

Chapter One

The Dream

The day it was announced, the sky felt too still.

Abby stood at the kitchen sink, rinsing off the last strawberry from breakfast, sunlight slanting through the blinds. Her son, Elias, was humming quietly on the floor behind her, arranging his toy animals in a perfect circle like always. Something about that circle always struck her as oddly intentional, like he was mimicking something he hadn't been taught.

Her phone buzzed on the counter.

Breaking News: WORLD BROADCAST AT NOON—Major
Global Peace Initiative Unveiling.

She narrowed her eyes. Another one?

The TV had been hyping some “solution” to the rising chaos—wars in the east, food shortages, digital unrest. There had been whispers for months: governments meeting in secret, CEOs stepping down, strange satellite patterns. But lately, everything felt like a buildup. Like the air was waiting for something to break.

She grabbed the remote and clicked on the TV. The screen flickered.

Then—smooth music. A white and gold logo appeared on a black background:

A.M.A.B.U.S.

Adaptive Mechanism for Advancing Behavioral Unity and Security.

The name hit her like static.

Her stomach turned, but she didn't know why.

A polished woman in a pale blazer came onscreen, standing at a sleek podium. Her eyes sparkled, but there was something hollow behind them—like light that didn't warm.

“Today, we usher in a new era of trust, protection, and global healing,” she said. “The A.M.A.B.U.S. System will unify our behaviors, identities, and values under a safe, secure digital framework.” Abby didn't blink.

“No more threats. No more disunity. A.M.A.B.U.S. will guide us toward behavioral harmony through adaptive biometric intelligence. Every citizen will be invited to participate freely—for their safety, their health, and their future.”

Her words were smooth. Soothing. Too smooth.

Abby's hands began to tremble.

She glanced at Elias. He was frozen now—just watching the screen. One of his toy animals had fallen sideways. She kneeled beside him instinctively, shielding his view with her arm.

“Mama?” he whispered.

“Yeah, baby?”

“That’s the system from your dream.” Her breath caught.

There it was.

She hadn’t spoken it aloud to anyone. Not the name. Not the black walls or silver lights. Not the rows of people with glowing wrists and emotionless faces.

But her son knew.

Somewhere inside her, something holy stirred—and something evil took notice.

