

## 10 Breaking Through

*I remember – when I was LILITH.*

From within the island’s belajoun tree, Janey’s maternal grandparents, Setebos and Cora, materialized. Simultaneously, a shimmering portal appeared closer to where she stood, winking away as her maternal grandparents – Ariel and Zoey – stepped through, onto the field of snowy flowers nodding in the twilight breeze. The former Celestial Engineers and the eternal Beatrices walked towards her, four members of Janey Babson’s miraculous family.

Ariel regarded his granddaughter. “You remember,” he simply stated.

“Yes, I remember,” Janey declared. “When I had children. When...” She paused, trying not to cry. “When I died – and left my family to suffer without me.” She felt her face contort. “And you knew! You knew and kept it secret the whole time, you KNEW. And YOU –” her eyes flashed with rage towards Setebos – “YOU made me forget –” She stopped, breaking down with angry tears.

Ariel spoke calmly, “You have every right to be angry. But if you truly remember everything, then you know why we had to keep this knowledge hidden from you.”

Janey stood, not answering at first. But then she suddenly exclaimed, “ARRRRGH!” She wiped her eyes with the palms of her hands. “YES. I know why, and I know it was the right thing to do. But twenty-three years! Twenty-three fucking years not knowing, wondering what the hell was wrong with me! Do you know how that feels?”

Her grandparents responded with silence.

Janey stared at them and then realized that she knew their stories – their pain and their triumph – to become the persons standing before her. Her grandmothers, who surmounted violence from the hands of others; her grandfathers, who fought through their own self-inflicted trauma. “Hah. Of course you do. How could I forget?” Janey shook her head and suddenly burst into laughter. But then the laughter became hysterical, and when they became gulping sobs, both Cora and Zoey came to her. They held Janey as she bowed her head into their caring arms, her body shaking.

“It’s okay, sweetie, it’s okay,” Zoey whispered, stroking her granddaughter’s hair.

Cora, appearing not much older than Janey, looked towards Setebos. “Tea,” she said.

The wine-dark winged angel nodded. With a twist of a hand, a blanket appeared underneath Cora, Zoey, and Janey. A small wooden tray and a mug filled with hazel herb tea appeared at one

corner of the blanket. He saw Zoey gently set Janey down on the blanket, speaking to her in soothing murmurs as they sat, and Cora reached over and handed the mug to Janey.

“Setebos.”

He turned to Ariel, whose snow-white wings glowed in the twilight.

“Janey’ll be all right. But we need to put up the shield now that she’s here.”

Setebos nodded. “Right.”

With strong wingbeats, both angels took to air, flew straight up, and then separated to opposite ends of the island.

Drinking her tea, Janey felt the mild soporific take effect as the jarring return of her previous life’s memories finally began to integrate with the memories of her current self. She looked up, seeing her angel grandfathers. She remembered clearly Setebos’ intervention seven years ago, when Aleph accidentally summoned her. But now she also remembered vividly the first time she saw Ariel – before he was even her grandfather.

On the day Lilith died.

#

*GRANTED.*

At the sound of the voice in the Reboot, everything around them changed.

A dizzying stream of cold stars flew past, and the last family of Kamret found themselves in darkness dimly illuminated with innumerable glowing pinpoints of soft blue. In the change, they had separated and were frightened when neither angel nor nephil could produce a light using their energy signature. Shaken, they called out to each other in hollow echoes as their eyes adjusted to the sudden change of light, and they reunited in the center of a vast cave, the ceiling high above them.

“Wait,” Lilith cried out, her voice echoing against the unseen cave walls. “Where are my mother and father?”

A strangely familiar voice answered from the darkness: “Here.”

All turned to a slight shimmer, from which an angel with glowing white wings and short-cropped graying hair stepped through, holding a glowing, red sphere.

“Ariel!” both Baraqel and Kokabiel exclaimed, relief and fear comingling in their voices.

Lilith started. She recognized that name – the commanding officer of the Celestial Engineers, in the containment room before the Watchers came to Earth. Her children, sensing the alarm in Kokabiel and their parents, drew closer to each other and closer to Lilith. *I must be brave*, she thought. “Where are we?” she asked. “And how are my parents here?”

But Baraqel, who had been peering at the cave walls and then at Ariel, suddenly asked, “WHEN are we, Ariel?”

Lilith turned to Baraqel. “What?”

Ariel nodded. “What Baraqel is seeing is a shift in the time signature of my energy, Lilith. Angels are celestial creatures who can travel not only through space but also time; the Reboot imparts that ability as well. You’ve arrived at a time very far after the Reboot, and the space is on the other side of the planet from where Kamret used to be.”

“We are still on Earth,” Kokabiel said.

“Yes,” Ariel replied.

Realization hit Kokabiel. “So – we passed the Reboot.”

Baraqel stared at Ariel. “That means – that means....” He hesitated, as if not wanting to jeopardize the hope blooming within him.

Ariel smiled. “Yes. Thanks to the intercession of Lilith, your Beatrice, your status and Kokabiel’s status have been restored. And even your nephil children have been granted a place in the post-Reboot universe, although they cannot remain on Earth.”

“Why?” Lilith demanded, as she felt her children cling even closer to her.

“Being the progeny of angel and Beatrice, they are too powerful to exist with humans. The only reason you are able to be here unharmed, Lilith, is because this cave is in a pocket dimension with energy dampeners in place, even though it’s nestled within an island on post-Reboot Earth. But once they leave the pocket dimension, they must leave Earth.”

“Ma –” Aleph began to protest.

Lilith placed a silencing hand on his arm. She turned back to Ariel. “Then where would they go?”

“They are free to travel anywhere beyond Earth, since they are children of this universe. Just like Baraqel and Kokabiel, who are celestial creatures, are free to return to Heaven.”

“But I’m human – would I be able to be with my children?” she asked. “And my parents – they are human, too – wait,” she interrupted herself. “You said they are here, but how are they here?”

“Ah,” Ariel said. “First, I must share something about myself that not even Baraqel and Kokabiel know.” With a soft sigh, he sent to all of them in that cave an extraordinary account: of his time as a fallen angel; his restoration through his Beatrice, several millennia later; and the redemption of his beloved Miranda, in the scouring waters of the Purgatorial Sea.

Baraqel stared agog at his former commanding officer, exclaiming, “You FELL? YOU? And Miranda – became HUMAN?”

Kokabiel frowned, as if troubled, but his only comment was “Charon duty – that’s your post-Reboot role.”

“Yes,” Ariel said. “I shepherd dying humans’ transition to Sacred Space, safeguarding their souls from the clutches of Hell.”

“That’s why you’re here then,” Kokabiel said. “Because we were with humans at the Reboot.”

“Correct,” Ariel replied. “Even though you, Baraqel, and the nephil children are immortal, you were together with mortals, and Lilith, Rifan and Zaia are in my purview. Lilith, as a Beatrice, is a simple transition, but Rifan and Zaia are another matter.” He paused. “That’s why there are in here.” He held up the glowing red sphere.

“HOW?” Lilith pulled away from her children, to peer closer, but Ariel drew back. “What’s going on?”

Baraqel asked, “Ariel, may I?” He held out his hand, and once the sphere touched his palm, he winced. “Oh my God.”

“WHAT?” Lilith asked, her patience wearing thin. “Tell me!”

“Lilith,” Baraqel said, his voice shaky, “your mother had been living in her own personal Hell for decades when the Reboot came. Even though we tried to break through to her before, her will was too strong – is still too strong – in her belief that leaving you was the right choice, even now....” He shook his head.

“What are you saying?” Lilith asked, but she knew. “Don’t tell me my mother is in Hell!”

“Lilith –”

“No.... NO!” she interrupted.

“LILITH,” Baraqel continued, “she’s not alone. Your father stayed with her – and a Heaven-bound soul can’t stay in Hell. It’s incompatible.”

She stared at him, bewildered. “What does that even mean?”

Ariel replied, “It means that your parents are locked together in an existential Limbo, caught in the part of Hell that is on the liminal border of Sacred Space. Your father is shielding your mother from Hell’s denizens trying to get to her, trying to consume her – but he is also fighting against his own Heaven-bound soul, trying to pull him away from Hell, leaving your mother behind. In order to stabilize your father’s condition, Central created a pocket dimension within Hell.” Ariel held out his palm, and Baraqel gingerly handed the sphere over. “But this stasis field won’t stop your father’s

torture, and it won't save your mother either, even though his love for your mother is as strong as her self-damning despair. They are at an impasse.”

Lilith shook her head, listening to the explanation of two former Celestial Engineers, and cried out in frustration, “Is there NOTHING we can do?”

Kokabiel, who had been listening to both angels, said, “You're giving us a choice, aren't you Ariel.”

“Explain,” Lilith demanded, her temper barely in check.

“Lilith,” Kokabiel said, “you sent ‘Be happy – be free,’ at the Reboot; thanks to you, we are. You, Baraqel, the children, and I are free to leave – right now – to have our ‘happily ever after.’ But that means leaving Rifan and Zaia frozen in Limbo. So the question is, can we truly be happy in our freedom, knowing we've left two of our own behind?”

“You're telling me that any one of us can choose to stay, to help them?” Lilith turned to Ariel. “Is that the choice we can make?”

“Yes,” Ariel said. “But it's not any one of you. In order for both Rifan and Zaia to have a chance to escape Hell, all of you must choose to stay.”

“All or nothing?” she asked.

“Yes. But it will be painful, for all of you. It will not be easy, nor swift. So be certain that you're willing to sacrifice your personal freedom for this.”

“Ma,” Aleph suddenly said, “I want to help.”

As if released from their own stasis, the rest of Lilith's children agreed, “Me, too, Ma,” even the youngest ones, little Dalet and Limeh— “We want to help, too, Mama.”

“Oh my loves,” she said, trying not to cry as her six children converged and hugged her as one group. She looked at Kokabiel, who gave a silent nod, and then Baraqel.

“Do you even need to wonder, Lilith?” Baraqel asked. He reached for her hand and kissed it.

Kokabiel regarded Ariel again. “Obviously we've all chosen to stay – and you already have a plan in place for that, don't you.”

“Yes.”

Kokabiel asked, “What is it?”

Ariel nodded at the sphere. “First is ensuring Rifan and Zaia's safety. I'll remove the energy dampeners so that you, Baraqel, and the children will have full access to your powers. Then Baraqel and I can join their pocket dimension with your own. We'll open a keyhole portal to the other

dimension, wherein you can slip through. As Sentry, you are best suited to serve as a shield for Rifan and Zaia.”

Lilith said, “Oh God, Kokabiel, I didn’t know –”

“I did,” Kokabiel said. “It makes sense.”

“But –”

“As Ariel said, I’m Sentry, Lilith,” Kokabiel replied. “I’ve been wounded by Lucifer’s army before. It didn’t destroy me then. It won’t destroy me now.”

She shook her head. “Stubborn as always,” she said, bittersweet. “What will Baraqel and the children do?” she asked.

Ariel replied, “Baraqel will remain on the other side of the boundary. He’ll keep Hell from creeping into your pocket dimension and will regenerate Kokabiel as your parents’ shield. Kokabiel and Baraqel will be like two sides of a lock.”

Baraqel nodded in assent.

“The children,” Ariel continued, “will stay with Baraqel. They will provide power as Baraqel serves as the barrier against Hell and regenerator of Kokabiel as your parents’ shield. They MUST maintain constant connection with Baraqel, or else Kokabiel will be recalled back here, exposing Rifan and Zaia to the denizens of Hell.”

The children, overwhelmed, could only stare.

“What will I do?” Lilith asked.

“Ah,” Ariel said, and whenever he said that, Lilith had already learned that he was about to say something unusual. “The second part – preparing the ‘key’ to release your parents from their pocket dimension in Hell.” He paused. “Once the energy dampeners are removed, Lilith, you’ll die.”

Baraqel and Kokabiel kept silent, waiting for clarification, but the children gave sharp outcries of alarm. Lilith hushed them, trying to keep calm herself. Then she asked, “How is that part of the plan?”

“Lilith, you are a Beatrice, but your energy signature as Lilith isn’t enough. You already know that you can’t withstand nephil energy, and you weren’t able to break through to both your father and mother during your time before the Reboot. As for your ability to cross over into Hell Actual, even with the Heaven-bound soul of a Beatrice, you don’t have that strength. So you’ll need to boost that signal strength. Having another scionic incarnation cycle, entangled with a more rigorous ancestral strain, will give you that boost.”

Lilith stared blankly at Ariel. “Can you please explain that NOT like a Celestial Engineer?”

Baraqel, breaking his silence, answered, “He means you’ll be reborn into a more powerful family, Lilith.”

“What?” She face grew incredulous. “I’ll be a baby and then grew up – as someone else’s child? But won’t I forget who I am – was –” She shook her head. “Please explain.”

Ariel replied, “True, your memories as Lilith will undergo Lethe sleep, but they will be intact, albeit dormant. When your second self is mature enough to have both memories integrated into one, you will remember, for it will indicate that your Lilith energy signature and your second self’s energy signature have also merged into a stronger signal strength, to break through the Lethe sleep. Your energy signal will be a hybrid of the two, and when that happens, then you’ll be able to return here, without harm to yourself. Then you’ll complete the third part of the plan, which is crossing into Hell and freeing your mother and your father.”

Lilith frowned. “But what if – what if I don’t remember? What if my memories don’t come back?”

Ariel replied, “There is that risk. But the family you will be born into has counteracted Lethe sleep before, becoming stronger as a result. Memories – and the knowledge and power that come with those memories – have returned. I’m certain in my belief that your memories as Lilith will return.”

“But – how can you be so certain?”

He looked at her, as if considering his options. “You’ll forget this anyways until you remember.” He paused. “Lilith, I’m certain in my belief because that family is MY human family – my Beatrice’s family. You will be my daughter AJ’s child.”

“Ariel...” Lilith stared at him, and her astonishment was mirrored by Kokabiel, Baraqel, and her children.

“It is the surest way to increase the odds for success,” Ariel said, “because not only will your mother be the child of a Beatrice, but your father, too.”

“You,” she realized, “will be my grandfather.”

“I suppose I will be.” Ariel paused. “Which means, to use AJ’s words, seeing you die will really really SUCK.”

Lilith blinked, feeling her heart beat hard. “Will it hurt?”

“No,” Ariel said. “You’ll be in Lethe sleep first.”

“Hah. Well, that part I’m familiar with,” she said. She gave a small smile to Baraqel, who stared at her.

“Make your goodbyes, Lilith,” Ariel said. He then walked away from them, stopping at the centermost area of the cave, and set down the red sphere. Then with his fingertips, he began to mark out on the ground a wide energy circle around it, the circle glowing white in the blue-tinged darkness.

“Lilith,” Baraqel said. His voice was so forlorn that Lilith pulled him towards her for a tight embrace. “I’m sorry for –”

“Idiot,” she interrupted. “I forgave you before the Reboot. Don’t make me knock some sense in you.”

“I’ll miss you, Lilith,” he murmured.

“I know.” She gave him a soft kiss, touched his face, and broke away, turning to her children.

“Ma,” each of her children said, and she gathered them up, embracing all of them, with the last one being Aleph, who was taller than she was. “I’ll be back – you’ll see,” she said, peering into the blue eyes of her oldest son.

“I know, Ma,” he said, softly. Then he turned away before she could see him cry.

She finally turned to Kokabiel. “My dear,” she said to him.

Unused to displaying his affection for her before the others, Kokabiel said, “I hope you remember us.”

She reached for him then, hugging him as tightly as she did with Baraqel. “How could I forget you?” she replied. “You’re my best friend.”

“Lilith,” he pulled back a bit so she could see his face and his somber amber eyes. “If you don’t remember me –”

“What are you saying –”

He continued, “then it’s okay. I don’t regret doing this – shielding your parents. It’ll be like shielding you.”

“Kokabiel –”

“It’s okay if you forget me because I’ll never forget you.” Then he kissed her forehead and let her go.

In the end, it was Ariel who was with her as she lay down on the cool, dark ground. As he placed a gentle hand over her forehead, the Lethe sleep beginning to lull her into unconsciousness, she saw her wondrous children spread out along the glowing circle. In the center, facing each other, sat her two foolish angels, the red sphere which held her parents between them. As they waited for the energy dampeners to drop away, they dared not look at Lilith, lest they were tempted to change their minds.



Even as the Lethe sleep finally took hold, she still heard Kokabiel’s final sending when she was still Lilith.

*Farewell.*

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Sipping her tea, Janey saw Ariel above her, and she shook her head in disbelief, that this angel whom she had known since she was a newborn in diapers was also the same one who had first seen her as a married mother of six children. Then her eyes drew to Setebos, and she thought of what Cora had told her as she drank her tea. “It’s incredible, Ina, that until I went missing seven years ago, you, Ino, my mom, and my dad didn’t even know of the existence of the pocket dimension – and the fact that I was another person in a previous life! I mean, weren’t you pissed off when you found out?”

Cora gave a snort of laughter. “Of course, Janey! But that’s Need to Know for you. The less people who knew otherwise, the better.”

“But wasn’t that a huge risk, Ina? What if I had never remembered?”

Cora shook her head. “Even though Lethe sleep repressed all memories of Lilith in order for you to grow up as Janey, we all believed that, in time, those memories would come back. The effects of Lethe sleep don’t last in our family.”

“Like you,” Janey commented.

“Yes. And like me, you had to recover those memories on your own.” She looked up, seeing Ariel. “With his Charon duty, Ariel knew of your previous life. Of course, once Zoey became his partner in that duty, he told her. But they’re not a continuous part of your upbringing, so there was no risk in her knowing.”

“Sorry for keeping this secret, my dear,” Zoey said, but Janey gave a soft smile that said, *It’s okay.*

“However,” Cora continued, “David and AJ, as your parents, are an intricate part of your life; them knowing might have influenced how they raised you, so they never knew until Ariel had to reveal it to them, seven years ago.”

“That’s why my dad got so mad!” Janey realized.

“Yes,” Cora said. “In fact, your dad was so angry that he refused to set foot on this island until you were allowed to come back, and I don’t blame him.” She shook her head, remembering how enraged her son had been. “But, angry as he was, even he understood that you needed to grow up as your own person, as Janey Babson. The same went for Setebos and me: our duty is overseeing Earth’s

unfettered nephilim, so we also had no Need to Know about the matters of this special arrangement – until we needed to know as well.”

“When Ino had to find me,” Janey realized. “But why didn’t Lolo go instead?”

Cora gave another bark of laughter. “Because once Setebos and I were briefed, then it became part of OUR purview; Setebos immediately sent his acknowledgement to Aleph. And if he was going to have a pocket dimension with a precarious gateway to Hell under himself and me, then he was definitely going to make his presence known to the gatekeepers.”

Zoey peered at Janey. “Are you okay, dear?”

Her head swimming with several lifetimes’ worth of memories, Janey replied, “Not really, Lola. But that doesn’t matter.” She lifted up her mug, drained the remaining cold dregs of her hazel herb tea, and set it down with a resounding *thok* into the tray. “My memories are back, my children are bleeding themselves as fuel cells, Baraqel is locked in agony, my first parents are stuck in Hell, and Kokabiel is being tortured by demons on their behalf. And I’m supposed to cross into Hell and save my mother?” Janey’s tone of voice grew higher at the end, sounding agitated and mildly hysterical. “I don’t know who I am anymore – am I Janey? Or am I Lilith?”

Cora and Zoey glanced at each other and then shifted on the blanket so that Cora sat on Janey’s left, Zoey on the right. With their arms wrapped around Janey’s waist and shoulders, they regarded the young woman who strongly resembled Zoey herself and yet, through the quirk of genetics, was also the 21<sup>st</sup> century doppelganger of pre-Reboot Lilith.

Cora said, “Yes, you were once Lilith, and a part of you will always be Lilith. And Lilith is scared and angry that she had to bear this burden alone, to be the strong one. Zoey and I know how that feels like, my sweet girl. My God, we know.” Cora paused. “But you are Janey Babson, too. And even though Janey Babson is also scared and angry, she is also the scion of angels and Beatrices who will always be with you.”

Janey stared up into the sky, seeing Ariel and Setebos finish installing the double-barrier, in preparation for her return to the pocket dimension. “What if I fail my family?” she asked. “What if I fail all of you?”

“So you fail,” Zoey replied bluntly. “So what?”

Janey started and turned to Zoey, seeing cobalt blue eyes that matched her own. “Lola?”

“Janey,” she explained, “in spite of everything, you’re still human, and failing when doing hard things is human. So if you fail, no one will find fault in that. Not me, not the rest of us, not anyone. In the end, it will be Zaia’s choice.”

“But whatever the outcome, Janey,” Cora added, “you are our beloved granddaughter.”

“Yes,” Zoey agreed, giving Janey a soft squeeze of her shoulders. “No matter what happens, you are forever our family, my dearest girl.”

“Ah,” Janey said. She turned her eyes again to the sky. “Ina, Lola -- you’re gonna make me cry again.”

“That’s fine,” Cora said, smiling. “We have plenty of shoulders to cry on.”

Janey shook her head, smiling. “I’m okay now.”

With her dual memories integrated into one, Janey easily saw Ariel and Setebos channeling their energy – one shining alabaster-white, the other silver-gray – to form a double-walled energy barrier that effectively sequestered the island from the rest of the Earth. No one had to tell her why they needed to install such a rigorous shield since she would be entering a pocket dimension that contained her powerful nephil children and then another pocket dimension that nested in Hell itself. If anything, she hoped that her grandfathers’ shield was strong enough to contain the explosion of energy if the plan went catastrophically wrong. Once installed, she saw them descend from the sky. She and her grandmothers rose up to meet them as they touched down in front of the blanket, with the silence and precision of owls.

“How’re you feeling, Janey?” Setebos asked, holding out his hands.

She grasped them, and in the darkening twilight she could see not only his silvery-gray energy signature but her own in her arms and hands: twining strands of Setebos and Cora’s matching silver-gray, Ariel’s white, Zoey’s blue, and Lilith’s fluorescent indigo. “Better now, Ino. I’m sorry for yelling at you earlier.”

He shook his head and gave Janey’s hands a reassuring squeeze. “Like Ariel said, you had every right to be angry.”

“Still.” She looked towards Ariel standing behind Setebos. “You, too, Lolo. I’m sorry.” She saw him open his arms, and she moved forward for his hug. In his warm embrace, Janey felt her grandfather tremble. She pulled back a little to see his face and care-worn blue eyes. “Lolo,” she said, surprised, “are you afraid?”

“Of course,” Ariel responded. “You’re my granddaughter, and I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“Can’t be helped, Lolo,” she said. She paused. “Free will always complicates everything –” she began.

“—especially when love is involved,” he finished. He kissed the top of her head, as if she was still a little girl, and sent what needed to be done.

Janey stepped away then, her four grandparents behind her, as she regarded the quiet field, the silhouette of the belajoun tree, and the darkening sky. She inhaled, taking in the sweet scent of hazel herb, and exhaled hard. Through the shimmer of the shield, she could see the stars appear in the coming night. She turned around to them. “I’m ready,” she said.

Setebos nodded. Before he took flight again, he kissed Cora and then leapt up, gaining height before stretching out his wings. He flew until he crossed through the island barrier and stopped just on the other side, hovering over them. Janey knew that he was monitoring the integrity of the double-walled shield from the outside. Meanwhile Ariel stayed on the ground, to monitor the shield from the inside, as well as survey the integrity of the pocket dimension from the outside. With a small series of twisting motions with Cora’s left hand, the air next to them began to shimmer and then a glowing portal appeared. Cora stepped through first.

Zoey was about to follow, but she paused. She turned to Ariel and kissed him softly. “I always do, Ed,” she said, using her private nickname for Ariel, and she stepped into the portal.

“I told her to be careful,” Ariel said before Janey could ask. “As should you.”

She regarded Ariel, a former superior officer of the Celestial Engineers and the patriarch of her miraculous family of angels, humans, and those in-between. “You really are just a Mama Bear inside, aren’t you,” she said.

He smiled at that. “Now you know my secret.” He stepped aside.

As she entered the portal, Janey recalled what Ariel had said as part of his sending -- *Once you cross into the pocket dimension this time, Janey, you can’t cross again. Your arrival provides the final part of the pocket dimension’s stability; once you leave again, it will collapse.* With a sharp breath, she emerged from the portal, on the other side, and she felt the portal immediately wink out behind her.

Janey stood for a beat in the cool silence of the cave, darkly illuminated by innumerable blue glowworms from above. As Janey, she knew that the dimension lay in the centermost cavern within the island, which had been Cora and Setebos’ pre-Reboot home, before Janey’s father was born. As Lilith, she knew that the dimension was the post-Reboot connection that the last family of Kamret had to Earth. Both memories hit her with a keen double-stab of déjà vu.

But then the moment passed, and she approached the glowing circle. Waiting for her, Cora stood just outside of the circle’s perimeter, and Zoey stood nearest to the circle’s central focal point.

Like the incident seven years ago, Janey saw six kneeling figures, separated equidistant from each other along the circle, with heads bowed low towards the center. But now she recognized them – her six children when she was Lilith. She recognized the fluorescing indigo of Lilith’s energy

signature within them but also Baraqel’s golden energy entwined with the indigo. The dual energy emanated from their bodies, forming thin tributaries that flowed towards the center, where Baraqel lay. Unconscious, his wings wrapped tightly around him, Baraqel lay curled into a fetal position. The children’s energy flowed into him – just enough to sustain him. Then it flowed underneath him, through the paper-thin barrier separating Earth and Hell, towards a place like submerged smoky glass – where Kokabiel lay, whose position mirrored his partner on the other side.

Cora stood six feet behind Aleph, indicating where Janey was to stand within the circle. Janey took a deep breath, thinking, *I can do this*. She crossed the glowing border of the circle, knelt before Aleph’s bowed form, and placed her hands on his bowed head.

Immediately, a thick ribbon of Janey’s hybrid energy flowed from her hands to Aleph, who began to glow with Janey’s energy signature. Like liquid light, the energy split on either side of Aleph, following the circle’s outline, and flowed from one nephil child to the next in two strands – Dalet and Limeh, Isa and Dala – until they rejoined as one with Tallo. With Janey’s infusion, their strained yet unconscious forms relaxed.

Monitoring the children’s progress, Cora declared, “They’ve recovered.”

Janey nodded. Even though she was reluctant to remove her hands from her son’s head, she did so. In doing so, the circle contracted, pulling away from the still-unconscious children, and arrived underneath where she stood. They exhaled, as if they had been holding their breaths, and settled down onto where they were, in a deep, restful sleep.

The six tributaries from the circle continued to flow towards Baraqel, but now Janey was the source. As she stepped closer to Baraqel, the circle narrowed until it circumscribed Janey and Baraqel, with Zoey just outside the circle. Kneeling next to Baraqel’s frozen form, Janey sent the full force of her energy, looking like a massive glowing ribbon. Still, Baraqel lay trapped in pain, as his connection to Kokabiel’s agony remained unchanged. Janey frowned, feeling her energy flow meeting resistance as it tried to cross the dimensional boundary. With a deep breath, she pushed through, the remaining speck of the circle contracting and dissolving underneath her, and Janey felt her energy cross through to the other side. It rushed, unabated, towards Kokabiel in the pocket dimension nestled in Hell.

Janey gasped once it reached Kokabiel, feeling through her energy the other angel’s dire condition.

Baraqel’s eyes flew open as he felt the unexpected change in his connection to Kokabiel. “NO!” he cried out.

Zoey quickly crouched down, next to Baraqel, who reared back, staring at her in bewilderment. She placed her hand directly into Janey’s energy ribbon, as a blinding light emerged around Zoey. In a flash it dissipated, and Zoey gone.

In her stead, just an arm’s length away, lay a barely conscious Kokabiel, twitching and hemorrhaging ichor through his flayed wings. Baraqel began to leap towards Kokabiel, frightened and confused, but an unfamiliar woman rushed past him to Kokabiel’s side while another woman grabbed his arms, holding him back.

“Baraqel!”

He stared at the other woman then – shining with the blinding light of a Beatrice, unfamiliar yet strangely familiar. His green eyes blinking like a newborn, he stared into cobalt blue eyes. “LILITH?” he asked, bewildered.

“YES,” Janey confirmed. She touched his face like she had done all that time ago. “It’s me.”

At that, he flung his gaunt arms around her and sobbed, releasing the pain he had borne in silence. Through her energy, he received her sending of everything that had happened from the last time he saw her to what was happening now – a torrent of memories and emotions and knowledge. In the end, he pulled back and said, “Your name is Janey.” He said the name as if trying out a strange, difficult word.

“Yes.”

“And your grandmothers,” he said, “are the Beatrices of Ariel and Setebos.”

“Yes,” Janey replied. “Zoey and Cora.”

Baraqel looked to his other side then, seeing Cora tend to Kokabiel’s wounds.

Janey’s energy still flowed from himself to Kokabiel, but not towards Hell Actual once Zoey swapped herself with Kokabiel. In conjunction with her own energy, Cora coaxed Janey’s energy to heal the other angel, tending to injuries that Baraqel hadn’t seen since the War in Heaven. Because he was still connected to Kokabiel, he could feel Cora’s healing methods, reminiscent of both Miranda, her first teacher, and Setebos. Baraqel saw deep gashes that exposed bone and sinew sealed up, leaving angry, dark lines. Then the lines became lighter, leaving faint, silvery scars. Kokabiel’s shredded wings, sticky with ichor, became clean and intact with restored, smoky-ash flight feathers that lay neatly against his back. Kokabiel’s labored breathing became slow and even, and his twitching ceased as he relaxed into a peaceful slumber, similar to Baraqel’s six children.

Cora sighed and stood up from her kneel, stretching her shoulders and back, also reminiscent of Miranda.

Baraqel marveled at what he had seen and what he had felt. “Thank you,” he said, amazed.

Cora smiled. “You’re welcome.” She held out an assessing hand, palm out, to both him and then to Kokabiel. She looked at Janey. “You can draw down, my dear.”

Janey nodded in confirmation, and the energy ribbon that she was sharing with Kokabiel and Baraqel retreated back within herself. Kokabiel remained in his peaceful rest, and Baraqel felt fully recovered.

He saw Cora walk towards his children, still lying unconscious all around him and Janey. “Are the children –” began.

“They’re fine,” Janey said. “Like Kokabiel. Like you.”

He frowned, knowing what she had yet to do. “I wish I could do more.”

Janey reached up and touched his face once more. “You’ve done plenty.” Then she pulled his face closer and kissed him.

Baraqel was startled at first, for while Janey looked identical to Lilith, in his head she was an entirely new person – someone whom he didn’t know as intimately as his wife. Yet, at her familiar touch, he responded in kind. Afterwards he said, “I missed you.”

“I know.” She smiled a little. “You weren’t meant to wake up yet. Just like Kokabiel and the children, you need to rest after that extended contact with Hell Actual.”

He shook his head. “You should’ve known that wouldn’t happen. I’m the linchpin; once I felt the balance change, of course I’d wake up.”

“Granted. But now you’ll be here, being worried about me.”

“Lil – I mean, Janey,” he corrected himself, frowning.

“It’s okay,” she said. “I’m Lilith, too.”

He shook his head again. “I’ll always worry about you.”

Instead of answering, she gave another small smile and touched his face again. Then she moved a little, closer to Kokabiel, and lightly swept the other angel’s hair from his closed eyes. Janey leaned down, softly kissed Kokabiel’s forehead, and sat up again with a determination that mirrored her grandmothers.

Baraqel looked at her. “You need to go.”

“Yes.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Keep watch with my Ina Cora.”

He nodded. “Okay.”

She touched his arm, then stood up and walked a few paces away.

Baraqel saw Cora, with practiced efficiency, open a portal from the Earthside pocket dimension to its counterpart in Hell Actual. He saw Janey steel herself before she entered, not looking back, and could feel her strength. Without a doubt, Baraqel knew she could save her mother. *Our Beatrice*, he thought. As the portal closed, he wondered what future lay for him and his partner, who had been restored to unfallenness; the nephil children, who neither belonged in Heaven nor Hell; and the living woman named Janey, of whom only a part was the woman who was once his wife in a world long gone.

Through the memories of Kokabiel, Janey knew what Hell Actual looked like.

It bore bare plains, stone mountains, and desert valleys under a red sky thick with sulfurous clouds crackling with electricity. High-pitched whining from intermingled, constant wails of despair was as palpable as wind. It was a sick, inflamed land, infused with a stifling, stinking heat, all created from a substance produced from the original fallen angels of old.

Through the memories of Malech – when he was the angel Miranda, Ariel’s beloved before Zoey – Janey knew where in Hell Actual the pocket dimension was: a lava river with fiery banks pockmarked with toxic pools as slick as mercury, two leagues away from the center of Hell Actual.

Yet, although far from the vast prison fortress of Pandemonium, which its deluded leader called his palace, the scent of Rifan’s and Zaia’s untouched souls drew Hell’s lackeys like flies to raw meat. The demarcation of a celestial pocket dimension stopped many, but those that could cross over were often the stronger ones. Thus the presence of an unfallen angelic protector – and a Sentry at that – spurred their ravenous frustration into enraged hate, and they poured their hate into the Sentry, ripping away his celestial flesh without rest, the Sentry’s ichor pouring into the infernal land, appearing red like human blood under the red, boiling sky.

When the Sentry suddenly disappeared, at first they believed they had vanquished their enemy as they saw the two human souls exposed. But then a creature appeared whose blinding light burned them with such agony that they screamed, as they suffered wounds like those inflicted on them during the War in Heaven. The hated light filled the entire pocket dimension, and they fled, not daring to come closer, yet raving at the abhorrence of its existence in their realm.

With this knowledge, Janey knew she was safe from Hell Actual when she arrived into the pocket dimension. From her standpoint, she saw Zoey stand as sentry, the Light of Heaven that always lay within her shining forth like it would do during her Charon duty with Ariel. Looking behind Zoey,



Janey saw an all-too-familiar icy wall, as high and wide as far as she could see, and in spite of herself, she began to feel afraid.

“Janey?” Zoey asked, sensing her fear.

“It’s okay, Lola,” she said, staring at the wall before her. “It’s just bringing back bad memories, that’s all.”

“Ah, sweetie,” Zoey said. “I wish I could help you.”

Janey smiled at that, for it was almost exactly like what Baraqel had said. “It’s okay, Lola. I know it has to be me.” It was still strange to Janey, that Zoey could keep back the demons from Hell because in Hell all personhood was stripped away so her energy could affect Hell’s lackeys, yet she was unable to engage either Rifan or Zaia because her personal energy wasn’t entangled with theirs. But Janey’s was. And thus she knew what to do.

Janey squared her shoulders and strode towards the wall. Before it, she placed her hands on the surface. When she was Lilith, she fought with it, trying to burn it away. But now she knew it was a manifestation of Rifan’s protective barrier – to keep Zaia from slipping further away from him. Feeling for Rifan’s energy nestled within Lilith’s, Janey realized that Rifan never meant to shut Lilith out. He was just trying to protect young Lilith in the only way he knew how, just like he had asked Baraqel to be her husband.

Janey reached out, imagining herself as an extension of Rifan, and the hard ice underneath her palms suddenly felt soft and pliable, as if a portion of the wall had turned to a gel. Then it thinned out, into a plasma, allowing Janey to pass through with little resistance. Once she crossed through, the area of the wall where she had entered solidified again. On the other side was a dark space that was much smaller on the inside than it was on the outside. There was just enough space for the familiar tableau: Zaia, incased in dark ice and curled on the ground, unmoving; indigo-fluorescing Rifan pounding at the ice, with no effect, and yet he would not stop. Neither of them noticed the presence of another soul with them.

Witnessing Rifan raise his arms to pound the ice again, she stepped towards him. “Father,” she said. With both hands, she caught his closed fists in mid-strike. “This is not the way.”

Rifan looked frightened at first, wondering why his arms weren’t moving. But then Janey came into focus, and even with the years separating them and unfamiliar clothes, he recognized her. “My child,” he cried out, “how did you come here?”

“I did what you did,” she replied. “I wanted to reach Mother.”

Rifan’s dark eyes roved over Janey’s face, glowing with a multitude of energy signatures.  
“You’re different,” he said, confused.

“I’m stronger,” she said. “And I’ve learned this isn’t the way to reach Mother.”

“How then?” he asked, his voice reedy with exhaustion.

“Make her remember,” Janey said. “what she is to us.”

“HOW?”

Janey placed Rifan’s hands over Zaia’s ice-encased head, and her hands remained covering his.  
“We share our stories.”

Rifan sent.

His hate and anger against Tiros, but then seeing Zaia,

Zaia, smiling,

Zaia, laughing,

Zaia, shining like the sun.

Not caring if he lived or died, when he cared for her in her sickness,

Not caring if he lived or died, when he stood upon his execution block,

As long as Zaia lived.

She championed his innocence – the only one.

Even afraid, she gave herself to him.

Even afraid, she gave a beautiful child to him.

Not caring if he lived or died, when he cared for her in her sickness,

As long as his beloved was there,

As long as Zaia was Zaia,

She made him the happiest man in the world.

*You still do, Rifan sent. Zaia, you still do.*

Janey sent.

Her wonder that her blue eyes matched Zaia’s eyes.

Zaia’s open arms,

Zaia’s soft kisses,

Zaia’s warm tears in a smiling face.

Not caring if Tiros’ people approved of her,

Not caring if Kamret’s people approved of her,  
She kicked her doubt the same way Zaia kicked the Tyrant Tiros’ face.  
Zaia’s anger,  
Zaia’s stubbornness,  
Zaia’s ferocity,  
In the face of killers,  
In the face of angels.  
Zaia’s blood flowed in her blood,  
Flowed in her nephil children’s blood.  
And when being Lilith was not enough,  
She died and lived another life,  
Became Janey,  
So that she could come back to Zaia,  
Her mother.  
*You asked me to forgive you, Janey sent. And I do, Mama. I do.*

Under the ice, eyelids fluttered.  
Under the ice, tears formed.  
Then,  
and then,  
faint and far away,  
an echo of an echo,  
a small voice replied,  
*Thank you.*

“ZAIA –” Rifan began, feeling the ice sublimate underneath his hands.  
And then the darkness exploded into light.