

## Act II: The Sleeping Thread

The boy was found at dawn.

Wrapped in bark fibers, dew-laced and silent, he lay at the base of the Chant Tree—a place sacred to endings, not beginnings. No parent came forward. No birthmark hinted at an origin. He was lifted not in ceremony, but in curiosity.

They named him Yali, which in the old tongue meant “unfounded echo.” It was a name not given often.

The Collective raised him as they raised all rootless children—in gentle harmony, wrapped in rhythm and breath. But Yali clapped off-beat during chanting games. He traced spirals in the dust while other children practiced memory recitation. When assigned a lineage scroll to study, he ignored it entirely and told the story of a woman who swallowed a comet and sang stars into glass. No record spoke of such a woman. But he told it like memory.

The elders observed. They withheld judgment. But in the space between patience and concern, they sent him to the Quiet Branch.

There, dreams were meant to shape obedience. Elders soaked the walls in jasmine oil and cedar smoke. They hummed ancestral names into sleeping ears, soft as breath on clay. Most children woke calmer. Harmonized. Humbled.

Yali didn't wake.

He stared up at the ceiling for hours, unmoving, eyes open but unfixed. On the fifth night, he spoke in his sleep—not ancestral names, but unfamiliar ones. Names older than the archive, names never written in the Chant Tree's rings.

Some Harmonizers flinched when they heard them. One recorded the sounds phonetically and checked them against the Scrolls of Forbidden Recursion. Two matched. They said nothing.

Still, Ashvatha does not exile. It adapts. When they could not adapt Yali, they released him.

They did not use the word “rejection.” Instead, they offered him a task—quiet, dignified, far from the circle's center. He would be sent to Site 117-V, an excavation deep in the basalt lands where ancestral fragments lay beneath layers of sediment and fire. He was to serve as a Learning Emissary. Perhaps the soil would grant him belonging where the spiral could not.

He did not thank them. He nodded, softly, and said, “Maybe I'll find where I was before I was not.”

The site was wrong from the beginning.

The air was dry in a way that devoured words. Master Veyan, his supervising Archivist, treated Arvind—he had begun calling himself that again—with a cordial distance sharpened by suspicion.

“You’re here to preserve,” Veyan said. “Not imagine.”

Arvind nodded. But beneath the dust, he found shapes.

He uncovered a glyph carved in stone—sword-pointed spiral, crossed by a sliver of flame. He felt his mouth shape a name without meaning to.

“This isn’t in the ledgers,” he told Veyan.

“It isn’t meant to be.”

The argument that followed was subdued but seismic. Arvind accused Veyan of omission. Veyan accused Arvind of invention. When Arvind reached for the artifact to show the others, Veyan’s hand shot out to stop him. In the struggle, an ancestral chime shattered on the stones.

Later that night, as wind howled over the exposed cliffs, shadows gathered at the horizon.

Raiders. Or scavengers. Or something else entirely.

Arvind panicked.

He set the signal fire. No one saw it. He improvised traps. No one survived them. By dawn, the vault was smoke. The excavation gone. Veyan—gone.

He stood in ash, choked and nameless, clutching a melted shard of what might have once been a spiral.

He wandered. Through ruins and rootless plains. He ate bark, licked dew off stones, sometimes went days without speech.

At night, he carved spirals into the sides of dry trees. Into old bones. Into his own palm.

He dreamed again—of fire-split ledgers. Of a girl who whispered names that turned to blood. Of walls scrawled with sigils older than the soil.

When Ashvathan scouts found him collapsed near a memory-pillar, they did not ask questions. They recorded no names. They returned him for Harmonization.

Not punishment. Not death. Realignment.

They spoke to him in tonal frequencies. They painted new spirals on his skin. They gave him no script, no prayers.

He wiped away the ink. Drew his own spiral in soot—imperfect. Not closed. Inverted.

Later, a Harmonizer remarked quietly: “He does not rebel. He simply has no rhythm.”

On the last day, Arvind asked to speak.

They gathered in the shadow of the Chant Tree. He offered no name. Just a hum.

The sound was not dissonant. It was other. Not broken—but unconcerned with repair.

As he sang, his hands moved in the air—drawing open spirals that never met themselves. The leaves stilled above him. A single child began to cry, though no one knew why.

When it was over, no one clapped. No one interrupted. The moment ended as breath ends: unnoticed.

That night, Arvind was taken to the final chamber. No blade was drawn. No rite performed.

They handed him a scroll, blank.

He scrawled a spiral. Left it unfinished. Beneath it, four words:  
What was never begun.

He folded the parchment, placed it into the flame, and closed his eyes.

By morning, the chamber was scrubbed. His name never added to the ring-scroll. His spiral sanded clean.

A child walking past the tree later that week asked, “Did someone sing here recently?”

“No,” an elder replied without malice. “That space was unused.”

Far beyond Ashvatha’s borders, deep in a plain scorched by older suns, a spiral bloomed in a wind-worn stone.

Not carved. Not drawn.

Just... there.

Waiting.