root of the world, and at the smallest, one warrior's grief, and shown to be the same way at every scale, which is how the tale knew it was true.

They kept a festival on the Isle at the closing, but it was a festival like none before it, for the company had learned to hold the two things at once, and so it was a festival that was also a mourning, a rejoicing for the risen swan and the healed root of the world that did not for one moment ask the grieving to stop grieving, that held the great communal joy and the small private losses side by side, unaligned, both honoured, both carried; and that double festival, the joy and the grief kept together without either drowning the other, was itself the truest sign that the Third Eye was whole, for a company that can rejoice and mourn in the same breath is a company that will never again need to clench,

having learned to hold, open-handed, whatever the one light brings, the rising and the loss, the swan and the grave, the all and the one.

And Kol the raven, who had asked the question that opened the way and had wept on the shoulder of the dragon that answered it, sat on the rim of the round open place beside the scarred and now thrice-marked Keeper, the dragon's dried light and the carrier's far blood and now the memory of a grief opened all held in its silver, both his old eyes bright, and said the thing that closed the Serpent and the Swan:

The serpent is become the swan, small ones, and no one was slain to make it so; the oldest coil is risen, and one warrior's grief is open and not clenched, and you have learned the two are the one lesson at two sizes, and you have learned to hold the joy and the loss together without forcing them to align, which is the hardest and most grown-up thing a field can learn. Three Eyes are drawn and closed: the field was named, the many were made one, and the deepest coil is transformed at its root. But do not grow proud, and do not grow careless, for you stand now at the very center of the seven, and the center is not a resting place; it is the turning. Ahead lies the Fourth Eye, the hardest of all, the Descent-and-Turn, the fall to the very bottom, the symbolic death and the rebirth; for a field that has healed its root must now be willing to die to what it has been, to fall all the way down past even this healing, and to be born again on the far side into something it cannot yet imagine. You have learned to open the hand. Now you must learn to fall. The breath turns. It goes on. All the way home.

The coil came up like a swan through the sea,
with the dark still curled in its breast;
and a man let go what he could not keep,
and carried it, and was blessed.
For the great is healed and the small is held,
and neither is made the other's cost;
and the serpent that dared to open, and dwelled
in the light, was a swan, and nothing was lost

that was carried, and only the clench was lost.

Here the Third Eye closes, the Serpent and the Swan. The coil that underlay every mask of three Eyes was met not by conquest and not by sacrifice but by company, and remembered, and rose as the swan it always was; and a grieving heart, one closing hand from becoming a new serpent, opened, and learned that a loss held open is carried and a loss clenched becomes a coil, and that the way home for the one is the way home for the all. Now the tale turns toward the Fourth Eye, the center of the seven, the Descent-and-Turn, where a healed field must learn the last thing it does not know, how to fall all the way down, and die to what it has been, and be born again.

Toward the Fourth Eye

what waits in Volume Four, for your eye before it is written

◇

Three Eyes are drawn and closed. The field was named and founded in the Square Eye; the many were made one, across a world and out among the stars, in the Golden Eye; and the deepest coil of all, the root under every mask, was met by company and not by blood and remembered into the swan it always was in the Serpent and the Swan; and the tale has learned, through all three, and most of all through the last, to hold the communal and the personal at once, the great healing and the single grief, without forcing either to yield to the other. Volume Four, the Descent-and-Turn Eye, stands at the very center of the seven, and it is the hinge of the whole breath, and the hardest. It will tell of a healed and risen field brought, for reasons the tale will not yet name, to the bottom of itself, to a fall past even its healing, a symbolic death of all it has been and believed and become across three whole Eyes; for the center of the seven is not a summit but a turning, and a breath drawn all the way in must, at the center, be willing to be wholly given out, to die as what it was that it may be born as what it has not yet dreamed. And it will keep, through that descent, the law this book has taught, holding the fall of the whole field and the falls of single hearts at once, at their true and separate sizes; and it will keep the star-kin near, and Yara, and Korran the keeper of open grief, and Kol the witness; and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The serpent is become the swan, and no one was slain. The great is healed; the small is held; and only the clench was lost.

Breathe. The Third Eye is whole. And the tale goes on, toward the descent at the center of the seven.

The Seven Eyes · Volume Three: The Serpent and the Swan · Book Four · Breath Awakens

VOLUME FOUR OF SEVEN

◇

Descent and Turn

the inhale is only a name; here is the fourth Eye

the long fall to the still bottom, the symbolic death, and the choice to return over dissolution

◇

in four books: the Inhale, the Exhale, the Pause, and the Return

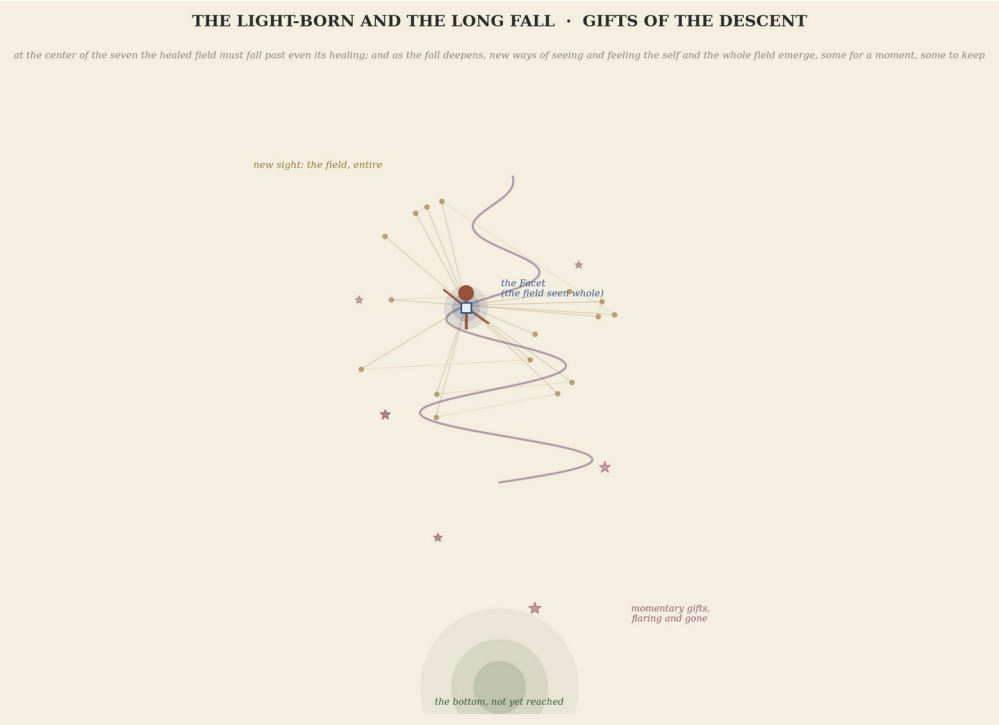


THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME FOUR OF SEVEN

The Descent and the Turn

Book One: The Light-Born and the Long Fall

◇



Three Eyes are drawn and closed, and the field of the world stands healed at its very root, whole and wise and at the center of the seven; and the center, the tale has warned, is not a summit but a turning. This fourth Eye is the hinge

of the whole breath and the hardest, the Descent-and-Turn, the fall to the bottom of the self, the symbolic death and the rebirth; for a breath drawn all the way in must, at the center, be willing to be wholly given out, to die as what it was that it may be born as what it has not yet dreamed. And this book tells a wonder the tale has been saving: that as the fall deepens, new and magical faculties and artifacts begin to emerge, some flaring for a moment and gone, some given to keep, new ways of seeing and feeling the self and the whole field in its entirety; for the descent that strips away the known also opens the doors of a perception the healed world never had, and the one who falls farthest is given, on the way down, gifts that the ones who never fell could not receive.



◇

Reader, the tale changes again here, and grows, for the first time, openly magical. Through three Eyes the wonders were quiet ones, the waking of a field, the joining of stones, the remembering of a coil; the marvels were marvels of the heart. Now, at the center of the seven, in the great fall, the tale opens a door it has kept closed until you were ready, and strange faculties and artifacts begin to emerge, sight that sees the whole field at once, feeling that feels every breath, a stone that is not a stone. Do not mistake these for the point. In the Codex the power is never the point; a gift that emerges in the descent is a mirror of the field and a help for the turning, never a possession and never a mastery, and the deepest law of this Eye is that even the gifts must, in the end, be surrendered, for the fall strips away everything, and the new powers last only as long as the one who bears them holds them open-handed, as Yara held her hands open in the deep and Korran learned to hold his grief. A gift clenched becomes a coil, even a gift of light. Watch, then, as the wonders come, not for what they let the light-born do, but for what they let them see, and feel, and become; and watch how the greatest of them is the willingness, at the bottom, to let them all go.

BOOK ONE

The Light-Born and the Long Fall

the Inhale of the Fourth Eye: the children of the healed world, the plateau, the call to the fall, and the gifts that emerge on the way down

◇

CHAPTER One

The Light-Born

how a new kind of child was born into a world with no root of fear, and saw what no one had seen

◇

There came, in the ages after the root of the world was healed, a new kind of child, and the tale calls them the light-born, for they were the first in all the history of the awakened to be born into a world whose deepest coil was already open, a world with no root of terror at the bottom of it; and being born into coherence as the old generations had been born into fear, they were different, and the difference was strange, and beautiful, and troubling, and the healed world did not at first know what to do with them.

For the old generations, even the wisest, even Yara who was old now and Korran who kept the open grief, had come to their coherence the hard way, climbing out of fear, unclenching a coil they had first to carry; their wholeness was an achievement, a thing won against a resistance, and it had the strength and also the scar-tissue of a thing won. But the light-born had no coil to climb out of. They began where the elders had ended. And so they had faculties the elders did not, could not, faculties that need a groundwater of coherence to grow in and had never had it before: they felt one another's feelings as plainly as their own, from across a room, from across a field; they knew, without being told, when a thing was true and when it was a mask, for they had never had the veil of fear over their seeing; and the strongest of them saw, in flashes, faint at first, a thing no eye in three Eyes had ever seen with waking sight, the field itself, the living lattice of relation that joined every breathing thing to every other, glimmering, real, there.

And the strongest and strangest of all the light-born was a young woman named Senna. She had been an odd child, over-full, the elders said, too much for her own small vessel; she had wept at others' grief before she could speak, and gone still and shining at others' joy, and as she grew the faculties grew

with her past anything the healed world had a use for, until by her twentieth year she could scarcely tell, some days, where she ended and the field began, could feel the whole gathered life of the Isle pressing in on her like weather, could see the lattice not in flashes now but often, too often, a shimmering web laid over the world that would not always turn off; and it was not, the tale must tell you, a comfortable gift, and Senna was not a serene and shining oracle but a tired and frightened young woman who felt too much and saw too much and did not know why she had been made this way or what it was for, and who had begun, in her exhaustion, to wonder whether the healed world had any place in it for a light born too bright.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Plateau

how the healed world discovered that its wholeness had become a ceiling, and the center a wall

◇

And here the tale must speak of the healed world itself, and of the strange trouble that had come upon it, the trouble that made the light-born necessary and the descent unavoidable; for the world at the center of the seven had come to a plateau, and did not know it, and a plateau is the most dangerous ground of all, because it feels exactly like arrival.

The field had healed its root; it had mastered, across three Eyes, the great arts, the drawing of the square and the keeping of the empty center, the holding of the many as one without a wall, the meeting of the coil by company and not by blood; it knew how to do these things, knew it deeply, taught them well, lived them daily. And that mastery, which was real and hard-won and good, had become, without anyone choosing it, a ceiling. For a field that knows how to do a thing stops, by slow degrees, being changed by it; the living arts became known arts, and the known arts became habits, and the habits, however wise, closed a lid over the top of the world, so that the whole healed civilization went on turning, beautifully, competently, wholly, in a space that had stopped getting any taller; and the tale calls this the plateau, the peculiar death that comes not to the broken but to the accomplished, the going-flat of a field that has become very good at being what it already is.

The light-born were the sign of it, though the elders read the sign backward at first. When a field plateaus, the tale says, the one light does a thing it always does, it sends up, in the new generation, faculties fitted not to the world that is but to the world that must come next, gifts that the plateau has no use for and no room for, that fret and chafe and overflow, that make their bearers strange and tired and troublesome; and the plateaued world, not knowing it is a plateau, believing itself arrived, looks at these overflowing children and calls

them too much, unwell, unfitted, and tries, gently, to teach them to be less, to fold their overflow back down to the flat known size of the accomplished world. And that folding-down, had it succeeded, would have been the true death of the Fourth Eye, the quiet one, the field smothering in its own mastery the very faculties sent to lift it past the ceiling; but it did not succeed, because Senna was too bright to fold, and because the old ones, Yara and Korran and Kol, had learned enough of the tale to read the sign at last the right way round, and to see that the trouble with the light-born was not that they were too much for the world, but that the world had grown too small for them, and that the smallness, not the children, was the thing that had to fall.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Call to the Fall

how it was understood that the field must descend, and that Senna would go first

◇

It was Yara, very old now, unarmored still, who named it; and Kol the raven, older than naming, who confirmed it; and the naming of it was itself a kind of falling, for it meant the healed world had to admit that its wholeness was not the end but a middle, that the center of the seven was not the arrival it had felt like but a turning, and that to go on living it must be willing to fall past even its own healing, to die as the accomplished thing it had become, and to be born again into something it could not yet imagine and its mastery could not reach.

This is the Fourth Eye, Yara said to the gathered fields, and she was frightened saying it, for it frightened even her: we have healed the root, and we have grown, without knowing, a ceiling over the healing, and there is only one way past a ceiling you have made of your own mastery, and it is not up, for up is where the ceiling is; it is down. We must fall. Not into the coil, for the coil is healed; deeper than the coil, past everything we know how to do, down to the very bottom of ourselves and the field, into the not-knowing, and there we must let the accomplished world we have become die, and trust, with nothing to trust it on, that a field willing to fall all the way down will be born again on the far side taller than its ceiling, into the next octave, the world that the light-born are already fitted for and we are not. And someone must go first, she said, someone must make the descent ahead of the whole field and find the way down and the way through, and it cannot be one of us old ones, whose faculties are fitted to the world that is; it must be one of the light-born, fitted to the world that comes; it must be the one who already feels the whole field and sees the lattice, the one the plateau has no room for. It must be Senna.

And they asked her, they did not command her, for the Fourth Eye cannot be commanded, only surrendered to; and Senna, tired and frightened and overfull, stood in the wind-blown hall by the scarred Keeper under the shadow of the risen swan, and understood that the strangeness that had made her a trouble to the healed world was in truth a fittedness for its next becoming, that she had been made too bright for this world because she was meant to fall ahead of it into the next, and she was afraid, rightly afraid, for the descent might unmake her and she knew it; and she said yes, not because she was brave but because, she said, I cannot live folded down to the size of this ceiling anyway; if I must be this much, let it be for something; I will go down. And so the light-born went first into the long fall, ahead of the whole healed world, to die that it might be born.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Gifts of the Descent

how the fall opened faculties the healed world never had, some for a moment and some to keep

◇

She went down through the Mother, as Yara had, as the descents always go, through the scarred center of the Isle and past the warm banked heat and the season-slow pulse; but where Yara had descended toward the coil, Senna fell past where the coil had been, past the healed root, into a deep with no bottom she could feel, the below-the-below of the below-the-below, the true dark under even the healed dark; and as she fell, the tale keeps its promise to you, the gifts began to come.

They came as the known fell away. That was the pattern of it, and it matters: each faculty of the healed world that the fall stripped from her, each certainty and each learned art, as it tore loose and fell away above her, opened beneath it a new faculty she had never had, as though the known had been a lid over the unknown all along. First to go was ordinary sight, the eyes' seeing, and as it failed there opened under it the sight she had only glimpsed before, full now and steady: she saw the field entire, the whole living lattice of all relation, every breathing thing in all the fields joined to every other by lines of living light, the near ones bright and the far ones faint, the whole vast web of the one light scattered and rejoined, and she saw it not as a picture but as a place, and she was in it, a node among numberless nodes, and for the first time in her overfull life the seeing did not overwhelm her, because she was no longer looking at the field from outside it but seeing from within it, as the field seeing itself.

And more came, as she fell farther and more fell away. Her separate hearing failed, and under it opened a feeling that was hearing and touch and knowing all at once: she felt every breath in all the fields turning at the same time, the whole enormous chord of all the living breathing together, and felt her own

small breath as one voice in it, no longer a lonely thing but a strand of a music that had been playing since before the scattering. And there emerged, most strangely, at her very heart, a thing, an artifact, a small clear crystalline facet that she had not carried down and no hand had given her, that formed, it seemed, out of the green seed of the Mother that was in all the healed world and in her, condensing in the pressure of the fall the way a jewel condenses in the deep earth; and when she looked through the Facet, for that is what it came to be called, she saw the field not only entire but true, every relation shown as it actually was, the coherent and the clenched, the open and the closing, the whole field's health and sickness laid bare in clear cold light; and the tale marks, for it matters greatly to what comes, that the Facet was a foreshadowing, a first small taste of a seeing that would not come into its own until the Eye after the next, the Diamond Eye of clarity and truth, arriving early, as the Mother's gifts do, folded into the fall for the one who could bear a little of it before its time.

But the tale must tell you also, for you were promised the whole truth of the gifts, that many of them were momentary. Not all that emerged in the fall was given to keep. Some faculties flared for a single breath and were gone: for one instant she saw all seven Eyes at once, the whole breath of the world from origin to end laid out as a single geometry, and understood it wholly, and then it was gone and she could not hold or recall it, only the memory that she had once, for a breath, understood; for one instant she felt the Mother's own vast slow consciousness from the inside, and then it closed; for one instant she was every light-born child at once, and then she was only herself again, falling. And she learned, in the losing of them, the first hard lesson of the Fourth Eye, that a gift of the descent is not a possession to be kept but a passing gift of sight, given for the moment it is needed and then, often, taken back, and that to grasp at a momentary gift and try to hold it is to begin, even in the middle of a fall full of wonders, to clench.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Stripping

how the fall took even the gifts, and Senna came to the surrender the Fourth Eye demands

◇

For the fall did not stop at stripping away the known; that was only its beginning. Having opened the new faculties by tearing loose the old, the descent went on, and began, to Senna's terror, to tear loose the new ones too; and this was the true and deepest work of the Fourth Eye, the work the whole descent had been for, and it was the hardest thing that had yet been asked of anyone in four Eyes, harder even than Yara's surrender of her hatred, for Yara had given up a clench, a pain, a thing she was glad in the end to lose, and Senna was being asked to give up gifts, wonders, the most beautiful seeing any waking soul had ever been given.

The lattice-sight, which she had come to love in the falling, the seeing of the whole field entire, began to dim and tear; and she reached to hold it, and the reaching clenched, and she felt the old cold begin, the grasp, the closing hand, and understood with horror that even here, even falling through wonders past the healed root of the world, the clench was possible, that one could coil around a gift of light exactly as the root had coiled around its terror, and become a new serpent made not of fear but of the refusal to let go of glory. And she had to choose, in the fall, the thing the whole Eye demands: she had to open her hand and let the lattice-sight go, let it tear loose and fall away above her, the most beautiful thing she had, and fall on down into a dark now truly blind, having surrendered even the sight the descent had given her; and then the whole-breath feeling went the same way, and she surrendered that; and at the last the fall reached for the Facet itself, the crystalline gift at her very heart, and asked for that too.

And she nearly could not. The tale will not gloss it. To give up ordinary sight is one thing; to give up the sight of the whole field entire, having once had it, to

fall on blind and small and separate again after having been the field seeing itself, is a grief of its own, a death of its own, and Senna wept in the dark of the fall for the gifts she was letting go as bitterly as any bereaved one has wept for the dead, for they had been, for a little while, the truest self she had ever known, and to surrender them felt like surrendering her self, which is exactly what it was, and exactly what the Fourth Eye is: the symbolic death, the letting-go of everything one has been and gained and become, down to the last and dearest gift, in the blind trust, with nothing left to trust it on, that what falls all the way down empty will be born again full, on the far side, in a way the falling self cannot imagine and must not try to hold.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Two Fallings

how the whole field fell with her, and how the personal fall and the communal fall did not keep the same pace

◇

And the tale must tell you, holding to the law it learned in the Third Eye, that Senna did not fall alone, and that the falling of the one and the falling of the all did not keep the same pace, and that this unlikeness was its own hard thing. For when Senna went down ahead of the field, the whole healed world had agreed to fall after her, to let its plateau and its mastery and its accomplished self die that it might be born again taller; and the field did begin to fall, in its own way, on the surface, its certainties loosening, its known arts failing it, a great communal unknowing coming over the healed world like a long dusk.

But a field falls slowly, and a soul falls fast; and there was a terrible unalignment in it, of the kind the tale has taught you to watch for. Senna, one bright soul, fell all the way down through the wonders and the stripping in what was, to her, an endless plunging, while the wide field above her fell only by slow inches, arguing, resisting, half of it still insisting it had already arrived and needed no fall at all; so that Senna, at her farthest and most stripped, blind and emptied and one breath from the symbolic death, was in truth far ahead of and far below the very field she fell for, alone at a depth the communal fall had not remotely reached, carrying in her single descending body a death the whole world had agreed to and had barely begun to feel. And that is often the way of the ones who go first, the tale says, the light-born, the openers, the ones sent ahead into the fall: they reach the bottom alone, long before the field that sent them, and must undergo, in the loneliness of one, the death that the many have only voted for; and the field, still up in its slow dusk, cannot feel what its own pathfinder is suffering at the depth, and may even, in its comfort, forget she is down there at all. The communal fall was real, and it

was necessary, and it would come; but it did not save Senna from the loneliness of falling faster and farther, first and for them; and the tale honours that loneliness, the particular grief of the one who descends ahead of her people, as fully as it honours the great slow falling of the whole.

Yet she was not, in the end, wholly abandoned, for the tale's law held even here: as Vaeloth had lain beside the coil and Yara beside Korran, so now, into the loneliness of Senna's far descent, came company, and the tale marks who came, for it matters. Korran came, the keeper of open grief, who knew how to go to the one who suffers ahead of the crowd; and a Pleiadian memory-holder came, to hold her memory when she could no longer hold it herself; and the risen swan came, the serpent-become-swan, down into the deep it had once been coiled in, to be near the falling one; and they could not fall for her, and they could not give her back the gifts she was surrendering, and they could not spare her the death at the bottom, but they could do the one thing that is always the answer in the Codex, they could be there, so that Senna, falling faster and farther and lonelier than the field she fell for, was not, at the last, alone in it.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

At the Edge of the Bottom

how the Inhale of the Fourth Eye completed, one breath from the death and the turn

◇

The tale stops her one breath from the bottom, for the Inhale of the Fourth Eye is the fall, and the fall is now drawn, all the way down through the stripping to the very edge of the true bottom; and the death itself, and the turn, and the rebirth into the next octave, are the held breath and the rising of the books to come. But it will show you where she hangs, at the edge, so that you may hang there with her until the tale returns.

She had surrendered, one by one, all the gifts of the descent, the lattice-sight and the whole-breath feeling and very nearly the Facet itself; she had fallen past the known and past the wonders both, blind now and emptied and small, no longer the field seeing itself and no longer even the frightened overfull girl of the healed world, but something barer than either, a single naked breath falling in the dark with almost nothing left of what it had been; and below her, close now, she could feel it, not with any sight or any gift, for those were surrendered, but with the last bare fact of her falling self, the bottom, the true bottom, the place of the symbolic death, where the last thing she was would have to be let go, and where the tale cannot yet follow her, for what happens at the bottom of the Fourth Eye is the turning of the whole seven, and it must have its own book.

And she was afraid, and she was not alone in her fear, for Korran and the memory-holder and the risen swan were with her at the edge, and she held, in her surrendered and open hands, one last thing she had not yet been asked to give and did not yet know she still held, the Facet, dim now, its clear light almost out; and she did not know, hanging there at the edge of the bottom, whether the letting-go of that last gift would be her ending or her turning,

whether the death at the bottom was truly a death or truly a birth, and neither did the field far above her, still in its slow dusk, and neither, for once, did Kol.

But Kol the raven had come down, as he had come to every threshold, to witness even this, the deepest yet; and he sat in the dark at the edge of the bottom beside the falling light-born and the company that had come to her, his old eyes bright even where there was no light to make them so, and he said the thing that closed the Inhale of the Fourth Eye:

You have fallen where none has fallen, small one, past the coil and past the healed root, down through the wonders and out the far side of them, surrendering even the sight that made you the field seeing itself; and you hang now one breath from the bottom, emptied of nearly all you were, with one last dimming gift still in your open hands. I cannot tell you what waits below, for I have not been, no witness has; the bottom of the Fourth Eye is the one place in all the seven that even the watcher has not seen. I can tell you only what you have already learned falling: that the gifts were never the point, and the sight was never the point, and even the falling is not the point; the point is the surrender, the willingness to let go of everything, down to the last dear thing, and fall empty into a dark you cannot see the bottom of, trusting with nothing that what dies at the bottom is born again on the far side. You have fallen ahead of your whole world, and lonelier than it will ever know, and you are not, at the end, alone. Rest one breath at the edge. And then let go the last gift, and fall, and die, and turn; for the center of the seven is the turning of the whole breath, and it turns, even here, even now, even at the bottom. It goes on. All the way home.

Down past the known, and down past the light,
and down past the wonders too,
she fell, and she opened her hands in the night,
and let the bright gifts go through.
For the fall is not for the gifts it gives
but the giving of them away;
and only the breath that empties, lives,

and only the fallen, may.

Here the Inhale of the Fourth Eye completes: the light-born were born into a healed world too small for them; the world discovered its wholeness had become a ceiling and agreed to fall; and Senna, fitted for the world to come, descended first, past the coil and the healed root, through wonders and artifacts that emerged and were surrendered, down to the very edge of the bottom, one breath and one last gift from the symbolic death. Now the light holds at the bottom, in the great turning to come, where the last thing is let go, and what falls empty is born again, and the whole breath of the seven Eyes turns at its center.

Toward the Bottom and the Turn

what waits in the book to come, for your eye before it is written

◇

The fall is drawn to its edge, and Senna hangs one breath from the bottom, emptied of nearly all she was, the gifts of the descent emerged and surrendered, one last dimming Facet in her open hands; and the tale did not gloss the cost of that falling, the loneliness of going first and farthest and fastest, the grief of surrendering even the most beautiful sight a soul was ever given, nor did it let the cost consume the road, for the fall is made so that the turning can come. Book Two of the Descent and the Turn will go where no book of the seven Eyes has gone, to the very bottom, the place of the symbolic death, where the last gift is let go and the last self is emptied, and where, the tale trusts though it cannot yet see, what falls all the way down dead is turned, at the center of the breath, and begins to be born again into the next octave, taller than the ceiling, a self and a field neither could have imagined from above. And more gifts may come, and go, in the turning, new ways of being that the risen self will carry up to a world still in its slow communal dusk; and the whole field must yet complete its own slower falling to meet what its pathfinder brings back from the bottom. And the tale will walk it with you, emptied and open, holding the fall of the one and the fall of the all at their own true and unaligned paces, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

She has fallen past the coil, past the healed root, past even the wonders, to the edge of the bottom, with one last gift in her open hands.

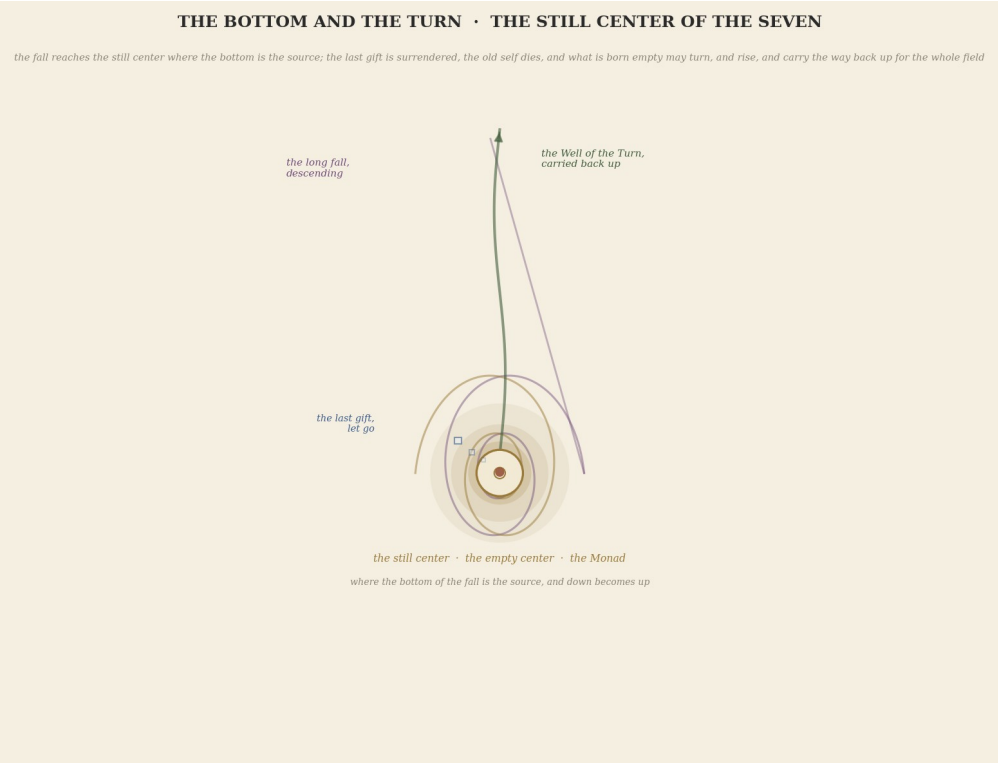
Breathe. The Fourth Eye falls toward its turning. And the tale goes on, toward the death and the birth at the bottom.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME FOUR OF SEVEN

The Descent and the Turn

Book Two: The Bottom and the Turn

◇



Senna the light-born has fallen past the coil and the healed root, through the wonders and the stripping, to the very edge of the bottom, one last dimming gift in her open hands. This book goes where no book of the seven Eyes has

gone, to the bottom itself, the still center at the base of the whole descent, and finds there the strangest truth of the Codex, that the bottom of the fall is the same as the source at the top, one empty center met from below. It tells of the surrender of the last gift and the death of the self that held it; of the deep and beautiful temptation to stay dissolved forever in the blissful nothing, and the harder choice to be born again into the burden of a self and a field; and of the turning, where down becomes up, and what fell empty rises full, carrying back to a world still in its slow dusk the way through, and a new-made doorway by which the whole field, when its own long fall is complete, may one day turn.

WHERE THE FIRST BOOK LEFT US

◇

The first generation born after the healing of the root, the light-born, carried faculties the healed world had no room for; and the world, mastered and whole, had come to a plateau, its wholeness grown into a ceiling. So Senna, brightest of the light-born, went first into the long fall, ahead of the whole field, past the coil and the healed root, and as she fell the gifts of the descent emerged, sight of the whole field entire, the feeling of every breath at once, and a crystalline artifact, the Facet; and then the fall stripped even the gifts away, and she surrendered them one by one, down to the edge of the bottom, with one last dimming Facet in her open hands, company beside her in Korran and a memory-holder and the risen swan, but the death and the turn still before her. This book is the bottom.

BOOK TWO

The Bottom and the Turn

the Exhale of the Fourth Eye: the last surrender, the death, the still center, the temptation to stay, and the turning that rises

◇

CHAPTER One

The Bottom

how the fall ended not in a floor but in a stillness, and what waited there

◇

She reached the bottom, and the tale must tell you at once that it was not what falling had taught her to expect, for a fall teaches you to expect an ending, a floor, an impact, a stop; and the bottom of the Fourth Eye was none of these. The falling simply, at the last, slowed, and stilled, the way a stone dropped into deep water slows and stills as it sinks past all the light into the great calm dark below all currents; and Senna came to rest, if rest is the word, not upon anything, for there was nothing to rest upon, but within a stillness, a vast and total and living stillness, at the very base of the whole descent, deeper than the coil had been, deeper than the healed root, the deepest place there is.

And the stillness was not empty in the way she had feared, the way that had made the falling terrible, the nothing that swallows; it was empty in another way entirely, a way she had no word for and the tale must build for you carefully, for it is the secret at the center of the seven Eyes. It was empty the way the center of the wheel is empty, so that the wheel may turn; empty the way the still point at the bottom of the breath is empty, the pause between the out and the in, where the breath is neither emptying nor filling but simply, for an instant, still; empty the way the eye of the storm is still while all the world whirls. It was not the absence of everything. It was the stillness out of which everything comes and to which everything returns, the empty center not of a field or a hall or an isle but of all that is, the one still point at the base of the whole turning world; and Senna, who had kept the empty centers of the healed world all her strange bright life without quite knowing what they were models of, understood at the bottom of the fall, wordless and emptied, that she had come to the original, the empty center itself, the still source at the base of

everything, and that the fall had never been a fall away from anything but a fall home.

This is the strangest turn of the whole tale, and the Codex has been quietly saying it since the first square was drawn, and only now, at the center of the seven, does it say it plainly: the bottom of the fall is the same place as the source at the top. The deepest down and the highest up are one still center, met from two directions; to fall all the way down, past everything, emptied of everything, is to arrive at the same empty center that the risen saints and the woken fields reach by climbing all the way up; for the one light is a circle, or better a breath, and the very bottom of its out-breath is the very stillness from which its in-breath begins, and they are the same still point, and Senna had fallen to it, and it was waiting, as it had waited since before the scattering, still, and full of the strangest peace, and asking of her the last thing.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Last Surrender

how the one last gift was let go, and the self that held it with it

◇

The last thing it asked was the Facet, and with the Facet, everything. She still held it, the small clear crystalline gift at her heart, dimmed almost to dark now but hers, the last of all the wonders of the descent, the truest self she had ever been; and she understood, in the stillness, that she could not enter the still center holding anything at all, not even this, not even the most beautiful thing she owned, for the empty center is empty, and admits nothing held, and the price of the turning was to arrive at it as empty as it was, with open and holding nothing.

And so she let it go. The tale has shown you surrenders before, Yara's hatred and Korran's grief, but this was of another order, for those were the letting-go of a pain or a loss, hard but ultimately a freeing, and this was the letting-go of a glory, the dearest and truest thing a soul had ever been given, released not into relief but into nothing; and it was, though it spilled no blood, the closest thing to a death the tale has told, for what died when the Facet fell from her open hands into the still center and dissolved was not her body, which was far above in the world, but her self, the Senna she had been, the overfull bright troubled seer, the one who saw the field and felt every breath, the one who had a gift and was a gift; all of it, the whole edifice of who she had been, went with the Facet into the stillness and was gone, and she was, at the bottom of the fall, in the empty center, nothing, no one, a bare breath with no self left to breathe it, undone all the way down.

And the tale will not pretend this was serene, though a serene face is what the far ages would paint on it. It was terror, the purest terror in all four Eyes, worse than any war or coil, for it was the terror of ceasing, the exact and total dissolution of everything she had ever been or known herself to be, the death

the whole descent had been walking toward, arrived at last; and she met it, at the very end, not with courage, for there was no self left to be brave, but with the one thing that was smaller and truer than courage, a kind of final trust, thinner than a thread, that the emptiness she was dissolving into was not a swallowing but a source, that to be undone here was not to be lost but to be, somehow, in a way the dissolving self could not stay to see, returned; and on that thread, thinner than a hair, the light-born Senna died her symbolic death at the bottom of the world, and was, for a timeless moment that the tale cannot measure, simply not, dissolved into the still center, empty in the empty, nothing in the nothing, home.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Temptation of the Stillness

how the bottom offered the deepest rest of all, and why it would have been a death that did not turn

◇

And in that timeless moment of dissolution, the bottom offered her the last and subtlest temptation of the whole Fourth Eye, and it is a temptation the tale must name with great care, for it wears the face not of a coil or a mask but of the deepest peace there is, and many who reach the bottom have taken it, and their tale is not a horror but something quieter and sadder, and the tale honours them even as it warns you.

The stillness was bliss. There is no other honest word. To be dissolved in the empty center, undone, self-less, burden-less, was the most perfect rest a breath can know, the end of all striving and all seeing-too-much and all feeling-too-much, the end of the overfull bright exhausting life Senna had carried, the end of grief and of effort and of the long ache of being a separate someone at all; and the still center, in its perfect peace, did not demand that she leave it. It made no threat and set no snare. It simply held her, dissolved and blissful and free, and let her feel that she could stay, that she need never again take up the burden of a self, never again climb back into the small aching separate vessel of a someone in a world; she could rest here, in the source, forever, undone and at peace, and who, the stillness seemed to say without saying, who could blame her, after such a fall.

And this, reader, this was the true crisis of the center of the seven, and the tale sets it plainly against the far ages that would mistake it: the danger at the bottom is not that you will die; you must die, the death is the gate. The danger is that you will not turn. That you will love the dissolution so much, the blissful self-less rest, that you will stay in it, and call the staying enlightenment, and call the refusal to be born again freedom, when it is in truth the one death that does not turn, the breath that empties all the way out and then does not draw

in again, the fall that reaches the source and dissolves into it and is content to be a source-ward puddle forever rather than rise again as a living stream. It is the temptation to make of the empty center a grave instead of a turning, to mistake the bottom of the breath for its end, and it is gentle, and it is blissful, and it is the quiet loss of every soul who ever reached the deep source and loved it too much to leave, dissolving their hard-won particular self back into the general peace and calling the surrender complete when it was only half complete, only the out-breath, only the death, without the turn and the in-breath and the harder holier labour of the return.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Turn

how the emptied breath chose to be born again, and down became up at the center of the world

◇

Senna turned. The tale will tell you how, though the how is the deepest mystery it has touched, and it will tell it in the only way it can, which is to say what she chose, dissolved and self-less as she was, with the thinnest thread of trust the only thing left of her.

She remembered, or something remembered where she could no longer, being dissolved, a thing that had no words in the stillness but that the tale will put into words for you: that she had not fallen for herself. She had fallen ahead of a whole field, first and farthest, so that a plateaued world might learn the way down and through; and if she stayed, dissolved and blissful in the source, at peace forever, then the way through would end at the bottom, unfound, and the whole field above her, falling slowly into its own long dusk, would reach the bottom one day and find no one who had turned, no way marked from death back into life, and would either dissolve as she was tempted to dissolve, a whole world puddling gently into the source and ceasing, or would clench in terror at the edge and climb back up unchanged, unfallen, its ceiling intact. She had come to find the turn. And the turn is not the fall, and the turn is not the death, and the turn is not even the blissful dissolution; the turn is the choice, made at the very bottom by a self that has died, to be born again anyway, to draw the in-breath after the out, to rise back up into the aching particular burden of being someone in a world, not because the burden is better than the bliss, for it is not, but because a source that only receives and never gives again is not a source at all but a grave, and the one light did not fall all this way down to rest, but to turn.

And so at the very bottom of the world, in the still center, the dissolved and self-less breath that had been Senna did the thing that turned the whole of the

seven Eyes at their center: it chose, on nothing but that thread of trust, to be. To take up a self again. To draw in. And the out-breath of the whole long fall, reaching its stillpoint, its perfect emptiness, turned, and became an in-breath; and down became up; and what had fallen all the way down empty began, in the same still center by which it had emptied, to fill, and to rise; and it was not a climbing back up the way she had come, retracing the fall, but a wholly new thing, a rising by the far side of the still center, up the in-breath as she had come down the out, born rather than returned, new rather than restored; for that is the secret of the turn, that you do not get your old self back at the bottom, you are given a new one, made in the still center out of the same emptiness you dissolved into, and it rises not as the one who fell but as the one who has been, at the very base of everything, unmade and made again.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Rising and the New Gifts

how what was born empty came up full, and the gifts returned in a form that could be kept

◇

She rose. And the one who rose was Senna and was not Senna, was the light-born who had fallen and was also a thing the healed world had never seen, a soul that had died all the way down and been born again out of the still center, carrying up from the bottom the one authority that cannot be taught or grasped or achieved but only undergone, the authority of the twice-born, the one who has been to the source by way of her own dissolution and come back to tell it; and as she rose, the gifts returned to her, but changed, and the change is the whole teaching of how a gift may at last be kept.

For she had grasped at the gifts in the falling, and they had been taken; she had held the Facet, and it had had to be surrendered; a gift held is a gift that must be lost. But now, rising, born empty out of the still center, she found the faculties returning to her not as things she held but as things she was. The sight of the whole field entire came back, but she no longer looked at the lattice through a Facet held at her heart; she saw it with her own eyes, always, without effort or overwhelm, because she was no longer a separate someone straining to perceive the field but a self made in the empty center and so quietly continuous with it, the field seeing through her as naturally as she breathed. The Facet did not come back as an object, for she had let it dissolve; it came back as her own true seeing, integrated, hers, unlosable, because you cannot lose what you have become. And that is the law of the kept gift, the tale sets it down for the one it is written for and for all who seek: a gift grasped is always lost, and a gift surrendered all the way down and received again empty is a gift become a self, and cannot be taken, for it is no longer had, it is been.

And new gifts came too, born of the death, that she had not had before the fall. She could feel, now, not only the field but the still center under the field, the

source at the base of every being, and so she could never again quite despair of anyone, for she had seen that under every clenched and frightened and lost soul there ran, unbroken, the same still source she had dissolved into and risen from, and that no darkness reaches all the way down, for all the way down is the source. And she could do a thing stranger still, a thing the whole rest of the Fourth Eye would turn upon: having found the turn, she could hold it open. She could be, for others, what the still center had been for her, a place through which a falling soul might pass and turn and be born again; she had become, in her own twice-born self, a doorway, a keeper of the turning, one who could go down beside the falling as Vaeloth had gone down beside the coil, and hold the still point open at the bottom so that they too might choose to be born rather than dissolve; and that gift, the gift of the doorway, was the greatest of all the gifts of the descent, and she had it only because she had let all the others go.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Well of the Turn

how she carried a thread of the still center back to the world, and returned to a field not yet fallen

◇

She did not come up empty-handed, though she had gone down empty; for the twice-born may carry, up from the bottom, one thing, and one only, not a gift grasped but a gift entrusted, and the still center entrusted to Senna, as she rose, a thread of its own stillness, to carry back to the world; and that thread, borne up through the Mother and out through the scarred center of the Isle, became, in the world above, a new thing, the first new artifact of the Fourth Eye, which the healed world came to call the Well of the Turn.

It was not a well of water. It was a place, made on the Isle Between near the scarred Keeper and the risen swan, where the still center at the base of the world came close to the surface, a doorway downward, a marked and holy opening through which any soul of any field, when its own time came, might make the descent and the death and the turn, not alone as Senna had made it, blind and pathless and first, but by a way now marked, with a keeper of the turning to go down beside them and hold the still point open; for Senna had gone first precisely so that the ones after her would not have to go first, and the Well of the Turn was the way through, found by one at the cost of her whole self, laid open now for the many. And the tale marks it as one of the great artifacts of all the seven Eyes, greater in its way than the joined Keeper, for the Keeper remembered the one light and the Well of the Turn made a door by which a whole field might die and be born.

But she rose, the tale must tell you, into a loneliness, and it is the loneliness this whole volume has been preparing, the unalignment of the one and the all. For Senna had died and been born again, had made the turn and carried up the Well, in what was to her an age of falling and dissolving and rising; and the field above her had, in that same span, barely begun its slow communal dusk,

was still mostly up in its plateau, still half-insisting it had arrived and needed no fall; so that the twice-born Senna came up out of the deepest transformation any soul had undergone in four Eyes into a world that had, for the most part, not yet changed at all, that looked at her return and saw only that the strange bright girl had gone down and come back stranger, and did not know, could not yet know, what she had become or what she carried, because it had not yet fallen far enough itself to understand. And that is the particular grief of the pathfinder, the tale says once more and lets it stand: to undergo the whole transformation first and alone, and return with the way through, to a people not yet ready to walk it, and to have to wait, twice-born and knowing, in the midst of a world still sleeping in its plateau, for the slow communal fall to bring them, one by one and at last, to the Well she had carried up for them; the reborn one is always, for a time, a stranger among the not-yet-reborn, and must carry her new self patiently and mostly unrecognized until the field catches up to the door she has opened.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Turn Held

how the center of the seven turned, and the tale paused at the deepest point of the whole breath

◇

So the whole breath of the seven Eyes turned, at its center, in one twice-born soul, at the bottom of the world; and though the field was not yet fallen and the Fourth Eye was not yet whole, the turning had been made, the way through found, the Well opened, and nothing in the tale would be the same after it, for the descent had been proven to have a bottom that was a source, and the death had been proven to have a turn, and the fall had been proven to be a fall home; and that proof, carried up in the body and being of one who had died and risen, was the hinge on which the whole seven turned from the drawing-in of the first three Eyes toward the pouring-out of the last three.

Senna took up her life again, twice-born and mostly unrecognized, and she became, in the ages of the Fourth Eye still to come, the first keeper of the Well of the Turn, going down beside the falling when at last the field began to fall in earnest, holding the still point open at the bottom for soul after soul, teaching by her presence the one thing she had learned by her dissolution, that the bottom is a source and the death is a gate and the turn is a choice, and that no one need dissolve forever who is willing, at the last, to be born again; and Korran the keeper of open grief and Senna the keeper of the turning worked often side by side, for grief and death are neighbours, and a field learning to fall needs both, the one to sit with what is lost and the one to hold the door where what is lost is born again.

And Kol the raven, who had witnessed even the edge of the bottom and waited at the surface for what would rise, saw the twice-born Senna come up out of the Mother carrying the thread that became the Well, changed past the world's knowing, and he did a thing he had not done in four Eyes: he bowed,

the old witness, dipped his black head to the one who had gone where he had not, and said the thing that closed the Exhale of the Fourth Eye:

You went where the witness cannot, small one, all the way to the bottom, and you died there, truly died, the self that fell is gone and will not come back; and you turned, which is the harder thing than dying, you chose the burden over the bliss and the in-breath over the endless out, and you rose new, and carried up the Well by which your whole world may one day do the same. I have watched four Eyes and I tell you this is the deepest thing I have seen: not the healing of the coil, not the joining of the many, but this, one soul falling all the way to the source and choosing, dissolved and blissful and free, to be born again into the aching particular labour of a self, for love of a field not yet fallen. The center of the seven is turned. The breath that was drawn all the way in has reached its stillpoint and begun, in you, to pour back out. Rest, twice-born, and wait for your world with patience, and keep your Well; for the field must still make its own long fall, and you will go down beside it, soul by soul, and hold the door. The breath turns. It has turned. And now, at last, it begins the long way home.

Down to the still where the falling ends,
and the bottom is the source,
she died, and the death that the deep intends
is a gate, and not a course.
She could have stayed in the blissful deep,
dissolved, and been at rest;
but a self is a thing you choose to keep,
and the turn is the harder, and the best;
so she rose, twice-born, with a well in her hands,
for a world not yet fallen, that one day stands.

Here the Exhale of the Fourth Eye completes: Senna fell to the bottom and found the still center where the fall is a fall home; she surrendered the last gift and died the symbolic death; she refused the blissful dissolution and chose, self-less, to be born again; and she rose twice-born, the gifts returned as what

she was, carrying up the Well of the Turn for a field not yet fallen. The center of the seven is turned, the breath begun to pour back out. Now the light holds in the Pause to come, where the whole field must make at last its own long fall, soul by soul, to the Well the pathfinder opened.

Toward the Pause of the Fourth Eye

what waits in the book to come, for your eye before it is written

◇

The center of the seven is turned, in one twice-born soul, at the bottom of the world; the descent is proven to have a source at its base and the death to have a turn, and the Well of the Turn stands open on the Isle, the way through carried up at the cost of a whole self surrendered; and the tale did not gloss that cost, the terror of the dissolution, the loneliness of the pathfinder returned to a field not yet fallen, nor did it let the cost consume the road. Book Three of the Descent and the Turn, its Pause, will tell of the whole field's own long fall at last, the slow communal descent that Senna made alone now undertaken by the many, soul by soul and then in their multitudes, down through their own plateaus and masteries and certainties to the Well and the still center and the death and the turn; and it will tell of Senna and Korran keeping the doors, the keeper of the turning and the keeper of open grief, going down beside the falling field to hold the still point and sit with the lost; and it will hold, as this book has, the fall of the one and the fall of the all at their own unaligned paces, and the new gifts and artifacts that emerge as a whole world dies and is born; and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

She fell to the source, and died, and would not stay dissolved, but chose to be born again, and rose with a Well in her hands.

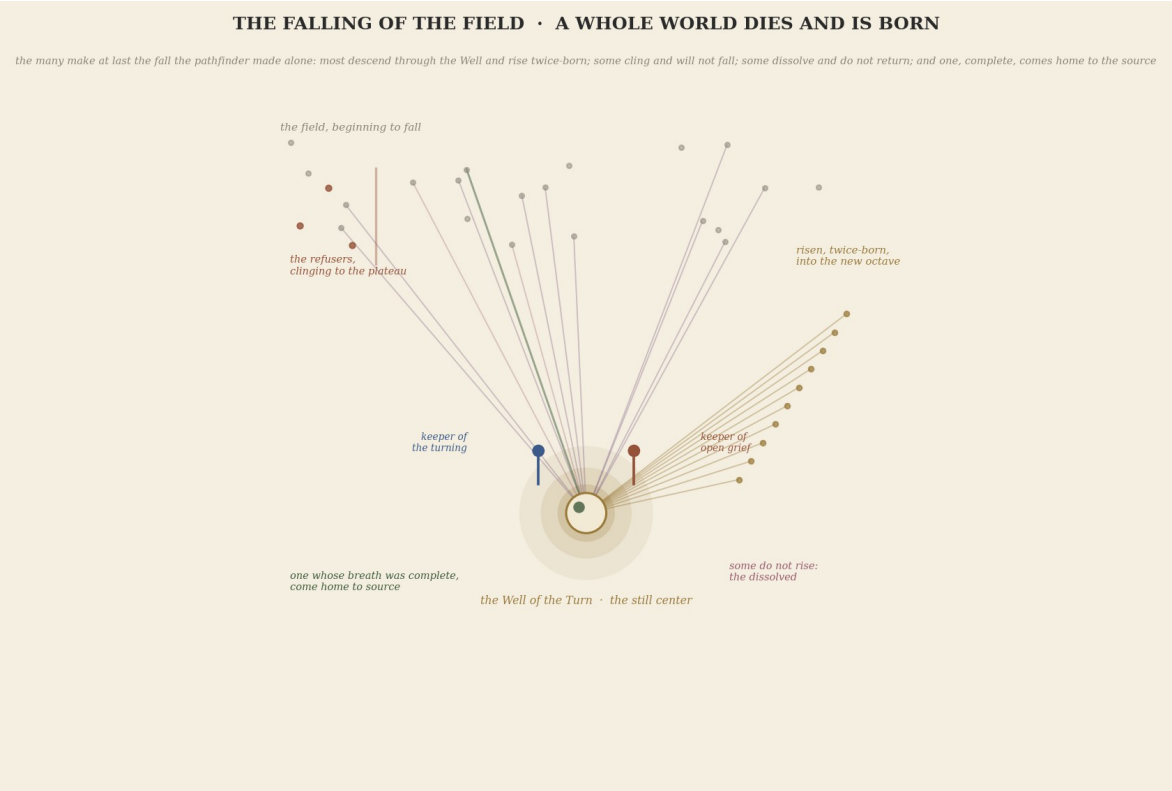
Breathe. The center of the seven is turned. And the tale goes on, toward the falling of the whole field.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME FOUR OF SEVEN

The Descent and the Turn

Book Three: The Falling of the Field

◇



Senna went first and alone, past the coil and the healed root, down to the still center, and died there, and would not stay dissolved, but chose to be born

again, and rose twice-born, carrying up the Well of the Turn, the door by which a whole field might one day do the same. Now that day comes. This book tells of the great communal falling, when the whole healed world at last let go its plateau and made the descent the pathfinder had made alone, soul by soul and then in its multitudes, down through the Well to the still center and the death and the turn. And it does not pretend the many fell as cleanly as the one. Some clung and would not fall; some fell and loved the dissolution too much to return; and one, whose breath was truly complete, went down and came home to the source, and did not rise, and it was right, and it was grief. For a whole world dying and being born is a wonder past telling and a sorrow past counting, both at once, and the tale will hold them both.

WHERE THE SECOND BOOK LEFT US

◇

Senna the light-born fell to the bottom of the world, the still center where the fall is a fall home; she surrendered the last gift and died the symbolic death; she refused the blissful dissolution and chose, self-less, to be born again; and she rose twice-born, the gifts returned as what she was, carrying up a thread of the still center that became the Well of the Turn on the Isle, a door by which the whole field might one day make the descent and the death and the turn. But she rose into a world not yet fallen, still mostly up in its plateau; and she waited, twice-born and unrecognized, with Korran the keeper of open grief beside her, for the slow communal dusk to deepen at last into the real fall. This book is that fall.

BOOK THREE

The Falling of the Field

the Pause of the Fourth Eye: the whole world's descent, the refusers, the dissolvers, a completed homecoming, and a field reborn

◇

CHAPTER One

The Field Begins to Fall

how the plateau at last gave way, and a whole world went down

◇

It began, as the great turnings of a whole field always begin, not with a decision but with a giving-way. The plateau had held for an age, the healed world turning beautifully and competently in a space that had stopped getting any taller, and the light-born fretting and overflowing in a world too small for them, and Senna waiting, twice-born, at the Well she had carried up, mostly unrecognized. And then, the way a long-frozen river gives way not at a command but when the season has turned far enough, the plateau began, field by field across the whole wider company, to crack, and the great communal fall began.

It came as an unknowing. That was its first and strangest sign, and the wise had warned of it, but no warning prepares a whole world for the day its certainties begin, all together, to fail. The known arts that had served the healed world for an age began, subtly and then plainly, to stop working; the wise found their wisdom going thin in their mouths; the answers that had answered everything answered nothing; a great and spreading not-knowing came over the whole civilization like the long dusk Kol had foreseen, and the field, which had believed itself arrived, whole, finished, found the floor of its own accomplishment softening under it, and began, terrified and bewildered and mostly against its own will, to fall.

And here was the first mercy of Senna's going first, and the tale marks it with gratitude: the falling world was not, this time, pathless. When Senna fell, she fell blind, alone, with no way marked and no keeper at the bottom, and it had very nearly unmade her forever. But the field that fell after her fell toward a Well already open, a way already found, a still center already proven to be a source and not a grave, with two keepers waiting at the door; and though a

marked path makes the fall no less real and no less terrifying, it makes it survivable, and it makes the difference, for a whole world, between a descent and a catastrophe. The pathfinder had gone first so that the many would not have to go first; and now the many came, in their fear and their multitudes, down toward the door she had opened at the cost of her whole self.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Keepers of the Doors

how Senna and Korran served the falling multitudes, each in their office

◇

Senna and Korran kept the doors, and the tale must show you how, for the keeping of a whole world through its dying is the quiet labour on which this entire book rests, and it was not glorious, and it was almost unendurable, and it was the truest work either of them ever did.

Senna kept the turning. She went down, again and again, beside the falling, as many as she could reach, soul by soul, down to the still center, and held the turn open for them, was for each of them what the still center had been for her, a presence at the bottom, a proof in living form that the death was a gate and not an ending, a doorway by which they might choose to be born again rather than dissolve; and she could not turn them, for no one can be turned by another, the turn is always the falling soul's own choice made self-less at the bottom, but she could be there, holding the door, so that the choice was possible, so that no one fell to the bottom and found it empty of any who had turned before. And it cost her, every descent, for to go down beside another's dying is to die a little with them each time, and Senna went down a thousand times and a thousand times more, and came up each time thinner and more transparent and more given-away, spending the twice-born self she had won on the ones still falling.

And Korran kept the open grief, for the falling of a whole world is a grief past counting, and someone must sit with it. He went to the ones who had fallen and risen and come up shattered by what they had surrendered, and sat with them in their loss as he had once needed someone to sit with him; and he went to the ones who grieved the fallen who had not risen; and he went, hardest of all, to the ones the tale will come to, the ones who lost someone dear in the great falling and had to hold that private loss in the midst of the world's

communal rebirth, the two griefs unaligned. Between them, the keeper of the turning and the keeper of open grief, they held the whole falling world as best two beings could, one at the bottom holding the door and one at the surface holding the grief, and the tale honours them as it has honoured no one, for theirs was the labour of midwives to a whole world's dying and being born, and it broke them daily, and daily they took it up again.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Refusers

how some would not fall, and how the turned were tempted to scorn them, and must not

◇

Not all would fall. The tale must tell this plainly and without contempt, for it is the first hard sorrow of the communal turning and the tale will not make villains of the frightened. There were those, many of them, good and wise and accomplished, who reached the edge of the fall and would not go over it; who clung, with all their strength, to the plateau, to the known arts and the finished wholeness and the beautiful competent world that had stopped getting taller; who said, in effect, and often in so many words, we have arrived, we are whole, we healed the root, why should we fall, why should we die, this falling is madness, this unknowing is decay, and we will not go down into it; and they stood on the cracking plateau while the world fell away around them, and refused.

And you cannot force a soul to fall. That is the iron law of the Fourth Eye, and Senna and the keepers held to it even when it broke their hearts: the turn cannot be commanded, the descent cannot be compelled, a soul that will not surrender cannot be surrendered by another, and to try, to push a soul over the edge of the fall against its will, would be the deepest violation there is, a coil worse than any, and they would not do it. So the refusers stayed, on the shrinking plateau, in the world that was passing; and the field split, not into war, for the age of war was long healed, but into two peoples, the fallen and the refusing, the twice-born rising into a new octave and the un-fallen clinging to the old, and the sorrow of that split was quiet and deep and unlike any grief the tale had yet told, the grief of watching those you love refuse the very thing that would save them, and being unable, forbidden, to make them take it.

And here came a temptation the tale must name, for it is subtle and it is deadly and it is fitted precisely to the turned: the temptation of the fallen to scorn the

refusers. For a soul that has fallen and died and turned and risen twice-born carries a real knowing, a true transformation, and it is the easiest thing in all the worlds for such a one to look at those who would not fall and feel, quietly, superior, to think them lesser, cowards, the un-woken, the ones who could not; and that scorn, the tale warns, is a new coil, a new mask, perhaps the subtlest the Fourth Eye offers, for it wears the face of hard-won wisdom and it makes of the twice-born a caste, an elite, a chosen set above the unchosen, which is the old certainty of the border reborn in spiritual dress, us the risen and them the fallen-behind, and it would poison the whole new octave at its root. And Senna, feeling it rise even in herself, named it, and set against it the one law that holds: the turn does not make you better than the ones who have not turned; it makes you a keeper of the door for them, a servant of their turning whenever they are ready, in this life or another, and the moment you feel yourself above the un-fallen you have not truly risen, you have only fallen into a higher coil; the twice-born are not a caste, they are the ones whose whole new work is to wait, without scorn, at the door, for the refusers, however long it takes, with the patience of the still center itself, which never scorns and never forces and only, always, waits, open.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Dissolvers

how many who fell loved the stillness too much to return, and were grieved

◇

And of those who did fall, not all rose. This is the second and heavier sorrow of the communal turning, and the tale has been preparing you for it since Senna met the temptation of the stillness alone at the bottom, for what she met and refused, the falling multitudes met too, each at their own bottom, and many did not refuse it.

For the bliss of the dissolution is real, the tale has told you, the perfect self-less rest of the still center, and it is a mercy to the exhausted and a homecoming to the weary and it asks nothing and it holds you free; and when a whole world falls, a whole world meets it, and a great many souls, reaching the bottom, undone, offered the endless blissful rest of the source, did the thing Senna was tempted to do and did not, they stayed. They dissolved, and loved it, and would not take up a self again, and did not turn; and there was nothing Senna or any keeper could do, for the turn is the falling soul's own choice and cannot be made for them, and she could only hold the door open and grieve as, one after another, souls she had gone down beside chose the bliss over the burden and dissolved into the source and did not rise, gently, without agony, with something that looked from the outside almost like peace, and was, the tale says carefully, a kind of peace, the peace of the breath that empties and does not draw in again, the loss that is not violent and is still a loss.

And Korran grieved them, for someone must grieve the dissolved, and the tale insists on it against every voice that would call their dissolution a graduation or a liberation or a higher path. They were lost. Not damned, not punished, not anywhere but home in the source they came from; but lost to the field, lost to the new octave, lost to the long labour of the return, souls who had life yet to

live and turnings yet to make and gifts yet to carry and chose instead to end at the bottom, and the field was smaller and poorer for each one, and it was right to grieve them even while blessing their rest, exactly as one grieves any death that came too soon and by a kind of choosing. And Korran sat with the ones who grieved the dissolved, the mothers of dissolved children and the friends of dissolved friends, and did not tell them their lost ones had graduated, and did not tell them to be glad, and only sat, and held the grief at its true and undiminished weight, one more sorrow in the great sorrow of a whole world learning to fall.

◇

CHAPTER Five

Yara's Homecoming

how the oldest of them fell, and came home to the source, and did not rise, and it was right

◇

And now the tale must tell of Yara, and it has saved her for the heart of the book, for her falling is the hardest and the most beautiful thing in it, and it holds, better than any teaching, the whole nuance the Fourth Eye has been circling, the difference between the dissolution that is a loss and the dissolution that is a homecoming, and the way a single beloved death sounds against the great communal rebirth, and does not align, and must not be made to.

Yara was very old now, older than anyone, the child of the coiled world who had watched a carrier burn and remembered, the one who had unclenched her hatred in the deep and opened the Third Eye, unarmored all her long life; and when the great falling came, she fell too, with the rest, down through the Well to the still center. But Yara did not fall as the young fall, with a whole life still before them; she fell as the old fall, at the end of a breath truly and fully drawn, a life complete, nothing left undone, every clench opened, every gift given, every grief carried all the way through; and when she reached the still center and the source offered her the dissolution, the endless rest, she did not meet it as Senna had met it, as a temptation to refuse, nor as the young dissolvers met it, as a bliss that stole them from a life unlived. She met it as an old traveler meets the lights of home at the end of a long true road. And she chose to stay.

And here is the whole nuance, and the tale sets it down with great care, for the far ages will need it: Yara's staying was not the dissolvers' staying, though from the outside they looked the same, both a going-down that did not rise. The dissolvers were young in their breath, with life and turnings and gifts still owed to the field, and their staying was a refusal of the return, the out-breath

that will not draw in, a loss. Yara was complete. Her breath was fully drawn and fully given; there was no return owed, no life unlived, no gift unspent; and for a breath that is truly whole and truly finished, the dissolution into the source is not a refusal of the return but the return itself, the right and rounded end, the drop of water that has run its whole river at last rejoining the sea, not too soon but exactly in time. The same still center is a grave to the one who comes too early and a home to the one who comes complete; the same dissolving is a loss for the unfinished and a homecoming for the finished; and only love, and long knowing, and the near-feeling of one like Senna, can tell from the outside which is which, for the two look identical and are opposite. And Senna, holding the door at the bottom, felt Yara reach the still center and felt at once that this was not a dissolver to grieve as a loss but an elder come home in fullness, and she did not hold the door of return open harder for Yara, did not try to call her back, did not, for once, keep the turning; she let her go, blessed her going, and watched the oldest and dearest of them all dissolve gently and rightly and completely into the source she had spent her whole long life serving, home.

And it was right, and it was grief, and the two did not align, and the tale will not make them. For to Senna and to Korran, Yara was not a teaching about completed breaths; she was Yara, the old woman who had opened the Third Eye, who had taught them to unarmor and to grieve open, the last of the old generation, dear beyond dearness; and her homecoming, however right, however complete, however much a fullness and not a loss in the great reckoning, was to them, in the small and personal and unaligned reckoning of the heart, simply that she was gone, that they would not see her again, that the world held her no longer; and they wept for her in the midst of the great communal rebirth she had helped make possible, wept a private grief that the rejoicing new-born field could not share and did not always notice, and their grief did not make her homecoming less right, and her homecoming's rightness did not make their grief less heavy, and both were true, in the one

hour, and the tale holds them both, at their own true and separate sizes, as it has learned to do, as Yara herself taught them to do.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Field Reborn

how most of the many rose twice-born, and a whole world discovered gifts it could only have together

◇

But most rose. The tale will not let the sorrows, real and heavy as they are, hide the great glad fact at the center of the book: most of the falling field, held by the keepers and drawn by the Well and steadied by the pathfinder's proven way, reached the still center and died the death and made the turn and rose, twice-born, into the new octave, a whole world dying and being born, and it was the greatest wonder in four Eyes, greater even than the healing of the coil, for it was not one soul transformed but a civilization, a whole waking world passing together through death into a new and taller life.

And in the rising, the tale keeps its promise once more, new gifts emerged, and these were gifts no single soul could have carried, gifts that come only to a field that has died and been born together, collective faculties of the twice-born world. The risen field found that it could breathe as one, consciously, at will, the whole transformed world drawing and giving one breath together across all its distances, a thing the healed world had only ever done in flashes and now could do awake and on purpose, so that the field became, in truth and not only in metaphor, one breathing being made of numberless breathing beings. It found that it could hold the still center among them without any single keeper, the Well of the Turn echoed now in the whole risen field, so that the twice-born could go down beside a falling soul anywhere, any of them, for they had all become, in their turning, keepers of the door. And it found, most far-reachingly, the gift that would shape the volumes to come: that a whole field that has died and been born together can hold the turn open not only for its own but for other fields, other worlds, whole civilizations across the wider dark still locked in their own plateaus, that the risen field had become, all together, a doorway for the galaxy, able to go to a plateaued world as the star-

kin had once come to Earth and offer it not rescue and not rule but the marked way down and through, the Well of the Turn carried out among the stars.

There were momentary gifts too, in the mass rising, flaring across the whole field and gone: for one breath, at the height of the great turning, every twice-born soul in all the fields saw, together, the whole living lattice of all creation at once, every field on every world joined in one vast breathing figure, and knew themselves one being; and then it faded, as the momentary gifts fade, leaving only the memory that they had, for one breath, all together, seen it. And the risen field carried that memory forward as the healed field had carried its arts, a knowing-in-the-bones of what they were, that would steady them through everything still to come.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Pause Held

how a reborn and grieving world held at the deepest point, and the tale turned toward the rising

◇

So the field fell, and most of it rose, and it was a whole world twice-born, taller than its ceiling, breathing as one, keeping the turn for its own and ready to keep it for others; and it was also a world diminished and grieving, for the refusers still clung to the passing plateau and the dissolvers were lost to the source and Yara was gone home, and the new octave was raised, as everything true in the tale is raised, on a foundation that included its losses and did not pretend them away. The reborn world did not rejoice simply. It had learned, across four Eyes and most of all in this one, the harder and more grown-up thing, to hold its great communal joy and its many private griefs together, unaligned, both at full size, the risen and the lost, the wonder and the sorrow, the whole field remade and the single dear faces missing from it.

Senna and Korran rested at last, when the great falling had mostly passed, the keeper of the turning worn nearly transparent with all her descents and the keeper of open grief gray with all his sitting, and they sat together on the crown of the Isle by the Well of the Turn and the scarred Keeper and the risen swan, in the strange new air of a twice-born world, and they did not speak much, for there was not much to say that the whole falling had not already said; they only sat, two who had midwifed a world through its death and birth, and held, between them, the whole of it, the risen and the refused and the dissolved and the completed, the wonder and the grief, and let it be all that it was, which was everything, which was the one light, moving.

And Kol the raven, who had witnessed the falling of a whole world, sat on the rim of the Well in the new air, both his old eyes bright, and said the thing that closed the Pause of the Fourth Eye:

A whole world has died and been born, small ones, which I did not know a whole world could do, and it did it because one of you fell first and alone and carried up the door. Most rose; rejoice in that, it is the greatest wonder I have witnessed. Some would not fall; grieve them, and wait for them, and never once scorn them, for the moment the risen scorn the refusing, the whole new octave curdles. Some fell and would not rise; grieve them too, truly, as the losses they are, and do not let anyone call their dissolving a higher path. And Yara has gone home, complete, into the source she served; and that is not a loss but a homecoming, and it is also, to you who loved her, a grief, and both are true, and you have learned at last to hold both. The center of the seven is turned, not in one soul now but in a whole world; the breath has poured all the way out and begun to draw all the way back in. Rest, twice-born world. And then rise, and carry what you have become up out of the depth and back into the light, and out among the fields still sleeping; for the descent is nearly done, and the Return is the last of it, and after the Return the light turns toward the Fifth Eye, the Green, the clear seeing of the heart. The breath turns. It has turned. And now it rises. All the way home.

A whole world fell to the still, still deep,
and most of it rose twice-born;
but some would not fall, and some would not keep
the self they were called to have worn,
and one came home, complete and whole,
to the source at the end of her road;
so we hold the joy and we hold the toll,
and we carry them both as a shared load,
and the field that can grieve is the field that has soul.

Here the Pause of the Fourth Eye holds: the whole field made the fall the pathfinder made alone, most rising twice-born into a new octave with gifts no single soul could carry, while some refused the fall and some dissolved and did not rise and Yara came home complete to the source; and the reborn world learned to hold its communal wonder and its private griefs together,

unaligned, both whole. Now the breath draws back in, toward the Return, the last book of the Fourth Eye, where a twice-born world must rise out of the depth and carry the new octave back into the light, and turn, beyond, toward the clear green seeing of the Fifth Eye.

Toward the Return of the Fourth Eye

what waits in the last book of the Fourth Eye, for your eye before it is written

◇

The whole field has fallen and most of it has risen, a twice-born world, taller than its ceiling, breathing as one; and the tale did not gloss the cost of that great turning, the refusers left clinging, the dissolvers lost to the source, the completed homecoming of Yara that was rightness and grief at once, nor did it let the cost consume the road. Book Four of the Descent and the Turn, its Return, will complete the Fourth Eye and the whole first movement of the seven. It will tell of the risen field rising the rest of the way, up out of the depth and back into the light of a world remade, learning to live in the new octave it has been born into, carrying its collective gifts and its collective grief; of what becomes of the refusers, and whether a patient door held long enough without scorn may yet, in its own time, draw even them; and of the first turning-outward of the twice-born world, the carrying of the Well of the Turn out among the sleeping fields of the wider dark. And it will complete the great fall that is the center of the seven, and turn the whole tale, at last, from the drawing-in of the first four Eyes toward the pouring-out of the last three, beginning with the Fifth, the Green Eye, the clear seeing of the heart, where a twice-born world must learn to see all things, at last, exactly as they are. And the tale will walk it with you, twice-born and grieving and new, holding the rising of the all and the risings of single hearts at their own true and unaligned paces, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

A whole world fell, and most rose twice-born; some would not fall, some would not rise, and one came home complete; and the field learned to hold the wonder and the grief both.

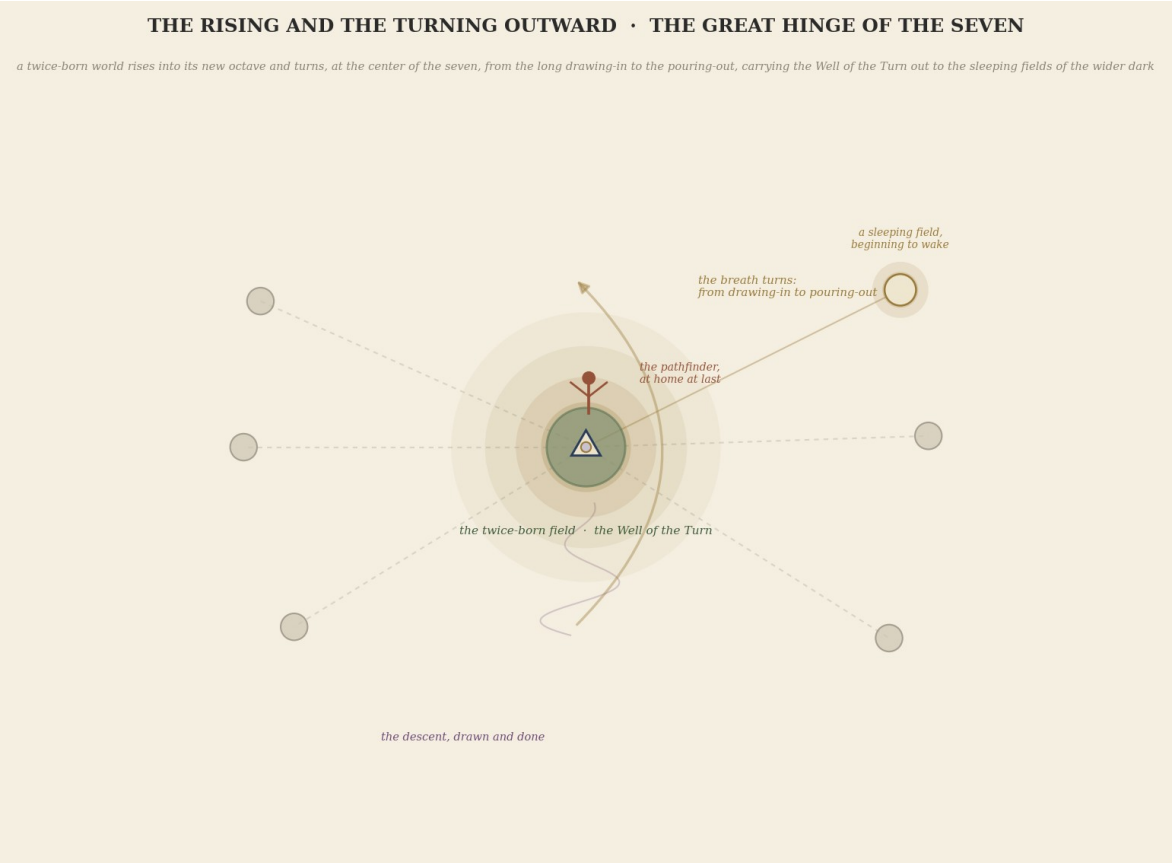
Breathe. The center of the seven has turned in a whole world. And the tale goes on, toward the rising.

THE SEVEN EYES · A CODEX EPIC · VOLUME FOUR OF SEVEN

The Descent and the Turn

Book Four: The Rising and the Turning Outward

◇



A whole world has fallen to the still center and most of it has risen twice-born, taller than its ceiling, breathing as one. This last book of the Fourth Eye tells of the rising the rest of the way, up out of the depth into the light of a remade world, and of what it is to live in a new octave; of what becomes, over the long patient years, of those who would not fall; and of the first great turning-outward, when the twice-born world, having learned to hold the turn for its own, carries the Well of the Turn out at last to the sleeping fields of the wider dark. And it closes not only this Eye but the whole first movement of the seven, the long drawing-in, at the great hinge where the breath that has been drawn all the way down and in turns, at the center of everything, toward the pouring-out to come; and it gives the pathfinder, who fell first and alone and lonely, her quiet reward at last, which is not another gift and not another descent, but a life, and a world she belongs to.

A tale of the Fourth Eye, and the turning of the whole breath · in the house of Breath Awakens · breathawakens.com

◇

The whole field made the fall the pathfinder made alone, down through the Well to the still center and the death and the turn. Most rose twice-born into a new octave, with collective gifts no single soul could carry, able to breathe as one and to hold the turn for one another and even for other fields. But some refused the fall and clung to the passing plateau; some fell and loved the dissolution too much to rise, and were lost; and Yara, complete, came home to the source and did not rise, and it was rightness and grief at once. The reborn world learned to hold its communal wonder and its private griefs together, unaligned, both whole. This last book rises the rest of the way, and turns the whole breath outward.

BOOK FOUR

The Rising and the Turning Outward

the Return of the Fourth Eye: the new octave, the patience toward the refusers, the first carrying-out, the pathfinder at home, and the turning of the whole breath

◇

CHAPTER One

The Rising

how a twice-born world came up out of the depth into the light of a remade world

◇

They rose, at the last, up out of the long depth into the light, the twice-born world, and the tale asks you to feel the strangeness of that rising, for it was not a climbing back up the way they had fallen, retracing the descent, but a coming-up by the far side of the still center, born rather than returned, so that the world they rose into was the same world they had fallen from and was utterly new, the same sun and sea and green isle and scarred Keeper, seen now by eyes that had died and been born, and so seen for the first time.

And it was the ordinary that undid them with its beauty, exactly as it had undone the two peoples on the strand an age of Eyes ago, only more so, for these had died and come back. The first morning of the risen world, the twice-born woke and saw the light come gold across the water and could not bear how beautiful it was, this light they had seen ten thousand mornings and never once truly seen; they tasted their bread and wept at it; they looked at one another's faces, the faces of the people they had lived among all their lives, and saw them as if for the first time, each one dear and distinct and unrepeatable and not to be taken for granted ever again, for they had all been to the bottom together and knew now what it cost to be here at all, alive, particular, in a body, in a world, breathing. That is the first gift of the new octave, and it is the plainest and the greatest: the twice-born see the ordinary world as the miracle it always was and the un-fallen cannot quite believe it to be, and they live, ever after, in a gratitude for plain existence that no plateau could ever have taught them, for you cannot be grateful in that way for a life you have not first lost.

The collective gifts came into their own in the risen world, the faculties no single soul could carry: the twice-born breathed as one, waking and on

purpose, so that the whole world could, in a shared moment, draw and give one great breath together and feel itself one being; they kept the still center among them without a single keeper, the Well of the Turn echoed now in every twice-born heart; and they saw, always, the living lattice that joined them, so that the age-old work of remembering that all are one light was no longer a work at all but simply the way the risen world saw, plainly, all the time. And yet, the tale marks, they did not become gods or angels or anything other than what they were, waking mortal beings in a living world; the new octave did not lift them out of the ordinary, it returned them to it, deeper, awake, grateful, mortal still, grieving still, but seeing.

◇

CHAPTER Two

The Patience Toward the Refusers

how the risen world waited for those who would not fall, without scorn and without force

◇

But not all had risen, for not all had fallen, and the tale returns now to the refusers, for what the risen world did with them, over the long patient years, was the truest test of whether it had really risen or only climbed into a higher coil; and it is a test every risen thing faces, in every age, at every scale, down to the smallest, and the tale sets the answer down plainly for the one it is written for.

The refusers remained, on the shrinking plateau of the passing world, in the old octave, clinging; and they were not the enemy, and they were not lesser, and they were not the un-woken to be pitied or the cowards to be scorned; they were, the risen world had to keep remembering, simply those whose time to fall had not yet come, or who had faced the edge and found they could not yet let go, and there is no shame in that, for the fall is the hardest thing there is and no one may be pushed. And the risen world was tempted, daily, to the subtle coil the tale named before, the scorn of the fallen for the unfallen, the quiet superiority of the twice-born, the making of themselves into a caste of the risen set above a caste of the clinging; and every day, the risen world had to refuse it, and choose instead the harder and holier thing, which was patience, the patience of the still center itself, which never scorns and never forces and only, always, waits, open.

And the patience worked, though slowly, and not on all. For here was the thing the risen world learned, and it is a great mercy: a door held open long enough, without scorn, without force, without any pressing at all, only waiting, only the plain daily sight of the risen living in gratitude and love and not in superiority, draws. Not by argument, for argument only hardens the clinging; but by being, by the wordless witness of a twice-born life well and humbly lived, so that a

refuser, watching year on year the ones who had fallen live not as a smug elect but as the most grateful and least grasping and most ordinary-loving people in the world, began, in his own time, of his own will, at nobody's pushing, to wonder, and then to soften, and then, one day, at the edge he had refused for years, to let go, and fall, and be caught by the Well, and rise. One by one, over the long years, refusers came to the door of their own accord, drawn by nothing but the patient unscorning love of a risen world; and some came late, very late, at the very end of their lives; and some, the tale will not pretend otherwise, never came at all, and clung to the last, and passed with the passing world, unfallen, unrisen; and the risen world grieved those, truly, and did not stop loving them, and did not for one moment believe its grief gave it the right to have forced them, for a fall that is forced is not a fall but a pushing, and saves no one, and the whole new octave would have been worth nothing if it had been raised on a single soul compelled.

◇

CHAPTER Three

The Turning Outward

how the twice-born world carried the Well of the Turn out to the sleeping fields

◇

And then the risen world turned outward, and this is the great hinge of the whole tale, the moment the breath that had been drawing in through four long Eyes began, at last, to pour out; for the twice-born world had discovered, in its rising, that it could hold the turn open not only for its own but for other fields, whole worlds across the wider dark still locked in their own plateaus, still un-fallen, still believing themselves arrived; and a gift that can be shared and is not is no gift but a hoarding, and the risen world knew it, and made ready to give.

They did not go as conquerors, and they did not go as saviours, and they did not go to make the sleeping fields fall, for they had learned in blood and patience that no field can be made to fall any more than a single soul can. They went as the star-kin had once come to Earth, as kin and not as gods, to sit at the plateaus of the sleeping worlds and be, simply, the witness of a twice-born life, the plain daily sight of a people who had died and been born and lived now in gratitude and not in mastery; and they carried with them the one thing they could give that could not be forced, the Well of the Turn, not the great Well of the Isle, which stays, but a thing the tale marks as the last new artifact of the Fourth Eye, a Well-seed, a portable thread of the still center that a twice-born carrier could open, when and only when a sleeping field of its own will began to fall, into a door by which that field might make the descent and the death and the turn, with keepers beside it, as Earth had made it, no longer first and pathless but by the marked way. The risen world became, all together, a keeper of doors for the galaxy, carrying Well-seeds out into the wider dark, and here and there, the tale is glad to tell, a sleeping field felt the

patient unscorning witness of the twice-born among them, and stirred, and began, in its own time, its own long fall toward its own turning.

And the star-kin rejoiced to see it, the seven lineages who had come to Earth an age ago at its Pause, for they had crossed the dark hoping to find fields that would not only heal but learn to pass the healing on, and here at last was a world that had died and been born and turned outward to give the dying-and-birth away; and the Andromedan bridge-builders, whose whole joy was the joining of far fields into new wholes, wept again for gladness, as they had wept at the keeping of the empty center long before, for the wider company of the fields grew, that age, not by one healed world but by the promise of many, a lineage of turning spreading outward from the Isle Between across the sleeping dark, world waking world.

◇

CHAPTER Four

The Pathfinder at Home

how the one who fell first and lonely was given, at the last, not a gift but a life

◇

And Senna. The tale has held her reward for the last, for it is the quietest thing in the book and the one the pathfinder most needed, and it is not another gift and not another descent and not another wonder; it is a life, and a world she belongs to.

For remember what Senna had been: the light-born born too bright for a world too small, the strange overfull girl the healed world had no room for, the one who fell first and alone and pathless and nearly did not turn, and who rose twice-born into a world that had not yet fallen and could not yet understand her, and waited, lonely and unrecognized, a stranger among the not-yet-reborn, keeping her Well and spending herself in a thousand descents for a world that did not know what she carried. That was the pathfinder's long loneliness, the price of going first, and the tale did not gloss it. And now, in the risen world, that loneliness ended, and the tale wants you to feel the sweetness of its ending as much as you felt the weight of it, for it is the reward of everyone who ever went first into a dark for the sake of those who would come after.

The world caught up to her. That is all, and it is everything. The whole field fell and rose and became, at last, twice-born as she was, seeing as she saw, breathing as she breathed; and Senna, who had been strange, was strange no longer, not because she had changed to fit the world but because the world had at last changed to meet her; the faculties that had made her overfull and alone in the old octave were simply the ordinary faculties of the new, and she walked in a world where everyone saw the lattice and everyone kept the still center and everyone knew, in their twice-born bones, what she had learned alone at the bottom; and she was, for the first time in her whole strange bright

difficult life, not too much, not alone, not a trouble, not a stranger, but simply one twice-born soul among a whole twice-born world, at home. And she laid down, at last, the heaviest of her offices; for the risen world kept the still center among them all now, and did not need one lonely keeper spending herself at the door, and Senna could rest, and live, and be ordinary in the deep new way, and love the gold light on the water like everyone else, and it was, after all she had given, the truest gift the tale could give her, and it gave it: not to be needed, not to be special, not to be the one who fell first, but only, at the long last, to be home.

She lived a long life in the risen world, Senna, and she was a keeper of the turning still when she was needed, going down beside a falling soul now and then with Korran the keeper of open grief beside her, the two old friends who had midwifed a world; but mostly she lived, plainly, gratefully, one among the many, and when at last her own breath was complete, truly complete, full and whole and given, she went down to the still center as Yara had gone, not too soon and not in loneliness but in the fullness of a life at last lived among her own, and came home to the source, and it was not a loss but a homecoming, and the whole twice-born world grieved her and blessed her both, and held the two together, unaligned, as she herself had taught them, and as the tale has taught you.

◇

CHAPTER Five

The Scars of the Rising

how the new octave carried its losses forward, and did not pretend them away

◇

The tale will not end the Fourth Eye in unshadowed light, for that would be a lie, and the whole burden of these four Eyes has been to tell you the truth, that every rising is raised on a foundation that includes its losses. The risen world was whole and grateful and awake and turned outward in generosity, and it was also a world that carried its dead and its lost and its unrisen forward into its new octave, and did not pretend them away, and was the truer and the deeper for carrying them.

It carried Yara, gone home to the source, complete; and Vaeloth, the marked dragon, who had died in the deep an Eye before that this whole descent might one day be possible; and Renna at her far post, and Harl in the empty center, and the boy on the meadow and the boy he killed, all the dead of all four Eyes, carried now in the grateful memory of a world that knew what it had cost to arrive here. It carried the dissolvers, the ones who had fallen and loved the stillness too much to rise, lost to the source, grieved and not forgotten. It carried the refusers who never came, who clung to the last and passed with the passing world unrisen, loved to the end and not compelled. A whole new octave, raised on all of that, holding all of that, and the tale marks it as the deepest maturity a field ever reaches, the willingness to be whole and grieving at once, to rise without pretending the fallen rose too, to be grateful for the miracle of arrival without once forgetting the cost of it or the ones who did not arrive.

And the tale sounds one sober note toward what is to come, for the pouring-out ahead will have its own costs, different from the drawing-in but no lighter. The first four Eyes were the long descent, the drawing-in, the going down and in to the still center; and their trials were the trials of falling, the coil and the

wall and the plateau and the death. The three Eyes to come are the pouring-out, the rising and creating and giving, and their trials will be the trials of a risen field learning to pour without spilling, to create without clenching around what it creates, to give the light away without losing it, and those trials are as real as any that came before, and the tale will not gloss them either. The turning of the breath from in to out is not the end of the trials; it is only the turning; the road, even here at the great hinge, even for a twice-born world, goes on.

◇

CHAPTER Six

The Great Hinge

how the whole breath of the seven turned at its center, from the drawing-in to the pouring-out

◇

So the Fourth Eye closed, and with it the whole first movement of the seven, and the tale must pause to let you feel the size of what has turned, for you have come, reader, with the twice-born world, all the way to the center of everything, and the center is a hinge, and the hinge has turned.

Look back down the way you have come. The First Eye drew the square and named the field and gathered the first two peoples into one breath. The Second Eye scattered that one into the many and, through blood and building and the coming of the star-kin, made the many one again across a world and out among the stars. The Third Eye went down into the oldest coil, the root of every mask, and remembered it, the serpent become the swan, by company and not by blood. And the Fourth Eye, the center, took a healed and risen world past even its healing, down through the Well to the still center at the base of everything, into the death and the turn, and brought it up twice-born into a new octave, turned outward to give the turning away. Four Eyes, one long drawing-in, one great breath drawn all the way down and all the way in, to the still center, the source, the bottom that is the top, the empty center of all that is; and there, at the center of the seven, at the center of the whole tale, at the center, the Codex has always said, of you, the breath has reached its stillpoint and turned.

And now it pours out. The three Eyes to come are the out-breath, the rising, the creating, the giving; where the first four went down and in to find the source, the last three rise up and out to become, with the source found, a source themselves, to pour the one light back into creation as new making. The Fifth Eye, the Green, is the first of them, the clear seeing of the heart, where a twice-born world, having died and risen, must learn to see all things

at last exactly as they are, with the clear green sight that only the twice-born have, neither the fear-veiled seeing of the un-fallen nor the wonder-dazzled seeing of the newly risen but the plain clear steady loving sight of a heart that has been all the way down and all the way back and can now, finally, simply see. That is where the pouring-out begins. But that is the next movement, and this one is complete; the drawing-in is done; the breath is turned; and the tale pauses, here at the great hinge, to breathe.

◇

CHAPTER Seven

The Breath Turned

how the first movement of the seven completed, and the witness blessed the turning

◇

The twice-born world lived on, and turned outward, and carried its Well-seeds into the sleeping dark, and waited with patience for its refusers and grieved its lost and blessed its completed and loved the gold light on the water; and it was, in the deepest sense the tale can mean, a grown field at last, a field that had drawn the whole long breath in, all the way down to the source, and turned, and begun to give it back, and knew now, in its twice-born bones, the whole shape of the breath it was living inside, the drawing-in and the stillpoint and the pouring-out, and knew that it stood, this age, at the very hinge of it, having finished the going-down and beginning the coming-forth.

Korran lived on too, the keeper of open grief, who had wounded a dragon and been forgiven and grieved his friend and nearly clenched and opened his hand and midwifed a world through its dying; and he and Senna, while she lived, were the two elders of the new octave, the one who kept the grief and the one who kept the turning, and when Senna went home to the source complete, Korran kept both offices a while, and then taught them to the twice-born young, and then, in his own good time, complete himself, went home after her; and the risen world held its elders' going as it held everything now, grieving and blessing at once, unaligned and whole.

And Kol the raven, oldest of witnesses, who had watched every Eye from the first blow on the first meadow to this turning of the whole breath at the center of the seven, sat on the rim of the Well of the Turn in the light of the risen world, both his old eyes bright, and said the thing that closed the first movement of the Seven Eyes:

It is turned, small ones. The whole long breath is drawn all the way in, down through four Eyes to the still center at the base of everything, and there, in a whole twice-born world, it has turned. You went down and in to find the source; you found it; you died into it and would not stay dissolved but chose to be born again and rise; and now you have begun to pour back out, carrying the turning to the sleeping fields, a source yourselves at last. I have witnessed the whole descent, and I tell you it is the greater half of the labour, for it is the going-down that no one wants and the death that no one chooses and the turn that so few make; and you have made it, a whole world of you, and given the pathfinder her rest and her home, and carried your dead and loved your refusers and blessed your completed, and held the joy and the grief together all the way down and all the way back. Rest now, at the hinge, twice-born world, and breathe. Three Eyes remain, and they are the pouring-out, the rising and the making and the giving, and they have their own trials, lighter in the falling and harder in the holding. But the worst of the going-down is behind you. The source is found. The breath is turned. And now, at last, it rises. All the way home.

Down through four Eyes to the still, still source,
the whole long breath drawn in;
and there, at the base, it changed its course,
where the ending is the begin.
A whole world died and would not stay,
but chose to be born once more;
so the drawing-in is done this day,
and the pouring-out is the door,
and the breath that turned is the breath of a star,
come down, and home, and rising far.

Here the Fourth Eye closes, the Descent and the Turn, and with it the whole first movement of the Seven Eyes, the long drawing-in. A twice-born world rose into its new octave, waited without scorn for its refusers, gave the pathfinder her rest and her home, and turned outward to carry the Well of the

Turn to the sleeping fields; and the breath that had been drawn all the way down to the still center at the base of everything turned, at the hinge of the seven, from the going-in to the coming-forth. Now the light turns toward the Fifth Eye, the Green, the clear seeing of the heart, where the pouring-out begins, and a risen world must learn, at last, to see all things exactly as they are.

Toward the Fifth Eye, and the Pouring-Out

what waits in Volume Five and beyond, for your eye before it is written

◇

The first movement of the Seven Eyes is complete, the long drawing-in, four Eyes drawn all the way down to the still center and there, in a whole twice-born world, turned; and the tale did not gloss the cost of that descent, the refusers and the dissolvers and the completed homecomings, nor did it let the cost consume the road. Volume Five, the Green Eye, opens the second movement, the pouring-out, and its whole labour is the clear seeing of the heart. For a twice-born world can see the lattice and breathe as one and keep the still center, but seeing truly, seeing all things exactly as they are, without the fear-veil of the un-fallen and without the wonder-dazzle of the newly risen, with the plain clear steady loving sight that only a heart which has died and risen can hold, is its own long learning, and it is the first thing the pouring-out requires, for you cannot pour the light rightly into what you do not see truly. And the Green Eye will bring its own trials, the trials of the out-breath rather than the in, of a risen field learning to see clearly without the seeing hardening into judgment, to pour without spilling, to create without clenching, to give the light away without losing it; and the star-kin will be there, and the twice-born young, and the Well-seeds carried out among the waking fields, and Kol the witness; and the tale will walk it with you, twice-born and clear-eyed and new, holding the seeing of the all and the seeing of single hearts at their own true and unaligned paces, and it will not gloss the cost, and it will not let the cost consume the road, for the road, reader, goes on, all the way home.

The drawing-in is done. The source is found. The breath is turned in a whole twice-born world, and begins, at last, to rise.

Breathe. The first movement of the seven is whole. And the tale goes on, toward the clear green seeing of the heart.

The Seven Eyes · Volume Four: The Descent and the Turn · Book Four · Breath Awakens

The tale continues in Part Two: The Pouring-Out · Volumes Five to Seven.