Hell’s Retribution

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Lucifer Unbound

Book 1 of 3

BRANDY MARKS

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# Part One

The universe is born and Lucifer battles heaven and loses, and is thrown into hell, but he also becomes god of the earth. He enters The Garden and causes some mischief, then much later he kidnaps a certain angel, takes her to hell intent on seduction in revenge against another. As you will eventually see, Lucifer is seduced by his own schemes.

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## Prologue

Imagine the dark a complete absence of light and sound, a stillness so absolute the mortal mind cannot conceive. Then, out of nothingness, a power appears and says, “let there be light” and there is light. As the voice spoke, a universe came into being; a hundred billion galaxies are born, and in His breath millions of planets form, while trillions or more stars glorify His eternal radiance.

Such glorious majesty was not to enjoy alone but to be shared by all. So, Adonai created a creature of beauty to cover His throne, and the whole universe embrace. This creature walks upon the Holy mountain among the stones of fire. The first of its kind, called Son of the Morning, the cherub is glorious to behold as he lit the heavens. So, Adonai made more creatures of light and beauty to guard the heavens.

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Wings folded in against a well-muscled back, as he turns around, Michael notes a chiseled chest, the skin glows with health, and sculpted abdominal muscles give off the impression of raw power. The image of perfection is dampened, however, when he opens his mouth to speak. “Damn, one more day and I’d had the pretty little miss, well, you know.” His eyebrows waggle with a smirk on his face. “Her mate does not give her any attention, not until she picked the fruit. Then he stood there like an idiot and didn’t say a word.” Lucifer chuckles.

“What are you going to do Lucifer, talk all day?“ said the Archangel, an eyebrow raised. “If you’re fearful, I understand.”

“Nonsense. Of course I’ll see what He wants.” *Like I have a choice*. “Likely He’s going to complain about what I’ve done. But is it my fault she took the fruit off the tree simply because I suggested it?“

“Well she is an innocent with no worldly experience,” Michael said with a frown of disapproval. “It’s not like you didn’t entice her. After all you did say she wouldn’t die by eating it.“

Lucifer laughs good naturedly. “I know it’s so humorous. Of course she’s not going to die. How could eating an apple cause someone to die; it was a joke, and she was stupid enough to believe. Neither one knows the difference between physical and spiritual death.”

Michael shook his head as he listens to Lucifer prattle on, and looks heavenward as though pleading *Why me?*

“If she had a brain,” Lucifer said. “She’d have known better. This is the  reason it’ll be so easy to ensure human destruction.”

“Lucifer why do you have to provoke him? Do you hate the humans that much, or are you jealous of the One to come?” He slowly shakes his head and sighs deeply.

“Jealous? Just look at the man. I’m supposed to bow down to him, the supposed caretaker of the earth who can’t manage his own wife and home? Spare me please.” Muscles tense, he glares at Michael, his stare both challenging and full of judgment.

“It’s time Lucifer. You’d best get going, find out what he wants.” Unable to look Lucifer in the eye, Michael turns away.

“What do you know?“ A tremor of fear hurtles across his mind like a tsunami, and he steps back, fearful for the first time. Swallowing, his heart hammers painfully, Still, Lucifer pretends unconcern. “Well, I do want to get back to a certain little sweetheart.”

Lucifer cannot begin to imagine the questions Adonai might ask, the answers he would need to give. He knew it could not be the bravado he’d shown Michael. His throat dry, fear slid over him, a black silk sheet, smothering, then, in a blink, he stands before Adonai. Lucifer looks up and swallows, face pale with a film of sweat on his upper lip.

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## 1.In Eternity

Long before, the Cherub, known as Son of the Dawn chose a name for himself. “I shall be called, Lucifer, Bringer of Light.” Walking about on the stones of fire at his feet, gazing over Adonai’s holy mountain, he mutters, *This pitiful space is all I have when the whole universe should be mine.* Am *I not the bringer of light, beautiful to behold*? Eyes gleam, a warm blanket of pleasure covers him. Stars light the darkness and the colorful nebulae, a cloud of gas and dust in the vast space, an indistinct silhouette against the luminous matter.

The universe now filled with stars, galaxies, planets and more are a veritable buffet of beauty. “Those fools truly believe He created all this in six days,” he said to those who follow him about. “He couldn’t have done it without me. Is it not made up of light, my light?” His gaze lands upon the angels who quickly nod in agreement.

“It’s my light that warms the entire universe.” His chest expands as he takes a deep breath, and gazes at all he’s done: the nebula, and star clusters like the one the humans one day would name the Milky Way. *They cannot even imagine what took place as it came into being*. Lucifer smiles. “You weren’t here then,” he said to the angels standing about. “Even I was astonished.” His arms spread wide to indicate the expansion as it took place. Faces brighten, mouths hang open, and their eyes glow with excitement as they imagine what he’s seen. Yet he knew no one could; you had to have been there.

“The whole of space in chaos looked like an enormous explosion of fireworks all at once, stretching away to infinity, powered by an invisible irresistible force. Was it His? Perhaps.” He shrugs. “You could see the clouds of gases come together, striking with such force. Mostly, though, they came together in a thundering crash of light.” Smiling he looks off into the vastness of space.

“Why did he create it as he did?” He asks, knowing the angels have no idea, and each shook its head. “Likely, He didn’t want me to know,” he said, snarling. “My light came first! But did He notice? No.”

Lucifer ignores the fact, the heat from the universe's creation made it too hot for light to shine. He’d had to wait eons before he could add his light. Still, delighted at another memory, he said. “It was amazing at the creation.”His hands then came together in a clap of power of such force the angels had to cover their ears, as the sound rang across the galaxy, and a star exploded. “Did you see it?” He laughed.

Mouths hanging open, most had not, but they heard the explosion. “Then, it broke into a dense fog made up of particles.” Gazing at them with scorn. “You cannot begin to imagine as the light like a cloud spread throughout space.” He leans in close to the celestials, his own eyes wide and glowing with the telling of his story. Lucifer breathes deeply, throws back his head imagining it all taking place once again.

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“Is he for real?” one of the angels whispers to another.

“Hush. Don’t question. Who knows what he’d do with his power? To stay in his good graces. . .”

The other interrupts. “Why do you care if you’re in his good graces? He is not the creator and ruler of all.”

Eyes widening, the other backs away, and whispered, “He may be the next ruler of the universe. What do you imagine Lucifer would do were he to hear what you’re saying?”

“Like I care,” he said, now aware of a dark shadow falling over him, he looks into eyes that gleam cruelly. Mouth suddenly dry, he is silent a heartbeat. “Lord, we are discussing. . .” he stops speaking, and wonders *Had he heard? What would he do?*

“What is it you don’t care about?” Arms crossed, his eyes narrow, cold and calculating. “Would you care to elucidate?”

“No, my lord. I believe it’s time for me to leave.” He licks his lips, and swallows. “I’ve work to do.” He hurries away.

Lucifer turns to the other angel and glances at him from head to toe, then asks, “Do you care to hear the story?”

“Why yes, my Lord. I surely would.”

“Do you wonder about the darkness before my stars formed?” The other angels are gathered about, watching.

“Yes, my Lord. Yes indeed,” stammers the angel, eager to please.

Shaking his head side to side, Lucifer continues. “I’ve considered it a very long time. The first stars formed from the gases collapsing in on themselves.” A smile spreads his lips. “It was almost magical.” Realizing a truth, he ceases to speak and turns away. *Magical. Humm. What if there were magical creatures upon the earth? Interesting idea.*

The angels, faces downcast at the story’s end, for they’d hoped to hear more, but Lucifer’s lost in his own thoughts. *I should’ve destroyed the worthless glob of water back then,* he grumbles to himself*.*

Yet, time and again he returns to the blue planet, covered in water, watching as it changes. Then one day he knows its purpose, and his fury mounts. Recalling the dark matter and its attraction to ordinary matter, he has a plan for using it. *There’s not enough of any consequence, so He won’t notice what I’ve done.*

Lucifer’s imagination takes over; heart pounding, chest thrust out, he envisions it all. *My time to rule has come!* Pleasure blooms within, in an almost orgasmic rush. *First, I must see if Adonai will concede His rule of the universe to me.* Lucifer knows he himself will not yield a thing, *yet one must appear willing*, he snickers to himself as malevolent thoughts swirl in his active brain.

It takes but a thought to be in Adonai’s presence and in a blink, he stands before heaven’s ruler but his courage flees. Before he can ask for an audience, Adonai’s new project grabs his attention. Turning towards it he wonders but remains silent until Adonai acknowledges him.

“Lucifer, Son of the Dawn! You’re doing well in all your efforts. So much brightness in those dark corners. Isn’t it amazing what a little light shining in the dark will do?”

“Thank you, Lord. What I came to ask was. . .” He stops speaking, seeing Adonai is not listening.

Involved with his project, Adonai doesn’t seem to hear Lucifer until he looks and says, “Do you see this world forming, and taking forever, but so worth it! See the deserts and seascapes, and those mountains rising! Splendid, are they not?”

Not waiting for an answer, Adonai says, “Come, look at the garden. What do you think of it?”

“Yes Lord. But what’s its purpose?” Lucifer sees something odd. “What are those?” He points to some peculiar creatures he sees in varied shapes and sizes they roam about the landscape.

“I haven’t named them yet. I’ll make a human out of the earths dust. He can name them; he and his mate will care for the earth and its garden.” Adonai smiles at all He has in mind, with a far-off look.

Lucifer scorns Adonai. *I suppose He can see it before Him like it’s a miracle or something.* Yet he feels the fear begin and says, “Lord, I came to ask about creating in another universe perhaps, a place beyond here. I’ve some wonderful ideas.”

“All your projects are terrific, Son of the Dawn. You’ve placed so much light into the darkness the heavens are glorious. Those will be for the One to come and build upon.” He pauses seeing Lucifer’s expression and says, “You seem disappointed. You know of my Son to be born and his purpose upon the earth, do you not?”

Flushing, Lucifer’s lips flatten to a thin line. *Why am I not the one?* he snarls to himself. *He’d be better off destroying them*. Eyes narrow, his lips turn down, marring his perfect features. He glances at Adonai. Arms crossed over chest and starts to speak then stops. Finally he asks, “What can he do I cannot?”

“You need to ask? You of all the celestials know His purpose. One you’d not undertake were you willing and you’re not.”

Opening his mouth to speak, silent a heartbeat. His cheeks flare with spots of color, teeth clench, a tightness forms in his chest and his jaw muscles twitch.

Lucifer, unable hear Adonai’s thoughts (*his distorted angel powers, vile imaginings, and petty jealousies),* did hear what He said. “I’m asking you to have faith. Will you trust me, Lucifer?”

Not answering, stalking off, he returns to Andromeda Nine muttering to himself. *Why should I trust Him? He created me before those creatures*. Head in his hands he ruminates. *He loves those mortals more. I am nothing, no longer His beloved.*

Lucifer rubs his chest, a sharp pain sears and he wipes away tears, angry at himself for having them. “I’ll show him. I was willing to work it out, but not now,” he says aloud to himself, scowling.

“I will rise to the highest heavens and sit on the throne. All His power will be mine.” Lucifer’s elation swells. “My throne will be far above His, and I will rule the universe." Once bright, his light now has dimmed as dark clouds of hatred shadow Lucifer. Pain like a dull knife tears through him with absolute brutality.

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Adonai watches Lucifer stalk away, knowing an evil has grown in him and considers, *Perhaps one day. . .* The thought left unspoken for Adonai knows it is not to be, not yet. He also knows what must be and calls to his archangel, “Michael, the rebellion is soon to begin.

“I know your friend Andras follows Lucifer so warn him and the others too. Lucifer will make his move soon. The cherubs and seraphs must know what is coming.” Adonai watches as Michael leaves on his way to carry out heaven’s defense and warn the heavenly hosts.

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Meanwhile, Lucifer seethes. *The brightest galaxy thanks to me. He humiliated, ignored me*. He paces the heavens seeing the nebulae burn and stars flare with his ruminating as his hands weave starlight to form the first black hole, pulling in the surrounding light of many stars. I’ll see to it my light no longer shines in His heaven.

*I was the light of the heaven’s but no, he must have another. I’m not good enough.* Envy of the One rises within. *He doesn’t seem to see all I’ve done.* Lucifer’s eyes look upon the light he’s set in the heavens. *Now I must work to have what should be mine. Still, it will be worth it, once the heavens are within my power.*

Gnashing his teeth, Lucifer abandons the holy mountain to pursue other interests. *If Adonai can create a universe, I can also.* Envisioning the worlds he will create, he dives into the black hole. Upon his return, he pursues once again heaven’s takeover.

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Adonai heard rumors and knows*, I must deal with this directly.* “Lucifer, come my adored one.” *I want to hear him speak it.*

Hearing the voice of the Lord, Lucifer rolls his eyes yet answers. While all celestials have freewill, angel, seraph, or cherub, they all obey Adonai’s voice, and Lucifer comes before the Lord of heaven.

“What is it You desire?” He inquires, raising an eyebrow, his voice laced with sarcasm. “Have I offended you, Lord?” The corner of Lucifer’s mouth rises with a look of cool detachment he knows Adonai sees, and he savors the moment.

Adonai smiles. “Lucifer, you are so precious to me, set above in the heavens to cover my very throne. You had all of heaven to enjoy.” His hands move out to indicate the universe. “Now it is I who ask, what is it you desire, my lovely cherub?”

*I had all of heaven. So that’s the way it is.* “What I desire is to rule and must insist before I take it by force you abdicate your throne!”

Not surprised to hear Lucifer make the demand, yet Adonai it taken aback and roars with laughter, and gasps to catch his breath.

“You think to take my throne to rule a universe! Lucifer, oh foolish one, you have much to learn.” Adonai walks away chuckling. *And learn you will my lovely cherub. All in good time.*

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Lucifer and the powers of darkness, angels and cherubs tainted by evil come together against the powers of heaven, angels and cherubs and seraphs in an epic battle, wherein hate and indifference war against love and compassion. While the conflict and chaos reigns for some time, Lucifer’s angels, created in love, yet distorted by evil, not strong enough find they are easily defeated by heavens army of love and peace.

Adonai watches the conflict in what seemed mere seconds to some but took place over eons in the heavens. In time, wearied of the conflict, He calls Michael to him. “This war serves no purpose.”

“No, Lord,” said the archangel.

“You know what to do. In pride he made his poor choice, as did the others. It won’t be the last time they choose so poorly and must endure the consequences. Bring Lucifer to me,” he commands.

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Lucifer’s torment with doubt began long before the war in heaven, and now he trembles as he awaits the Lord of Heaven. His pulse races as Adonai approaches, a thoughtful look upon his face yet, firm resolve.

Trying to hide his trembling hands, while avoiding eye contact, he turns slightly away as if to shield himself from Adonai.

“Lucifer,” Adonai rumbles, his voice like a thunderstorm. “How you have fallen Son of the Dawn! In seeking power, you became my enemy, and in wanting to replace Me and be more significant, higher among the stars you have become less. You desire to rule and you shall. Only now you will be lower and can rule.” He pauses. “On the earth.”

Hearing Adonai’s judgement, quite unexpected, a strangled cry escapes his throat, “No,” Lucifer said. “Not the earth.” His voice breaks and eyes grow wide in disbelief. “You wouldn’t.”

“I made the decision Lucifer.” *How my heart sorrows for him for he does not realize what is yet to come, and the part he must play.*

Gulping air, breath shallow, Lucifer looks all about. Unable to stand, he collapses to the floor, with fist to trembling lips, he frantically thinks. *No this cannot be.* Bounding to his feet, Lucifer looks around again, as if seeking another solution. His heart pounds painfully as if it could burst from his chest. *What am I to do?*

Taking a deep breath to control himself, Lucifer knows the decision cannot be altered, yet pleads, “You are destroying me, Father in heaven. How can you do this to your beloved?” *Perhaps He’ll change his mind.* “Is this not what you called me, your first born?”

Adonai’s eyes widen at his misbelief. “Lucifer, you’re first created. Even those in the garden were created. The One to come is first born of My Spirit. This you could not accept nor comprehend.”

*Damn. Of course, how could I forget. His son yet to be born.* Lucifer pleads again, “I’ll do whatever you ask to make things right.”

“I’ve made it right. Your purpose Lucifer, you shall fulfill, like it or not and you do not like it.” Adonai’s word are deliberate, though Lucifer does not hear His thoughts, *Oh, Lucifer, how I love you.*

Lucifer stumbles at the truth, looks at Adonai, away, and back again in disbelief. He knows the worst-case scenario has come upon him, and in his arrogance, anger rises. Obstinate to the end, with no other option, Lucifer stands up tall and says, snarling, “I would rather rule in hell, than serve in heaven.”

“And so you shall, for a time.” Adonai spoke. Nodding to Michael, who casts Lucifer to earth with the mortals he despises. A fiery chasm awaits his fallen ones and their evil powers with stones of fire for Lucifer to walk upon, only of a much different nature. His throne now is below the heavens and all the earth encompass.

Adonai declares, “Now he can seek another to devour.” Knowing this is merely the beginning of troubles within the universe.

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## 2. Into the Garden

Considering ways to create more havoc, Lucifer commands his fallen, “You can manage for a time without me. I’ve other matters to attend.”

He vanishes, and entering The Garden, Lucifer savagely pushes aside the leaves, while muttering to himself. “I should’ve destroyed it long ago. It matters not, but let’s see what we have here.”

Face tightening, his anger surges as he stalks along, for all around is a symphony of pure delight, one enchantment after another. Leaves dance to an unheard melody, the whisper of songs in the wind. All sorts of life are sheltered by the tree boughs suspended above, from the busy ant to the enchanting birds of every color. Tilting his head up, the warm sunlight caresses his face, a brilliant golden shaft of light illumines the path before him, the leaves shadows flutter amid the sunlight on the forest floor. Its beauty permeates his soul as he swallows the anger that swells.

Strolling farther on, suddenly he spies a creation. *Oh my. And what is this lovely creature of rounded form and beauty?* Her hair flows in waves of dark brown to reflect the golden light of the sun; each strand moving free in the breeze, in contrast to her stillness. Eyes of deep river waters, sapphire blue in quiet serenity, her fragrance permeates the air. And in that moment, the smile on her lips warms even his cold heart.

A pace off, stands another not so softly formed, yet its own splendor is evident. His eyes the blue-green of fresh dew glinting in the sunlight off leaves, pink lips thin, nose slender, and a prominent jaw curves gracefully. The strength of his neck is seen in the sinewy cords of muscle that shape his strong arms, bold thighs and calves, a firm chest and abdomen. *These are his special ones. Are there no others?* Lucifer wanders on.

In the trees, small furred creatures leap briskly branch-to-branch, then, startled by a sudden noise above, Lucifer looks up to see dozens of small feathered creatures take flight, their wings lifting them into the air where they soar about. Moving swiftly through the cerulean sky in hues of brilliant color, full of dazzling sunlight sparkling like the wind-dappled sea-water. Caught in the moment, Lucifer almost laughs with joy, then remembers his purpose and anger again surges.

Returning to the two mortals near the center with the odd trees, he notes each gives off a glowing light. *What is this peculiar light emanating forth?* He considers this while observing the mortals, and the trees.

Then another peculiar creature walks by, smoothly and quietly, its colored scales of olive green and cream. *Hmm. It’s not one of the fiery winged seraphs though it’s scaled, long and lean*, he muses, watching as its arms reach to pluck the fruit; yet it also avoids the two trees. *What is their purpose?* he wonders coming closer.

Seeing Lucifer, the creature asks, “Who are you? I’ve not seen you in the garden before, and would’ve for I’ve noted your splendor.”

While in the heavens and a cherub, Lucifer bore multiple wings of light which spread to cover the universe with glory, and varied faces with which to survey all within space and time. Now no longer within heaven, he cannot appear as a cherub so assumes a human form, to his disgust, though it’s infinitely more practical. Not handsome, in the traditional sense yet he is attractive with eyes of green, strong firm jaw and sinewy muscles shape his form, a broad chest with well-defined thighs, and powerful arms.

“Tell me of yourself,” Lucifer said, to distract but also curious as to whether the creature knows of him. *Did Adonai warn him of me?*

“My dear fellow, I am a serpent. Lovely am I not?”

*Certainly full of himself,* Lucifer muses. “Indeed. Tell me lovely one, why avoid those trees? You eat from all the others, as do the humans.”

“Those two were told not to eat from them, so I too avoid the trees. I’m not stupid you know, not wanting to die, as they were warned.”

Lucifer smiles to himself. *Not too bright either.* “I’m a celestial spirit, formerly of the heavens who now resides on the earth.”

The serpent also curious asks, “What is a celestial spirit?”

“I could show you, if you were willing to entertain me as a guest.”

“What do you mean, as a guest?”

“Come closer, if you’re brave enough.”

Insulted at the slight, the serpent comes close to Lucifer. Instantly, assuming his spirit form he slips inside the serpent’s body.

“What have you done?” the serpent cries, wriggling frantically to try and cast him out. “This is most uncomfortable.” Voice filled with panic.

Lucifer finds it odd and says, “Yes, I too find it most peculiar to be within you.” His intent, to calm the creature.

“How long will you stay for I’m not sure I like it.”

“I’ll stay for a short space, if you agree. I cannot remain without your consent, my friend.”

*I’ve not had a friend before, whatever that may be.* Excited, yet still he hesitates and asks, “What if the creator disapproves?”

“Why would he disapprove of our sharing with one another?”

*Adonai says we should give of what we have,* the serpent considers. *Surely, He would not disapprove.* And he nods in agreement.

“Excellent. Now, if you would be so kind as to sleep for a bit, so I can do what a spirit does. You won’t get into any trouble, I promise.”

“Well, if you’re certain.”

“If you imagine I would deceive you, you’re no friend of mine, and I should be on my way,” Lucifer said, in pretense of hurt feelings, and makes as if to abandon the serpent.

“My apologies. Do as you will,” the serpent said, his feelings hurt at the accusation. Lucifer uses his subtle skills to coax the serpent into a slumber then gently.

Within the serpent, who is far shrewder than any Adonai’s made, Lucifer carefully considers. *Angels are gullible when complimented, and perhaps humans are as well.* He approaches the woman. “What a lovely creature you are, well-formed and delightful, so pleasing to the eye.” His words caress, tongue darts out to lick his lips, and he smiles.

Looking up to see who spoke, her cheeks pinked, a warmth spreads throughout her, and she smiles upon seeing its smooth scaled body and thin-lipped mouth. *It’s the serpent.* *Yet he’s never spoken to me before.* “How kind of you to remark so.” Her voice soft and gentle.

“How can I not take heed of such loveliness? While a mere serpent of the forest and far different, I still know beauty when I see it.”

Her face flushes with pleasure again for its been a long time since her mate has said such. *Ah, when Adonai first brought me to the man, he recognized me as part of him*. She glows with happiness, remembering, then sighs. *He’s not noticed me much since.*

Lucifer interrupts her thoughts, for they’ll not achieve his end. “What does a lovely woman do all day in this lush garden?” Coming closer, he glances at the forbidden tree not far away. Then, his eyes travel over her slender form. He reaches, trailing a finger upon her arm, his power sends ripples of pleasure throughout her body.

Nearby, her mate glances over at them, then seeing nothing amiss, seemingly, he turns away, his attention again on his own interests.

Hand reaching, she takes a piece of fruit from a nearby tree and puts it slowly to her lips, watching the serpent. She bites into its tender flesh, and flicks her tongue out to capture the juices from her full lips.

Moving close, his arm brushes lightly against her and he glances at one of the trees. “Did Adonai say not to eat from the trees?” he asked.

A smile spreads her soft lips. “We may eat from any tree, except that one.” Pointing to the tree Lucifer eyes. “Adonai told my mate, ‘You must not touch or eat of it, or you will die.’”

Chuckling he said, “He must have misheard; you won’t die! Adonai knows when you eat of it, you will be able to see clearly, like the gods; then, you will know both good and evil.”

Her eyes bright with intrigue. “I see you find the idea as tempting as are you.” And a sly grin spreads his lips, eyes gleam with mischief.

Licking her lips, the woman looks at the tree, leans in close, her eyes lustrous. “Yes,” he whispers in her ear and strokes her arm. “It is desirable for wisdom too. How grand for an intelligent woman such as yourself.” He moves pours out upon the fruit the poison of his wickedness, lust.

His hand continues to stroke, moving around her waist, increasing the sense of pleasure. “Imagine how it would feel to be all-knowing,” he whispers again, and feels the warmth of her breath. Before she knows it, the woman finds herself standing close to him, by the tree.

Her mate notices the serpent and the woman together near the forbidden tree, and came to inquire. Quickly he moves between her and the serpent, to stand at her side, yet is silent.

Seeing his concern she said, “I haven’t eaten of it.” Then reaches to touch the tree, and glances at her husband who says nothing, yet she can almost hear his heart thud painfully in his chest as his eyes grow dark and wide, and asks, “Why so frightened husband?”

Smiling at him, she said, “Nothing has happened.” Her hand reaches for the fruit, and places it between her lips. Eyes sparkling, her teeth sink into its flesh. Fragrant juices flood her mouth and seep from her lips. She chews and swallows, then sighs in satisfaction.

“It was forbidden, woman.” He stammers, eyes grown wider, and glances about, expecting any moment to feel death, though he has no idea what death means to them.

“So you said, but I’ve eaten and am alive.” She plucks another fruit from the tree. “Come,” she said, placing the fruit in his hand, laughter in her eyes. “If I’m to die, should we not do so together?” Leaning her body close to him excites his passion, and he dares not deny her.

Yearning for this pleasure she instills, yet fearful, he lifts the fruit to his lips, takes a bite. His eyes widen as the juice flows over his tongue. He chews and swallows. “It’s amazing,” he said, gazing intently at his wife to pulls her close, feeling her naked flesh, then looking up he again sees the serpent, a gleam of delight, a smirk upon its thin lips.

Realizing she is naked and another’s eyes are upon her, the man moves to cover the woman from the serpents sight.

“What are you doing?” she asks, eyes widening.

“You are naked, and he was gazing upon your flesh.”

“You are also naked my husband, your flesh exposed.”

“I’ll find something to conceal our bodies. Cover yourself. Perhaps hide within the trees.”

The woman glances at the serpent who continues to watch, and discerns his lust. Having this knowledge now her face flushes red, and she turns to enter the trees and finds a place to hide herself.

Soon her husband returns with leaves to weave together and make for themselves loin-coverings. “Here, wrap these woven leaves about you so you are covered,” he said, his voice urgent.

Wrapping the woven covering about her slight frame, a frown upon her brow. “It’s strange, these coverings, for we cannot feel the air move upon our skin,” she said. “I don’t believe I like it.”

The man looks away, not knowing what to say and thinks. *Indeed, the freedom we enjoyed, even this the new knowledge has taken from us.* Not wanting to cause discord, he remains silent for a space, until he hears Adonai Elohim moving through the garden in the wind of the day.

Suddenly, ashen faced, he breaks into a cold sweat, wipes his hands tearing the leaves slightly. Grasping his mate’s hand, with trembling lips, he said, “We must hide.” A pulse throb in his neck as he shuts his eyes to blink away hot tears that threaten.

“Husband, why are you so fearful? What is wrong?” Dropping the fruit she’d been eating all sense of pleasure evaporates.

“It is the Lord Adonai. We must hide or he will know what we’ve done, and our punishment will be the death he promised.”

Moving quickly the two hide in the trees of The Garden. “What is this death He speaks of, is it painful?” she whispers.

“Hush now,” her husband warns and she grows silent.

Adonai Elohim calls out, “Man, where are you, and your wife?”

Slowly The man comes forth. “As you walked, I heard the sound in the garden,” he said, heart pounding as never before with lips trembling. “I was afraid for being naked, I hid myself.”

Sighing, with a small nod, knowing what they had done Adonai pauses a moment. Then, with a head shake, he approaches the man, the woman still crouched in the shrubs. “Who told you of your nakedness? Have you eaten from the Tree of which I warned you not to eat?”

*What is it to die, and how will it feel?* The man wonders within, as he looks at the woman. *It’s not my fault; it’s hers.* The man said, “The woman You gave me, she gave me of the Tree, and I ate.”

Adonai Elohim knew what the man would say, shakes His head again, and with a heavy sigh turns to the woman. “What did you do?”

Nodding toward the serpent who’s in the shadows of the trees, a slight smile on his lips, eyes alight, she said, “The serpent deceived me.” *Surely Adonai would not make me to die, if the serpent’s the guilty one?* Hope blossoms in her heart as she waits.

To the woman, “Because of this, you will birth your children in pain. Your desire will be for your husband, who will rule over you.”

*He will rule over me?* Her anger is about to explode at her husband, but Adonai is speaking so she quiets her thoughts to listen as well.

Turning back to the man, he said, “Because you listened to your wife, and ate of the tree, cursed is the ground you walk upon. By the sweat of your brow will you grow and eat your food. And, in the end, because you were made of dust, to dust will you return.”

*Got what he deserves,* she muses with a nod and satisfied smirk.

Turning to the serpent, whom Adonai Elohim knew housed Lucifer, yet He said, “Because you did this, cursed are you. On your belly will you crawl, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. The humans and all those to come will despise and fear you.”

The serpent is astonished to find its arms and legs, hands and feet have vanished; it lies coiled upon the ground. Its tongue flicks out not to taste the fruit of the trees, but dust. “Now see what you have done?” it rages at Lucifer, who exits its body. “I’m punished for what you did.”

No longer lovely to behold, its flat black deadly eyes are like staring into the abyss. The snake works its way across the ground on its smooth scaled stomach, powerful muscles propel it along until it disappears into the undergrowth of the surrounding garden forest.

Lucifer chuckles, then himself slinks away into the shadows, leaving the garden. *No longer perfect, is it, nor his pet humans. Wonder what he’ll do?* A smirk upon his face, casting an enquiring eye heavenward.

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Lord Adonai calls the man and his wife. “Those leaves won’t last.” From the skin of an animal He makes tunics with which to clothe them, then considers. *These humans cannot be trusted. If they disobeyed once, so to eat from the Tree of Life they’ll live forever. This cannot be. I must secure the Garden from them.*

“Adrian, you and your wife now will leave the Garden.” Adonai said, voice firm yet resolute, his eyes filled with sadness.

Lucifer watches as the man and woman exit, heads downcast, and both weeps, brokenhearted and terrified.

East of the Garden, Adonai directs a cherub. “Here you will remain. Guard the way to the Tree of Life, so the humans do not return.” Giving the cherub a sword, it flashes fiercely around and about. Lucifer cannot look upon the sword of heaven, for it hurts his eyes, so he turns away.

*He does not want the humans to see within either. No matter.* He’s pleased with the results of his mischief, watching the man and his woman as they leave, though they lie near the gate, heartbroken for many days. Bored with the man’s self-recrimination, Lucifer turns toward the rising sun, and sees only water; it seems to reach the borders of heaven*.*

Turning away, he travels north of the Garden to a sea of clear water. Never allowed near it before, he now gazes and sees into earth’s depths. *Perhaps, I could lead the man and the woman to these waters,* he muses. *Then we’ll see what He does to remedy that situation.*

Michael appears, countenance stern, “Lucifer. What mischief do you devise this time, to vex Adonai?” Not waiting for an answer he says, “You know what happens if either one enters these waters?”

“I suppose you know.” Lucifer snarls. “Adonai creates a sea but why? He knew what the man would do. So, He doesn’t want them near the sea either. Does He always take the fun out of everything?”

“Adrian and Eva cannot go near the sea else they would be cleansed of their sins. It is not yet time.”

“Time? So, where then, to the southern side of the Garden?” he said. *Damn His constraints. Even away* *from heaven, I can’t do anything.*

“Nay, for the sweet scent of the trees would come on the wind and his sorrow would intensify. He can only live where Adonai’s has sent him, to the Cave of Treasures below the garden.”

“The Cave of Treasures, heaven’s treasure!” ﻿A grin splits his face as his eyes sparkle in delight. “You say it’s below the Garden?” Not waiting, he leaves, Michaels answer unheard. His mind on the stones Adonai had placed upon him: the ruby, topaz shining bright, diamonds. A beryl, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and emerald, in a workmanship of gold. Heart beating rapidly, he plunges ahead to claim what is his. Nodding his head as if agreeing with himself, his pace rapid, a lightness in the chest as he rushes forward, humming. Reality, however is quite different from what Lucifer imagines.

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Adrian and Eva, having left the garden, stand at the opening gate, to see the broad earth spread before them, covered with stones and sand, it’s a bleak landscape. Mountains rise in the distance, the ground before them is barren. The couple tremble and fall to the ground, their hearts thud painfully in their chest, too overwhelmed to move. Finally, Eva lifts her eyes toward the Garden and sees a cherub at the gate with a flaming sword flashing brightly, so she could not see past into the Garden.

Adrian cried and said, "Look at this world, a place of punishment! It can never compare to the garden. See the ground, strewn with stones, and no delicious fruit trees, nothing to eat."

“I’m sorry. Never did I imagine such a fate would come to us.”

“Still, we must remain, for we have no other choice.”

“Yes, husband. But where do we go?” The man answered not and lay beyond the garden and the cherub with its flaming sword, bemoaning his fate. “Why did I listen to her and eat the forbidden fruit?” he mutters and continues to weep, turning his face away from the woman.

As the days pass. Eva hungers and is frustrated with her husband and his useless mourning. Eyebrows drawn together, she demands. “How long will you lie in the dust of the earth? The serpent was placed down on the ground, not you. Adonai did not say you should spend your days weeping and wailing, but providing for your family.”

Glaring at him, she turns her eyes away, muttering under her breath, “First he stands silent while the serpent tempts me, and blames me when he ate the fruit. ‘The woman you gave me,’ he said to Adonai. You could have said no,” she shrieked. “But did you try to stop me? No. Now it’s all my fault our being left out in the cold.”

Unable to sleep and in a fury, Eva, storms about. “I’m hungry and tired. When will you find us some food? Lazy miserable man. Get up.” Angry and frustrated she would like to beat on him but stays her hand.

But Adrian weeps silently, ignoring her. Staring at the ground, unable to look at Eva, he flinches away whenever she tries to touch him to get his attention. Clenching his teeth to keep from yelling, he refuses to speak.

Falling down tears flow until her eyes are red and swollen. “I wish we were still in the garden, too, but we’re not, and He’s not going to let us in. You saw the cherub with the flaming sword. No doubt it would cut us to ribbons were we to try and return.” Lying beside her husband, Eva wraps an arm around him. “Adrian, I’m sorry. Yes, it was my fault. But I cannot change what was done. Please.” Finally, she rises in search food.

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Adonai shook his head as he gazed upon the man, so despondent. “Michael, go to the man and woman and say, “Strengthen your heart, go to the Cave of Treasures, and there remain.”

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The archangel approached the man and said, “Man, you must cease this weeping. Arise and go to the Cave of Treasures. There you will remain. It is to be your dwelling place until Adonai determines else wise.”

Sitting, Adrian’s face brightens. “Where is this Cave of Treasures?”

“Come, I will show you, if you and your wife will follow me."

Adrian imagines the Cave of Treasures to be bright and beautiful and eagerly looks forward to it. “Let us go, immediately,” he said.

“No,” the archangel said. “We will await Eva’s return.

Upon her return, Eva said, “What is this new calamity the Lord has brought upon us? Has the archangel at last come to take our lives?”

“Nay. The Lord has given us a place wherein to live, so we do not have to wander the earth, lost and alone. He will show us the way to a place he called the Cave of Treasures upon the mountainside.” Eagerly, the two follow the archangel.

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Pushing from the forest of tall cedar trees, after walking what seems forever, Lucifer’s gaze meets a tall mountain, its granite sides rise upward and he’s greeted by stones and boulders dotting the landscape. Stumbling over the cracks, he slips on the pebbled-covered ground, the few trees on the mountain are covered with bits of moss. Above, he sees low-hanging clouds that cover the mountain tops and he imagine the mist drenching him were he to spend the night. Nearby, a waterfall pours nearly hiding the opening to the cave of treasures.

Coming closer, a rock shelf overhangs its opening. *Ah yes, the cave wherein lies my treasure.* Eagerly Lucifer strides forward and enters. His eyes, however, see not glittering jewels and gold but a dank narrow place, lined with dull grey stone walls with tree roots growing through, dirt and dead leaves tracked in by animals no doubt, or blown in by the wind. He steps gingerly past animal scat, and clumps of fur. The floor merely sand and rock. “What is this?” He utters. “Where is my treasure?”

“No, It can’t be. He would not trick me so.” Mouth trembling, he collapses to the ground, disbelieving. Then, rising to his feet, he dusts himself off, and stumbles from the cave. “He’d never be this cruel.”

A heaviness settles in his chest, yet is reminded of the words Michael spoke before he left. *I wouldn’t listen. No. It’s he who knew I’d come and be disappointed. How he must hate me.*

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Sadness overshadows Adonai for he knows Lucifer went ahead, and he knew what he’d found. At Michael’s look, he said, “Yes, you tried to warn him. Be not dismayed, for he chose not to listen, again.” Adonai’s features soften and he chuckles. “Yet, the man and woman were the ones given the Cave of Treasures, not Lucifer. Leave it up to them to make it into a place of beauty, a home away from the garden.”

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Lucifer saw the humans following Michael toward the cave. Quietly he slid into the shadows of the forest, slaps at a spider, swiping the web from his face. *I’d love to see their look of despair at the cave He’s handed them for a home.* Lucifer chuckles and disappears.

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The smell of cedar in the crisp air was refreshing, though neither one knew what type of tree it was then. Still, the waterfall near the opening brought fresh water to drink, and earthy moss clung to the cold wet rock, which she found strange. A few wild plants could be seen with green fruit upon them. Tasting the round berries, chewing, she spit it out; they were bitter. Michael said, “soon the sun will ripen the berries. It will not be the same as in the garden, but edible nonetheless.”

Upon entering the cave, both are as appalled as Lucifer. Forgetting about the lovely outdoors of the mountain, again Eva bemoans her fate. No lovely garden, no treasure, nothing but hard stone for a bed and dirt. Adrian took her in his arms to comfort. “Before long, together we’ll make it into a home, and find a way to make it beautiful.”

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## 2. Earthbound

Lucifer leaves the couple to their pitiful cave, devoid of treasure. “He’s given me all the earth and hell, of which I said, I’d rather rule, and so I shall. He’ll regret doing this to me.“

Upon falling from heaven, after Michael cast him out, Lucifer landed in a sea of salt water at the edge of a great desert. The salt and sand scour his perfect skin, lips dry and cracked after days wandering in the desert, he’s ready for hell. The desert winds carry debris, as well, which leave his eyes gritty, the air nowhere as pristine as heavens.’

﻿No longer lashing out at those who come near, he compensates in other ways. *I’m not the only one in this dreary place. How could Adonai have created such a world? It’s nothing like his lovely garden. Were it up to me,* He grumbles bitterly*. I’d have made it a place of beauty with lovely warm balmy waters and lush plant life, a sea nearby with white sand, not this wretched dry desert.*

Roaming the earth with Andras, a mighty warrior and fallen angel, Lucifer has finally ceased to blame Andras for his own failure. Untiring in his effort to rule on earth if not in heaven, he creates chaos wherever he goes. Lucifer no longer a cherub, is six feet of humanity disguised as the mortals he despises yet so much more. Chest muscles strain against the fabric of his tunic, forearms and biceps taut and well-defined, and his abdomen ripples like snakes in water.

*At least I’m taller than these desert men*, he scorns. *And seen as a human makes things easier living on this miserable earth.* Yet, he chafes at the shame of his lowered place, though being so tall means others must look up to him, which he finds pleasing.

Lucifer’s mind, pricked by the memory of the lush garden, recalls the first man and woman who’d dwelt therein, until he tempted the woman into disobeying and giving into lust. He sniggers remembering*. It was almost worth this misery I now endure. Still, I will make Him pay for doing this to me and he calls to his fallen ones.*

“See to the earth women, tempt them into a life of disobedience. They’ll fall easily into sin, as did one in the garden.”

Lucifer encourages all kinds of depravity. “Tempt them to indulge in idol worship. See to it the men bring their women into the temples to gratify the sexual excesses of others. They’ll enjoy the life, and then you can bring in the sacrifices, which Adonai desires, just not the kind I have in mind.” He chuckles to himself.

Eager to obey, his fallen, no longer constrained by heaven’s rules, easily captivate the earth women and copulate with them, and, in time produce giants in the land, known as the Nephilim.

Soon idols spring up with statues of gods, and goddesses made of clay for the people to worship*. See how Adonai likes those rivals, though they’re not real gods.* Lucifer sniggers at Adonai’s imagined displeasure. “Let him criticize me now.”

Lucifer wipes his eyes to dislodge the grit and looks upon the women of the desert. Beauties with luxuriant dark hair and black eyes, he tempts them into sin also*. No wonder they so easily tempt the fallen as much as the fallen tempt them. Tasty treats,* he muses, fornicating with many. “Why have you not partaken of these delights?” He asks his commander. “Do you not find them delightful?”

Andras shrugs. “You have enjoyed them enough for both,” he said then asks, “When do you return to hell?” *So I can get on with my life, and not have to take care of your ego.*

“Don’t worry, Andras,” Lucifer reassures. “I’ll be gone soon, then you can see to the one who admires you. I hear she is pleasing to the eye, but many of them are demanding; they make life miserable for the fallen, perhaps even the one who desires you.”

Lucifer sniggers. *Andras sees me as taxing, no doubt.* Het he knew of the one who watches Andras, and says, “I’ve seen the one who desires you. Have you not noticed?” Andras’ face flushes.

*What is this, embarrassment?* Lucifer ponders this odd event.

“No, for they can be worse than the war in heaven.”

Looking up just then, Lucifer forgets Andras. His eyes land upon the silhouette of a beauty, one he’d not seen before. Walking toward her, he pretends not to notice, yet is aware of every curve of her lush body, creamy golden skin, and red-gold luxuriant hair cascades over smooth shoulders to lie upon her voluptuous breasts.

His breath hitches as the fabric of her gown, light enough to reveal rose-tipped nipples, which protrude slightly. Lucifer turns his eyes up to gaze into her violet orbs, gleaming with lust; he’s no longer pretending disinterest.

Heart beating rapidly, his breath now short, he finds himself drawn irresistibly towards her. *Surely, she is no earth woman, for none have ever affected me so,* he muses. “Who are you and whence did you come to this earth? Surely not from heaven,” he said smirking for he knew no such thing is true. And Lucifer moves even closer.

“No my Lord. I am created from your passions and desires for you and anyone else you’d like me to entice. I am specifically Hells succubus, made for your intense delight, and that of mortals.”

Lucifer’s gaze explores every curve of her body and parts he can only imagine. “What is your name, succubus?” His nostrils flare as he continues to look her over, saliva pools in his mouth.

“Clio, my Lord,” she says with a coy smile. “Clíodhna, if you prefer, named for the Goddess of love and beauty. In my case, beauty and lust for my work is to tempt mortals and take their souls to hell upon their death.” She flicks her tongue out running it over her lips.

Approaching the woman to press himself against her as his hands glide over her flesh. The back of his hand he slides softly over her cheek and she flushes with pleasure at his touch. Lucifer puts his lips gently to her mouth, to bite her lower lip, sucking on it.

She deepens the kiss as her tongue quickly penetrates his mouth. Lucifer’s arms wrap firmly about to pull her closer, and she feels him harden in desire. Not a word is spoken for there is no need to express their mutual passion in such a way.

Lucifer’s on fire, his breath rapid and shallow as she runs her hands through his hair and down his back, then slips between, under the fabric at his waistline her fingers stroke his maleness. He nearly orgasms.

Lucifer pulls the woman into the shadows with a grip possessive and demanding. He pushes her legs apart, fingers penetrate wetness as he focuses on the intense sensations in his body. “A succubus, you say,” he murmurs, then bends, his tongue teases her nipples.

Pleasure intensifies in anticipating the joining. Heart pounding, he feels a shiver of pleasure and her wetness increases. Unable to contain himself, he pulls aside her gown, enters her welcoming heat, and with shudders of pleasure he releases his passion into her.

“Tell me woman of lust and beauty, what is it you desire?”

“Why, my Lord, I desire only to serve you.” *For now.*

“Then I desire you in hell to await my good pleasure, which won’t be long in coming,” he said and snickers. Now his consort in hell she pleasures him as he desires, and many others over the centuries. Yet, she also plans for the time when her role changes. After all, change is a given in hell, and even a succubus made for hell cannot be trusted completely.

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“Andras, why so glum? There’s not enough here on earth to satisfy you and make life interesting?”

“My Lord, the dragon hunters are interesting as is hunting dragons. Though I’ve not seen any such as the one you seek.”

“If you’re bored, Clio could help pass the time. She is quite a treat, and hungers for you. As I said, those earth women are a bother. But we’ve had this talk many times for many centuries.”

“I’ll give it some thought,” Andras says.

*That’s as likely as his returning to heaven,* Lucifer muses to himself.

Within days, Lucifer returns to hell and his charges. Lucifer’s fallen one’s created more havoc on earth and Lucifer keeps them busy tempting mortals. *What to do with Andras,* he wonders? *I have an idea for he is not using the mortals for my agenda. This must cease.* And he considers what to do.

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“Clio,” he calls. “Come my lovely temptress. I have work for you.”

Clio slinks in like a cat on the prowl, cups his chin in her hand and asks, “What do you desire, Lord.” Fingertips trails across his cheek and down his chest, a coy smile lifts her lips. She almost seems genuine, yet her smile never reaches her eyes, violet with thick long dark lashes, they gleam with lust from a face perfect but devoid of emotion.

Red-gold hair falls in spiraling curls over her creamy white shoulders, smooth as the rest of her. A gown of silk falls about her lush body, moving with every step and each one is with purpose. Voluptuous breasts whose rose-tipped nipples harden as he gazes upon her. Seeing his lust, she imagines, *Oh yes. He’d love to fornicate but not today.*

A Succubus and potent female Fae, Clio can bind a person and steal their soul. She’s a demon in female form who tempts men and women to engage in sex with her using any technique. And she’s especially creative. Yet Lucifer is mostly immune to her lust, after so long.

“I missed you. Your obedience is most desirable,” Lucifer says. “Had you been willing to serve me this well in the before we could still have what was so enjoyable, was it not?”

“Not being the key word.” She says, mocking. “What do you want? Isn’t it enough I’m here to serve you as well as demons and mortals?”

She heaves a sigh, folds her arms across her lovely chest, raises an eyebrow and rolls her eyes, waving a hand in dismissal, letting the corner of her lip curl up on one side.

“How much fun would you have with those impotent angels?” He says, lip curls in a sneer. “You know you enjoy it here! All those people to seduce and demons to practice upon. Tell me. Are they worth the trouble when they become obsessed with you?”

Clio recalls the powerful archangels; they spurned her attempts to seduce them, shaming her for the behavior. She shrugs off the memory. *The demons? Those were a lot of fun.*

She turns to cross the room, red-gold hair tumbles about across her shoulders, clothes cling to her body in a seductive manner and the warm air seems to whisper over her skin, as if caressing.

Clio enjoys the moment and Lucifer’s attention, as she arches her back, breasts strain against the fabric, she turns to see his lust and the corners of her lips curve up slightly.

Slipping over to lie on the couch, she pouts shifting her legs, baring herself slightly to enjoy his noticing the dark between her legs. Lucifer’s consort at one time, she’s no longer, but is pleased to merely work for and occasionally fornicate with him. Still, Lucifer cannot keep his eyes off her and the provocative allure she brings.

“What is it you want?” she coos, moving to allow her gown to reveal more of what entices him, moving her hips slightly, suggestively.

Sighing, Lucifer says, “I know it’s difficult you being a succubus, but let’s stay on track? You know, Andras. Well, you don’t ‘know’ him - if you get my meaning? But you know who I mean.”

She nods in agreement, leaning forward to listen and eager to hear more of the tall handsome angel. *I’ve had my eye on that one but he won’t let me fornicate with him.* “You want me to seduce him?” she asks, eyes brightening, eager to hear ‘yes.’

“No, not ever. He’s not adapting, not enjoying earth’s pleasures, its women. He’s interfering with my plans for the earth. I need him to engage more, be compliant inciting the mortals into sin.”

“So, you want me to what?” Clio smiles knowingly, slender fingers drift between her legs. "He'll find me a fun playmate.”

 “Ah, no. While difficult, do control yourself. Hmm.”

“Okay.” She snarls. “What in hell do you want?” She tosses her hair impatiently, crossing her legs.

Lucifer moves to strike her and stops himself, “I admire you being so wicked.” He sits beside Clio, runs a finger up her thigh. “While I know you desire him, I want you to incite Andras’ desire, but for another.”

Lucifer shares his ideas with Clio, who smiles, though disappointed to not get the angel herself. Lucifer moves close to her afterward, intent on his own pleasure but is disappointed himself.

Clio quickly rises, “I have work to do, love.”

*No sex today.* She leaves him wanting*, I imagine the woman will be an easy target for we’ve met before, long ago*.

Meira had been an unwilling temple whore when Clio first met her and knew she was special. Having survived multiple rapes by priests as a child, she’s resilient. Now, after escaping the temple life of a prostitute, Clio had provided her with a different more creative profession.

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Clio watches Meira*. It’s been a long time but she’s as lovely as ever. Lucky her, having Andras to herself.* She eyes Meira’s size and hair color, which differ, but otherwise they’re alike*. I remember her well; it will be a delight.*Clio watches Meira walk. *Beautiful but she doesn’t know how to make the most of her walk and other assets.*

Clio walks to the café where she saw Meira. “Mind if I have a seat?” She sits without waiting for an answer.

“If I said no,” Meira asks, irritated at first, then looks closely at her. *She looks familiar.* “Do I know you?”

Clio shakes her head. “No, I’m not from here, so it’s not likely we’ve met before. I’m only here for a short time.”

“Really?” Meira persists, “I’m sure we’ve met.”

*Lucifer doesn’t know I helped her. If she remembers, it’ll ruin his plans and mine.* Clio said, “I have a friend. Maybe you know him, Andras? He asked about you and seems to think you might like him.”

Meira’s eyes widen but she says, “I don’t know him, and he sounds full of himself anyway.”  *He noticed. How embarrassing.*

“Andras wants to meet you.” A smile builds as Clio slides closer, and puts a hand on Meira’s shoulder. “Perhaps it’s not a man you desire?” her eyebrows raised.

Meira shrugs her off and frowns. “Not interested, if you’re offering,” she said and backs farther away. *She has a lot of nerve.*

“Andras seems to like you. Maybe you’d like to get to know him. He’s hard to miss: tall, dark hair, and handsome. Did I mention he’s well-built and a man of means, if you know what I mean?” She winks.

Meira stands up and scowls. “This is crazy. I don’t know you or this Andras, so leave me alone.” Striding to the door with firm steps, Meira opens it and walks outside. Searching the street in both directions, she sees the street’s empty and hurries off.

*He must have seen me and thinks I’m interested!* Meira mutters, her anxiety rising*. I’ve heard he’s one of the fallen, but he looks no different from other men.* Recalling when she first saw Andras, her heart skips a beat thinking about him. *Why am I so attracted to him?*

At home, Meira's thoughts linger on Andras*. I heard the fallen mate with earth women.* Shaking her head she puts it out of her mind, briefly though she’s very aware of her body’s response thinking of him. Her hand drifts down her belly where she feels her own lust.

~~~

Clio watched Meira leave and thought, *She must know he’s a fallen*. *It’s easy to see she’s attracted to him, though she denies it. But why does Lucifer want Andras with her?* Clio leaves the shop and walks away.

Andras watches and wonders, *Why is she here?* Thoughts swirl like dust mites and he’s unable to focus as he ponders the situation.

An archangel until he joined Lucifer and was cast out of heaven*. Now, I’m stuck here, bored for eternity. Though the earth woman could spice things up, if she’s interested. It doesn’t have to be permanent.*

After arriving on earth, Andras found work with the dragon slayers; it paid well and kept him away from Lucifer. *Now Lucifer has me looking for that damn dragon, a cherub.* He puts the woman out of his mind to focus on the one he seeks for Lucifer. *Too bad this one didn’t stay out of the rebellion, it wouldn’t have ended up as a dragon on earth.*

~~~

To help find the dragon, Andras puts the word out with a warning, “It is more dangerous than most dragons. When you see it, you’ll know. Be cautious or likely you will be slain.”

“Sure Andras, but really, it’s only a dragon.” They laughed at his concerns. “Look, we promise to let you know if we find it, as long as you make up for lost monies.”

“I know. Some of the men have families and others are saving to buy land so they can raise a family. I understand,” Andras said, and agrees to pay for any financial losses while they hunt the dragon.

Several weeks pass before new is brought. “It was breathing fire and flashing lightning. I’ve ever seen anything so terrifying; it killed my companions. What the hell. It’s not an ordinary dragon.”

“I warned you guys, if you recall.”

“I don’t know why the dragon let me live,” he said, trembling as he recalled the creature. “I begged it for mercy. Said we were searching, not hunting it. It chose not to eat me. I want nothing more to do with those things.” Hurrying off, he soon quit dragon hunting.

Andras laughs. *I did warn them.* *Ordinary dragons have a long tail, four legs, horns, barbs, and scaled bodies.* Shaking his head, *I couldn’t tell them it’s a cherub;* they’*re very different.* While dragons are fire breathing lizard-like with wings and a long tail, Cherubs have more lethal attributes. Andras wasn’t sure what to expect. He’d seen Lucifer as a cherub, but all things heavenly, on earth they differ.

Though winged, dragons often can be found underground in caves. So, Andras went to find a cave and found himself a dragon. *This for sure is nothing like those I’ve seen before.* He watches the dragon translate into its cherub self. An icy shiver courses through Andras up his spine, his heart races, and he steps quickly back. *No wonder he was terrified,* he gasps, stepping back even farther.

This dragon had three sets of wings, four inexplicable faces, and legs unlike ordinary dragons who had curved legs. It gleamed like brass, finely polished*. He’s luminous, like heaven’s angels.* Andras unable to mount a defense in his own terror, stood frozen, then the dragon spoke.

“Ah fallen one.” Breath touched by a scent of brimstone. “Fear not. What is it you desire? Did you come to slay me like the hunters you sent to vex me a time ago.” *What does this one want?*

Its snout curves into a bit of a smile. “In desiring to devour the one, he told me a mighty dragon hunter searched for me. And so, I let him live. Generous no?” Andras is speechless then finds his tongue.

“Indeed. I am a dragon hunter, in search of Lucifer’s friend Azrael, a sort of dragon, a cherub.” Head tilts to the side, eyes narrow he watches the dragon cautiously. “Don’t suppose you’ve seen it?” Taking a breath to calm his fear, Andras smiles, yet remains wary.

“I like your sense of humor, so will not eat you.” Chuckling deep in its throat, its inner flames stir, sending grey tendrils of smoke into the air. “You say you’re Lucifer’s friend.” The dragon grumbles, and Andras feels a whisper of heated air flow past. “It took him long enough to seek me. It’s not as if I’m hard to find.”

 “Why it took so long, I know not. Still I’ve found you, and will let him know you’re here.” Andras walks to a nearby hillside and calls to demons who rise from the earth. “Let Lucifer, know his dragon is found, it is safe,” he said. “It awaits his pleasure.” The demons vanish back into the earth, likely on their way to report to Lucifer in hell.

“Awaits his pleasure,” the dragon rumbles with its eyes narrowed. “I’d eat him too, leaving me here, if I were not a faithful friend,” he said as the angel returns, and this time Andras feels a rush of heated fire blow past as the dragon breathes out. *This one is most pleasing.*

Andras waits for Lucifer with the dragon, whom he found curious, and interesting as they shared stories of the heavens.

“Had we fought as they do here, we might not have lost. You think those archangels knew how to wield a sword with a shield? Pardon me, for I know you too were such.”

Andras shrugs it off. *He meant no insult to me and it was the truth*. “Those powers were tricky to fight,” he said. “Which may be why we lost. It’s easier to battle against flesh and blood with a sword and shield than nebulous powers of good against evil.” His head nods agreeably.

“Ha. Speaking of flesh and blood. What about those earth women? Men often speak of the troubles with them. I’m glad to be a dragon with no female among us. Adonai created us cherubs and did not see a need. Why did he think they’d be useful here on earth?” Laughing together, for they knew what use most made of women, even the fallen.

“Indeed, more than one fallen planted seed in a woman who birthed offspring, giants in the land, I’ve heard.” Andras shakes his head slightly. *Though there’s an earth woman I’d enjoy planting my seed in, only not to have children but pleasure instead.*

The dragon hears Andras’ thoughts and smirks. “Yes, I’ve heard.” He shook his head as if to lose an intrusive thought; its green-gold scales vibrate, some falling to the ground.

“Having not seen one, I don’t care to,” Andras said. “The Nephilim surely do not care for children.”

The dragon asks, “Do you desire children?” His great head tilts as he leans in, amber eyes calm without fire burning, and eyelids blink as he watches and wonders about Andras and the earth woman.

“I’ve seen no woman worthy. Nor could I imagine one as a mate.” He pauses, thinking of the earth woman who watches him named Meira. He’d seen her recently. Long auburn hair moving in the breeze, clothes clinging to her body seductively, arms casually at her sides. The warm air seemed to whisper as if caressing her. A smile in the corners of his lips. “There’s one who does intrigue me. Though her interests lie elsewhere.” Taking a deep breath, Andras smiles as he toys with the hilt of his sword and his mind conjures an image*: full lips to plunder; when she walks, her hips sway nicely.* He licks his lips. *Hmm.*

The dragon ponders his words, and the inconsistency in his actions and thoughts. “Do you imagine you fool yourself, for it seems you have thoughts of her. If I may speak to you as a friend.”

“Anything is possible.” Andras lips spread in a grin. *The dragon is most insightful and agreeable.* Yet, he changes the topic.

“Be cautious, I do not wish to see you someone’s meal, as there are others like me who hunt dragon.”

Both laugh at the absurd notion. “Yet we’re all vulnerable, regard Lord Lucifer.” As both consider his ignominious fall. *Ah, yes. Lucifer.*

~~~

As the two are chatting, Lucifer appears. He looks from one to the other, not liking what he sees. Jealousy grows in his heart*. Not this time.* he scowls at Andras. *How dare he steal my friend and dragon*?

Lucifer curses within and says, “Andras slayer of dragons, I’m glad to see my friend lives.” Slyly glancing toward the dragon, he embraces its long-scaled neck. “Cautiously I sent my commander to find you, knowing he’s a slayer of your kind. I’m glad he did not steal your life.”

The dragon muses, *One of* *Lucifer’s one greatest faults is jealousy, but not the only one.* “My friend long in coming. Resilient friends are rare. These you hold to not by whim or envious will.” He smirks.

Lucifer decides not to alienate the cherub for its brashness, yet ﻿his nostrils flare, lips pull back, and he bares his teeth, snarling. Cracking the neck from side to side, he takes a deep breath. “I see you have become friends.” *A day will come and revenge will be mine.*

“Life on earth has required my time in such ways as you cannot imagine, friend. Else I’d have sought you earlier.”

The dragon, ﻿a flat look to its narrowed eyes, scowls at the words, knowing them for the lie they be. Breathing slowly out, a tremor of rage burns deep within, and Lucifer feels the heat of his anger.

He considers, “You’ve outdone yourself, Andras. Is he not glorious!” His words cascade into the air as he tries to dispel the dragon’s righteous fury. “Earth should never forget their splendor so he remains safe from hunters such as yourself. Long should he live.”

Andras replies, “This dragon is your friend, a fine companion for you, my lord. It is a privilege to protect what is yours.”

Lucifer notices the dragon snicker. At the imagined slight, he turns his own rage on Andras. “Begone, before I reduce you to ash!”

~~~

“I will not fail to speak of Leviathan

its strength and its graceful form.

Who can strip off its outer coat?

Who can penetrate its coats of armor?

Who dares open the doors of its mouth?

ringed about with fearsome teeth?...

Its snorting throws out flashes of light;

its eyes are like the rays of dawn.

Flames stream from its mouth;

lightning bolts shoot out.

Smoke pours from its nostrils…

a boiling pot over burning reeds.

Its breath sets coals ablaze and

flames dart from its mouth…

When it rises, the mighty terrified.

Retreat before its thrashing.

The sword has no effect

nor does the spear or javelin.

Iron it treats like straw

and bronze like rotten wood…

Nothing on earth equals it—

T’was a creature without fear.

It looks down on all who are haughty;

it is king over all who are proud.”

(Job 41:1-26)

## 3. His Desire

Andras returns to Eridu, in the land of Sumer at the edge of a river plain. It sits close to a marsh between sea and land with shifting waters and deep reed thickets. As he heads for home, Andras sees the woman, her hair pulled back to reveal a face other women doubtless envy.

*Though she watches, the earth woman pretends else wise.* *Perhaps the direct approach is best*. He strides toward her, heart thundering in his chest, he chews his lips. Drawing near, her almond-shaped eyes of violet-color flicker with silver fire. Her skin flawless, creamy yet a light golden brown, very appealing. *How I’d love to trail my fingers over her soft skin from face to just about everywhere.*

As he nears, her face flushes in surprise, yet she does not flee, and watches as he approaches. Breath catching in her throat, noticing his size, very tall and well-muscled. The tunic he wore fit his sculpted form perfectly. It was easy to see he was likely a warrior. You don't look like he did without some serious workouts. She’d seen men at training on the field and had always admired the way their corded muscles rippled when wielding a sword or lifting a shield, sweat glinting in the sunlight, and her heart sped up.

“Why is it, when I see you,” he said, watching her lips curl at the corners into a smile, parting to moisten them with the tip of her tongue. Andras’ heart speeds up and his breath shortens. His abdominal muscles tighten. *Were we alone in private, I’d drag her to my bed*. “Though you pretend otherwise,” he said, nostrils flaring, “you seem to pursue me like a hungry wolf?” Her face flushes.

“What… such arrogance.” She clears her throat. The woman, who is Clio, swallows, takes a step back, as if unsure of him.

“It’s not my intent to make you uncomfortable.” Seeing her flush from full breasts to her face, the tips of her ears turn a bright red, yet his gaze lingers on the full lips as he licks his own. *All I want is to kiss her until she says yes to whatever I demand of her.* Instead, he apologizes. “I’m sorry. I meant nothing by it.”Yet she turns to leave.

Andras reaches for her, their fingers briefly touch, and Clio uses the opportunity to set a spell of entrapment binding him to Meira*.*

*~~~*

*I should have asked her to stay*. His eyes follow as she walks away: *stride calculated, a lioness stalking her prey, except she’s moving away from me. What fun in bed she would be!* His mouth is suddenly dry and Andras realizes he’s almost panting. *Get a grip,* he chastises himself.

Recalling his talk with the dragon, he wonders. *Why does she have this effect on me?* He recalls the dragon. *Although, why would I speak to a dragon when I’ve friends to consult?* And speak to them he does, the dragon hunters. “You have no idea what happened, when meeting this woman and how it turned out,” he said.

Andras describes the one he believes is Meira.

“You’ve been bested by an enchantress.” They all chuckle. “There’s plenty of them about, swaying their hips, enticing us men to make fools of ourselves. It’s amazing one’s not captured you yet.”

Sniggering, one of the men says, “Aye, I’ve heard them talk and many women find you intriguing.”

Andras face flushes. *What would they think knowing my thoughts about her and how I remained silent when she made me an offer?*

Seeing Andras’ embarrassment, one man mistakes it for confusion. “You’re a good provider, bring home fish from the sea and dragon flesh. Women like it. While they want looks, mind you, providing for a family is most important. I’m not talking about the lovely young ones without good sense who only tease.”

All the men nod and another says, “We like to look.” He winks at Andras. “Easy on the eye.” He glances around. “Don’t tell my wife you hear*!” If she knew about Clio and our intimate exploring she’d kills me*. He smiles as the others laugh and consider female’s qualities.

~~~

Since meeting Meira, and taking her place, Clio said: “Meira’s away with friends and so, I’ve assumed her image. When Andras touched me, I set an enchantment so he desires Meira.” *It’ll be interesting when she returns to find herself pursued.*

“I want you to tempt him with those desires he’s long denied in being a good soldier.” He chuckles. “Reminds me of Uriah, how his wife cheated on him with David who got her pregnant. Remember?”

“Oh indeed. He refused to bed his wife while on leave so David could pretend the child was Uriah’s. Being a good soldier, Uriah refused. What a fool.

“All it did was get him killed. Which reminds me. Who have you made a fool for you, cheating on his wife?”

“One of the dragon hunters agreed to spy, in exchange for favors of which you’re familiar. I’ve been able to keep an eye on Andras, knowing you’d be pleased.”

“I’m assuming he’s pleased, not knowing he’s lost his soul.” Lucifer takes Clio to show her how pleased he is, pulls her in his arms, and says, “You’re not leaving so soon. Not this time.”

Slowly removing the gown, none too gently, his powerful arms hold her so she cannot leave as he suckles her breasts while his fingers inside tease her to orgasm. Flowing richly, he then takes his time plundering her until he satisfies his own cravings, then slowly pulls on his trousers and walks away.

Rising from the floor where he’d thrown her, Clio rages, *To think there was a time when I found him desirable,* she hears Lucifer behind her chuckling as she pulls on her clothes. He reaches for her again.

“Lucifer, I have other things to do,” she said, pulling away.

“The only thing you have to do is pleasure me. Is that not what you said to me once?” His voice a snarl. “You were made for hell and me or what I desire. I desire you.” He rips her gown and throws the pieces to the floor, followed by Clio. Standing above her, powerful chest and arms ripple as he removes his pants. Clio tries to scramble away on her hands and knees, but he grabs her hair, twining it around his fist, he pulls her face to him. “Pleasure me, as you’d like to do Andras.“

Finishing, Lucifer shoves her to one side and said, “Now get out and don’t return until your work is done. Clio rises, a sour tang in her mouth. She feels a burning in her throat, head bowed, but holds back the tears, visibly trembling as nausea rises, and she wants to vomit.

Taking a deep breath, she stands and goes to her wardrobe, and picks out a new gown all the while keeping a safe distance from Lucifer. Anger burns within until Lucifer speaks.

“Were you not pleased to copulate with me, your Lord and master you once called me? Eager to please then, were you not?” He said, eyes narrow, he waits for her response.

Hesitating, she recalls the first day and her words of passion. Then turning, she looks at him, forces herself to walk over, and said, in a voice soft and low. “Yes, of course, I’m always pleased to serve you my Lord, in whatever way you desire.” Leaning in, she kisses Lucifer tenderly, then turns and leaves, determined to begin anew for Clio is no idiot, and her own plans must one day be fulfilled.

Eyebrows raised in surprise, ﻿with an incredulous stare, Lucifer’s fingers touch his lips as he watches her walk away. He stands silent for a very long time, not knowing what to think.

*~~~*

“Andras, how nice to see you,” Clio said, running into him the next day. A flirtatious smile on her lips, as her dark lashes shadow violet eyes. *Whenever I see him, he captivates me so. Wouldn’t I love to be Meira. Damn Lucifer.*

Andras’ face flushes, yet he remains silent. She knows her curves scream female and Clio can see evidence of his lust. *He imagines being with me.* Flashing a smile, she turns away, then glances back. “Don’t be such a stranger.” And smirks seeing a glimmer of lust in his eyes.

~~~

Taking a deep breath, Andras hadn’t realized he’d been holding, he stares after the woman, the movement of her hips entice him. Suddenly short of breath, his mouth dry. Speechless, he blinks several times, his mouth open, and wants to follow her, but remains where he is.

When he sees her several days later Clio’s wears an outfit clinging snugly. However, it’s like she doesn’t see him, as she walks by. Andras’ desire then conflicts with self-doubts to spring up like weeds. *Maybe I’ve misread her. Why do I care?* He argues*. She’s an earth woman.* Yet he can’t forget her. Each time he imagines her his breath grows short and he forces himself to push away disturbing thoughts of her.

Expecting to see her at every turn, Clio vanishes for a few days which adds to the mystery. When she reappears it’s as a shameless flirt, and Andras feels a warm flush of desire until she ignores him again.

*What is she doing?* Angry and hurt by her games, he thinks, *I’ll not have her play with me.* Andras puts her out of his mind, except Clio has decided to ‘up the game,’ as she says.

Clio again disappears then reappears to deliberately bump into him and said, “What a surprise to see you.” She looks at him under lowered lashes, eyes twinkling merrily.

Andras wants to ignore her but cannot with the enchantment at work. “I haven’t seen you in a while,” he says and desires to walk away and ignore her, yet almost against his will, without realizing it, he finds he’s moved closer; they’re almost touching, and Clio’s so tempting.

“I’ve been around,” she said, her hand lightly brushes his arm and again she turns to leave. “I look forward to seeing you again.”

He’s in a daze: *The woman mounts him and with her hand slips him inside her. Once he’s deep inside, she began a slow rotation of her hips. It felt so real, and Andras couldn’t shake the feeling. She felt so warm as she drew him in. His erection grew harder and he felt about to burst, as he feels a powerful orgasm overtake him*.”

Andras’ startles out of his daydream or whatever it had been, his breath catches in his throat. Unable to speak, he watches as her tongue moistens full red lips. She leans close. “What fun, eh?” Then she winks at him and walks away.

Andras’ desire flames, his breath grows short, heart thunders in his chest, and he thinks, *This woman I must have.* His long-time refusal to have anything to do with earth women vanishes.

~~~

Lucifer follows Clio’s antics. Pleased with the results, and he says, “It’s time to return home before Meira shows up.”

*I had him in the palm of my hand, in my bed.* She scowls, unable to hear Lucifer’s thoughts who thinks: *If Clio were to bed him before Meira, it’d spoil my plans. What is she thinking? Revenge on me, doubtless.*

~~~

Andras, enticed by the woman, eagerly seeks after her. It doesn’t take long before he sees Meira. Heart racing in delight, he approaches the woman he believes is Meira. Only it’s the real Meira.

“Hello. It’s nice to see you.” He looks her up and down cheekily, as Clio had him. *Maybe I’ll invite her home with me.*

Meira scowls at him. “Who are you?”

“It’s Andras,” he said. A frown crosses his face, and he swallows. Scratching at his bearded cheek. “We’ve met several times.”

He moves closer, hears a sharp intake of breath. Her eyes widen in fear, and Meira backs away, eyes flickering back and forth.

“Andras. I don’t know you.” Her hand out as if to ward him away. “Get away from me, or I’ll scream.”

 “Have I offended you in some way? You seemed interested in me last time we met.” *The other day, she almost took me to her bed.*

“The other day,” Scraping a hand through her thick hair, Meira tucks a strand behind an ear, her cheeks pink. “We’ve never met. And the other day, I was nowhere near here.”

 “My apologies,” Andras stammers. “I swear you look like a woman I met a couple of weeks ago. I’m so sorry.” His face flushes red.

Meira recalls meeting a woman before going out of town. “She looks just like me? That’s odd because I met a strange woman a while back who resembled me.” Meira considers and thinks*, This might be a way to get to know him*, and smiling to herself, she asks, “Would you like to join me for some tea, to make sense of this situation?”

She’s inviting me to tea? What a strange woman. Andras briefly reflects. “If you’re sure.” He says.

“There’s a café down the street.” Together they walk to the café where Meira had first met Clio. “She walked up and sat at my table.” She nods toward the table and Andras follows her over and together they sit at the same table and order tea.

Andras sees the life flowing in her and realizes. *There’s so much life in this one. How did I miss an obvious clue? Her eyes are green, not violet. The other must have been a demon.*

“I may know what happened,” he said. “My guess is, the other is a demon, one I’ve met before.”

“A demon! You’re not serious?” she says. *He’s making a joke about it*. “Are you kidding me, or what?”

“You know about fallen angels, so why not demons?” he challenges. Why would she think I’m joking?

“I’ve heard of fallen angels, but demons. Sure, people talk about demons but, come on.”

*What can I say to convince her?* “You believe angels are real, demons are powers Lucifer gave the angels when he turned them from love and compassion, only he distorted them into something evil.”

 “Don’t tell me you believe this foolishness?” Yet Meira’s intrigued by the idea as she says, “You do believe, don’t you?”

 “How else do you explain the woman who spoke to you, who came to me looking exactly like you? She is a demon who plays with humans. I’m familiar with Clio, and while your eyes are green. Hers are violet. Didn’t you notice?”

“Now you mention it. At the time, I thought her violet eyes were unusual. But a demon?” Meira frowns. “I want nothing to do with this sort of thing.” She gets up to leave and Andras thinks, *She can’t leave. I may never see her again.* He reflects on his daydream.

“I’m one of the fallen.” He quickly says, “You may not believe me, but I can prove it.” He waits to see if her curiosity wins out. Still under Clio’s allure Andras wants this woman. *Say yes*.

Meira sits back down but farther away. *I want to know him, but Is he even safe to be around? Sounds a lot of crazy to me.*

Green eyes darken into slits of doubt, and Andras again recalls the other woman’s violet eyes. *Clio used her power to attract me to Meira. What’s Lucifer up to now?*

“How can you prove it? Do you have wings?” Meira asked.

“Angels don’t have wings,” Andras said. “Cherubs do, like Lucifer who was once a cherub. Adonai sent him to earth and to rule in hell. His angels he locked up in hell for the most part.”

“If you’re one of the fallen, how did you get out of lockup? It’s not as if your god Adonai would make a mistake.”

“That’s a good question. Many of the fallen on the earth, mated with earth women, had children, the Nephilim. Lucifer commanded them to engage with the earth women, tempt them into having sex.”

“Enough nonsense. What can you prove?” She says, sits back, arms crossed. “Some accept gods and angels, fallen ones even, but it doesn’t make them real*.” Like those in the temple who use their so-called gods to turn children into prostitutes.*

Meira’s scowl deepens as she considers the evil she’s been a part of*. Those foul temple priests raping mere children.* She continues to think on it while Andras stands silent, watching and wondering.

~~~

*How much should I reveal?* “Let’s get out of here and I’ll show you*.” Will she follow?* Standing, Andras walks to the door, then looks back. *You’ll see I’m crazy for you, enough to want you to believe me.*

Meira looks away, lips tight, she clears her throat. “I don’t know,” she said, then raises a hand to rub the back of her neck, fluffing her hair. Finally, she draws a deep breath. Meira gets up and walks to the door, as if to follow him. “I don’t know you well enough to go anywhere with you,” she said with a frown. “How do I know you can be trusted? Everything you’ve said sounds crazy to me.”

“If you want proof, I know where we can go; it’s one of the safest places around. Then you’ll see how crazy I am.”

Meira hesitates, then follows Andras out of the café. He tries to take her hand, but she pulls away yet still follows.

*~~~*

Andras has seen the outer temple, but knew*: it’s a place of worship so, If I take her to the top, she should feel safe*. Pleased with the idea he walks on, Meira at his side now.

Shaped like a pyramid, the temple’s four walls terraced in receding levels slope up toward a flat top. However, seeing where Andras’ is going, crossing her arms over her chest, Meira moves away from him, her eyes stare at the building, and she hangs back. “No, I don’t think so.” She turns away from Andras, her face sweaty and pale.

“Are you okay?” Andras reaches for her but she cringes away from his touch and cries, “Oh, no. I’m not going there!” Breath short, she drops to her knees gasping for air.

 “What’s wrong?” He sees Meira’s eyes wide in terror. *Now what? Does she know about the temple practices?*

A couple walking by inquire, “Is she alright?”

“She had a scare.” Andras reassures them. “She’ll be okay.” Looking around to see if anyone else noticed as the couple walks away, though, the woman looks back, a time or two.

Andras reassures Meira, “It’s okay. We won’t go inside. I was taking you to the top where you can see the view.”

Her breathing slows as her color returns. *Thank the stars. I don’t know if I could go back in there*. She takes a deep breath to calm herself. “If we have to go inside, I’m not going with you.”

“No. We can get to the top another way. I’ve been there before and can take you, but only if you’re okay with it.” He hesitates, unsure now. *Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.*

 “If we’re going, we’d better go before I lose my nerve,” Meira says. As the words leave her mouth, without another thought, he grasps her about the waist, transforming at the same time.

Meira shrieks as he lifts her but she doesn’t see him change for he’s moving rapidly. In a blink, they’re at the top in the warm fresh air, blue skies above. Gasping to catch her breath as Andras sets her down, Meira gazes at him in wonder.

“What are you?” Her words tumble over like leaves in the wind as she turns her eyes upon him: his skin smooth bronze, and white-gold hair spills over broad shoulders to curl slightly at the ends. *Lord, he’s tall, at least nine feet. His eyes gold and lustrous.* *He’s radiant and impossible.* Her mind goes blank. Not believing in angels, Meira’s unable to grasp what stands before her.

“You’re wrong about angels,” Andras says and reaches to catch her as she collapses in a faint at his feet.

Angels like other celestials are spirits who can assume human form, as needed. When cast to the earth, the fallen, disguised as humans move about between earth and hell.

For centuries some angels moved among the mortals. Meira had just met her first angel, and a fallen one it seems.

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## 4. Awakening

Meira awakens in Andras’ arms. Looking up, her amazement asserts itself. Pushing away, she gets to her feet, unsteadily. “You’re an angel,” she said, “with no wings.” Brushing hair out of her face she cannot quite understand. *I thought everyone was nuts believing in heaven and hell, angels, and demons. Look at him, an angel, and incredible.*

Andras is not only handsome, rather his face shone brilliant, and she had to turn her eyes away. She’d glimpsed eyes like flaming torches, and his arms and legs gleamed like finely polished bronze. But the sound of his voice when he spoke, Meira had no way to describe; it’s like waters rushing over a waterfall. Clad in a loose tunic and pants with an ornate kimono robe over the top; it’s a watercolor-type wash of blue to gold and browns, from lighter to darker down the length from top to bottom. She smiles, for it reminds her of a desert sunset. Though his pants are plain dark-chocolate brown, almost black.

Slowly, the light emanating from him dims. Meira hesitates, then reaches to touches him to know Andras is real and not her imagination. She strokes his face as he leans over, then drops her hand to his chest, his arms, each in turn, feeling the warmth of them, awe-struck. “How?” Her breath coming in short gasps of wonder. “How is this possible?”

“It’s a lot to take in,” he says, noting her courage.

Having fainted, she recovers her scattered thoughts as she takes in his angelic form, head to foot. He’s now not so brilliant to look upon and she gazes at him in wonder. “Who is this god of yours? In this temple they worship many – hundreds even.”

“You’re right. I am of the One God of the heavens, Adonai, or was, until I followed Lucifer in his rebellion. Adonai sent us here to earth, cast us out of heaven. Lucifer may be the god of this earth, but he rules in hell and could call me back, anytime.” Andras resumes his human form and, in a blink, he’s back to normal size.

Tilting her head to look into his eyes, she opens her mouth to speak, then pauses to collect her thoughts*. I thought he was the crazy one. Now I feel crazy seeing an actual angel.*

Meira grips his hand and says, “Is there any way you can return to, you know, heaven?” She smiles. “It’s okay if you stay. I mean, an angel with me, here on earth. Wow!”

Andras sees the sparkle of humor in her eyes. “Earth is more like hell in many ways,” he says. “Still, you’ve had enough excitement for one day. Let me take you home.”

Meira grins. “I suppose, as you’re an angel, it’s safe to show you where I live?” She grins. “Unless you followed me and already know.”

Andras’ eyebrows draw together and a pained look crosses his face, briefly. He smiles slightly, then choosing his words carefully said, “Meira, don’t assume because I’m an angel it’s safe. I am one of the fallen and none of us are completely trustworthy.”

She has no time to respond for just then a door slid open in the temple wall and two women walk outside. “Look who’s here. I knew we heard someone walking about.”

The older one, takes Andras’ arm. To Meira she says, “You’re not one of us. We’ll take care of this fine young male.” Her hand still on his arm.

Andras turns removing her hand. *How did they know we’re here?* “No, it’s you who should leave,” he says. “We have no need of you.”

As if on cue, she cries a loud, “What is this deception?”

Two men burst through the door as if they had been waiting to show themselves. The younger woman, with a look of fear on her face, does not understand and cringes against the wall.

The first woman nods the men toward Meira, her heart races and she is unable to move or defend herself. One of the men grabs her arm and the other follows, the door closing behind them.

Andras can see her terror and her inability to respond to the threat. Held captive by the two men, she had vanished through the door, or so he thought for just then, the woman places her hand on Andras arm and he turns toward her and sees, Meira? “I thought they took you.”

Turning his head to glance quickly about, he sees only Meira. His face crunched in a frown, Andras struggles to make sense of what happened. “We need to get out of here,” he says, and turns toward the one he thinks is Meira and heads for the ramp leading down to the street.

As they pass the doorway, she says, “We’re here, let’s have a look. I’ve heard a lot about the temple and with the new changes.” Laughing, she pulls Andras into the darkness. “Come on. It’ll be fun.”

Confused by her behavior in total contrast to the earlier reaction, he follows. He can barely see where he’s going. Red light from wall slits offer little light by which to see. Smoke swirls in the corridor and smells odd. Andras asks, “Are you sure we should be in here?” Not knowing what to think, he follows as she pulls him into one of the rooms.

“Oh, look!” She exclaims. Meira walks over and drops onto a couch covered in red velvet with plush red silk pillows. “Come sit with me.” She slides over to make room. “Isn’t this exciting?”

Seeing a gleam of mischief in her eyes Andras feels playful himself and sits next to Meira, as he puts his arm around her. *This is more like it,* he muses. *She doesn’t seem to mind the temple now. And I’ve heard it’s changed since I was last here.* Still hesitant, Andras looks around and asks, “Do you imagine they mind?” But no one comes to throw them out, and he likes the idea of being here with Meira*. I wanted a little fun, but did not expect this. She’s full of surprises.*

“No one cares,” she says, chewing her bottom lip, she shifts her legs and turns toward him. “You like to play?” Meira pouts as she looks at him under her dark lashes. Her slender hands drift low on her belly and she slides her gown up. Taking his unresisting hand down between her legs he feels her wetness and instantly hardens.

*Wow, she’s more forward than I thought, but who am I to complain?* Andras wraps an arm around Meira and pulls her to him, kissing her neck then pulls the gown off her shoulders with her help.

“We have lots of privacy,” she says pushing him down then slides her hand inside his robe. “Oh, we are going to have fun.” Seconds later, no longer able to think, simply enjoying the moment, he rises above Meira to penetrate her heat and moves inside. Feeling her muscle clamp down, and they move together until both find release.

“How I’ve thought about and desired you like this. Of course,” he says, “when we first met, it was the demon, but now It’s you.” He smiles and turns to look at her, hungrily.

“Stop talking and do what you’re so good at, fallen one. I’ve not enjoyed this so much in a long time.”

“Neither have I and you don’t hear me complaining,” he says.

Meira reaching down to fondle him and soon Andras is ready again. Mounting him, her hand reaches to slip him inside her, as she began a slow rotation of her hips. *Lord she feels hot and tight,* as his erection grew even harder, about to burst. It was a strange sensation, beyond simple sexual pleasure. He cried out as an intense orgasm swamped his senses; it was unlike anything before, and he recalled his daydream.

Andras hears a familiar scream, which he’d ignored before, caught up in his lust. Again, he hears the scream*. That sounds like Meira,* and he looks down only to see the woman’s true image. Shocked, Andras springs to his feet, pulls his robe on to cover himself. *This woman is not Meira.* “Who are you?” he said, then not waiting for an answer, he bounds from the room and races down the hall, heading toward the room from where he’d heard the screams.

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The men first dragged Meira into the temple, and quickly took her to one of the rooms they’d used before with temple whores. “Okay baby. Let’s get on with it,” one of men said as the other looks her up and down, slams shut the door then turns the lock. “So, we won’t be disturbed.”

“What are you doing?” Meira backs into the bed. *Where’s Andras? Does he know what’s happening? Was this part of his plan? He wouldn’t do this; he’s an angel*. In a flash she recalls his words, ‘We’re fallen. None of us are trustworthy.’

Her face pales. *He’s a fallen, one of the evil ones.* She rushes forward, trying to escape the room, but one man blocks her way.

“I’m not one a temple whore!” Meira shrieks.

“To me you’re a whore.” He strikes her across the face, knocks her back onto the bed. Ripping her dress off he throws it on the floor. One hand holds her about the throat as he forces her legs apart, his eyes wild with excitement. Holding his erection, he roughly shoves it inside her, until he reaches a climax. Getting off, he said, “Great job, honey. You’re the best. Len’s looking forward to a good time too,” he said, stepping back to watch, while fondling himself.

*No, this can’t be happening. This is worse than before when I knew what to expect. I was a whore then.* She shakes her head side to side as she sits up. “No please. Don’t. This isn’t right.”

His partner approaches, appearance is surprisingly seductive. Raven black hair, it glistens in the light, his face carefully structured, but with cold green eyes, intense above a Roman nose his thick lips form a smile that never reaches his eyes. His pale skin looked almost corpse-like, and she knew he is far more dangerous.

“You’ll get no sympathy from me, whore. Open up and give me what I’ve paid for and do it now,” he snarls and shoves her back down, pulling the covering off her. He slaps Meira across the face, then pulls his fist back and strikes her in the stomach. She falls back. Kneeing her legs apart. “I love it when they fight.” He shoves his fingers inside her, long thin fingers penetrate, probing. “Nice and wet.” Then rising, he pulls aside his robe and slams his hard organ into her. “Damn she feels good.” He gasps. “She’s not like the other whores. We’ll keep this one.”

Meira is terrified of his meaning, for at times the temple sells whores to certain men and they’re never seen again, alive anyway. She’d heard of bodies washed up in the reeds at the edge of the marsh, and the things done to the women, she never wanted to know. “Oh please, do not take me from here. I’m truly not a temple whore.”

“No? You’re my whore now, sweetie.” She struggles to break free. “Now stop your playacting, so I can enjoy myself,” his hands reach to pull her arms behind her back. “Mack let her suck you while I finish.” And his partner eagerly climbs on the bed, forcing his erection in her mouth, and warns. “If you bite me, you’ll have no teeth left.”

Andras grasps the scene as he kicks in the door and enters the room. Instantly, a vengeful angel sword in hand, he grabs one man, knocks him to the floor then shoves the other away, angelic sword raised high.

Meira grabs the cover from the floor to shield her naked body as the other scrambles, trying to pull up his pants at the same time.

“Did Lucifer send you?” Andras, not waiting for an answer, cleaves head from body. Blood sprays the room and runs in rivulets down the wall to pool on the carpet. *This one looks familiar,* Andras thinks glancing at the head, it’s white face covered in blood now. Smile gone, green eyes stare sightlessly at nothing.

The other had tried to flee, but couldn’t pull his pants on and get out the door fast enough. Andras took hold and quickly dispatches him. “Tell Lucifer, I sent you!” He snarls as the demon turns to ash.

He sits beside Meira, who’s cringing and sobbing, “I’m so sorry. It’s all my fault. Please forgive me.” He doesn’t want to frighten Meira more, so Andras takes her hand gently and holds it. “I had no idea this would happen when I brought you to the temple.”

Meira watched in horror as he slew the men. Terrified, she doesn’t know what to do. Meira had feared the men were going to kill her, for she’d seen the knives they carried and the one man’s vile nature, then, when Andras entered, *I thought he would rape me too.*

Nearby, the young woman trembles in revulsion at what she’d seen. Andras turns to the other who tricked him, then followed to this room. “Who are you?” he asks, getting to his feet. “Answer me!” His gaze fierce and deadly as he glares at her.

Fearful she stammers, “I was told to entice you, to give you pleasure. You did too.” Nodding at the young woman, “Take her. She’s nothing but a temple whore and won't say a thing. No charge.”

Andras, human again, looks on in loathing, “You knew they planned to rape and possibly murder her? How does it profit you to lose your soul for nothing? Your life is forfeit.” She gasps as his sword cleaves her head, and she becomes as dust. Andras knew then she also was a demon.

Looking at the young woman, “What are you, a whore or a demon of hell?” She’s shaking like a leaf, and Andras feels pity for her youth and perhaps innocence. “Have you learned anything?”

Fearing her life’s about to end, she cries, “I’m not a demon. Only a temple whore. What am I to do? I didn’t know they were going to rape the woman. Please, you must believe me.”

She hesitates, tries to explain. “Men and women, often come here and we do whatever is asked of us. Some pretend fear at being raped. The priests let the men and women do as they will, even violence if they desire. There’s always more where we came from.”

Meira has stopped shaking and regained her calm. Feeling pity for the young girl, she says. “Andras please, a moment.” She turns to her, “When a child, I was given as a temple prostitute and helped to get free. I can do this for you, if you desire it.”

Falling to her knees, she said, “Oh my lady, I will do whatever you require of me. I’m at your service.” Crumpling to the floor, still terrified he will take her life. “Please. I don’t want to die.”

Looking at Andras with grateful eye, filled with tears, Meira says, “Thank you. No man has ever defended me, only took what they wanted. Now, it’s time to render help. It’s not our place to punish this woman. You took care of the demons.”

“It’s what any decent man would do.” *Though a decent man hardly applies to me,* Andras thinks. More gently, he says to the young woman, “Can you find her something to wear?”

She leaves the room, reappearing a couple of minutes later with a damp towel and a clean garment.

Meira cleans the blood off and the men’s ejaculate and pulls the gown over her head then stands, more collected now. *Did he not know it wasn’t me he was with before all this?*

Andras says, “We best leave before anyone else comes. We don’t know how they conspired to do this*.” Although, I suspect Lucifer had a hand in it. He’s always watching*. They head out the same door they’d entered, moving swiftly away from the temple, down the ramp. Though Meira couldn’t move too quickly. Andras carried her part way.

Andras says nothing about copulating with the woman, assuming Meira suspects. Andras had desired her*. It was an honest mistake. Then why do I feel so guilty, like I should’ve known? And I did.*

*~~~*

*He thought he was with me, so thinks I’m a loose woman.* Sad, she considers. *I had fantasies too, only this was not the way I’d imagined.*

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Lucifer is beside himself with glee as Clio looks on in horror. *This he contrived and apparently succeeded in doing? “*Bastard. You ruined what could have been a perfectly good time for me with the angel.”

“Oh, stop grousing. You have more than enough mortals with which to fornicate. Let me enjoy myself for a change.”

“Oh, like you don’t enjoy all those who come here and are raped and mutilated repeatedly? He should have been mine.”

“Would you like a taste of what he was going to do to her, had he taken her from the temple?” Lucifer sneers at Clio, who is silent.

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*It does no good ruminating on it. I’ll speak to him later*. Meira puts the thought away, and soon they’re standing before her home. Andras sees a building with a shop and living quarters in the back.

“This is where you live?” He asks, entering the building. All sorts of odds and ends, pieces of handmade jewelry lay about on the counter. In a case nearby, with a sheer fabric cover, he couldn’t see what was inside, so walked to the back, and glanced inside another room, which appeared to be for storage. “This is very nice. It seems you have a livelihood here. Where do you live though?” he asked.

“There’s another door in the back. This is where we came after the woman rescued me. She let me stay and taught me skills to earn a living. One day she left and never returned. She left this place with my name on the title.” Meira explains.

The young woman in wonder says, “You are so blessed.” She moves about the room, though less bold than Andras.

Meira recalls: “Everyone called her Cee. Red-gold hair and wicked looking with a gleam of mischief in her eyes. She surprised me because she did not seem the sort to help anyone. The men came more for her than any jewelry. At first, I thought she wanted me for them too, but no. They always called her Cee and only came to see her. She was humorous and doubtless a prostitute - only a finer one than those in the temple.”

Andras wonders if it was Clio. *It makes no sense. A succubus helping the prostitutes! What Lucifer would make of her doing such a thing?* Andras chuckles to himself.

Looking around he notices the handcrafted jewelry, its exceptional artistry and is in awe. “You made these?” he asks Meira, astonished.

A rosy blush creeps into her face, Meira nods. “Cee made some. But I keep them as a reminder. Aren’t they wonderful?”

Meira picks up several, one piece at a time, to admire them. Then returns them to the cloth upon which they were resting. “I show them to patrons who aren’t sure what they want.”

Andras noticed one piece had an identifier etched on the back, the letter ‘C.’ He was then certain of her benefactor and chuckles to himself. *Guess she’s not all evil.* “It’s time to leave,” he says. “You have a life, as do I, so I’ll leave you to get acquainted.” He glances at Meira.

Meira says, “I believe we’ll be fine, Andras. “You need not stay. But it would be nice to see you again.” *What am I thinking? I don’t know him, other than being a fallen angel who likes to fornicate, and with me.*

Andras looks at the young woman, “I need to know my friend here is safe.” He nods at Meira, “I have nothing to worry about. In other words, you won’t rob her and run back to the temple richer but…”

Seeing the threat on Meira’s face, he stops. “Okay. I’ll leave it to you. I do worry about you,” he says, looking at the young woman.

 “Nothing within my power will ever harm her,” she says.

Andras leaves, though he doesn’t trust the girl. *I have a living to earn while I’m on this earth, so best get to it.*

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## 5. Andras Returns

Weeks later, returning to Meira’s shop from a dragon hunt, several coins richer, Andras is surprised to find the women working together and laughing over some humor. A smile crosses his face, and he rubs a hand self-consciously through his hair as he approaches, uncertain of the reception he’ll receive. “What have we here?” Raised eyebrows, he says, “Laughing and at work? Is such a thing allowed?” Both women looked up in surprise to see him standing in the doorway.

Eyes brightening, her heart skips a beat and Meira jumps to her feet to rush over and give him a hug. “We are so glad to see you.” Glancing at the girl she amends, “Well, I am glad, and I’m sure Salma is as well.”

Andras heart races at the sight of her, and he takes her hand, “Come, let’s walk, if you have time, for I am pleased to see you as well.

Nodding, she glances at Salma and blushes, then taking Andras’ hand the two leave the shop. “It’s good to see you. I didn’t know if you’d return for sure, and am glad you did.”

“How are you since, you know?” She blushes slightly, as he looks her over, knowing to what he refers. ﻿Nervous she scrapes a hand through her hair and tucks a loose strand behind an ear. “My lady part was sore for a day or two,” she blushes again. “But it’s fine now.”

He turns her to face him. “If I’d known sooner. Lucifer put a glamour on them, so nothing appeared as it was. Knowing you as little as I did, it didn’t take long to realize she was not you.” He smiles. “No one is you. You’re amazing.” *Certainly not the woman who I thought was you.*

Andras feels guilty about fornicating with the woman in the temple, yet he says nothing*. I thought it was Meira. How was I to know?* Guilt assails him for he knows it was lust that had hold of him.

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you while hunting dragon,” he said. “And was eager to leave my companions upon our return.” Spots of color rise in his cheeks. “Anyway, I made haste to return to you before you forgot about me.”

“Forget about you. Never.” Meira smiles at the man she knows is an angel beside her. “Andras, this is as close as I’ve let a man get, outside the shop. Fallen or not, I feel safe. One day I’ll share more. Still, the past I don’t want to talk about.” Again color rises in her face.

“When you’re ready.” Together they return to her shop. “Is Salma going to work out?” he asks. “She seems nice.”

Laughing, “She’s full of life, even with what happened. I think she’ll do fine. Salma’s a joy to have. Stop worrying about the past; it’s all over. And she has an admirer already.”

Turning his eyes to her, he asks, “It’s not Salma I’m concerned about, it’s you, after what those men did. How are you doing, truly?”

“It’s nothing to speak of. I’ll be fine. Nightmares and anxiety, but those are normal and as before, they will lessen.” A sadness crosses her face briefly, then she smiles.

“I left weeks ago and already your life has gone on without me.” Andras said, turning to Meira again, whom he admires and wonders, *Do I have a future with this woman? Lucifer will see to it I do not if he knows about her and how I enjoy being with her.*

“Silly. You were missed. If it makes you feel any better,” she chortles. “I adore seeing you again.” *Does he come for me as a loose woman, hoping to find his entertainment, or a woman he enjoys to be around*? “Andras, I need to ask, “You were with the woman in the temple, thinking she was me and I just wonder.”

His face flushes but Andras cuts her short. “Yes, I was with her and thought she was you. Now you wonder if I think you’re a loose woman and I’m only after you, for what men want.” Thoughtful for a moment, he said, “From the first time I saw you, I wanted you. Your lips soft and full, I longed to kiss and other parts as well.” he chuckles. “You’re a beautiful woman. What’s not to desire?

“Do I see you as a loose woman, a whore? No. The time in the temple I’d like to repeat with the real Meira, but only when you’re ready*.” I hope it’s soon too, but can keep my fantasies*.

“Hmm. More information than what I wanted, but it’s good to know where I stand and one day, if you’re willing to wait. There you have it.” Her face flushes bright red as she bites her lower lip and looks away.

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Andras grins and flushes at the thought. When not hunting dragons, Andras spends time with Meira and her companion, looking forward to the day of which she spoke. Salma, he’s told, is an artisan as well. She’s sold some small works and has attracted a young man, Marc.

Andras visits Meira often and realizes he is falling in love with her. *Never thought I’d feel this way about an earth woman. Though, marriage is out of the question.* Salma and Marc had decided to wed, Meira said, and tells more about their customs. “Among our people, women can have sex without marriage. Yet to marry she must be a virgin.”

“Sex is okay without marriage, but to marry you must be a virgin! How does that make sense?” Andras shakes his head. *If we can have sex without marriage, what’s she waiting for?*

“It encourages girls to remain a virgin until they marry. If they choose not, then decide to marry, the husband-to-be must be willing to take her as she is – not a virgin.”

“That’s more like it. A certain amount of freedom,” he said, giving Meira a light kiss.

She pulls him close to her, “You call that a kiss?” and firmly places her lips on his. The kiss quickly deepens into one of passion. *Is she ready to move this forward?* And he feels himself harden at the thought.

Anak finds it almost impossible to break the kiss. His pulse throbs in his throat. Breathing heavily, face flushed he knows Meira feels him hard, and he doesn’t want the kiss to end. *We’re in the shop and someone could walk in.* “We need to stop before someone comes.”

“Do you want to stop,” she murmurs, tongue sliding over her lips, eyes smoldering, she pulls him closer to her, and feels his hardness as it rises against her and smiles.

*Damn. Not when I’m ready for her.* “Mercy no.” He pulls her tighter, letting her feel more of him. “Perhaps, your room in the back?” Leaving the question unspoken.

Meira rubs against him with meaning. She can feel him pulse against her and said, “We’ve waited long enough.” Hungrily she clings to him, a low hum in her throat, and swallows. “Oh, yes.” She breathes, her heart pulsing as she sucks on his lower lip, nipping him lightly. “What an idea,” whispers Meira. “Salma will be gone the rest of the day.”

Pulling away, she reaches over to close the door and leads Andras into her private room at the back of the shop. Shocks of pleasure ripple through her lower belly as she anticipates his lovemaking. She pulls the top cover from her bed on the floor and turns to him.

“Salma will be gone all day so no worries.” He slips her robe off; it slides down to pool at her feet. He takes a moment to admire her body then gently pulls her down onto the mattress. Rising on an elbow, Andras looks down at Meira and asks, “Are you sure you want this now, after what happened? It’s not too soon?”

“You want to stop now?” Her eyes hooded, she pulls him down and raises her hips to let him know how eager she is to feel him inside.

Andras does not hesitate, hungrily he enters her feeling her muscles clasp him, reveling in her passion until both move in rhythm together. Both have waited a long time and soon reach orgasm.

“I’d hold you forever, if I could,” he murmurs, arms around her, he nuzzles her neck. *If I could. With Lucifer’s expectations I’ll soon be gone, especially if he finds out about Meira.*

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After a time, Salma and Marc plan to marriage. “Salma must attend the temple and agree to have sex with anyone who asks,” Meira informs Andras who shakes his head in disgust.

“How is this any different than prostitution, yet the very one who take part in it, look down on those women?”

“It’s just the way it is, Andras. Fear not for I believe Marc has similar sentiments when it comes to Salma.” Meira wasn’t wrong.

“Didn’t you say, a woman had to be a virgin before marriage, yet they’re required to have sex with a strange man? How can they honestly claim to be a virgin when they wed?”

Laughing at his confusion. “Let’s not talk about it anymore. Clearly you find it distressing, and it’s not going to change any time soon, so let’s forget about it.” She pulls him into her arms and he ceases to worry about anything other than pleasuring her and receiving in like kind.

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Not wanting to share her, Marc shows up to have sex with Salma, yet tries to keep it as private as possible, in the shadows and unseen, then gives her coin to donate to the temple.

“Sex is healthy; it’s merely enjoying one another!” Meira argues.

“Except, the young girls violated, are made into temple prostitutes,” he says. *Who am I to talk?* Andras muses*. I’ve used them in the past.*

“Well yes. You’re right. What about your god?” she asks.

 “Simple. No sex outside of marriage, which is a covenant bond not to be broken; we promise to always remain faithful,” Andras says. “Angels in heaven do not marry, but down here. It’s our choice.” His deceit leaves a bad taste, for one day he will leave*. I’ve told Meira about Lucifer and said he may call me back to hell one day.* Andras imagines this serves as a forewarning and thinks nothing more about it.

Meira, unaware, discusses marriage requirements, ticking them off, one finger at a time. “Temple sex we won’t do, by choice; an engagement contract; your family pays a bride price and mine a dowry. Since I have no family and yours is what it is; then we have a feast to complete the ceremony and it’s over.”

“You’re poking fun,” he said. “You just like to eat.”

“True but still necessary. Sex can be freely shared so we can live together, but the marriage is sealed only after the feast.” Meira looks at Andras and asks, “Are you sure you want to marry? It’s not necessary to wed me, you know. I enjoy being with you no matter.”

Andras kisses her from the tip of her nose down to where she heats with passion again. After spending more time in the back room enjoying one another, she continues the lesson as they lie in one another’s arms, he gently strokes her skin, reveling in its smoothness.

“The bride moves to her father-in-law’s home. How does it work up there?” Meira quirks an eyebrow. “No marriage there as it’s not an issue. Once wed, the bride gets pregnant. If not, the husband takes a second wife if he desires children, to forward the family line.”

“So that’s all there is to it?”

“Would you like it more complicated?”

He shakes his head. “No. Keep it simple I say.”

“Angels procreate, for there are the Nephilim. Yet I cannot bear children.” A flicker of sadness is seen in her eyes. “If I could get pregnant, would our child be a Nephilim?”

“Yes,” he answers honestly. “Would such a child bother you, if you could have children, of course?”

Instead of answering, the asks, “If Lucifer’s angels are in hell, how did the Nephilim come to be?”

“When Lucifer first arrived on earth, with his angels, he instructed them to copulate with Earth women and bear children, which they did. The fallen will one day, along with Lucifer, be in the fires of hell.”

“Okay. If you’re a fallen angel and not in hell, weren’t you evicted along with Lucifer?”

“All I know is, the Father completes His purpose, and one day Lucifer will call me back to hell. I don’t have all the answers. Enough questions. So, having a child, a Nephilim would be no problem for you?”

“In my eyes, you are a giant among men,” she smiles, her eyes alight. “So, why not my son, if the child were a male?”

Andras takes Meira in his arms, he says, “Let’s get married.” *What on earth am I doing? I am belonging.* He smiles to himself.

“It’s not necessary, Andras.” Seeing the longing on his face she says, “Of course I will marry you.” The two begin to make plans.

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They draw up a contract; sign the legal documents. The wedding day arrives with Meira and Andras’ friends. As the bride approaches the altar, she holds her best friend’s arm instead of a nonexistent father. Andras finds the ceremony exciting, and everyone enjoys the wedding feast.

The two are off for a few day’s journey alone. Andras had a pleasure barge built but no pilot, being as he knows how to maneuver one himself. He wants Meira to himself. Traveling upriver during the day, the couple leave for an oasis one evening to enjoy the natural spring, under the shade of the palms both relax and soon fall asleep.

Andras watches Meira awaken, stretch catlike. He reaches to gently strokes her skin she slides into his warm embrace as his lips caress her. He murmurs words of love as his lips trace down her belly. A bolt of desire sweeps through Meira and she opens herself, inviting him to enter.

Andras takes his time, enjoying her salty taste as she responds to the warmth of the sun and his calloused fingers gently tease. She whimpers, “Fill me with your love.” Andras eagerly enters her welcoming heat.

Soon they return to the barge to enjoy the rest of the journey, and not to think of the past or the future, but simply delight in one another. All too soon, it’s time to return. Andras knows Lucifer will be seeking him. He ponders his deception and the consequences.

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Life seems great until, Andras heard Meira speak to someone who looks a lot like Clio, talking about problems with him. “He’s always coming and going, never home. I think he’s cheating. He’s been gone a long time. I haven’t seen him in weeks. He’s not hunting dragons.”

“If he returns, would you accept him back?”

“Oh, absolutely. He is my husband.”

“If he doesn’t return, you could start seeing other men. There’s quite a few interested.” She smirks. “It’s what I’d do in your place,” she said, with a flip of her long blond hair.

“Oh, no. I couldn’t. We took vows.”

“He’s not keeping his why should you?”

“Well, because. . .”

Andras wants to hear her say, ‘because I love him,’ but the words do not leave her lovely mouth.

“I’m not sure how I feel but he is my husband. If I accept him back, he’d have to stop the on and off again. Otherwise I might have to find someone else.” She smiles, considering the idea.

Fuming about Meira’s threat to see another man, he shrugs it off as foolish. *She’d not cheat, surely.* Returning home, Andras sees Meira on the same street where they’d first met, but she’s with a man, one of the fierce dragon slayers. The two of them look very chummy, his hand on her ass stroking it intimately, and she’s not objecting.

His gaze intense, an unblinking stare he stalks toward them, takes a deep breath, chest pushes out, he flexes his fingers into fists. “I’m going to kill the two of them.” Watching, he takes a deep breath and decides*, I’ll bide my time, wait until he alone.* Andras turns into an alley before either sees him. He watches though, from the shadows as the man pulls Meira into an embrace and fondle her butt. She leans in closer, rubbing against him as she had with him once. Andras can barely contain himself from exploding, beating them both to a pulp. *How can she do this to me?* He rages to himself.

Andras follows Meira and this unknown man to her shop. Together, they enter. The man’s hand never leaves her butt. Andras watches from across the street and sees the door close. He knows the only reason it’s closed is because they’re going to use the back room with Meira.

With a heavy heart, Andras turns and walks away. *Had it not been for Lucifer, I’d be the one with her. She’s a whore.* He rages to himself, for his anger takes away the sorrow he feels, in the moment.

Andras came awake with a start, heart hammering in his chest, and he realizes, *It was only a dream*. Yet he can’t get it out of his head. *Would she truly find someone else? Is this about my leaving her, not for another woman but returning to hell? Damn.* Andras, confounded by the dream, doesn’t know what to do about it. *I’m damned if I do or don’t.*

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## 6. Deception

Recalling the dream, Andras takes Meira into his arms, kisses away the frown, softening her lips kissing them until she is willing to listen. Stroking her intimately, she responds to the fire he kindles in her, feeling the muscles of his abdomen tighten as his passion increases.

Heat pools in her belly between her legs and she burns with desire as he pushes her onto the bed then hesitates, “Don’t stop, love.”

“Say yes, I’ll explain later.” He moves, teasing.

“What would you have me do?” she gasps.

“It’s not what you can do,” he persists, “It’s for you, a gift.”

“You’re my gift. It is enough.” Impatient with lovemaking.

“Say yes to my gift. You’ll love it. I’m certain.”

“I’ll take your gift–whatever.”

Andras responds to her. As they near completion, she feels a warmth spread throughout her womb and wonders.

A few minutes later, lying side by side gasping to catch their breath, relaxing, she asks, “What was that?”

“Remember, you told me you could not have children?” For Andras knew what she referred to.

“Yes. I remember. And?”

“I saw sadness in your eyes, though you seemed resigned to not having a child. The gift is what you thought you could never have.”

Meira lay still for several heartbeats as she considers what his words mean. “So, the warmth I felt inside?” She asks, her heart skips a beat.

“Yes. It is a new life beginning in you.”

“What does it mean? Why am I afraid?” She turns to him. “Tell me your plan. I want the truth, all of it, no matter.”

“Meira.” Andras stumbles to speak. “To tell you all could put you in jeopardy. Are you sure you want the whole truth?”

Sitting up, eyes flame, not the fiery passion he’d seen earlier. “Damn. What are you doing? You’re leaving me, aren’t you? Tell me the truth.” She sees it in his eyes.

Jumping up, to pull away, she crosses the room to stand against the wall and glares at him. “That’s it, isn’t it? You think giving me a baby to raise alone could take your place! You bastard.” She shrieks, hands curled into fists. She wants to hit him. “How can you do such a thing!”

Chewing on his cheek, a pained look on his handsome face. Andras struggles. “Meira, there’s a reason. Let me explain.”

Numb with shock, “Shut the hell up.” She points a finger at him, eyes narrow, a feral cat. “I need time, then maybe you can explain yourself, if that’s even possible.”

Clenching and releasing her hands, she’d like to scratch his eyes out. “Great,” she says. “What a fool I’ve been - for you, your stories, your lies!” She snarls and grabs some clothes, yanks them on, and slams the door as she storms out into the night.

~~~

Clio had been waiting, fearful how Meira might respond and appears in the room. “Didn’t go so well, did it! Now what?”

“What can I do?” Andras said running his hands through his dark, sweat-dampened hair. “She’ll come around. At least I can hope so.” An agonized look, head bent, his heart hurts. “What she went through, I hate myself for doing this to her.”

“I rescued Meira in the past. She’s resilient. Still, I’m not sure about how to help her this time.” Clio paces. “What about Lucifer?”

“I’m sure he knows. We argued about it because he’s the one who wanted me to be with her. Now, he wants retribution and, as usual, he wants to take it out on me, through Meira.”

He sees Clio’s shock as she takes a step back, eyes wide as she blinks a time or two, trying to process what she’s heard. “The rat bastard,” she says, looking about then sits down and tries to think. “It’s not a surprise. What will you do?” She hesitates. “That’s why the pregnancy!”

“I need to tell the truth. I thought she’d be pleased not get so angry.” Dejected, Andras shakes his head. “This is a mistake, one which may cost me dearly if she walks away.”

Clio’s mouth drops open. “Uh, you’re the one leaving her, yet you’re saying it’s worse if she leaves you because you’re the one being left?”

A flush of shame brushes his chest to cover his neck and face. “I’m more concerned about my losing her and haven’t thought about how this affects her, what it will be like for Meira.”

“How might she be feeling and what might it be like to bear a child not only part angel but a Nephilim she must raise alone! Need I remind you the Nephilim can get territorial. And the angels who spawned them, most are pure evil.”

Clio’s pauses. “To be honest, and I rarely am; still I cannot imagine her going through this alone. Did you even think before ‘gifting’ her?” A demon, Clio at times sees beyond the suffering she inflicts on mortals. The two now sit in silence, wondering when Meira will return. After Clio leaves, Andras falls asleep while waiting.

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Standing on a dismal plain, Andras can see what seems for miles all around nothing but emptiness; it’s a dry barren desert. In the distance, a woman is weeping. Realizing it’s Meira, he walks toward her to comfort, except there’s a river in front of him and it’s too wide to cross. Andras tries to imagine himself on the other side, traveling as he could in heaven, but he cannot; there’s no way for him to get to the other side.

“Meira, I’m here. I haven’t abandoned you,” he shouts but there’s no sound from his lips. In frustration, Andras continues trying to get her attention but to no avail. The woman now has a child in her arms as she walks to the rivers’ edge. As she glances up, her eyes connect with his and smiling, she steps into the river and is swept away.

Andras wakes with a start, realizes he’d fallen asleep after Clio left, and had other dream. *Damn dreams. Why do they plague me? There’s nothing I can do about my life. It is what it is.*

~~~

Andras conceals his marriage from Lucifer who asks more questions about her than Andras is comfortable answering, "She's a plaything. You said to taste the earth's fruit, I did. Don't see why you thought it needful. She’s the same as the others.” The dream comes to mind as he speaks. *Damn dream. What’s it doing here now.*

Lucifer considers his commander*, lying to me, the greatest of liars;* it angered him. “You never know. You may want to bring her with you, to share with me and the others.” Lucifer sees Andras cringe. “You wouldn’t mind sharing, would you? She is quite lovely.”

*I know about the assault and my demon, your rescue of the female,* he snarls to himself, keeping an eye on Andras.

“Tell me, Andras, are you prepared to return? I’ve need of you, for you’ve remained on earth far too long.” *He dreads the day of his return*. “Until you do, I’ll visits earth’s temples. See to the sacrifices, those souls. Perhaps*,* even lovely Meira.” Lucifer chuckles at Andras, mouth agape, he blinks then looks away, stepping back from Lucifer

“As you will, my Lord but she is not for here,” Andras said*.* “There are those Clio brings in who come willingly, so why do you need this one?” He shrugs, “Too many deserving ones.”

Lucifer knows Andras’ affection for the woman and their marriage. *He’ll wish he’d not deceived me*. “I’ll be the judge of that my commander while you take care of other business. Before I leave, I’ve another female for you to seduce, as you did so well with the one.”

“Lord, you’d best send someone else. You know I’ve not the skills.” *What in all of hell does he really want of me?*

“Andras, you imagine I don’t know you and your talents.” He laughs. “All the more reason. You need the practice.” A grin splits his face, eyes bright with laughter. “No, this one’s perfect for my purpose and you’re perfect for doing it.” His eyes glow with mischief. “Do not fear, she’s in a town far away, so no one will see you.”

“My Lord, I’d rather you sent someone else.”

Snarling, Lucifer turns to Andras. “Why do you object so? Is there some personal reason you cannot do as your Lord commands?” His eyes narrow into mere slits as he stands nose-to-nose with Andras.

Pulling back, breath shallow, “No, my Lord. It’s as you desire.”

“Good. Then here is what I desire.”

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## 7. Meira Returns

Andras awaits Meira’s return, haunted by Lucifer’s expectations, and nervous about how to achieve what he asks. Clio comes to reassure and keep him company. “Let me give you a few pointers on how to seduce even the pure ones. All women have desires. You may desire a woman, but the woman merely desires to be desired by you, the man.”

“How does that help me?”

“How did you seduce Meira? Once you figure that out, you’ll have no trouble with this so-called naïve girl.”

Clio, leaving Andras to his thoughts, traveled to the village where Lucifer had also sent her. *He won’t have such a difficult time once I’ve properly prepared the young maid,* she laughs to herself.

~~~

Days later, Meira returns exhausted, hunger gnaws her belly and growls its displeasure. Changing clothes, she goes to the kitchen to grab a quick bite. Andras sits across from Meira and takes her hands in his rough, calloused ones. Looking her in the eye, he is silent for a moment. Then says, “I’m so sorry for what I did. I wasn’t thinking.

“I never thought how it might affect you. I wanted to ensure. Never mind. I thought it would help, after I was gone,” He fumbles for the words, “I never thought what it might mean for you alone.”

Opening and closing her mouth, she struggles to speak then looks at him, despair dimming the light in her eyes. “Why do you have to leave?” Tears flow, cascade down her cheeks. “I cannot do it alone. How can you give me a child, then leave? You don’t know what it will be like!”

Reaching out, Andras enfolds her in his arms as she weeps until there are no more tears. He carries her upstairs and lays her down, gently kisses her wet face and dries her eyes.

“Sleep now.”

“You won’t leave me, not yet?”

“No. I promise. You will understand, though neither of us like or wants what must be done.” *I am abandoning her, though I have no other choice; it’s either that or return to hell with her.*

Andras rubs his face with a vacant stare, wishing he could see the future to know the end. He leaves her to sleep and walks out into the plains. Hours later, imagining her finally awake, Andras returns.

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Meira slept only an hour to awaken and find him gone. A heaviness comes over her. Why does he have to leave? Her heart aches. Meira feels a thickening in her throat and tries to hold the tears back, but her eyes well up and she sobs brokenly.

Andras returns to find Meira in the kitchen, eyes red and swollen. He sits again across from her. Swallowing hard, Meira turns away, shaking her head. “I don’t understand how you can do this, to our unborn child!” Her voice strangled from his betrayal.

“If the child dies and you have not pledged to Adonai and you die, you will suffer. Love, hell’s not the place you want to be. As an innocent, though, the child will be taken to heaven.”

Meira said. “I wish it were possible, but I cannot now and maybe never accept your god. If you believe he hears your prayers and answers, pray he does for I worship no god, especially one who would sacrifice his own son. How he could permit Lucifer to do this to you.”

“I won’t argue. As I’ve said, it’s not about being good; it’s about faith no matter what we’ve done. Simply striving to do better, follow in the ways of the Lord Yeshua.”

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Days pass as Andras goes on with his life and Meira. Yet despair hangs heavy on his heart. No longer does he try to convince her. Andras knows how she feels, yet fears for her soul. He is afraid in so many other ways as well. Lucifer is more insistent on his returning to serve him, bringing her along. Yet, Andras refuses.

“Come, my loyal commander,” he says an ugly tone laces his words. Andras feels his stomach drop; tears threaten as Andras thinks of Meira. “You can bring her into hell on the chosen path.”

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He then calls to Andras who attends him immediately. “When do you leave for the eastern village? I’d expected you’d be done by now. Did you have more pressing matters to attend to?”

“No my Lord. I’m leaving day after tomorrow.” He looks calmly at Lucifer, determined to reveal nothing of his feelings or what he’s done.

“Excellent. Then I expect to hear the results within a fortnight, and know you will succeed. Though it’s a first for you is it not?”

Andras swallows as he says, “Yes, it will be the first for me.”

“The first what? I want to hear you say it.” Lucifer’s lips a thin line, his face as stone, eyes cold, he waits for Andras’ response.

“The first child, one of the Nephilim.” He swallows the lie and says, “If I may leave now, my Lord.”

“Of course, my obedient commander.” Lucifer snickers, knowing the lie Andras has told and the resulting consequence.

~~~

The next day, Andras is on his way to a small village east of Sumer. Upon entering the village, he seeks out the blacksmith, knowing he’s in need of help. “I’m a fine blacksmith,” Andras said. “Though doubtless not as good as you. I’d be pleased to assist as long as needed.”

“Why are you so nice to me?” his voice rough and gravelly. “It’s not as if I’ve a choice. Your master, Lucifer ordered me to take you in.”

Andras follows the man inside and said, “We each do as the Lord commands, though you’re inconvenienced, friend.”

“I be no friend of yours. Still, there’s plenty of work to be done, and I can use the help for a time, anyway.” He shows Andras around his shop, then takes him inside and introduces him to his wife.

“Lycia, this is Andras. He’ll be helping us out for a bit. See you mind yourself when he’s about his other business. Whatever it may be.” As he turns to Andras, a question in his eyes. “Anything you’d like to offer?”

“Nay. You’ve said it all,” Andras said, blushing at the reminder of what his actual task is while in their village.

The next day, after spending several hours helping the blacksmith, Andras sets off into the nearby hills. It isn’t long before he sees the one Lucifer’s sent him to ‘seduce.’ Spying her with the sheep from a distance, he remains where he is awhile, watching her.

She had a regal bearing in her walk. High, delicate cheek bones, small nose, luminescent blue eyes, creamy smooth skin, and dark hair dances in the breeze. His gaze wandered down to caress her curves.

After all, he would be more intimate with it. She was very petite and almost dainty. Delicate, even with a slender, curving waist, yet hips full and womanly. He took her all in. She was pure yet doubtless had spirit. He could already feel fierce protectiveness for her. He would make sure no harm befell her, other than the harm he would inflict, for she would be a temptation to him as to many men. Still, he would be her first.

“Hello,” Andras said, as he approaches. “You knew I was here?” He saw the look in her eyes, which said she was afraid of him, more than the wolves who attend the sheep.

Yet, the girl smiles, knowing he is no ordinary man and said, “Aye. For you stand out tall against the sky yonder.” She sees his hands loose at his sides and her lungs expand to take in the cool air. His words soft with the sure smile, and her fear stills a bit.

“What is it you want?” she stammers. Drawing back, nervously she. looks about but sees only the sheep who ignore her.

“I’ve come to walk the hills and enjoy the song birds of evening, as have you. And to relieve you of your boredom.” His smile warm, calms her fears, and she turns away.

“I’ve my sheep to keep me company,” she said.

“Surely you do. But I’m not here to do you harm, just to walk and enjoy the evening. So, I’ll bid you goodbye until the next time.” Andras leaves as he arrived, the girl’s eyes widen for she’d been led to believe the one she longed for might soon come. Andras looks back and smirks to himself for her downcast face shows regret. *Clio was right,* he muses as he returns to his room.

Evening after evening, around sunset as the sky turns golden then violet and the clouds are edged with scarlet, Andras returns and walks about nearby, occasionally stopping to converse with the girl.

From the first day she’d seen him, it seemed written in their gaze, an invitation to learn more of the other. Yet, always they walked apart, he on the hillside, she with her sheep, hearts beating faster whenever they came closer. Then one day a way opened for Andras to be alone, a chance to meet without the need for words. Upon his arrival, she stood on the hillside, looking over the valley, her village below.

She smiled as usual, and the curve of his lips turned up into a smile, as usual, then she asked, “What is it you want of me?”

“I want you, the most beautiful girl in the world. Skin no doubt soft as the petals of a flower, tender to the touch,” he murmurs coming closer. He sees her eyes darken and the center expand until they’re almost black. “Did you not want, someone to fill the emptiness? What is it you desire?” Tendrils of power flow from him over her golden skin, knowing how it will affect her, and she takes a hitching breath, cheeks pinked.

Suddenly, she smiles. “Would you sit with me a while and talk?”

His smile in return is warm, comforting. “If you asked for the moon I’d do what I could to get it for you.” He said.

“Yes, I know.” She walks over to the knoll of the hill, the village below now laid out as a living map. Together they sit in the waning brightness, feeling the evening breeze - the only relief from the earlier heat. “I could see the kindness in your eyes, though something dark too.”

“Yes, for there’s a bit of dark in us all. What is it you desire? I’m here alone with you.” He sees her hesitation. “Never mind. We’ll sit and enjoy the moment.” She moves closer and Andras places his arm protectively around her shoulders, drawing her closer.

Andras waits for her to make the first move and before long she turns to him and says, “Will you kiss me just once.”

He knows once he kisses her any possible resistance will crumble. After a few delicate touches of his warm lips she is putty in his hands, willing to do his bidding. “There is only one desire within you and we both know it will happen in a moment.” Her eyes widen and she is captivated by this strange man beside her, heart beating wildly like a captive bird, and indeed she is captive to him and his desires now.

“I want you to lie down and relax,” he says.

She does and lies completely still, petrified under his command, her lips quiver while Andras’ hands move lightly to cup her face. Suddenly, the girl sits up and in one fluid motion turns pushing him back, and then, she is astride him. His eyes widen in surprise, a smile curves his lips, for her dress rides up her thighs. Their gaze lasts a moment, enough to take in the face of the other. He glances down to see her creamy white thighs, begging to be touched and he reaches to stroke them.

Her breathing ragged, heart beats an intense irregular rhythm, then like lightning his hand moves up her smooth firm thighs, searching, then slips smoothly under the hem of her dress. His fingers find what they seek, and they slide into her wetness, she slips to the ground.

While pressing his body against hers, he gazes into her eyes, as his fingers fondle, tearing the slight fabric of flesh. She moans and he begins kissing her neck and feels her grow wetter. He knows what he’s about to do and Lucifer’s cruel intention is heeded. Andras pulls her gown up high, loosens his trousers, and fiercely penetrates the girl. Surprised, she cries out, and he uses his power to stimulate her passion. Mouth open, breath coming in gasps then she orgasms, her eyes wide as unexpected intense pleasure ripples through her. Andras follows sending his fertile seed deep into the girl. She then falls asleep, and upon awakening, he is gone.

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Lucifer delights in Andras’ turmoil. “Did you not enjoy her?” He says. “You seem distraught, Andras. Well, you know how to help yourself, as you’ve done with the lovely virgin. Oh, yes. I saw and you say you have no talent. You are so talented, I’ll have to use you more often.”

“As you will it, my Lord.” He glares with nostrils flaring. “Yes, I cannot deny I enjoyed the hunt and taking her virgin flesh.”

“Forget the virgin and self-gratification. She’ll neither remember you nor how the child came to be. Never mind what your lovely wife may think of your misadventures, perhaps you’re ready to embrace hell, and one day bring your wife to us?”

Lucifer laughs as Andras snarls. “I know and cannot wait for her and the child you’ve spawned to arrive. It won’t be long now. You know she’ll not survive. You believe Adonai will rescue her? Nay, she won’t submit even for good reason,” he says and sniggers. “Not that there are any. And Meira is a stubborn whore.”

“If she won’t submit to Adonai, she won’t submit to you, so you’re not so powerful after all, are you?” Andras taunts.

“Your disrespect deserves punishment. Go say farewell, then return. I’ll see her soon enough.” He snorts. “I do look forward to it.”

He’s angry both with himself and Meira. *Why is she so stubborn, blaming everything on her childhood and mother? It does her no good*.

~~~

Once home Andras calms himself and prays before again speaking with Meira, then says, I’m sorry, love.”

*That’s all he can say, I’m sorry*. “Perhaps this once you could think before doing,” she shouts. “You deceived me.” Meira astonishes him. “To hell with Lucifer.” Arms crossed over her chest, eyes narrow. “We did our best, and it ends now. He’ll not have me if I can help it.”

Pained by his leaving, she says, “I will miss you so much.”

Andras take Meira upstairs, they slowly make love for the last time. Her belly has begun to swell and show the pregnancy. Andras prays, “Lord, keep the child and its mother safe.” *Not that he listens to me.* To Meira he said, “Don’t concern yourself with Lucifer. He has no foresight.” She falls asleep in his arms.

When she wakes, Andras is gone. Scrubbing a hand over her face, Meira lays a hand on her belly and heaves a sigh. “Time to get on with it.” Going about her day. It’s one more tragedy in life I could grieve over, but it would serve no useful purpose.

In the coming months, her belly swells. Ah yes, I will have something to remember him by. She rubs the mound that once laid flat beneath her breasts, but no longer; the child in her womb is a mountain of new life. *What will he bring?* She questioned. *Joy or sorrow? How could a babe small or a large bring anything but joy?* Meira smiled.

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Meira tires easily and leaving the shop to Salma, she lies down to naps, something she does often as the end draws near.

Deep Prussian blue sky overhead, a hint of gold as the sun rose, she notices the lights in the sky, they twinkle like fireflies. Soon she became aware of the trees, their branches like fine filaments, feathered fingers reach toward the heavens, silhouetted against the sky it lightens to gold. Before her stretches a wide placid bay, and a man before her.

Surprised to see another here, she steps back, afraid at first, until she looks into his amber eyes; they catch the golden light of the sun in early morning, reflecting only the love he bore.

“You will come to me one day. Fear not, your destiny is before you, though you cannot see it. Andras was but is no more. Do not be afraid for you have found favor with Adonai.” He was gone, and Meira stood gaping at the place where his feet had gripped the sand.

Thinking he’s an illusion, Meira draws near to see the impression of bare feet in its moist surface. *Who was he? At least I wasn’t hallucinating. Whoever he was, he was here and did speak to me.*

Shaking her head at the improbable visitation of what she could only imagine might have been an angel like Andras, yet she senses he was so much more. *Those eyes, what a color and the love shone in them.* A sense of deep peace flows through her. Yet, Meira refuses to ponder further on the event, and walks on down the beach.

She awakens as had Andras on many occasions only to realize: *it was a dream and a strange one.* *It’s like all dreams, meaningless. Simply my desire for more than life offers. Still Andras is truly gone.* Meira puts the dream out of her mind and goes on with life.

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# Part Two

This part of Lucifer Unbound introduces the Nephilim, at least one who’s now being born into the story, Anak.

The Nephilim, the Biblical giants and the fallen ones, some say are the offspring of the sons of god comingling with the daughters of man. These characters describe one group found in the Hebrew Bible,” but whence came the sons of god and the men of renown?

The “sons of God” (Hebrew *Benai-Elohim*) came from heaven, succumbed to their passion for the beautiful “daughters of Men” and had children with them. These offspring were known as the Nephilim, and they were the “mighty ones of old” and “men of renown.”

While centuries of rabbinical and church tradition would say otherwise, the audience to whom the text was intended would have understood the “sons of God” as the members of the divine assembly mentioned throughout the literature of the ancient Near East, including the Bible (see Job 6:1; Job 38:7; Psalm 29:1; Psalm 82). In the biblical texts, the “sons of God” are usually described as lesser heavenly beings in the service of the Most High God.

In texts of the cultures that surrounded Israel, like the Canaanite literature found at Ugarit, the “sons of God” similarly appear as divine beings in the service to the king of the gods, El, and his queen, Asherah. They include the likes of Baal, Anath, Astarte, Yam, and Mot.

The audience of Genesis would have understood these so-called “fallen ones” to be the offspring of celestial beings and human women. (The root word for *Nephilim,* used elsewhere refers to miscarriages and strange births. Exodus 21:22)

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Taken in part from an article of Biblical Archeological Society found at https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/hebrew-bible/the-nephilim-and-the-sons-of-god/

## 1. a New Day

In labor, Meira pants, hoping for relief as sweat slides into her eyes blinding her. Pain tears through her body worse than any she can recall. Lucifer watches her writhe in agony. She sees him in the shadows, as she strives to rid her body of the creature within, Andras’ child.

“Ah, child of love.” Lucifer tilts his head up with barely concealed glee, a look of triumph in his moss-green eyes and his mouth twitches upwards on the left, dimpling his cheek. Anyone not knowing who he is would likely see him as handsome and charming, at times.

*So, he eagerly awaits my last breath to capture my soul into hell. Yes, it’s close now, evil one*, Meira muses in a brief pain-free moment, and sees his hands rub together in excitement. Meira turns away, so she does not see Lucifer glance at Andras, and snicker at his anguish.

Looking back, Meira can make out Andras’ spectral self and his eyes. “What have any gods ever done for me? No, I’ll never believe!” The words torn from her throat, in a scream as she strains to birth the child who seems to struggle against entering the world.

The mid-wife looks up, not understanding what’s happening, then returns to the passing of the infant.

As the pain passes, Lucifer smiles. *Ah, yes. He imagines success this time–to win against Andras.* Meira laughs within as another pain tears through her and Lucifer’s image fades until the pain again passes.

*How I long to take that final breath and end it, be with my love.* Another pain rips through her and she recalls Andras’ words, ‘Do not imagine he will let us be together. You will be his plaything. I will not have you, but he will make me watch your agony throughout time until it no longer scourges me.’

Hearing Lucifer snicker, her head turns toward him, standing in the shadows. “Oh, Meira. Your lover is right, you will be mine and whoever else might enjoy you. What else are you good for?”

﻿She sees a visible tension in his jaw muscles, intense gaze and his unblinking stare. Taking a deep breath, chest expanding, his fingers flex as he bides his time, certain she will soon die and enter hell. “You’ll not escape me, my sweet, nor your deceitful lover.”

Again, Andras’ dark specter merges with the shadows that hold him bound to hell. His eyes plead with her, yet she continues to turn from the plea he dares not voice. Then Meira hears a voice, soft and gentle it cheerfully encourages. “Choose whom you will serve, the god of earth or Adonai, creator of all.”

In agony and uncertain despair, she imagines her mind plays tricks, and later swears she saw an angel as she looked for whoever spoke, and saw blue and silver cloth shimmer. Gold trims his robes, face shining, a golden glow emanates from within and the angel smiles saying, “Choose and all will be well.” His face full of a deep love shone so bright it lit up the surrounding shadows, fading the image of both Andras and Lucifer. And her heart swells with an indescribable joy.

Lucifer did not see the angel. His focus was on Meira he believes lay dying, and is shocked to hear her words: “I choose Lord God Adonai creator and ruler of all.” An incomprehensible peace settles over Meira, she looks to the side, and wickedly smiles at Lucifer. Joy lights her eyes and she is satisfied to see the rage in his.

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The angel was Gabriel who cheered her in that moment and later said, “A little push helps to move the inevitable right along.

The child erupts from her womb whole and healthy caught by the midwife who is completely unaware of the drama between heaven and hell taking place. Having despaired, Meira now filled with new life sees Andras’ smile as he fades into the Otherworld secure in her accepting the Lord Adonai and is at peace.

Lucifer’s silence lasts a heartbeat, then erupts in an epic rage of vile curses such as never before heard. Meira cannot help but laugh aloud in the moment, realizing what she’s done.

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Later Meira lay with the babe in her arms and a little help from her friends. Salma and Mark came to be with her for she is weak still and the babe is no wee thing. Meira needs all the help she can get.

Salma asks, “What will you name him?”

“Andras was fond of the Hebrews. Anak means Sons of Anakim; it’s a race of giant men of a great stature. I shall call him Anak, for he will be a giant among men and a Nephilim I believe.”

 “What about… will you tell him about Andras? Shouldn’t he know of his father? Sorry, I suppose you two talked about it before.”

Thinking of Andras, Meira seems to smile at nothing as her gaze drifts away. But Salma knew where her thoughts went. Taking a deep breath, a yearning look, Meira says. “No. He didn’t want his son to know.”

“You’ll let him believe his father left him!” Salma said, “You were married! He wasn’t born out of wedlock.” Anxious she reaches to take Meira’s hand. “Are you sure?” Salma and Mark uneasily wonder if Meira is making the right choice.

“Yes. I’m making the right choice. I’m also asking you two to hang around for a few years if possible and, if you do, keep it to yourselves. Andras doesn’t want him to know.”

“You couldn’t get rid of us and we’ll abide by your decision.”

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Flushed with excitement, a glow lights Meira’s face as she leans down to smell the scent of baby and lays her hand over her heart as she gazes upon her son. Murmuring affirmations as the baby coos. Everyone who enters the shop asks about Anak and she eagerly talks about him, then apologizes. “I’m sorry,” she says often, “you’re here to see about an order, not the baby. Thanks for asking.“

She keeps the baby close so she can touch him. Meira hears even when it’s noisy in the shop for her hearing has become more acute and her eyesight too*. This is unexpected*. She muses. *What improves besides sight and a longer life? Very nice.*

Meira thinks about Andras and how he’s doing in the Otherworld with Lucifer. No doubt, he avoids her to keep them safe from Lucifer. Did Lucifer blame Andras for her choice and punish him? She wonders, but has no one to ask. Fear sends a stab of pain through her heart. She put a hand out to steady herself. I am powerless and there’s no turning back. She prays, “Lord Adonai, let him be safe in your care, yes, even in hell.”

Meira studies as much as she can about this faith of Andras, so she understands what it’s all about. Several months after the baby’s birth and an old friend of sorts greets her, the woman who’d helped her long ago. Now Meira knows she’s Clio, and a demon succubus. But she’s not all evil, at least Meira doesn’t see her as such.

Her mind eases when Clio drops by at odd times. “Can’t stay love. Lucifer doesn’t know I’m mixed up in this affair with you and Andras, and it’s best if he never finds out.”

“How’s Andras? Was he punished for my choice?” She’s terrified to hear what’s done to him in Lucifer’s retribution, but can ask Clio and have some peace of mind.

“He’s fine. Lucifer gave me to him, which only means we live in the same dwelling. We do not share the same bed.”

Seeing the raised eyebrows, questioning, Clio laughs and reassures, “Never fear. While I’ve always adored the idea of having him, I’ve more men than I know what to do with. Nah. That’s a lie, but it’s all good. I am told to tempt him so he’ll forget about you. He’ll never submit. Andras takes those vows you made seriously, for now anyway.”

“Yes, I know. In time, it could change. It’s normal for one to have sex with others, whoever they wish.” Meira shrugs.

Clio’s eyes widen and she asks, “You have sex with other men? What do you imagine he would think about that?”

“Oh, no. I spoke with a rabbi from Israel. He told me about faith in Adonai and what it requires. No fornication outside the marriage bed.” She snorts. “I tell you the Hebrew God has many rules to abide by. There’s nothing wrong with these rules. I am comforted knowing Andras would be pleased.”

“Don’t you miss it though, the intimacy?”

“I do and I often think of him, especially at night. But it’s simpler too, and different from our part of the world. The Tanakh says male to male sex is a scandal. I never understood it, anyway. Sex is for pleasure without boundaries, but the Hebrews see it as vile outside marriage!

“We could play around,” Clio says. Eyes sparkle as she runs a finger up Meira’s arm and toys with her lovely long hair.

Moving away, Meira says, “I’m sure having sex with a woman is forbidden and it’s not of interest to me.” She giggles. “You’ve been a help, caring for me, but I’ll pass on the offer, once again.”

Clio grins. “No? You’re able to say no to my offer of pleasure.” She chuckles wickedly. “Andras does too, though it makes him more enticing. You know I had the hots for him before he met you, but Lucifer refused to let me seduce him.”

Meira changes the subject, not wanting to think about it. “Clio, do you want to see the baby?”

Clio shakes her head. “It’s safer if I don’t have anything to do with him. Maybe someday.” Clio knows she’ll meet him one day a long time when he’s grown up and beyond. “I’m off to the temple. Lucifer’s angry with one priest who has a conscience of sorts.” I’ll tempt him into doing what will bring on the guilt so he relaxes his conscious. It’s such fun.”

*She is the most wickedly evil person I know, or demon, which ever, but she’s a good friend to me,* Meira muses.

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Anak no longer an infant as he was the last time Clio visited, now looks like a four-year-old at the age of two and in the next four years he is nearly the size of an adult. Meira’s neighbors know of the Nephilim, but they’ve never seen one, and many are fearful in knowing he is one.

Anak is a happy, playful child. Being so tall, he’s often teased by the younger ones. Meira watches him struggle and sees how he’s learning to be patient. Anak also helps Meira around the shop as best he can and often travels with her.

Israel is a land bridge connecting the land of her birth with Egypt. In her travels, Meira crosses Israel. On one journey, Meira met a Hebrew rabbi who was as curious about her and her son as she was about him and his God. He answered more of her questions than she did his. Still, he did love to talk about Adonai and Meira’s eager to listen and learn.

“Rabbi what’s the Courtyard of the Gentiles”

“It is for those who do not believe - to meet and talk - to search for Adonai who’s unknown to them. The one true God is the great unknown. To seek and let oneself be found by him is needed. One must be ready to listen to him; it is the basis of life,” the rabbi said. “Your country has many gods while we have the one true God.”

Meira sees the question in his eyes, “How did you come to believe? Was your husband a believer?”

“You’ve heard of the Nephilim?” Casting an anxious glance about, not wanting anyone to hear. “Andras was a fallen angel.” Not knowing how he will respond, she rubs her neck and looks away, then back at him, chewing a fingernail.

The rabbi seems more curious than offended.

“You don’t seem surprised?”

He laughs, eyes sparkling, “People talk about your boy, who looks like a man. It is common knowledge, Meira. If he were not so boyish and he is merely a boy.

Most who believe know him to be one of the Nephilim. As for the others, who knows? Do not be concerned.” He shrugs.

Meira takes a deep breath, not realizing she was holding it and finally relaxes. “Thank Adonai. I was so afraid. Anak’s been teased and people act differently once they know. Some are afraid of him.”

“Do not fear; you are accepted here. How can I help you, Meira?” Kind eyes and soft voice comfort her heart, and she is at peace.

Meira had met the rabbi shortly after Anak was born. In his travels, he came to her shop to buy a menorah. She had to make one for him, not having seen a menorah before. In a brief conversation, she found both believed in Lord Adonai, though he called him by the name Jehovah. Hebrews, she discovered, have many names for Adonai, but they only worship the One True God.

“Rabbi, I would like to know more about this one God so I can teach my son as he grows into a man. Andras left us before he was born, but he believed. At Anak’s birth I accepted Adonai as Lord.”

“Praise Jehovah, Meira. Our tribe has strict rules, but not as strict as some; however, there are certain ways we must behave, with women. So, you know a man will not make any contact with an unrelated woman, not even shake hands and conversation too. So, if we meet again to learn more, you will need to bring your son, so it appears he is the scholar,” he said kindly. “It may seem strange to a woman from your land…”

Meira interrupts, “I honor the faithfulness Adonai asks in marriage. Andras who is not with us insisted, and I’m pleased to obey. I’m sorry for interrupting, rabbi. Please go on.”

“Ah, I need not explain. Moral behavior means we obey the laws of Jehovah who gave the commandments, so we live well. Yet there are many traditions one must attend to, as well. For you to keep the commandments of Jehovah, it is enough.”

Meira left the rabbi’s synagogue. On the way home, she shares with Anak what she has learned from the rabbi. “It is so wonderful son not to have to go to the temple and follow the old rules. Though the new ones are not easy.”

Anak eagerly nods his head. "When do we go, soon?"

“When it’s time we’ll go,” Meira says.

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## 2. On Faith

Leaning forward, eyes glowing, Anak’s excited to hear about what his mother has learned from the Rabbi ,and to learn along with her. His own words rush forth as a river, agreeing to whatever she suggests. All he wants is to meet the rabbi, even better, go with her.

“I‘m pleased you’re so eager to meet the rabbi. He will pass this way again in a few months, at their feast of leaven.”

“Yes, mother." Meira hugs Anak tight before releasing him. “Go now and enjoy life while you can.” She cautions, “Be careful about our talks and with whom you share them.”

“Yes, mother. I’ll be careful,” he says, as he runs off.

Rolling her shoulders to loosen tension, Meira glances out the door but sees no one nearby who might overhear. Taking a breath to relax, not wanting to think about the consequences if the temple priests know.

Yet inside her fear grows until Meira hears, “Do not fear for I have redeemed you and called you.” In relief, she recalls those are the words the rabbi spoke. Adonai commands us not to fear. He will never leave nor forsake you. It is his promise, so do not be afraid or discouraged. He is with you always.” Meira chuckles as she recalls the dream of Yeshua who has not yet been born, but she never shared it with the rabbi.

Meira recalls the words the rabbis spoke. ‘To not believe Jehovah’s words calls attention to a lack of faith,’ the Rabbi said. ‘When you fear something, imagine Adonai saying those words. My lowest most painful moments, have been my closest times with the Lord.

“I recall crying after the synagogue burned once, and instantly felt the presence of God’s comfort and love. It was so powerful all I did was laugh through the tears. Jehovah said, ‘I am here and all you need. You are not alone.’ It’s been ten years and Adonai has never let me down. He will never let you down, Meira.’

Later that evening Anak returns home and after dinner, he sits with his mother and asked, “How can love fight fear, mother?”

Unsure how to answer, she says, “What makes you ask?”

“Something I heard at the synagogue in Israel. It’s no big deal. I was just thinking about it while out walking.”

“It’s a great question. Let me ask you, how does my love for you overcome your fears like those you’ve had in the past?”

Anak looks as though he’s gone into the past, remembering his fears. “I know you love me enough to be there when I mess up. Even then, you held me then sent me off to deal with my fear of the consequences when I did wrong. I knew you would be there afterward.

“It’s like hearing a weird noise at night, especially when I was little; you always protected me even from fears unreal. When lost in the desert, to me, it seemed like hours when it was only a few minutes, yet I knew you would find me, and you did.”

“Come here” She gave Anak a hug. “I am proud of you. Even when faced with the worst fears we can imagine, weird noises in the night, we can trust Adonai the way you trust me. “If we remain in love, His love is perfect, then we are saved from all fear.”

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Anak recalls his mother’s earlier words as he lay in the dark, head throbbing, throat dry, stomach aches with hunger. *What do they want? And who are they?* Anak hears a scuttle of some creature, spiders likely moving quickly across the floor of what he assumes is a cave for every sound echo off the rough harsh walls*. It must be of some size. Likely it’s in the upper hills surrounding the city.*

Anak lay in the dark, listening, then a new sound came and a new scent, a putrid smell. He once had seen a dragon, a vast red-gold scaled beast dead. It lay still, then, scales no longer glistening in the sunlight as limbs and wings stretched in death to reveal silver scales along its belly. Anak shook his head to dispel the image.

It must be a dragon, and the horror of it went through him like a sharp knife. He’d not seen a living dragon, but what his mother had said about dragons came to mind. Blood-thirsty, winged beasts with sharp teeth; they breathe fire and kill without mercy.

Fear holds Anak as though chained, heart races as he gulps down a breath of foul air and pushes away the urge to vomit*. I must leave, get out of here. But how? To pass the dragon is impossible.* He trembles as an icy terror freezes him where he crouches. How did my father manage to kill those dragons?

“Not all did he kill,” rumbles a voice like grinding stones; it seems to shake the walls and vibrate the air around him, and its foul breath while nauseating, it warms the cave.

Anak’s teeth clack, face ashen, cold sweat breaks out chilling him. Wiping clammy hands on pants, his pulse pounds. Pressing back against the wall to make himself as small as possible, clenching and unclenching his hands, yet he dared not move and so, he remains rooted, holding his breath to listen.

Faint reddish light glows in what he imagines is the rear of the cave. He strains to see as the glow becomes brighter, a flame burning within the beast. Anak knew he was about to become a feast for the dragon. A great roar poured forth, lightning flashed within fire and the sound seemed to expand and fill the cave. Hands pulled over his head, he crouches in a fetal position, terrified to even breathe.

 “One dragon became his friend, and he never let me down.” Its voice thundered, like the sound of a landslide crashing down.

Anak drew a deep breath and spoke, “Who or what are you?” His heart skitters through his chest, breath short as he gasps for air.

“Azrael, a companion to Lucifer, even more so a friend to Andras, your father, as if you didn’t know. You seem to be a fearful lad. Too bad Andras wasn’t here to raise you to be a man and friend to dragons.”

Anak’s anger burns away his fear and with a scowl he shouts, “He may have been a friend to you and never let you down, but he left me and my mother without a thought. I hate him, so do not speak of his care for dragons as he had no care for his wife nor son. My mother had to raise me by herself!”

The dragon ponders this news for a while. His eyes droop sadly, if that were possible for a dragon who then responds, “I knew your father well on earth and elsewhere, so pardon, but you have misjudged him.” The dragon looks close at Anak whose eyes are narrowed in suspicion. “What did your mother tell you about him? All good I would hope.”

“She made excuses for his leaving to reassure me we were loved. Ha! It doesn’t agree with what my mother taught me about Adonai who never forsakes His own! Him I believe and trust in - not my father.

“Look, if you’re not going to help, get back to hell or wherever you’re from and leave me to die in peace. Unless my captors plan to sell me. I suppose that could be the answer as to why I’m here.”

Perplexed, the dragon’s gazes curiously, and Anak suspects its pondering what to do, eat him. Instead it spoke. “Those men mistakenly left you in my cave. His grin wide as he belches a foul, disgusting odor. “They were to hold you for a time, I heard one say. Made a tasty snack,” he rumbles with a shrug of his great wings creating a draft and clearing the air of the foul stench, briefly.

“Why would. . .? Never mind. I’ve heard the stories. Get out or get me out. Either way, I’ll manage whatever happens.”

“Head toward the rising sun which you shall shortly see and make your way home. I’m not permitted to offer aid. Nothing said about not eating your captors.” The dragon snorts vanishing from Anak’s sight.

Relieved to be rid of him, Anak muses*, That’s a dragon for you. Never help anyone but themselves.* Lying down to await the rising sun he falls asleep and awakens later to the watery light of dawn. Stepping toward the exit, expecting to see a dragon, but there is nothing but the pale light of morning. The golden sun rising, promises a hot day. Filled with excitement, he sets off for home joyful in his newfound freedom.

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Hours later, following the rising sun, Anak enters the door to his mother’s shop, thirsty and hungry. Looking up as he enters, she sees his dirty face, ragged clothes, followed by a faint stench of something foul, reminiscent of dragons.

“Oh, good Lord.” She says, “Where have you been? Gone for hours without a word. I was worried. The Nephilim were raiding villages, and we feared they had entered the city, or you had been. . .” She stops, not wanting to speak the fear in her heart, yet her words cascade like water crashing over a broken dam. Meira had trouble taking a deep breath to calm herself. “I’m just so glad you’re home.”

“It’s okay, mom. Calm down. Raiders captured me for the Nephilim and left me in the hills. Can I get something to eat? I’m starving? No one fed me!” His stomach growls in protest.

Meira, relieved he’s home, gives him a hug. Quickly preparing some beans and rice with goat meat, which he hungrily he gobbles down. He sits back satisfied and tells of the dragon. “He didn’t really help. All he did was eat the men who took me. Then left me to find my own way! Damn dragon. I’d slay them all. Not one is worth the sand they walk on. He killed those men, else I’d have waited until daylight and found my own way. He had the nerve to tell me I was not brave.”

Meira is silent, bothered by his arrogant tone, yet does not defend the dragon either, for she suspects it was likely Andras’ friend, else why would he have helped Anak. ﻿Swallowing before speaking, she wipes her hands to dry them, having just washed the food plates. Meira struggles for the right words, and shakes her head, then takes a deep breath and pushes the air out in one breath. Instead of saying anything right then, she decides on a course of action.

Meira realizes Anak’s failed to learn valuable skills that would help him in life, and so, she speaks with Andras’ dragon hunter friends. “Will you teach the boy to defend himself against−whatever. Warrior skills is what he needs,” she said, not knowing what else to say, then tells them of his experience with the dragon. “He was never in any real danger, not from the dragon anyway.” Seeing eyebrows raised she said, “I know it sounds crazy, but the dragon was a sort of friend to Andras. And before you say anything, it did help Anak out of serious trouble.”

Not understanding, still, they finally agreed and Anak began going out with the dragon hunters, to his delight. “I can learn to kill dragons,” he said, excited to start training. Amused by his eagerness and seeming lack of fear, the men put him through weapons training before allowing him to attend a dragon hunt, much to Anak’s dismay.

While Anak came upon no dragons to slay himself, he saw a couple slain by the group. By observing and his training he become more adept in the use of sword and shield, among other weapons. And he enjoyed the company of the dragon hunters who enjoyed telling him many tales of their hunts and his father. Though he was less enthusiastic to hear of him but courtesy stilled his tongue.

Months later, one of the men told him, “We’re off to help another region who’s having trouble with dragons. Your mother does not agree you should attend. Therefore, we bid you farewell.”

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Anak was saddened to see them leave yet, because of his training, he’d grown into a strong man, a Nephilim, a giant among men. Having met the Nephilim who are warlike, he could fight, or die by their hand. Having faced a dragon or two, in his imagination, and seen them slain, Anak was not fearful of the other Nephilim.

“You’re a fearful boy,” one said, and sniggered.

“Seems I’ve heard such a remark before,” he said. “Have dragons for friends do you?”

“It’s possible, but how did you know?”

“My father was a dragon hunter and I met one of his associates, a dragon, once long ago.” Anak thought he resembled his own features. Dark hair and eyes, common to the Nephilim yet, there seemed more to the resemblance.

The Nephilim folded his arms across his chest, raised an eyebrow, and said, “Won’t take much to put you down.” Then rapidly struck with his sword, intending Anak harm.

He soon learned this was no fearful boy, but a man with fearsome skills. “They didn’t tell me you were a skilled warrior.”

Panting Anak struck and missed. “Who didn’t tell you?”

“I’m not to say.” The Nephilim hit Anak’s shield a glancing blow.

“Humph. It seems to me you’ve already said. Might as well finish, or perhaps it’s all nonsense.” Anak cleaves the air with his sword, and misses the other by a hair’s breadth.

Several minutes after much swinging and missing for both, he said, “Are you ready to give into my superior skills?”

Chuckling, the other Nephilim set his sword tip in the soil. “Nay. I’m not prepared to acknowledge you as superior, but well-matched.”

“Suppose you’re right. And this foray here is going nowhere,” Anak said in agreement. “Why would anyone send you after me? It makes no sense. I’ve been captured by raiders not knowing my end. A dragon of sorts helped me out. None of that made any sense either.”

“Someone wants you dead, or so it seems.”

“Yes, I’m inclined to agree with you. Still, do you imagine it has to do with our parents for it also seems you and I may be related.”

The Nephilim stood, mouth open, gazing at Anak and said, “I’d also considered the same when first we met.”

“My mother had but one child, myself,” Anak said.

“Aye. And my mother who died in childbirth also had the one child, myself as well. So, it’s our father it seems. I never knew him, and know even less about him. Only he came from the dredges of hell.”

Anak sat down upon the ground. “So, the culprit is known. My, or our father is the same scoundrel who arrived on earth from hell, serving Lucifer no doubt, impregnates two women. . .”

“Or more,” he said interrupting Anak, then tells his mother’s story of meeting a man she thought was the one intended for her. Or so the blacksmith told my mother who is not here to share her sad tale.”

“The blacksmith?”

“Aye. He was coerced into accepting a stranger into his home by the Dark Lord in exchange for certain favors. It wasn’t until the whole village became aware my mother was pregnant and the man was gone. Before he arrived, a strange woman came, prophesied his coming, but promised it was for the good. She failed to say he was hell’s denizen and would not stay with the maiden.”

“Truly. My father, also, after impregnating my mother, returned to hell and she never saw him again, except as a shade at my birth.”

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So, Anak and the one he believed to be his brother, became friends as did others who taught him skills with which few Nephilim are gifted. Shape-shifting for one, which would come in handy one day.

Anak is amazed as they enter a village and the Nephilim shifts to a size nearly that of a human. “How did you do that?”

“I’d seen others doing it. Later, I realized not everyone can do it. Like another said, when in the heavens, to get someplace, all I had to do was think of the place to be or someone to see, and he was in that place or with that person. Just do the same. You too, Anak. Think about being human size and let it happen.”

Thus, Anak learned to be a warrior, as well as more human-sized as a Nephilim. His mother hardly recognized the man he’d become, though he never told her of his brother. A time came when it was too late.

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## 3. Enduring

Another day of heat, so dry, it chokes the air out of him. Blinding sand clogs Anak’s mouth, nose, and ears. The desert lays before him, dry sand. How much farther? He wonders in his misery as he puts one foot after another before him, trudging on hoping to see an oasis. His chest rises and falls with each breath of the hot dry air, his skin burned from the sun, now bronze and tender. The air stagnant. *Dead like I will be if I do not find the oasis and water soon.*

Ruminating on what he knows the oasis is inland from a nearby river and that means a boat to take me home. Will mother be there and alive? Reflecting on the first time he was a captive, it’s been years. The Lord saw me through it then and will now. Laughing to himself, what did I do to him that he would bother to place me and mother in these perilous situations, so we would lose our faith in Adonai? Well, Lucifer, he mutters to himself; it hasn’t worked so far.

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Lucifer considers what next. “The dragon didn’t eat him nor did the Nephilim slay him. If Anak survives this, perhaps then, he’ll curse the god who helps him not but leaves trials for him to face.”

Andras knows Lucifer speaks of Adonai and sorrows for his son but does not interfere. *Best he endures, learn and grow strong as his mother wisely noted.* Andras is satisfied his son is becoming a man.

Lucifer chuckles. “It’s his mother you care for.” Disgusted, he turns to Andras. “Flapping his hands to rebuff any dispute, “Yes, temple whores were my idea. Still, you didn’t have to marry one!”

“My Lord, I’ve been loyal to you since my return. Is there a purpose in this? You know I have only your interests at heart.” Andras pleads with Lucifer, but he rages on. Look at him, waiting patiently. Perhaps I’ll rage the century away to tempt his patience. He snickers.

“One day, he will tire of Him and curse that worthless god.”

Andras refuses to dwell on Lucifer’s vile dreams, traveling back in memory to when he and Meira married, boating up the peaceful river, making love in the moonlight. Scenes from the oasis come to mind as Andras sees himself again, stroking her warm skin and touching her in all the ways she loved, kissing her soft skin. Lost in memories, Andras forgets Lucifer, bliss lights his face.

Noticing Andras’ face, glowing with pleasure. “You dare to enjoy her memories. Get out before I have you flayed until you have no skin. Then see how much pleasure your memories bring.” Burning in jealousy, Lucifer has never loved nor has anyone loved and gave him pleasure as Andras has had. He recalls the joy when Adonai created him in love and snarls. *What good is his so-called love?* Then flees into deepest hell and is caught in the torture of souls, he soon forgets Andras.

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Anak strives through the desert as night falls and no an oasis. Then, his heart leaps, for in the distance, light from a campfire glows outlining a tent. Someone is here. I’m not alone. Praise Adonai. Gaining his feet to get there before it vanishes, yet he knows it can’t be a mirage.

Having lived near a desert all his life, Anak knows it is not unusual to see a lake of water in the distance during the day when thirsty. Still, the bright bluish patch, a reflection of the sky, drive a person dying of thirst insane because they can never reach it. But to see a campfire at night Anak knows it’s no mirage or hallucination.

Moving quickly as he comes upon the campfire by the time full night arrives. Dusk since ended, the sun had settled below the desert sands and the dark of night brings out the stars.

The night chill comes and Anak is eager for human company and water to drink. Licking his dry lips, he watches as two people sit next to the fire and murmur in low voices. What they say he can’t hear. One of them casually stands up and turns to face the desert where Anak is, “You may as well come up and join us whoever you are.”

Anak climbs the sand dune into the light of the campfire. “How did you know I was out there?”

“First, you’re very good at being quiet. But we saw you hours ago as you came across the sands. He tosses Anak a water sack, “Here you’re probably thirsty. How long were you in the desert?”

Anak is busy drinking, not talking.

“Slow down, friend. You don’t want cramps.”

Anak hands the water sack to the man and nods his thanks.

“No, keep it. We have plenty.”

Anak set it aside for later. Looking at the man’s companion, he’s surprised to see it’s a woman. “I saw no camels or heard no donkey,” he said. “Are you on foot also?”

“No. We came by boat. The river is across the way. We set up camp after we saw you coming. Thought you might need some help coming out of the desert. Even a strong man can die of thirst out there.”

Anak’s heart lightens. “So, I am near the river? Thank Adonai,” he said and sank down, exhausted, almost weeping in gratitude.

The man raises his eyebrows; his mouth twitches up into a smile as he gives Anak a peculiar look. “You’re one of the Hebrews, and were in the desert, right? If so, you’re lucky to come out alive.”

“I’m no Hebrew, but a believer in the One God. My mother is too. She raised me to believe, and a rabbi from Israel taught her.”

“Not a Hebrew yet a believer. Hmm.” Looking at his companion. “This here’s my daughter. She’s on her way to the temple to do her duty so she can marry on the next moon.

You’re welcome to make the offering for her if you want.” He looks at Anak slyly, who wasn’t sure what he meant.

Raising an eyebrow, he says, “You’re young, tall and powerfully built, quite virile. Women must find you attractive.” He snickers and looks at the woman he calls his daughter. “She no doubt does.”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand,” Anak says.

“Well, she has to have sex with a man so he can make an offering. It’s supposed to be in front of the temple. This is close enough. You’d save us a trip. Go on, woman.” He walks away.

“Where is he going?” Anak asks.

“Back to the boat so we can be together.” She comes to Anak, “I’m ready if you are.” She sheds her robe, and he sees the flesh of her body is firm as she moves close to reach inside his tunic and fondle him. “Now we can enjoy one another.” She rubs her naked body against him.

Stunned by her boldness, feeling his desire flame, Anak pushes her away, and stumble. “No. I cannot lie with a woman!” Settling his clothes, he says, “I’ll call the man who left you. He can take you to the temple. I’ll find a way upriver elsewhere.” Anak walks off shaking his head. *No one would know,* a voice echoes in his head. *Come on, you know you desire her. Fornicating is not a sin, just one time.*

Anak can’t seem to put her out of his head and images of her body naked and lovely flash through his mind. *You’ve never had a woman, so what harm can it do to try it just once.* Again, the voice tempts him.

She follows Anak and says, “He’s my husband. What’s wrong? Just once won’t hurt and you’d like it.”

Anak ignores her and continues walking toward he hopes the river. She comes to him and wraps her arms around, her fingers penetrate his clothing, his mouth goes dry. He can feel himself harden and throb with desire. “No,” He said. “Get away from me woman. Adultery is a sin.”

Suddenly, her husband accosts him. “What’re you doing? She wants you. As long as both consent there’s no hurt.”

“While I appreciate the offer, I’m not here for her. One day, perhaps, if I marry. Until then, I do not consent.”

The man scowls at the woman and says, “We did as commanded. Let’s get out of here.” The two pack up their tent, douse the campfire and before Anak knows it, they’ve vanished into the desert.

Anak’s glad to see them gone, though he’s alone again. So, it was not Adonai who sent them. Recalling the raiders who’d told him Lucifer had a treat for him at the oasis*. If that was the treat, the oasis must be nearby. I’ll wait for morning to find the river.* Anak lies down on the sand to wait the coming of a new day.

Then, he decides to pray. “Lord, I’m lost. Help me to overcome my fears. My pleasure is only in you. Help me find a way out of the desert. Thank you, Lord.” Anak lay down and fell asleep in the chill night air.

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Anak awoke at dawn as the sun peaked over the edge of the sand dunes. He felt the warm sun on his skin as it rose sending a golden light to dispel the chill night. air. Anak then heard what first woke him, singing and a greeting!

 “Hello.” A cheerful voice greets him from atop a camel. “Why sleep in the desert sand when our oasis is a pace away? My husband will be delighted to meet you. He gets tired of only female company.” She looks up and Anak’s eyes follow. Another rider approaches astride a camel.

“What have you found this time, dearest?”

“A stranger in the land who doesn’t know where he is.”

The camel fell to its knees. The man steps off and comes to Anak. “Is this true? You don’t know where you are in the desert?” He brightens. “No matter. Come, you can tell us your story.” As Anak rises from the sand the stranger says, “My, you’re tall.”

His wife agrees. “He is a giant among men.”

“That’s what my mother always said.” Anak feels at peace. *Perhaps Adonai has answered. I thought so last time too.* I’ll see.

The Bedouin invite Anak into their camp, fed and watered him as if he were one of the camels and precious to them. Anak takes a moment to shift, so he’s not so tall. The Bedouin stare, amazed at his ability.

“It’s amazing, husband. Never have I seen such a thing.” He nods in agreement, then the two listen attentively as he relates his adventures and the temptation of the night.

“Not to worry, friend, I’ll not be offering you my wife,” the Bedouin assures him, pulling her close to his side.

Anak spends the day and stays that night with the couple. In the morning, they show Anak the river and he bid them farewell, for they are crossing the desert for home.

“We are enchanted to have you here and would love for you to follow, but we know you must find your dear mother.”

Anak thanks the couple, “You’ve been kind. I thank you for not taking offense by my beliefs, which differ from yours.”

“Many strange things happen in the desert and they cannot always be explained. So, we accept and learn from them. Thus, we become stronger people. And now we have a fine tale to tell our Bedouin family.”

He clapped Anak on the shoulder, gave him a fierce hug and walked with him to the boat. *This is like the story mother told about when she and my father married. They took a boat upriver to an oasis, he muses. Perhaps this very oasis. I will have to tell her about it*. Anak looks forward to returning home.

~~~

Meira sat by the fire, fixing a meal. “Isn’t it peaceful in the desert? I love the sunset, the lovely colors in the sky.” Watching the sun sink in the west, she smiles remembering Andras and their time at the oasis.

“Yes, mother. We should’ve stayed with the others. It’s not safe alone.” Anak scans the area for danger but sees nothing.

“We’ll be safe with Lord Adonai, our protector. If something dire happens, we can only trust in Him. Tribulation can come in a heartbeat. Our place is to serve him and be at peace.”

Anak shook his head, marveling at his mother’s faith. He put out the campfire to enter his tent. Anak slept peacefully knowing they would be home on the morrow and all their worries over.

But before dawn, the raiders entered the camp silently and secured Anak before he could cry out a warning. Blindfolded and gagged then thrust upon a camel, they take Anak farther into the desert with no food or water. He endures in silence.

“You have no dragon to rescue you now and take our lives. I should kill you for the loss of my men. Good men too.”

Striking Anak a blow, he knocks him to the ground and kicks Anak savagely. The leader says, “If found this time, nothing but your bones will they find picked clean.” He saunters away.

No one spoke to Anak until the next morning as they release him. “We’ll leave you water and bread.” The man smirks as he hands Anak a small leather sack with water for about a day, not much in this heat. “It takes many days to find the oasis by the river. Lucifer has a treat for you.” Chuckling, he and his companions depart, “if you make it that far.”

“I thought you were leaving some bread,” Anak said.

The man eyes him, “Sorry, we ate it for breakfast.” Laughing, they rode away. Anak began his journey across the desert and found an oasis, more of a watering hole, the only thing that saved him.

Eventually, he faced the temptation and overcame yet wondered, where’s my mother, did they leave her to die alone in the desert?

Anak travels on the merchant barge moored near the oasis. One of the men found a change of clothes for him as the Bedouins had nothing that fit. Even with his ability to shift to a smaller size, didn’t help. After much searching, they found a pair of pants and a tunic.

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Upon returning to Sumer, Anak find chaos. The city ravaged. “What happened?” he asks, but the people run from him. Finally, Anak arrives home, “Mother. Is anyone here?” He calls, heart in his throat and near panic, for no one is about.

Scouring the store, he sees jewelry smashed and thrown on the ground, everything. The curtains ripped off and tossed. In the sleeping quarters, the same.

Everything broken and torn. Nowhere his mother. All the neighbors turned away at the sight of him. He had no answer and feared for her. Did she make it home?

Trying to restore some order, he finally gave up and sat with his head in his hands staring morosely at the floor. Hearing a quiet scraping, Anak silently pads into the back. He enters as someone scurries away, heading for the window, and grabs the woman as she screams.

“Who are you?” He asks, then realizes its Salma, Meira’s friend, “What is going on?” Terrified, she tries to claw her way free from his grip, not realizing it’s Anak.

“Salma, it’s me.” Pulling her around to face him, “It’s Anak. Don’t you recognize me?” He catches a glimpse of himself then as he looks up in the brass mirror hanging on the wall. Its mirrored surface, however, reveals a face he does not recognize. “Oh, Lord. Salma, it’s me,” Anak says.

Anak speaks soft and gentle, as he might to a child. Salma finally calms down and tells him what happened. “They stormed through the city, Nephilim. Why they destroyed the city, no one knows. They were looking for you but you weren’t here.

Enraged they–well, you see the destruction, which was pointless. Nephilim, those anyway, didn’t care, and wreaked havoc, simply for the fun of it, or so it appeared.”

“We were in the desert on our way home but had left the caravan because mother wanted time in prayer.” He shook his head. “She would hate the destruction our stopping cost the city and her friends.”

Salma took his hand, “Anak. Even if you’d been here, they would’ve killed you, wrecked the city, and killed people. They were looking for any excuse to destroy; it wouldn’t have mattered if you were here or not.”

Shocked and not knowing where to look, his gaze wanders over the disaster, left. “Did they kill everyone? Never mind. I saw some people left when I entered the city. No wonder they were afraid. The way I look, no one would recognize me.”

She smiled, “You are scrawnier, darker, rough-looking. Yes, you look like the desert Nephilim.” She laughs, “Thank the Lord, you’re not one of them. They all have a price on their head.”

Looking fearful, she said. “You be careful because the price, well, they won’t care if it’s you. You’re in danger, Anak. You need to go back to Israel, at least until things quiet down.”

“What about mother? Did she return? I need to find her.” He paces. “Salma, I don’t even know where to look.”

 “I’m sorry. After the raiders finally left, we searched the area and they found your mother,” she said. “She had died sometime before they began to search. I saw her.” Salma weeps, knowing this is hard for him. “I’m truly sorry.”

Anak rubs his neck, trying to make sense of it and says, “You must be mistaken.” He snarls, “She wasn’t supposed to die. It isn’t possible. Why?” He shouts looking up into the sky hoping for some answers.

Salma tries to speak, but impatient Anak curses under his breath. “This is not right. Adonai would not leave her helpless in the desert.” Stretching his hands out to the sky, he shouts again, “Why would you allow this?” Letting his hands fall, he exclaims, “What is the point in going through this and the one you love is gone?” Anak lashes out in a fury.

Salma reaches out her hand and says, “I’m sorry and I know how you must feel, how painful it is.”

“You stay away. You know nothing.”

She pulls away to give him some space.

“You can hurt me with your words all you want. But I felt the same when they murdered Mark, yet I had no one to blame. Then to see you walk through the door… oh, you have no idea the hurt I wanted to lay on you. All I saw was another Nephilim.”

Anak, realizing he’s blaming the wrong person, heaves a sigh, comes back inside and hugs her. “Salma, I am so sorry. I know you lost Mark. What about your children?”

“The kids hid, so they came out of it safe, but you know the other sort of damage.” Tears fill her eyes as she watches Anak. “There is no sense to be made of it. Only time can heal. Who knows how long?”

Anak runs his hands through his hair then pounds the table hard enough the wood cracks. He wraps his arms about his chest, sits down and weeps like a child. Salma waits silently.

When he seems finished, she says, “It’s no comfort, but now she’s home with the Lord. That’s what I tell myself when I think of Mark.” Salma leaves, “I’ll stop by tomorrow.”

Anak lies down to get some rest. Upon waking, mind made up, he thinks, *it’s time to leave. I’ll ask Salma to go with me, her and the children. We can start a new life*.

Later that day, Salma stops by and he asks her to go with him.

“Where? I’ve never lived anyplace else. All I know is here.”

“We can go far north. I’ll find a map and check out the land. I don’t have any money unless Meira stashed it. She held our funds. There’s always work to make enough for traveling,” Anak ponders, thinking of what he could do.

Smiling, Salma says, “That’s what I came to get yesterday.”

She leaves the room and Anak hears her rummaging about, a loud thump followed by a louder thump.

Curious, Anak walks into the other room. “What are you doing?” She has a small casket in both hands and a smile on her face.

“Every time Meira or both of you would leave on a trip, she put the most valuable jewelry and money not needed for the shop in this casket. t Nephilim who came weren’t interested in working to find valuables. They smashed what they couldn’t carry and grabbed what they could. They took a few pieces. Mostly kid stuff.”

Anak opened the small casket; it revealed gold coins and jewelry Meira had made. “If we can find the buyers, will they pay for it?”

“I wouldn’t count on it. Most of the wealthy took what they could salvage and left for Egypt, where there are no Nephilim. Jewelry can be sold anywhere, even up north, more than likely.”

Once they decided, by the next day they have packed everything they need and they're ready to leave.

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## 4. Journey On

The journey takes months going through uncharted land to reach Ireland, at the northern tip of the world. At times both Anak and Salma wonder if it’s worth it. Many of the lands they travel through are poorly in habited and few people have any goods to share. Most of what they have with them, they trade for work as coins are useless in the wilds.

“Do other people actually live where we’re going?”

“Sure, but we can stop anywhere in-between and settle for a time. It’s up to you.” Salma brought her two boys, but her daughter stayed behind with Mark’s parents. Salma let her because of difficulties they’d face on the journey.

“That would be nice. For Mark and Jules’ sake, though we best go on so when settled, they’ll be in one place for more than a few weeks.”

Anak was not interested in marrying but wondered about Salma. “Would you like to find another husband? Sorry. I know it’s too soon to ask that. You’re still grieving.”

“It’s okay. It shouldn’t be up to you to provide for two boys and me. Depending on customs here, I enjoy being married. But what about you. Have you thought of marriage?”

“I’ve thought how to avoid it. Marriage isn’t for me, not now. Maybe never.” They walked on; the boys asleep in the cart.

The two talk for hours as there was little else to do as they traveled. The boys enjoyed the country roaming through the forest, chided to be cautious by their mother.

Anak instructs them to be careful, not to get lost, as they had no time to search for boys who wander off with no concern for the fairies waiting to snatch them for their dinner. Frightened the boys entered the forest looking about for the mythical Fae not believing, yet Anak assured them they were real.

Salma laughed, “Fairies! What are you teaching them? There is no such thing.” She punches his arm laughing at his sense of humor.

He looks at her and says, “Are you so sure? I’ve heard tales as we’ve crossed through these lands, and they cannot all be false. “They spoke of Tír-na-nÓg an island realm of youth and beauty, joy, and abundant health. A forest wilderness, flowery meadows dangerous to humans who visit unless they be a hero of sorts. The Fae must invite the hero before he can enter either through the ancient caves or through the mist and clouds, or sometimes even underwater.

“Mortals who visit the Otherworld, the echtrai or adventurers, must cross the sea of Mag Mell. The Plain of Honey is one of its names; it’s a golden path made by the sun’s light upon the ocean.”

Salma listened but merely rolled her eyes at Anak’s fancies.

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At last, they came to what could be a home where he could care for her and the children - at least until she found a new husband. Anak viewed the land before him strewn with rocks, boulders, and thorns. Stones rose up everywhere, the specters left no room for crops even had they seed. Anak saw an odd shimmering in the air. ‘What was it? Were the Fae he teased the boys with indeed real?’ He shook his head.

Anak turns away from the strange sight figuring it must be a weather event in the land. Then, an old man steps from the forest into the field. And Anak, surprised at first, eagerly crosses over to greet him excited to meet another person.

“Greetings,” Anak said to the man who stood of average size. Tall but no means as tall as Anak, who’d shifted to a more normal human size so not to frighten people. “My name is Anak.”

The old man looked him over, considering, “yer a bit tall fer a human and for sure you be no Fae.” His thick accent, difficult to understand.

Anak delighted said, “What are you, a leprechaun?”

He considers, *He’s too big for a leprechaun, yet his speech is almost unintelligible,* still he said, “I’ve no interest in your gold.” Imagining the leprechauns do not like to part with their gold.

Salma stood back watching in amusement the going on between the two men, not hearing their words.

The old man who was indeed a leprechaun smiled slyly. “Do you have gold? And would you be thinking to part with a small bit” He watches open his pouch and take out a gold coin, “I have one, unless you prefer a bit of silver to shine amongst your own gold?”

This one thinks to trick me. And the leprechaun laughs. “You’re a bit a trickster yourself.” Still, he held out his hand.

Not wanting to think he was tricking the Leprechaun, Anak held the coin over the man’s hand and dropped it. Legend says to catch a leprechaun the Fae must grant three wishes. Anak designs to build the old man’s trust for he does not believe in wishes but prayer. However, gold in hand, the old man disappears.

Salma rushed over. “What was that? Where did he go?” Then, silent for a minute, she said, “I suppose an apology is due, for surely he was a Fae or some such creature. Do we have to worry about anything, for the boy’s sake, I mean?”

“He’s not dangerous, I don’t think. If he makes mischief, which could be annoying, it won’t be harmful. I could be mistaken, so let’s see how things go. He may not be the last strange one we meet. The village people said not to make bargains with anyone, until you know the person!”

Salma wrings her hands, chews on her lower lip, “Okay. But you know the boys; they love the idea of fairies once they know – about being their dinner.” Eyes sparkle in amusement. Seeing his look, “Yes, I know, be careful. I’ll let you talk to the boys.”

“I will, when they get home. Where did they go?” He looks around to see if the boys are nearby and sees nor hears neither of them.

“I don’t know. They were here a minute ago.” Salma begins to feel concern for she cannot hear the boys and looking about, she doesn’t see them either. Panic lights her eyes, “Oh Lord, you don’t suppose.” Salma runs for the forest, for the boys had found an old well. Set on investigating it, she’s warned them to wait, but they never listen, too busy having fun.

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“You just had to climb down into this yukky place,” Jules said. “It’s so gross. He scowls at his brother, Mark, who’s crouching in fear in the well’s bottom.

“How did you climb down?” He couldn’t recall himself how he’d gotten in and gazes up at the rough stone walls climbing forever into the small circle of blue sky above. Moss clings grimly to its sides and Jules’ sighs. “We’re not injured, which is a good thing,” he says. But how do we get out?

“Jules, can’t you climb out for help?”

“You’re the one who got in. Why don’t you climb out?” Glaring at his brother, he sees tears and terror in his eyes. “I’m sorry Mark. We’ll figure it out. If we see that old man again, we’ll have Anak give him a talk.”

He reflects, ‘The old man was scary. Should’ve never gone with him,’ tears wet his cheeks as he shivers in the damp. Likely he’s one of Lucifer’s. Anak warned us about him. We should’ve listened, but I didn’t believe him. He was simply too strange.

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Returning to the cabin Salma and Anak had made into a home, she prepares dinner hoping the boys will return. They don’t. Anak and Salma search until dark but cannot find the boys or the well.

After a sleepless night worrying, early the next morning Anak went outside and found a message tacked to their door, but he could make no sense of it. “What is this?” Anak asked, showing the paper to Salma, searching for some meaning. “Just words that sort of rhyme.

“Let me see,” Salma said, taking the paper. “I know about poems whose meaning is hidden often in verse.” She reads from the ragged and dirty parchment, the messy yet somewhat eloquent writing.

O listen my dears or there’s no help for thee

Cease your sighs for those who left did flee.

In the hawthorn-tree lose the spirits will;

Lay aside the memory thy heart haunts still.

Do not return to bed – the dew does arise;

In pure heart forgo all your tears and sighs.

Deny my tale of woe - get yourself away!

In soft and silent feet take to the hill I pray

For they will not last within the dreary fell:

If you leave them in the Fae well.

“Well. What do you make of it?” Anak scowls, pacing.” Does it have any meaning, or is it just nonsense?”

“Hush. Of course, it has meaning. The first two lines ‘listen my dears or there’s no help for thee; cease your sighs, for the ones who left did flee.’ Whoever wrote this wants us to find the boys. If we do nothing but weep and sigh and weep, they will never be found.”

Anak’s impatient. “Get on with it. No suspense.”

“The ones who left did flee. The boys did go on their own but not to escape. Poems are to rhyme, so it makes sense.”

“It doesn’t make sense.” Anak rubs his forehead.

“Do you know of a hawthorn tree? Because it seems we must find one, but let’s make sure. The tree might be somewhere near the boys. Find a hawthorn-tree to lose the spirits will and lay aside the memory of which thy heart is haunting still!

"One of us is holding onto a memory that may have sent the boys into danger. Do I live in the past, Anak? Does it keep me from seeing the boys right - being there for them in a way they need?”

He would like to give an untruth to save her feelings, yet he knows truth is best. “Salma, I know you love the boys, but memories of Mark keep you away from them. If you have time to reminisce about him with the boys, not avoid talking about and longing for him as you’ve done.”

Tears pool in her eyes and trickle down her cheeks. She smiles and says, “Thanks.” Salma reads, dawn and dew and sighs, then the next, get yourself away – with soft and silent feet and go to the hill, I pray.

“Any hills come to mind?” eyebrows raised. “It’s not like there isn’t a hundred or ten times that and more.”

“Let me think.” Staring off, Anak envisions the surrounding land, not knowing it well, not having minded it while traveling. Where would the boys have gone? Anak questions. One hill struck Anak’s fancy, he recalled. “The Hill of Tamair is said to be sacred, and has an entrance to the Otherworld. There’s a hawthorn tree nearby I’m certain. That must be the place. Is there more in the poem?”

Tears fill her eyes: Long now they will not last - if you leave them in the Faerie well. Quickly rising, she says, “We must leave now!”

~~~

Anak knew where to go and made haste to pack a few things to take with him and Salma. Food and water for the boys as they would likely need nourishment. The two boys had spent the night in the hills in a well and who knew how deep. “A rope.” He thinks. “We may need it. In case they can’t climb out or have been hurt if they fell.”

Anak knows Salma’s heart breaks seeing her haunted look. She’ll not forgive herself if anything happens to either of the boys.

“You okay?” He asks seeing her body quake and he knows its fear.

“Do I look okay” she snaps, and Anak feels instant guilt. The boys had gone missing because of his faerie tales. Salma says, “I’m sorry. I’m so afraid for Mark and Jules and what we might find.”

“We may be in the Fae land, but we do not leave our faith,” Thus encouraged, Anak takes her hand. “Let us spend a moment in prayer.” Falling to his knees, Salma follows. The two travel most of the day and the sun is low in the sky by the time they reach the Hill of Tamair.

“Here it is.” Anak clasps Salma’s hand to reassure. They search the hillside for a hawthorn tree, but they find no tree or well. In despair, Salma sits down and weeps as Anak holds her to comfort. “It’s all for naught. Oh, Anak. There’s no well. My boys will die alone.”

Standing, he lifts her onto his shoulder and turns to head down the hill toward home. Just then, she sees the rim of what could be a well, next to several large trees.

“Anak,” she says, excitedly pointing, “Are those hawthorn trees? And a well, in the brush near their roots.” She scrambles to get down to the ground. “Let’s go look,” she says, running toward the trees she’s not seen earlier, Anak in tow. Coming closer, her excitement builds and she shouts, “Mark, Jules, are you here? It’s mom and Anak. Answer boys, if you can.” Her voice increases in volume. “Mark Jules. Answer me.”

Entering the clearing she shouts, “There is indeed a well. How did we miss it? The boys must be down there.” Salma sobs as she scrambles closer, hoping the boys are in the well and can hear her.

As they come to the well, Anak hears faint sounds from deep within. “Mark, Jules,” he calls. “Are you down there? Answer me.” There is only silence and a deep darkness down in the well.

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Lucifer smirks at the sleeping boys. Ah fine boys so young and eager for adventure. See where it’s brought you, to me. He hears the mother’s cry far above, and Lucifer blankets them in silence so boys cannot hear and they continue to sleep. Fear is good, but perhaps it’s best not to leave them in my well. Let’s give the problem to Anak. Calling to the Faerie, Lucifer gives further instructions. “See to it the boys are found, and when it’s done here’s what else I want you to do.”

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Out from nearby, a young woman steps from the foliage, “I see you got my message. It took you long enough.” While she has an ethereal glow about her, her words instill guilt in both Salma and Anak sees her as insubstantial, almost ghostlike.

“As you a ghost?” He asks. Salma looks at the woman, ignores her and continues to shout down the well for the boys.

“Nay. I am no ghost, just not your type of mortals.” Smirking, she says, “Never fear. The boys are safe. I’m glad you made it before dark, for after the second night it’s time to end the vigil.

Fear strikes anew, and Salma pays attention. “What are you saying? What vigil? Surely they’re not dead.” She investigates the well and is silent for a moment. The Fae hears her thoughts, prayers to their god.

 “The Fae says. “No, not dead else Lucifer would have taken them. In this land, if no one seeks the lost and we find them, they are taken to our kingdom as sacrifice to our god.”

Anak steps between the two and says, “We are here for the boys to take them home. We didn’t know where they’d gone. A leprechaun, an old man, created some confusion with his mischief.” No doubt incited by your so-called god, Anak thinks to himself.

Eyebrows hike up. She frowns at his thoughts, which she discerns, yet says, “He’s up to mischief again, the old man in rags?”

Anak frowned, “Why yes. Do you know him?”

“We didn’t know why children would have wandered to our lands. Likely, he enticed them with sweets and tricked them into the journey.”

Tapping her foot, impatient, she says, “We’ll rescue your children so you may return home. We’ll deal with the leprechaun. If you need help, we offer a gift, in apology, anything you like to make up for the trouble caused by the leprechaun. No tricks.”

The Fae awoke the children and helped them climb out. Then Anak told her what help he desired.

Smiling for this gift would work well with Lucifer’s plans, she knew. So, she pledged to fulfill his request by the time they returned home. As it was late at night, the Fae offered the family a cozy cave as a place to sleep, and they accepted, not knowing it was a place of sacrifice.

Returning to converse with Lucifer, he gave her instructions, which she was quick to fulfill, laughing at the trouble it would cause. The faeries saw no need to speak with the humans and left with her companions to do as Lucifer had asked.

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After bread and cheese for breakfast, Salma and Anak with the boys made their way home. Sure enough, upon their arrival, he saw the field cleared of stones and thorns; it was a wonderful sight indeed. The Fae had gifted him with a packet of seeds for planting as well.

Anak was suspicious. “Strange she gave more than we bargained. What do you think, should we plant them, see what comes up?”

“Prayer did good before,” Salma answered. “So, it’s again a good place to start.”

Anak agreed and together they knelt to pray and then they waited to hear from the Lord. Several nights later, Anak dreamed a dream.

After planting Fae seeds, a wealth of plants sprang from the ground. He and Salma became wealthy selling the produce and expanded their business. Everyone began buying from Anak, but his neighbors fell into poverty when their crops failed year after year. Then greater disaster struck. Their ships sunk and the boys, grown now and aboard the vessels, were both lost at sea. Anak and Salma were in poverty.

Anak awoke in a sweat, fear beating at his heart. He realized profiting from the Fae gift could cause tragedies for everyone. Adonai would want them to share with their neighbors, not profit at their expense. And so their destiny was set.

Salma and Anak planted the seeds, praised God for a good harvest, and when it came in, they called their neighbors to share. No one went hungry in the land and all profited for many years to come.

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The Fae surprised and pleased by Anak, did the family no harm for they realized Anak is unlike other mortals and left the family alone while their god, Lucifer was in a rage. “It’s your fault. How dare you give them seeds to profit by? You were supposed to rain havoc on them.”

Lucifer refuses to hear what he believes are excuses. Except they were doing just as he’d instructed. “My Lord, you said to rain disaster on the family and give them seeds to plant that would incite their greed. They did not behave as other mortals and their profits they shared with their neighbors. We did as you asked.”

Lucifer’s response was to take several of the Fae and seal them in hell’s chambers with delusions of pleasure as he stole their magic, slowly sucking it from them for his use. “You and your magic will be mine for all eternity.” He snarled, watching their misery. For while they had delusions of pleasure, they experienced no joy in it.

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While the Fae’s punishment continued, unaware, Salma and Anak met their nearby neighbors, one was a farmer, Aodhan, whom Salma fancied for a husband. “Anak, why not get to know him better and invite Aodhán over for supper one evening?”

Anak agreed and soon Aodhán was a regular visitor, after he learned Anak was not Salma’s husband.

“I’d have called on her sooner, if I’d known you were not wed. How is it you live together without vows?”

“We do not live together as man and wife,” Anak said. “Salma sleeps in the house with her boys, while I sleep in the shed with the animals. This our God desires because we are not wed.”

Aodhán, heart lightens with the news for Salma is very appealing and he determines she will make a fine wife. So he spoke with Anak.

“I would enjoy having a wife, Anak. As you and Salma are not wed, do you believe she would like me to court her?”

Anak smiled and said, “Indeed. It was her idea to invite you to supper the first time. I must tell you, we are believers in the one true God, Adonai, creator of the heavens and earth. You seem to have many gods, as do the Fae, and he would not approve of such a marriage.”

Anak saw his face become sad. Then Aodhán asked about Adonai and how he differed from their god. “I know nothing about your gods, only that Adonai demands we worship his alone. Anak told how Adonai showed. them to their harvest and the profits they enjoyed.

“So then, I would be pleased to hear more about your god, so see if he is acceptable to me. For my gods do not help me as do yours. One has problems with temper and mischief such as the Fae who prey upon people. Though, I notice you have none of those problems, and I heard the Fae helped by giving you seed.”

“Ah yes,” Anak said and laughed. “It was a most unusual situation when we first arrived here.” He told Aodhán how the boys went missing, they then met the Fae, he had a dream, and Adonai’s answer.

In time, hearing more of Adonai and not having profited by his old-world gods, he began to worship Anak’s God. Soon, he was courting Salma and in a short time, the two planned to marry.

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As time went on, Anak could tell Aodhán was jealous of how close he and Salma were. It’s not right to cause trouble between the two, our being so close. Tis time for me to move on.

“Aodhán,” Anak says, “I’ve an offer for you. Please speak with Salma after you hear me out, and if you both agree, I’ll sell you my land.”

“Sell! Why ever would you sell?” Yet Anak saw the gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

“It’s time I found a new place. I’m going to Wales and start over. So, you two let me know what you decide.”

Salma came running when she heard about the offer, “Anak, how can you leave me and the boys?” she cried in dismay. “You’re our friend, mine and Aodhán too.”

“Salma, Aodhán is your husband. He’s more than capable to do everything I used to do. He does more. And you know I’ve a need to find my own way apart from you.”

Sad to miss her longtime friend, yet Aodhán and Salma agree after a mild protest. Once a price is agreed upon, before long, Anak has packed a few of his belongings and is off to Wales excited for this new adventure into a strange land.

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## 5. A New Home

Wales, south of Ireland and of the Celtic farming tribe, is Anak's new home. Well-known in the land for his fair practices Anak had no trouble finding property whereon to raise crops, cattle, and sheep. Land grants doled out by the rulers who, having heard of Anak, were pleased to replace those who made life hard for their people. Even so, the men who came to work for him were afraid because of his size.

Anak could shape-shift and become smaller, even so, he still was a tall man, compared to others. Nevertheless, soon the people found he was a fair man and unlike the first Nephilim who’d been cruel task masters. So, the people were deeply grateful for his kindnesses.

The fairies were somewhat different than those he’d known before and created problems for men like Anak. Single most are not immune to their beauty or charms. Fae, able to take on any form, cause mischief in a human visage. The Fae queen, very beautiful and powerful, is hardest for men to resist and she’s caused trouble for many. When gossip of Anak reached the queen, she set her sights on him.

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Bidding his men good night, Anak travel for home after seeing to his holdings one evening. While his overseers usually keep an eye on things, he considers the land to be in his care so keeps his eyes open to troubles and deals with it quickly.

On his way home, Anak walks eagerly toward his home, anticipating a hot mean the housekeeper always sets out for him. However, he sees an unusual sight for sitting at the roadside head down, is a female. Not realizing she’s Fae and unawares Anak offers her aid, “Are you in trouble, miss? Is there anything I can do to help?”

Looking up, she sees a farmer not realizing its Anak and snarls, “Go away. No help is needed from the likes of you.” The Fae queen turns her back on him but he ignores the insult.

“I’ve had troubles too,” Anak said. “I see you’ve your own. If in need, come to the house down the way. I won’t bother you otherwise.”

He walks home. Other workers walk by, ignoring her. Besides, most have wives at home and suspect she’s Fae, which means only trouble. Anak has not met such a Fae before and is unsuspecting.

As darkness fell, Anak heard a knock on his door. At first, he thinks he’s imagined it and ignores the knock, but it comes again. Answering the door, he’s surprised to sees the young woman, the same one he’d seen on the road earlier, “Can I help you?”

“I said,” shuffling her feet she looks away, “I didn’t need anything from you.” She bows her head, twisting her hands in front of her.

“And now,” he said, not a question rather a statement.

“Well, I would be most grateful to do whatever you ask.” She looks up to see his response and smiles, “I mean housework or whatever you need in exchange for food and a bed. Or anything you might desire.” Her intended meaning is clear as she sways her hips and trails her tongue over her lips, wetting them.

“It’s late. The workers went home. I have no one to safeguard you.” He prays to himself. What am I to do. Lord, I need help.

“Don’t need safeguarding. What could’ve been done to me already been done.” She looks up, sorrow in her lovely eyes, “Still, I trust you.”

“It’s not proper to be with you alone. Do you understand?” Anak doesn’t know what to do, never having this situation before. Frustrated, he opens the door and invites her inside but stands in the doorway not closing it. Making up his mind, Anak says, “The kitchen’s in the back and a room upstairs. I’ll be out in the barn. Lock the door.” He walks away to leave her wide-eyed with wonder.

*Well, I never imagine such a thing; that’s a first. None will believe me from a simple farmer. I’d thought this Anak was more,* she says to herself wandering about the house. *Not much to look at*. She enters the kitchen. *Tis useful but could use several improvements*.

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Anak trudges to the barn, grabs a pile of hay, *I’ve slept in worse*, he muses and grabs a blanket and doesn’t give the woman another thought. Anak’s fast asleep with nothing but pleasant dreams.

In the morning, returning to his house, surprised to find the woman gone, the door closed but unlocked. Walking inside, Anak cannot believe his eyes. Radiant floors shine in the sunlight through windows covered with a pleasant fabric and the kitchen’s a miracle. Things she’d done he never thought of doing. She must’ve been a Fae.

Anak’s housekeeper comes, looks around and gasps. “Lord a mercy. You had a Fae! What did you do? Never mind. Tis best I don’t know.”

He shrugs. “Nothing, gave her food and a bed to sleep in and left her. I slept in the barn.”

“Oh, you are in such trouble.” She cackles. “She’ll be very pleased. You’ll see.” Laughing at Anak, his housekeeper leaves for the day.

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Curiosity settles over Anak as he waits to see what his housekeeper meant. Time goes on and nothing happens. Yet he wonders, how does a Fae show she is pleased? In the past, the Fae had repaid a leprechaun’s unkindness by clearing his fields with a bonus, which he shared with his neighbors who all profited, but this time nothing and he soon forgets.

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The Fae queen stamps her foot. “The idea was to trap and punish him for taking advantage of me but he did not.” Surprised, she doesn’t know quite what to do until a new idea arrives. “Clearly, he is a man I can trust to do me no wrong. I will make him my own.” The queen begins to plot her next move. “He’ll become my mate and king of the Fae.”

Smiling she wonders, what would be like to wed a mortal? Another Fae reminds her, “To wed, you cannot trap him; he must come willingly. He cannot be king of the Fae; he’s one of the Nephilim.”

“Oh bother.” She snaps, not pleased. “Why do my plans always fail?” Though they usually go her way, still she considers, “He’s an honest soul who esteems his One God. Can I use magic?” she asks her advisors.

“You can alter your appearance with a glamour, so he does not see you as the one who tried to ensnare him. You can use a glamour on the people around him. Once he falls in love then can you use magic, if they approve other criteria. The queen doesn’t ask what it is.

“You could tell him you’re a Fae queen, though he might want you for your powers. His feelings for you must be real regardless.”

Smirking the other Fae turn away, but the Fae queen seeing the looks is more determined to win his love. Her friend suggests, “Medea, it might be wise to read the rules of courtship to avoid surprises.

“Yes, of course,” she agrees then dismisses the idea. That’s why I’ve advisors, she tells herself and goes to seek their counsel.

The advisors suggest she enter his dreams to learn more about him. Entering someone’s dreams seems fun and the queen does so, entering his night visions to learn of his desires.

“Bother,” she tells her friend. “It’s the same every night, reaping and sowing. A woman who’s a friend with a husband and two children so she cannot be his love.”

“Are you sure? Perhaps he’s a philanderer, using women but is tricky about it, like some Fae I know.” Medea sees her knowing look.

“Yes, I’m trying to trick him. But I’ve done it before. So, what?” And she flounces off, in a huff seeing her friend laugh at her.

The Fae sees Anak’s dreams of love and imagines such for herself. Perhaps tonight in his dreams I’ll find what he desires. She hungers for romance and love, which is totally lacking in the Fae kingdom.

Medea tells her friend of Anak’s new dream woman who’s different. Oh, she is lovely the one he desires?”

“Who is it? What’s she like? If he’s in love with another what will you do to capture his love for yourself?” the friend queries.

“It’s not all bad, I don’t think. The woman is his mother. I could feel the loss ripple through his dream world. She died long ago.”

 “You want a man who’s captured by love of his mother,” she gasps. “Tis a recipe for disaster Medea.”

“What if I’m merely a reminder of his love?” she sniggers, recalling her own lost love eons before.

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“Come with me,” Lucifer said. “You can be with me for eternity.”

“Nay,” she’d said. “I’d miss the sunlight and flowers.”

“There’s more to life than sunlight,” he snickered. “To warm you in the dark I’ve a pleasant trick or two.” As he wrapped her in his arms.

Lucifer knows she enjoys his strength and power and is tempted, yet he also knows she longs for the sunlight above and the glorious flowers in springtime. *How can I tempt her to remain?* He muses.

“I see Adonai’s worldly light still has hold of you if not your heart.” Lucifer glowers. *I have all the pleasure I could want with many lovelies who enter my domain and profess their love. None who truly love me not even the fair Medea*, he grumbles to himself.

Medea’s refusal to enter hell to be with Lucifer led to her lost love, if one could call lust a love for that was truly all they had between them, and Medea was wise enough to know it. Yet, she seeks the illusive love of her life and is determined Anak will be the one.

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Asking her advisors, they warn against using a glamour to look like the mother. “It’s not a good idea.” But determined to have her way, she ignores their advice and that of her friend.

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The following day, at worship service, Anak enters the meeting hall and sees a new face. A woman of lovely shape and face is by the preacher and his wife. They come around monthly to share the word of the Lord and he always brings his wife.

Anak sees the woman with them and wonders. Who is she? She looks very familiar. Someone from my past? Still Anak doesn’t recognize her. After glancing at her several times, it comes to him who she resembles. Her hair is a not as red. He muses. And her eyes, with bits of silver within light up when she laughs, like mother.

Anak smiles to himself. The Fae sees and laughs to herself. Perhaps this will work, she says amused by the prospect.5t

Later, Anak contrives to be near her. Not wanting to seem too eager, for she doesn’t seem interested in meeting men, so he’s cautious.

One day, the preacher’s wife comes over and takes his arm. “Anak,” she said. “I have someone for you to meet.” She guides him to the Fae. Anak freezes, daring not breathe and his heart pounds in his chest, faster, louder, sure she can hear its rhythm.

“I thought you should meet get to know one another.” Her husband looks on in surprise at his wife, then Anak and finally the woman who did not seem offended, so he smiles as his wife introduces them.

“Anak, this is Medea. She joined our little gathering a while back. Perhaps you two have something in common.” Smiling, for the only thing they had in common was being single.

Medea smiles, that worked out nicely. I cannot enchant the man, but then the other humans are doing it beautifully.

Taking him by the arm from the preacher’s wife, Medea walks away, leaving the preacher shocked and his wife pleased with herself.

“Tell me about yourself,” the Fae says looking at him After shifting but still tall, she says, “My you’re tall and handsome.”

Anak blushes. His mother was the only one who said that to him, and he’s embarrassed having an attractive female find him handsome.

“The strong silent type, are you?” She purrs. “It’s a quality I admire." Medea squeezes his arm lightly. “Oh, you’re so strong.”

Delighted, the Fae walks on in silence, hoping Anak will make the next move. Down towards the stream that runs by the hall, she thinks, it’s a nice setting wherein to get acquainted and moves closer to him.

Her boldness intrigues Anak, for most women thought to win a man being coy then turn into something else once she captures his heart and he thinks, she's quite bold. Not wanting to offend her and remains silent. Still she does please me.

The Fae hears his thoughts, it’s boldness he enjoys. Looking up at him, she says, “Tell me about yourself.”

“Not much to tell. I’m a simple farmer, nothing more. What I’d like is you telling me about yourself.”

That’s original, she thinks. Usually, humans only want to talk about themselves. I’ve never met one who cared a moon drop for me. She takes a moment to decide - how much to reveal.

“I’m single, alone in the world, no parents. My folks passed long ago. Although my dreams bring them to mind occasionally. Dad made life fun. Mum left after my birth didn’t want a child - needed her freedom.” The Fae allowed a look of sadness to play over her face.

Eyeing Anak, she knew this could link them together: his childhood was similar, except it was his father who abandoned him and she noticed Anak’s own sadness upon hearing her story.

“She’s my mum but wants nothing to do with me even now. Says I’m better off. Still, we could have been friends,” a look of longing clouds her eyes a moment.

Anak reaches to take her hand in comfort. Then realizing the bans jerks his hand away and apologizes. “I’m so sorry. Didn’t mean to be forward but your story….”

Laughing, he says, “How do you get by? Do you have a trade or…” self-conscious, he flushes, “Sorry, its none of my business?”

Lightly punching his arm, she chuckles, “How else would you know?” Eyes sparkling, she says, “You could sneak and ask the preacher’s wife.” Her laughter trills as she leans close. “Isn’t it delightful she contrived for us to meet? Nothing shy about her.”

She pulls away. “I’m glad to have met you.” A hint of longing creeps in. “I’ve been alone a long time, as have you, I’m guessing, right?”

Anak’s heart softens. This woman I could love. Realizing, he pulls away, not sure he’s ready for a commitment, “We should return before they think we’re up to mischief.” Taking her hand, they head back.

Her small hand in his large callused one, she marvels at the strength yet finds him so gentle. Ah, I’ve made the perfect choice.

Humming softly, she starts to instill a sense of love and longing in him then remembers she’s forbidden to use magic. If they sense a spell, they’ll bar me from him.

“Don’t stop,” he says; “it’s a lovely tune.”

“No. It’s nothing.” She smiles, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. Anak’s heart surges with an unfamiliar emotion.

“Where are you staying, here in town?”

“To be sure, I’ve met a couple who have a merchant shop in town.” When she had shown up one day and showed them what she could do, they invited her to stay, even allowed her a space to work in and materials she would need. Naturally, a little magic had helped in their decision. In exchange, she creates jewelry they sell for a profit with a portion to themselves, in a mutually satisfying arrangement.

No mischief by the Fae, not yet anyway. Perhaps later. She smiles to herself at the possibilities as she rummages through her fertile mind.

Several times, when he can get away, Anak goes into town to visit. In the evening, he walks Medea and talks until the sun begins to set. She always made sure he is well away before dark so she can return to her Fae tribe and report progress.

Medea coyly shares her progress, glorying in the awe she inspires.

“Yes,” her friend exclaims. “It is a wonder how you’ve done it.” And they send her off, knowing she’s succeeding in snaring this mortal where even human females had not. Anak belongs to the One True God however and cannot marry a Fae without consent of her people and meeting other criteria. The romance continues, until the queen’s change of heart occurs, at the very least, a change of mind after a visit by Lucifer.

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“My lovely queen who professed her love then refuses me. Now you whore with a mortal and a despicable one who’s caused me no small amount of trouble yet you enjoy his caresses. My heart hurts thinking of him touching your fine self, the one who before only allowed me to caress her in those ways you desired. Or, was it all a lie?”

Pouting, Medea looks at Lucifer. *How I long for his caresses, yet Anak is also strong and powerful, though different*. “Oh, my love. If you were on the earth, I’d be in your arms night and day feeling you pulse within. My heart leaps imagining us together. Sadly, the mortal desires the sort of love I too desire, and he’s a man of the earth.”

Lucifer’s eyes narrow, “Yes, he is of the earth, and the one true god, who will never allow you to wed him.” Moving close to where she can feel his prowess, he breathes his passion on her neck and enjoys seeing the goosebumps rise, her breath shorten. Whispering slyly, Lucifer asks, “If so sure, why have you not bedded him and made him yours?” Tongue flicking out to tickle her lips and she gasps in pleasure.

“Yes, in that you’re right.” She sighs leaning in. “He honors his god and not mine – you my precious one.”

“How then will you wed him, for you have to give me up completely to have him and his impotent god.” Lucifer’s tongue licks down her neck and he breathes warmly between her breasts. “Come now. Do you not desire my power as you ride the dragon to the end you desire?”

Gasping with passion, Medea long to throw herself at Lucifer and ride him into hell, but pulls back. “Anak’s asked me to marry him and I must give an answer today.” Her eyes travel over Lucifer from head to toe and she longs for his touch but also for the man of the earth. *He will give me more than Lucifer can or will, at least I hope so*.

“No, my precious,” says Lucifer. “You are wrong. He can never give you more than I. Once you know this, return to me. But this time, you will follow me into hell for eternity.” Ripping her clothes off, he savagely enters her, eyes flaming in lust. Finished, he pulls away, and vanishes, leaving her hungry for more.

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Medea walks along the stream where she first walked with Anak and surveys the land across the way, his land. Another woman sits by the stream and looks up at Medea as she walks by. “Come sit with me,” she said, and moves a bit to indicate there’s room.

Medea gazes at her blue eyes like the sky, and long black shining hair falls below her waist to curl on the grass. *I’ve never seen hair like hers,* she muses. *It’s beautiful. How did she grow it so long, magic?*

“Stars no. Magic is for those who have no other resource.” Her eyes twinkling in a pale face with cheeks pinked and lovely, her lips rosebuds, and Medea thinks, *This woman I would like to know.*

To Medea’s surprise, she again answers her thoughts. “Sadly, it will never happen. My world is far from yours, and you’ll never see because you long for the evil one, and there is none whence I come.”

“You mean Lucifer? What if I said, I’d give him up for a glimpse of your world, would you take me there?”

“No, Medea. You must give up Anak or he’ll never find his destiny for he belongs to my world. Now tell me truly, if I said, deny Lucifer and I’ll take you home with me, would you?”

Medea feels her longing for Lucifer and his intimacy and knows she would love to see this woman’s world but she’d never stay. “Sadly, it’s not a world wherein I could live for long, or so I imagine.”

“Anak will go one day. You either leave him now or lose him then.” You’ll have another chance to decide. Just not today.”

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## 6. Farewell Love

Medea is to meet Anak, who asked her to marry him. She flinches at the thoughts, lips curl back in disgust. Her eyebrows draw close and she considers, *A child of the One God, Anak cannot wed knowing I’m a Fae.* She mutters to herself. *I would have to give up my powers and the Fae world and become one with his God!* Medea abhors the thought. *Worse, I would never see Lucifer again.* Her body still surges with unmet passion before he so rudely left her longing for him. *Even so, I’ll lose him one day*, she muses as she reflects on the woman she’d met.

*What was I thinking?* She moans, closer to the truth and Anak*. If I don’t tell him and we marry, I’ll have my powers, but will be banished. If we have children, they’ll be Fae, so he’ll know and likely end our marriage.* Medea slumps down, *I cannot live without my magic. I don’t want to give up Lucifer. I’ll lose Anak eventually, so it may as well be now,* she mourns.

Suddenly a bright light shines all around. A white-robed woman like the sun she’s so blinding. Medea tries to set a binding spell. “You cannot bind me, Fae. I came to help you decide - to marry or not.”

“Who are you?” Eyes narrow slits, knowing full well she’s an angel. “How can you help me? I’m not a child of your Lord Adonai.”

“Oh, but you are just not one who honors Adonai. If he created the universe, do you imagine you’re not His? Rather than the ethereal, let’s talk about you and Anak. My name is Ariel, Lioness of Adonai, who assigned me to care for Anak at his birth.”

“You have control of him,” Medea snaps. “To hinder our marriage.”

“Not at all. All Adonai’s creations have free will, which is the reason you Fae kept your magic but went your way. Your powers were meant to create good in the world and not become mischief-makers, deceivers, and followers of Lucifer, the one who now rules the earth and you.”

“Oh, you say I’m Lucifer’s child!” *More like his whore,* she muses. “Why don’t you go and leave me to my misery.”

Turning away, Medea pouts with tearful eyes. “You know I have to give him an answer?” Angry and taking it out on the angel, “Is that why you came to trick me into saying no!”

Ariel answers, “Medea. I would never trick you. That’s a Fae talent, and a refined one. An angel of Adonai, I will be candid with you.”

Medea looks into deep blue eyes, seeing only truth, no deception with which she is very familiar. “I don’t want to lose him. To marry, I’d have to tell him I’m Fae. If he still wants to marry me, I’d have to give up my powers. If I don’t, I’ll lose him anyway. It’s hopeless.”

Medea sniffles, “I wish I’d never contrived this love affair,” she says and stamps her foot peevishly, crosses her arms, her lips in a pout.

“It surely is an arduous task you set for yourself. Why did you not tell him you’re a Fae when you first met?” Ariel asks, bemused.

“It would spoil the fun. Anak would’ve had nothing to do with me, a Fae. I didn’t trust what he’d do - before I knew him. Now it’s too late.” Chewing a fingernail, Medea waits on the angel to speak.

“You can have love and marriage,” Medea looks at her. “First accept Adonai as Lord, give up your powers and status as ruling queen. Then you can go to Anak with a clear conscious out of love.”

“If I do, he will leave me. You see, it’s hopeless.”

“It’s hopeless because you don’t trust his love. Love requires faith. Are you willing to take those steps, Medea?”

Looking hungrily at Ariel, desiring the offer, Medea turns away, “No. I cannot. Your God asks too much and gives too little.”

Ariel says, “Farewell then,” and vanishes.

Medea makes up her mind, goes to Anak. Only this time, she goes as the Fae he’d first met long ago. Smiling, she says, “You may not know me, but I have a gift you being so nice to me, often times.”

“I don’t understand,” he says, not knowing to what she refers. Then, in a blink, all his memories are gone, as is Medea.

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Lucifer instructed Medea to enter hell if she wants him and has given up Anak which she has, but leaving earth for the hell she finds arduous. So, for a time, she lingers on the earth. *Why dawdle when Lucifer awaits?* She feels the heat rise in her. *Oh bother. I should’ve at least bedded Anak before leaving.* Medea takes one last longing look and heads for the Sidhe and Lucifer’s Underworld. Excitement builds as she travels and Medea knows she’s made the right choice.

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Anak goes on with his life, but with a longing in his heart he never had before. Feeling something is missing, not knowing what it is, he puts overseers in charge of his fields, fills his pack, and assures the foreman, “We’ll plant and harvest together upon my return.”

When he and Salma with the boys had left their former home, they moved north to the Black Sea. From there, they took a river as far north as possible and then overland. They went out of their way to avoid the mountains south of them with their high peaks of snow and ice. Now Anak wants to see those mountains.

Much had changed in the few hundred years since he had left the middle east and excitement fills him. Anak knew Salma and her husband as human passed on long ago with their families. Nephilim are long-lived, centuries, and leave many friends. But they also made many.

He considered the mountains to the south. Celtic tribes had come to those mountains that lay above the Italic lands. He’d heard of a Roman commander who would one day defeat the tribes*. Julius Caesar must be an excellent commander to overthrow the fierce Celts*. Anak had no desire to fight in a war, wanting to enjoy life for a space. At times, he thought about it when hunting dragons with the men his mother had introduced him to, but that was long ago, far in the past.

Arriving in the mountains, excited to begin the trek, Anak found a guide to help him climb the mountains. In the early morning, they set out from the summit near the Italic lands. One mountain after another, he scaled, finding the climbs fantastic, but in the valleys, at a little village on the left-slope, a fairytale mountain rose to the foot of a granite titan.

The sun was breaking in the sky with its golden light when he awoke, the surrounding terrain brought into sudden and sharp focus. They were high above a valley ringed by the snow-capped mountains. A lake below of icy blue waters lay. In places the layer of deciduous forest, resplendent in golden hues, came to the water's edge, indeed, the corpse of trees ringed the shore, after having falling in. Above were green pine, and from there arose tons of grey granite, only softened by the pristine snow; it lay in the jagged crevices like the lines of an old man’s face, while higher up not a hint of grey peeked through, it was brilliant white.

A small brook wound through massive boulders at the back of a hut where they’d spent the night. Built close to the mountains where granite boulders, after severing off the peaks above, had rolled to a stop.

Its four cathedral-like peaks set one atop another and close to the Northeast face was the amazing experience in climbing. Anak’s guide led him across the many north faces. Yet trekking the lower Celtic lands and over many mountains, soon Anak’s farmlands called to him and he knew it is time to return home. Smiling to himself, he thanks his guide and bids him farewell as he sets out for home.

Returning home did not still the heartache. Nonetheless, one evening, as the golden sun smeared the cobalt blue-sky deep purple, and an orange fire brings on the night, had Anak looked he might’ve seen in the grey-purple shadows Medea watching him.

Medea had stayed near Anak’s home for a time and now decides, “I’ll give my love to another who’ll accept me as I am,” not seeing the absurdity of her words, and heads into the Otherworld and Lucifer.

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## 7. Lonely Heart

A Fae came upon Anak as he lay on a hillside looking skyward into the dark night. Taking pity on him, the Fae asked, “Counting the stars?”

Anak startled, nearly jumps out of his skin, “Who are you and what do you want?” He snarls at the Fae. “Go away and leave me be.”

The Fae laid beside him anyway and said, “That group,” pointing to a specific group of stars, “they’re called the seven sisters: Maia, Electra, Alcyone, Taygete, Asterope, Celaeno and Merope. One day I will travel to those stars and visit the planets in that star system. I would love it. Can you imagine what it would be like?”

“Don’t be a fool. How would you get to the stars and how do I know those are even stars?” Anak barked. “You could be making the names up. They are nothing more than lights in the sky.”

“True, but what would I gain by deceiving you? As you know, we Fae are good at deception. Still, you lie here at night under the stars. What do you hope to find? And if you find it what would you do with it?”

“I know nothing about you Fae nor do I wish to,” Anak rolls his eyes, lips curls in a sneer, “I look for nothing but merely pass the time.”

“Oh, you know more than you realize. You’ve been near us a long time and then some. You fell in love with one of us. Though you have no memory of her and your time together with our Fae queen.”

“You speak nonsense.” Yet, Anak wonders if it could be true. “Let’s say I believe you. What’s the difference?”

“It could be the reason for the longing in your heart.”

“What’s it to you? If there were someone to love, and she left, I’m still alone and longing.” Bitterness tinges his voice.

“Well, the problem was not her or you, but this Adonai you worship. He expects too much. Why else does he deny your love or deny her love for you; so many rules to live by? They’re impossible.”

“You don’t know what happened,” Anak said, frowning as a memory teases his mind. “The woman I loved,” he hesitates, hearing the words fall from his lips and says, “The one I’ve loved is my mother long dead. Now, all I have are dreams,” Anak argues.

“Are you sure? With no memory, how can you know? You’re a fool if you think your heart aches for nothing. Perhaps if you ask your angel, did she reveal all?” He vanishes leaving Anak to wonder.

Anak cannot forget the Fae’s last words, swirling around in his mind, until he’s totally baffled. “Ariel what have you done?”

Anak dreams: A woman of beauty and grace instills even deeper the ache in his heart. Lucifer called her Medea. Is this the one I desire who indeed captured my heart? “Where are you, my Faerie queen?” She answers him not. Then he sees a dark, forbidding place, far from her bright Fae home. Yet, she seems pleased if not content with herself and the one with her, Lucifer, in an intimate embrace.

Anak awakens, angry at the truth revealed! The angels say nothing! He snarls and his rage burns hot in his heart. *Cowards with their deceit,* He fumes hurt at hearing no answer.

Going about his daily life, Anak pretends all is well, yet his heart breaks for the one he once loved. Then the Fae on the hillside returns.

“What do you want of me?” asks the Fae, curious.

“I did not call you,” Anak says with a snarl.

“Oh, your voice of woe is clear, just as the first time. Night after night you sit out under the stars in the heaven and mourn a loss.”

“Nay, I mourn no one. You’re as deceptive as the angels in heaven who bother not to answer when called.”

“You call to your god and there’s no answer? When we call our god, he always answers.” Pretending to consider he says, “Perhaps your god is not as real as you imagine.” He looks to Anak for his response.

“You seek to turn me from Adonai? Get out away you miserable Fae. I’ll have nothing to do with you. Adonai does what he does. I do not have to agree with his reasons,” Anak says, yet his face downcast.

Kai adopts a dejected look, trying to make amends for the seed of doubt planted, which he hopes will grow with proper motivation.

“My apologies for any lack of awareness of your great Adonai, whom you care for. How can I correct my error?” Slyly he watches Anak. “Attend to my apology and hear my sincere heart.”

Anak’s heart softens, believing the Fae’s sincere in making amends. “Friends are in short supply and one always needs more. Adonai asks me to forgive slights. So, I accept the apology.”

The Fae’s heart jumps in glee believing he’s gained the advantage. “You are a fine man, Anak.” Kai praises Anak for all he has done on the earth and without magic. “You made friends among my kind and most unusual. You know Fae enjoy playing mischief on humans. How is it you have not suffered?” He asks knowing the answer.

Anak’s heart swells with pride. “The Fae enjoyed my fairness after they’d offered a gift in recompense for a leprechaun’s trickery.”

“Because you’re such a fine man, I would be pleased to invite you into our kingdom to feast and enjoy what we have to offer.”

Anak imagines once there he can look for the queen and eagerly accepts thinking to find her at last and fill the longing.

The Fae discerns Anak’s heart, “While there, search for the one you desire though she has gone into the Otherworld. You won’t find her. Yet you are welcome to come anyway.”

Startled, Anak doesn’t at first know what to say. Then, asks, “Medea was your queen, queen of the Fae?”

“Yes, and you will be safe because of your pure heart. No one will do you harm.” The Fae urges Anak to accept, thinking, it doesn’t mean we won’t use your foolishness against you.

Upon entering their world, another contests Anak’s right to be there, “You have no right and must leave.” Not demons the Fae are still subject to Lucifer and as a child of the One God Adonai, Anak is not welcome. Yet, another in authority decides differently and says, “If you desire to remain, you must convince the Fae king. Only he can agree to help you.”

Anak agrees but a message arrives, “It seems they cannot find the king and were they to find him, he may not agree to meet.”

“Why does this not surprise me? Now what?” he asks Kai.

“Oh, fear not. The king is likely off wandering the forest, perhaps hunting. He loves to hunt for deer.”

“Great. Do we wait until he bags his deer? I’m imagining I’ll return home. I grow bored and we will be planting crops soon.”

“Wait one more day. If he doesn’t appear then we’ll leave.”

“You need not attend me. I can find my way home alone.”

“Ah, Anak, I imagine you’ve been alone to long. It’s time for company and what better companion than a lively Fae.” He smiles brightly.

Anak frowns but agrees. “I’ll remain one more day and if he doesn’t return, I am leaving with or without you.” He turns away and sits with his back to the Fae, ignoring further requests for conversation. After another day, Anak grows impatient, and determines to leave as the king arrives and agrees to speak with him.

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“Anak is your name. Yes, I’ve heard that name somewhere before.” The king frowns trying to recall when and where he’d heard the name when the more agreeable Fae whispered something in his ear.

“You don’t say? So, you’re the fellow our Medea desired to wed. She was our ruler until she fell in love. Sadly, she was unwilling to forgo her powers so she left her crown for the Otherworld to be with Lucifer.”

Anak is shocked, “Why go to be with Lucifer?”

“She loved him for a long time. Some say her love had more to do with lust for they enjoyed fleshly pleasures together. Still she gave up her kingdom and you, it seems, to be with Lucifer.”

“I desire her return. Do you imagine she would return, if asked?”

“Most who go never return, so she may not either, nor may she be willing.” Said the king. “To find Medea, you must go where she has gone, and endure the Otherworld, Lucifer’s world. How say you?”

“I’ll go and bring her home, if she agrees.”

The king is pleased for part of him hopes Anak succeeds and returns their queen. No Fae has ever gone to the Otherworld and returned. The Fae, now pleased with the king’s approval and celebrate with wine and delicacies, delighted Anak’s journey begins the next day. Kai, the one who tricked Anak into their kingdom, fears for him. “Anak. I would be pleased if you allow me to accompany you on your journey.”

“Why go if the Fae have never gone and returned?” Anak asks.

“There’s a first time for everything and I could be the first Fae to go and return. I’d make a name for me self.”

Anak shakes his head at the foolish thinking but agrees to let him accompany him for he’s a bit nervous about it. Soon the two leave for Otherworld. “What’s your true name?” Anak asks.

“It is Kai, meaning ‘keeper of the keys’!”

“Really,” Anak says. “That’s great.”

Standing proud and tall, Kai says, “To enter this Otherworld where secrets abound, you will need to unlock them; there are always secrets,” eyes twinkling mischievously. “Come. I’ll show you the way.”

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Leaving was not hard, though they had to enter through a Sidhe, a hill of moss. To do so, Anak had to become smaller. May as well stay this way, he muses to himself, and he did.

“I’ve never been on this path,” Kai said. “Going to the Otherworld is not difficult for Fae, humans usually find it troublesome. At least, we are on the right path. You must be excited to start, hey?”

“What is it you seek on this journey? Surely more than helping me.” A sad look crosses the Faeries face and makes Anak wonder. “Come now have I not bared my soul. Surely you can share a bit of yourself. Those secrets you speak of, perhaps one of your own.”

“There is no reason not to. The Otherworld’s trials will help fulfill my heart’s desire*.” Perhaps find forgiveness for a great wickedness.* Though he does not share the details with Anak. “We may be the first to return and that will be grand!” Anak and Kai enter the unknown. At first, Anak is silent, which makes Kai uneasy. “You are very quiet, friend.”

Anak tells Kai, “We are quiet because there is a lesson we can learn in silence. There are times when the Lord tells us to run, pick up the pace, and jump into the mystery. In those moments, we step out in faith. Yet this is the time when we wait in silence, in the stillness.”

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Anak was walking up to a mansion, very elegant. Upon entering in the front door, which opened easily before him, he had to decide which way to go. There were several hallways branching off from the entry, and as he peered down each hall, he saw doorways lining the halls, but no clue as to which door he should enter.

*What is in those rooms, another hall?* The more he vacillated on what to do the more confused and frightened he became. ‘You’ve set before me too many choices Lord,’ he cried into the silence. Then he realized there was no sound. Anak couldn’t hear himself breathe nor his heart beat, which he usually could discern. Panic overwhelmed him and he thought, *Am I dead? Is that why my heart’s not beating my breath not moving in and out of my lungs. Is this hell?*

Anak turned around to flee back out the door he’d entered, however there was no longer a door there. Eyes widening in terror, he screamed and found Kai shaking him into alertness.

“Anak what’s going on? You’re trembling, seeming to be terrified. And when you screamed just now, I didn’t know what to think.”

“It was a vision, though I was awake. I’ve had visions in the past but never one like this. His lungs pulled air in and out, sounding loud in his ears as did his heart pounding in his chest; he felt it in his throat and heard it with his ears. Heaving a sigh of relief, he gasped. “It’s okay. I’m alive and the journey is on. Though some frightening choices will have to be made, or so it seems.”

Kai looks at him strangely. “Okay. So you got something out of your vision or daytime nightmare.” *Am I with a crazy man?* He wonders.

Anak says, “It’s going to be fine.” He set off down the corridor.

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# Part Three

The next chapters are in part from Divine Comedy, Dante’s Inferno, an allegory of human life, a visionary trip through the Christian afterlife; it’s written as a warning to a corrupt society to steer itself to the path of righteousness, and relevant for today.

The narrative’s literal subject is the state of souls after death and it presents divine justice to be meted out either as due punishment or as reward in Dante's travels through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. This portion of Lucifer Unbound, takes the reader into Hell alone for t*he idea of Purgatory is not in the Bible.*

Aside from personal and practical motivations, Dante’s purpose inwriting The Divine Comedy was to give lessons about living ethically and following God's law so one goes to Heaven, and not Hell.

The narrative opens in the evening traveling through a dark wood, Dante has lost his path and now wanders fearfully through the forest. ... and is told their path will take them through Hell to reach Heaven. Yet, for Christians, heaven is reached only by faith in Yeshua.

The main theme of Dante is the human’s spiritual journey through life wherein he or she learns of the nature of sin and its consequences. And comes to abhor it sin after understanding how it corrupts the soul and draws humans away from God.

I’ve simply applied the circles of hell Anak and his Fae friend Kai’s experience as an intriguing bit perfect for a fantasy novel.

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## 1. Otherworld

“The Otherworld has overlapping realities not upper, middle, or lower levels within, at least from what I was told by the ancients,” Kai explains as he and Anak draw closer to the Otherworld. And the deeper their steps take them and the darker it becomes. Walls of black shining rock streaked with silvery-green, gives off an unearthly light, lifting the darkness. This makes it easier to see where they're going as they travel down toward the Otherworld. Turning a bend in the corridor of rock, there seems to be a doorway, except there’s no way to open it.

“Now what?” Anak says as he pushes the door, trying to slide it from one side to another. But it doesn't budge. Looking at Kai, he said, "What do you recommend?”

Kai thinks for a moment, “Perhaps this is where my keys to unlock secrets could come in handy?”

“What exactly would those be?”

“They are ancient symbols of magic, the god of the earth gave us for unlocking these doors, or so I was told.”

Startled, Anak says, “Has it occurred to you the reason no one returns is your keys were given by Lucifer, who allows no one to leave his abode once there?”

“Honestly, no. I’ve never considered it. Of course, I’d never expected to be at the threshold of hell either. So then, what do you want to do?”

“Let me think a minute. Something is tickling the back of my mind, a story I heard about ancient symbols too, but far different than yours for they are of Adonai and not the god of the earth.”

“Do you imagine if we use the symbols of magic from your god,” Kai asked, "then we’ll be able to leave the Otherworld?”

“First, they’re not magic. They are the words he spoke at creation and they opened doors to a world he created, the earth. So, they should open this door easily and any other door when it's time to leave.”

"I'm pleased to know we may be the first to leave the Otherworld," says Kai and smiles even broader, looking forward to returning home.

“To be sure. It’s said all the dead go there to lie in sleep together–whether good or evil, rich, or poor. It’s a dark place, cut off from Adonai and humans where the dead are abandoned with no eternal hope. While you do not believe in Adonai, Kai, I do. Therefore, I will pray before we begin our journey.

“Lord, we stand in a place of chaos and darkness. We ask you to light the way as we speak Your Words.” Anak spoke each symbol’s meaning, traced it with his finger at its placement and the words to reveal:

Unity between us כ רת never separation

Seeing to know חכומה what is before us

Understanding of  הבנה dangers to avoid

Mercy if we fail רחמ ים and forgiveness

Strength to endure  חמורה from you alone

A heart of beauty יו פ י for ashes of grief

A creative spirit נחצ to divine your path

Open mouths פאר to speak only truth

A firm footing קרן when we hesitate

Your destiny won ממלכה until journey's end.”

As he spoke, a golden light shone at each symbol, until the last, then the door unlatched and opened onto darkness. Stepping through, a light shone before them and Anak said, “Lord. We thank you to bless and separate our feet, the unsteady from the firm upon which we tread, to guide us on this treacherous journey.”

Kai wondered at the words of Adonai from Anak’s lips, though not a believer, he is intrigued as Anak says, “The Lord goes before us.”

 “How can he go before? I see no one in the corridors with us.”

“It’s a matter of faith. Believe in what you cannot see.” Kai nods but still looks doubtful. *Believe in what you cannot see? Ridiculous.*

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“What your reason for coming with me?” Anak asked for he knew there was more to Kai’s story*. I do wish he’d share more of himself.*

“In learning about magic, I was told, “one day you will understand.” Unlike you, I resented what I was told and went my way. I betrayed my sister, who trusted me with a secret. I broke that trust!”

Anak felt sorrow, “Would you like to talk about it? For I understand how difficult it can be to hold these hurts within.”

A fiery light burns nearby and a voice speaks out of it. “He doesn’t want to talk about it.” Anak looks to see who speaks. “Why would it be any of your business?”

Malice scratched over him like a knife, carving deep lines of doubt in his heart. The light dims, shadows deepen, and the fire seems to burn hotter but does not touch Anak. He no longer sees Kai. “Where are you? Answer me Kai, if you can,” Anak shouts as he struggles to see clearly where Kai may have gone.

“He is not your concern. My brother has lost the light of your god. He who told my tale to the heartless world and enjoyed my anguish!” Her voice weeps in an ancient pain and flames lick her flesh.

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Kai screams in agony, as flames flicker over his flesh, and enter his screaming mouth, deep into his body scourging him throughout. “Why, Nys, do you scourge me so? Have pity.”

“You brother unforgiven feel only the pain you shared with me, and you ask for pity.” the voice accuses. Kai strives to escape the flames that burn but do not seem to devour him. “Oh, where are you, Nys?” his voice bleeds with pain. “Nys. I’m sorry. Can you not forgive me?” Falling to his knees, Kai forgets the light of Adonai. “What would you have me do, you have only to ask?” he cries piteously, while the flames continue to burn as though to eat away his flesh.

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Anak sees no one, yet he hears the taunting voice of malice, and sees the flames though they touch him not. “Father, I pray you save him from this agony,” Anak calls, then sees a faint shadow of Kai, reaching into the fire, he takes him by the shoulder, “Kai, it’s a wraith, a shadow sent to deceive you. It is not real! Nor are the flames.”

Anak urges Kai to follow him away from the condemning voice, as he struggles to pull Kai away. Nearing an exit, finally Kai emerges from the shadows and burning flames, his mind clear. He stumbles to a halt. “It’s too horrible. The flames burned but did not consume me. How is this possible?”

Anak said, “It was a spiritual fire. Those in hell burn for an eternity after death. I called upon Adonai, for you have not yet died so your soul still hangs in the balance. He answered my prayer.”

“Pray for forgiveness. Adonai’s arms are open no matter what you have done. We’ve all done things we wish we hadn’t Kai, me included. If not, one day you will die and hell will be your reward.”

Kai shakes his head. “I don’t know, Anak. My god, Lucifer is the one who saved me, for it is his world we travel through.”

Anak knows it is useless to try and convince. "This Otherworld must be where we face the sins we committed. Pray we endure as we walk through the valley of shadows."

Kai nods, trying to understand Anak’s words, but he hurts from the pain torn from his past. The pain of the fire has vanished; it seems now like nothing but a dream, something he’d imagined.

"Demon are at work, the ones who taunted you Kai,” said Anak. “What do you know about demons? The Fae serve Lucifer, so demons likely pretended to be your sister. Is it not possible?”

Kai answers, “Lucifer sent companions what you call demons to show us the way, but they were not what you seem to imagine demons to be. I’ve known none like those you describe.” Kai shrugs.

“It’s the way they showed you into a life of deception.”

Kai smirks but nods his head, yet seems to enjoy the idea.

Silent, trying to think. “As a child, my mother used to speak with a scholar who knew about Lucifer and demons. He told stories; they’re beings who disguise themselves, more deceptive than the Fae.”

“Okay,” Kai says, “enlighten me. I’m all ears.” He said and wiggles his, then turns toward Anak with amusement and genuine interest.

“All celestials, cherub or seraph and even angels Adonai created in the beginning. Lucifer was the first, though not finite, nor is he equal to Adonai. Also his power is not infinite. Lucifer has no divine powers, so he’s no match for Adonai! This is one reason he failed in his war against heaven. Although, he may be equal to the archangel Michael, both are very powerful. After all, he is a Cherub, fierce and deadly.”

“I am more interested in the demons down here.”

“Demons are Lucifer’s. They can give you superhuman strength, move swiftly when needed, and can get quickly from one place to the next. Physical barriers that restrict mortals do not hinder a demon.”

Kai brightens. “I heard a story of a ‘legion’ of demons in one man. Did you know a legion is 6000? That’s a lot of demons, if true.”

“Yes, having seen the armies of Egypt, their legions of warriors had enslaved the Hebrews for centuries until freed by a great leader whom Adonai chose to lead them out.” Anak smiles.

“Who was the leader?” Kai asked, curious.

“I don’t recall his name. The rabbi would know. Let me continue.”

Kai swept his hand forward, to indicate Anak should continue: “By all means, go on,” he said with a good-natured smirk.

“Demons assault mortals and cause afflictions. Did you hear the story of a young boy thrown into a fire? My mother told about temple violence. Likely demons were responsible. Mortals are evil by nature too. We cannot blame every evil on demons or Lucifer, though many do who commit all sorts of atrocities.”

“Indeed, even the Fae, some are born evil,” Kai said. “Among the Unseelie this is very true. I’ll tell you about them another time.”

“Lucifer can be in one place at a time so he sends his demonic hosts to do his dirty work because he cannot be in two places at once.

“Demons are spirits, not physical. All they can do is promote chaos and confusion, that sort of thing. So, they can persuade mortals to act a certain way, tempt them to do evil, and they’re hateful.”

Anak recalls those he’d met in the desert: “a man and his wife, mortals, both possessed by demons, tempted me to turn from Adonai.”

“When a spirit leaves a person, it looks for a place to rest. Once it finds one, even if later evicted, it can return. If that person doesn’t fill his or herself with Adonai’s word, their life is worse than before.

“My mother told me about a woman who abandoned the temple to follow Adonai. It was harder than she thought to live a pure life, so she went back to the temple life. I heard physical ailments and mental confusion assailed her. Eventually, she killed herself.”

Kai and Anak walked in silence for some time, ruminating on the evil in the world and Kai on the fires of hell. Finally, Anak said. “Demons are Lucifer’s and do his will, as we know. We’ve met demonic influences here and I’m sure those won’t be the last.”

Kai sees the chamber they entered glow dimly, casting strange shadows that snake over the walls. They hear arguing between a man and woman.

Anak sees a man, “You told her false, yet she paid you,” he says. “You cheated so there’s no way out for you,” he takes her by the arm. “If you want to be saved from the fire, I require a favor.”

She hesitates. “Whatever you want.” The two then walk away yet, Anak feels the need to stop her. He says, “Don’t go.” Though he knows there’s no salvation in hell.

“Leave her alone!” cries the man. “You’ve no rights.” He eyes Anak. “Unless you want her. Use her and pay up.” He said. “She’ll do whatever you ask.” Anak knows it’s a demon from the stench rising but distracted, he says nothing.

She smiles at Anak as a look of cunning slides over her face. She looks him up and down and grins. “You’re a fine-looking man. You’ll enjoy yourself, and my debt will be gone. Won’t cost you a cent.”

Anak feels his passion surge at the temptation and quickly turns away. “Sadly, it would cost me my soul, and she doesn’t want to be helped.” He walks away without looking back, and hears the woman’s scream as she follows the man into the fires of hell.

 “Nothing will help them, didn’t you say? How does fraud deserve the punishment she’s enduring?” Kai asked. “Sometimes when I think about Lucifer and his hell, I don’t understand it.”

“The Fae’s commit fraud all the time, right? If so, more of your kind should be down here suffering in the flames, but I don’t see any.”

“We do not defraud. We deceive like Lucifer. The people trying to get something for nothing is not fraud; it’s deceit. We deceive them is all. Greed is amusing and so deserving of what we offer!”

Anak shakes his head, “You believe what you say, but it’s the same and you deceive yourselves. Now that is amusing. It’s also terrifying to imagine the evil people inflict on others, even Fae.”

Kai chortles, “You may be right, but we are what we are, and not likely to change. We have too much fun being ourselves.”

“Even if it means you serve Lucifer and lose your soul to the flames of hell?” Looking around he says, “It’s getting gloomier.”

 “We lost our soul to Lucifer long ago. Tell me, how would your god solve the Otherworld’s problems if he could? You seem to imagine your god is so great. Even Lucifer is imperfect, selfish even.”

“What do you mean if he could?” Anak scowls.

“So, your god is all-powerful, yet he allows trials and temptations and failures. Indeed, souls who end up down here. Why not save them, if their soul is important? It doesn’t seem he cares. I can imagine him laughing when they end in hell?”

“He sacrificed his own desires to save his people. As I understand it, we must go through trials and temptations; it helps us become better.” At times I do not understand why this Fae prefers Lucifer, hell’s ruler. Can’t he see his deception?

“That makes no sense. Adonai saves you from. . . what? He sacrifices his desire so you can have trials, temptations!” Kai flaps his hand in a dismissive gesture. “I want nothing to do with such a god.”

“Answer this,” Anak said. “How did you get so good at using magic? As a warrior or as a magic wielder, your skills, as far as I know, are good and you are very clever. How did you get so good?” Let him answer that one, Anak smirks to himself.

“I was taught and I practiced.” Puffing his chest, strutting, he said, “No one is as good." Hesitating. "Well, some may be. But I'm very good at what I do. We all become better, more proficient, with practice."

"I see your point, Anak." Your trials strengthen you, right?”

“Yes. My faith grows stronger and I’ve learned greater patience when with people who seem slow-witted at times.”

Kai laughs, hailing Anak’s repartee’ as they continue. “I suppose it’s your faith that’s saved you from the flames,” he said, snickering.

Anak remains silent for he knows Kai will not believe him. *He’s not ready to hear the truth of the Lord.* He muses.

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## 2. into Danger

Both are surprised as a man runs by, shrieking, seemingly terrified. "Save me. He'll kill me. I beg of you, don’t let him get me.” He falls at their feet pleading, but Kai and Anak see no one.

“My good man,” Anak says, “No one is after you. Look. You can see there is no one. Perhaps he gave up and is no longer seeking you.”

Shaking with fear, “You don’t understand! He’s coming. I can feel it,” and folds himself into a ball on his side, head down, weeping.

Anak's eyes widen. He smiles and looks at Kai, shakes his head. *What is wrong with him? No one is coming after him. Is he crazy?*

He bends down to reassure the man, when a thundering sound shakes the walls. Into the cavern a loud sound thrums; it vibrates their very bones, and hurts their ears. “What in all the stars is it?”

Then, a shadow fills the doorway, black clouds and flame pulsate and burst from the glowing coals in the doorway. The heat is so intense, Kai seek escape, but Anak seems not to be bothered by it. The creature is huge and blocks the opening.

Screaming piteously, the man hides behind Anak. “What is that?” He asks, and grabs the man by the shoulder and shakes him while Kai looks on, unable to move.

“It’s a fury,” the man moans, frozen in terror.

“Fury?” Kai asks, quaking in fear himself, leaning back as far from the flames as he can get.

“The furies attack anyone who enters.” His teeth clack together. “It’s been after me forever. I can do nothing but run. There’s no way out. Now you’re trapped along with me! The flames will devour anyone touched by them.”

It shocks Kai when Anak laughs, as though amused.

*This reminds me of my childhood and how mother used to deal with me and my anger,* he muses to himself.

Anak puts a hand on Kai’s shoulder. “Recall, demons appear in many forms, and the flames are spiritual fires. Be at peace. The heat of anger is a burning flame, and fear merely increases the anger. Remain calm, and be at peace.” But Kai is anything but at peace. He sits against the wall as far from the flames as possible.

“In considering how my mother managed, when those who ordered jewelry were disappointed in the end-product, often they would rage to intimidate, but by remaining calm herself, they usually calmed down and became reasonable.”

Anak goes to the boiling cloud of rage. “Enough of anger. Leave; it is a will-o'-the-wisp. You need not destroy him, for he is but dust in the wind. Still your rage and be at peace to calm your fury.” Anak spoke in the calming voice his mother often used.

Within a few moments, the roiling clouds lessen as the calm set in. Soon, the flames die down, replaced with soft, warm ash, cooling.

Kai steps over to the trembling man, now less fearful, “I believe you should leave.” When the man doesn’t move, Kai kicks him with a toe of his boot, being more insistent “Be off now!” He said with emphasis and the man quickly scurries from the room.

“Sorry, Furies,” Anak apologizes. “We’ll be out of your way. I know you have your work and we cannot solve their problems.”

The cloud lowered itself toward Anak, now a soft blue-grey it seems in agreement. The two swiftly leapt through the door and on into another corridor, quickly moving away from the furies.

“How did you know what to do?” Kai asked. “I was amazed how it lost its rage so quickly, and cooled the flames.” He chuckles, for the man could have done the same if he’d not been so fearful.

“When a lad, I had a temper. My mother was calm throughout my tirades. Once I calmed down, she would talk about whatever was the trouble. I’ve always kept that in mind and learned from her. I calm my fury when it rises by being at peace, and committing no violence. As you see, I’ve even calmed a storm or two.”

Kai laughed. “I imagine you learned a lot from your mother.”

Anak sat on a rock shelf jutting out from the wall, “It’s time we pause a moment–the need to pray had come upon me - before the furies – a realization came to me so we need prayer.”

Eyebrows drawn together concerned, Kai tilts his head at Anak who’s looking intense. He opens his mouth to speak, but pauses when Anak holds up a hand. Growing quiet to better listen, Kai stills as Anak begins to pray.

“Lord, let us accept what we’re about to see. Help us know what to do and give us words if needed. If not, give us peace, and see us through safely. Keep Kai from the flames until he finds peace in you.”

Letting his breath out and standing, Kai follows, not understanding but willing to. After all, Anak had gotten them this far with his wisdom. *He may be right about Lucifer. He is a selfish sort.*

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Suddenly, the ground falls away. Kai gasps, astonished, as he slides through, the earth crumbling opens before him. Falling, not knowing if or where it ends, he sees again the flames, and screams.

Anak shouts in surprise, tumbling past. There is no light, no sound, complete silence as they plunge down landing on what seems black volcanic rock. Dust fills the air, making it hard to breathe.

Anak sneezes. As the dust clears, the two look around to see where they are. Neither sees a threat, indeed nothing. Suddenly, a boulder-like fist, strikes out of nowhere, landing on his cheek, sending Anak to the ground, dazed. Kai looks on in shock, unsure what to do, relieved to find he’s not in those fires of hell again.

As a Nephilim, nothing or no one had ever struck him like that; it was mind-shattering. At human size, it’s more of a shock. Rolling out of the way as the figure comes at him again. His breath shot from his lungs as a sharp kick connects with his ribs. Stumbling to catch his breath, he feels the pain, Anak hopes it’s not a broken rib.

Anak kicks, misses, and feels panic take him. He cannot see what attacked. His mind’s awhirl. Before he knows what’s happening, Anak finds himself low on the ground, crouched, a snarl emerging from his lips. Long sharp teeth slide over lips drawn back and again he snarls. Razor-like claws slice into dark rock beneath massive paws. Thick fur covers him head to tail, specked like a spotted panther, he’s growing more powerful by the second, formidable.

Born a Nephilim, he could shift in size and knew being an animal was possible, but this was the first he knew of this ability. Turning to see who had struck him, in his peripheral vision, his eyes land on Kai whom he sees is no threat. Swinging his huge head, the other way, Anak sees a large male, one of the ugliest he’d ever seen, and again snarls.

The pupil in his yellow eyes constrict, watching the enemy he looks for any weakness to use to his advantage. His physical form has changed while his mind functions more cunning. He is unafraid, a fierce predator defending himself.

The beast is doing the same, although initially startled by Anak’s shift to panther, he it’s not his first time with violence, and he sneers.

Circling, he waits for an opening, pacing himself. No weapon is seen yet his physical strength indeed is his weapon of choice. Anak’s claws and teeth are far stronger and sharper, and he considers, *perhaps the advantage is mine,* until the giant of a man moves.

Lightning speed surprises Anak. And he glances at Kai who watches, mouth agape, seemingly stunned at how Anak shifted and the speed of the man moving. Anak barely has time to get out of the way. Struck a glancing blow by the man’s leg as he swept past, sharp pain once again flashes through him, but this time Anak quickly regains his footing.

Anak put aside all hesitation about hurting this creature who is out to destroy him. He’s never killed a mortal, yet with heart racing his mind now insists, it is time to kill. It’s no different from a dragon, Anak argues with himself, watching for an opening.

Also watching for an opening, the giant of a man lunges forward, intent on sailing over Anak’s head, trying to adjust for Anak’s strike only to meet the unexpected. His intestines spill to the ground as razor-sharp claws find their mark. Crashing to the ground, his body slack, dark blood pools on the ground. A final shuddering breath and the fight is over.

Anak turns into a man, again, trembling all over. Trying to catch his breath, he begins to realize the man is dead and the battle won.

Kai would have hesitated to approach Anak before, but now came to him. “How did you do that?” Unable to grasp the shift to panther and back to human. “I didn’t know you could do such a thing. Fae change all the time, but human to panther to human; it’s astonishing.”

Anak shakes his head, unable to speak for a moment, trying to grasp the situation, catch his breath. “I’ve always been able to change my size,” he gasps for breath, “to live more at ease around humans and the Nephilim told me some can shift to animal.” He takes a shuddering breath. “I’ve never needed to until now.” He takes a deeper breath. “Guess panic brought it out.” His breathing begins to ease.

Anak walks over to the body, takes several more breaths to steady himself. In sizing up the man, he isn’t sure he could call him a human, and finds he’s right. Suddenly, the body turns to dust and vanishes into the volcanic rock. “Demons. Is this the last? Lucifer sends them, so we can expect more.” Anak snarls, exasperated. “Well, let’s hope so, and pray this is the last, but I doubt it. He doesn’t give up easily.”

The Centaur, guard of the underground prancing as he enters says, “Now we have a new aggressor; our demon is dead.” Looking at Anak, he glances at the Fae who trembles as its four-legged form towers over him, 16 or more hands high. He is formidable.

Kai doesn’t know what to do, so remains still, waiting for Anak. *Oh, stars. A centaur. It’ll stomp me to death under its hooves.* Images flitter through his mind of other Fae who’ve died in such a manner, and Kai is terrified. *Centaurs hate the Fae.*

“You’re not needed,” the centaur said, contemptuous. “We have enough deceivers. Begone vile one.”

The remark stings Kai’s pride, but he says nothing.*Thank the stars, he’s not going to trample me.*

Anak says, “Don’t speak to my friend in such an insulting manner. Besides, we are not staying. Find yourself another fighter.”

 “It’s a pity. You would be formidable.” Turning his back on Anak and Kai, he lopes off toward the dark tunnels. He turns at the last and said, “I’ll see you later, Anak.” And snorts as he gallops off.

“I’ve a feeling we will meet other temptations for one or both. Maybe more difficult ones. It’s not over, I’m certain.” Anak looks at Kai, wipes sweat-dampened hands on his pants. Anak grabs for Kai as he doubles over as if to vomit, pale as a ghost and faint.

“Sit down before you fall down.” Anak has Kai lower his head, “It’s the after-effects of the violence and natural to feel this way even as an observer. Really affected you, didn’t it?”

Kai looks at him, his smile sickly. “Yes. It was exciting. A relief when you won, though.” His breath ragged, he swallows convulsively until he can take a deep breath.

“Thank you, lord Lucifer for not letting the centaur stomp me. I must have done something right in this life.”

“You’re thanking Lucifer?” Anak said. “What has he ever done for anyone other than himself?”

“Well, he helped us with the centaur. Those beasts hate the Fae.”

Anak shakes his head and holds up a hand, “Don’t tell me anymore. Think about our situation. Every level has brought a new challenge. We must be better prepared. What have we faced so far?” Anak pauses.

Kai responds, “First, is treachery, mine against a family member. One who committed fraud, tempting with deceit. We had hostility while discussing your god. You said it was heresy or some such. Then anger, which led you to shape-shift.” Kai still looks pale and shaky.

“We can rest for a few minutes, if you need the time.”

“We may as well go on,” Kai said, and stands to takes a shaky step, then sits back down. “Can’t get any worse, can it?”

Anak laughs. “It depends on what you consider worse.” Finally, they set off down another corridor.

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## 3. Deeper Still

“Have you noticed?” asks Anak, “These tunnels go on and on, but we’re not actually going any deeper, not getting anywhere?”

“Thanks. I thought it might be my imagination. Why do you think we remain at the same level?

“Interesting choice of words,” Anak said with a smile. “Maybe the next could simply be another level of violence.”

“Want to guess what sort of violence we might face?”

“No. Just be cautious of unstable flooring!” He chuckles.

The floor remains stable though it seems to take forever and they get nowhere as they walk on and on and on. The farther on, the darker it becomes until they can hardly see one step in front of another.

Irritable, Kai rubs his arms, “Does it feel cold to you?” Face ashen, again he senses more than sees a flicker of hell fire nearby, with hands tucked into his armpits for comfort more than warmth, his heartbeat pounds and he gulps down several breaths trying to stay quiet, but feels the prickle of fear as the flames seem to lick at his flesh, sending tendrils of fire down his throat. It takes everything for Kai not to scream. *It can’t harm me; I’m not dead. Lucifer, my god, help me.*

Frowning, Kai can barely put one foot in front of the other, and he began to chew a fingernail, mumbling, “Why did I ever let him talk me into coming?” He rubs his temple, more agitated. “When will it end?” He glares at Anak: *It’s his fault we’re stuck here, never getting any place, like his life, stuck mooning over her!*

Clenching his hands so tight the knuckles turn white, feeling a tickle over one eye, he scratches his eyebrow to get rid of it, but nothing, and a slight moan escaped his lips. Huffing short breaths, he grinds his teeth, certain Anak can hear. Why doesn’t he turn around, end this hopeless quest? Unable to stop a moan it escapes his lips.

Anak plods on. “Keep your eye open and walk. It’s bound to end.” Despair tinges his voice and Kai grumping doesn’t help. “Stop griping; it’s not helping.” Then under his breath, “Sniveling coward.”

Kai’s sharp ears hear and he rages. “Coward? Because I can’t turn and murder someone and not give it a second thought.” He snarls, then cries out, feeling the flames push farther down inside him.

*Why is he weeping; it’s not like he’s in pain.* Anak feels guilt more deeply with each step as he flashes back on the life he’d taken. Though it was a demon, still. Now he reminds me I’m a murderer, no different from other Nephilim. Where’s my pride now? Pride goes before the fall. He snickers to himself, feeling a heavyweight bearing on him. If there was a cliff, I’d jump off and end it. Then Kai could be happy and go to his so-called sister.

Turning a corner, the two see before them a vast cavern falling into a deep chasm greater than anything they’d seen. A footbridge appears to be the only way across. The flames seem to have subsided. Forgetting his irritation, Kai cautiously goes over to the side and peers down. “Feel like jumping?” he jokes, not knowing about Anak’s earlier thoughts, and laughs. While dark below he sees bodies strewn around, harpies pluck at the dead flesh.

Anak stands next to him and glares at the nasty creatures. Harpies, rapacious monsters with a woman's head and body but a bird’s wings and claws. Birds of prey. Disgusted, he shakes his head to clear the image–turning from the dead below.

“They are wind spirits, who surpass many birds being so fast.” Kai said, impressed with them. “One is Aello, storm swift, the other one is Ocypete, swift wing, and Celaeno is third meaning darkness. Aren’t they beautiful? Well, not what they’re eating, but still.”

Anak sees no beauty in the predators, gorging on the dead’s flesh and says, “Lucifer disguises himself as an angel of light though he’s no angel. To see those harpies as beautiful, you are deceived.”

Anak recalls the woman he sought. Once I was deceived by beauty, a deceptive Faerie queen, forgetting for the moment that is the reason for starting this journey.

“It’s said the harpies take people and torture them on their way here. Your god uses harpies to punish the guilty, like the man with the Furies.” Kai sniggers, feeling malicious and wanting to inflict hurt.

 “I cannot see Adonai using these for any reason,” Anak says. “Though he did create all creatures in the universe, so it’s possible.” Anak patiently ignores Kai’s provocation and moves on.

Surprised but pleased Anak did not react, Kai says, “Perhaps if we leave them alone and take the footbridge they won’t bother us.”

Anak follows Kai as he steps onto the footbridge and grabs the rails as it sways dangerously. The two seem to hang perilously over the vertical chasm, for the bridge is not especially stable. Anak and Kai make their way slowly across, hands clamped fiercely to the guardrail.

Anak feels the sweat on his brow and armpits, his breath short and he glances over the rail seeing the darkness below. Don’t think I want to jump in there. Lord, I take back what I said. He shivers in trepidation seeing the harpies below, their beaks tearing flesh from the dead.

Anak sighs in relief, as he and Kai reach the halfway point, until one of the harpies looks up and takes notices. She drops the body she gnaws on and swiftly rises, coming toward the two of them.

Gliding in close, she states, “Ah, we have a Fae and a human, or are you human? What a tasty treat you would make. In coming you choose to share your miserable life with us? Delightful.” The wind of her wings swept her hair about; it obscures her face.

The other harpies take notice and soon arrive. “Let me introduce my sisters, Aello and Ocypete. My name is Celaeno. The Fae knows us, don’t you sweet one,” she says and she flings the hair from her face.

*Oh no; it’s my sister again. Will she never leave me alone? I’ve done all I can to make amends.* Again the flames of hell swirl around him, and he puts his hand over his face and cries out, trying to shut out the sight of the one he believes is his sister. Stumbling Kai nearly falls through the railing. Clinging to the wooden rail, he cries, “Have mercy. I beg of you.” Body quaking, Kai falls to his knees but struggles to rise and is unable. He lies helpless in his misery, the flames again lick his flesh, though Anak is unaware of the torture Kai is enduring.

“You wish to join us?” Her silky voice slides over him, a blanket of evil smelling of death. “Recall, you promised to do whatever was asked. Come to me, I say.” She glares with savage intent, her voice harsh and cruel. “There is no relief from the flames, not for a betrayer!”

He quakes in terror at her words, denying her request, he struggles against the opposing forces that compel him to obey. Again he screams as the flames burn hotter and deeper within.

“Do as you promise!” She shrieks. “You promised. You promised. You promised.” Soon the others took up the chorus.

Every word pulls Kai toward the rail’s edge. As if in a dream, Kai rises, pulls himself upon the rail. *Anything is better than these flames that slowly are burning me to death.* Slowly perching precariously, the bridge sways, threatening to toss him down into the chasm.

Anak watches horrified as Kai seems about to fall and become food for the harpies. Creeping close, suspecting what Kai is experiencing, he whispers urgently not startle him, “Kai, don’t do it.” *How is it he’s kept his footing on the rail and hasn’t fallen?* “Come down. The harpies have tricked you again. You’re alive and the flames cannot harm you.”

“No, Anak. You’re wrong; it’s so painful. I can endure no longer.”

“Recall the cavern, when we first entered the Otherworld, and your sister? It was a demon, tempting you, as now.”

Kai turns his head, puzzling at Anak’s words, confused in his mind. “No, she’s here, my sister. I didn’t recognize her before. At last, we’ll be together.” Kai smiles, gazing into the chasm. “No more anguish.” And he begins to fall as his feet slip and lose their hold, arms open as though to fly, he pitches forward.

Anak reaches for him in less time than it takes to blink. He doesn’t know how, but he caught Kai as he fell. Clasping the back of his tunic, the fabric tears yet he holds on, the. shirt caught under his armpits. Kai dangles in space by a mere thread it seems as the harpies fly, eagerly awaiting new flesh. Jeering and encouraging him to let go.

Flying in close, they flap their wings in Anak’s face to distract him, but he clings all the tighter and says, “You’re not his sister.” Anak glares at the harpies. “She is dead.” Anak accuses, “You deceive yourselves. You are nothing to him. Begone in the name of the Lord Adonai.”

Instantly the harpies fly away to resume their feeding below, unconcerned by this turn of events. These two would not be the last and they will feast anew soon. Although, they keep an eye on Kai, still swaying perilously, and crying as though in pain.

“Kai, wake up.” Anak shouts. “I’ve got ahold of you but you need to help.” Anak pants to catch his breath and feels his strength departing as he holds Kai’s limp form and wishes for once he was his Nephilim size. He again urges Kai to awaken.

Kai blinks like coming out of a trance. Seeing where he is, his fear nearly causes him to surge from Anak’s grasp. “Anak! Don’t let me fall,” he shrieks. Then, looking down, he screams, again, seeing the harpies greedily eyeing him.

*Not so beautiful, now, are they?* Anak queries to himself. “Kai, I’m trying here, but some help would be nice. Swing yourself so I can grab your other hand. And be careful so I don’t lose my grip.” Kai does as he’s told and energetically swings his body as best he can.

As he swings up, Anak grasps his hand, pulling him up far enough so Kai can get a firm hold on the footbridge and right himself.

No longer prey to the harpies, Kai sighs. “Anak, what happened?” he said. “Those flames are torture, Anak. For a moment, I saw my sister again amidst the burning fire. Was it she?”

Anak fills Kai in on what had transpired. “Harpies may be beautiful and winged, but in the Otherworld, assume there is only evil, demons. Is that not all we have encountered so far?”

“You’re right. I’m easily ensnared by deceptions. Why?” He looks miserable and confused as they finish the crossing, safe on the other side. “They do not seem to bother you as much. And you don’t seem to see the flames or be bothered by them. Why?”

Anak says nothing. He knows Kai suspects the truth, but he’ll have to come to that reality on his own. “Give it time,” he says. “You’ll find your way and be set free!” He smiles, imaging Kai discovering the truth, finally. Yet, he knows it may be a long time in coming.

“Come. Maybe the next part of our journey won’t be so depressing and tortuous, shorter we hope. Setting off, Kai is lighter-hearted.

Sometime later, Anak stops to rest, and Kai joins him. “We are on the same level and going no farther down it seems. No more violence I hope or cannot imagine. What do you suppose, Anak?”

Shrugging, “I strive not to know. Trust in the Lord, not how I view a situation or what I think. When my mind takes over, it gets in the way. Because we had violence before doesn’t mean it will repeat.”

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Anak walks along the dusty corridor. He hadn’t noticed so much dust other than in the first cavern. This was like sand, and he recalls his time in the desert long ago. A man and woman invited him to share their campfire. Chuckling at her poor attempt at seduction. *Had I not known of Adonai, I might have fallen into the temptation.*

“This sand reminds me of an incident in the desert when raiders who killed my mother set me free, well, they left me in the middle of nowhere with little water. After crossing the desert, a man and woman came to help, I thought. But she tried to seduce me,” Anak says. “Her husband even encouraged it. She was not subtle at all.”

“Ah, my wife was beautiful and surely knew how to seduce a man, many men indeed, except it didn’t work on you.”

Turning swiftly, Anak sees the man he had met in the desert, alone. “Where’s your wife? It’s been ages.” Embarrassed at not giving the man time to answer, Anak stops talking.

“As you say, it was ages ago. My wife is here in the Otherworld but down with the demons torturing her. They do not allow me to see her.” He shrugs. “I suppose its punishment for allowing her promiscuity when we were together. After all, she is my wife.”

“I’m sorry. What happened?”

“After you rejected her, and we left, likely the ones who waylaid you assaulted us. When they captured us, she thought it was exciting having sex with different men. After a dozen or so had their way with her roughly, in despair, she’d had enough and asked them to kill her. It was many weeks later, they put her out of her misery. The men forced me to watch as they repeatedly raped her, sharing her with any others who stopped by the oasis. Afterward, the slit her throat, then took me farther into the desert and left me. Unlike you, I cursed god.”

He sees Anak’s frown. “Yes, we cursed Adonai, blamed him for our troubles. Now I see how wrong I was, but it’s too late. I don’t know how long I can endure the agony, those flames, they burn my flesh. Yet, here I remain for they do not devour.” As he was speaking, suddenly, crying out, Anak saw him enveloped by the fires of hell.

Anak knows he can do nothing as the man made his choice, both he and his wife. “I’m sorry,” said Anak. “Tell your wife I forgive her, if it will help her pain.” He and Kai bid the man farewell.

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Anak considers the tragic results of the couple like so many others. As they walked along, after a time, others appeared who also ended in the Otherworld. “I cannot always tell what their sin was; it’s unclear,” Kai said.

“Some are here, because of greed aside from not believing.”

“All they did was profit from their labors.” He frowns. “It seems those they refused to help were sluggards. Why help those who were too lazy to help themselves? Your people have a saying, ‘if you don’t work you don’t eat,’ so their poverty was self-inflicted, right?”

“You may be right, Kai. Yet some fell into depression. Look at her, and Kai glances at a young woman who seems tired for no apparent reason. She wanders about, anxious yet sad looking. He recalled times he felt exactly like she looks, gray and miserable. She sank down on the floor as if to go through the motions, walking about was too arduous. “Yes, I felt like I was dying inside, when I found myself in that state once,” he said. “It was awful.”

“Yes, when depression it can tempt me to distrust God. When desperately seeking deliverance, He seemed to withhold it from me.” He laughs softly. “I cried, ‘why will you not lift me out of this pit? Are you not my deliverer? Why is despair’s voice louder than yours?”

“What happened?”

Laughing gently again. “He gave me no answer.”

“Your god did not help! How could he leave you in such despair?”

“He didn’t. In an ancient text, one king wrote: ‘Have you forgotten me? Why must I mourn, pressured by the enemy?’ He no doubt referred to Lucifer, but perhaps others too.’ Desperate, I cried, ‘I’ve had enough of this misery, Lord. Take my life.’ He did not, as you can see.”

“But you made it through the dark times?”

“Yes, as have you. I know nothing can separate me from God’s love. Certainly not demons, nor my fears and worries not even the Lucifer’s powers here in hell can separate me from God’s love.”

Kai saw Anak’s face shine with an inner light and felt heartened.

One day, all will answer to Adonai. It seems these people gained the world but lost their soul. From what I’ve seen, no one’s wealth came with them into the Otherworld.”

## 4. Onward

Unlike the other corridor long and arduous, the next came quickly; it was easy to see why the two connected. Having left lust for money and the greedy ones, they found themselves with those who tried to fill their emptiness or greed with food.

Kai looks at the obese people, his mouth hangs open in awe. Flab hangs over the edge of chairs they’re sitting on. Their clothing looked as if was about to burst, fat pushing through opening in arms and at ankles. It seems to pile on as he watches them shovel food into their mouth, barely taking time to chew before gulping it down their throats.

Watching in horror as a man snatches some meat from a woman’s plate. “Give me that,” he says and shoved her to the floor. She lay for a second panting, then pushed herself up and waddled off, returning in a short time her plate piled high with meat and gravy, biscuits with butter dripped honey onto the floor.

Kai hears Anak’s stomach growl and imagines his mouth water as he looks the delicious food but he doesn’t seem to notice the people. Yet Anak says “We haven’t eaten in a while. Aren’t you hungry? I am.”

“Starving,” Kai said, “but I cannot eat watching these people. They’re disgusting and you want to eat here in this place?”

Kai turned away seeing another woman in the corner, force herself to vomit so she could go back to eating more food. “Eew, disgusting,” he said trying to control his nausea yet Anak ignores her.

“I’m hungry,” he says, lifting his face to the aroma of roast meats drifting in the air. Eagerly he walks to where he had seen the woman go for food. Soon, he returns with a plate heaped with food. “Okay, I’m going to eat. I’m hungry.” Anak sat down and began to eat.

Kai shudders and notices no one seems to enjoy the food they’re eating; they’re eating simply to be eating. Kai couldn’t stomach watching them, so he sat on the floor to wait for Anak.

He leans against the wall. *It feels like soft belly fat, blubbery but comfortable. Is there no place where it’s not filled with lard*? He moans, and after a time, falls into a fitful sleep and dreams of food: all kinds of roasted meat, vegetables, creamy desserts, and luscious berry pies with buttery flakey crusts. Upon awakening, he thinks, *I could eat a horse*.

A huge man walked by and remarked, “They roasted a huge horse if you want some.” Sniggering he waddles off.

Kai loses his appetite. Looking over, Anak still is eating. He swears he’s grown larger. Jumping up, Kai goes over, snatches his plate away, and pushes it in front of a woman who hungrily begins to stuff the food into her mouth, ignoring her own plate.

Anak’s head came up, he glares as Kai grabs him by the arm, “Come on, I want to show you something. You can eat more, later.”

“What are you doing” Anak snarls, trying to pull away. “Go away. This is the first meal I’ve had in ages. You’re not taking it from me.”

*This isn’t working,* he thinks as Anak pulls away so, changes tactics. “There’s better food over here,” he says points across the room. *If I can get him away from here, maybe the spirit of gluttony will leave.*

“They have berry pies with buttery crusts to die for.” *And you will die if you keep eating all that garbage.* He encourages, “You won’t regret it.” He continues to pull Anak away from the food.

Anak grudgingly follows eyeing the food others are eating, hungrily watching. His stomach growls as Kai tugs him on down the corridor. “You better be right because I’m losing out. And I’m starving.”

A minutes later, Anak realizes Kai’s purpose and stops resisting. “Enough, you got me out,” he said. “I’ve lost my appetite, though the food was delicious, and I did feel like I was starving at the time.”

Rubbing his belly, he looks down. “Good grief how much did I eat? This is terrible. I’d best do some serious walking.”

Eyeing Anak’s stomach, Kai snorts. “Yes, it is a bit thicker,” he said. “It’s amazing the effect food had on those people, expanding their body so fast. It’s being where we are I suppose, the temptations. You’ll wear it off in no time.” Laughing he walks on, Anak by his side.

“I hope we’re getting closer to the end; it feels like it,” Anak says as he picks up the pace, eager to reach the end. Imagining Medea, nerves on edge, unsure what he’ll say when they finally meet Anak slows down. *What will I do or say? She might not remember me. It’ll be all right. She’ll be surprised, glad I came for her.* He imagines her joy and his heart skips a beat as he smiles to himself.

“You nervous? We travel all this way, and we’re almost there. What are you thinking?” Kai asks as Anak halts.

“If you’re thinking about the Fae queen, I know you don’t want to hear this but they’re like morning mist, vanish in a blink, moving from one love to another. Medea’s flighty and doesn’t know how to love; it’s all a game to her.”

“She didn’t seem that way to me. She was kind and sweet, loving.” Relaxing, Anak tries not worry, but Kai’s words give him pause.

Anak sits down to consider what Kai said, leaning against a wall to relax as Kai talks on, not wanting to think about it being nearly over.

Kai’s as nervous as Anak, he realizes. *Why am I nervous?* he muses. *It should be the last temptation we will face.*

Kai hears giggling, “Did you hear that?” His face brightens and he turns to Anak but he’s asleep, lying along the curve of the wall. “Sleep my friend, if you’re tired. I’ll be back. It would be wonderful to finally have something to laugh about.” Smiling, Kai walks down the hall eager to investigate the source of joy.

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## 5. Tempting

**Kai, a handsome Fae** sees the queen as soon. As he enters. Soft red-gold hair i spills down to curl over creamy white shoulders, breasts firm and uplifted, and he imagines suckling them as her nipples peak in desire. W*here did that thought come from*? He’s appalled at imagining such a thing. *She's Anak's love.*

The Fae queen turns to lay her shining eyes upon the Fae, and finds she’s equally tempted by him. Firm muscled legs, strong arms to firmly wrap around her and draw her close to him. Imagining his embrace her breath quickens with a flush of desire. Instantly she saturates his mind with images of her lush body and what pleasures they could share.

Breath short, eyes narrow, she prowls catlike, reaching him in a heartbeat. Hands play over his well-muscled chest down over the firm flat abdomen just above where his desire swells. “Humm,” she purrs, her tongue slides out, she stretches upward to tastes his sensuous lips, breasts pressing close, and her teeth nip lightly only to pull away.

“Oh my,” she breathes, eyes shining with lust, nipples taut, Medea rubs against him as she walks around Kai. Her hands trace the powerful muscles along his back to twin indents above his firm buttocks, and she fits her body close, intimately, rotating her hips slightly as she slides her body along and around his, inciting his imagination.

Her fertile mind imagines all sorts of sinful things and fills his mind with pleasure-seeking doings, breathing moist kisses upon his lips, and her tongue flickers over his skin teasing. Seemingly ignoring his arousal, yet she is very aware and says, “Ah, love you are mine, and I am yours! Come now and feed among the lilies.” As she presses her hands to his shoulders, taking him to his knees.

Remembering Anak whom he left sleeping, in need of rest, it is his love that drew them to her. Kai struggles in his lust, “No. It is wicked.” He strives to move away from her yet his desire throbs as she moves her hips, tantalizing him, effortlessly pulling him close, her slender fingers roam freely through his hair encouragingly.

“My queen, no.” Kai can barely breathe yet he finds himself unable to resist. Captive to his desire, on his knees on the stone floor, her taste on his lips unlocks his hunger.

As they indulge their mutual lust, Medea tears away all reluctance, saying, “Your mouth, lips like fine wine, flowing to my garden, my lips. Imagine the delight therein,” she moans in pleasure, then with graceful fingers pulls him to his feet, and runs her hands down his belly. Shocks of pleasure ripple through him. “My sweet powerful king,” she purrs. "How I have longed for you - so strong - so able to satisfy."

Looking down, Kai sees the longing in her eyes and he responds. *She desires a strong king.* He convinces himself. *I can* *be all she desires.* But he deceives himself as his arms encircle and draw them together. Kai feels his hardness rise against her.

Medea draws him onto the couch and Kai’s passion intensifies in anticipation. Her legs spread, inviting him to enter her welcoming heat, and eagerly he thrusts himself within, and sighs in pleasure. Her muscles contract to draw him in and he is captive then to his desire.

Later Kai lays satiated, lying beside her, imagining himself inside her, once again, pulsing with passion as they found pleasure together, and release. He finds himself hardening again.

Out of the corner of her eye, Medea sees Anak watching Kai lying beside her and she lays her head on Kai’s shoulder, reaches to stroke him and teases. “How strong and powerful. Often you rode the forests at night as you ride me now lover, so passionately. Gladly I put myself in your hands my sensitive powerful king,” she purrs. Stretching catlike, her breasts push against him as she slides her leg over his thigh to rub her wetness against him, her nipples swollen, hand on his maleness.

Aroused Kai hardens more as she guides him inside her hungrily moving in and out with heated passion, until she cries out in release, and he following her in mutual ecstasy.

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Anak heard her crafty words, the one he’d imagined wished to wed him. Anger surges as he sees her full breasts and smooth rounded belly, the long legs and dark wet patch between she never shared with him or even pretended to desire. Anak feels himself harden as he watches and he aches for her, to be with her as is Kai.

She attracts him but his heart trusts her no more. *Deceit is in this woman. She left my love preferring her power! First, she gave herself to Lucifer, and now to my companion, my friend!*

Anak pushes aside the jealousy calling to him, to know, to have her! *No!* he cries to himself. *She deceives Kai even if what she says is true and he is the Faerie king.* His head whirls. How to know, to discern the truth and not have my head filled with lies! Anak prays.

*Hear me, Lord. You know I seek the truth. You’re the eagle under whose wings I shelter. I’m lost and unable to discern reality. Adonai, I know you hear me. Come rescue me.*

Hearing Medea’s words of love she once uttered, he shuts his ears. *My heart breaks and I long to have all made right. Adonai free us from the evil one and his lies, the one who desires our soul. Help us to escape the darkness and step into Your light with joy and delight!*

Anak steps from the shadows into the cavern and walks toward the Fae, and Medea, the one he came seeking.

Kai sees Anak and pulls himself apart from Medea. Uncertain as to what Anak will think, embarrassed for his actions have not been pure. *I have failed my friend and given into her.* His face flushes red.

Scrambling into his clothes, Kai goes to greet Anak., cheeks flushed and he swallows. Stuttering Kai tries to speak, growing more frustrated as words refuse to come. He tucks his arms at his sides and looks down, unable to meet Anak’s eyes. Kai hopes to make amends, yet knows it’s impossible. *Will he ever forgive me for taking her away?*

“Did you have a good rest, Anak, my friend? I didn’t want to disturb but. . . you see who’s here.” Nervously wiping his palms on his pants, his fingers run over his scalp through his hair. Glancing at Anak, hoping he’ll say something. Kai has no more words. Anak remains silent.

Medea walks to Kai; she wraps her arms around his body, running her hands over his chest and down his belly. Even with Anak watching, Kai respond to her touch and he feels himself harden again.

Medea glances at Anak, “Why are you here?” she asks. “Looking for someone?” Medea smirks, releasing Kai to prowl over to Anak. Medea’s hands glide over his bare chest as she looks back at Kai. “You’re still as handsome as ever. What shall I do with two of you?” letting her tongue peak out and travel slowly over her lips.

Medea walks away hips swaying long legs graceful while Kai looks and wonders, *what is she doing? Are we not mated after joining? Yet she runs her hands over Anak as though she desires him also.*

Eyes twinkle in mischief. “Come, did you think I’d be yours alone?” She laughs at Kai, “I still desire you my playful one as well as Lucifer and those he tempts me to indulge in sex with, and so many others.”

Kai’s passion turns to ice. Mind goes numb, he’s unable to think.

She turns to Anak, “What is it you desire?” She moves closer to him, rubbing her sex to his body and feels his response. Eyes glittering with evil, she said, “You search for me?” Chuckling in delight. “You can have me along with Lucifer whom I serve. Clio taught me well the art of love. Let me show you how to love me my lusty male? I desire you still, part of you anyway.”

Her tongue slides wetly over Anak’s lips to penetrate his mouth. She pulls back and says, “You came for me, did you? That’s lovely.” She slides her hand inside his tunic, “Oh, you are ready.” She snickers and turns to Kai. “Want to join us, love?”

Kai watches as Medea rub her body against Anak’s hardness, then she spreads her legs to insert him inside herself, but he pulls away.

“My body may desire your offer, I do not.” Anak pushes her away. “Leave him alone too. You used Kai’s innocence to tempt him,” he said. “You don’t want either of us but prefer the father of lies!”

“An adorable Fae, handsome and so sensitive!” She winks. “Delish. A Fae king though another rules. Well, you can have him to yourself.”

Medea turns suddenly then speaks, “You must return whence you came. Win the war, set the captive free. It’s time for you to go.”

Anak looks around but Medea is gone in a blink. Stunned by what sounded like a prophecy he turns to Kai who says, “Anak, I’ve failed you. It was not possible to resist her. See the fool I am.” Kai wants Anak to say something, anything but the silence and he waits.

“We must leave,” Anak said. “We can talk later. I have nothing to say right now.” The loss of his dream is a crushing burden. And so, with a heavy heart, shoulders lowered, he heaves a sigh and walks out of the room in hell to put the past behind him.

Kai’s heart breaks. *What am I to do?* he moans trailing behind Anak several paces. *Could Lord Adonai help if I place my trust in Him*.

*Lord Adonai,* *I’ve seen you present for Anak these many months, however long we’ve been here in the Otherworld. Father, as he calls you, I call upon you to be mine and to guide me. Come into my heart and my life and be there for me. Show me the way to help Anak, or if not, you help him. Help me to be all I can be for you, and my friend.*

The flames of hell that seemed to continually flicker nearby Kai, suddenly are gone. Kai feels his burdens lift. His heart leaps for joy and his energy is boundless. He cannot stop smiling yet restrains his urge to laugh. Taking several deep breaths, Kai holds each before releasing it. Tension falls away. Tears of joy flood his eyes. *I must tell Anak,* and yet he hears a voice speak and he obeys. *I will bide my time.*

Soon after, Kai and Anak enter another chamber, hopefully, the last. This is the worst in many ways for despair covers the people and a great sadness fills everyone. Hundreds if not thousands of people are milling about no one trying to leave though there is an exit clearly seen.

People stand around looking lost shoulders slump slack expressions head hanging low. A woman who looks like so many others. Eyes closed, sighing her mouth opens silent. She struggles to find words, but nothing comes. Weakly she throws her hands in the air only to let them fall loosely in her lap. Despair seeps from her very soul.

Sitting, she leans forward hands limp on her knees. As she looks up, sorrow fills her eyes. Her head lolls on her shoulders. Taking a shallow breath, she rises, stumbling feet catch with each step. On she walks.

A moan pushes from her lips; she whispers brokenly, “Oh God.”

Anak’s heartbreaks. He knows her hopelessness; she denied Adonai now she suffers in the fires of hell. “Is it possible to help any of them?” Anak cries. No answer does he hear and Anak feels pity for these people in their despair and hopelessness.

Kai looks around stunned. I thought my depression was bad. Seeing a man stumbling around Kai asks, “What is wrong?” But he knows for he sees the same flames shimmer over the man, seeking entry into his soul, to burn and scourge him for an eternity.

“Every day is torture. I promised myself I will do something to make it better, but day after day nothing but this fire burning in me. Even the simplest tasks. It feels like an eternity of days have piled up and despair is all I have now. The agony of the flames. Can no one help me?”

“It feels like I’m being flayed alive one moment, then the next I’m struggling through quicksand to save myself. I can’t sleep or eat. My life is a dense fog, a never-ending depression.”

Kai tries to speak to encourage, but the man’s answer is a repeat of before and it makes no sense.

“Each day I wake up in a fog hoping the cloud will lift. Then searing flames come upon me; they seem never ending. I’ll cannot see enough to untangle the despair or to fix what’s wrong and be freed.”

Kai is at a loss for words. He knows Anak’s solution would be to turn his life over to Adonai but he also knows he’s in the Otherworld because he’d not turned to Adonai. Kai turns away feeling helpless, yet his own life now feels so much lighter and he smiles to himself.

Anak has not given Kai a passing glance for a while. Now, he turns to the Fae. Something has changed! Anak walks around Kai looks closely at him, his eyes sparkle, his face is aglow with an inner light. Sucking in a breath, Anak’s hand reaches out. A shake of the head, and says, “I can’t believe it!” Grasping Kai firmly a smile on his face, he erupts in laughter. “You did it!” He understands seeing agreement in Kai’s eyes.

Kai smiles shyly, his face alight even with the sorrow he too has seen among the people in this place of death.

“After my surrender to Medea’s temptation, the hopelessness of my life came upon me. The answer was to surrender to Adonai, who is now my God.” A huge grin splits his face as Anak firmly clasps him.

“God answered my prayer.” Anak cries excitedly. “For these people, I prayed and you are the answer. What a wonder is Adonai!” Looking into Kai’s blue eyes, he notices concern a faint cloud.

“What is it? Something is bothering you.”

“All these people. What is wrong with them?”

“Come now. You denied Adonai as they, your hopelessness in not believing. Yet you repented and turned to Adonai, they did not.”

“Is there nothing to do?” Kai’s eyes flood with tears of sorrow. “Oh, Anak. Will the suffering for others always be this painful? A moment ago, I was on top of the world and now…” He cannot finish.

“No. If the Lord gave you a heart of compassion, you’ll learn to deal with it in time and in helpful ways. Until then, it always will be painful. Yours is for but a moment; theirs will be eternal.” He clasps Kai in a hug. “Let’s get going, see what’s around the bend. This is so exciting.”

Kai looks back in sorrow at the milling crowd who he knows will suffer for an eternity because of their choices. He turns to Anak. “Where to next?” His face now alight with hope for a brighter future.

After traveling away from Medea, exhausted, they stop to rest. Anak falls into a deep sleep and dreams:

There is a great chasm he sees between Otherworld and heaven above with a mountain so high it reaches into heaven. He thinks, *surely no* *one could climb it.* Anak hears Ariel’s voice, “Adonai knew when he created the heavens many would turn and speak His name only in desperation. You listened to those who refused, those you spoke with. Did they listen, turn to Him, and speak his name?

Many of them refused Adonai and now suffer. Those who chose to speak Adonai’s name and turn to Him, heaven opens easily; they have no need to struggle to climb. You have one more task in the Otherworld, to cross the chasm to the garden near the mountain; it will take you to the place of your dreams to rescue the maiden.

“Anak, you won’t believe it.” Kai shakes Anak awake. An excited Kai tells about his dream. In hearing, he realizes Adonai gave the vision to them both. “I, too,” Anak said. Just then Lucifer appears. “Well, isn’t this sweet you two close and friendly.” He sniggers.

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## 6. Lucifer

“Kai was so friendly with lovely Medea. Isn’t she a delight? I find her invigorating and all the Fae folk who come to me.” Frowning. “What have you done!” he scowls. “You gave yourself to Him!” Lucifer’s scowl deepens, and he mutters words unintelligible under his breath.

“Still, to cross to the other side,” pointing to an opening, the two see a chasm dark and vast. “You will have to climb it.” In the distance, a high mountain; it seems beyond all possibility. In spite, of his dream, Kai sees and despairs realizing how far they have yet to go.

“It seems impossible because you have committed acts of treachery against Adonai. Too bad for you,” Lucifer says and snickers.

Kai imagines the Otherworld his home forever, his inner light dims. Anak refuses Lucifer’s scorn for he’s the prince of liars and a deceiver.

“You’re no angel nor Cherub of Adonai’s now. You are an evil spirit, a deceiver. I challenge you to prove what you say about those who are Adonai’s. If you can and, if unrepentant sinners, we will stay.”

“We’ll see.” Lucifer snickers. “You dare challenge me to prove my words. I accuse you Anak of treachery against your father, archangel appointed by God. You deny him honor as a parent. Adonai’s command states you are to honor your father and your mother so you may live in the land he provides. He removed you from the land which speaks for itself!” He waits for Anak to deny.

Anak thinks for a minute. “Tell me how I have refused my father's honor, then I will answer. At the time of my birth, he was absent from my life by his choice. And my mother, whom I honor, was told by my father you had something to do with that.”

He holds up his hand to stop Lucifer’s denial. “I know it’s hearsay as my mother is not here to defend her words. Were you true, however, you would confess.”

Lucifer at first, looks outraged then smiles. “Good point. But I have no need to defend myself. You’re the accused. How say you? You either denied your father or not, and shamed him in doing. Which is it?”

“Where is this archangel? Fallen angel! Does he accuse me? Can I not stand before my accuser?” Anak demands. “Only he is not present for fear of facing me!”

“Certainly not, for it is I who accuse you. So, you owe me an answer. Andras leaving before your birth is not relevant. In the desert and to your faery queen, did you not speak ill of him and then reject women, dishonoring his memory and image to others in so doing?”

Anak considers how his actions could look to others and so, he dishonored his father because of how others viewed him. “Yes. I stained his reputation.” Anak bows down, “Father in heaven, Lord, it is against you alone I have sinned. I come before you to beg your forgiveness. You who cast my sins far away, and they are gone.”

Lucifer thinks Anak would defend himself with more sin if outraged when Anak confesses and begs Adonai’s forgiveness.

“You think to trick me.” Lucifer snarls. Let your friend Kai answer for he is a Fae who worshipped me for centuries, has he not?”

Lucifer accuses Kai, “You I accuse of treachery against your family resulting in the suicide death of your sister. That sin falls to you, Fae.

“You fell for Medea’s temptation. An exciting day, hum, fornicating with your queen. Do you deny the pleasure in ‘her garden of delight?” he said suggestively. “And treachery toward your friend Anak who was chosen by - you know - what’s his name?” Lucifer’s eyes flick toward the heavens. He’s not about to speak the Lord’s name and invoke disaster.

Kai cringes, embarrassed by Lucifer’s attack. “Did you deny Anak’s God to worship the Fae idol, myself as you know.” Eyes gleam as he whispers, “Fae Kai, you will be mine. Indeed, you are mine.”

Kai steps back, a pace, clears his throat and considers what Lucifer said and answers, “Some of what you say is true. Regardless, today I set before me a new God.”

He repeats words of Adonai’s prophet, “I swept away your offenses and like the morning mist your sins are gone. When you returned to me, I redeemed you.” Kai smiles and says, “Today, when I called upon the Lord Adonai, He was gracious to answer and wash all my sins away.”

Lucifer screams in his fury. “Get gone into the chasm and may you be lost forever in its darkness. I will ensure you never find your way out. Evil gleams in the depths of his eyes, for he knows what lies in the chasm better than either one of the two.

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Turning to leave, before either can move, there’s a blinding flash of light and the sound of thunder crashes all around. Yeshua, the messiah had entered the Otherworld and speaks to Lucifer, “These are mine and any others I claim.”

Thus, Yeshua spoke and the battle between good and evil ensues as Anak and Kai, not understanding, wait to see what happens.

Snickering, Lucifer asks, “How did you do it? It appears the Romans are not so good at follow-through. Why are you not dead?”

Lucifer walks around Yeshua, picks up one of his hands, sees the nail hole in his wrist. “It appears you suffered.” He said, flinging aside the wounded hand as if it were meaningless and bore no consequence.

“Tell me *Ye-shu-a*” the name spoken as a foul word slithers from his mouth. “Exactly who do you imagine belongs to *you*? Do they not deserve what they find here? Humm.”

“Adonai does not like you afflict. He pardons and forgives offenses. Nor does he remain angry forever but delights in being merciful. He will again have compassion on those you tread on while He treads their sins underfoot and hurls their iniquities into the sea.”

“Yet he punishes those who worship me.” He grumbles. “Do you call that fair because they attend to me? What you call a lover, I call a fool who takes his anger out on anyone he chooses!” he shrieks and reveals:

*A battlefield of gore. The killing field a tangle of blood and bones, corpses torn apart by the hulking forms of the Nephilim raging snuffling for blood. It seems they never get enough, never cease from wanting, and so they destroy heedlessly.*

“Did he not use his Hebrews to slaughter innocents?” Lucifer says, lips curling and they no longer look on but find themselves on the very battlefield enclosed in its wretched misery:

*With the heavy cloud cover and heat, the smell grows unbearable. The need for rain to wash away the carnage dominates yet it never falls. Flies crawl on grimed eyes unblinking clouded by death.*

*Picking their way across once pure sand, it took all Anak’s strength to remain. Stunned by the scene, Kai turns away appalled, seeing only a landscape canvas smeared with blood and gore.*

*The funeral pyres burn in the blazing heat of the smoke from unholy fires darkening the once blue sky. A scream is heard but no one moves to save the one engulfed in a burning hell. T*

*he dead indistinct from the living, too exhausted to move or protest are hurled into the pyres, yet their screams seem never-ending, echoing across the plains.*

Lucifer’s voice woke them from their seeming trance, yet Yeshua never blinked as he answered. “He is merciful to all. He overlooks their sins so they can repent and those you look upon refused and cast their own children into the fire before their gods.

“Yes, Adonai holds nothing against anyone or anything, what you have made abhorrent. You know nothing of love. But Adonai, who willed it spares all because they are His. You cannot say he loves not fairly; he is the lover while you are death.” Yeshua steps to one side.

“In your voice, I hear the blame laid upon for the carnage, the wars and destruction, and death thereof.” Lucifer shakes his head. “Yet I am a lover as is dear Kai. Medea will tell you how I love and Kai loved on her.” Fire in his eyes as he reveals:

*Kai mingles his lust with Medea’s as he enters her enthralled with passion not seeing what she became.*

*Eyes burn as the demon in her emerges to gloat, its tongue snakes out to slide over sharpened teeth beneath a smile to enjoy the illusion of pleasure she takes in his lust.*

Kai shudders, recognizing not the demon whom she had become. “You must want to see the truth, but no one ever does.” Lucifer snickers. “Oh, you enjoyed the sin as you immersed yourself in the flesh of her luscious body, her garden of delight.” He smirks.

Yeshua steps forward. “You blinded the minds of unbelievers to stop them from seeing me reflecting the image of God. Sin quenches the Spirit within through their ongoing rebellion. Each knows what they do is sin, fornicating, rebelling, pleasing the flesh. They unite my spirit to a prostitute and the sinners care not if they merge the spirit with their vile, immoral thoughts and images in their minds.”

Lucifer smirks, “Yet they enjoy it while they live, though it shortens their life. Sinners care only for the momentary pleasure which I provide and they so much enjoy, for a time. Another scene opens.

*Men and women masturbate while watching each other, waiting to fornicate with one another man or woman, they care not. The ultimate pleasure of orgasm never comes, yet they strive on, running from one to another, seeking the ultimate feelgood.*

*A man hides in the shadows, tears the clothes from a young virgin who screams for mercy. Later, she walks the streets uninhibited. Later, not recognizing her as the one, he falls on the bed as her hands undo his shirt then trousers. She takes him in her mouth−swelling in response−he hardens even more as she uses her tongue to give pleasure.*

*Reaching up, he pulls her down on top, his excitement peaking. His hands around her throat she gasps rocking back and forth on him inside, him eyes shine in lust. A slight moan escapes, then she sighs. His hands tighten and her eyes widen in fear−too late. She struggles to break free. “I will soon be done. Here it comes my sweet release.” She gives a final shuddering sigh and breathes her last.*

Lucifer shrieks, “You see; they fight the ecstasy only to delight in it. Even better, they both come to Otherworld to repeat their desire, seeking pleasure in one another,” He says, snickering.

Compassion is the only sign Yeshua hears. “The Lord is gentle and gracious, slow to anger abounding in love. He will not always accuse nor harbor anger forever; he does not treat anyone as their sins deserve or repay according to their iniquities. As high as the heavens are above, as far as the east is from the west, so far he has removed their offenses casting them into the sea.”

“Ptah,” Lucifer scorns Yeshua’s words. “He repaid what he said was my iniquities, so his love is not for me. Don’t bother. No, I don’t fear him - blah blah.” He turns away tired of that old argument. “I read your book and know everyone who refuses to believe in you the wrath of Adonai comes upon them, so don’t speak of his enduring love. We know−all who reject you Adonai will reject, that is truth. What say you?”

“Surely, it was for their benefit I suffered.”

*Yeshua is bound to a whipping post lashes on his back, blood flows. The scene shifts to a cross upon which he is nailed and blood flows his skin cold and sensitive as he breathes his last, “It is done,” he whispers.*

“My love my sacrifice keeps them from destruction and puts all your sins behind you. All Adonai asks is one favor in return to love and obey his one and only son who suffered and died for them. There is joy and peace; all things work for the benefit of everyone who believes.”

“You ask too much.”

“You’re right in saying evil will not go unpunished. The offspring of the righteous Adonai will deliver. Do not the rich get rich at the poor’s expense? Rabbi’s take from widows so they live well. Corruption in government also. Why should they benefit? Yet they do. Let me show you,” another scene opens on a store having a meeting of managers:

“What’s the lowest wage we can offer to get workers who can at least function?” the manager asks.

“Wouldn’t it be better to pay more so we can compete with other companies for employees who are more than just adequate?” a junior manager asks.

“Yes, it would, but cuts our profit margin and no one likes that as stocks go down along with dividends.”

“Most of the employees barely subsist now, sir. They live in shared housing because they don’t earn enough to afford an apartment on their own.”

“Let me ask you do you like working here or would you like to look for another job?” His manager looks at him thoughtfully. He knew it was time to shut up and do what they asked. “Okay, then let’s move on.”

“How many full-time employees do we have? Seventeen? What’s that costing us in benefits? Okay. Start cutting hours for half of them, at least ten. Got it?”

The junior manager nods his head and his manager smiles and says, “You might make it after all. Keep up the good work.”

This scene bleeds into another: *a rabbi asks a poor widow to increase her tithe. “You are not paying as much as you can.” Towering over her.*

*“Rabbi, I’m paying more than ten percent of what my son brings home. We barely have enough to eat.”*

*“Nonsense. I’ve been to your home. You always have food on the table. You don’t want everyone to know we had to beg you for an adequate tithe, do you?”*

*Bowing in shame. “I’ll do better rabbi. Please forgive my disrespect.”*

“She had food on the table,” said Yeshua, “only because they prepared what little they had to feed the rabbi. He had plenty in his own home but fed off the poor to satisfy his greed. Adonai was not pleased.”

“The widow suffered to meet another’s needs,” Lucifer said.

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord He rewards their generosity,” Yeshua said. “Adonai does not ask the poor to fill the pockets of the rich but the rich to care for the poor−the widows and orphans.”

“Yet suffering benefits,” he says revealing:

An Egyptians whip lashes across the back of an old man who has stumbled under a considerable weight. “Move or you will feel more than my lash” the guard strikes again with the handle of his whip. The old man falls and does not rise again. Others glance at him and continue their work, fearful for their own safety.

“Harsh labor! Bah they’re worthless. Adonai saw their sniveling at having to work and set them free, bullied the Egyptians to satisfy his need for power and control! Then he fed them and prospered them. Tired of their whining no doubt.” Lucifer argues, “Adonai spoils the people. Here they get nothing unless they pay for it in one way or another.” Looking sly he chuckles.

*A young girl sobs, several men rutting as they savagely steal her innocence. She ceases to struggle as a knife guts her. The scent of raw blood assaults their nostrils pooling beneath the girl.*

*Kai has trouble watching and again turns away. Anak shakes his head in disgust at the sight. Yeshua observes, his pity evident.*

*~~~*

## 7. The Garden

*A breeze wipes away a lingering smell of death to leave a scent of roses. Sharp thorns glide over the garden walls to curve and crawl across the floor. Anak sees a foot bare; it’s chained at the ankle and female.*

Looking at Yeshua whose amber eyes flecked with gold light within his heart fills with gladness. He senses this may reveal a task for later.

Lucifer sees and his eyes flame like unto the fires below, deeper than Anak and Kai had been. Even the Fae who worshipped him on the earth and now in the Otherworld are trapped in warrens like rabbits, obedient to his will, having done so in exchange for a bit of magic. Their souls he enmeshed in his power beneath the earth.

Thousands of the Fae roam the empty corridors, not knowing they’re prisoners as any other who’d died and gone there. Crammed into chambers of darkness to be released only at Lucifer’s good pleasure the Fae are forbidden to speak of this place. After a time, some gave up their remaining humanity to become wraiths wandering forever, not realizing they were no longer Fae. Some ensnared became frenzied and attacked even those they once called friend when released.

“Indeed, upon their release,” Kai whispers, “they did horrible things too ghastly even to speak. When released to their kingdom, they knew not what to do with their freedom.” He shudders at the memories.

“How is it no one knew among the earthlings?”

Kai raised a brow, “You a Nephilim ask this! How long since you remembered you were one of them?” At times Anak forgot he was Nephilim so long had he lived apart as a human his size smaller to seem less fearful to the humans.

Flushing in embarrassment, Anak says, “I see your point. It is easy to forget being someone other than yourself. After a time. . .” His voice trails off as he sees another vision:

The garden walls covered in vines sharp thorns poison oozes from them. The woman, chained to the wall, unable to move far, if the poison tips score her flesh she would die a painful slow death.

Anak hears her soft voice. “No one left to save me. They’re dead and gone, burned in the funeral pyres.”

Anak cries, *she suffers terribly. Is there nothing we can do*? Looking around for help, he sees Yeshua and Kai and the vision vanishes as Yeshua commands, “Lucifer, lose your foul delusions from him!”

“Oh, such fun,” laughing Lucifer drops the illusion.

Anak wonders, is it an illusion or someone in trouble. Drawing Kai to one side he suggests, “We need not stay to watch out of idle curiosity, not after this last illusion Lucifer gave. Are you okay to leave?”

“Why? What’s going on? Was it the illusion?”

“Remember the scent of roses thorns curve and slither over a garden wall or what was left of it twisting and crawling across the floor?” He asks.

Eyes blinking, “Oh, you knew about when I used the Fae magic?”

“Everyone did. I’m surprised Lucifer didn’t object. I may know the reasons now.”

“What do you imagine is happening?”

“Yeshua knew about the illusion, right?”

“Okay. So, what did Lucifer or Yeshua show you?”

Anak shares the details: thorns, poison, a girl who dies, if not rescued. “We need to cross the chasm. She may be within the darkness in need of help.”

“It does seem a coincidence I use Fae magic, which reveals a thorn garden and not your illusion of a similar garden."

Anak remembers long ago, “When the Fae cleared my fields of thorns, they did it as a favor. But was my favor a tragedy for someone else? Is this how the woman became trapped in a garden of thorns!”

“Fae wouldn’t use poison,” protests, Kai, voice uncertain and they both take a moment to consider what it means.

“Nevertheless,” Anak says. “Poison or not, whether Fae or another of the fallen, she is trapped and we must help her to escape.”

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# Part Four

This portion introduces the Tuatha de Danann, a mythical people who really existed; they’d once sailed to Ireland from somewhere East. Scholars agree the Irish "Dana" or "Danu" literally are a human ancestor who was later deified and became their goddess. The original Hebrew historical ancestress, Bilhah, mother of Dan is also in Welsh mythology, where she has been turned into Beli, the consort of Don, and parents of "the children of light."

In Hebrew biblical terminology (1 Kings 11:36), Tuatha de Danaan or the Irish Milesians are linked with a sacred 'banner with a coiled serpent and the rod of Moses.’ A bronze snake, kept in the Temple of Jerusalem for many centuries, was until in the days of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4).

From an article on Tuatha de Danann:

Wandering Dan: Biblical Roots of the Irish, Welsh, and Related Peoples https://www.hope-of-israel.org/wanderingdan.html

[See Appendix, “Dragons in the Bible” for more on Moses and snakes]

## 1. The Chasm

‘…Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed; so those who desire to pass from here to you are not able, nor can those from there pass to us.' . – Luke 16:26b

**Anak and Kai** struggle on their journey into the chasm between the Otherworld and heaven; they have no idea what they’re getting into.

“Do you imagine we’ll run into more Fae? My experience has been limited,” Anak said, his thoughts on the leprechaun who tricked them and the Fae who went out of their way to help.

Kai, eagerly said, “You never know what temperament you’ll find. There is a difference between the Fae and Faeries.”

Eyebrows hike toward his hairline in surprise. “Different, how?”

“The Fae look a lot like humans only with magical powers. The faeries are not several feet high, rather quite small. They see magic while humans don’t. Oh and no wings on Faeries no more than angels. Instead they fly on the backs of dragonflies or butterflies, if they’re real tiny, and the larger ones take to the sky with large birds.

“A marvelously intelligent part of Faeries are the elementals while the spirits of air, fire, earth and water are Fae. They’re amazing! I already told you about the courts: the Seelie Court and the Unseelie Court. We have kingdoms and many live alone while others live in settlements. The solitary Fae avoid the Fae settlements.”

“What are changelings?” Anak asked. “I’ve heard stories about them but I don’t understand what they are.”

“When a Fae child becomes ill and Fae magic cannot cure it, they exchange the child for a human child. The human child receives the magic of the Fae while the defective Fae child often dies.

“Makes my head spin. Trust in the Lord. When in trouble I pray and Adonai send help in answer. He sends an angel to help and to protect!” Anak drops to the ground. “I’m exhausted. Let’s rest, for the chasm lies before us, and we’ll need our strength to get through every obstacle.”

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The steep-sided chasm looked like it was carved by a raging river at one time. Sharp channels cut through layers of basalt and red rock. Far below, a torrent swept through which once widened it with twists and turns, the white-water foamed as it made its way along.

Leaving for the chasm at dawn, the sunrise casts a golden light over the walls, and for the final time they have a good look at the canyon in its entirety. “Oh my. Look at that would you. It’s amazing. Almost make me forget the purpose in our journey.” They stop for a space on the rim, watching as the mist in the early light casts an ethereal glow spiraling down into deep purple-grey shadows hiding the bottom far below.

Thus, they began their descent, past layers of red rock, lime, and sandstone. It was a perilous journey. Heart thundering in his chest as Kai rounded a bend to find nothing before him for one terrifying moment. A slight misstep could have left him hanging in space briefly before plunging 500 feet or more down. Gasping for breath, he clings tight to the trail wall as he cautiously proceeds, too frightened to speak.

Anak chuckled at the Fae, yet carefully watched his own feet every step of the way. “There’s an area up ahead; it appears not as steep or slippery. Let’s stop a space and rest for a bit, if it’s okay with you?” He grins seeing Kai heave a sigh of relief.

“As long as the space has solid footing, I’m okay.” Kai remarks and upon reaching the spot Anak had indicated he gratefully sits down.

It seemed like it took forever but they made it down by sunset which came early at the bottom. From the rim the view had been breathtaking yet in the hike down one felt its power and beauty; it was an entirely different experience. On the way, they passed through layers of changing colors in the rock. It became incredibly hot like the corridors of the Otherworld near the fires of hell the lower they went. The little available shade made it tiring and exceptionally challenging.

In the shadows formed by the setting sun relief from the intense heat came. The chasm is genuinely awe-inspiring though, which made it easy to forget they were on a risky journey. After resting a bit, Anak took time to assess their canteens and other supplies.

“The water supply is getting low. You may have to use your magic to draw water from the rocks,” Anak said. “There’s enough for tonight. In the morning we can search for more.” The two busied themselves with their packs. Then ate a quick bite before lying down for the night.

Anak is fast asleep shortly after lying down. Kai, however, lay awake for hours listening to the night sounds, waiting for what he knew not. Just before dawn when the night is darkest, they came slithering in through deep shadows. Kai’s heart sped up and he tries to calm himself looking furtively about, trying to see what may not even be.

*Am I imagining things?* He forces himself to relax. *Breathe deep and let go,* he told himself, listening. Surprised to hear a bell sounded, he sat up and looked around. No melodic chime but a hollow resonating sound. *Why has Anak not awakened? He must be deaf not to hear that bell!*

Moments later, Kai awakens. *It must’ve been a dream.* *Am I awake or still dreaming? Or was I dreaming before?* Confused he rolls over to go back to sleep before dawn when there’s light to see by. Just as he falls asleep it seems, Anak shakes him awake.

“Ho, Kai, time to be up and about.”

The light is beginning to filter into the canyon bottom. Kai rolls over and groans “I went to sleep moments ago. Then a bell clanging. It wasn’t ringing because you didn’t hear it.” He yawns and sits up. “At least I got some sleep.”

“What are you talking about? You slept all night through. You snored so loud it’s a wonder you didn’t wake the dead. I was awake all night. You didn’t wake once, I guarantee it.” Anak rolls up his sleeping pad, shaking his head at Kai’s imagined foolishness.

“You must be joking. Well, you seem well-rested for someone who’s awake all night.” Suddenly it dawns on him as he slaps his forehead. “Oh, no. Likely, we both slept all night.”

Chuckling, thinking Kai’s having fun at his expense, he moves on to prepare breakfast, but inquires, “Why do you think we both slept through the night when I know for certain, I did not?”

“Fae mischief; they trick humans and it seems their own kind. We’ll have to...” Lowering his voice to a whisper, he shares an idea with Anak. The two of them camped for the day and night, resting before continuing their journey. Then before the moon rose, after placing his sleeping mat, Kai enters a nearby crevasse, and assumes the guise of a deer. He then lies down to wait. Anak laid down on his side, pretending to sleep, but kept himself on high alert.

They didn’t have long to wait. At moonrise sure enough a couple of the Fae slid in through the shadows to play tricks−disturbing their sleep. Once the mischief began, the Fae doing their best to disturb their sleep, without awakening either, noticed a young deer wander into the camp. It asked, “What are you doing?”

The Fae explained to the deer who said “Let me help. I've an idea.” After sharing his idea, the Fae agreed his plan was a good one. Pulling the dried vines off the rock walls they wove them into a great net within which to trap the humans when they awoke.

The deer then said, “You can see, I’m too big but if you two get in, we’ll know if it’s large enough for those two.”

Not thinking but excited, the Fae entered the web. Once inside, Anak pulled the end of the vine as he stood up to his Nephilim height bringing the Fae along with him. In a tightly woven web, the Fae couldn’t move their hands to wield magic to release themselves. Terrified of the giant Nephilim, they cried, “Oh please kind sir. Do not eat us. It was but a wee bit of fun we were having. A favor we’d give if you release us.”

Anak, pretending to think it over, said, “What sort of favor could two small helpless creatures such as yourselves do for me? It seems you’d be a nice midnight snack.” Eyes gleam as they shudder in terror, while he gazes hungrily at the Fae, licking his lips. After several moments, deciding they are suitably frightened, he breaks into laughter.

Kai who’d left, now no longer a deer, appears and makes a bargain, warning them not to trick another Fae again. The two apologize as Anak and Kai free them and they went away content. “Aye, ‘twas a fine trick you played on us. A fine one indeed. We always appreciate tricks even those others play; it’s how we learn and life becomes more interesting. Upon departing, they thank Anak for not snacking on them.

“It was innocent mischief,” Anak said and Kai agreed.

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## 2. Moving On

Anak and Kai are pleased; for some creatures in the chasm are now on their side. The journey could go on with less trouble at least without Fae magic, and maybe find the female who they believe is in trouble. “Those vines you used last night, we might be near,” Anak said.

“The Fae don’t know everything about this chasm. I asked if they’d heard about her but they said no. We’ll just have to keep looking.”

After hours of searching in several crevasses on the floor of the chasm they found no one. “This will take longer than we thought.”

Heading out to search a new turn in the wall they came upon a farmer hiding in a deep crevasse. “Who are you and what are you doing down here?” Anak challenged.

“Please don’t hurt me,” he cried. “I’m hiding from a dragon, a Fae who spits great tongues of fire and is sure to cook me for its meal.”

Kai came around the corner, “What have we here?” he said. Upon hearing the farmer’s story, he laughed, knowing what the farmer is.

“It’s no joke said the frightened farmer. “I’d pastured my horses not knowing it was Fae land. She appeared as a splendid horse with wings of an eagle and a tail like a dragon spitting fire. She set fire to my horses cooking them for dinner. I ran away and stumbled into this chasm. She ate my horses and seeks to eat me. I don’t know what she looks like now.”

“What do you mean what she looks like now?”

“After she eats my horses, she changed into a man lame of leg then sat down to the feast. My poor horses. And they were my only livelihood. What to do now even if she does not find me?”

Kai listens then takes Anak to one side and shares his concerns.

“I have an idea,” Anak then shares his idea with Kai.

Anak went back to the farmer and said “We don’t have a lot but if you’re hungry we’ll share what we have.”

“It’s generous of you.” The farmer said with a wicked gleam.

Kai said “I’ll be right back. I must take care of some things before we settle down for the night to eat supper.”

While waiting for Kai to return, a small doe entered the clearing. Anak stepped back as the farmer jumped to his feet changing in a blink into a horse with the wings of an eagle and a tail like a dragon hissing. Before it could spit fire and cook poor Kai Anak rose to his Nephilim height, grabbed it by the neck, and made quick work of it.

As they gazed at the dragon’s corpse, Anak asked, “What made you think he was the dragon?”

“No dragon would allow part of its feast to get away. It turned into the farmer to catch us, so we would think he was a helpless victim.

“Had she been a Fae who kills with fire she would not let the farmer getaway but would cook him on the spot too. They are insatiable.”

“What do we have for dinner, other than the deer who got away?” He laughs. They sat down to partake of their meager provisions. “We need to find a real deer, or find a way out of here if we cannot find that woman, we’re not even sure exists.”

Searching every trail and cave of which there are many they stumble upon a site, miles from where they began. “We could camp in this rift,” Anak suggested.

“Which direction?” Kai’s asks, exhausted in need of rest. “It’s getting so I can’t remember my last words. Does that mean I’m losing my mind? Oh no!” He laughs.

“You’re okay. There’s nothing easy about the task we’ve undertaken. There’s a simile for you - undertake. Those who bury the dead undertake the task so they’re called undertakers!”

They laughed so hard, both were rolling on the ground. “It seems we needed a little levity to lighten up a bit. Maybe we do need to stop for a rest.”

By a small fire in the dusk Kai speaks of his life within the Fae kingdom. “If what Medea said is true and I am king of the Fae being stuck here is no good. Why did the king whom you spoke with say anything?”

“Perhaps he didn’t know or Medea deceived you as she did me.”

“No matter. King or not, there’s so much I could do once we return home. What are you going to do Anak when you return?”

“We need to get out first, and rescue. . .” They hear a scrabbling in the shrubs as Kai leaps to his feet and into the brush before he can think. “Got you. Stop wiggling. We won’t hurt you! Ow. Stop biting!” Anak hears a sharp slap then a woman crying.

“What now?” Anak sighs as Kai emerges from the brush with a female over his shoulder squirming vigorously.

“She tried to – no she did bite me. I gave her a lesson in manners.”

He smiles at Anak and sets the woman down. She tries to scramble away but Kai grabs her and sits her down on the ground firmly. “Now if you don’t want to be tied up, you’ll stay put.” He said harshly.

Then softening his tone, “We’re *won’t* hurt you. I’ve said that once. If you hadn’t bit me…” showing her the marks her teeth had left on his forearm. Raising his eyebrows, he glances at her and asks, “Would you like to explain what’s going on?”

Anak watches the scene with amusement. Kai clearly put her in her place and he’s nobody’s fool, not after Medea which left him suspicious.

Anak smiles, “We mean you no harm. What’s your name? That’s a good place to start. Tell us your story.” He leans back relaxed to show he is no threat.

Looking fearful, she says “You truly don’t know me, who I am and you’re not here to – to take me back?” A deep shuddering breath, she heaves a sigh of relief when they shake their heads no. “My name is Isobel. I don’t know. . . I have to trust someone.”

Slowly her story unfolds. “I was supposed to marry. But if I kill him the knight to preserve my life; it’s the only way. The knight is the one I promised to marry. I dies because I refused his offer of marriage. Now I will never marry him. She spit on the ground. “I heard you talking. You being a Fae king and thought... It matters not; the king would not be the one to come for me. I didn’t think. That’s why I ran - to preserve my life.”

“You plan to kill him as the solution?” Kai asks “whoever he happens to be and not considered the consequences of killing a knight? Whether he finds you or you find him, if you kill him you die! You lose either way.”

“I would rather be dead than married to him!” She gets up and stamps her foot like a petulant child.

“Who is this knight you so despise?” Kai asks hoping he knows him and can make sense of the situation.

“It’s Drake Willow. Why? Do you know him?”

Kai’s smile is difficult to hide when he hears the name. “Oh yes. I certainly know him” He chuckles.

“Now you’ll help him.” She throws herself on the ground and weeps.

“Why kill him? He is about as dangerous as a mushroom. I’ve never known him to cause anyone hurt. It’s not that you're lying. I simply do not understand after knowing who you mean.” He looks amused. Willow Drakes’ actual name is Tam-Lin, a part-human Fae with special powers. He lives among the Fae and is Kai’s half-brother. Kai shrugs his shoulders thinking this is not the time to reveal that bit of information.

“We’re willing to help. He’s a knight, so he can help himself.”

She nods her head, listening though still weeping.

“If you’re willing to stay the night and not run off, we’ll figure out what to do in the morning. It is getting late and we could all use some rest. Are you willing?”

Sniffling, she dries her tears. “I’ll stay if you don’t to take me back.”

Kai said, “We promise not to and you’re welcome to travel with us. We’re going in a different direction anyway.”

She smiles and Kai uses his magic to create a decent tent for her to sleep in. He and Anak go off to their beds a short distance away.

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Tam Lin lives with the Fae and is an earthly-knight with Fae abilities. While he’s supposed to marry the Fae Lucifer frightened his bride away then insisted the Fae pay Tam Lin as a tithe so he can use his powers.

Tam-Lin begged the Fae to let him find his bride and wed her to stop the tithe and the turning. Hesitantly they agree, but he has only until the next Fae moon when he turns and he will hunt her, not to kill but to mate.

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Exhausted, Isobel falls asleep in her tent. Kai slides over near Anak and whispers, “Let’s walk. I need to tell you something.”

Leaving the campsite, Kai says, “Willow is my half-brother who has unusual abilities.”

Anak’s mouth falls open, he glancing around to make sure Isobel can’t hear and to be sure they’re safe. His head swivels around to face Kai, “Did I hear you right? He’s your brother!” His voice tense Kai has no trouble hearing.

“Half-brother,” he says, “he’s only half Fae.”

Anak waves his hand dismissively, “You’re telling me this because?” hands to his sides glancing at Isobel’s sleeping tent. “What else is there?”

“My half-brother or half-Fae is a shape-shifter with a wolf as his inner companion.”

Mystified Anak rotates his head and shoulders to loosen up. “Now, we have a problem.” He says, looking at the stars waiting to listen to the rest of the tale.

“It’s fascinating if you want the whole explanation.”

Anak nods his head indicating Kai continue, gnashing his teeth trying to be calm. *It would be nice if he would tell the whole truth upfront – just once.*

“The Fae moon, you must keep your wits about you, else it can bewitch. And it is dangerous for the less careful. Fae who carry a wolf within, they shift into its animal nature and this may be what attracted her. Wolves react to the full moon; she will feel him intensely and yearn to mate with him.

“In moonlight a wolf, he is wildly beautiful yet can seem threatening. That is the danger—not seeing him for who he is−a beautiful wolf albeit Fae though disguised by the magic of the moon’s light.

“How could she misconstrue his intent, thinking he wants to kill her.”

“You realize the moon is about to reach its fullness?” Kai says and starts to explain until they hear a scuffling sound.

Both turn to see Isobel struggling with a man. Anak hadn’t noticed anyone entering the camp.

Kai recognizes the intruder. “Tam-Lin. Leave her be. Isobel’s under our care.” His hands spread as a blue ring of fire dances around Isobel.

Tam-Lin let’s immediately backs off, hands out to the side. “Let go the blue fire! Isobel’s my bride-to-be,” Tam-Lin shouts. “We are destined to mate, can’t you see?” Stopping he faces Kai, who sees the fire about them, within his blue fire of protection. “I would never harm Isobel.

“Lucifer had to get rid of Isobel so he could demand the tithe. The council gave me until the next moon to mate with her. Tomorrow!”

Anak can see the firelight is not from the campfire, but the two are glowing with Fae-fire, pulling them closer.

“Kai, he speaks truth.” As Kai arrives at the same conclusion.

Isobel stares wide-eyed. Her body trembles in fear, then bending over arms wrapped around herself, Isobel shuts her eyes to block it all out. Clapping her hands over ears not to hear she whimpers. Tam tries to go to Isobel, but she screams pushing him away, “No. Leave me be!”

Tam is devastated. The mating bond calls to him but he fears to approach. Tam turns to his brother, “Kai, talk to her, please. Help Isobel to understand. You know Lucifer - the tithes. And he wants me.”

Eyes fill with sorrow Tam pleads hands outstretched as he glances from Kai to Isobel. Anak goes to Isobel. Taking her hand, he sits down. “Isobel, what attracted you to this Fae?”

Pulling away, her tear-stained eyes mist, “He was beautiful, full of life and so gentle.” She stops, “Now he wants me dead!” Crushing closer to Anak, “I’m afraid. Do not let him take me.”

“No. You will not go with Tam, or Willow, as you call him.” His hand reaches palm out to still Tam-Lin’s move toward him. “To go with him or to stay, it is your choice alone.”

After a few minutes, Isobel calms enough to hear Willow’s story. “It is clear Lucifer deceived her,” Willow shouts. “He wanted to force me into the Otherworld to serve him and use my magic for his evil.”

Tam-Lin explains to Isobel, “I refused to go so, he frightened you into leaving. Isobel, You are my love, my mate. I’d never harm you.” He begs on his knees, voice cracking.

Eyes widening as she listens, mouth hanging open, she then says,. “If what you say is true, then I’m in the wrong.” Tears pool in her lovely eyes and trickle down her flushed cheeks.

“I trusts you more than Lucifer who I know now is a deceiver. And both your friends,” she nods at Kai and Anak, “trust you. What can I say but yes. Of course I’ll marry you.”

Faces beaming, the four of them begin to plan. “You need to wed as soon as possible, for the Fae moon is tonight.”

“Yes, we must be bound,” Isobel said, glancing at Tam and blushing for the intimacy implied. “Anak, would you be pleased to wed us?”

Tam’s eyes brighten at the thought, and he grins. “Most certainly, my friend. For we’d have no other officiate at the ceremony. There is no time to return and prepare. Our mating bond is calling to us.”

“I’m not sure how to do a wedding,” He looks at Kai. “You’ll use your magic to prepare the setting and Isobel can help Anak speak the wedding song the two will repeat, singing together.”

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The Fae Wedding:

May the Wind of our words

Blow freely between us;

May the Fires of our love burn

fiercely in our passion;

May the cool Waters of life

a healing balm - soothe us;

May the Strength of the Earth

bind and steady us together,

Anak speaks the Fae Blessing:

Above you are the stars

below you are the stones

Like a star your love is constant

Like a stone your love is secure

Be close, but not too close

Possess the other not distress

In patience, be loving and kind

Storms come, but quickly go.

Freely give affection and warmth.

Make love often and sensuously.

Let not fear or the mortal ways

in the world give you unease.

When life’s woe seems to persist,

Be at peace with one another.

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## 3. Unexpected

**Tam Lin and Isobel** return after the wedding to find the home he’d left has nothing but dust, mouse dropping and moldy furnishings.

“What is this?” He cries. “Where are our friends?” His eyes look to his bride as if she has answers. “I’d no idea time would pass us by.”

Tam then enquires of a nearby neighbor. “We’ve been gone and now I discover all my friends have left.” The neighbor looks him over and says, “Any Fae who’re here before you left, have been gone three centuries or more. Can’t say as I’ve seen one myself, until you showed up.” Rubbing his hands down his pant legs, he and clears his throat. Not having seen a Fae before, and he’s heard the stories of deception. “Ain’t nothing more I can tell you.” Backing away, he turns to leave.

“Thanks,” Tam said as the man walks quickly away. He returns home to Isobel, and shares the tragic news.

“I’m so sorry. If only I’d come to you instead of running away.” Her eyes rimmed with silver, look beseechingly toward him. Tears spill down her cheeks. Reaching to take her in his arms, he pulls her tight to him, and holds her for several moments. “It’ll be okay, dearest. We’ll figure it out, and our life will go on no matter, right?” He smiles to encourage.

Pulling back, Isobel looks up at him. “You’re right. Let’s get some rest and deal with it in the morning. I’m tired.” She returns his hug, takes his hand and turns toward the house.

Together Tam and Isobel slowly made their way inside and upstairs to find what’s left of the bedrooms. A bed or sorts is in two of the three rooms. Another room looked like it was an office and holds some chairs, legs broken and unusable. In the hall closet Isobel pulls out some sheets, which were clean and in one piece, once upon a time. Now they are dusty and riddled with holes from mice who doubtless enjoyed roaming about, nesting no doubt. Isobel pulls the sheets out and snaps them as clear of dust as she can. Flipping the sheets over to a nearly clean side, she makes both beds. “Why both beds?” Tam asks.

“While we bonded after the ceremony, we’ve no marriage contract, so you have your bed until then.” She smirks, eyebrow raised. “The ritual ceremony was fulfilled with our mating. Lucifer cannot claim you but you cannot yet claim me.” She closes the door behind her.

“Isobel, there’s no Fae left, not since the Yeshua came,” he shouts at the closed door, grumbling he goes into the other room and climbs into his bed alone, pulls the tattered blanket up over his shoulders, and alone he falls into a deep asleep.

Awakening in the morning, Tam hears only weeping and his concern launches him from the bed’s warmth. Racing from his room, Tam enters where Isobel should have been and stops. “Where is Isobel?” The woman before him looks like Isobel though ages older with pale wrinkled skin, sagging at the neck, arms thin and blue-veined. “Who are you, Isobel’s mother? How did you get here?” Frown lines deepen as Tam tries to make sense of what his eyes see.

The woman gazes upon Tam, her weeping renews more vigorously. “Oh, Tam,” she cries, “It is I, Isobel. Not my mother. Look.”

She turns him so he can see in the mirror. Before him he sees an ancient fellow with bewildered eyes, white-hair, who’s rumpled and skin as wrinkled and aged as the old woman. “You see,” she cries. “We have aged since. Now we can’t have children and are too old to joy life anymore.” she breaks into sobs, and sits on the bed.

Tam realizes both have aged overnight and are so old, he doubts they have much time to live even. “We may have stayed the same age in the Chasm, but meanwhile, here on earth, our lives passed us by,” he said as he tries to make sense of it, and what to do.

“I’ve tried to use my magic to reverse it but it didn’t work. Not only are we likely to die, but we’re too old to have children?” Isobel weeps, all her dreams crushed in one night it seems.

“If your magic did no good, likely mine won’t either. There must be a way! I’ll think of something.” Tam-Lin takes her fragile body in his arms and holds her gently. “Give me some time to think.”

Tam-Lin goes for a walk to consider his nonexistent options, then he has an idea. *Our god is always promising his wonders to behold. Let’s see what wonder he can devise*,” Tam rumbles. Recalling the ritual, the elders used to contact Lucifer, Tam goes to a Sidhe in the nearby hills to finds an underground alter but what he finds is devoid of any Fae magic, indeed it’s empty of any evidence they Fae’s ever existed.

*Where have they gone?* *Home was here for centuries and now, gone! Could the Yeshua from the stars had that mighty an influence on the Fae to where they vanished?*

Heartbroken, Tam turns away to pursue his request of Lucifer. He busies himself setting up the altar, then intones the ritual blessing, yet with no sacrifice to offer, Tam takes his knife and open a vein on his wrist to let the blood flow upon the stones.

Grudgingly Lucifer appears before Tam in the underground Sidhe. Still furious his plan had failed again but curious as to what the lone Fae could want. *Indeed*, he says to himself. *It’s a wonder any Fae* *exist here*. Looking at the neglected room. “What do you desire ancient one? How did you survive when others have not?” *Is this old Fae tricking me?*

Smoothing his clothes with a self-deprecating laugh Tam looks away and shrugs. “I’ve no answer as to where the others have gone, my Lord. But here I stand before you, sadly ancient as you say.”

Clearing his throat, he bites his bottom lip, waiting for Lucifer to say something, then offers a smile that quickly fades and swallows. “Lucifer, my lord, god of the Fae who are no longer.” Tam looks up but Lucifer stares at Tam until his eyes drop down and away.

“Stop sniveling. I’m well-aware the Fae are gone. The question I’m asking is how are you here? How did you survive when others did not? What power or trickery saved you from the One to come?”

“Lord, in the chasm while seeking my lost love, I was a tithe to you, if you recall. Of course, you do most powerful one. So, I desired to wed my bride before coming before you,” he begins to explain.

“Your lies are nearly as refined as mine. Your intention was to marry and to hell with me, right?” he snarls, leaning close.

Tam’s heart almost stops. He recalls Isobel waiting, and said, “Yes, my great Lord, assuredly I deceived.” He adds, “A fine deception it was, too.” Swallowing hard he sees Lucifer smirk to acknowledge his bold yet dangerous honesty.

“Yes, yes, I always appreciate one nearly as deceptive as I, but what is the reason you call, and what in hell, or earth here is it you desire?” his voice slowly rises, eyes slits, “My patience wears thin.”

“Lord, as you see I’m not a young man with a young bride. Indeed, after the chasm, returning home, the next morning, this morning, Isobel and I found we are ancient with little time.”

Heaving a ]sigh Tam offers Lucifer: “Were you able, mighty lord, of which you are most capable,” he corrects, “to extend our lives and youth as before we would be grateful. Far more grateful than before.”

“Exactly how grateful?” Lucifer begins to see possibilities but wants to see how grand the offer before agreeing to any deal with a tricky Fae. “It must be something far beyond anything I might imagine.” Lucifer licks his lips and said, an evil gleam in his eyes. “Go on. What is this gift you offer your mighty and most worthy lord?”

Listening to Tam-Lin’s offer, his desire emerges. So pleased is Lucifer, his delight is almost orgasmic. He savors the proposal, “Yes, it would be most pleasing,” rubbing his hands together his fertile mind churns. “And if there is no child in the next year, what return do you offer to match it? I cannot imagine anything more than a first-born.”

“What is it you desire my lord?” Tam-Lin stammers, terrified Lucifer will ask for him in hell again, only worse than as a tithe.

“What I desire, if you not fulfill your contract, is your lovely wife, to enter hell and remain with me, as my consort. She is lovely, or you’d not have gone to such extremes to retrieve her?”

His face expressionless, Tam hangs his head and closing his eyes His mouth opens but no words issue forth. Slumping he nearly falls to the ground in shock. Taking shallow breaths tears fall from his eyes and he makes no attempt to wipe them away. Lucifer sees his despair and said. “Come now. It would not be a problem unless you plan to trick me.”

With cry he cannot without, he moans, “What will Isobel say? She’ll hate me forever.” Tam’s completely unaware of Lucifer’s presence now, all he cares about it his Isobel.

“Fool. Did you imagine I’d freely give anything you desired without having to pay the cost? There’s always a price, my friend.”

Tam nods in agreement, unable to speak.

“Then, I’m satisfied, my young Fae.” He places his left hand on Tam’s right shoulder and leans to grasp Tam’s left hand.

Tam places his hand into Lucifer and shrieks in pain, looking down to see a brand burned into his palm.

Lucifer chuckles, “Just so there’s no trickery. You keep the bargain and the mark will disappear when its fulfilled.” Lucifer disappears.

Upon arriving home, Isobel waits at the door, her youth and beauty restored as is Tam-Lin’s. “What have you done?” she demands.

“You wanted your youth restored, to marry and to bear children. So, we both have what we desire, except our firstborn will be Lucifer’s.”

Her mouth falls open, eyes widen, at a loss for words her face pales. Finally she speaks, her expression frozen as winter snow. “You did what?” Then, collapsing to the floor Isobel cries, “After what we’ve been through, I couldn’t bear children, now I can but you’ve given one away!”

“Isobel, the deed is done.” He holds up his hand with the brand still red upon it for Isobel to see. “Elsewise we will wake up old tomorrow and no children. We can have many children, Isobel.” Ashamed, Tam does not share the second part of the bargain with her.

Grief-stricken, Isobel completes the wedding ceremony with Tam. Gazing at Isobel that night, before making love as husband and wife and not just in a bonding ceremony, Tam-Lin smiles and says, “I have an idea.” Tam Lin explains what to do, and Isobel eagerly agrees.

The next day the two leave for the isle of the Tuatha de’ Danann. Tam’s brother Kai had rescued the Tuatha kings’ daughter from Lucifer, so now they go to the king for help. “Upon our return from the Chasm, we were ancient, no longer young. Neither of us realized how time passes between earth and hell. I made a bargain with Lucifer to return our youth, so Isobel could have children and we could have a life. He demanded our firstborn in exchange and I agreed.”

“Now, you seek to trick Lucifer?” The king chuckles. “While you Fae often deserve his retribution, the child should not suffer for it.“

“You’ll help us then?” Eyes bright with hope.

“Lucifer will be displeased, so yes.” He explains what must be done, and a means to a proper end is agreed upon.

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A mortal midwife attends the birth of Tam Lin’s firstborn and is told, “Be sure you place this salve in its eyes. It’s vital.”

The midwife does as she’s told, then takes the babe to a nearby cave, and places it inside, as directed. She hurries quickly away only to find the salve in her pocket afterward and, curious, the midwife uses it on her own eyes, realizing the child was a demon changeling not a Fae. Horrified she doesn’t know what to do and flees into the night.

Lucifer unwraps the swaddling clothes. “What is this, not the child they were to bestow upon me.” Nostrils flare, legs planted wide, he glares at the infant. Breathing through his nostrils with bared teeth, his fingers flex, itching to rip its head off, yet something stays his hand. And he cracks his knuckles instead, a vein pulses in his forehead as he ponders. Now the Fae child with abilities is not mine. No, I’m saddled with this creature. Lucifer looks more closely at the child, and realizes. This is no changeling, but what is it? He grinds his teeth as he paces about the hillside, unaware of the watching eyes. *They think to trick me.* Returning to hell with the child, he’s greeted by Clio.

“What have we here?” Clio said a smirk on her lovely face. “Doesn’t look much like the female Fae child you anticipated.” She chortles. “No, indeed not. This child is a male and. . .”

Lucifer interrupts her. “I knew they would trick me, the Fae. Yet the bargain is done.” He scowls. “A child was born from Isobel’s womb yet now I have another demon and no recourse.”

Clio remains silent. *He ignores me, then he can live ignorant of the gift he’s been granted.* She chuckles to herself. “Poor dear. You know those tricky Fae. They are your creatures, my sweet.”

“Don’t remind me.” He said with a scowl. “Throw this one into the fire for all I care.” Hesitating. “No, on second thought. Keep it here, and he can be a servant to me.” Lucifer smiles and nods. “Yes, I like the idea. You can find someone to care for it until its old enough.”

Clio heads into the lower hell to find an earth woman, someone who would not have the sense to know the child for what he is. “This should be most interesting to watch as the child grows.”

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“Look Isobel,” Tam-Lin said excited. “Our deception worked. The contract mark has disappeared. He holds out his hand, and both sigh in relief, yet fear Lucifer will still seek retribution.

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Before the child’s birth, the Tuatha made a switch, another child for the Fae. When the time came, the Fae child was magically removed from the womb and given to the tribe’s queen to raise. The other was placed in Isobel’s womb, which then triggered the birthing.

“One day, you will meet your child,” the queen said.

“Can we not at least see her before you take her away?”

“Nay. Tis best if you have nothing to do with her so Lucifer cannot perceive you had any part in it, though he likely guesses.”

“Should we not tell Tam and Isobel about her abilities – those she acquired from all parties concerned.

“Let us wait and see how they all develop,” said the king, and the queen agreed. “We already know she’ll be a mighty force.” He chortles. “And Lucifer has no idea of what we gave him in exchange.”

“We can only hope he decides not to destroy the infant.” Said the queen, a look of worry marring her fine features.

Placing an arm around his queen, the king reassures. “Never fear, for a charm has been placed on the child. He may desire to destroy the male but will be led to keep it in a place of safety.”

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The midwife sees into the Otherworld and believing she sees her Fae lover trapped. “I’ve been given the sight so I can free him,” she said. “I’ll need your help.” She had struggled to find her way into the chasm from earth, and there met Kai and Anak who’re leaving.

“Please,” she pleads, unware that Kai is the brother to the Fae who was the father of the child given to the Tuatha. “I need to save my love. He’s trapped in Lucifer’s world, in hades. Please, help me free him.”

Kai is reluctant to return to the Otherworld, for they may not escape this time. Still, he and Anak agree and start the return journey only to find the way blocked by a huge wall of stone and they can find no other way to return.

“We came through here a short time ago and this stone wall was not here. I’m sorry, but we can go no farther. Chances are, being ‘stone-walled’ saves you from remaining in hell forever; it could be a trap the dark Lord has laid. Think, why would Lucifer want to do you harm – do you have any idea?”

“A Fae and his wife, Isobel had a child; it was switched with a demon changeling at or before its birth. I took the demon child to Lucifer, as I discovered later. Perhaps he blames me. He did expect a Fae child.” She sees the look Kai gives Anak. “What do you know of it?”

“The father of the child is my brother, Tam Lin. His wife, Isobel is the child’s mother. My guess is Lucifer is angry and does blame you and will not let you leave. This is his revenge.”

“What I don’t understand,” Anak said. “How could Isobel and Tam have a child so soon? They left here not that long ago; it’s been but a few weeks.”

“Time passes differently between here and the outer world, Anak. We don’t know how much time passed between their entering the chasm and leaving.”

“You’re right,” said the woman. “I heard them talking and the two were old when they returned to the earth above. Tam Lin made a bargain with Lucifer for youth and a long life. He and Isobel went to Tuatha de’ Danann and they agreed to make the switch to deceive Lucifer. Although, the child of Isobel’s womb went to the Tuatha queen to raise, Isobel still lost her child, yet was promised she’ll see her daughter one day.”

Stunned, Anak and Kai agree, “Lucifer is taking his revenge upon you for your part in the deception. There’s not much we can do.”

“Thank you for wanting to help me. There’s nothing left for me so I’ll return home.” She makes her way out of the chasm as she had entered, leaving Anak and Kai to their adventure and Lucifer once again disappointed.

“It appears the Tuatha have blocked the way, knowing Lucifer’s deception was to keep us in hell. He’s failed again,” Anak said.

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Lucifer rages. “All three should be here with me.” Glowering at Clio. “It’s your fault. You said ‘make the bargain. It’ll work out.’ Well it did, it worked out for them, not me.”

Lucifer turns into his fire-breathing dragon self and slithers across the floor toward Clio, breathing fire. “Perhaps you’ll be a tasty treat to sooth my anger.”

Clio’s not worried and decides to let Lucifer have his day, so she cowers, head down and trembling. “Lucifer, please. I had no way to know they would help her.”

“Oh get up. You do put on a good show. One day I may tire of you and eat you anyway. Surely there are others who can satisfy as well,” he says and allows his dragon self to abate, content for now. He sits down on the couch next to Clio, ruminating.

Clio pulls him close and coos, “Great Lord, you know I desire only to please you.” Fitting her body to him. “I’d drag them down to hell for you if I’d only known.” Drawing him down on the couch. “Come now, let me help you forget.” Her hands roam his lean muscular body caressing him in all the ways he desires, her lips trail kisses unending until his passion begins to rise. Lucifer succumbs to her seduction, putting all his anger away for the time.

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Several days later, Anak and Kai come to what seems to be the end of the chasm. Sheer rock walls rise high above with no apparent way to the surface. “Is this the means Lucifer uses to keep us trapped?”

“What are we to do?” Kai asks, gazing at the sheer walls the blue sky high above. “It is a long way to the top.”

“What other temptations must we endure before we can leave?” Sitting down, head in his hands, Anak begins to feel more despondent. “We thought the last problem was the end but here it seems is another and this one may be unsolvable.”

Trying for hope, Kai says, “Let’s make camp for the night. Tomorrow we can take a closer look. There must be a trail out or Adonai would never have sent us, right? There’s a purpose for everything under the sun.”

“Yes. Under the heavens, there is a time for every purpose:a time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, a time to reap; a time to kill and a time to heal, and so on. I feel like weeping, I’m frustrated. I don’t know if I can do this anymore.”

“What choice do we have?” Kai stops, “The woman we helped, she left the chasm the way she’d come.” Glancing at Anak, Kai says, “All we had to do was follow her when she left. Why are we here still?”

“You want to go all the way back to where she left? Do you have any idea how long that will take?” Anak shakes his head.

“No. I’m not saying go back. I’m wondering, why did we go in this direction? What were you thinking?”

“Oh, so now it’s my fault!” Anak snarls. “Leave it to you to find fault with me. Okay. It’s my fault, so what. Blaming me is not getting us out.”

Kai’s amazed at Anak’s obtuseness and shakes his head. “No. It’s not your fault. The point I’m trying to make, there’s a reason you chose to head in this direction, and finding what seems to be a dead-end. But is it? Is there not a purpose in our being here?”

Anak’s face brightens as Kai’s words finally make sense to him. “You may be right, but I’m too tired to give it much thought now. As you said earlier, let’s get some rest and, in the morning, we can figure it out.

Satisfied Anak is more optimistic, Kai prepares to sleep and lays down to gaze up at the sky a deep midnight blue for the sun had pitched its light over the horizon. Starlight sparkles above as the moon peaks over to shine its light upon them.

The next morning, after a good night sleep, Anak and Kai investigate the sheer rock wall. The day before, when the chasm seemed to end, it had opened into a valley around which the walls stood. “When I first saw these, they didn’t seem so high.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. After walking from one side of the valley to the next, I don’t see a way to climb these cliffs,” Anak said as they walked back to camp.

Kai was the first to notice they had visitors. “Look, Anak. The Tuatha de’ Danann have arrived.”

“What is. . .” he stopped speaking as his eyes fell upon them. “Oh,” was all Anak said as he looked at the tall red-haired people with brilliant blue eyes and pale skin who stood about their camp. “They’re certainly different from the small, dark people native to Ireland and you Fae,” he whispered to Kai.

“Aye. To be sure. They’re God-like people with supernatural powers who invaded and ruled Ireland many years ago, then disappeared.”

“Yes, we Tuatha with many others once came from the sky,” said the one who could have been the leader. “Disguised as mist we entered and went to islands in the north. Our tribe lived there for centuries in what you call Ireland. We are tribes of Adonai from his creation and have lived in this chasm for many centuries now. We long to return to the stars. However, we cannot leave without freeing the queen’s daughter.”

Shocked at the speech and its brevity, Anak is silent. Kai, however, is not and asks questions. “We Fae thought you had died out.” He stumbled to a stop realizing Isobel and Tam-Lin, his half-brother had gone to the Tuatha for aid, so they could not be dead. “Sorry, of course, you’re not dead. My brother went to you for help, if I’m not mistaken.”

Chuckling, the one who first spoke said, “Yes, Tam Lin helped his bride and deceived Lucifer in doing. We were pleased to help him.”

Anak spoke up. “I don’t understand how Tam Lin and Isobel left us and shortly after, in a few weeks, had a child. It makes no sense.”

“I suppose not. You would need to understand the passage of time between earth and hell and the chasm to truly grasp how it was possible. Time is vastly different in the chasm and earth, never mind the heavens whence we came long ago.”

“Where was that?” asked Kai, curious.

“A place unfamiliar to earth’s people, Murias by name and where we hope to return one day when our daughter is found. Taken by Lucifer, but that story is for later and we will share with you in time.”

Smiling, Anak said, “Please join us at our camp. “You’re here, so you may as well stay. We don’t have much but will share what we have.”

“You’re most gracious,” said another who said his name was Oisin and his lady, Niamh. Seeing the look on Kai’s face, he chuckled and said, “No. Not that Oisin and Niamh, my Fae friend. We carry the same name and title, however.”

“To have Oisin a mighty warrior of the Tuatha and his wife, Niamh with us would have been more than my heart could bear.”

Puzzled and wanting an explanation Anak asked, “who are Oisin and Niamh of whom you speak, if I may be so bold to ask.”

Kai sat down, eyes bright with excitement and said, “Oh yes, do tell. Oh, where are my manners. Perhaps we will eat first,” he said, ashamed not to have offered nourishment earlier.

“Let us share ours.” The Tuatha gathered around, and out of what seemed like nowhere a spread of foods appeared, rich in color and appeal; it smelled like it was meant for the gods. Once gathered, they all commenced eating, then an elder spoke.

“Oisin, a mighty warrior loved Niamh a beautiful woman of the Otherworld and she loved him. Yet she wanted to stay with her people. Oisin and Niamh decided he would stay with Niamh in the Otherworld and travel home to earth as needed.”

Anak interrupts, saying, “I thought those in the Otherworld were Lucifer’s. There are others, you say?”

“Lucifer resides deep in the Otherworld. Niamh lived in the upper. Oisin went to her world and lived there. They shared the Otherworld with the Dark Lord, yet freely traveled between the two. Not everyone can, as you know, Kai.”

Kai nods in agreement. Anak listens, riveted by the tale.

“Oisin was happy with Niamh; they had two children, a boy and girl. Niamh and her children traveled between the worlds. Her horse carried those who wished between earth Ireland and the Otherworld on the wind and over the water.”

Hesitating she said, “I could tell you how the travel was made but it’s not necessary to the story unless you want to hear.”

“No,” said Kai, and Anak nodded for her to go on as well.

“One day, the children went for a ride to Ireland, only the boy fell off the horse and died from a head injury. The people feared the Tuatha would blame them for his death and so they asked Lucifer to return the daughter, Ériu, and explain the boy’s death. Instead, Lucifer imprisoned Ériu, promising to release her only if Tuatha would share their powers; they refused and fled into the chasm. And we have remained since.”

Oisin senses Anak is the one destined to free Ériu and so the Tuatha tell their story. Once he frees her, if he chooses to do so, the tribe can return to the stars. However, the two must decide to help of their own freewill without any undue influence.

The Tuatha waited centuries for the prophecy’s fulfillment Yet are hesitant to answer when Kai asks, “How may we help?” and suspects the answer will not be to his liking.

“You are so kind to ask. We hesitate to say for Lucifer has imprisoned our daughter and until she is freed, we cannot leave. Someone must find and set her free.”

*We just escaped hell,* Kai though, frantic now and wishing he’d never asked, for it’s the last place he wants to go.

“To keep her from us, he chained her inside Thorn Castle to the east of this land, not hell. Nevertheless, she is in constant danger in the castle for Lucifer’s evil overruns the entire land about.”

Anak’s says, “Thorn Castle!” Understanding passes between him and Kai as both realize it’s a ‘meant to be’ moment. “Would you pardon us while we talk it over?” Anak said.

The two go to one side to talk. “Having come from Thorn Isle, which it seems is unrelated to Thorn Castle, this could be the garden of thorns where a maiden is held prisoner, surrounded by poisonous thorns.” Kai said, excited to finally have a direction in which to travel.

“It’s too much to be a coincidence. Are you prepared to go with me? It must be your choice. I can go alone, if you’d rather return home.” Anak said. “Perhaps, the Tuatha have a way for us to get out of here.”

“Let’s find out. If we don’t have to return to hell, I’m game,” he said. “So, let’s find out how to get out, then be off to the castle. You know, the thorns may simply be a metaphor for problems we’ll encounter.”

“If that’s all they are, it’s a blessing for we’re used to dealing with problems and not poisonous thorns.”

Anak approached the one he assumed was the Tuatha’s leader. “We decided and agree, together we will do our best to free your daughter, and return her to you. I take it you know how to leave the chasm?

“Of course. I’m surprised you didn’t find it when you were looking. It’s not difficult.” Together, with Kai and Anak they walk down the valley, to a crevice in the stone they’d not seen before.

“You wish to take this journey to free the daughter?” the Tuatha ask. When Anak nods his head a few words are spoken in a tongue neither understood, and the crevice slides open to reveal a staircase. “We would have shown you either way, but we are pleased you have agreed.”

Without much ado, returning to camp only to pack their belongings Anak and Kai set off for Thorn Castle to rescue the maiden. Little did they know they would face other obstacles, the least of which would be a war, and amid it, a surprise awaits Anak.

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Bidding the Tuatha farewell, once they surfaced from the chasm, they crossed the Italic valley. Anak points out to Kai the mountain ranges he’d crossed and those he’d climbed. “They were spectacular, Kai. It was long before we met. Do you recall the night you came and interrupted my evening musings?”

Kai chuckles. “Aye. You were quite upset, preferring to indulge in your, what is it the humans say, a ‘pity party?’

“Well, I don’t know if I’d say. . .” Just then, the sound of armor is heard, and gruff voices rumble as men, soldiers come into view.

“I wonder who they are what they’re doing?” Anak spoke softly so as not to be over heard and thought they’d been bypassed until a voice behind them spoke.

“What have we here, a Nephilim and a Fae?”

The two turn in surprise. “My king,” Kai said. “What are you doing, and with human soldiers?”

“Aye. Tis strange, I know. Still, when the demons arose and began to attack humans, they came to the Fae for help.” He chuckles.

“You mean a war fighting with humans against the demons and such? Can it be true?” Anak said.

“Aye, lad. Tis good to see you two found your way out from the dark lord and have returned home. Would you enjoy another adventure in this war of ours? Tis nearly won.”

Anak and Kai agreed to help with the cleanup and followed the king to their camp to see what help they could be.

“Although we’re surprised to see you,” Kai said. “For I heard Tam, my brother was centuries older when he returned home. Yet you seem not to have aged more than either of us.”

“They didn’t leave the Otherworld as they’d entered, else, they’d not aged as they did. It all depends upon the portal entries and exits. It’s too bad they ran into difficulties.” He shook his head sadly.

“Actually, it went well in the long run.” Anak briefly shares the story the Tuatha had told about Tam and Isobel.

“It’s enough to make one’s head spin. Magic is a peculiar thing and there’s much even the Fae does not understand. All’s well that ends well, or at least not with too much disaster.”

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## 4. Its War

**Anak and Kai** had known a war was coming but had not expected to be in it and were glad to see its end. Fae against humans against demons. Even with the line drawn, it was hard to tell the difference.

Demons in all sizes often mistaken for humans, made life confusing. Fae’s who’re able to shift, confuse things too. Even so, the main fighting began in the West, a line snaking from the Fae woods to the North Sea. The western front, generally wound through the Celt's region and into the Baltics and R’lyrians**.** The country was rough and not what any one of them was used to, yet they fought on.

Farther South were the Illyrians, eager to rid themselves of the evil holding their lands. Lucifer’s forces infiltrated the peoples for centuries. Now to rid the land of Lucifer and his darkness and protect it, would be a challenge. Until the war began, most were barely aware of the impending troubles. As they became aware, the people were determined to make the land their own once again.

“The enemy lies and deceives, creating doubt, the humans lived in comfort so long, they failed to see the danger all around them. As a result, they were not prepared and nearly destroyed.”

Kai warns all who will listen, “While not all believe tell the people, believer or not, to summon the Lord Adonai and his son Yeshua when their gods fail. He is the answer for anyone who calls for He will answer and save them!”

Anak calling him to one side said, “Be careful the people understand it is their soul being saved, not necessarily their lives.”

“What do you mean?” a frown carves deep lines in his forehead ﻿ as he scratches his cheek. “They can still die?” Blowing out a breath of air, he said, “I don’t understand. Did we not make it out of the Otherworld safe and sound when many times we could have died?”

“Yes, but that’s because our work here is not finished, or I assume it’s the reason Adonai hasn’t called us home.”

“So, what do I tell them they’re saved from what?”

“Tell them their soul is secure. Should they die in battle, no longer will they enter the abyss with Lucifer, but they will be in the heavens with Yeshua, in the arms of the father.”

“I’m not so sure they’ll care.”

“To tell them anything else is deception. Imagine being told you won’t die in battle, and you’re safe. Then the person who told you died, what happens to your faith then?”

“Okay. I get it, or think I do. So, be sure they know it’s their soul he saves to be with him in heaven. When they die, they won’t have to enter hell with Lucifer.” He walks away shaking his head.

Anak could see Kai didn’t quite understand but trusted the Lord would show him the truth.

Anak slept a dreamless sleep. Upon awakening, the sleeping bag next to him was empty. Thinking his friend has risen, Anak seeks Kai. *We’ll breakfast together this morning.* In eagerness, Anak quickly crosses the yard to the kitchens, yet senses things are not right. *No one’s around; no horses neighing nor stable hands* *preparing for the day*. *Where are the kitchen’s pots and pans clanging?*

*It’s too is silent.* Hurrying across to the stables, he enters and finds no one. *Where has everyone gone?* Mystified, Anak has no idea where to turn next. The castle seems to crumble around him. The walls have defied battles for centuries and even now there is some protection from the driving rain that threaten. Close to the frigid walls he can at least forget the biting winds for a time but not this deadly silence.

His eyes roam the courtyard not seeing anyone, yet feeling a need to do something. *Where is everyone?* Hands reach the back of his neck, massaging his upper shoulders, he tries to relax but his mind’s in turmoil. Turning his face up, to clear the confusion in his head. “Trust in the Lord always, not yourself,” Anak hears his mother’s words. Instead of comfort, his anger rises. Walking he shouts, “Where are you!” Images assault him, his mistakes repeating. *It’s all my fault*. *He’s punishing me,* he moans, digging deep into a well of self-pity.

Kai watches Anak and doesn’t understand. “Anak. Let’s go inside.” But Anak walks away as if he didn’t hear Kai. One of the commanders asks, “Do you think he’s alright?”

“Commander if you could take your men to breakfast. I’ll deal with Anak.” He said, his voice sharp and the commander turns away. “What’s your name? So, if I need you.”

“Andras,” he says lips curving up as he watches Kai. *Why should he recognize me?* He muses. *We’ve never met before.* He turns away.

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Striding into the barracks within the entrance, Andras sees the men lying about and he chortles. *No discipline; they won’t survive in battle.* Shaking his head, Andras leaves the camp to report.

Fading from the earth into the dark corridors of hell, “My Lord,” he said upon entering Lucifer’s rooms. “The camp is in a binding spell. The spellcaster has enthralled Anak; they can see him, but he can’t see them. It is as you wish. Kai is a useless Fae. His men without command also useless. What else do you need of me?”

“How does it feel working against your son?” Lucifer said, snickering, clearly delighted with himself, savoring the moment. Yet he does not trust Andras and with good reason. Lucifer cackles. “Oh, Andras, faithful one who despises me.” His eyes gleam with cruelty.

“My revenge is not over, not until those two grovel before me.” He shakes his head, “I’ll call when I need you.” Lucifer turns away, seeing his commander’s anger subdued. *So satisfying.*

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Kai becomes suspicious as Anak continues his odd behavior and doesn’t respond to anyone. I*t must be a spell of some sort. But what kind, who did it, and what to do about it?*

A kitchen maid watches the goings-on in the courtyard and Anak’s odd behavior and recalls seeing the commander in the early morning. Awakening before everyone else, the kitchen maid had gone down to light the fires. While fetching water, she’d gone out the doorway when she’d seen him with a Fae who seemed to be casting a spell. Not wanting to disturb them she ducks back into the kitchen.

*Should I say something, tell him what I’ve seen?* Chewing her lips, she wrings her hands in frustration, not knowing what to do.

Kai glances toward the kitchen. Noticing the maid, he calls out, “Miss, you there.” And walks toward her. Frightened, she scurries away, but Kai catches up. “Hold a minute. I just wanted to ask a question.” He smiles kindly, his hand on her shoulder so she won’t run off.

“Do you know if there’s any spellbinders or casters? I don’t know most of the people here. My friend needs some help.”

Nervously she toes the dirt and shakes her head. “Only one I seen - he be casting a spell earlier. But I don’t. . .”

Startled, Kai interrupts, his grip on her tightens. Flinching in pain, Kai realizes he’s hurting her and releases her arm “I’m sorry. Don’t mean to hurt you. Who cast the spell, do you know? Where did he go?”

“No, sir. But I think he left with the commander.”

“The commander?” Concerned, Kai heads for the barracks. *I’ll find that spellbinder and that commander, if I can.*

His search proved a waste. In the courtyard, he watches Anak’s insanity grow with each passing moment. Feeling hopeless in the face of Lucifer’s doing or so he imagines, he sees the men watching him. Kai ﻿hopes for something to delay because he doesn’t know what. To do. His mind races, searching for answers, feeling judged.

Most everyone had heard Kai was searching for a spellbinder but it wasn’t every day one was there. The maid, feeling more confident, said, “Sir, your friend gave me a spell - whenever I was in need.”

Eager for any help, he urges, “Well, out with it, girl.”

Nervously, she recalls: *Great One above. Our Father of Love. Hear my plea I cry to thee. Reveal to me the One I need to see. Or show me what I need to know.* He told me to use it whenever I was in need for whatever reason and someone would come.”

Kai laughs, “Why did I not think of it myself! How foolish to turn to magic when we have our faith.” Kneeling, Kai prays ‘the magic of heaven’ as he would call it later.

As Anak’s guardian since birth, courtesy of Gabriel, sent in answer to the prayer Ariel arrived swiftly on the ‘wings of heaven.’ “Goodness, it’s about time you called. I’ve been watching and waiting.”

Could we get on with it, please? I know we or I should have prayed sooner but I didn’t and there you have it, and here we are.”

Ariel walks. Slowly around Anak, watching him closely trying to discern Lucifer’s enchantment.

He has caused Your son, Anak to pass through the fire, and the one used an enchantment, thereby he sold himself to evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to great anger. This is a power of darkness in the spirit causing this person, Anak to behave as though he were alone to please the devil. He has lost his freewill, Father and become possessed, and a made to carry out the bids of Lucifer.

Lord we confess and renounce every one taking part in this occult, in Yeshua’s name. Every spirit working against Anak’s life, cease to do so, in the name of Yeshua. Father we nullify every covenant, and/or promise made in this place, in the name of Yeshua. Father close every doorway of demonic invasion, and purge his soul, spirit and body of every evil, in the name of Yeshua. Every spirit of the man in bondage, working in his life, let it be cast out by fire, in the name of Yeshua.

Suddenly, the binding shattered and Anak stands in a daze, not realizing what happened. “Ariel, what are you doing here?”

“Ask your prayer-less friend. You guys might want to think of some way to remind yourselves to pray just for the heck of it, to set a pattern for problems like this.”

“Problems?” Anak said. “What problems, what happened?”

“Better ask Kai.” She stands silent.

“Ariel, thanks,” Kai grinned. “It took time and the help of a kitchen maid to send for the right sort of help.”

Anak nods his head in agreement, not really understanding.

Several moments they wait, puzzled by Ariel’s silence.

“Neither night nor day has either one sent a prayer until the maid came beside you. Do you imagine to fight the battle alone without the Father and His warriors?” Ariel shakes her head.

Anak eyes widen, speechless. “If I knew what was wrong, I could have but so far no one’s told me.” He glares at Kai.

Kai says “Lucifer’s spellcaster enthralled you. Had you not given the maid a prayer a while ago, we’d still be stuck.”

Kai tells Anak all and introduces him to the kitchen maid who’s so shy she almost faints away. “Many thanks for listening when I shared with you the prayer for help.” He smiles. “If you were uncertain before, now you know how well it works to bring the help one needs.

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Later, Ariel stands watching above the Tollense River. It is no skirmish. Thousands of warriors in a ruthless struggle. Ariel is familiar with wars and smiles at the weapons used by these fierce warriors: bludgeons of wood, knives of flint, and bronze a recent addition. None of which stood a chance against Fae magic when employed wisely.

Sadly, he also watches as Fae are slaughtered, cut down with sharp swords and knives, cleaving them in half or head from neck; for they’d not been trained to fight in a battle such as this and were confused by the violence, their magic useless. Warriors are used to fighting hand-to-hand with clubs, spears swords, and knives maiming and killing whoever they could reach.

Bronze and flint-tipped arrows loosed at close range pierce skull to lodge deep into bones of young and old alike. One of Kai’s favorite horses, fatally speared, crumples in the mud its blood mingling with that of warriors. Kai is saddened, but continues to battle from the ground. Not everyone stands their ground in the conflict: Some break and run for their lives, struck down as the enemy buries a war ax in the back of their skull.

Finally, the fighting is over, at least for the day. Hundreds lie dead, their bodies littering the swampy valley. Soldiers plunder the corpses as others lie in shallow ponds, bobbing in the muck; some sink, protected from looting by at least a meter of water. Ariel knows the peat will slowly settle over the bones in time.

*“Soon* *this battle will* *be forgotten, replaced by another”* Michael said, standing with Ariel, who remarked: “Had they called to the Lord we could’ve protected them, at least partially.” She shook her head in sorrow. “It seems they never learn.”

## 5. The Castle

Andras strides into the castle, wandering around to get his bearings. Trying to recall the layout of its rooms, where the dungeons are. He knew some are in the upper walls of the keep, yet in war, prisoners had been taken down into the darker castle depths, into dismal cells without light and rarely food or water.

Recalling his goal, he strides up the staircase, it runs parallel to the outer wall and up to the second floor. In a high-ceilinged chamber of the castle, tall windows look out on fog-shrouded lake. Inside pale winter light reveals dozens of weapons salvaged laying in heaps on the shelves and tables. Heaped upon one another, in no order at all, and he shakes his head at the demons.

Andras decides to deal with the prisoners first. He orders his second-in-command down to the main floor, “See to the injured and find some food for the men. And stay out of the dungeons for now.”

“Lucifer wants the prisoners dispatched, and the bodies harvested,” he questions Andras command.

Andras turns on him, grabs him by the throat and warns, “Don’t you ever question my command, or I’ll rip out your miserable throat. Do you hear me?” He snarls in his face so close the demon can see the rage in his eyes, and he trembles overwhelmed with fear as he nods his head, unable to speak, barely able to breathe. Andras releases him with a look of disgust and gives him a shove, nearly knocking him down the stairs. “I should break your foul neck,” he snarls. “Leave the prisoners in cells for now. See to the men and get those demons out of here. They smell like hell.” His second-in-command salutes, trembling all over and hurries off to obey.

*No doubt he’ll scurry off to Lucifer.* Andras snorts. *To gain his own advantage.*

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“We received another message.” Kai hands the paper to Anak. “What do you think? His info was good last time though it came too late.”

Anak stares at the piece of paper, torn and smudged with blood and grime. The words warm his heart marveling at the risk this person took, *I wonder who he could be?* “No doubt this note is good. Again, we’re short on time. If we can reach the castle before they leave, we can slay the enemy and salvage the prisoners while we’re at it.”

“What about the messenger? We don’t know who he is; may even be a she.”

“I doubt Lucifer would have females around unless they’re camp whores. He has no regard for women, so there is no way one would have this information. He may have used a female to pass it on, though.”

Anak smiles at Kai. “Let’s not waste time. Get the men ready. We have until dawn but I want to arrive while it’s dark, so they don’t see us. Silence and stealth are both vital. Our messenger likely can take care of himself.”

Anak and his men travel through the night, arriving at the castle before the light of dawn. Quietly the men edge into the entrance. Surprised to discover it is open both are suspicious. “Maybe it’s a trap,” Kai says.

“Or our helper is at work once again. We’ll find out soon enough,” Anak replies. “Let’s not waste any more time.” He says as he leads his men into the castle.

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Entering the castle, the guards wake suddenly from sleep, try to defend themselves but caught unawares, Anak makes short work of them. Slicing into unarmored bodies their organs and blood spill upon the stone floor. Made aware of the intrusion by the scuffle, more join the fallen comrades, but too late. Magic sears the air and scars the walls as the Fae, having learned their lesson in warfare, launch blue fire leading into the enemy’s castle, cutting down demons with sharp swords of fire.

Men begin to fall around him. An arrow strikes Anak’s left forearm, another glazes his right thigh. Bawling in rage, he powers through the pain and a dozen or more bodies lay mutilated by his blades. Those wielding bows he cuts down. Still, the enemy has awakened the animal in Anak as he snarls in-the-turn, becoming a black panther. In a blink, his razor-sharp claws disembowel several men and decapitate any foolish enough to get close.

Unseelie Fae, using their magic to defend the castle the soldiers pick them off easily. Thinking they were mere adornment and not really needed the Unseelie were not prepared for real battle. Anak, however, knows others will find their way into the fray and prowls on into the darkening hallways. The Fae wide-eyed at Anak’s change into a great cat, battle with magic, lightning bolts, and blue fire swords to cut down the demons and Unseelie alike.

Some of Anak’s’ men head off into the dungeons seeking the prisoners. Others will find their way Anak knows as he continues to cut them down like a farmer in harvest. Each strike dissects hungrily gnawing into soft tissues shattering bone until dozens lie maimed or dead on the stones, blood running freely. The main force lessening, Anak returns to human form, moving quickly through the corridors.

Suddenly, a demon stands before him grim and resolute. No gloating this one. Fire burns within the demon, as he prepares a heated blast. Anak’s white-hot flame pierces the demon-like a lance. Seeing it coming, the demon had tried to shield himself but didn't have time. The blast pierces shield and armor and Anak watches as the demon flames briefly then disintegrate into black ash.

He can hear the trickle of water, the crackle of flames, and the quickened breath of those around him. He knows angels came to answer the earlier prayer and smiles at the sound of heaven’s power. Silence enfolds him for several seconds as he notices angels battle against demons.

Coming around a corner, seeing the angels Kai’s mouth opens in surprise. “Where did they come from?” He gasps.

“Heaven, I imagine. It’s a first for me, but it does seem our prayer was answered,” Anak grins and heaves a sigh his energy nearly spent.

“Reminds me of a dragon battle long ago, striding off. “Let’s free those prisoners.” Hearing a thick sucking slap from boots as he treads through blood and gore, the other soldiers move aside for him.

Anak sweeps into the dark interior of the castle sword in hand. In passing, the last enemy hits the floor with a wet smack eyes wide his final breath hisses from open lips, his eyes dimming as the light leaves.

Other Fae enter the dungeons to release the captives. Anak hears them move about locating the cells where the demons held the prisoners, releasing locks. Moving down another corridor, a pair of boots behind. Anak wonders, *Who’s following me?* Praying it’s one of his own; he’s exhausted, his energy spent. The stench of death overwhelms and he doesn’t look forward to more battle. Enemies of all kinds lay dead. Rivers of blood creep across the cracked stone trickling into thick grooves to a drain in the floor.

Turning a corner Anak steps into an alcove to wait. In less than a minute, his stalker appears. Anak steps out to confront whoever it is, sword drawn. No demon or Unseelie Fae. Clothed in black-scaled armor unlike any Anak’s seen before, the man’s grinning.

“Who are you?” Anak snarls holding a sword to his throat.

“It’s a poor way to show appreciation for the help you’ve received,” says the man, mouth a lop-sided grin. “I see you got my last message as you made it in time.”

Anak releases him. Sitting down on a stone bench lining the walls, wiping sweat and blood from his face, his gloved hand covered in grime, he asks, “Who are you?”

“I’d give you my name but…”

Anak quirks his head, “But…?”

“Lucifer’s spies are all over. If he knew I’d helped, he wouldn’t be surprised, but he wouldn’t be pleased either. So, leave it there,” he says, dropping his hand when it became clear Anak was not going to shake it. “I only came after to meet for once. Now I have and must be off before the demons see.”

Looking Anak up and down, “You’re a fine man,” he grins again, eyes sparkling. “I’ll be off unless you want to take my head off with that sword.” He laughs and walks away down the corridor in the direction he’d come.

Anak shakes his head perplexed, wondering what that was about. *Our messenger, eh*.’ Then he follows a reaper into the cells spying several men disheveled and bloody. “Looks like you made it this far,” Anak remarks. “Glad to see some did; not everyone made it or if they did, not all are in one piece.”

One man smiles grimly. “No. Not everyone.” Anak helps him from the cell foul with blood and excrement and live with vermin. Rats as big as werecats feast on the dead; the warriors chase them into the gutters. Prisoners had to watch in horror for weeks, their cellmates devoured by the rats, while they lay dying.

Grateful to be alive now, yet the memories will long remain. As the conflict ends, Anak and Kai search the castle and find only planting beds ruined in the battle but no garden or prisoner. “Our messenger didn’t offer any word either.”

“Maybe we’re looking at it the wrong way. Recall the Tuatha said something that seemed nonsensical then, but maybe he was telling us something about our quest.”

“What did he say. Out with it my friend.” Anak waits to hear Kai, “It may be the answer we need.”

“He said “Look to the sky. The end you seek is in chariots of fire as the ice melts.”

Rubbing his head, striving to understand, “What does that mean! It almost sounds prophetic.” Anak looks at Kai, “Are you sure you heard, right?”

“It was a peculiar thing to say I thought about it long after he vanished. I heard right. It’s not something you’d forget – coming from them.”

Anak shakes his head again thinking. ‘Look to the skies. The end you seek is in chariots of fire as the ice melts – as the ice melts!’

Anak doesn’t understand.

“Chariots of Fire: Could they be falling stars striking the earth where the ice lies thick over the land then melts? There’re the multicolored lights in the sky we’ve seen far to the north. Are they chariots of fire? At times they appear as flames. Yet it sounds like the ice melts with the chariots of fire - whatever.

“The warriors plan to defeat Lucifer’s evil. If he overcame Tuatha de’ Danann in the past, what makes them think they’ll succeed this time?” Anak and Kai puzzle over the mystery but resolve nothing.

“Maybe the maid in the garden is Tuatha’s daughter, do you suppose? Perhaps that’s the reason they made the exchange for Tam and Isobel?”

“From the story they told, that could likely be it. If true, that shortens our journey. Only one prisoner to free.”

Kai smiles, “What a quest to help people from the stars. He said they are Adonai’s creations?” He muses looking at the night sky. Would it not be amazing to travel in-the-beyond and see the stars?”

Kai daydreams of the beyond and the possibilities he’d only imagined before.

Anak laughs, “What a dreamer. With Adonai and Yeshua, nothing’s impossible in this universe. Let’s go. They’ll clean up tomorrow. It’s time we left.”

The two return to camp, grab a bite to eat, and fall asleep in their tent. The rest of the men quiet and the camp sleeps. The next morning Anak makes sure the prisoners are fed, then he and Kai quietly leave, knowing the war is won.

## 6. The Plains

Anak and Kai traveled all day and far into the night only stopping occasionally for food and drink. Towards dawn, they lay down to get some sleep. “We should be nearing the countryside where the castle is,”

Anak looks around at the beautiful landscape. The sun’s golden rays warm the watery blue skies of early morning. Kai found it a startling contrast to the Otherworld, lush green grasses with flowers and butterflies dipping in for a drink. “It’s hard to imagine anything violent in this place. One could live here forever, it’s so peaceful.”

“We’re not there yet” Anak said. “We could cross the next rise and find a pit of vipers or storm clouds bringing heavy rains or even dragons attacking.”

“Oh, aren’t you the optimist,” he says laughing. “Still, you may be right. In this land, we never know what we’re going to run into or have run into us.” Kai points to the left. “Those look like fruit trees. Might be a nice change instead of rabbit or snake for lunch. We haven’t seen either one today.”

“You’re right. We could stay and spend the night under the trees in case it does rain. You see those clouds you were talking about,” he says, indicating the hills toward the west. “Looks like they’re moving this way, so shelter may not be a bad idea.”

By the time the rains came, Anak and Kai were under cover. Apples and pears made the meal. Laying their sleeping beds under an evergreen tree, its heavy boughs provided enough cover, though the rain was tapering off.

“Let get an early start in the morning,” Anak said as he lay down.

“I’m glad the rain has ceased, and we’ll have a dry day tomorrow.

Anak fall asleep looking toward the stars and dreams.

Standing in the garden alone

Just know what you’ve become

An empty man of fire and ice

For you paid an unjust price.

You fought and won the battle

Slain Fae and men like cattle

Even with your sorrow and pain

You cannot take away the stain.

There’re only the flames of hell

You hear the tolling of the bell!

Struggle with the hate if you can

Return then to the One my man

Escape is for those who can love

It will be for you a treasure trove

Unless your sins are far too great

Did you think you came too late?

Anak awoke the words echoing in his head; it was the Garden he saw clearly still, he did not believe they had come too late. Anak put aside the obscure words, for now, to ponder later.

“Kai,” he shouted pulling the Fae from his sleep. “Let’s go. I know where it is - the garden.”

Kai rouses looks bleary-eyed at Anak, turns over, and closes his eyes again. He’d dreamed of his home. He wanted none of the world’s struggles to interfere. “Go away. When you can say we’re on our way home, then I’ll listen,” he mumbled into his blankets. Squeezing his eyes shut Kai tried to fall back asleep. In a few minutes with Anak sitting and staring at him, he could *feel* his eyes on him. “Oh, for earth's sake. Alright, I’m awake. You have no idea because if you did you would leave me alone.”

“Yeah, wait until you hear my dream, which sounds more productive than your dreams of home, far away!” Anak grins.

Rolling out of bed, Kai grumps, “So it’s the garden of thorns, eh? This better be good.” Scratching his head, he rubs his face to remove the sleep then sighs.

Anak, while waiting, decides to tell Kai the whole dream, poem and vision for they may be related.

Kai asks, “what’s it means, *‘you came too late*?’ You think you did, but it’s not the truth, or we’d not be going there. Adonai would’ve sent us elsewhere, right?” trudging wearily through the widening countryside. “Right?”

“Maybe it’s about my guilt and shame at having murdered those men, even in self-defense. Mayhap there’s a time for battle and destruction; however, most men do not feel good about it.

How do you feel about the men you killed on the battlefield?”

“Yeah, I get it. But let’s get back to the poem or dream. If it’s prophetic how does that help us now?”

“I’m not so sure now that it does. Perhaps it was merely something I needed to be aware of, and now I am. So, let’s get on with it and find the garden if there is one” and Anak smiles.

“Because I’m beginning to wonder if such a place exists” eyebrows raised.

Kai smirks. “Oh yeah. I hear you there. We’ve been at this a long time, and no one else has ever heard of it, and we’ve not come close so far to it as you say if the place even exists! Well, what now?”

At mid-day, Anak tosses down his bedroll. “I don’t know about you, but I’m ready for a nap,” he says, sitting down.

“Oh, now you want to sleep. I’m okay with a nap. Maybe I’ll dream again” Kai says as he lays out his bedroll, imagining the life he once thought he’d have, and now, how different his reality.

“Ah, it’s about time,” Anak hears as he’s awakening then startled fully awake; sitting up, he looks around. To his left, a young woman sits cross-legged, whittling a piece of wood into an unusual shape. “Who on earth are you?” He snaps, angry being caught unawares.

Before she can answer, Kai arouses and looks around at Anak to see who he’s talking to. “Found yourself a friend have you,” he says, cheerfully. Realizing Anak doesn’t know her, a frown begins until his eyes light upon her.

Laila, an angel, her name means ‘daughter of the night,’ and she is a beauty. Knee-length, long dark hair flows down her back like a midnight waterfall. Skin milky white glows in contrast to her black hair and pale rosebud cheeks. Her eyes like the night are deep violet nearly black and glow with heaven’s light.

Kai is awestruck the moment he laid eyes on her. It was love at first sight for Kai, or so he thought.

She smiles, “You’re not in danger from me nor I from you, it appears.” She chuckles softly. “Never fear for I came to help. You do need help, right? We know you don’t pray anymore,” she says shaking her head.

“Who pray tell, I use the term casually sent you here to help us and with what?” Anak’s sarcasm is evident.

“Now you jest. Did you not speak earlier about your journey and wonder if you’re on the path?” eyes wide eyebrows raised. “Yes, a specific prayer would have been helpful. So, what is it do you believe you need?”

Grumbling to himself, Anak let Kai take the lead on this one, for he sees Kai’s attraction. Kai can deal with it this time. Anak rolls over, ignoring the two pretending to sleep again.

Kai, amused by Anak’s conduct, cannot stop smiling as he gazes upon the angel. “Would you consider marrying a Fae?” he asked. “You are truly lovely. Adonai might make an exception to the rule,” he grins. “I surely would.”

Laila laughs at this beautiful Fae and his sense of humor. She also knows his future and who’s in it but says nothing. Besides, Laila knows as well as Kai angels do not marry, not that he was serious. “You are so kind but let’s talk about the problem you seem to be having” she replies.

Kai laughs with Laila and tells her about their adventures, the dream, poems, and such, and how it all became confusing. Both quit praying as the dreams seemed to offer an explanation but truly made things more difficult.

“Of course,” she said bemused. “Still, the riddle is not so complex; it only seems so. You’re headed right. Once you get to the far hill you will find the land you seek.”

Kai heaves a sigh and says, “That’s a comfort. Anak also is comforted,” he says and chuckles while Anak merely mutters.

“I’ll travel with you awhile” Laila says “So want to be off?” Anak pulls his head off the ground, grumbling and grabs his pack, the three head out across the plains.

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Laila listens to their ongoing debate about the dream, and knows it’s simply a way to pass the time and be amused.

“If Laila’s right, it will be over the rise. Climbing to the top, a deep valley stretches before them and in the distance a dark castle is seen, surrounded by a moat.

“The problem, how do we cross that river?” Kai questions, gazing upon the stone edifice dark against the landscape. On two sides, sit mountains, and a white-water river sweeps around the other to form a perimeter.

“Leave it to me,” Laila smiles mysteriously. “Let’s cross the plains.” She runs down the hill, hair rippling behind her, its own river of darkness gleaming with light as it flows behind her in the breeze, and they follow.

Kai and Anak laugh at the sight yet follow at a slower pace watching for danger. Still, the countryside is peaceful enough as they lope along until reaching the river. White water rapids push the wide-stream over and around sharp stones to rise above. “It’s a wonder they haven’t been worn down over time.

Usually, river rocks are smooth even large ones like these.” Anak comments. “But they look sharp as knives.”

The angel smiles as she leaps across the waters her hair a stream of blackness lies over the river unmoving. Standing on the other side, Laila beckons them to cross, her hair has become a causeway upon which they apparently can walk.

Anak remembers the weird country with the Waterfield and thinks, *why not* and steps out. Within seconds he has crossed the river. Kai watches mesmerized yet is hesitant to cross himself. “You can follow or wait until I return,” Anak taunts. “I’m sure it won’t be too boring standing around.”

Kai pauses, heart pounding in his chest, breathing heavily, he sees only the raging waters and sharp rocks upon which he could so easily fall and be torn into pieces as the waters pulls him along over the hard edges.

Anak calls, “Come on, Kai.” It’s no different than a bridge, nice and stable, just walk across, one foot in front of the other.

Kai’s mind goes back into hell’s corridors where they saw the Harpies and he’d almost fallen where they would feast upon him. *If I fall in now, will they come and take me to hell and feast upon my body, ripped and torn?*

Hearing Anak he glances up to see the tension in his friend. *No, I will not be a feast for the harpies. I’ll make it across.* Taking a deep breath, he steps on the walkway and quickly crosses over, nearly fainting in relief once he’s on the other side.

“Now it wasn’t so bad, right?” Anak slaps him on the back.

“You have no idea,” Kai says with a smile though still shaky.

“I’m sorry to end the journey, but I must be off” Laila said in apology, “You remember to pray when you’re in need next time!” and she vanishes.

“So here we are at the end of one journey,” Anak remarks looking around. “Let’s hope there’s nothing else to face, no new trauma or drama.”

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The path glistens with many-hued pebbles as they approach the castle. Entering the opening to the keep warlike equipment lay against the wall of the building. Lances stand tall in a cluster ashen-shafts mounted edges of iron. So, they set their arms aside on the same wall.

A grim-faced warrior approaches. “Whence and why have you come to this castle and keep?”

Anak replied, “I’m sent by heaven and with boldness of spirit known to many Adonai sent me to release the young maiden held in the castle keep.”

The warrior eyes Anak, amused, “Indeed, I’ve not heard of such a thing. Whether you, with your companion, may enter will depend upon my liege lord. From whence have you come at the Lord Adonai’s direction?”

Anak, gives a short version of their story, offers to share the details, “However,” he said, “the long story could take more time than you may have, at the moment.”

Nodding his head for he knew epic stories often came out of great journeys and held much fascination for his people but also needed time telling. “Pray have a seat. Food will be brought while I approach my liege lord for a decision.”

Bowing, the warrior left.

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## 7. The Battle

The warrior, son of his liege lord, said to his father, “I urge you to receive these men courteously having come so far from the lands away up and yonder. It has been many days they travel, indeed, weeks if not months on their journey.” He smiles broadly, “If one believes even some of their tale, they have a generous story, which would be fine for an evening to hear of their adventures. It would delight the men who enjoy a fine story.”

Looking at his son, the father smiles. *He loves the stories of* adventures. *Perhaps, he needs one of his own?* Then says, “I am not unfamiliar with this Anak as a youth and his father who resides in the Otherworld,” he declares. “I have no doubt he has a grand story to tell. Let me consider it for a time.”

“What shall I do with them, my lord, in the meanwhile?”

The lord of the castle decides, “Put them in a decent room. They can visit with each other; but they are not to roam the castle. I’ll give you my answer after a space.”

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Anak and Kai waited in the inner court for several hours. And they pray. As dusk approaches, a maiden arrives and escorted the two of them into the castle. Given a room, comfortable and well-appointed Anak feels confident treated as guests, it wouldn’t be long before they received an answer to their quest. However, days pass, and they see no one other than a serving maid. The two are not allowed to walk about the castle either but are required to remain in their rooms. The warrior comes to keep them company at times and to hear more of their story.

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*Lucifer is the one I answer to.* The Lord wonders what to do. *Send them on or invited them in*? After a few days and hearing more of Anak’s story, his son comes again to his father.

“Anak is of the fabled Nephilim,” Cayden explains, “Adonai sent them for the young maidens rescue. It is reported Anak has the strength of thirty men or more and becomes a giant at will, also reported.” Excitement fills his son’s eyes as his glorious imagination carries him away.

*Perhaps he may solve my problem for me,* thinks the lord.

“A fine man and warrior you are. Let him come to me and speak his request then I’ll decide.”

Thus, after several days, in which Anak and Kai despaired, the warrior finally came, “My lord bade me, your origin knows he and so, valiant of spirit you may enter.” The castle lord receives Anak and Kai, hoping to use Anak to prevail over his enemy, if such a thing is possible.

The castle lord explains, “There is a monster who resides beneath the castle, sent by Lucifer who devours the clan chiefs who have tried to set her free. No one fierce enough is there to cope with the monster. As this maiden you seek is bound to me by Lucifer the Dark Lord of the Otherworld, it is to him, I answer. And so, to free her, you must overcome the monster.”

*How will Anak respond?* He wonders. *Will he slay the monster for me or refuse? Should Anak destroy the beast, Lucifer will require a price. One for the loss of the maiden and another for the brute who now protects her.* Taking a deep breath, the lord of the castle decides to take the risk or pay the price.

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Anak talks it over with Kai, who says, “It’s not worth it. What if he kills you!” Not knowing what they will do should Anak die; he pleads against it. Anak is determined to set free the maid but to do so, he must kill the monster.

“I will help only if the maiden is allowed to leave the castle with myself and my friend, Kai,” Anak bargains.

“Agreed, however, if you defeat him, my son, Cayden must go with you so he can experience the world. He has a great love of adventure and has remained at home long enough.”

Anak agrees to the bargain and the warrior, Cayden, leads Anak and Kai into the depths of the castle. Surprisingly he once again finds himself in a most unusual but familiar place.

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“Here you are,” said the Centaur. “You’ve found the castle and come to journey’s end.” Turning his head and with barely concealed glee he sneers. “Still have the Fae around. Well, to succeed won’t be as easy as killing a demon and no magic or shifting are allowed.”

Running tongue over teeth grinning, “To rescue the maid, you risk your life! So be it, foolish man. Now let’s see how good you really are without your magic.”

Iron bars crash down, slam into the ground, leaving Anak imprisoned. Kai is on the outside a helpless spectator. Not knowing what to expect Anak, hands at his side, flexes his fingers, looking around, he sees a pair of knives.

*Those are my weapons, I imagine*. He looks at the unadorned hilts wrapped about with stained leather blades marred with age and use. *Nothing fancy but serviceable*, he judges then, scoops them up snug against his palms. Hearing someone clear their throat, he turns around to his opponent.

A man swathed in chainmail neck to knees. A leather coat covers his midsection stained with dirt and blood. Anak suspects it is not his opponent’s blood. The man’s helmet is a piece of metal, with eye openings. He bears a hatchet in one hand and a short sword in the other.

A frown crosses Anak’s face. His leather tunic and pants he has worn from the start. *They offer some protection still, they’re no shield against the other’s more effective weapons. The knife blades span from elbow to fingertip. Against this man, they won’t be helpful but I must endure.*

Anak glances between the bars and sees faint shadows of what he imagines are spectators or specters more likely. The cavern is in shadows—but Kai can see him and his opponent as well. Anak knew he would have to kill the man no other outcome is possible. Unarmed and poorly protected the only way out of here is to fight and kill. He imagines it’s Lucifer’s doing. *He must not have told the castle lord this part of it.* Anak huffs to himself, disgusted. *Typical of Lucifer.* Turning, the corner of his mouth twitches up into a sneer, and with a slight bow in the direction he imagines Lucifer to be.

Tightening his grip on the knives, Anak moves toward his opponent. His adversary falls into a relaxed stance hatchet in front; sword lose at his side. Anak circles to his right away from the reach of the sword.

The man shuffles, shifting to keep Anak to the front of him. With the face mask he can’t turn his head too far as it catches on the chainmail. Yet he seems confident of his weapons superiority. *His reach is longer, so he’ll wait to attack,* Anak thinks. *I need to get closer to use the knives. But he’ll have a chance then. To use his sword and hatchet.*

“Use caution,” Kai whispers to Anak but more to himself.

Continuing to drift around his opponent, keeping the same distance he lets the knives dance through his fingers, and assesses the man trying to discover a weak spot. No longer aware of his breathing, focused on the subtle changes in posture and position Anak avoids distracting thoughts.

The heat in the outer keep is such, he feels sweat bead on his neck and slide inside his arms under his leather tunic. His opponent's leathers will help protect him from injury but not from the heat. The chainmail offers some coolness but not much.

Having made two circuits of the man’s position Anak settles into a low stance, ready and waiting. *How long before I can finish and move on?* he wonders, a desperate thought, wanting to end it quickly.

Shaking his head to erase thought of the chained maid, *Stay focused,* he tells himself.Still, seeing Anak’s momentary shift in focus, his enemy moves quickly, hatchet lashes at Anak’s neck, his opponent’s blow follows behind as he whirls toward Anak with the sword waiting.

Unlike Anak knives, his enemy's weapons are well-honed and sharp. Still, Anak knew the first strike would come from the hatchet. While his attack was swift, Anak had seen his intent in his eyes and his body as he readied himself.

The hatchet in his opponent’s left hand snapped toward him, and Anak stepped quickly aside, slamming his knife hilt and forearm against the man's arm, blocking the blow of his hatchet.

His opponent reacts swiftly, folding his arm in to use his elbow as a weapon. His energy carries him forward elbow striking Anak hard in the rib cage. Breath whooshes from his lungs as Anak automatically tightens his abdomen to reserve his breath.

He feels the sword coming at him. His torso a natural target the man cannot miss. Quickly Anak steps back to the side but not fast enough to avoid the strike, and turns away to protect his midsection.

In moving, his left-hand blade came up, slashing under the mask. Metal rang but with no blood. Jabbing his right hand into the man’s left armpit, he put all his strength into the strike. The man collapses with a grunt of pain from under the mask.

Anak jerks the knife as it tore from his grip, grabs the man’s shoulder who. Finds himself off-balance. *Now it will be easy to throw him down on the ground and cut him.* Suddenly, fire explodes across his back. “What the hell,” he groans in agony.

The man had twisted the hatchet down striking into Anak’s back. *Thank the Lord he missed my spine.* *The leather split, my only protection, Damn.* Snarling Anak drives his knee into his enemy’s groin sending the man to the ground. *Stay down you bastard.*

Twisting, he pulls the ax handle from his opponent’s fingers as he feels his back muscles tear painfully. Anak tries to reach around and grasp the hatchet. Pain shoots up into neck and skull, as he twists to get a grip, fingers slip on the handle. *Oh lord that hurts,* he agonizes

His opponent struggles to get to his feet. Kai shouts to warn Anak. The man grips his sword with both hands and charges. Anak’s hand finds the hatchet, tearing it loose as pain sears through his back but he ignores the agony and the blood. *Now I am armed, you freak.*

As the sword comes toward him, Anak sweeps the bloody hatchet up, slamming it against the man’s sword arm.

Even before the shock of the blow ripples up to his shoulder, the man is turning. But Anak is inside his guard again.

The man snaps his fist to connect with Anak’s jaw—battering him several times. Stumbling back, he takes advantage of hitting with short jabs repeatedly to keep him off balance, forcing Anak to retreat.

Anak sees an opening: his palms unprotected by chain mail leave skin exposed. The man punches him repeatedly, but the next time a hand comes toward him, Anak jabs the knife into it with all his strength grinding and twisting deeper into his flesh to bone, as far as the blade will go.

His opponent screams and Anak grapples with him, the man’s elbow now pinned against his side. Throwing all his weight against Anak, the man tries frantically to overwhelm him but Anak drops lower to gain the weight advantage twisting his body as he sweeps his right leg back.

Striving to regain his footing but off-balance, the man’s feet lift off the ground as Anak still holding his arm takes him down. Hearing the bone-snapping sound, his elbow twisted too far in the wrong direction, and he’s incapacitated. Anak struggles to rise, with his opponent down, Anak’s gratified to be able to move while his opponent cannot.

The man’s arm is useless, his hand disabled. Unable to remove the mask, he lies helpless.

Retrieving his other knife from the sand, Anak kneels and shoves his blade into the mask’s eye-opening. He feels it grate against bone, and the squish of soft tissue. A clear liquid mixed with blood leaks from under the mask. The man thrashes a moment, then stills. Anak looks up in time to see the specter turn and vanish.

Kai, shocked by the violence, once again, pale and shaky, turns into the corner and vomits repeatedly.

The bars holding him prisoner rise. Anak staggers away from the corpse, grabs Kai, who’s too stunned to talk and moves to leave. *Lucifer will not be pleased with any of these folks, but it’s not my problem.*

The castle lord had watched with Lucifer’s specter. *This had been the Dark Lord’s plan all along. Only he’d not planned on Anak winning. Still, at least he cannot blame me for the outcome.* Or so he hopes.

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## 8. Kai and Ériu

Lucifer vanishes in a rage as the castle lord releases the maiden to Anak. Again, Lucifer has lost the battle.

Anak and Kai, with the maiden, who is Ériu of the Tuatha, gratefully leave the castle with the warrior. Cayden leads the trio out of the keep. Anak keeps his word and the young warrior accompanies them. Now he’s wondering what to do with the maiden when Ariel arrives with news.

“I’ve come to let you know the Tuatha de’ Danann have gone home, returned to the heavens. Your questions will find an answer before long.” She smirks knowingly and leaves.

*Why have they left her*? Anak wonders.

Ériu does not seem concerned. While relieved to be set free, she seems inordinately pleased to meet Kai who’s enthralled with her.

With Kai by his side, Cayden the castle Lord’s son, and Ériu, the Tuatha maiden, Anak leaves the castle and they journey on. *This will surely make for an interesting trek. What reason does the Lord have for us traveling together?*’ He knows, eventually, all will made clear.

Several weeks pass with Kai and Ériu together. It isn’t long before Anak has an answer to his question. He sees the bond forming between Kai and Ériu so when they inform Anak the two have decided to head for the Middle East, the land of Anak’s birth, he is not surprised.

“Anak, as you may know, Ériu and I have become close. She revealed her family left after we left, for a prophecy foretold our marriage.”

“How did she come to know?” Anak queries. “They returned to the stars? I know how mystical they are and I merely wonder.”

“Like you, Ériu has visions where her family speaks to her. You know they are children of Adonai who arrived on earth long ago. Like the Fae, the Tuatha went their own way but now have returned to the Lord.”

Before leaving, Kai asks Anak to bind them in a ceremony of marriage but Anak says, “I know not the words to speak.”

“You have the words. Do what you will with them, as He would were He to bind us,” Ériu said, clasping his hand and seeking his eyes.

On the next day they’d set aside for worship, Anak spoke the blessing. A simple gown of cream white wool and Kai in his best tunic, together they spoke the binding:

*By the power of the Christ from heaven,*

*may you love me for all an eternity.*

*As the sun follows its path,*

*may you be with me across this world and beyond.*

*As light to the eye and as joy to the heart,*

*may I always protect and serve you.*

*Oh, one that I love, may the Lord’s will*

*stay with us in this life and even beyond.*

Having spoken the words together a kiss seals the vows, the two say their good-byes, leaving Anak and Cayden behind as the couple begin their journey to the middle East.

Cayden desires an adventure and upon learning Anak will return to Ireland and re-establish a farm in Wales he bids him farewell and leaves for the southlands. “I hear a war is in the making,” he said with a grin. “It will make a fine story to tell my people upon my return.”

Returning to his home in Wales, little did Anak know, his adventure was far from over. One day he would have a tale his friends would tell of him long after. But, I’m getting ahead of the story, and likely you prefer to hear it from Anak himself.

# Part Five

The Nephilim are mysterious beings or literal people mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The Nephilim were in the earth in those days and, also, when the sons of God came… Gen 6:4. The second is Numbers 13:32–33, where ten of the Twelve Spies had seen fearsome giants in Canaan.

Because the Bible records “the Nephilim were in the earth” I took the liberty to assume they could then have been in Ireland and Wales, the places Anak, a Nephilim traveled in his journey.

Dragons, on the other hand, are in many cultures, from the Americas to Europe, and India to China. They have a long history in many forms and continue to be seen in books, films and television shows.

It's not clear when or where stories of dragons first emerged, but the huge, flying serpents were described at least as early as the age of the ancient Greeks and Sumerians. For much of history dragons were thought of as being like any other mythical animal: sometimes useful and protective, other times harmful and dangerous.

Yet there is a modern-day counterpart in the Komodo dragons of Indonesia. They live only on the certain islands including Komodo. The world's largest lizards, they are believed to be the last survivors of the giant lizards that meandered through Australia millions of years ago. But were they dragons, and are dragons real?

For details on real live “Dragons in the Bible” see the Appendix.

## The Nephilim

**Dragons are terrifying** blood-thirsty beasts with long tails, winged, sharp talons and teeth who breathe fire and smell of brimstone. Once a common sight throughout the world, it's been ages since a dragon has been seen! Dragons some believe are Cherubs Adonai cast to the earth with Lucifer and his angels after the great war in heaven.

While dragons once were a common sight long ago, the Nephilim, known as giants, are part of life. Some say the fallen, enticed by pleasing women of Earth gave birth to these offspring, who are giants in the land. Some are good, some are evil, some fierce while others friendly. Still, they are the spawn of the fallen angels, known as Sons of Adonai and they live upon the earth at this time.

Wales had its share of Nephilim and was home to one of the few good ones named Anak. Close to eight feet tall without his boots, he was a giant with black hair tumbling about his face in a disorderly manner, which he kept tied back with a leather thong. His skin is dark and coarse working outside in the sun. Powerfully built, Anak works with his men in the fields, as often as he can get out and enjoy their companionship.

Many times, Anak leaves, seeing to his other holdings. Yet, he often returns home to make sure everything is going well with his fields and those who tend the crops and care for the beasts. His people are precious to him, and he always ensures they are well-cared-for.

Thorne Isle, Anak’s home, it’s a rock-filled piece of land resplendent with thorns. Hence its name. Thorne Isle and part of the county of Elgin Anak rules, and cares for its people and other nearby holdings.

One day, upon returning to his home in the evening, Anak stopped to check the fields, as it was nearly time to harvest. His gaze falls upon what had once been healthy growing fields, tall and golden, ready for harvest. Before him a blackened, smoking disaster. Sinking to his knees, grief-stricken, he gazes upon the smoldering ruins as tears cloud his eyes. *All the work those men put into this and now the harvest is gone. Where are the men?* Silvery-green fire still flickers amidst the fields.

“This is dragon’s work,” he rumbles as anger surges. “I’ll not stand for it. If I don’t do something now, it will only worsen.” Images of winter flicker in his mind, people without adequate food, and without seed for the next spring planting. Anak many times had seen starving faces before grow lean and bleak because of the greedy ones who had ruled this land before him. ‘*Never again’* Anak had promised the people and he meant to keep his word.

“Where’s the manager of this field?” Anak said as the men began to gather, standing about looked worried. They’d never seen Anak so angry and memories of the harsh Nephilim came. His eyes ablaze with fury; it seemed to be out of hell itself. Realizing he was frightening the men, Anak said, “Come now. It’s not me you should fear, but the dragon who did this to our fields. He is responsible and we must seek out and destroy it.”

To a man nearby, who trembles, eyes wild. “Quickly,” Anak said. “Find the overseer. And move as if your very life depended on it, for if we do not deal with this dragon soon, it may.” Anak would not harm his men, but not taking care of this quickly means other fields could lie smoldering. Next would be a house, then the cattle, and the people for dragons cared nothing for humans or beasts, and destroy without conscience.

The man scurried off to find the overseer. Before long, he returns, the overseer and several others from nearby fields follow along. All agree to join Anak in the dragon hunt. They knew if the dragon came calling, burning their fields, they too would need his help.

“If we tarry long, it will be harder to find the dragon. So, let’s make haste.” Anak said, quickly arming each of the men with sword and shield he’d long ago prepared for just such an eventuality. Anak knew he would likely be the one to slay the dragon yet, the men needed to feel they had a hand in it. After all, those fields provided for their homes and families, and so, they are a part of the land.

Anak cautions. “The hunt can be dangerous, and some of you could even die, but we have no choice. To kill the monster means we rid the world of it for good; otherwise, it will return to wreak more destruction. Next time, it could be your cattle and sheep, even your own lives and family. If you trust in Adonai, as I know many of you do, then whether you live or die, you will be safe in His care. So, if you’re ready, let’s go.”

Eagerly the men went at eventide into the encroaching dark to hunt the dragon. Traveling throughout the night, both Anak and his men sought for signs of the dragon, stopping only for a brief rest. Keeping still as they can in the dim light of the moon, the men spoke little and in hushed tones when they did.

Anak spoke as he sat down to rest briefly. “The first time I hunted a dragon,” he said with a grin. “I was both excited and terrified; excited to be hunting one but also terrified imagining meeting a dragon.” He looked at the men, knowing that was how some of them were feeling. “Once we met face-to-face, it was by accident. I was so startled, I nearly fell off the cliff when I stumbled forward, caught by surprise.”

He laughed, his men chuckled along, imagining what it must have been like. “The dragon was coming home and trying to land, for its cave was nearby.” He paused.

“What?” one of the men said, “You must have killed it!”

“No. Instead, it took one look at me and flew off, like the eagles who protect their young by distracting the predator from the nest. You’ve seen those?”

They nodded, captivated by the story. “Then what?” as the men encouraged Anak.

“The thought of eagles led me in search of its nest. I found it on the underside of the cliff. The one I’d nearly fallen off.”

“Did you find any young and kill them?”

“Oh, there were eggs, unhatched, cracked and useless. I left the dragon to her nesting as she waited for her eggs to hatch. Of course, they never would. The dragon presented no danger, so I went home for my friends. Together we went after the dragon and slew it, but not just me; we did it as a team. Saying this Anak could see he had bolstered the confidence of his men.

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Finding a dragon is not as difficult as one might imagine. Forty feet long, nose to tail, it stands as much as fifteen or more hands high. Clearly, taller than Anak whose close to eight feet; and so, it still is a fierce opponent. “There are few places a dragon can hide that size,” Anak said. “The smell of Sulphur along with the stench of half-eaten carcasses of sheep rising up from within is sure signs. It’s an odor hard to miss.” The men laughed to relieve tension as much as humor at the thought.

Throughout the dark hours of the night, they traveled. Several hours later, as dawn is about to break, Anak and his men smelled what could only be a dragon. All weariness vanished in a blink with a whiff of the dragon and hearing its snore. Adrenalin courses, their heart races as the men tense, preparing for a fight to the death.

Creeping through the dense underbrush, as they neared the clearing, in silence, they arrived. Once outside the dragon’s lair, they saw the creature for the first time. It lay sleeping near the opening, and it was a most peculiar sight.

One man had to restrain himself from laughing out loud for sprawled on the ground by its cave entrance, tiny puffs of smoke drifting up from its nostrils, a half-smile upon its lips, the dragon looked about as dangerous as a pussy cat. Snuffling, and snorting sporadically, rolling over, its underbelly exposed. With a burst of steam, he turned over again, humming within, perhaps a pleasant dream had brought it pleasure.

Not fooled in the least, Anak stood at the ready, knowing this was the most dangerous part of the hunt. The dragon was superb at pretense, unconcerned with its own safety. Confident in their fierce ability to maim and destroy, a few mere humans would not bother a dragon in the least.

Anak wondered if the dragon was sleeping or pretending to catch them unaware. At this thought, the dragon opened one eye, looked at Anak, looked at the men, and smirked. Anak knew he had been feigning sleep. The situation was about to get nasty. Doubtless, the dragon had scented them long before they arrived. While it was small for a dragon, he knew when it became its true self, it would be a fearsome sight.

Now, wide awake, the dragon rose to its full height, and in a blink transformed into its singularly magnificent self, a Cherub, a sight few humans had ever seen. In its inhuman image, it flashed burnished bronze and Anak had difficulty looking directly at it. Under its broad wings were hands that could easily reach with its sharp talons to grasp and pull a man into its maw, making him one quick and tasty snack.

The man who nearly laughed fainted dead away while the others quickly backed into the shadows of the nearby woods. This apparently harmless dragon was beyond anything these men could have imagined had they lived thousands of years. It struck such fear in their hearts, had Anak not stood firm in the face of this beast, the men likely would have fled for their lives, having never seen a dragon much less a Cherub.

Then, in less than a blink, the dragon’s talons extended, its wings spread, sharp teeth bared, its enormous tail swished side to side. As its wings spread out to touch one another, the draft from their movement swept the nearby men off their feet. Its face they could not look upon it was so startling. As its eyes narrowed, its wings spread upward, lightning flashed within. Darting back and forth, eyes flashing, fiery coals glow within as it prepared to attack. Black smoke churns the air, making it hard to breathe.

Suddenly, the creature rears back on its legs and opened its massive jaws, they saw a fire burning within. Anak knew–it was time to attack.

The dragon lifted its head, spread its claws. With a fierce roar, it opened its massive jaws, preparing a terrifying blast. Anak charges, sword held high, he ducks under and strikes the monster a heavy blow on its left side, then darts back and away. His fierce blow shortened the lightning blast which skittered harmlessly off nearby rocks. The dragon howls in pain and darkening fury but also disappointment.

In the heavens, Cherubim are invulnerable to weapons, but on earth, a Cherub can be wounded even killed. Anak is not invincible and, like the dragon, he had armor to protect himself: a helmet inscribed with the Word in tribute of his faith, a breastplate to reflect the dragon’s light, a shield to cover and protect him from dragon fire, and a double-edged sword, longer and a great deal sharper than any dragon’s claws. And Anak’s faith was intact.

Enraged, the dragon swung around, head swiveling on a long neck, and sent a scorching blast. Anak stood his ground and delivered a second blow. Round, and round the opponents fought, striking at each other.

Anak’s men watched amazed as the two warriors battled it out, earth against evil. While the dragon seemed to have little effect on Anak who repeatedly struck the dragon, each blow caused pain yet made little impact on its armor. Nevertheless, with the effort Anak expended, he had begun to tire and his energy fast departed.

Anak’s breath came in short gasps as he struggled to pull more air into his lungs. Clouds of the dragon’s black smoke furled about making it more difficult to breathe and tiring. The dragon noticed and, seeing an opportunity to end the battle in his favor, pulled back.

Pretending to retreat, he said, “This time you’ll not win human.” Anak was surprised the dragon spoke to him, and thought it was simply trying to distract him so he would relax his unyielding defense, he then, called upon his dwindling energy.

Taking advantage of Anak’s apparent fading strength, the dragon reared upon its hind legs as it prepared to attack. Swelling its bulk, turning ever brighter as it built an inner lightning blast, its effort draining the last of its energy. The dragon didn’t care for he surely knew now was the time to strike the killing blow or himself die.

As it was about to launch its crucial strike, the sun rose above the horizon’s rim over the snowy mountains. For a second, its dazzling rays reflect off the snowy peaks to blind the dragon. Anak nearly on his knees in exhaustion, sees an advantage, gives thanks to Adonai. As the great beast flicked its eyes briefly to shut out the sun’s bright rays, Anak dove forward and with his last bit of strength he pushed his sharp two-edged sword past the scales and into the dragon's heart.

A high-pitched scream filled with terrible rage and seeming to split the sky. The dragon had no energy left to repel the superb double-edged sword. In dreadful agony, finally it gave up and crashed to the ground.

The great beast lay upon the earth, wings outspread, head to one side, and again it spoke to Anak. “I should never have let you leave the cave alive.” Its eyes glaze after a final breath. Greenish silver blood flows from its breast to pool in the dirt.

Anak exhausted, yet shocked at the dragon’s word, felt triumphant. Turning to his men he remarks, “Well, that’s an end to one dragon who’ll burn no more fields.” The men, he noted, were looking not at him but over his head mouths agape, eyes open wide. Puzzled, Anak turns to see where the dragon lay, then up at an unexpected sight. There, standing beside the dragon, was Lucifer himself, in an absolute rage.

Anak could not understand why Lucifer would be there. While he realized this was not just any dragon he’d slain, he didn’t know the beast was Lucifer’s favorite and the last of the dragons on the earth. All others were long since slain by the Nephilim or dragon hunters. This Cherub had followed Lucifer in heavens war and Adonai cast it with Lucifer and his followers out of Heaven to the earth.

The dragon, named Azrael, was a companion well-suited to Lucifer. Indeed, had Lucifer a second-in-command this dragon would’ve had that privilege. Lucifer had no second-in-command for he ruled hell by himself, so no one ever second-guessed him. Still, his heart wept for the dragon. He ranted and raved, every foul name he could imagine and a few more spewed from his mouth!

His burning rage expended, Lucifer said, “I demand payment!” He snarled. “All your life you shall live in fear - for upon your death - I will drag your soul into the fiery abyss.” So terrifying was he, Anak’s men trembled in fear and near fainted.

"No matter whether they bury you inside or outside the church,” Lucifer spit venomously. “I will have your soul," Your ‘holy armor’ or ‘sword of truth’ will not help you.” He snarls. “No way in heaven or hell will you escape my wrath!”

Anak unable to grasp Lucifer’s anger he thought, *it was only a dragon.* When Lucifer finished his tirade Anak said, “My soul belongs to Adonai, you will never have it. Besides, I choose the place of my burial!”

Turning his back on Lucifer, Anak heads home with his men, leaving Lucifer fuming for he’s used to people cowering before him. Anak did not and never gave the episode a thought. Yet, the story of his battle against a dragon became legend, retold numerous times by those abroad−with Anak the hero. This alone was enough to refuel Lucifer’s rage.

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Many centuries later, on the day he lay dying, Anak asks for a bow, knocks an arrow and, to his men says, “Wherever this arrow falls there is where you will bury me.”

He pulls back and lets fly the arrow; it flew straight through the window of the abbey to embed itself in the north wall. “Into your hands, Father, I place my soul.” Anak breathed no more.

There was weeping as the people of Thorne Isle mourned his death. Entombed in the North wall of the abbey−neither 'inside nor outside the church'−Anak was at peace.

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## 2. New Life

**As the pastor read liturgy** over Anak’s body and sealed the tomb, Anak found himself in a brightly lit room with lovely music. He felt tears pool in his eyes until a soft voice said, “There are no tears evermore, not here in heaven."

Anak dries his eyes, looks around then down upon the earth to see his friends gathered in the church sanctuary to watch his body entombed, precisely where the arrow landed, safely within the Northern wall.

Lucifer also watched and swore, “He fooled me once; however, no matter how long it takes, I will have revenge!” Lucifer enters Adonai’s court for many different reasons. Knowing where Anak is he does not go to Adonai’s court as usual, but elsewhere, to again confront Anak.

Anak is looking around the heavens amazed when Lucifer shows up. Anak’s taken by surprise and hearing Lucifer say, “You think you’ve won. It was a neat trick with the arrow. Even I could not have guessed where it would land. However, I will have my revenge, if not today, then another. Your friends still live and the earth is mine.” Snickering at the look on Anak’s face, Lucifer walks away, pleased with himself.

Not grasping the threat and a bit fearful, Anak considers the friends he left behind. He recalls the dragon he had slain and Lucifer’s reaction and worries about his friends on the earth. *Just how much power does Lucifer have, anyway?* He wonders.

“Fear not,” he hears. “I bring you peace. What can he do to you or your friends on the earth? He cannot harm them. Slaying a dragon was a gift of Adonai. So, don’t boast in your strength like Lucifer taking pride in what you’ve done.”

Anak turns to see who spoke. Michael, an archangel, stands nearby. “He had to leave, but Yeshua will be back. Perhaps you might look around and get use to the place.” He disappears.

Anak took Michael at his word and began to walk about. First, he looks for his mother, imagining she would be in heaven. However, he is unable to find her. Instead, he sees several men he had known on earth, men who had worked for him, those he had told about Adonai; they came to warmly greet him. Soon, Anak realizes he is not truly listening. His mind was elsewhere. “Sorry, I’m looking for my mother but cannot find her. She must be here somewhere.”

None of the men knew his mother so had no way of knowing where she might be. Still, they cheerfully promised to keep an eye out for her. Anak met several others unknown to him from the past. “Would you like something to eat?” one asked. “You must be starved. I was at first. Come, I’ll show you where the banquet is.”

Whoever he was disappeared leaving Anak. *People eat here?* Looking around he couldn’t see where the man had gone.

Just then, he reappeared, “I’m sorry. I’ve been here a while and often forget. It’s a challenge to figure all the ins and outs. By the way, my name’s Jacob. Here grab ahold.” Jacob holds out his hand and Anak took hold of it as he said, “Think about hunger and food.”

In a blink, Anak found himself in a huge room a table laden with a variety of foods, some he’d never known, but they looked delicious. There were fruits and vegetables, sweet potatoes, and others he had no idea of. He was considering what to try first when a man walked over and said, “Anak. I’m glad you could make it.”

Anak turns to see who spoke. Not very tall, his amber eyes had flecks of gold and his hair was dark and just below the ears. Anak didn’t know his name, but he seemed familiar and his voice–it was the man who’d said ‘peace’ to him earlier. Recognition dawns. “Yeshua? Is it you?” And he felt love envelope him. “It could only be you!”

“My sheep hear my voice and they know me,” Yeshua said, a grin on his face alight with joy. “Grab a plate and come walk.” Yeshua took a plate and filled it, and poured a drink, then waited for Anak.

Anak walks to the banquet table. Hesitant, at first, but after looking around, he picks up a plate and begins heaping it with foods.

“Take your time,” Yeshua said. “You have plenty and I’ll always be around as you’ll soon discover.”

Anak slowed down to consider foods he truly desires. It seems there are so many. *Even wine!* He puts several items of food on his plate, pours himself a small glass of wine, and joined Yeshua.

“Sit down,” Yeshua said as he sits on the grass. “Don’t worry about your mom. She’s fine. You’ll see her soon enough. Just not now.” Smiling, he said, “You’ve met lots of old friends and some new ones I see?”

Anak nods and Yeshua says, “Fellowship is a good thing. There’s a lot here for you to see and enjoy, which I’m sure you will.”

Distracted by everything, Anak hadn’t noticed the grass, but realized he was sitting in a grassy meadow with blue skies above.

“This is not what I thought heaven would be,” Anak said. One hand held his plate as the other reached to touch the grass, a vibrant green with so many colors flickering through it in the light from above. He had never imagined such lovely colors and textures.

Looking around, soft, white clouds flow across a sky of cerulean blue. High up, under the clouds, flocks of birds shimmer with brilliant colors, to race across the sky, and dive up and down at extraordinary speeds. “Amazing, aren’t they?” Yeshua said.

Suddenly a sound from above, almost like music, reverberates in the air; it was the unrestrained joy of the birds, as they soared in the air. It was an irrepressible sound of pleasure, filling Anak with gladness.

“Oh, Yeshua, it takes my breath away, yet fills me with … I don’t know.” Anak said. “A feeling of pure bliss.

Yeshua laughed at Anak’s joy. Jumps to his feet, and says, “Come. It’s time to talk.” He moves over the grass like he’s floating; it doesn’t seem like he set foot on it. *This is the strangest part* *of the universe, of heaven*, Anak thought as he watched Yeshua move.

Without thinking, his plate and cup disappear leaving his hands free to reach out and touch the grass, the flowers, and even birds who occasionally land near him. A nearby stream he finds equally delightful as it flows by. In its sparkling depths Anak saw so many vibrant colors. His fingers reached to sweep its coolness, a profound pleasure he nearly jumped into the cold waters for a swim.

“When I said you had time,” Yeshua said. “I meant in the moment, for in another moment, you will need to make a choice in which way you want to go.” Anak notes a serious expression on his face yet his eyes are warm and inviting. “Even here, there are choices, for you have free-will, though, it does not always seem like it.”

*What does he mean?* And Anak asks, “What are you talking about?” He stops walking, waiting for an answer. “Could you explain?”

Yeshua grinned, “I knew I would enjoy talking with you. You are to the point and want answers.” He became serious. “And you want me to be plain-spoken?” He looked at him questioningly.

“Yes, I believe if you have something to say, don’t hesitate,” Anak said. “I’ve always enjoyed people who can speak the truth.”

“Yeshua stops a moment. “The thing is, you’re not human, nor angel. Rather, you’re both. So, your choices differ from a human’s.”

Anak felt sudden panic; images of hell fire burn in his brain and he can’t breathe. His heart races, thunders like it would escape his chest. Lucifer’s words push at him with great urgency. “I will have my revenge. You have not won, nor will you, ever.”

“Lucifer, be gone!” Yeshua thunders. “Adonai may allow you here but not to interfere.” He said and looks over toward the hills.

Anak’s breathing slows with his heart rate. He looks in the direction as Yeshua and sees Lucifer slink away, muttering to himself what Anak couldn’t imagine.

“Sorry,” Yeshua said. “Lucifer knows better, but you know, he’ll take more than was given when Adonai has indeed given him nothing but His longsuffering patience.

“Still, why afraid? Where’s your faith. Did it not see you safely here? After all, he has no power here.”

Anak said. “I panicked.” He realized his panic had dissolved like mist on the warm morning air. “He’s never bothered me before. After I slew his dragon, Lucifer showed up to threaten me. It didn’t bother me, nor his threats. I’m not sure why he has this effect on me now.”

“Even with faith, Lucifer plays on seeds of doubt,” Yeshua said. “He never ceases trying to destroy one’s faith and drag the into hell. While it’s natural for doubts to surface, faith is all that matters here, as on earth. And Lucifer doesn’t like to lose. You made the right choice, putting your faith in Me and in Adonai. Now, let’s talk about those choices.”

Anak walks alongside as Yeshua explains.

“As an angel, you can remain here and visit on earth to fill the will of and give glory to Lord Adonai. It’s no different as a mortal, except the options are limited. As a human soul, you would remain here or on earth to help rule in the City of Light, at least for the most part. Of course, there are exceptions.”

“Exceptions?” Anak said.

“Sometimes, a soul has been gone from the earth for a long time and they can return. Not as a reincarnation. Just with an angel to visit and help mortals, ruling with me on the earth, within the City of Light.”

Anak replies, “But who would I visit, those I left behind?”

“Well, no.” Yeshua scratches his head before answering. He knew Anak would be disappointed in his next words. “Anak, most of your friends believe and already have a strong faith – because of you when you were with them. Besides, your showing up now would be a problem. They know you passed on. Yet, as an angel that could be even more distracting for them. Still, by the time you return to earth as an angel, if you decide to go in that direction, most will have passed on.”

Anak asks, “If I stay a human. Is there much to do here? It’s perfect, no evil, and all that, right? So, it doesn’t seem there’d be much going on.”

“Anak, there’s much to be done. Lord Adonai has work for you, no matter where you go,” he said and smiled. “If you work for His glory and the good of others, it will go with you. Our work is endless.”

“So, no problems?” He said. “It would be nice to live here.”

Yeshua nods his head, “There’s no corruption, greed, unemployment, or favoritism, like in the world. Evil is no more on earth for Lucifer has departed long ago at least for a time, and now there is peace. All life has meaning, including work.

On earth, humans tend to not follow Adonai. It’s part of the creative spirit. Yet, that creativity can get out of hand. Look at Lucifer whose creative spirit was too expansive and he acted before his intended time! He was unwilling to trust Adonai.”

Anak stops. “I see trust is important, faith in Adonai. Without faith, Adonai is not pleased, I know.”

“Yes,” Yeshua said, more serious. “Many want to know the future, before its time, what it will be like and fail to trust. How do you create from a base of love if you do not grasp what it is? Love is a deep caring beyond any emotion. So, whatever you do, it must come from love.”

“I’m willing to learn,” Anak said. “I’ve felt Adonai’s love and yours here in heaven. Already I feel a love for everyone I never had before.”

“And so, it begins.” Yeshua said with a smile.

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## 3. Lessons

Like many who believe, Anak as a Nephilim heard the teachings from well-meaning pastors and priests. And some not so well-meaning who spread false teaching among the people for their own profit.

“Mortals must learn about Adonai’s truth, His teachings and evaluate every other teaching by His standards,” Yeshua said. “Adonai teaches only what profits one’s soul so when He corrects and trains you are prepared to teach others.”

*Have I learned Adonai’s truths?* Anak wonders, *I must if I’m here with Yeshua. Still, there must be more if Yeshua teaches me,* he muses.

Yeshua, knowing Anak’s thoughts, “Don’t be troubled; you believe in Adonai and Me, so you’re okay. His house has many rooms in which to live and He has one for you. One day, you’ll understand. And there’s much to learn while you are here, as well.”

Feeling a tightness in his chest Anak wants answers. Yet he doesn’t know what to ask Yeshua. *What’s expected of me?* he wonders. *What can I do? There must be some expectations.*

Yeshua laughs so hard he fell down laughing.

*What did I say*? Anak wonders, his mouth dry and doesn’t know what to say he’s so confused.

Yeshua stands and puts an arm around Anak and wipes the tears of laughter from his eyes. “Oh, Anak.” As He looked at him, Anak felt a sense of love envelope him. “You don’t have anything to be anxious about. Do what you please. It’s your home!”

“Well,” Anak said, feeling relief. “On the earth, I had people to look after and I thought here, in the Hereafter, we’d have duties to give our lives meaning and to glorify Lord Adonai, of course,” he added hurriedly.

“That too. By the by, this is not the Hereafter it’s Here and Now; you are here, now forever, for all eternity. Just try to relax.”

“Okay,” Anak said. But confused with the Hereafter versus Here and Now he says, “This will take some getting used to. It’s certainly nothing like on the earth.”

“No. It’s not. You will adjust in time.” Yeshua reassured. “Even the decision to be a servant, human or angel is not something you need to decide right away. Okay?”

Anak felt relief flood him and he relaxed. Taking a deep breath, and letting it go, he was able to finally relax even more.

“That’s it. Just let it go. In the world you had troubles, but here, you have none nor will you,” Yeshua smiled. “Of course, it depending on which role you choose.”

“What do you mean?” Anak asked nervously.

“There you go. Worrying again. Give yourself some time, and we’ll talk again, later, down the road a bit, which may be narrow but it’s long and straight ahead.”

Anak is about to speak when Yeshua vanishes and Jacob, appears. “Had a talk with Yeshua?” He chortles and slaps Anak’s back. “I can imagine. You have more questions now than you had before, right?”

“Yeah,” Anak said. “Right now, I’m not sure where to go or what to do, other than stop worrying. At least, that’s what everyone keeps telling me.”

“You’ll get the hang of it,” Jacob said. “Come on,” and in a flash they were at the gathering. “Let me introduce you around,” dragging Anak from one group to another.

While he doesn’t know most of them, he runs into others he knew on earth. Anak relaxes, his cheeks pink with pleasure; it is like coming home. *So many friends here*, he thought, running his hand through his hair, nervous.

Several people approach and greeted him. Anak hugs one women and squeezes the shoulder of one of the men he knew and had called friend once. Warmth spreads in his chest and tension flows away.

“Anak. Come join the party.” Jacob says. Anak starts to follow Jacob until he thinks he sees his mother. Excited, Anak turns in her direction but soon realizes it’s not her. Anak heaves a sigh of disappointment, feeling a heaviness in his chest. To Jacob he says, “I just want to be alone for a while.” As he turns to go off by himself, another person introduces himself, “My name’s Malek. We never met. But you are a legend on earth. The dragon story, Azrael, and Lucifer, I’ll not forget nor will many who’ve heard it. You made a real impact down there.”

“Thanks. It’s nice to meet you.” Anak sense this man’s an angel. “We haven’t met, but still, you look familiar.”

“I was at a gathering, those you were guardians of, with the other Nephilim, I was supposed to be there, but you were not supposed to see me. I’m surprised you did. Most mortal humans or Nephilim don’t see angels unless we allow it.”

“Yes, I recall the prince of Pembroke had a large gathering. I’ve never forgotten. He was a believer. For a prince of the realm, it was unusual and daring for him. Yet he had no problem speaking of Adonai, sharing his testimony and how his faith made so much difference to him, especially in trying circumstances.”

Anak and Malek continue in conversation. He notices the group has become quite large and more so as others join them. Soon, laughter spreads as people reminisce about how they were saved by hearing the word from different people who shared their testimony and the difference it made in their lives.

One of the farmers came to greet Anak. “When my wife heard you talk about how belief in Lord Adonai changed your life, your words pierced her heart. She was never the same and that affected me; she was brimming with life.” Shaking his head, he smiles in remembrance.

Anak recalls on earth he worked the fields with the men and often shared supper with their families, in their homes. Laughing with children and adults, as they delighted in his stories. He also remembered Thorne Isle and how difficult it had been at first.

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## 4. Thorne Isle

**When Anak first moved** to Thorne Isle, aptly named, the people saw only a giant like the others. Close to eight feet tall and rough looking, a Nephilim. They feared him because the Nephilim who had ruled there before hated the thorny growths, you couldn’t move without their sharp curved points pricking you.

Angry at their fate, in such a dismal place, they took it out on the villagers. The people saw Anak as no different and were afraid, not knowing what to expect; would he be cruel, like the others or kinder? They could only hope.

Yet, Anak had a skill, unlike many Nephilim, and was able to shift and reduce his size, to adapt more readily. He also learned to manage his temper. Often, recalling his mother’s words: *a soft word, turns away wrath*. *To get along with people, be gentle*. In this way, over the centuries, during his rule, people found he was different. And they grew to respect him, which was why he was meeting so many in the ‘Here and Now!’

In what seemed a short time, Anak found himself enjoying the company of people he’d met, even those who’d come to hear of his slaying the dragon and Lucifer’s vendetta.

Laughter did abound as he told of the great battle, one man fainting and the dragon dying. A couple of the Archangels joined. He knew Ariel and Michael, but one he couldn’t place. Then it came to him; Gabriel, the one who had arrived at his birth.

Going to greet him, Yeshua arrived and Gabriel turned away yielding to Yeshua, who it seems wants to talk.

“This a good time to talk?” he asked. “It’s been a while, and I’m ready if you are.”

“Truly, it doesn’t seem much time has passed.” As he turned toward Yeshua, the people simply vanished. Such was life in the here and now.

Anak had not the time to consider what to do, being busy meeting and greeting people. Nervous about what to say, he wiped his palms on his pants, *Do I remain human or become an angel? Being a Nephilim was one thing, but I never considered what it meant being angel and human. At least I have a choice. The mortals do not.*

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“Well, have you decided?” asked Yeshua, a twinkle in his eye, which told Anak all he needed to know.

“You already know I haven’t, so what can I say?” Anak said, his face flushed with embarrassed. Yeshua handed him a chart with a list on it Anak didn’t recognize.

“What’s this?” Looking closer at it, he. Said, “I assume it’s a chart of the celestials, angels and mortal souls and the Nephilim or mixed DNA.”

“Sort of,” Yeshua said. “We work with humans or mortal souls. To keep it simple, we use their pecking order. While it’s not very accurate, it’s a place to start,” he said. “Some rank angels with the Seraphim; they imagine those to be highest in rank. Yet, Cherubs were first. Lucifer was the very first cherub.

“Angels do not have wings though cherubs and seraphs do, three. sets, four to six wings in all and four faces too.

“Lucifer, as the first Cherub covered Adonai’s throne and walked on the Lord’s holy mountain amid the stones of fire. He was not nor is he now an angel. Called Son of the Dawn or Morningstar, Lucifer was magnificent. All of which led to his prideful rebellion and, ultimately, brought him down to earth.

“We have the archangels too, like Michael and Ariel who are part of Adonai’s army and fight alongside the warrior angels.”

“What about Gabriel? I noticed him earlier. He came at my birth to welcome me into the world.”

“Yes, Gabriel is an archangel, but not a warrior angel.

“You lived among and worked with humans for centuries. Since you’ve been here, it’s clear you’re a natural leader and could have a place among the warrior angels, become an Archangel at some point.” Yeshua raised his eyebrows. “So, what do you think?”

“I don’t know,” Anak said. “Can’t see myself as an angel, much less an Archangel. I’m used to being - not a human mortal but not an angel either. I’ve been part of both for so long it’s hard to imagine being one or the other.”

Yeshua considers Anak, “Of course. Only someone who’s walked in your shoes, to use an expression, understands. So, I’ll ask you to trust me. As to being an Archangel, “It’s not easily attained and takes discipline. Everyone must learn discipline to endure temptation and to be competent to lead. Still, with your skills as a warrior, you would be a superior force for good.”

“In Heaven. No earth?” Anak looked disappointed.

“Heaven is vast reaching far beyond, more than most imagine” Yeshua reminds, “The universe is complex. And as Adonai builds His lodging places for believers, which He’s preparing for all His people. You’re here, but one day you’ll go into the beyond.”

“I never thought beyond now and earth,” said Anak. “Does that mean… I can’t express all the many ideas flooding my imagination,” he said. “I can see so much more - possibilities for the future - in the beyond.”

“It’s another reason we want you here, because you, my friend, as a visionary you can see above and beyond, and will be the one to take His armies into the far reaches of Heaven, one day, and possibly beyond.” Confident of Anak’s choice, Yeshua amends to himself, *Only Adonai knows*.

“While you’re in the Here and Now you must resolve your life in the Before–in your past–so you can go into the Beyond, once you’ve managed everything between, in the Here and Now. Somethings could influence how well you lead, the choices you have made and will make. In and of themselves they’re not bad, but you need to learn to be aware and manage them.”

Yeshua sat down on the grass of a vast meadow they had arrived at in their walk. Anak, watching the birds and butterflies as they flitted over the field of flowers. “I’m not sure what you mean,” he said. “but I’m prepared to do whatever is needed to be who Adonai has made me to become.

Yeshua asked, “You’ve made your decision?”

“As if you didn’t know.” Anak smiled back at him.

“Truly, there was a chance you’d go in either direction. Adonai knew. I would’ve hesitated to call it myself.”

“Of course.” Anak agreed. “So, what’s my next move?”

“You’re off to learn the techniques for dealing with the demonic forces. Some will help you clear up your past.” Yeshua said as he rose. “Come!” and was gone in a blink.

Anak had become skilled in Heaven’s ways of travel and was right behind him. While it had taken some time, he’d learned, by merely thinking where he wanted to be or with whom, he was there in a blink. He joined Yeshua on the training ground.

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## 5. In Training

**Anak had been** in training with the other angels for what seemed like eons and eagerly looked forward to battling actual demons, those he’d heard so much about. Yet, he had not seen one. Yeshua was nowhere and Anak has become bored.

A Nephilim, Anak had used great patience with humans, but wanting to use his warrior skills, his patience is wearing thin. It was like when he tried to decide between being a man or an angel it is difficult. Humans need patience to survive, being weaker. While angels faced a fierce foe fighting demons. Anak too faced challenges.

“What good does it do” Anak stormed, “Fighting each other not actual demons! What’s the point?”

The other warrior angels, practicing with him, remained silent. They understood the implicit workings of Adonai. So, they kept silent for Yeshua would clarify matters in his own time. Anak went to his quiet place and after prayer he fell asleep.

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In a dark wood, Anak surrounded by shadows, imagines the demons lurk nearby waiting to slay him. His heart thunders in his chest feeling it’s about to burst. Confused, for in the dream, it is the 16th century, and part of him knows it cannot be. These creatures should not exist. The woods are deeper from what he remembers. Feeling lost, he moves into the dense undergrowth yet his unease grows and Anak knows this is fertile ground for a dragon’s attack.

“I cannot be in that same forest,” he thinks. “Am I not in Heaven – Here and Now? It is demons not, dragons I should be fighting! Why am I here?”

Suddenly, his focus shifts to a house. Inside he sees a man and from the look of him he knows the man is greedy and corrupt. Suspecting the man is up to no good, yet he cannot tell for certain what he’s doing. Then Anak sees the man’s brother, a wealthy landowner, lay dying. His brother, the evil man’s thoughts are clear to Anak, *Tis my chance to gain his wealth*. The man muses. *Since my brother’s wife died after the birth of their second child he looks after their children. If it were not for those brats, his wealth would soon be mine.*

“No,” Anak cried. “This should not be. How can I help his children?” He continues to watch, feeling helpless to take any action.

*The wealthy landowner knew he was dying and called for his brother. He did not realize how truly evil he was. “Ask him to come to me soon.” He cried to his friends and they did as he said.*

*Upon his evil brother’s arrival, Anak could see the uncle came only to claim his brother’s riches. He discerns the man’s wicked heart and how he plots to dispose of the children so he would be the one to inherit.*

*“Please be good to my poor children,” the dying man said. “Keep them with care and love them as your own.”*

*The evil uncle agreed while thinking how the little brats were not-so-poor, yet he managed to look indignant and swore. “In the sight of my gods, no harm will come to your children, brother. I will care for them and love them as my own.” He had no children and knew not how to love.*

*Under the terms of their father’s will, the two children would inherit everything, but the malicious uncle knew, if the children were to die first, the money would be his. Anak watched, helpless to intervene.*

*Shortly after, the rich man died and the wicked uncle, pretending to be loving, had his wife care for the children while he devised a plan to rid himself of them. “The brats take all the wealth that is rightfully mine.” He snarled to himself and quietly sought out those in the underworld. He found the perfect team, and made a deal with the ruffians. “I don’t care how you do it. Kidnap the brats, sell them or do away with them. I’ll bring both to the city so they’re far away and no blame laid on me.” And the children, thinking they were off to fun and games, went happily. He misled his wife, telling her the children had gone to stay with an old friend in the city while he was caring for business.*

“If only I could warn them,” moans Anak. “Is there no help for the children?” he cried aloud in his sleep. “How can he contrive such evil?” Anak tossed and turned until, feeling a firm hand on his shoulder, he struggled to rise in defense but upon awakening, it was Ariel gently shaking him awake. Upon awakening and seeing Ariel, Anak said, “It was only a dream! Thank the Lord.”

“No, it was much more than a dream,” said Ariel. “Yeshua sent you a message.”

“A message?” Anak now wide awake. “Why send a message in a dream? And why not just talk to me?” He asked. “This makes no sense.”

“Likely, you would not hear,” Ariel said. “You seem to think demons are easily seen both by mortals and angels.” She explained.

“It was the impression I got,” Anak argued. “What else could they be?”

“Other than his evil nature what stirred the uncle to harm those children and those two men to agree to kill them?” asked Ariel.

“I never thought about it,” Anak replied. “It was or it seemed to be nothing but a dream, like any other. It certainly was not real.”

Ariel nodded his head. “Of course. Some seeming night visions are just a dream and not a vision or portent, just one’s mind processing events of the day. Or it can be Adonai telling you what you need to hear, then He sends me to help.”

“I do not understand.” Anak, head in hands, agrees with Ariel because it’s easier than arguing and wonders, *is it worth all the worry?* “Won’t Adonai work things out without all this fuss and bother?”

“You’re doing great,” Ariel assured him. “In answer to your question, let me share how the rest of this story went and how it turned out with the children.”

“The sight of the two innocent children pricked one of the ruffians’ conscience and he could not carry out the evil deed. The other had a hard heart and resolved to do it, having been well paid. They argued violently. The one who had pity on the children killed his companion then took the children deep into the woods with a promise to return with food, and find a home for them.

The children never saw him again. Hungry, tired, and terrified, especially as darkness fell with only berries to eat they hungered. The scene broke Adonai’s heart to see them suffer but he waited patiently, knowing the outcome.

“After several days without food, the two children sat down near an old oak, and holding each other, they died in despair. Birds of the forest came and covered them with leaves. Those were the only ones who mourned the loss.”

“Oh no,” Anak cried, “Could this evil not be stopped?”

“Recall, the children came straight to Adonai, the uncle was evil, and would have had the children, anyway.”

“Money would not help them, I imagine,” Anak said, “I suppose the uncle got the money, did he not? It doesn’t seem fair.”

“If the uncle thought he would benefit from the tragedy he was mistaken. While he did get his brother’s money, nightmares attended his sleep, and demons entered his home and took up residence, bringing many others. He could not see the demons, yet they preyed on his human emotions of guilt.

“Disaster beset him; his barns burned, his crops failed, and his cattle died. When his estate lay in ruins his wife left him, alone and destitute. She had suspected her husband had something to do with the children’s disappearance but could not prove it and unable to remain with him left to live with a sister.

“After a short time, his debts rose and he could not pay he was thrown in debtor’s prison, where he died. The ruffian who agreed to bring food to the children and did not, when caught for another crime and condemned to death, he confessed his other crimes. It was then he told about the children.”

“I suppose there was justice.” Said Anak. “What does this have to do with me? I get it about the demons, but could not angels have helped in this situation? I see the children ended up in Heaven, but this can’t be all there is to it.” Anak’s said. “Could no one do a thing to make a difference, if not here, in another’s life?”

“Now you’re beginning to understand. In the past, as a giant in the land, one of the Nephilim, you cared for the humans under your rule because your heart was softer than the others before you. Why do you suppose that was?”

“When a fallen angel had relations with my mother and she became pregnant with me he left her alone.” Anak said. “In despair, and not knowing what to do, she finally turned to Adonai and prayed.”

While Ariel knew that was not the whole of the story, he didn’t correct Anak, but asked, “Did her life change?”

“She had plenty of food for both us and clothing, and our shelter was quite adequate. Mother said an angel helped her.”

“I was that angel who tried to help your mother. It’s not easy to change cruel hearts,” Ariel said, sadness evident. “I came in response to prayers. As the *Lioness of Adonai,* I provide for human needs and have power over the forces of the Earth, nature, and animals. While I do not consort with mortals as do the fallen, my work is to care for those who pray when in need.”

Anak felt a sense of relief, “Well, I came to believe because of the care you gave; it made a difference. Later, I received those lands I cared for by some good fortune.”

“Lord Adonai saw your future and where it would lead. He had me provide for you in ways you did not see.” She said.

“So, you helped my mother?” Anak asked.

“Yes, and you,” said Ariel. “Whether believer or not, we always answer prayers, if Adonai commands it. And your mother was quite persistent.” She smiled, remembering.

“So, prayers made the difference?”

“Oh yes,” Ariel said. “Besides in weapons training, we are waiting for prayers to answer for we respond at Adonai’s will. When mortals speak to Adonai He hears and sends us to give aid, as he sees fit.

“Our war is not with the authorities, or cosmic powers in darkness or spiritual forces of evil alone. When you fought the dragon, you used armor and sword, right? Adonai’s words are our sword, our weapons, and our power. And they should be yours as well.

“We listen for His will to prayer,” Ariel explained. “If humans don’t pray – talking to Lord Adonai – there is nothing for us to do.”

“Did the children pray? I didn’t see in the dream, nor did you speak of it.” Anak said. “Do children know how or what to pray?”

“Specific prayer is not needed,” Ariel said, smiling. “Adonai hears the cry of the heart and answers in His timing. Although, his answer is not always in-line with human desire but universal need.”

Ariel was quiet for a space, deciding what to say. Finally, she spoke. “You saw the temptations the one man experienced in the dream, and your father had temptations. There are evil forces, demons who tempt; that’s their purpose in hell and in the world.”

Anak felt his anger rise. “I know. After all, did I not live with the results? My mother was tempted to consort with the one who became my father. He leaves her for selfish reasons, I’m certain.”

“I see your anger. Your father leaves your mother, she raised you, and endured much hardship. Now, you avoid women, thinking never to be tempted yourself, or cause any pain.”

“I’m nothing like my father,” Anak said scowling at Ariel. “I would never let myself be tempted that way. He was weak.”

“Maybe, but consider. Do you believe yourself to be invulnerable to temptation?”

“No, of course not. It’s just that…” but Ariel vanishes, leaving Anak perplexed with her parting words. “Keep it in mind for the future.”

*It’s exhausting. What good will it do to keep it in mind?*

Falling asleep, Anak thought he was shown the way. Soon he would find out, for a dream can be just a dream, often a rehash of the day, also the dream can be Adonai speaking. The difference we learn by living with the choices we make in response to the dream and our desires.

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## 6. Dreams

**In a dream,** Anak sees with clarity, what he believes the path to take as Adonai reveals it. Yet, upon awakening, once the vision vanishes, Anak is less sure what to do - to follow the dream or not.

While he gained insight in an earlier dream, which Ariel had helped him grasp its meaning, now Ariel is nowhere about. *Is this new dream a metaphor or an answer to my prayer?* And he wonders. *Well, I did ask for directions, yet I’m right back where I started. How to know the truth, if I’m interpreting it correctly?*

“Ariel,” he calls, hoping for any Archangel to appear. Nothing. *Usually, when I think about one of them, they show up with unasked for advice*. Anxiety wells up, and indecision. *Just step out in faith, and hope for the best. But is it the smart thing to do? Perhaps I should wait.*

Imagining all that could go wrong going off on his own, fear troubles his mind. Heart racing, thoughts tumble about of the unseen. Anak recalls, *Adonai does not give a spirit of fear, but power and love – a well-discipline mind. Except I don’t feel too well-disciplined right now.*

Recalling when he hunted the dragon. ‘*There is no fear with Yeshua,*’ Anak breathes deep, his anxiety lessens. *I did what was necessary and slew a dragon. Why so uncertain?* He paces. *Ridiculous. I know what to do. What’s the difference?* He asks himself. *I didn’t hunt the dragon alone and there was immediate danger!*

In a rush of decision, Anak thinks of Jacob, and in a blink, he arrives, standing in front of Anak, “You have time for an adventure?”

“Sure. I guess.” Jacob said. “What do you have in mind?” He asks, hesitant, for he’s aware of Anak’s tendency to take foolish risks rather than wait for directions.

Anak shares his dream or vision and how Ariel helped him to understand the first one. “I think I’ve got a handle on this dream thing. And this dream showed us going to… (he shares the dream).”

“We’d have to travel a long way. Are you sure this is the right thing to do? Have you told Ariel?” Pausing, Jacob continues to question if it’s a sound idea.

Anak reassures him. “It came after prayer, so it seems Adonai sent it. Can’t find Ariel, so… you know?”

“Uh. No.” Jacob knows what can happen if they go off on their own. “If we mess up, we’ll go back to the beginning of training.”

“I’m trying to tell you. Being with Ariel, I’ve learned a lot. After the first dream, she helped me to understand, made it easier. And she said Adonai speaks in dreams and visions, at times.”

Jacobs sighs. “We can convince ourselves a dream means something other than what it is, too.” He swats as if to get rid of a gnat, which does not exist. “I know. You want to go where you want to go,” Jacob’s foot taps a beat in tune with his anxiety. Shaking his head, he takes a deep breath and holds up his hands, “Okay. I’ll go with you into - hell is it?” sarcasm laces his words.

“If you don’t want to go,” Anak said, irritated. “After the dream, you know I have to go on this journey. Oh, never mind. You clearly do not want to go.” Anak turns away, “So, I’ll see you - friend.”

“Hold on,” Jacob said. “I didn’t say I wouldn’t go. You know I’ve got your back - *friend*.”

Anak turns and gives him a questioning look. “You sure? Don’t feel pressured,” he said. “It’s not into hell, either.” Not knowing what surprises await. “Still, if you don’t want to go, it’s okay.”

“No, I get it.” Jacob smiles, “No one wants to go on an adventure alone. You’re enough angel for two. Besides, who would you have to back up any story you tell when we both return, alive and well?”

“Thanks. You’re a pal.” Anak returns Jacob’s smile. *Now, where is that galaxy?*

Right then, Jacob asks, “Where are we headed anyway?”

“It’s the M Galaxy.” Anak said. “In your research, have you ever heard of it, because not having been there or seen it, that makes it hard to zip on over.”

Jacob’s eyebrows seem to disappear into his hairline. “You have got to be kidding! Well, if we’re going, let me check it out first. I’ll be right back,” and in a blink, Jacob disappears to do some research likely.

In a heartbeat, Jacob returns. “Let’s go.” He sends Anak an image of the star system so he can see where they’re going, and the two are off on their grand adventure.

“M galaxy is a place of great beauty, a swirling patch of violet and orange clouds,” Jacob says, excited. “When we enter the nebula – yes, I looked it up - the colors become even more electric. To the human eye – mine - they are a shadowed grey cloud, but to your eyes, the colors in them will be incredible.

“Nebulas are wonderful- stellar nurseries they’re called – where stars are born. Imagine the mortals who first spotted these galaxies from earth; they saw them as massive clouds. I’m so jealous I can’t fully see them.

“The stars hide all sorts of mysteries along their borders. We’ll see strange things among the nebula. Oh, Anak, it’s a landscape of great mystery we’re entering. I’m so excited, I can barely wait.”

Jacob fails to mention - those who’ve gone to the M-galaxy never return. No one knows why. It’s a mystery, and so, it’s forbidden to travel there.

“Did you know,” Jacob askes, “M Galaxy known as Mayall's Object, it was created by two galaxies colliding. Afterward a tail formed in the collision from the shockwave; it helped form the ring. Wouldn’t you like to have seen that, wow! It’s so exciting!”

“Is that right?” Anak says, not really hearing him, he was thinking about what to do once they got there. His excitement began to grow. “Don’t let stardust get in your way,” as he suddenly vanishes in a flash. Jacob following a nanosecond later.

“Did I mention, Anak,” he said, catching up to him. “The M Galaxy is forbidden, travel there? Yeah, I know. Should have said something earlier.” To himself he says, *not that you would have listened anyway.*

“A little late.” Anak frowns, “Why forbidden? And if so, why would I dream about it if Adonai didn’t want me to go there!”

Jacob is about to answer, but there is no time for they found themselves entering a nebula within the M Galaxy. “Now what?” he asks, looking all around. “It’s certainly nothing like where we came from!”

“You’re right,” Jacob said, moving to look around. “Lots of stars in this one. Any planets to set down on? Oh, look; it’s so lovely. What a splendid place to be.”

“Yeah. That’s for sure,” Anak said. “I mean, no, don’t see any. I don’t see what was in the vision. But… “

“Who do you imagine that is?” Jacob interrupts.

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Creating a new mountain range with snowy peaks, orange-tinted like the sunset reflecting off it, Azrael walks to a nearby coral reef, wondering, “Where is. . . Seeing the tide had gone out, leaving a bar of white sand, he also sees. . . “Who are you?” He shouts, aghast, “On my isle?” Angrily, he approaches the two.

Anak is surprised to have someone shouting at him in the middle of nowhere. “Who are you?” he demands, baffled by the whole scene. “Jacob. Where are we?”

“Darned if I know.” He looks at the shouting man and says, “Hey, friend. You might want to calm down, and we can explain ourselves.”

“My name’s Azrael,” which mean retribution but he doesn’t share that with them. Azrael eyes narrowed watches the two. *So, someone disobeyed and made it here. Wonder how they found me? Did the One send them to bring me back? Humm.*

Azrael is Lucifer who, after evicted from heaven for starting a war, sent to the earth and to rule in hell, he escaped to the nebula. Seeing himself as a creator, he wanted to be other than a light-bringer in the universe*. I may be a bringer of light or the morning star as they call me, but I’m also a creator*, his pride rising.

To Anak and Jacob, “I live among the nebula in this land of stardust. It didn’t take long to see it’s as boring than where I came from. So, I created this piece of heaven: blue skies, beach of white sand, waters of the sea, and magnificent mountains. Still, it’s not my home for long, I’m sure,” he muses to himself, *not* *once Adonai figures out I’ve left the earth and come here – if he hasn’t already.*

Looking at the coral reef before Anak and Jacob, high mountains in the distance, violet with orange-tinted snow dusting its slopes, they see, below the peaks vegetation with ripe fruit hanging from the branches of trees. Lucifer as Azrael created new effect before their eyes as they gaze upon its beauty. He is indeed a creator.

“Best yet, no rain to mar the landscape, just volcanic eruption, but no lava to spice it up, or burn it down like cornfields. Perfection!”

Smiling broadly, looking around, desiring applause for his creation. “It’s a fabulous, so why can you not appreciate it?” he asks with a scowl.

Anak swallows, blinks his eyes in surprise, “Uh, I didn’t know this was a test of appreciation. When I use to grow crops, including corn fields, and it went well, I knew it was a job well done. Nobody had to pat me on the back. If it didn’t turn out, you tried the next season again.”

Azrael smiles, “Exactly my thought. If things don’t work, just get rid of the mess, and start over. I tried to tell Adonai, but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Well, that’s not exactly what I was saying,” Anak said, but Azrael had turned away and wasn’t listening. Lost in thought, he looked at his creation, *they don’t like it, so I’ll start over when they leave! Maybe someone else will appreciate what I’ve done.*

It was a beautiful day, the sun shining in a cloudless sky. Azrael feels like sharing his thoughts, “Where I lived before, it was different. Adonai did not permit me to do any creations of my own. Now? I am a creator.” He glows proudly. “It seems he only allows Nephilim to wander about and do as they like, and a misbegotten soul as well.”

“How did you know he was a Nephilim?” Jacob demands.

“He is not small,” Azrael said “Just look at him; he’s no holy angel, either.” Contempt fills his voice. “Sorry. Being there and now ‘here’ is unexpected. Don’t get me wrong, I came here by choice. Now stranded, It’s like being punished again for being myself as I was created.”

“Free will can be used too freely,” Jacob said, suspicious. “Never heard of Adonai punishing anyone for no reason.” *Although, the Lord usually has a reason for anything he does. Half the time, no most of the time he has a reason I don’t understand.*

Azrael ignores him. “Don’t care. I’m happy here, for once.”

Annoyed, Jacob doesn’t trust Azrael. *Likely he’s up to something, and it’s probably no good.*

When Anak first saw Azrael, he thought he looked familiar, and recalls the dragon he’d slain and who’d shown up, then later, when he went to heaven. *He can’t be Lucifer, can he?*

Lucifer took the name Azrael, after Anak had slain his dragon, before escaping earth for this venture into the universe. Disguised as someone other than himself, now he explains, “Here I am walking along, looking at shells and flotsam of leftover stardust, washing onto my beach, and you two show up. Care to explain yourselves?”

Suddenly, Jacob sees a pool before them its water cerulean blue and pristine. And he sees something or someone in the waters.

Uncertain, Jacob calls, “Anak, look.” He points toward the waters, “What is it? You’re closer, maybe you can see.”

Anak glances up to see a pool and a woman with long red-gold hair; it swirls about her in the waters. His heart quickens as he sees her violet eyes and full lips the color of pomegranate, her skin smooth and creamy as rich caramel. ﻿*She doesn’t seem to like us being here,* he muses.

Crossing her arms, she twists a lock of hair around a finger, glances at Azrael as she bites her lips. Shifting about in the waters, the woman seems uncertain as what to do, almost in a panic. Anak steps back, so as not to frighten her more.

Azrael’s eyes open wide, in surprise for he’d forgotten about Clio.

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## 7. Azrael

Azrael, startled, remembering Clio thinks, frantic. *Damn. I forgot, with these two showing up.* He himself is in a near panic*. Now, what to do with them* *and her*. Fuming, Azrael has no idea. *Managing all this is harder than I thought it would be*. He recalls the Lord final words: *He said* *I was not ready to rule, and He laughed at me. Well, I’ll show him.*

To admit Adonai was right, Azrael would have to humble himself; no way, not then and not ever as far as he’s concerned. *I’ll show him. I need a plan but first, decide what to do,* Lucifer muses. *Don’t let him be right.* Though the competition is only in Lucifer’s mind.

Azrael shouts, “Get away!” and moves to block Anak.

Anak and Jacob both have questions now. *What is he trying to protect? Better yet, who’s he trying to fool and why?*

Anak circles around Azrael for a better look, except what seems to be a female darts deeper into the pool and is gone in a flash.

Curious and alarmed by what he’d seen, Jacob warns, “I’ve heard strange things about this Nebula. Some of them dangerous. Perhaps this one is also, so we need to be careful.”

Turning to Azrael fuming nearby, his face red with anger, hands in fists at his sides, he said, “You have no right to interfere. How dare you come uninvited and involve yourself with my guest.”

“Your guest! Where in the stars is this?” Anak demands, “And what is that, that thing in the water?”

“Ha.” Azrael scoffs. “This is no Heaven, none I’ve seen. It’s my home. As for that ‘thing’… she is my guest. She was here before you two.”

Jacob interrupts. “How long have you been here?” he asks, irritated and wanting answers.

"None of your business,” Azrael said. “I created this for myself. She showed up and a beauty she is too,” He snickers. “Yes, she’s my guest. If you want her and she doesn’t object, I suppose it’s okay.” *That’s one way to deal with them. And it’s why the succubus was created.*

Ignoring Azrael’s distracting talk, Anak asks. “She looks human, but humans don’t live in water. So, what’s really going on?”

Azrael turns away to collect his thoughts. He changes the subject. “Let’s not talk about her. Who she sees is her choice! Now, who are you and why are you here?”

*What’s this subterfuge? This Azrael changes topics faster than. . . well, faster than a fish moves through water.*

Jacob, however, naturally friendly yet still suspicious, introduces himself and Anak, thinking to get an honest answer out of Azrael, and find out what’s going on, and how to get out of here and back home.

“My name’s Jacob, and we came to the M Galaxy,” he said. “This is my friend, Anak. It was his idea and I came along to help out.”

“Big mistake,” Azrael said with a cruel look in his eyes, looking from one to the other, lip curls up and he’s glad to have distracted them, at least until he can decide what to do.

“What are your plans? Not that it matters. You’ll have plenty of time to do most anything here.” He chuckled. “And the female, for that she is. Don’t know much about her. She’s a pretty thing so I let her stay.”

Jacob, incredulous, is unable to ask a thing. He stares at Azrael who shakes his head “I’ve no idea how she got here. A natural spontaneous creation? Who knows. I am a creator, after all,” he said.

Abruptly the female come to the pool side. “Can you help me?” she asks, tears pooling in her eyes. “You can’t believe what he says. I need help to get home.” She looks slyly at Anak under her thick dark lashes, with the hint of a smile curving her full lips.

Clothed in a blue-green gown, not quite see-through, but enough to be tempting, she glances again at the two and tilts her head. She glances at Azrael first, then focuses her attention on Anak.

Anak is thrilled. "What saddens you?" he said his voice kind as her beautiful violet eyes gaze at him. “I’m here to help,” Anak said.

“I don’t know how I got here,” she said. “It’s not a bad place, but it’s not my home either. I hate living in this, she looks at the water. I’m not sure where my home is anymore.” Tears overflow.

Anak’s heart breaks for her and he wants to comfort the woman but doesn’t know if he should, so he waits.

“All I know is, here I am floating in – whatever it’s called.” She looks up from under her lashes at Anak, pushes a strand of hair behind her ear, hand sliding down across her neck and casually down her arm.

Tensing at her movements, seemingly done unawares, no one moves a muscle; they watch as if mesmerized.

*This doesn’t make much sense,* Jacob thinks, *there must be more to it than what she said. Though she is captivating* and smiles to himself.

Anak, enthralled by her hypnotic movements, looks into the depths of her violet eyes losing himself in her beauty and charm.

Jacob caught in the allure shakes his head to clear it, “It’s water,” he says and looks at Anak, then back at her. Realizing what’s happening, he says, loud enough to get her attention, “This is your home now?”

Blinking and turning from Anak she looks at Jacob, who himself ensnared, turns away, his mouth suddenly dry, heart racing. He knows something is terribly wrong.

“Anak, can I see you alone.” Jacob turns away from her, hoping Anak will follow, but Anak seems not to have heard him. “Hello!” Jacob says, louder, finally gets Anak’s attention.

Azrael laughs, aware of the effect she is having on both angel and mortal soul. *As she was born to,* he muses to himself, seeing now where this situation could lead.

“Yeah,” Azrael said. “It’s a medusa effect.”

*Yes, but Medusa was a monster, a winged human female with living venomous snakes for hair.* Jacob thinks. *Those who gazed upon her face turned to stone. Yes, it sounds right. She could also be a monster.*

She hears Jacobs thoughts and turns quickly to look more closely at him for a second before turning back to Anak and smiling.

“Be careful.” Azrael warned them, “Don’t believe everything she says.” Splashing the water onto Anak, he comes out of his trance.

Jacob is glad because he couldn’t keep Anak’s attention off her.

“What happened?” Anak stutters. “Did I fall asleep or…?” He seems to have forgotten where he is.

“Oh, sleep sure. Don’t know; it’s not like the female knows what she’s doing.” Azrael said with an odd look. “Still, I’ve learned to be wary around her. You never know with females.”

He looked from Anak to Jacob knowingly. “Cli’odhna’s her name and she doesn’t follow the rules. I call her Clio. Makes up her own as she goes along,” Azrael said, nodding toward Anak. “Keep an eye on your friend. Anak, is it?” Azrael remembers Anak quite well.

“Dragon slayer,” he snarls so soft, neither Jacob nor Anak hear.

“Anak’s been around a few centuries,” Jacob said, watching Anak for he’s also attracted, feeling jealous of the attention Clio’s giving Anak. Yet, knows it’s not worth losing a friend over, so turns away.

Jacob takes Anak aside to warn him, “Be careful.”

“Okay. I hear you,” Anak says, yet he can’t keep his eyes off her.

She certainly looks human, but Anak recalls his mother’s words, ‘Remember, wisdom will save you from the woman, who tempts you with sweet words.’ And Ariel’s warnings. ‘Do not be ensnared *by a pretty face,’* still, drawn to her he feels helpless under her spell.

“Be sure you don’t look into her eyes. Are you listening?” Jacob grabs his arm and says, “Anak. Do you hear me? Windows to the soul and her intent may be to ensnare your soul.”

“Okay. I hear you.” Anak walks away, glancing toward Clio but more cautiously, at least for a time. Yet, it isn’t long before Anak is not only looking but talking to and laughing with her, clearly enjoying his time with Clio. *I don’t see what Jacob is so worried about. She’s delightful and not an evil bone in her lovely body.*

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Azrael shows Jacob around his isle he’s so proud of, while Anak spends his time with Clio.

“Isn’t it great. Don’t think anyone else could create this or anything close to it, so beautiful.”

Jacob agrees its lovely thinking, *Earth had beautiful beaches and mountains too, but in* *the Here and Now it’s lovelier than anything in the whole the universe.*

Azrael is furious, hearing Jacob’s thoughts, but tempers his anger and pretends he doesn’t know what they think, yet, his need for revenge kindles a fire in him for his pride is again wounded.

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Day after day Anak leaves Azrael and Jacob to wander the nebula while he makes his way to the pool and Clio. After a time, she begins to share more time with him, talking about her life on the nebula.

“So, you’ve been here a while,” he smiles at the water nymph, for this is what he decides she must be. Stretching out full length on the beach, his shirt off for he has in mind to attract her, though he’s not entirely aware of his reason. Looking over the blue waters, “It’s amazing how beautiful it is here, and the waters so warm.”

To himself he thinks, *You’re so beautiful too, more than the sea. What is she, truly? Do I even care*?’ He turns toward and imagines himself with Clio in a more intimate embrace.

Clio smiles leans down to gaze into his eyes amused. *A water nymph*. She chuckles. *What a romantic. Where did he get that idea*? Hands under her chin, she leans closer to say something, but Anak has turned away to gaze out over the sea and is surprised seeing Clio watch him.

*Oh, my, if I were but decent. He’ll be an easy one to ensnare.*

Clio’s intense eye contact causes Anak’s heart to race as she looks into his eyes, strokes his arm and smiles. She leans even closer then, seeing a sharp intake of breath she pulls slightly away, watching his anxious look as she withdraws. Clio turns to face him with eyes shining brightly, tongue glides across her lips moistening. A smile spreads, her hand reaches to touch his face, moving over his lips in a tender gesture of fascination.

Anak hears his own heartbeat pounding in his chest and a warmth floods his body. His mouth moistens, for he longs to taste her lips. His fingers ache to touch her, so he reaches for her and Clio finds her breath quickens, and a shiver of pleasure washes over her.

Shocked by the emotion he’s provoked, in a blink, Clio slips beneath the surface of the water. Anak doesn’t know what to think. *What did I do to offend her?* He calls, “Where did you go?”

But Clio has gone. So, Anak sits by the pool, waiting. *So beautiful, she rivals the women of earth, who were only interested in marrying and bearing children. Not* *for me.* He muses and before long, Anak falls asleep while waiting for Clio to return.

Cautiously she surfaces, still avoiding him. *So, you’re still here. What to do? Yet, what a lovely one to play with but it’s best not to, unless Azrael desires it. Perhaps I’ll speak to him.* Before Anak awakens and sees her, Clio slips out of the pool and away into the woods.

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Jacob is busy wandering about the isle, which is so much more than it first appeared. Azrael is eager to show him from white sand beaches to snowy mountains. “I’ve never been to the top of a mountain or seen snow! Jacob said. “Of course, we don’t have mountains in the desert.”

“So, you’re seeing snow and white sand beaches for the first time?” Azrael says. “There’s nothing in this nebula or any other like it,” cackling. “I created this.” *Earth hasn’t had a white beach in longer than I can recall. Burned black as the marbled halls of hell now.*

Jacob spends his time with Azrael exploring the isle. As a human soul, Jacob cannot create like Azrael or the angels, so enjoys Azrael’s bringing to life new creatures and plants from nothingness Jacob believes. Missing Anak and thinking he might enjoy the isle too, he says, “Let’s see if Anak wants to go with us.”

“He’ll be okay. What can harm him, right?” Jacob remembers the effect of Clio and fears for Anak. *It’s not why we came here*. *What* *can I do to help him so he doesn’t fall into an entrapment?*

“He’s not a newborn babe. I’m pretty sure he doesn’t need a mommy anymore.” Azrael laughs at Jacob’s discomfort. “Didn’t mean to upset you. I see you care about your friend, so I’m sorry.”

“You’re right. Anak doesn’t need me hovering over him.” Jacob says. “After all, he thinks Adonai sent him for some reason.” Jacob doesn’t notice Azrael flinch at the name Adonai.

*That’s why they came.* “Why would the big guy” He refuses to use the name Adonai “send an angel here to M Galaxy?”

*That’s right. Anak’s an angel and I’m a human soul. He can take care of himself.* He replies to Azrael, “Anak has an overactive imagination and is goes off on a tangent, even when Adonai has other plans in mind.”

“So, he’s done this kind of thing before, has he?”

“No.” Jacob answers. “He’s done some odd things, though. This one is the strangest yet. He’s following some dream.”

Azrael perks up. “A dream: ‘in the faraway reaches of space lies a vast nebula...’” he cackles. “Sorry. Do you remember a movie scene from centuries ago, a Star Wars thing? They were movie films.”

“No.” Jacob replies and shares Anak’s dream. “It sounds interesting. His dream or vision is one reason I agreed to come with him.”

Azrael pretends to find the dream amusing, all the while plotting his revenge on Anak. *It still amazes me how sweet revenge tastes even after the first, or however many times. Will I never tire of it?*

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## 8. Clio

Anak hangs out at the cove near the pool to be near Clio, who seems friendlier now. He enjoys his time with her, the touch of her skin, and the feelings that stir within him.

*If I’d known women could be like this, I’d have met one sooner,* he muses, spending more time with Clio. *I long for her to open to me like a wildflower.* Anak in his poetic mind, imagines how it will feel.

*Open to him like a wildflower!* Clio watches Anak. *He’s not made a move even with my hints. Am I too subtle? Yet, I thought being too direct might scare him.* She smiles to herself. *It’s time I speak with Azrael. Find out what he would have me do.*

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A sweet scent of flowers comes to Anak, *she would love those flowers*. He walks over to pick some for Clio. *In the evening, she’ll be back in my arms and hopefully will enjoy this surprise.* Anak waits long into the evening butClio never appears. *What have I done wrong*? He wonders. *Why does she not come? Does she not care?* Feeling rejected, he wanders down the beach, feeling lost and alone.

Having left as Anak slept, Clio speaks to Azrael, “I left him as you said, for his fears surface and deepen his longing. He’s in love! What more would you have me do? Isn’t it enough, making him miserable.”

Azrael laughs, “Oh, no. You’re not done, my lovely one.”

Clio is hesitant. “Are you sure? I do enjoy it, but an innocent,” she argues. Clio’s come to care for Anak, and avoids Lucifer’s gaze.

“You really like him?” Lucifer said with a snarl. “Do you know what he did to my dragon? I will have my revenge and your part of it,” He said and grabs Clio roughly by the arm to pull her around. “Look at me.”

Trying to pull away, Azrael holds tighter,

“Do you understand the consequences if Adonai knows?” Clio cries, “Why not get out of here and away from him?”

“You, the great tempter with an angel. Unbelievable. Let me tell you what you will do. And it’s not to leave here. You will do whatever it is you do to capture a man or angel’s soul!”

“No!” She said, horrified. “You know he’s sent by Adonai. You know the rules, even in this forsaken place.”

Grabbing her again more roughly by both wrists, Azrael hisses, “When did I ever abide by His rules, or you? Besides, Adonai did not send him, so Anak’s already disobeyed and went off on his own.

“Don’t forget, you were made for one thing.” He plunges his hand between her legs. “Now cease your whining, and take care of it quickly,” His voice turns ugly as he roughly pulls her close to fondle her.

“You don’t have to get so nasty,” She growls. “I know my job is to do your bidding. Let me think a minute.” Azrael finally releases her.

Clio says, “Recall, Sheba, the one who schemed to seduce David?”

“Of course, I do, idiot. I initiated it.” He growled.

“Don’t get so testy. Here’s what we can do.” Even Clio finds herself excited by the thought of taking him to her bed, and eagerly she looks forward to fulfilling her plans.

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In despair, Anak longs for Clio’s return, to touch her once again and feel her heartbeat next to his. *What if I never see Clio again?* In agony, he weeps for his lost love. *My only love,* he moans, miserable at her absence. Climbing a high hill, he gazes out over the forest from high up above and looks down. *She must be out there somewhere*.

A breeze moves the branches of the trees, and as his eyes glance at their movement, he sees her nearby. *There she is.* Watching her bathe a moment, he admires her naked beauty he’d not fully seen before, then realizes he’s invading her privacy. Anak turns away,

Just then, Azrael appears. “What are you doing?” He glances over Anak’s shoulder, “Oh, I see.” Seeing Clio through the leaves. “Why are you leaving?” He gives Anak a little shove. “What are you waiting for? You think she doesn’t know you’re here, watching.” But Anak is unsure. “If you don’t go, you’ll never know.”

Glancing once again through the trees and seeing Clio, Anak turns and begins walking down the hillside through the trees and shrubs, and enters the clearing. He hesitates, a lump in his throat, fearful of being rejected. Clio looks up and steps from the pool, the water slides off her naked form, to pool on the ground at her feet. Moving toward him, she said, “Come to me, love. You know I am here for you.”

His eyes caress her body and he moves as in a trance as Clio glides to him, her hips swaying and he responds as any man would, human or angel. Her hand cups his face, and she tenderly kisses him. Then takes his hand and walks him deeper into the forest shadows.

Aware of Adonai Clio snickers. I*t’s not his kingdom I serve.*

Heart pounding Anak finds it hard to breathe as he touches her silky skin. *How I’ve longed for her.* Wrapping her in his arms, immersed in his passion he falls upon the bed of soft green moss with Clio. Raining kisses on her face, neck and breasts bared to him at last, she guides his face over her belly, savoring his kisses, then lower. He’s enchanted with longing as he tastes her wetness, then moves up to suckle her breasts. Before long the two comingle, to complete their love-making.

Together as the dawn lightens the woods, birds sing in the trees Clio opens to Anak again. Then later she dons her gown and reveals the fantasy she contrived of her life before the Isle. “In the Land of Promise, long ago, one day a great wave swept me away, and before long, I found myself here on this isle.” She smiles. “You wonder how it fits with what I told you before. It doesn’t. Still, you’d love the Land of Promise where life can be whatever you desire.” Her eyes sparkle like diamonds in the morning light. A frown creases her smooth forehead. “My other home, its light never shone as it does here and hurt my eyes, it’s too bright.” *It’s always dark in hell. Lucifer must have a longing for heaven still.*

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Jacob arrives to find them together. Heart thudding painfully in his chest as he sees Anak holding Clio, he burns with jealousy and becomes angry. “What have you done, enticing him with your flesh?” he glares back and forth between Clio and Anak.

“Jealous? So, you come and spoil our time!” Clio accuses. Pulling away from Anak, she rises, and hurries from the woods, vanishing back into the pool and her dark cave.

Anak looks at Jacob, and grasps what’s happening. “Is she right, are you jealous? Else why would you disturb our private time.”

“What in heavens name are you doing? You’ve become ensnared by her beauty and lust after her flesh,”

Jacob’s jealous of what he can only imagine has happened. “It’s easy to see she’s turned you from Yeshua and the Lord Adonai.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Anak said while his gaze tries to follow Clio as she flees. He turns back to Jacob and tries to explain, “I’m in love with her and will make her my wife.”

Shocked by Anak’s words, Jacob says, “She’s only with you because you’re an innocent and unable to resist! You don’t even realize you’re being tempted,” Jacob says. “I’ve seen them together when they didn’t know. You must resist her and turn away.”

“Maybe I don’t want to resist her.” Anak cries. “How can anything so good be bad for me?” He cries. I’m not giving Clio up.”

“You’re an angel. You cannot marry. Don’t you know?” Jacob says. “No one in heaven marries, Humans do not marry in heaven, nor do the angels, not ever. Neither are they given in marriage.”

“It’s too late. I’ve made Clio mine, bonded with her.”

Jacob is at a loss for words. *Lord.* He cries. *How do I help him*? Turning, he wanders off trying to figure out how he can help Anak and get him away from Clio. *And I have no way back. Anak brought us here, so I’m stuck with him.* Turning his eyes up as if he could see the heaven and Adonai, Jacob realizes, *Adonai, You knew we’d take this foolish risk. What do you want from me? I’m here so, I may as well be useful.* Jacob goes his own way, trusting the Lord will inform in time.

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Anak becomes more deeply immersed in the deception and forgets his purpose in going to the M Galaxy. Clio has effectively entrapped him. Jacob struggles to get Anak back to reality but without success.

Speaking to Anak one day, he says, “You accuse me of jealousy and at first, I was jealous, until I realized it was a deception, or a temptation. You have forgotten the dream Adonai gave you! The reason He sent you to this galaxy? I told Azrael about your dream, and this happened.”

“The dream *was* just a dream. Everything is perfect now, so we’re both where we need to be! Maybe it’s the very reason Adonai sent me. I’m not worrying. When it ends, it ends; if an illusion, I’ll figure it out,” yet, he didn’t believe his own words.

Anak returns to Clio and their love nest in the forest. Jacob goes to Azrael and receives no sympathy.

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Pretending to understand, Azrael laughs to himself for the snare was his plan, so he’s not too sympathetic. “Don’t worry. He’s been alone all his life. Now he’s sowing his oats, as humans say. Why begrudge his having some fun? Being in love is a treat. Then when love is gone, the exquisite pleasure in the pain is intense.”

“Since when is pain pleasurable?” he walks away.

Jacob returns to the cove daily to convince Anak to leave Clio while Azrael tries to draw Jacob from Anak, “I’ve a new beach to show you. The sand’s pink like Himalayan salt. The surfing is spectacular.”

Azrael is pleased about Anak and Clio. *Their love affair won’t last. In the meantime, I’ll enjoy it. When Ariel arrives and jettisons the illusion we will both be gone and his pain will just be beginning.*

Chuckling to himself he strolls along, enjoying the deception and Anak’s pain-to-come; *so effective and it’s only the start of my revenge*. He cackles in glee. *Bonded to hell’s brazen temptress, he will yield to me one day as well.* Azrael is unaware of more powerful forces at work.

Jacob’s in turmoil and goes with Azrael, unable to help Anak he cries aloud, “Lord Adonai, hear my prayer! Listen to the words I cry. We are but travelers in this strange place. I’m lost and alone and in need of your help. Help me. Help us, Lord.”

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Occasionally, Anak tempts Clio out of the forest into the bright light of day. Then, one day as he lies on the warm white sands by the water, enjoying himself, Anak turns to see Clio appear, only she’s changed into something quite different. Wide awake, Anak jumped to his feet, stared at the apparition, and said, “Who or what are you?”

A sneer on her not-so-lovely face, he sees Clio as she is, a demon succubus, and he struggles to believe she’s one-and-the-same creature, gargoyle-like with tiny ineffectual wings, and a tail, horns and scaly skin. She rubs her sex against him, “Hello love.” Snickering, red tongue oozing slime flicks between his lips, then she disappears.

Then a more familiar image appears. “How did you get here? Clio, where is she? What’s that vile creature I saw?” Anak watches as the isle or the illusion of it vanishes. White sand, and blue waters of the sea, the pool, the tall treed forest, and mountains, all gone!

“Where is she, Azrael?” he appeals. “Bring her back.” But Azrael too is gone. Desperate for Clio, in despair, his mind numb, unable to think, Anak falls to his knees, as he struggles to understand. “I cannot believe it? Adonai would not do this. He knows I love Clio.” Anak then recalls he had just seen her as a vile demon.

“He would however show you the truth,” Ariel said as she appears. “Slow down. I’ll answer your questions one at a time.” She said, with a grin. “I’ve missed you and wondered where you went. Adonai explained the whole thing to me, and it all makes sense.”

“Well, I wish someone would explain it to me because it doesn’t make any sense.” Anak looks around wildly, hoping Clio will materialize. “Where did she go?”

“Anak, it was an illusion to trick you. Lucifer’s revenge.” Ariel puts an arm around Anak’s shoulders, turns him around. “Have you forgotten the truth you saw; she’s a demon!”

*“*No. You’re the one deceiving me. Why would you?”

*It’s going to be a lot harder than I thought to get him back. Jacob waited too long to ask for help.* Ariel muses. *Guess that’s what happens when you try to do things on your own by yourself.*

Ariel looks into Anak’s eyes and sees only despair. “It’ll be all right. You simply forgot what’s most important.”

“What’s more important?” Tears fill his eyes knowing Clio is gone, vanished with her beauty and the pleasure they enjoyed – gone like she never existed and indeed, the woman he knew never had.

“Come, Anak,” Ariel said. “Let’s return home.”

“No, I will stay and wait for Clio to return.”

Anak roams the nebula for a long time, seeking his lover. His heart cries for her. Any image of her as a demon, he pushes away, refusing to see, convinced Ariel tricked him with the vile image. In time when she doesn’t return, he begins to think about it and questions himself.

*Was it truly all an illusion?* Recalling when he first met Clio and the strangeness of it, how he fell into her hypnotic eyes. Imagining it again, he travels back to that moment in time.

“No!” he shouts. “You’ve tricked me.” And his despair intensifies. Denying the loss, he refuses to speak when Ariel shows up repeatedly. “Begone. How could you?” He returns to his memories, and being in the woods with Clio, making love in the moonlight.

Anak recalls the first time, wanting her so much and she wasn’t there. At the peak of his despair, he saw her in the pool bathing. Azrael came and urged him to go to her. *Was it all an illusion,* not wanting to believe it but he begins to see the truth.

Anak wanders the stardust of the nebula seemingly for endless days longing for the white sand beaches and blue sea, but mostly he yearns for Clio. Yet, all is gone, as is Clio. Weeping, a deep emptiness overtakes him. He realizes, Azrael duped him.

﻿Tipping back his head he looks up at the stars, then lets it fall and walks on, feet dragging and catching with each step. Anak weeps with reddened eyes tears slide unheeded down his cheeks. An uncontrollable moan wracks him as he struggles to contain his pain. Falling to a moon on one of the distant planets in the nebula, Anak whispers, “Lord, why did I have to love her?” Head pounding, he rubs his chest to rid himself of the heartache, but it remains and he can feel it pulse in his throat.

Losing track of time his bleak thoughts persist. She’s gone and I’m alone. I can’t live without her. Emotions numbed he ceases to care and doesn’t notice when Ariel drops in occasionally. He’s shut down, and thoughts of suicide come and he shakes his head. *I can’t die anymore.* Bitterness is his constant companion.

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Azrael gloats. “Ah, my love. You did well.” As she weeps, he snorts, “You’re pathetic. Where is my shameless seducer, the one who enjoys the pleasure of fornication! How many broken hearts have you left and this one has you weeping wretchedly. You look disgusting, red swollen eyes with snot coursing from your nose. Clean yourself up.”

Azrael glares at her. “How in hell or anywhere else is this helping?” Clio stops, knowing he’s right; the sorrow helps not. “You’re right” She glares at Azrael “I can still feel bad. He’s a sweet boy and did enjoy his first time and the others. “So, get my mind on some other wretch. Who do you need me to tempt? Please, no innocents.”

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Anak weeps until there are no more tears. At times he cries to Azrael to return her, knowing it is hopeless.

“I don’t understand. Even when warned, I fell into temptation,” he says to Ariel who happens by on one of her infrequent visits.

Ariel said, “Now you know the temptations angels like your father faced on earth, those who followed Lucifer; it is not a sword, arrow, or another but flesh is the greatest weapon of all. Temptation is so subtle. Lusts of the flesh; they are most dangerous−a woman, a drug, or really anything. Look at all you’ve lost. Do you even know?”

“My friend, Jacob.” His shame now overwhelms and he weeps anew until he hears Jacob say, “It’s okay, Anak. I’m here.” Jacob was waiting to speak to him but Anak pushes him away angry.

“How can you after what I did? I’m no friend. I don’t know why you would want me.” Anak disappears into the depths of the nebula, once again looking for what he’d lost, “Azrael. Bring her back to me.” Jacob suspects Azrael is Lucifer, but he cannot find either of them.

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Lucifer relishes his revenge. “How sweet it is,” he crows, savoring the pain Anak is experiencing. “He’ll find a way out of course and I’ll find a way to make him suffer again.” Rubbing his hands together in glee, he looks forward to the day. And he sends Clio on to her next conquest.

Lucifer, known as Azrael, snickers malevolently to his demon hoard. “You see, it’s not the one act of vengeance that’s so lovely, rather it’s the gratification you gain in repeating it again and again−for as long as there is−for all eternity.”

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Profound despair crowds his every thought. “I want to not live,” he cries. “I cannot bear this pain. Where has my love gone?”

“I am right here.” A voice speaks “Whatever made you believe you needed anything or anyone but me, Love itself?”

Love so warm, secure, and enveloping permeates his being, more than any he’d yet experienced. “Adonai,” he cries. “Father. Oh Lord. I’m sorry.” He tumbles into the embrace of the One who is love, who loves and never leaves. “Forgive me Father. I know you love me and call me your own; I am your child.”

“Weep and endure, for the new day comes bringing joy,” Adonai said, a smile in His voice. “And now return.”

Anak and his friend Jacob find themselves home in Here and Now. Ariel speaking to the angels, while Anak and Jacob listen.

“Lust of the flesh,” Ariel said, “is what all humans and angels face; it’s a great temptation. It pulls us away from all that’s good. Anak, now understands he’s learned a lesson of which we all may benefit.”

Anak nods his head in agreement. His memory of Clio fades when compared to his memory of Adonai’s loving embrace; it goes on.

“The answer, no matter who, when troubles come go to Adonai and put your trust in Him. Forgive. Yes, that includes Lucifer. Don’t look so shocked. Has not the Lord said love even your enemy? Is not Lucifer your enemy, how much more so is forgiveness for the hurt he causes so deliberate, or the temptations he’s visited upon people.

“There is much to be learned for everyone. I hope you can see that fighting demons is not simply a matter of picking up a sword and shield but is much more. And yes, there are battles in the heavens that require weapons of war. Michael’s expert with those, as Adonai’s commander, those are his areas of expertise to teach.”

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# Part Six

This section addresses modern-day trials and failed belief systems. Ever since life began on Earth, people have had to deal with obstacles, and for centuries, we’ve tackled them to the best of our ability. Some of the problems confronting us today include:

* Climate change is something that’s happened for decades and it’s the outcome of human selfishness and greed.
* Cruel and greedy people are ready to sell their souls for money. And these same people run our nations, indeed the world.
* Money is needed, which most of us earn through employment. But the economy is so bad, it’s hard to get a decent job.
* Worldwide, basic needs are not being met. Women, men, and children are abducted, raped, and killed, increasing fear.
* Religious conflict is one of the biggest modern-day problems but this is not new, either, nor is hatred and rejection of God.
* Whether we like it or not, we’ve become social media slaves, hooked to cell phones and tablets. Addicted is a better word, and it has influenced people to such a huge scale it seems impossible to control anymore.
* Drugs, sex, and the media are cause for much human suffering, so, you’ll read about some of these within the story as well.

## 1. In the Now

**On earth,** before his death, a Nephilim, Anak had been abandoned by his father, Andras. A fallen angel, he’d impregnated an earth woman, Anak’s mother, Meira. As a half-human, Anak understood what life was like for his mother and the hardships she endured, which led to his kind and gentle nature. This was not true for all Nephilim, spawn of an angel, most did not care. Yet, the knowledge helped Anak, until Clio.

Having overcome his earlier challenge with Clio, Anak now returns to earth to help those, who like him when tempted did not resist and lost their faith. Anak, now an angel, appears as a human on earth, as do many angels who’ve gone before him. The difference, with heaven’s insight he could change events on earth. Still, the benefit in his foresight is to suggest ideas or a course of action, but not interfere with personal choices or alter the consequences of those choices – for good or ill.

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Anak, and Malek, both angels, and Jacob, a human soul go to the earth to help humans in need. Some challenges are worse than others. But they do their best to steer a better course for some humans.

*Made more than my share of mistakes*, Frank thought and rocked to a song from the 90s sipping an eggnog that tasted like old socks. *It’s hot. My face tattoo itches and shirt’s soaked. They look away from me, not seeing my slogan, ‘Bad Choices Make Great Stories.’ It’s true but to hell with them. Who needs any of those fools?*

“Pretend you don’t see me,” he yells at people walking by, but they move far away pretending not to see him. He considers the coming night. *It’s going to be dark soon. Need a fix. Shit, need money for a fix.* Not finishing the thought, he moves on, desperately seeking.

A man watches down the block, thinking, *I should be ashamed of myself, but he has needs as do I, just different*. he snickers. *I’ve got what he needs and he’d do for me.*

Anak sees the man as he goes after the boy, blade in pocket. “Hey, kid. I got what you need.” His look said it all.

The boy nods, knowing what the man wants and moves into the alley, drops to his knees, and waits hand out.

The man enters the alley, looks around, puts some money in. the boys hand, then leaning against the brick wall he unzips, and closes his eyes as the boy’s mouth moves toward him.

“What’s going on?” Anak said, entering the alley. He pushes the man away from the boy to move beside him and puts a hand on his shoulder to stay the boy before he can run off. The pervert grabs his money back and hurries off down the alley, zipping up.

Anak said, “You’re too young for this, though there’s no good age.” Anak looks up and down the dark alley, waste cans overflowing littered with stinking garbage. “Do you really want this life? On your knees for someone who only brings death?” He looks at the boy, but he answers him not. *He couldn’t be more than sixteen.*

“Who the hell are you? Why do you give a damn?” He said with a snarls. “You just cost me.” On his feet now, he starts to walk away.

Reaching into his pack, Anak pulls out some bills. “Take this and get what you need, but if you ever want real change. You think about taking on someone like him,” he nods his head in the direction the other guy went, “He would have slit your throat−and for what!” Anak leaves his card with a number, and the boy with his thoughts. “Call.”

“To know how to free oneself is nothing; the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom.” He says aloud then to himself, *what would the boy do with his freedom?*

“What’s happening?” Malek’s voice snatches Anak out of his reverie on a quote by Andre Gide, a French Author who received a Nobel Prize, as he comes strolling up the street.

“Fixing a boy’s mistake. I was trying to help.”

Malek, another angel joined Anak as Jacob came toward them, the human soul who works alongside him. Now a threesome, they roam the earth seeking those who Lucifer would like to devour.

“Most don’t want help. Their mistake leads to captivity to drugs and sex—when all they want is freedom. Look what it gets them!”

“Manlike turn and face it. Look into its eyes, search its nature—see the lions whelping. . . you will find inside the perfect grasp of its nature and with his hands, will meet on the other side, defy it,’” Anak quotes.

“I have no idea what it means,” Malek said, “but it’s amazing, how you recall those poems or quotes. Don’t hear you recite them often.”

“Emerson’s words encouraged his readers to discover their own inner voice, to find and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin, and see. His hands meet on the other side, he can henceforth defy it, and move on.

“Hope the boy’s choices don’t ruin him, condemn him to despair and misery, hell in other words. I’ve offered hope, a silver-lining — if nothing bad happens first. If he’ll calls, he’ll be okay. To have empathy for the pervs too is important for many were also used as children, but why they turn out the way they do, I’ll never understand. Paid attention to the wrong prompts.”

The two move off down the darkening streets, looking for someone in need, someone who may be looking for hope instead of a needle and disease or death.

Stopping for a moment to greet some of the ladies of the night, Anak, and Jacob share Adonai and his love and offer resources to get them off the path they’re on, at least for a night. “Aren’t you sweet,” one said, laughing. “You or your mate want anything, we’ll be here for you.” Amused by these men, so different from the ones they usually meet, the women walk away.

“Where’d Jacob go?”

“At the center, giving a talk on regret. Several kids have shown up. We can hope some will take it to heart. Last week several gave their life to Yeshua. However, not all of them stick with it, sadly.”

“I wish there were more we could do. Yet, interfering is not part of the plan. Do what we can and move on. Maybe we should join Jacob.”

“Fear can motivate. Others heed the call of love and forgiveness, but not all.” As they walk in the door of the center, they hear a song:

“Amazing grace, it’s sweet sound; did save a wretch like me. Once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see. Oh, grace it taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did grace appear, the hour I first believed.”

They noticed Jacob sharing John Newton’s story with some teens who sat listening intently.

“John wrote Amazing Grace because of his gratitude for a God who loved and helped him turn away from a sinful life. The ship he traveled on was in a severe North Atlantic storm over a week, its sails ripped and the wood on one side splintered. The sailors knew they were going to die but worked nonstop to keep the ship afloat. After eleven days, John, too exhausted to pump, tied himself to the helm and held the ship on course for eleven hours.

“As the storm raged, he thought about his life; it was a ruin and a wreck just as the ship he was trying to steer in the storm. At sea since age eleven, like many sailors, he was a profane and coarse man.

“John denied his mother's teachings and led others to deny Adonai. In despair of his life, however, John turned to Adonai. In reading from a Testament verse, he hoped God heard him. *If you being evil, give good gifts to your children: how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to whoever asks*. ‘That day, the Lord delivered me out of deep waters.’ he said. As an old man, John wrote: ‘Only God's amazing grace could take a rude, profane, slave-trading sailor and transform him into a child of God.’ John was in awe of God his entire life.”

The story awed the teens and perhaps even saved some or it would one day. Nevertheless, opinions about Adonai varied among the teens.

A young girl, hair dyed black with blue-tinted spikes said, “I believe in a god who created the world and watches over some. Maybe it’s the same as Adonai.” She shrugs like she isn’t sure. “There’s no way any god cares about us though. We don’t fit the mold.”

Another girl wearing jeans too big for her and a tank top, her face scarred with acne spoke up. “I think Adonai wants all people to be nice, be fair to each other, what most religions teach. But they have a lot of rules that make it impossible."

"Life should be happy." An angry-looking boy said. “Cept there’s no such thing. You’d have to be able to trust someone and I haven’t found anyone I can trust yet.”

“I like you using the word yet, Jacob said. It suggests you have hope that one day you’ll be able to trust. Not everyone is trustworthy and we have to guard our lives carefully against those who deceive.”

Many of the kids looked thoughtful, nodded their heads.

A sad-looking youth, twisting his hands back and forth snarled and said, “Adonai is not any more real than other gods people worshipped for centuries. When I need help, there’s no god anywhere.” He spit on the ground and glared at Jacob.

“Yet, here you are listening and, I like to think, hoping.”

“I know if you’re good and don’t hurt anyone you go to heaven, at least my parents said so. Though they're not very nice people. Does that mean they’ll go to hell?"

“If you believe in a hell. No hell below us, above us only sky.” Said one girl, looking around for agreement.

Most indicated agreement.

“Because you believe in something, like John Lennon’s song doesn’t means it’s true.”

“Yeah, and because you believe in a god doesn’t mean it’s true.” Snarled the same boy from earlier.

To his surprise, Jacob agreed with him and said, “This is the reason one must carefully consider what they believe and not accept every lame idea presented. It’s something worth thinking about and maybe talking about again, next time we meet, okay?”

Most nodded in agreement but still are confused about Adonai and what it means to believe in Him. Anak wishes he could share his whole story but it involves too many events they’d not find believable.

*They’d think I was high, but some have testimonies, like Jacob who’s saved by the blood of the lamb and his testimony. I’m thinking a lot of them would be open to his story next time.*

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## 2. All Gone

**No longer** are there Nephilim. The giants are gone and earth differs from when Anak was on the earth several centuries before. It’s now the 22nd Century. An apocalypse many Christians had looked forward to for years, came and went in 2031-33. Still, the world was in such conflict, its people couldn’t tell an apocalyptic event if plastered to a billboard, they were simply trying to survive one more day.

Other dangers lurked. The rich and powerful against the poor and weak, drugs and violence are widespread. People lose faith in anything or anyone. Sunk in depression and hopelessness many turn away from Adonai blaming him and refusing to turn to Him in their need. Liberal churches preached a message agreeing with a sin life wherein Yeshua's name is despised and not trusted. Preachers preached the opposite of what the Bible taught at one time; they’d rewritten it.

“We’re sinners who can’t even come close to perfection, though we’re created in His image and loved without reservation supposedly. So, love as you please. Hetero or homosexual matters not. Adonai loves and created you as you are. Paul taught criticisms about homosexuals, but it’s not relevant for those today who serve a loving god!

“Those prejudiced against homosexuals misread the scriptures and use Gods Word to accuse and condemn homosexual behavior perverted by 18th century bigots. These scriptures are taken out of context and do not apply." This was the false message many preached.

“They accuse gays of not hearing sound teaching, having itching ears and hanging around those who agree with their fleshly passions and turn from the truth.” He went on to say, “They are the ones not hearing right teachings and have turned to their own bigoted ways, calling us perverts when its they who pervert the truth.”

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Anak said, “We bring Adonai’s message of grace not the false messages, causing harm. Honor Yeshua as Lord, and give an answer for your hope, if anyone asks. And yes, people have a right to live as they choose. And they have a right to the consequences of their choices.

“Do you know what you believe and why you believe? This is not to smile at or nod your head without understanding. Ask yourself, what do you believe? If you cannot answer it, come speak to me later?"

“Some believed Yeshua would take them from earth in a so-called Rapture−before the apocalypse. When He didn’t, they turned away from the faith. Some had a ‘whatever” attitude to make it through the hard times. Their faith was in themselves and ideas some taught which are not of the Lord; they lost heart and walked away from the faith.

“Let me take a minute here to share what it means to believe. We are to live worthy as a people Adonai chose to be his, which means to be humble and gentle, patiently put up with each other for love is being kind. And live at peace with everyone, as much as you can. Some people can make it nearly impossible, and it takes time to learn and grow into these ways of being, as well.

“None of us is better than another. Adonai uses us for his purposes. Yeshua went to heaven from earth to fill the entire universe. No matter where we go in the beyond, Yeshua has gone before. Isn’t that amazing! And we have a home there with him one day.

“Whatever has you fretting and in despair, remember He is your God and is there for you. Have faith and use the gifts Yeshua gave to prophets, pastors, artists, teachers, or any of the other creative or more practical. In this way, we serve each other and grow healthy. We all are united by faith with real joy and peace of mind when we love fully.

“Sadly, those who do not believe in Adonai have no one to turn to for comfort or help. Suicide is a way out for many, speaking of which…” Anak notices Jacob signal him.

“We have Another suicide attempt.”

“Okay,” Anak says. “Sorry to cut this short but we must be off. We’ll pick up where I left off when I return, the Lord willing.” Joining Jacob, the two are soon on their way to help.

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Ashly picked up the bottle of iodine with the skull and crossbones on its label. Her wound in need of healing is not on the outside but the inside. A friend’s thoughtless remark, not intended to be malicious, had cut Ashly deeply. Holding the bottle of iodine and looking at the poison label, she thought, *I could drink this and end it all.*

Hurt and discouraged, she is overwhelmed. *Why are my thoughts so sad? This isn’t me.* *What difference does it make? I cannot manage it, not today; it’s too much.*

The hurt a raw wound opens the way for demon Despair to creep near and claim another victim. He whispers to the girl, *Go ahead. No one cares. And you don’t care so why not do it?*

“To hell with it,” Ashley cried. “I’m doing it.” She lifts the bottle to drink and end her life as Jacob and Anak enter. Arriving in spirit form, Ashley cannot see them but the demon can and quietly leaves.

Jacob watches the woman unscrew the lid on the bottle. “Anak, what are we going to do?” What seems like forever is but a moment for these celestials as they debate what to do and how to help.

“I don’t know. What’s in the bottle?”

“Iodine! It may be poison. Not enough to kill her. It will make her sick and more miserable.”

“Let her be sick and miserable,” Anak says and shrugs. “It’s not like we can take the bottle from her without her knowing.”

Jacob reaches out and Anak shouts into Ashley’s silence, “No Jacob, you can’t…” Jacob’s hand merely brushes against Ashley’s. The bottle slips from her fingers, falls to the floor and spills. Then a bright red stain spreads over the hardwood floor.

*At least Ashley will never know an angel accidently upset her plans,* Anak muses as he and Jacob watch to see what she does.

“Oh no,” she cried. *Mom will be furious when she sees the stain.* Bending down to clean up the spill her eyes land on the bottom shelf of a bookcase. Ariel who watched the event had pushed one of the books to the forefront earlier, unseen by Anak or Jacob.

*Holy Bible,* Ashley reads. *Haven’t seen that in a while.*

Picking it up, the book opens to the page with Psalm 46:1. She reads, “God is our refuge and strength, a help in trouble.” Tears well up and overflow down her cheeks. “I’m sorry Lord for what I had planned,” she said. “I’d forgotten, for a moment. Please forgive me.”

“All’s well that ends well,” Jacob says with a smile.

“Yeah, if my hand hadn’t hit yours and knocked it away. . .” Anak rolls his eyes like a little child. “It’s a good thing we were here. Thanks for that quick thinking with the book.”

“Nope. I didn’t touch the book.”

“Just dumb luck then,” Anak says and turns to leave.

“Dumb luck. Seriously?” Eyes wide, he shakes his head.

Neither one noticed Ariel hovering nearby, keeping an eye on them, intervening as they wobbled earlier with indecision.

“So,” Jacob asks. “Where we off to next?”

“Ariel said a friend of Yeshua, his friend’s daughter will try to take her life tonight. We are needed there right away.”

“Not another. We’re on suicide watch? I hoped for something more exciting, like a murder or robbery.” Jacob says. “It would be fun to stop a criminal and turn their life around.”

Anak rolls his eyes, feeling a bit juvenile. “Suicide can be more lethal than a robbery; is has more eternal consequences. A bank when robbed, well, there’s a chance for the thief to repent. With suicide, if successful, their chance is gone out the window or down the bottle.”

Anak also points out. “Suicides are not criminal, in a sense, yet they are a sin to Adonai. We must prevent her death so she may come to know Yeshua. We can hope and pray anyway.”

Before long Anak, and Jacob are at the house. The 18-year-old girl has already taken the pills in hopes of ending her life. She has no knowledge of the angel’s presence for she is not conscious.

“It was a tragic mix that led to this suicide attempt,” Anak said. “First, a knee operation so she’s out of sports the last year of high school and it was important to her. She’s a star athlete.

“A friend criticized her for something and her boyfriend cheated on her with the friend. She began drinking so her ability to cope had vanished. The teen took the whole bottle of pain meds at bedtime.

Anak instructs, “Let’s get busy and wake up her family so they can get her to the hospital. Her dad’s still at work and her brother’s asleep. Make sure her mother wakes up, okay? Give her a dream. She responds well to dreams or has in the past. I’ll keep an eye on the girl.”

Jacob set off to the mother’s room and quietly enters her sleep with a dream about her daughter in great danger in a ridiculous scenario with a bear attacking the girl. Still, it worked, for the mother awoke and remembered the dream. *Good grief. A bear attacks Julie. How ridiculous.* She rolls over to return to sleep but memory of the dream continues to bother her. *Rats. I better go see if she’s all right.* She struggles into her bathrobe and trudges down the hall. *Likely she’s fast asleep and won’t even know. She hates it when I check up on her.*

Knocking lightly on her daughter’s door and getting no response, she quietly opens the door and peeks in. *What is that?* She spies an empty pill bottle on the bedside table. *She just had that filled after the accident. It shouldn’t be empty.* Going to her daughter, the mother shakes her and tries to wake her. “Julie, are you alright?” She said but the girl didn’t respond. “Oh, my,” the mother looks closer, sees her face, pallid, a bluish tinge to her lips. Fearful, she runs back to her bedroom, grabs the phone and dials 911; it was answered after several rings.

“911. How may I help you?”

“Hello. I believe my daughter overdosed. The pill bottle is empty and she won’t wake up. Please. She looks awful.” Dropping the phone, after she gives the operator her address, the mother returns to Julie, falls on her knees beside the bed and prays. Anak and Jacob watch and pray, as Julie’s breathing becomes slower and more labored.

Soon, an ambulance and the police arrive. The EMTs place an oxygen mask placed over Julie’s face and insert an intravenous line. Loaded into the ambulance she’s on her way to the hospital.

The EMTs assure the mother likely her daughter will be okay. “You did good, found her in time. It’s a good thing you called when you did.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I had a dream something was wrong and went to check. After I called 911, all I could do was pray.”

“Well, that never hurts, either.” The two said as Ariel arrived and frowns at them. *Never hurts. Humph. Those two need a wake-up call. I’ll have to speak with the Lord about them.*

Ariel congratulates Anak and Jacob saying. “People can live for weeks without food, days without water, and a few minutes without oxygen, but without hope, the demon gains a foothold that can be deadly.

“But now she has a chance to meet Yeshua.” Each stood silent and thanked the Lord Adonai they were there to help so the girl would make it to her next birthday and sporting event.

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In the new age, several technologies fell into disrepute and collapsed, out went the lights and in came the dark and the beasts of greed.

“You want drama, well, it’s at your doorstep.” Ariel said.

“Sounds like Azrael is back at work. Will it never end?”

Jacob smiles. “You really want it to? Come on now.”

In the shadows of an ancient church, the four huddle with Ariel.

“What are we here for?” Malek whispers.

“Just watch,” Ariel said so low they could barely hear.

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## 3. Dark Powers

Out of the darkness, powers held back by Heaven and prayer emerge in dark magic. A priest, intent on creating chaos lights black candles in the church’s sanctum. Several figures in robes stand in a circle, uttering an eerie sound. The pitch rises and falls as an obese woman utters a guttural moan. She lies completely unclothed among Lucifer’s acolytes in a ritual of some sort! Apparently conscious, they know she is willing. Blood is in the chalice for they can smell it.

*What’s going on, if it’s not a blood sacrifice.* Then it occurs to Anak, *Oh, they can’t be doing what I think they’re doing.*

“We have to stop it!” Anak said. “You can’t let this continue.” He whispers urgently to Ariel the archangel. Anak grabs her arm. Frowning, she pushes his hand away. He is confused.

“If you can’t be quiet, then leave.” Ariel said harshly. “Now, watch.”

As the chanting continues, they hear her moan and cry in passion, until peaking, then the woman sighs. The obese woman quiets and lies still a moment, then begins to rise. The acolytes help the wobbling mass of flesh off the table and cover her in a red robe. The priest turns to the sanctum, lifts the chalice of blood, drinks, and offers it to the woman, who looks like she isn’t quite there, but she drinks. The acolytes walk her from the room.

The priest stands for a moment, then turns to leave, but first he looks in their direction, his tongue flicks out to lick the remnants of blood from the chalice as he grins. Suddenly, he too is gone, vanished.

Anak turns to Ariel. “Why must we be quiet when the priest knew we were here? It’s an abomination and it’s appalling. You knew what was happening! What’s the point of allowing it to continue?”

Ariel said, “He may have known we were here, the acolytes did not. Had they known, they would have directed their powers at us, thereby ending the ritual and doing no one any good.”

“Isn’t that what we want? It was disgusting,” Jacob said.

“Only angels and demons can see the demon incubus performing. I allowed it because, had I not, they would have gone elsewhere,” Ariel said. “Then, we’d have to start all over.” She walked into the sanctum, where the ritual had taken place.

“It was a sex ritual with a demon to produce a child with which to fill the earth. Worse, it would have been a similar yet distorted breed of the many sins it carried. The incubus promote sexual sins.”

Anak said. “There’s more than one!”

“It’s not like a Hollywood movie of ancient earth with Lucifer’s one and only child being conceived. This one cannot survive. So, we let them think they’re achieving this evil plot. Lucifer’s not going to win. Now you know what evil he is trying to perpetuate, while less than he imagines, you can help to stop it.”

“There is a choice between good and evil in the world,” Anak said. “This coven chose evil over good. I feel bad for the women who chose to bear a demon child, campion they’re called and then to watch it die.”

“No, when born, the child will enter hell to be trained, those who live anyway. The women will have no memory. After a few months, the child dies and Lucifer will weep and wail. Not at the death of his demon changeling but at his failure once more.”

Anak and the other two smirk at the thought of Lucifer losing.

“I feel bad for the children.” Jacob asks, “Do they remain in hell?”

“No, it’s similar to Anak,” Ariel said. “The children are half-demon and half-human so upon its death, its soul’s given a choice. Anak chose his angel DNA. Adonai never abandons children. They die in innocence, so they have a choice. Humans don’t, of course.

Some select heaven others hell. It depends on the personality, genetics, and of course, personal inclinations influence its decision. Though it’s a soul and not a grown, it has a mind and can choose.

“The earlier scene was important to learn from, so when you see it, you will not interfere but leave it unless instructed otherwise.”

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Aside from demonic ritual’s, stories circulate of miraculous events as well, which the angels usually participate in. Often, no one believes them. Yet, with miracles, angels Anak and Malek help to bring healing or wisdom and knowledge, as needed.

“Check this out,” Jacob said, reading from a local paper. ‘An emergency team Tuesday night recovered the body of a 14-year-old boy from Lacona Lake after he drowned. It was ruled an accident.’

“It seems a group of boys went swimming and after they hadn’t seen their friend for about an hour, they searched for him. They waited long enough to miss him. They looked and found his clothes but not the boy. So, the other boys called 911. The sheriff’s office showed up with divers who found his body in the lake within a few minutes.”

Jacob shook his head. “This is a tragedy. We’re worried about demons and what they do in the world and this is happening. Anak, there must be something we can do about this sort of thing, right?”

“Maybe a demon wasn’t to blame for the boy’s death,” Malek says with a shrug. “I agree with you, though; it is tragic, but we weren’t there nor were we notified, so our help wasn’t required.”

Anak pauses, “I’m not so sure. Perhaps, we were meant to know and find a way to help the humans? Interesting you should see that article and have feelings about it.”

Malek and Jacob look interested. “Like what,” they said in unison. “What could we possibly do?”

“That’s what has me interested. I have an idea. Thing is, we need to find someone who can help make the−whatever−miracle happen.”

“What miracle?” all spoke in unison.

“Imagine this. A life vest for swimmers.”

“Life vest for swimmers!” Laughing. “Why? You go to swim not float in the water, Anak! Have you ever gone swimming?” Jacob said.

“No. But listen for a minute. Let me describe it. The life vest would not inflate, right away. Made of a material that did not inhibit the sun from, well, aiding humans in getting a ‘tan’ they so love.

Still, why anyone wants to darken their skin and get skin cancer, I’ll never know. Here’s the idea. “The vest could be made of a comfy inflatable and secure material.”

“Not plastic,” Jacob interjected. “Eew.”

“No. It something else. The most important would be its assets. Those being, once the body temperature fell below 96 degrees Fahrenheit, or their heart rate slowed below 50 beats, or they’d not taken a breath, say within 30 seconds to 3 minutes. That part could be a variable, depending on the person. Some can hold their breath longer. Anyway, if the limits are violated the vest would inflate and the person be brought to the surface.”

Anak looks at his friend’s astonished faces. “What do you think? Would it work? Assuming we can find someone to make it.”

Jacob said. “That’s a great idea and a miracle to find someone. Now, who? It needs to be someone who could make it affordable for kids from a poor home, those who have few resources.”

Malek said, “Now we pray for guidance.” And they did.

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Adonai must have been waiting around for them to pray so he could answer because an opportunity arose the very same day.

“So, you’re saying, this guy walked up to you and said, he heard you were looking for an investor and he didn’t have a clue what you wanted invented, but was willing to take it on?”

Jacob looks suspicious, but knowing him they also knew paranoia was a tendency, or one could say it was one of his personality quirks.

“Yup. I told him, ‘it sounds like you heard from Adonai.’ He laughed.”

“So. What did you do then?” Malek asked, chuckling.

“Told him, of course, we had prayed for someone and here he was, so, what else was there to think?”

“And?”

“He gave me an odd look and said he’d get back to me. Haven’t seen him since, but he’s the one, only he has to wrap his head around the idea of Adonai speaking through him, and then, his obeying.”

Anak smiled, “Okay. I guess we simply wait until… well, whenever.”

“We who wait on the Lord renew our strength. We mount up with wings of eagles, run, and are not grow weary, we walk, and do not faint!” Malek said a huge cheesy grin spreading across his face.

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“You heard from him! And he’s willing to take on the project? How? Money is always needed.” Jacob said.

“Oh, we have a backer. He just doesn’t know it yet.” Anak said with a knowing smile.

“You mean the guy who’s going to create the creation?”

“Yes. He’s looking over the plans and design right now. My guess is, he’ll see its potential for making him very rich in a short time. Mainly if he markets it in the desert states. People spend a lot of time on the water. So, there’s potential for everyone. Harry makes money and we save lives.”

“Likely, he’s interested in growing his bank account.” Frowning, Jacob looks disgruntled. “Is he for real? I don’t know about him.”

“I mentioned to Harry−his name−*Seek the Lord He will prosper you*. While he wasn’t explicitly talking about money, Harry was.

“I forgot to tell you, he lost a daughter a few years ago. She drowned. So, the Lord will help him to do the right thing. After his daughter died, he was angry and quit following Yeshua. We had a conversation about that too and he’s coming around or will.

“I suggest he find a church whose emphasis is not on money and false religion. Like this one.” Anak points to a church down the street.

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It was a refreshing day. Harry walked into his first service in years. A woman who’d quit coming stood hesitantly outside surrounded by well-meaning friends. She’d attended this same church for years then recently had stopped because of the other pastors’ emphasis on money.

“Come on. The new pastor is great. You’ll enjoy his preaching.” The friends encouraged her.

Tentatively, the woman went inside with them. Anak and Jacob sat in the back and listened to a good sermon−one of Yeshua’s favorites−how to manage your wealth for His kingdom. The pastor began to speak then, seemed to change his mind.

While her friends had invited the woman to return to the church she had been going to another for some time. All that preacher spoke about was money and how to make more. She quit, felt all he was interested in was acquiring the money in her bank like the other one.

*It’s interesting,* she thought. *It seems they always ask for a tithe and then more. What am I even doing here? It’s the same thing.*

Looking around, it didn’t seem the church was in need. Beautifully appointed with plush seating, stained glass, and nice paintings on the wall, she thought, *what they needed is more Lord and less money, unless the pastor’s sabbatical needs financing. Hush now,* she told herself. *You're unfaithful to Yeshua. Forgive me Lord,* she said, ashamed.

She noticed a change in the sermon. Listening, her attitude altered.

“Good morning,” he said. “I had a sermon prepared then felt the Lord speak. So, open your Bible and turn to Luke 14, verses 28-30.

“Yeshua said: …to build a house. You first estimate the cost to see if you have enough? To lay the foundation and not be able to finish, those who see will ridicule you and say, ‘this man began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ Likely he did not manage his money well, which we’re all familiar with for we’ve done it too. [Laughter]

“Clearly, with every decision we make, we give our allegiance to the kingdom of self or to Adonai’s. Even houses can become a burden if we try to keep up with the Jones and it can take over our lives and lead us into poverty. I’ve certainly experienced that in my life. Any of you?”

Several people were nodding their heads and the pastor could see the Lord was working on a few. The woman he’d noticed standing outside earlier was also paying attention and in a more positive mood. *Not that I’m surprised*, he said to himself. Yeshua does know what he’s doing after all.

“Yeshua’s advice with wealth has to do with not its acquisition,” he said. “More importantly, it’s about how we manage our finances and our relationship with our money; this shows where our real treasure lies.

“These are Yeshua’s words, “Do not store treasures on earth, where it can easily be destroyed or stolen, but store treasures in heaven, where no one can ruin what you have nor take from you. Where your treasure is, there is where your heart is. The verses are Matthew 6:19-33.

“Often, the Lord reminds, we focus on bringing in money for the church and its ministries, which some believe indicates success. But are we truly successful? Yeshua was not a wealthy man, yet look at what He has achieved in His 2000-year-old ministry! The reward he sought didn’t occur overnight. They’re ongoing. Still Yeshua gave of himself, his time, and his personal resources, his gifts if you will. This is what those who do not have deep pockets can do, give of your time or other types, work in soup kitchens, etc.”

People, nodded in agreement, except for a few of the prosperous big donors in the church. *Their displeasure will surely mean* *unpleasant results*, the pastor thought uneasy, *their discontent is not my problem nor should they dictate Adonai’s Word*. He went on with the Word of the Lord.

Anak and his group met that evening to discuss the church service. They had stayed behind after service, to listen to conversations. “Sounds like he’s making some changes for the better and many agree with him,” Anak said. “Not everyone listens after praying though.”

“Harry stayed to speak with the pastor. He and that woman decided they would take the project and provide the financing and sell at an affordable price. He thanked Anak for the chance to serve the Lord.

Afterward, Anak and his friends remained on earth and helped in a variety of events to turn people's hearts to the Lord Yeshua. Despite their hard work things were about to change in the months ahead.

While the dark powers continued to be in play upon the earth, these three continued in pursuit of Adonai’s will, helping as many as possible to see the light and find their way home rather than into hell.

Anak and his friends continued in the word prepared to do the best they could in any situation. It wasn’t long before new teachings came along, though and demon hoards increased on the earth and the black arts impacted society. Troubles mounted as storms of discontent raged over the planet along with the weather, destroying homes and lives. Anak had his hands full dealing with the aftermath the strong winds and catastrophic events brought.

## 4. the Narrow Gate

While some with a heart for Yeshua heeded Him, others continued to pursue wealth, following only their own desires. Those with faith in Yeshua, faced severe persecution when it became known.

Other believers fled into the woods, especially after the fires that destroyed so much of the earth. They grew gardens to provide for their families. Fortunately, the stored seeds stayed fertile and grew especially well under the darkened skies, giving thanks to the Lord.

These people worked alongside another group who had formed the walled City of Hope, which the people slowly built over time. Unified, they merged their skills and shared with those who wanted to learn and use them for good if there was no threat to the community. Many came and enjoyed the companionship offered.

Prayer groups flourished, as did skilled trades: blacksmith shops, which hadn’t existed for a long time, opened. Skills once thought of as hobbies now became occupations as the need arose. Their people saw their work as Adonai’s and based it on the law of the harvest.

The City of Hope was only one of several communities across the country and had 2000 members with a mainly vegetarian life, for animals to slaughter for food were rare. They lived by the fundamental values of nonviolence and respect for one another, all life, and the environment.

High in the great cedar trees of the Olympic peninsula, just outside the City of Hope in the Pacific Northwest, was a sustainable community, linked to the City of Hope. It’s too had an alternative life. Anyone could enter, but there were rules one must agree to before entering.

“What is the reason you wish to enter our city?” an elder asked.

The couple had applied for the privilege days earlier. “We believe in Adonai and would like to learn some skills as well as offer our own.”

“Are you wed in the sight of the Lord?” the elder continued, looking from one to the other, seeking signs of deception. Many came to the City of Hope to ask for entrance, then lied about their marital state or skills. “Yes, we have skills. We’re not wed but can do so.”

“Then, welcome,” the elder said, and the gates opened.

In the City of Hope, people either trained or learned and taught new skills to others. Anyone bold enough to profess their faith in Adonai, and declare those aloud and not be ashamed to speak it. This requisite made some people very angry.

A woman and her son stood outside the gate, shouting angrily at the gatekeepers. “Who are you to deny us entrance! You have food and we have a need.”

“Yes, we do,” the elder smiled and calmly said. “However, you said you did not believe in Lord Adonai and while willing to partake from the community resources, yet, when asked if you would share your skills or produce with others you said no.”

“If I am in need, why give what little I have to you who already have plenty?” she demanded. “What difference does it make if I believe in Adonai?” Hands-on hips, now, she glares angrily at the elder.

“Well, one thing, we have plenty because everyone shares what they have. As to Adonai, He built this city which gave us hope and is the reason it’s named the City of Hope.”

“Well, you offer me no hope.” Turning she walked off.

The elder called “You are welcome to get your produce at the community door, miss. No one is sent away hungry.”

The woman looked back over her shoulder, scowling, and shouts, “Your and your kind be damned,” she walked away.

One of the other women put her arm around the elder, “You did the best you could. Some people are hard to understand. Yet it was strange she refused food. Demonic forces enter unbelievers and influence them to behave in irrational ways,” she said, shaking her head sadly.

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In the deep of the forest, another group had gathered. As the angry woman appeared, they all gathered around to hear how it had gone.

“They threw me out, which we knew would happen.” She sneered. “It was uncomfortable. And not one I’d want to repeat.”

She looked around at the faces watching her, hoping for sympathy.

“Don’t look at me like you would have felt any different being all high and mighty.” A couple of the women looked away, embarrassed for that was their thoughts.

“Why should we feel embarrassed about anything? We’re just as good, acting like their outhouse doesn’t stink.” Laughter exploded. “And no one has to believe in their god!”

The leader who’d been listening entered and said, “I applaud you taking a risk though ashamed.” He slapped her across the face, three times. “You’re a damn demon. Get over it!”

Looking around at the others, he said. “If you expect acceptance and love among humans, then you’re not one of mine. You belong to Adonai,” he said with a sneer. “You know what that means?” He glared at the woman he’d slapped and took out his rod. Terrified, she turned to run. A bolt of green light shot out turning her to ash.

Lucifer, known as Azrael, snarled, “Am I clear? I give in abundance, including punishment.”

The other demons fell to the ground, groveling in fear, eager to do whatever he demanded of them. Demons of deceit who do not believe in Adonai use deception to insinuate themselves into the city, knowing what to do and Lucifer’s consequences for failure.

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A few days later, another woman came, smiling and cordial. “Hello,” she said. “Are you accepting new converts?” Putting her arm around her child, she pulled her close. “Me and my girl need a place to stay and food to eat. We’ve done our best to get by but haven’t made it.”

The gatekeeper, Adelaide, thought the child looked familiar but was uncertain about the woman.

“If you’re a believer and want to share what you have or to learn a skill to help, you’re welcome,” Adelaide said.

“We believe.” She said and to herself, *we believe you’re a greedy bunch of do-gooders. Our skills you will regret when our master takes over your miserable city*. As she and her daughter entered the city.

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## 5. Truth vs a Lie

Outside the City, a new belief sprang up by a dynamic speaker who had no trouble convincing the people who came to listen to her pitch. Much like a pyramid scheme, it spread and multiplied because people always wanted the easy way, which she offered.

“Beliefs are interesting,” she said. “Those with faith know the proven power of belief and how one can alter the physical world and themselves by what they believe. I’m speaking of quantum faith, not religious faith; both can change your world, however.”

“You mean, changing how I think about something will change it?” A man asked. “Seems farfetched.” He mocked. Several others standing nearby also nodded their head in agreement.

She ignored him. *What an idiot for he isn’t really seeking* *answers*. “Quantum Physics tells us how what and why everything that makes up the universe and both the seen as well as the unseen results.

“The fact is, some won’t believe or accept what science says. The only guarantees you have is your life still will change, but you have no control over how it will change.

“When you want to think different then act on that new belief or way of thinking, your life will still change, but you will have more control over the way those changes take place.

“So, a basic understanding will help you in alter your belief (or faith) in your life, then develop your ability, you can improve your physical, financial, relational, and emotional or spiritual self.

“I know it sounds too easy. And it can get complicated at the atomic and subatomic level. But you don’t need to know all the details until you understand quantum physics basics and your world.

“Now, anyone still interested in more, stick around and I’ll help you to learn what you want to know.”

She walked off over to where Anak stood with Jacob and asked them, “What do you think? Are you ready for some answers?”

When Anak and Jacob had arrived in this world, they were amazed at the changes and surprised by this woman’s teachings.

“So, you’re saying my thoughts and emotions can shape my world?” asked Anak. “It sounds good, but I’m not sure it makes good sense.”

“There’s more to it,” She said. “So, stick around, and you’ll learn all you need to help you understand better and even change your world.”

“Okay,” Anak said, always eager to learn. Before she went back to the podium, she stopped to speak to a man off to one side. Not meaning to eavesdrop, but with his sharper hearing Anak couldn’t help but hear.

“Keep an eye out. He’s one of *them*. If we can convince him, more will fall into line.” She smirked before turning back to resume her lecture. “The master will approve,” she said in an aside.

Anak moved to the back and continued to listen. Disturbed by what he had heard he now listened with a different purpose in mind.

“Everything you see in the physical world is made up of atoms and molecules,” she continued. “After the atom are subatomic particles with Photons, Electrons, Neutrons, and so on. Back in the century, the theory of Quantum Physics only went to the subatomic level. Now, the ability to go further is infinite!

“It will become obvious why beliefs, whether you can or cannot be, do or have something ensures you always will be right.”

Laughter in the audience. “For some, that’s a dream come true.

Now the explanation, which I’m trying to keep understandable - in simple terms.

“First, Einstein's world-changing discovery of E=MC2 proved atoms, broken down, then tested and analyzed, these subatomic particles were pure energy or light.”

She smiled. “I see the ‘light’ has dawned for some of you. [Laughter] You recall Yeshua, who said, ‘I am the light of the world, but when I’m gone, you are the light’; don’t hide it but let it shine for all to see. Consider what his words mean to you now,” she said. “If you are now the light of the world, how do you enlighten others?”

Anak muses*, she’s talking about Yeshua being the light and then believers when he left the world. People are to allow their light to shine for others.* He ponders. *Yet, she is glossing over it;* *does she believe as he said, or. . .* Anak isn’t sure what she’s really saying. *Father, how much deception is there in words that sound like yours, but are they yours*? he wonders, still listening as she speaks.

“Einstein, a 20th-century scientist, thought the particles existed as solid matter. Another scientist said they were waves and not stable. They discovered these particles are pure Energy and this One Pure Energy makes up all things! Could it be god?

We are not the ocean but merely a drop in an infinite ocean of the universe and therefore part of god, our higher power.

“In the 21st Century, even knowing these theories were false, they were still taught in public schools! Believe it! So, now you see why some struggle with beliefs and bringing change by changing their thoughts? They’ve lived with a lie for so long, it’s become automatic.

“Regardless, whether nature, sound, colors, oxygen, wind, thoughts, emotions, the chair, your house or car, your physical body, the stars, your ability to see, hear, smell, taste, touch, etc. all exist because of this very same energy - the god energy! Nice, right?

“Think about the effects. If all things that exist have this energy, waves, or particles, the seen and the unseen, what certain texts have shown for thousands of years is true. ‘What is truth?’ Pontius Pilate asked; yet, it would be more accurate to ask, ‘Who is truth?’ You are truth if what you believe *is right for you*.”

“Long ago, Yeshua had this conversation with Pilate. But today, those religions are useless, whether Catholic, Protestant, Islamic or any others. Leave the religious nonsense created by the mind of man and you soon realize - what you believe has become your reality!”

Anak thinks to himself, *She’s the worst kind of deceiver, taking the words of Adonai twisting them into something dangerous, for her or someone else’s purposes. Lucifer agenda is at work here today*.

“Einstein believed things ‘were the way they were,’ and Adonai alone could change it. Later, they found energy occurs in waves, so it’s not Adonai but when our attention focuses on it, the waveforms collapse into solid matter. In other words, the thoughts, and the attitude of the person toward what she or he views determines if it was a wave or a particle, energy, or solid matter.

“So, how can, and how does it impact you and your life? Everything once existed as a wave (a pure spirit form) and observing it and expecting the wave would do something, transformed it into a particle (physical or material); this was based on what a person thought and believed about it and how it would appear. They became their own god or self-creator!

Pausing to look around, confusion on many faces, but some grasped what she said and Anak seemed to be one with eyes that saw and his ears heard. *But do you see and hear too much,* she thought to herself with some concern. *I’ll have to consult with Azrael. He should be showing up any day now.*

She had every right to be concerned. Anak was seeing and hearing what Adonai wanted him to see and hear, not the ideas of Lucifer’s she claimed was the end-all. They would be the end, all right.

“Your thoughts are creative. Some of you ‘get it’ while others, not so much. Not everyone can or is supposed to grasp these ideas. For some, it will come slowly. You with the brains likely have the most trouble,” the speaker said, slyly.

Anyone with ‘brains’ found this offensive, for they could grasp ideas quickly, more than the ‘average’ person. Offending the intellect of so-called smart ones, they were more easily deceived and drawn into the deception faster than any ordinary person. *Pride goes before a fall*, she snickered as she saw the ‘intelligent’ ones incensed.

The same belligerent man from earlier spoke up, “You don’t actually expect people to believe this rubbish!”

*You just showed your stupidity, proving my point,* she thought. “Perhaps you can explain what you find so difficult to believe?” she asks while doing her best to be polite to one who clearly was an idiot.

“Yeah.” He sneered. “My friend, some friend he is, told me about this place and suggested I come. He must have known I’d never accept this hogwash.”

“I’m in complete agreement with you on one point, in that you do not accept the teachings.” She pointed out, “As I’ve said, you do not have eyes to see or ears to hear, not yet. So, leave or be silent so those who want to hear can.” Looking at him, her intent clear.

He saw the fire in her eyes and became uncomfortable waving his hands in a dismissive gesture, the man shook his head in disgust and walked out, muttering to himself about fools and their wasted words. But those words had the desired effect on other doubters in the audience who also left in agreement with him.

“Sorry,” the speaker apologized seeing others also leave and knew she must refocus to draw them back. “About this energy or ‘waveform,’ as I was saying, it alters subatomic particles and directly affects them in the way they take on form - become solid matter - based on what you think and believe about it.”

“What if you have doubts about the whole idea?” Came a woman’s voice in the back. “Not everyone can believe or accept enough to actually create change, right?”

“Like the woman who believed by touching the robe of Yeshua she would be healed, but she did and was,” she said eyebrows raised. “Not everyone can believe as did she. If you recall, a man sought healing for his son, and said, ‘if you can.’ Do you recall the Healer’s response?”

“Yes. An evil spirit was responsible and he commanded it to come out of the boy.” She said. “And it did.”

It was an unexpected reply. *She knows her scripture.* The speaker had to quickly rethink her response so she didn’t lose more of the audience.

“Certainly, but there was more to it. Still, you’re right, which brings up a topic we’ll explore later. *Distract, distract*. For now, just grasp this basic idea, we can shape our lives based on what we think, believe, and our emotions, no matter if it’s an ‘actual’ or ‘perceived.’”

Looking at her watch, she said: “Let’s take a break until after lunch.” Walking to where Jacob and the other humans, or whom she assumed to be humans, stood. “Where’s Anak?”

“After talking with that woman in the back, they left,” he said.

*Stupid. I can’t have lost him now*. Her lip press together in a hard line, eyes narrow and she frowns. Feeling a tightness in her chest she takes a deep breath and says, “Oh, well, maybe later.”

Jacob saw anger bloom on her face as she realizes her mistake but with a forced laugh she walks away. To her helper she says, “You idiot. Didn’t I tell you to keep an eye on him. Where did he go?” Furious, she looks around. “You better find him or Azrael will have your head.”

The man scurries off in search of Anak, terrified. Lucifer will shred him in tiny pieces, literally. As she suspected, Anak and the others are now lost to her way of thinking.

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“Let’s go,” Anak said to the woman he spoke with earlier, though he couldn’t recall her name. “There are too many ears who hear only what she wants them to hear.” Together they leave and walk by the river so he can see anyone approaching. Anak struggles to recalls her name. *I think it starts with an M*, he muses. *Miriam. That’s it!*

“There’s something wrong about this Quantum theory,” Anak said. “And I feel like I’ve seen her before but cannot recall where.”

“Do you think it’s important?” Miriam asks.

“It’ll come back.” He says. “Forget her, Miriam. It’s not my belief in Adonai I question.” He hesitates, unsure how to explain himself. “Where is faith in all this? She mentions faith a couple of times but when speaking of her quantum theory, she does not speak of Adonai.”

Miriam starts to speak. Anak interrupts. “I know what you’re going to say. Still, while we show our faith by our works. Our thoughts do matter.”

Offended by his assumption, Miriam wonders, *does he care about anyone’s opinion but his own?’*

Miriam is tall though not as tall as Anak an imposing six-three yet she comes close. Looking up at him and trying for peace she says, “Her theory is about human effort, which is folly. We know the folly of Adonai is wiser than all human wisdom.”

He smiles in delight at the truth in her words. Seeing her shining eyes, he imagines Miriam would be a good friend and hopes she’s not wanting another type of relationship, for both are angels.

Memories of Clio and their romance resurface, which Anak dismisses along with the idea of a romance with any women. He’s still not over Clio and the hurt he experienced by her deception.

Anak finds Miriam beautiful, but focuses on the beauty of her mind and her faith and the love of Adonai. “I enjoy our conversations,” he says not realizing she too is an angel.

Miriam, flustered by his attention, says, “What about the other one, the one who came with you?” she asks. “Does he ‘believe’ in this theory too or does he follow Adonai?”

“Don’t worry about Jacob. His soul may be human but he’s Adonai’s and not one of Lucifer’s. You’ve heard of him, of course.”

“What do you know of him? I’ve heard Lucifer’s powerful and has great beauty, but I’ve not met or seen him.”

“He disguises himself as an angel of light,” Anak explains. “He was powerful and the first Cherub. Still, in his pride he went to war against Adonai and lost. He was tossed out of heaven along with his angels who followed him and a couple of cherubs.”

“Oh, goodness.” She exclaims. “So, he’s a Cherub, and the ‘angels’ Adonai threw out with him. I’ve heard Lucifer was an angel of light, so he would’ve been a celestial? Why give it all up?” Miriam shakes her head not understanding.

“No. Lucifer is not an angel. He’s pure evil. There is no beauty in him, for he’s a deceiver incapable of love.” He stops talking, nervously thinking*, I shouldn’t be sharing this with her.*

“This all sounds so exciting! Tell me more.”

Anak replied. “I’ve read the ancient text that describes the Cherubs who’re very different from angels.” *Father forgive me for saying too much. I’ve read the ancient text and have seen the Cherubs too.*

Disappointed, Miriam wonders how much this man or angel knows and is not telling. Brightening, she looks up, “Speaking of angels. Look at those clouds. Aren’t they remarkable?”

Anak looks to see clouds knowing they are angels in the clouds. Anak can almost see Ariel smile down upon him.

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## 6. Miriam

“Come on. Let’s go. I’ll introduce you to Jacob and Malek,” Anak said. “There’s my friends. You’ll like them.”

“That’s an odd name, Malek,” Miriam says. “I’ve heard it before; it’s unusual, hard to forget. Perhaps, he’s an angel; it does sound angelic.” She laughs as though teasing

“More likely, he needs my help.” *What is this? If I didn’t know better,* *I’d think she’s an angel*. Anak shakes his head, rejecting the notion. *If she were an angel, I’d know*. Anak recalls when he first met Jacob he instantly knew Jacob was an angel.

“He seems competent as though he could handle himself,” she says with a curious look. “Not thinking he’s an angel, but he has a confidence about him.”

“Come on, so we can get back in time.” He quickly changes the topic to mull it over again. *If Miriam were an angel, she would know Malek and Jacob were angels. So, she can’t be one.*

“Do you want to listen to the rest of that lecture?” Miriam says, amused by Anak’s distracted look and his thoughts.

“It’s good to know what you’re fighting against.” Yet Michael’s words of caution ring in his head. *While you have a curious mind you’re easily tempted by what attracts you, which may come from darkness.*

“What’s that saying,” Miriam asks. “If you hang around an angry man, you learn to be angry and the same with other temptations.”

“You’re right. I’ve had my share. So, we’ll pray with my friends.”

“Okay,” she agrees, and increases her pace, to match his. “Jacob and Malek might wonder where you went.”

“Right,” Anak says and moves faster.

Nearly running to catch up, Miriam says, “Slow down.” Panting to catch her breath. “Do we have to be in that big a hurry?”

Anak stops and comes back, “See, you’re good for me. A good friend. You keep me on my toes, slow them down, at least.”

Anak senses her disappointment and wonders if she expects more between them, yet he knows friendship is for the best.

They return as the lecture resumes. And with Malek and Jacob, the two decide to take the conversation outside to pray.

Afterward, as one, they decide to leave the talk. Adonai clearly spoke a warning, for each had negative feelings about what the talk suggested.

Malek warns of the dangers of putting one’s faith in a self-centered belief. “We put our faith in Adonai,” he said, “not in personal beliefs. He does what’s best for everyone. The problem with this quantum faith,” he points out, “it’s self-focused.” All nod in agreement.

“To believe in and practice quantum faith, it leads, tempts is a better word, each person toward getting for themselves regardless of others.”

Anak warns, “Most of those who agree with her like the guarantee she seems to offer, which could mean someone in need goes without and that’s against everything Adonai teaches.”

Malek said in dismay, “We can tell them what the future brings but if they don’t listen, and it doesn’t appear like many will, they’re lost.”

“True, but some have ears to hear the truth and obey.”

“On that note, it’s time for me to leave,” Miriam said, “I have to be someplace else in a little while, so maybe I’ll see you all later.”

Ariel arrives after Miriam leaves and sends the three home to heaven with the reminder, “Adonai does not give mortals everything they desire. Those who follow the quantum theory will find their end.” She warns, “Spoiled children are from parents too lenient, who do not set limits; they give in to tantrums and whining. Giving the child too much power and they become self-centered. Lucifer and all his beauty as Light Bringer let it go to his head. Adonai allowed it for a time, then no more. Now he suffers the consequences of his sin as will the mortals.”

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As time moved on and the quantum theory movement grew the earth in shambles suffered as the rich grew richer and the poor poorer. Even pastors took advantage of the new beliefs promoting get-rich-quick schemes, encouraging people to give money to get more for themselves. Adonai sent dreams of warning but they went unheeded.

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Storms thundered over the world so great people hid in terror as the lightning flashed and hail fell, destroying fields and buildings, and anyone outside had to run for shelter to protect themselves from the onslaught. Rainfall exceeded the grounds capacity to absorb the water in what was typically dry desert.

Flash floods became deadly in desert canyons, stream beds and dry washes where the water reached above the creek banks, weakening soil, and causing mud slides, damaging homes.

The slow-moving thunderstorms multiplied faster than anyone could prepare for by sand bagging. As such homes and even small villages along streams washed away in the floods. Many lost their lives.

In cities, with the construction of buildings, highways, driveways, and parking lots these caused increased runoff with greater flood damage. Storm drains were unable to absorb the water and the roads flooded as did some buildings, underpasses, underground garages, and basements, becoming death traps for anyone caught in them when the flood hit.

Almost half of the flash fatalities occurred in vehicles. People trying to flee the rising waters soon found themselves floating away and swept off bridges into raging waters of catastrophic intensity. But the weather and desert flash floods weren’t the only tragedies.

Those who’d believed in the theory who gained wealth lost it when the rain and hail destroyed their fields and crops. Their companies then went bankrupt. Living a luxurious lifestyle many were unable to cope with the sudden poverty and committed suicide. The more resilient benefitted by absorbing the bankrupted companies and those few grew financially in power to control the world’s economy.

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“So, some actually benefited from the quantum theory,” said Anak as Yeshua joined in on the conversation.

“The wealthy believed what was taught, it would make them rich and powerful, so they put in the effort to make it happen. Ergo, believing their wealth would increase it did, but by self-effort. Many of the poor did not believe they would prosper so did nothing to prosper, and so, did not. One must not only believe but act on their beliefs. As James once said, “Faith without works is dead.”

Recalling Yeshua Malek quoted, “To those who have more will be given and in abundance. But from the one without, even what that one has they will lose for it will be taken away.”

Yeshua laughed, hearing his own words repeated.

“While quantum theory does work unbelief cause spiritual blindness. Adonai cloaks the truth from their eyes and ears.

As you said, indicating Yeshua, 'Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’

Yeshua agrees. “Both are true. Adonai does not blind these people because He delights in their misery. It’s a mercy, so they will seek the truth and have their eyes open.”

“Not everyone learns from their misery or the misery of others.”

Yeshua agreed. “Yes. While some may blame Adonai, who gives each a talent or two and the experience to learn skills. But what happens if they don’t use them or learn? Who’s at fault if they don’t prosper? Use what you receive and a reward is yours. You don’t use it you lose it,” Yeshua instructed. “So, it’s time to use your talents and skills.

“Maybe it’s time to go on a journey, an adventure,” his face crinkles into a smile, eyes sparkle with mischief. *Maybe something a bit different.* “You could use some excitement, right! Do you think you’re up for it?”

A chorus of eager yes’s greeted him. “Fabulous.” And he vanished.

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## 7. A Peculiar Place

**Upon their arrival,** “Where are we? It’s a very peculiar place. Are we on earth?” Malek asked. Buildings line the streets, if one could use the word line, for the streets seemed to curve this way and that, and the building are even more peculiar. It was as though each had been caught by an explosion and an implosion, for buildings bulged outward then curved inward, like a full-figured woman. It was bizarre to say the least and improbable the building of them, yet there they stood.

Anak marveled at the buildings and the varied colors, like children had taken a paint gun to them then doused each with water before the paint had dried. He turns to take it all in. “Can’t say I’ve seen buildings quite like this, so I doubt its earth.” He examines what he can see of the unusual construction and design.

Malek remarks in a thoughtful tone, “This city doesn’t look familiar at all, not like any I’ve been seen,” he said. “The landscape is strange yet long ago on earth, there were some buildings vaguely similar.”

“A lot can change over time, but not this much. There’s usually. . .” Jacob stops as an odd-looking fellow appears; they all turn to look.

“Good day. Are you new to the city?” Short and round, dressed all in brown, no shoes. His pants resemble the dhoti worn in earth’s India. His shirt is brown but untucked, light in color.

Jacob walks over to introduce himself. “Names, Jacob. “Where are we exactly? This is a most peculiar place.”

Puffed up like a big brown toad, the man frowns. “I’m the mayor as if you didn’t know. But you should have known. Everyone knows who I am. And this is our home world, and it is not peculiar.”

Malek eyes him curiously, “Your name is, mister major?”

“Mayor,” he shrieked piercingly, so much so it pained their ears. “I’m the mayor, not major. We have no military. Are you an idiot? How can you not know anything as simple as that?”

“Hey now,” Anak stepped up, hands in a placating gesture.

“There’s no need to be rude. We’re strangers and came to help. We don’t want to be impolite, despite what we see. You may be very good at what you do but come now, a little courtesy.”

The little man deflated and stepped back a pace. “Well, if you’ve come to help find the magistrate’s daughter, your help is welcome.” Bowing he turns to walk away and disappears.

“Hello,” Jacob called after him. “Where are you?” Looking at Anak and Malek with raised eyebrows, “Well, that was weird. Do you think?”

“Certainly, this is the strangest place we’ve ever been. We can’t be on another Here and Now. It could be a different universe.” Malek said.

Needing an answer, Anak says, “I’m trying to figure it out like you. That guy looks peculiar as do the buildings, like I said before.”

“Okay.” Said Jacob. “We agree we’re in a strange place. Now, what do we do with that piece of information? Did Yeshua send us here to help or for an adventure?”

The others shrugged and looked from one to the other. As they mulled over their options, few as they were, another man came out of nowhere, “Why stand around? You’ll not find the daughter doing nothing.” Looking askance at them he too began to walk away. This time, before he could disappear, Jacob grabbed this man by the shirt and said, “Now hold on a minute, my friend. Not so fast …”

Shrieking a high-pitched sound enough to shatter eardrums, pulling himself loose from Jacob’s grasp, he backs away rapidly, yet did not leave, as they covered their ears, shocked by the sound. It seems the only sound here is high pitched shrieking!

“What are you doing? Never touch this person.” He said. “It is not allowed. I am the magistrate.”

*Not by your daughter either?* Anak wonders but said, “Pleased to meet you. I’d shake your hand but…. You see, we’re new here and thought *Might as well say it*. We came to find your daughter and could use some information to help with that task.”

“Oh, dear. My apologies. You need access to the data. If you follow me, I’d be pleased to show you where and offer any help needed. She is, after all, my one and only procreation, you know. I do miss her terribly.”

To keep from laughing for he refers to his daughter as his procreation Anak turns quickly away.

Jacob is thinking, *it has an Alice in Wonderland feel about it*. And he chuckles to himself but his humor is not lost on the man.

“Laughter for no reason is not permitted, regardless of your being in Alice’s Wonderland. Wherever that is. After all, one never knows if you intend mirth to be cruel or something else, you know?”

Frowning, “Come along now.” Walking briskly, he looked back to ask, “Would it be possible for you to travel by notion?”

Anak suspects ‘travel by notion’ like unto heaven and thinking to get where you desire to be. “Once we know where we’re located, and where we need to go, it’s possible. Don’t know for certain.” Taking a wild guess, “I’m not familiar with your universe.”

He beamed. “Well, we’re almost there. Good thing we weren’t too far away.” Smiling again, “Here we are. I hope you will complete your analysis and retrieve the daughter from, well, from wherever.”

He turned to look at each one and each felt analyzed, categorized, and not found deficient, as far as they could tell Still, they were not secure in that theory. But they were at least at the data banks.

“I’ve let the analyzers, who have failed so far, know the experts have arrived and taken the contract. They will help as if their very lives depended on it. And well they may.” Without notice, not walking away this time, he disappeared to wherever people went in this land.

Anak, Malek, and Jacob enter the data bank only to find themselves confronted with open hostility.

Several men stood in a half-circle, scrunched, and looking suspiciously at the three as they entered. “And who are you?” one asked as the group moved to encircle them.

Malek spoke, “We’re here to help,” backing away to gain more room. “I’m sure you’re very good at what you do. However, it appears more help may be needed to find the magistrates’ daughter.”

“What gave you that preposterous idea?” One man said, annoyed. “Do you believe we are incompetent?”

‘No. But the magistrate sure does.’ Jacob thought and the men in grey all gasped, faces reddened in outrage.

Anak and Malek being angels can hear another’s thoughts and realized, ‘these men can hear our thoughts!’

‘Of course, we can! Do you imagine we’re idiots?’

Jacob, confused by the apparent silence, is also aware some dialog is going on and looks at Anak.

Being intelligent seems important to him, so Anak says, “We apologize for any misunderstanding. Our goal is to find the daughter. Can we do this together as a unit?”

These men in grey never leave the data bank, so Anak and his friends are responsible for finding the daughter. It took a while, however, before the men in grey finally gave them all the available information, and they set off to find the magistrate’s daughter.

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“This is the last place she was seen,” Jacob said, looking at the home and over the landscape. Colorful greenery stretches onto a gentle sloping hillside, contrasting with the brightly colored buildings. On the other side of the hill is a water field. An image of a sea came to mind but different.

“Oh no,” the homeowner said. “An ordinary sea is quite different from the Waterfield, as you will discover.” A singularly handsome man, he did not seem bothered in the least by the girl’s departure. *Why has neither he nor his son gone looking for her?* Only after did he recall the man seemed to have heard his thoughts, *very angel-like*, he thinks.

Eyes widen, eyebrows reach for his hairline the man, said, “It is not our charge to seek the lost. Rather, those who analyze data have all the information needed so we need not be involved.” He looks at each one, in turn, to establish their grasp on the data.

Not arguing the obvious - the more who seek, the better chance of finding the lost – Anak asked, “May I speak with your son?”

“No, that is not impossible, the boy left; he went in search of the girl, the daughter, feels responsible in a way.”

Scratching his head while trying to understand, for this seemed the opposite of what he’d just said a moment before. Frowning, Anak looks in the direction indicated and sees a young boy traveling up the far hillside.

Irritated at the lack of suitable explanation, Anak nods to his friends, indicating they were to follow the boy and sets off with them. Surprisingly, it was not difficult to cross the fields of greenery as it parted before them, flattening as needed to provide smooth footing.

“This is a unique experience more than any we’ve yet encountered,” Jacob said. “It’s astonishing how inept they seem in this situation, yet they also care for her.” No one else remarked.

Quickly crossing the green fields, much faster than they would have imagined, given how far it appeared earlier. As they topped the hillside, all three stood speechless, looking out over the vast expanse of water before them, reaching to the horizon, it faded into the sky. No land was in sight other than what they stood upon.

“How in His name are we to cross that sea?” Malek said, “Or, what they call a Waterfield.” *I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s amazing.*

Anak looked across the water, judging their options. “Yet, cross it we must if we’re to find the daughter,” he said. *If only we can figure how to get across a sea that monstrous. Then said,* “I wonder where the boy went. Anyone see him? He was climbing a hill.”

They turned in different directions, scanning the landscape and the water, seeking the boy but could not see him. “That is most peculiar. How did the boy disappear so fast? Don’t see him swimming.”

Amused by a sudden idea, Anak said. “What if, like the grasses, this Waterfield is similar? Consider for a moment the possibility.” He smiles as he steps into the water. While he didn’t walk on water, neither did he sink beneath what looked to be very deep water. Instead, he walked through it with ease and the water parted before him. *This is an amazing experience and my feet are not even getting wet.* And so, the three of them set off across the watery expanse.

Yet, it was going to be a long way through the water if it was as large as it appeared. Small waves lapped their ankles and they felt the need to push against it, which turned walking into an effort.

*This is going to take forever* Jacob grumbled to himself.

Suddenly, the young boy appeared. “You’re going about it all wrong. Come here and walk around.” He said from the side. Jacob was able to see what now appeared to be sidewall, like a swimming pool. *Very peculiar,* he muses as he slogged over to the side and climbed out.

Anak and Malek follow. “Nice huh?” The boy said. “Not an ordeal.”

“This just keeps getting weirder and weirder,” Jacob said. *Weird isn’t all bad though. I wonder what else we’ll discover.* He walked on excited not to get to where they were going but to discover anything new.

Malek, who’d barely spoken, laughing at the situation in which they’d found themselves said. “Yeshua is having a real laugh about now.”

Anak looked over and joined the laughter. “Oh, no doubt.”

Before long, the boy disappears again and the three find the walkway has rapidly taken them to a building in no time at all. While distances were variable, for sure, what to expect was also undetermined and seemed to depend on. . . well, they weren’t sure what. The building was at first what appears to be one end of the water field. Jacob left to search one area while Malek heads over to investigate another.

*There’s a stairwell,* Anak notes. “I’m going up there,” he said, heading up to find just inside a doorway, he finds himself with several corridors to choose from. All lead in different directions. *Which way to go?* he muses then, sees a door on the left side of the hall.

Opening the door, he’s confronted with darkness, a total absence of light and panic strikes. Anak’s dream about a black marble room in hell surfaces. His heart beats rapidly and his breath shortens as feels like he’s sucked into the darkness. *There’s no way she’s in there* he says and slams the door on the dark and his fear.

Taking a deep breath, he leans against the wall, his breathing slows as he calms. *What is wrong with me? It’s been eons since I had that dream. Yeshua keeps me safe. I have nothing to fear. I can do this for he is with me.* Anak heads in the direction of a well-lighted corridor.

Feeling better, Anak continues the search for no shadowy reminders of the dream plague him now. After a fruitless search, up one corridor and down another, he hears Malek’s panicked voice, “Anak, where are you? Come quick. Jacob… Oh, dear Lord.” Anak can feel the emotions coming in waves from Malek and he rushes to follow the sound of his voice. Within a few minutes, he finds his way to the end.

Anak enters the room where Malek weeps in despair. Rushing over, Anak leans down, “Good grief,” he said. “What’s wrong? Are you hurt or someone else? What’s happened?”

Malek, looking down, points over the rail to the waters below where they stand. Anak leans over and sees someone in the water, lying on his or her side. He isn’t sure if it’s a female. If a female, then they’ve found the girl. However, a closer look tells him it’s a male.

“Malek. What or who did you see?” for Anak cannot see the upper body. Floating beneath the surface, the upper body lies partially hidden.

“It’s… when I first saw… down there… before it floated under… Oh, Anak. It’s Jacob.” He begins weeping again.

“Dear Lord.” Anak rushes to find a way down, but it seems the stairs do not extend down into this area.

As Anak rushes to find a way down, the father with his son appear, smiling. “Don’t worry.” He said. “We’ll take care of everything. You see, we have the perfect place to take him for repair.”

“Are you nuts?” Malek shouts. Reaching to grab the man, wanting to take him by the throat and throttle him. “This is not … you cannot repair this, him! He’s not a robot or machine, you know.”

“Oh, I know.” He smiles at him gently, then disappears with the body of their friend, now vanished from the water.

Malek cries, “Where did they go? What have they done with him, with his body? They need to give him back. Anak!”

*He took the body. What is he doing? There must be more to this than what either of us are seeing* Anak muses as he watches Malek in despair and the body disappear. *We need to return to the house.*

“Let’s go back to the house,” Anak says. “There more going on.” He leads Malek away. “Perhaps that’s where they took him there.”

Malek nods sorrow etches his features as he follows Anak the way he’d come through the corridors and back down the stairs.

Anak says, “We know where this time so, do not need to go through the waters again. Just think of the house, Malek.”

“I don’t know if I can do this… it’s too horrible, Anak.”

Anak says, “Think Jacob.” Upon arrival, Anak sees the father and demands, “What in Heaven’s name is going on?”

The father says, “My son has the answer, but in time.”

“In time?” Anak said. “What is wrong with now?”

“Yeshua will be here by the time my son returns. Come inside, and have some food. When all is ready, you’ll be informed.” Not bothering to respond to the confusion all three are feeling.

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## 8. Explanations

Numbly, Anak and Malek follow and wait impatiently. Days pass and no answer to where Jacob went or to Yeshua. Anak paces, anxious for answers to the questions fluttering through his mind like dust mites. Even the beautiful weather and flowers blooming across the landscape does nothing to reassure his heart.

On day three, the boy returns. To the two angels he says, “Please, I’ll explain. It’s my fault you’re here. You see, the girl you seek is my sister.” He sits down. “Please have a seat.”

Anak scowls at him but sits down while Malek glares and refuses, standing with arms crossed over his chest. It seems not to influence the boy who continues to explain.

“We have different fathers each of whom does things differently and in opposition to each other. We’re trying to force them to change how the they and their rules work. I’ll let her explain - her way.” He looks at a glass door into the house neither of them had noticed before. It’s almost as if the door suddenly appeared in the side of the house.

The door has an intricately designed pattern etched into its surface, apparently there to hide its occupant. As the door opens, a lovely young girl emerges. Not beautiful by some standards of beauty, but her irregular features gives her a haunting quality. Eyes like agates, multi-colored, clear, and bright, they’re quite beautiful.

“I’m sorry for frightening you when you’re not part of the problem.” She whispers, “Please forgive me.” Tears flow from her eyes and trickle down her cheeks, pinked with embarrassment.

“Why hide?” Anak said. “Why worry your family so?”

“Have you seen the people here?” She said. “The way they behave, especially with strangers? Condescending and impolite, nearly all the time. My father is no different, even more so, and he’s the magistrate!”

“I’m not sure I understand what you hope to achieve,” Malek said, looking confused, “Tell me, what’s the real problem?”

Angrily, “My dad is always on my case, pressuring me to do stuff all the time, my homework and chores; it’s civic duties no one else has to do. But he’s in competition with Ian’s father, my brother’s father.

“When I do the chores, it’s never good enough. He compares me with Ian. Even when he does poorly, my work is always worse according to my father. I have no life. I’m not allowed to be different,” scowling, she says, “If we can’t change how they do things here, what’s the use in living.”

“Okay. Now we’re getting somewhere. And after the past three days, your dad will change. Well, Yeshua can speak to him. He’s good at helping people ‘understand something clearly at last,’ if you know what I mean.”

“Yeshua.” She scowls, “All I ever hear is how we have to do for him and be perfect as he is perfect, so Adonai will accept us. What good is it when nothing I do is acceptable. He doesn’t love us. All he wants is purity and he doesn’t care about imperfect me.” Crossing her arms, she scowls and walks away, “If I were dead, maybe…”

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Everyone held their breath at that remark, then Yeshua arrived and glanced at all the worried faces. “Greetings. I see you’re all here.”

Anak takes a breath and sighs in relief. “Finally, you’re here.”

Yeshua ignores Anak and goes to the young girl. “Lily,” Yeshua said, “Do you know who I am?”

“Yeshua, I suppose the son of Adonai. They’re all waiting for you like you’re the miracle man or something”

Laughing in delight, Yeshua says, “Right but you don’t sound like you’re too impressed. Okay, what you would like to do right now?”

“Right now, I want to be dead.”

“Life not worth living, huh? Days like that I hate too. Let me tell you, there were times long ago when I wondered how long I’d have to contend with an ungrateful bunch of people. Well, never mind. Want to see where the dead go? If you want to, of course. It’s your choice.”

Her face had gradually taken on a look of amazement at his words and when he asked about the place of the dead, she glanced up to see if he was serious. He appears to be and she smiles, eyes alight. “You mean we can go? You’ll take me?” smiling in joy she looks eagerly at him.

“Sure. If you want.” Yeshua held out his hand and the two vanish.

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“Wow. Is he really taking her to the place of the dead?”

“Yeshua never lies,” Anak said. “Speaking of the dead, by the way, what happened to our friends’ body, Jacob?”

“Right.” The father got up and moved to the door of a shed. “Ian, you two can come out now!”

As the door opens, into the bright sunshine steps the boy, Ian and . . . “Oh, my Lord!” Malek said. He staggered back and sat down seeing his friend Jacob walk into the yard.

“Jacob. What happened? We thought you were. I don’t understand how can you be here now.”

Malek stood in shock, not saying a word. Then he began to weep and crossed to his friend. Wrapping his arms around him, he cries, holding onto him. “We thought we’d never ever see you again.”

“Are you serious?” Jacob looks amused and glances at Anak who looks thoughtful. “Now wait. It’s not occurred to me until now. How can you be dead? How could you even drown? You’re a human soul, which means you died once and you can’t die again.”

Malek let his arms drop. He looked at Jacob suspiciously. “He’s right. What in the stars is going on?” Drying his eyes, he stares at Jacob, waiting for an answer, eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Embarrassed, Jacob explains, “Well, it’s good you didn’t figure it out too soon, in case Lucifer was about, you would believe I had drowned. We knew he’d figure it out, but it wouldn’t matter by then, if Lily was safe. That’s why Yeshua came. He’s here to protect her from him.”

The boys’ father explains how Azrael had tricked Lily into a deception about her life, which led her into depression, making her vulnerable and more likely to end her life and end in hell with him.

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Yeshua had stopped in a lovely valley of green grasses and blue skies, white clouds swim by high above. *This is a good place to talk with Lily first. I’m certain she doesn’t want to see the dead.*

“Tell me, Lily, what really bothers you and why would a lovely young girl like you want to die? Truly.”

Looking at Yeshua, she sees amber eyes, flecked with gold, brimming with compassion. “Mom died, and I miss her so much.”

Tears course down her cheeks. “That’s why my dad’s so controlling; it helps him to not think about her. But it makes everyone else miserable. And not just me. If I were dead, would he think about me?”

“It sounds like you’re in a lot of pain, for sure. How did you come to some of the conclusions you did, like the idea of taking your own life?”

“Not long ago, well, a while back, I met a really nice man. Handsome too. I know he’s too old for me and I’m too young for men anyway. Still, he seemed nice like he truly cared for me,” she said, feeling foolish now, hearing her words. “My dad doesn’t care. The other guy spent a lot of time with me and seemed to really care.”

“Are you sure about your dad, not caring?”

“I suppose he does, but he doesn’t act like it anymore. He’s too busy doing for the community and is never home. He started pushing me to do better and be like Ian who thinks he’s in competition with his dad. I don’t know if that’s true but I’m sure he doesn’t want to be home because it reminds him of mom. And he forgets I’m home alone.”

“Go on,” Yeshua said, but when Lily didn’t continue. “So, my guess is, the good-looking man, he said there was a better place he could take you. Life must really be difficult for you here. You wanted to go to where your mother is, so you could be with her?”

As Lily tries to explain, a pained expression crosses her face. She looks down staring at her feet then covers her face with her hands to hide her tears and says, “It’s like I’ve faded into nothing, no one sees me anymore like I’m not important. Maybe I’m not.” She heaves a sigh. “I really do miss my mom. She was everything to me. I know what he told me was a lie, or I do now. Why Azrael would say those things to me. That’s mean.”

“His real name’s Lucifer. He’s the god of the underworld who enjoys bringing tortured souls into his kingdom. Usually he sends his demons, but sometimes he leads them away from Adonai himself, just for fun.”

“Oh gosh. He’s just plain mean. I would never have guessed. Lucifer was so nice. Made his country sound like a really great place.”

“For Lucifer, it is a great place; it’s his place, and not where you want to go. Your mom’s not there. Remember, I said Lucifer is a deceiver. Don’t feel bad for he’s good at tricking innocents and the not-so-innocent. So, what would you like to do? How can I help?”

“Bring my mother back, like you did Jacob.” Weeping quietly, she buries her face in Yeshua’s shoulder, sobbing brokenly. He puts his arms about her and holds on for a moment. Yeshua then releases her and looks into her eyes still brimming with tears.

“Ah. My sweet girl. If only it were that easy. You see, Jacob never really died – this time. He died on earth long ago. He’s a human soul who took your place, pretending death to trick Lucifer; it’s not your time. Your mother, however, it was her time.” Looking at Lily, Yeshua took her hand, and said, “You were there, were you not?”

She nods, “I was with mom when she drowned. I was in the water when Lucifer showed up too. He offered to help me. Even then, I didn’t trust him. I felt there was something wrong about it.”

“Oh, yes. I’m familiar with Lucifer. The reason you didn’t trust him is your pure heart, he wanted to steal your purity. Jacob knew who he was, and …well you know?”

“I’m so sorry all this happened because of me.” She said.

“It’s okay.” Yeshua chuckled. “What he did is not easy, which makes him one of the terrific guys.” He said, “By what you did, it helped Jacob to realize his full potential. Pretty amazing, huh?”

“I did?” Eyes brightening as she looks at him.

“You sure did. Jacob may never have gone that extra mile, giving himself for you, a young girl in need, though he didn’t actually die again.”

“Wow. Thanks for telling me. Uh. Yeshua?”

“Yes. Sweet girl. I’m going to ask you not to do it again. Jacob doesn’t need any more strengthening.”

“I promise I won’t and I don’t need to see the place of the dead. My mom’s in heaven anyway. Can we go to my home now?”

“Yes, she is. And, we need to send those other guys home, too. My guess is they’re anxious to be on their way.”

“When we get back, can you talk to my dad?”

“I’m sure we can arrange it.” Holding hands, Yeshua and Lily are home in a blink and true to his promise, Yeshua spoke with her father who promised Lily he would make some changes.

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After their adventure in the land of what Jacob liked to call Oz, all three, alive and well, have returned home.

“While you may want to do great things the mundane is worthy too,” Yeshua said. “You wouldn’t have gone to that wonderful land otherwise and met those unusual people, right?”

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Little did they know, a time would come centuries later when the knowledge they were acquiring would benefit the whole group and bring all the universe to a place of restoration.

# Part Seven

## 1. City of Hope

**Anak and Jacob** followed by Malek and – *Miriam*! Shocked to see her, Anak doesn’t quite know what to think. “You here? Shouldn’t you be dead? Sorry.” *So, she’s not human as I’d thought,* he muses. *She’s lovelier than many I’ve see, human or angel*

“You suspected I was an angel did you not! *‘If I didn’t know better, I’d think she was an angel*.’ Those were your thoughts. Her lips spread in a grin rounding her cheeks. “I am here and we are all together, see how they fly like angels in the sky.” Miriam sing-songs to an ages-old melody, and he recalls the angels in the clouds the two of them had seen the day they first met long ago.

Anak ignores Miriam. *Why wasn’t I told? It’s embarrassing.*

“Yes. It was at the physics lecture,” Jacob said, into the long silence that followed her announcement and Anak’s silence.

Miriam watches Ana*k. Yeshua said not to reveal I was an angel. There’s always a good reason behind his thinking.*

Anak brings everyone’s attention back, “At the end of the war, the City of Hope was built. It’s modeled after the City of Light which worked well for years. They educate, share talents and skills to return the world to a better state than before. Indeed, the earthquakes destroyed a huge part of the earth, the reason they built the City of Hope.”

“The City of Hope is about to end, I fear,” Miriam said, “Something always comes out of destruction. It had a place in the world, a refuge, but it is no longer a refuge. Once only believers were allowed inside, but the hoard found a way. Lucifer wants it destroyed.”

Anak looks around, as he considers the odds of taking back the city. *What to do*? he wonders for his bravery seems to have vanished.

*It’s not like hunting dragons. He* reflects. *All I did then was wield the sword of power and kill a dragon. Then came Clio’s temptation.* A smile curves his lips recalling their time together*.*

Marian knew his insecure thoughts and says “Why think that way?” She glares at him, “Where’s your faith!”

“What are you saying,” he scowls. “I’m not doing a thing right now. And get out of my head!”

Reading his thoughts has Anak angry. *Whoever thought it would be good for another angel to* *read your thoughts?* He scowls, not caring if she hears his thoughts this time.

“It’s where I’m supposed to be, as you know. It serves a purpose to keep you on track. You’re not thinking right – and dreaming of her isn’t where your mind should be.” Marian gets in his face, mere inches away for she knew he still focused on his lost love, Clio.

Flecks of gold spark, her eyes burn like hot coals. “It appears when you became an angel, you lost your fearless nature, turned into a wuss.” She offers a parting shot in turning away. “You may as well hand your power over to Lucifer and be done!”

Anak looks after her retreating form. *Why did I come?* he grumbles. *They are* *better off without me*. Slowly Anak walks away head down, his shoulders hunched. The demon of Hopelessness follows at a discrete distance but Anak’s too deep in his pity to notice. The others confused by what’s happening don’t notice the demon either.

Jacob tries to distract them, not knowing what’s going on with Anak. “Our job is to free the City of Hope, and we need your ideas to achieve it.” Saying this, he looks around expectantly.

“Come on, everyone. Get the thinking caps on. We are a team.”

Scowling at Anak, he nods toward the group, to get him to come back. “Anak.” Jacob said, trying to get his attention.

Anak ignores him then he again hears Yeshua, *Leave now deceiver.* His words echo in his mind, shocking him. “Adonai I ask you to rebuke the tempter of my soul,” he said under his breath.

The demon Hopelessness leaves in a rush burned by heaven’s light. While embarrassed, Anak returns to the group, feeling awkward. “Sorry the past caught up with me. Won’t happen again.”

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“What’s up?” Azrael asks as he returns to the group, looks at Anak and says, “I’ve got news you’ll doubtless like.”

*Who is this guy?* Malek wonders, unaware of his adventure in the nebula with Anak and Jacob, as are the others.

*Why do they distrust Azrael?* Anak wonders. *Jacob has never liked him, and mistrusts his reasons for leaving.* *He didn’t know Clio had left else he’d have come and helped me, I think.*

Azrael chuckles to himself, knowing Anak excuses him, but Jacob is not so kind-hearted. *Wisely, he doesn’t trust me, but Anak does so he’s no problem. Jacob though, I’ll have to keep an eye on him.*

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Miriam wonders, *why doesn’t Jacob trust this Azrael? He’s another who’s mind I cannot read.* Shrugging to herself. *I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt, now, but something’s off with him.* Watching from a pace away so he’s not aware of her scrutiny, Miriam suspects he’s hiding his true nature with a glamour of sorts. *Now why would he do that?*

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Anak considers, *we’ve not come up with a better idea than Azrael’s,* and says, “It sounds like Azrael’s plan is solid.” He looks around. “Are we all in agreement?” A few nods in agreement, but no one disagrees.

“The dawn is coming, that’s when we’ll go in. Nothing much is going then and they won’t be expecting us so we need to keep a sharp eye out, as it’s hard to see in the dawn’s early light.”

As soon as the sun lightens the sky, the first team enters the city, followed by the backup team. But all is quiet, and no one is about.

“Maybe it’s too early,” Jacob says.

“I don’t know,” Marian seems hesitant. “It seems strange. You would expect guards at the gate, but there’s none. And there’s no shopkeepers up and about, which is weird,” Marian says. “Every town I’ve ever been in, the shopkeepers are up before dawn and preparing their goods for early risers. There’s none of that going on here.”

“Be on your guard, everyone.” Jacob warns as he moves slowly down the street while he discretely watches Azrael.

“I’ll take a look in the back of the armory.” Azrael says, knowing Jacob is watching, so he slinks off into the shadows to avoid him.

Jacob notices Azrael disappeared! *Where did he go?* Jacob wonders. *Did he sneak off?*

Jacob tells those nearby him, “I’m going to check on Azrael. You stay with Anak and the others.”

Malek rejoins Anak and the others, “Jacob saw Azrael take off and he’s checking him out,” he informs Anak.

Slowly they relax as suspicious activity seems nonexistent. Indeed, there’s no activity. “It is out of the ordinary,” one of the men remarks. “The shopkeepers usually are up and about by now.”

Miriam walks over to Anak. “Do you think the stories we heard are true?” Frowning, she looks around, “There’s no one around and that’s suspicious by itself.” Nervously, she surveys the area.

“Even if true, these shops should be starting to open, especially this time of day,” Anak remarks. “Look at how high the sun has climbed since we entered. Can’t see anything with the glare. That alone puts us in a more dangerous situation if things go wrong.”

The City of Hope, faces east to the rising sun to honor Adonai, now this proves to be a handicap for the sun is in their eyes, blinding them to what’s down the street. Though a bit more relaxed, Anak nevertheless is cautious; it just doesn’t feel right.

“You want to wait for Jacob? We can wait outside the gate.” She then notices the gate, “Anak, look. The gate is closing and there are guards now. Something is definitely wrong!”

Even the guards, upon closer inspection, didn’t look like those who guard the city gates at night; these seem off somehow. Human in looks, something about them was odd. Their black scaled clothing, resembled armor and not the leather the city guards wore.

Everyone immediately went on high alert and look to Anak who turns, “What in His name?” Then, they hear peculiar sounds from the other side, behind some buildings, “Is that weapons fire?” *Who in the devil is here, and where did they come from?*

Anak starts to run toward the sound when Jacob comes from behind a building. “Find cover,” He yells. “They have weapons and they’re using demon fire.”

The team scatters to offer less of a target for whoever is firing. Shop windows shatter as green fire like lightning erupts from within. Wooden crates piled high behind windows are cover for the shooters. The air is hazy with smoke, making it hard to see, even without the sun in their eyes. “Where is Azrael? He is supposed to be scouting for us,” Anak shouts to whoever is within earshot.

Jacob says, “Maybe you’ll believe me about him now. I saw him with some demons. We’re fenced in with no way out. Azrael and his demons are the ones with weapons!”

Anak can hardly believe Azrael betrayed them and he looks around trying to decide the next step. He sees someone stagger from a nearby building. She can barely move ad blood soaks the front of her gown and a blaze of melted skin on her face. “Please help,” she cries, staggering. Anak realizes, *it’s the woman who told us about the city.* She falls then, unable to move. A pool of blood soaks into the ground.

“Isn’t that Nebiah, the prophetess?” Jacob asks. “The one who came to us for help in freeing the city?”

Not listening, trying to reach her, Anak scuttles forward, keeping low to the ground to make his way over to her side.

Nebiah grabs hold of him. “I’m s-so sorry,” she stutters. “We had … no idea …Please forgive me. He fooled us, …the city elders …all dead.” She took a last shuddering breath and lay still.

“Who did this?” Anak demands. But she can no longer answer. Abruptly, demon fire skitters through the air, too close for comfort. Anak runs for cover, feeling the heat of the demon fire.

“What did she say?” Jacob asks. “Did she identify Azrael?”

“She wasn’t able to say.” Anak knows Azrael is to blame. Yet he still finds it hard to believe. *Have I been deceived,* he wonders, thinking back to the nebula and in his memories, he knows Jacob is right.

Malek arrives, “I found a way out, or Abby here does.”

She has a startled look on her face and opens her mouth to warn but suddenly, demons surround the group their faces smeared in a grin, eagerly looking forward to the capture especially of angels.

“Lord Adonai, we could use some help,” Anak said. But he feels a spirit binding preventing his words from going out to the heavens.

Recognizing Anak, a demon says, “This one our master wants,” and strikes a heavy blow. Knocked to the ground, Anak’s wrists are chained one to the other. Feeling the spark of demon fire from the whips, they move when ordered, not wanting to feel the burn of demon fire. Soon they are being marched from the city to where they know not.

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## 2. Into the Deep

**Anger burns** and Anak wants to destroy the hoard with heavens fire, but he knows Adonai would not want it. *Not that I have the ability right now. Hopefully, we’ll be rescued*. *Trust in the Lord*, Anak reminds himself. He has a difficult time with it as he marches with the others into the darkening sky as the day ends.

“Isn’t it awful,” Lucifer sneers appearing suddenly. Anak who knew him as Azrael says nothing. “I know how you feel,” he sniggers.

Anak struggles to ignore him.

“Having to pretend to be someone you’re not, angel or Nephilim or is it human now.” Leaning close, he says, “Soon, you will know what my dragon felt when you slew him, pierced his great heart. Remember? He was friend to your father, but I know you do not care for the dragon or your father. An absent daddy, was he?” Lucifer laughs in glee.

Again, Anak is silent, careful not to respond to the taunts.

“I’ve waited long for revenge.” He strikes Anak a harsh blow, as his rage threatens to erupt fully. Anak struggles to stay upright. “Get him out of here,” Azrael growls, “before I kill him.” Then mutters to himself, *Except it’s not time. Still, I shall have my revenge!*

Anak, Jacob, and Malek led in chains, wonder, *What is this?* Jacob looks to Anak lifting his chained hands questioning.

Anak looks at Jacob as he lifts his own chained hands and shrugs to indicate his helplessness and lack of understanding.

“Quiet, scum.” A demon strikes Jacob knocking him to the ground. “On your feet,” it snarls. “No talking friend of the betrayer.”

Jacob stumbles to his feet, finding it hard to walk with the chains weighing him down. The guards leave him no choice so, he struggles on following Anak and Malek. Miriam is not with them he notices, nor are the other women. It’s just the three of them.

*Where are they taking us?* Anak wonders. Also noticing the women are not with them. *What have they done with Miriam?*

“You’ll get answers to your questions,” Azrael said as he appears beside him. “You won’t like it, though.” His words full of venom, and he leers at Anak who shudders in revulsion.

Even the demons seem fearful. “Keep your eyes on your work or you too will feel my whip,” he snarls as a flash of green light flares. A demon screams, shrinking against the wall. Azrael laughs for he enjoys taunting demons almost as much as Anak. *It will be so sweet*.

“Worthless angels. You know not of real terror. But you will. You will wish you never came to earth with this dog,” he said to Malek. “Nor will the lovely angel Miriam, who’s in my keep. What fun I’ll have. Such a beauty, is she not?”

Miriam and the others, including the humans, Lucifer kept in the City of Hope. Azrael eyes Miriam and separates her from the others to have her for himself. I’ll kill the humans in the funeral pyres. Perhaps my hunger for revenge will be satisfied when Miriam’s lovely body burns in hell fire with the others after I enjoy her a bit.

Once they left the green forest surrounding the city, black stone rose, mist curling in and around the rocks. A vulture rises into the sky, its prey clutched in its talons. *I know how that feels,* Anak muses.

The flush of the sun shrinks below the horizon to cast an eerie glow over the river; it twists like a snake below the golden orange-violet sky, then darkness fell, and they walked for what seems hours. It was hard to tell for none saw the sun again. Aware of the increasing darkness he couldn’t tell where the demons were taking them. *Maybe it’s a cavern of sorts,* he speculates, for the dark is complete. It never occurred to any of them they were bound for hell.

Driven relentlessly, they move down a steep incline. It feels like the last leg of their journey as the seemingly endless path wound down. But finally rest was allowed. Falling into a deep sleep they awake in a dismal place, a rank smell of sulfur and brimstone.

In chains, he hangs from a black stone wall, shackles hold his wrists by steel pinions likely placed by magic for the surface is undamaged and slick with his sweat. It’s a sweltering, painful distressing position, and he is completely helpless as are the others on other side. Able to turn his head slightly, Anak sees Jacob to his left and Malek on his right, both are also shackled as he. Neither one seems conscious. *Where are the other prisoners?* Anak cannot imagine Miriam in this hell hole with Lucifer.

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Miriam ponders. *Why put us here together?* She muses. *Wonder if the demons can read my mind or the other angels? Perhaps humans. If so, they don’t know we have special powers. Hmm.*

“Stop dallying,” A guard strikes her legs with a demon whip which burns like fire. “He’ll not be pleased if we’re late. The pyres will blister that pretty flesh tonight. We’ll have fun with you first.” Looking her up and down, ﻿ with a bark of laughter. Its face and neck flush with pleasure as the demon considers its prey, chest rising and falling its breath comes quicker, and spit dribbles from its lips.

Another demon, looking fearfully about, pulling on its arm and then whispers something to the other demon. A shudder of fear seems to wipe the smile from his face and he walks quickly away.

*Well, that was interesting.* Miriam muses, glancing around. *Wonder what he said to him?* She looks at the women sitting or lying about and wonders, W*hich one is Abby?* Miriam realizes from what the demon said they might light the fire of their own funeral pyre. *Whatever is intended, we must get out of here*.

Upon entering the City of Hope, the demons now secure them in an old building near the town square. Each woman had found a place far from the guards and settled in to wait.

The doors are unlocked she notices, the guards complacent and they seem to be ignoring the women.

*No chains, so they must believe we’re helpless. Of course, women so, we’re no threat. But no one ever accused demons of being too bright.* Miriam prays. *Lord, what are we to do? Please send help.* Soon she finds peace as she waits for an answer.

As Miriam considers the situation, she looks at her companions and, getting the attention of a few nearby. She nods her head, whispers for them to close their eyes, and breathe deep, pretending sleep. While exhausted, she does not allow herself to sleep. The others understand and do as directed, while keeping alert themselves.

Miriam’s thoughts open, she listens and sends quieting thoughts to the demons, inciting further complacency. She knows the demon minds are dull and soon, she hears them quiet down and themselves are soon asleep, snorting and make disgusting slobbering noises.

*Azrael or Lucifer has Anak, and the others. No doubt wanting his revenge*, she muses, *which means we’re going to have to find a way out to help them, if we can.* Looking she questions, *where is Abby, the one who knows the way out?*

Then, in the dim light filtering in from outside, she spots a woman she recognizes. *Let me see, how much influence do I have over her?* She sends her thoughts out to the one she believes is Abby.

A moment later, Abby turns her head and looks toward Miriam, who smiles and nods. The woman smiles back and slowly inches her way over, quietly, so as not to disturb the guards. Abby arrives knowing what Miriam needs of her, and begins to draw in the dirt, a map showing the way out of the city.

“We must get rid of the guards.” She whispers so quietly Miriam has trouble hearing but answers in a low voice, “Leave it to me.”

*They will be in for a surprise upon awakening,* Miriam muses. *When Lucifer finds out, likely he’ll be shy a few demons.* Sending her power out toward the demons, soon they are snoring, deep in sleep.

Shortly after, having gotten the attention of the other women, each one signals another nearby and soon they’re all moving to follow Abby who’s leading the group, quietly past the guards.

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“I was amazed you put those guards into a deep sleep,” Abby said once they were inside the tunnel leading outside the city. It had taken what seemed like forever to get everyone out. The women were afraid if caught and hesitant to leave. “They’ll kill us,” one woman whispered, clearly fearful. “I’ll never see my children.”

“You think to survive? What do you imagine those burning pyres are for - to heat up the night? Is it okay with you if your children are alive to smell your burning flesh?” Miriam harshly reminds them their lives are in jeopardy if they stay. More terrified of the fires–following Miriam and Abby−they at least have a chance to escape and join with their families, eventually. So, they scrambled to flee.

Cautiously the sixteen women edged their way out of the building and across an alleyway. Abby shows them a tunnel they’d dug long ago for such an eventuality, hidden behind some empty crates. Quickly, the women climb down a ladder into the tunnel that led outside.

Miriam remained behind, the last to leave so the entrance to the tunnel was secured. She catches up to the rest though slowly for there is no light inside the passage and they must move cautiously. Miriam warns the women to slowly follow Abby, “We can’t afford any injuries,” she said. While it seemed like forever, soon they see daylight at the end of the tunnel. All they needed was to break through the wooden lattice; it had been intended mainly to keep animals out.

“Whatever you do, find your family or otherwise, do so cautiously,” she said. Some left the group to find their families in the nearby area while the rest stayed with Miriam. The women joyfully walked the path to freedom, muttering prayers of thanksgiving to Adonai.

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Miriam went along with women, but in her heart she had a sense that things were about to change for her. *Lord,* she prayed. *What is it you hold out before me? I pray you find me worthy of your honor, and that I can be all you desire for me to be in whatever situation I’m placed.*

With joy in her heart, Miriam expected something wonderful, though she knew well enough, wonderful wasn’t always what the Lord had in mind, at least not initially. As she told one of the women, “While always delighted to follow Adonai, and look forward to his blessings, I’m just as often disappointed by what comes before.”

## 3. It’s Hell

**Chained**, Anak, Jacob, and Malek see only black walls. The chains holding them prisoner drain all their energy. Azrael, they now know is Lucifer, and he has them in his power. His rage at Anak having slain his dragon centuries before has not abated.

“I’ve not found a dragon to replace Azrael. Lucifer remarks. “You believe your Adonai is perfect, but he is *nothing* compared to the ones who do my bidding.” Lucifer considers what to do with the three.

Walking about the three men, bound helplessly, he flicks his whip, demon fire flashes like lightning burning across Jacob’s skin. He screams in agony as Lucifer scourges him with demon fire and chuckles as Anak watches helplessly, impotent to do a thing.

Lucifer savors the anguish and turns to Malek, moving the whip over and down his skin, causing him to writhe in pleasure so intense he cannot control it. Images he’d long imagined unable to cast them aside, beset him, and he burns with shame unable to stop the desire coursing through his body, his head hangs in disgrace. Lucifer snickers. “You are embarrassed to hang naked on a wall while others watch your passion flame, and to be shamed for your very sinful desires. What can you do?” Lucifer turns away and tosses his whip aside.

On earth, Anak could sense Lord Adonai. His torture here in hell is a terrible emptiness; it seems to devour him. *This torture, this emptiness being without Adonai, curses me.* He recalls those he’d seen burned by spiritual fires in the Otherworld, and knows how each must have felt.

“Which do you desire, fill your emptiness with the lovely Miriam?” She seems to appear standing before him, a coy smile on her lips, she moves closer to Anak who is shocked at the lust burning in her eyes. “Or is there someone else you desire, perhaps Clio?”

Clio then appears before him as she was on the isle, barely clothed. Her red-gold hair curls over creamy white shoulders, garment wet from the water it clings over her every curve, so revealing he feels the heat of his body flush seeing her rosy nipples harden in desire.

“Anak. I’ve missed you. Come, love.” Her legs part slightly as her gown slides up shapely thighs to entice. “Come to me, lover.” Slowly she peels the gown from her shoulders. Unable to take his eyes off her, he sees the gown slip down over full breasts, to slide over rounded curves and pool lastly on the floor.

Naked before him, she flicks the gown out of the way with her toe and both hands roam over her flesh, eyes gleaming.

A demon and succubus, feeding from the sexual energy of humans and supernatural creatures of either sex, she can bind them to herself. Many on earth are prostitutes or other women who seduce men, and steal their souls. Clio is a demon who serves Lucifer seducing both men and women and even angels including Anak. She comes offering herself to him once again, or so it seems.

“I do not follow every man,” she says, licking his belly. “Only you are the perfume upon my breasts.” His eyes travel down to her breasts that swell, nipples peak with each breath she rubs herself against him, licking farther down. “So handsome. All the women long for you. Such a young gazelle, graceful as you came to me with desire as you do now,” her fingers slide over his skin as she taunts.

“Remember you desired and pleasured me? You threw me down upon the bed in the woods, coming to me as I bathed in the forest pool. Remember how sweet it was? Hard as a rock you plundered my sex and enjoyed its fragrance, the salty taste on your tongue.

“You among all the men, an apple tree whose fruit I enjoyed, sweet to my taste it was.” Her tongue moistens her lips as she tantalizes and runs her hands over his sweat-slick skin.

Anak longs to turn his face away but cannot. His desire for her rekindles as the binding between them renews.

Lucifer snickers. “So, you’re not an impotent angel after all; human like your mother,” he said and Clio vanishes. “No, she is not for you.”

Anak realizes it was only an illusion. *Lord, I cannot do this*, *I need your help.* He cries out loud: “Save me, Adonai for my misery is great, and I sink into the mire with no firm footing. Despair engulfs me. Weary I call to you. My enemy is indeed great, but not greater than You.”

“No,” Azrael screams. “Cease crying to Him. It is forbidden.”

He lashes out with his whip, but it has no effect as it slides over Anak’s flesh impotently. “You have no right. This is my place!” Lucifer screams turning, knowing what or whom he will see.

“What are you doing? Who gave you permission?” Lucifer spewing words out to dispel the angels, but they remain.

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Anak, Jacob, and Malek are awed as Michael suddenly appears before Lucifer. “No authority? Where did you get that idea? It never ceases to amaze me how you think the universe is yours.”

Ariel at his side, smiles at Lucifer, “I am the lioness of Adonai so, little ol’ me has all the authority I need.”

“You should’ve stayed and worked it out with Adonai and not run away.” Said Michael, amused by Lucifer’s tirade.

“You threw me out at His command” he screams impotently. “What did I do? Nothing. After all, He gave me free-will.”

Michael steps forward, “Yes, you thought you’d freely take what was His –a foolish thing to do. So, *what* are you doing?”

“Anak is mine,” Azrael said snarling. “Had he not killed my favorite dragon, I wouldn’t have laid claim to him!”

“Ah, had your dragon not burned his fields, *at your bidding*, he would not have slain said dragon. So, no. He’s not yours.?” Ariel smirks and walks about the room, placing a spiritual covering over the nude bodies of the other prisoners.

Michael tips his sword and Lucifer’s eyes narrow as he watches it swing like a pendulum knowing it could swing against him or in his favor – so he’s cautious in answering.

“Perhaps,” he said. “Still, he did commit carnal sin with Clio.” His look cunning. “He enjoyed her lovely flesh, she who *is* mine; this needs answering. So, a choice then.” he smirks, delighted at himself.

“Indeed, I’ve offered only lustful temptation. Had you come earlier, you would’ve seen he did not resist nor truly overcome neither with the lovely Miriam or Clio. So, like father like son, human trash.

“Generational sins carried forth. I am entitled am I not?” He hisses. “Only if he survives will he be yours.” An evil smile lingers as he reaches to trail a finger over Anak’s bare flesh, watching the blood trickle.

Ariel looks on with disgust, *this is a revolting turn of events, bound to the succubus.* She turns to Anak. “He’s right, you know. You made a choice though warned. It’s not ‘like father, like son.’ Yet, still you have time to overcome your father’s sin, break the binding and be set free. Those are the rules.”

Anak stares open-mouthed trying to comprehend what she just said and where that leaves him. Apparently in hell as Michael vanishes from hell’s prison leaving Ariel behind.

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## 4. Into the Fire

**Shouting in anger**, “I’m stuck in this miserable pit with him and my father because of a silly mistake?”

“Silly, no. Foolish, yes. Had you been human, it wouldn’t be an issue. Still, you fell in the nebula as an angel,” Ariel reminds. “So, you must battle your father’s sin and overcome. Lucifer has you for a time but there is always a chance of success for your father once was and may still be very powerful.”

“How powerful? He never said no to my mother,” Anak yells, fear pronounced, heart pounding in desperation. “She tempts him. He didn’t say no. I said no to Clio and Lucifer.” Then he stops arguing. “It won’t be a problem,” His pride answers.

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“Great. This is most interesting. I suppose you want the other two.” Lucifer says, disgusted. “They’re of no use to me without him.” He flutters his hand; the chains fall to the smooth black floor as does Anak, Malek and Jacob.

“You’re not leaving him,” Jacob exclaims. “Let me stay. You cannot leave him here by himself; Ariel, it’s not right.”

“It’s my choice, so I will take the challenge.” Anak smiles as he bids his friends farewell, pretending confidence he does not feel. Inside, he wonders how in heaven, or hell, he’ll do it.

Ariel disappears with the human soul Jacob and the angel Malek. She returns a second later to speak with Anak with his head in hands he cries, “What am I to do? Yes, what I did was foolish, but why this? It’s easy to see how Clio affects me.”

“Don’t blame yourself. Clio is a tempter. In hell, you’re especially vulnerable. Even Lucifer, which is the reason even he keeps her at arms’ length and out of sight on the earth, usually.”

Ariel said. “It’s why he wants the innocent and vulnerable, like Lily. It’s what made her desirable. She thought a lot of him and would’ve done whatever he asked. Not Clio. She’s feisty and will argue every step of the way until eternity.

“Fear not, for this is part of your learning.” Ariel continues. “When temptation comes, resist to break the binding.”

“What binding are you talking about?”

“You know you’re now bound to Clio again, and once again you must learn what is needful to free yourself.”

Smiling, she disappears, leaving Anak still confused.

Lucifer disappeared after Anak’s friends had left, leaving Anak to wonder *now what?* Exhausted, he falls asleep on the hard floor, hell’s fire from below keeping it warm.

Upon awakening, Anak’s in a different room. No shackles hold him but green marble with a silvery fire running through the walls this time and he’s free to move about. Anak sees a door, opens it and steps through into another room, he thinks, and finds himself back in the same room. Again, he opens the door and ends in the same room. *Well, this is awkward. If I can’t get out, then what?*

He sees other people or demons, he doesn’t know which, enter and leave. *Why do they come and leave? It makes no sense*. After a time, he gives up trying to figure it out. A woman enters, walks to the door and opens it to leave. “Could you help me?” Anak says. “It seems I’m stuck here and can’t get out.”

“Don't waste my time," she said with a sneer and leaves. “Humans or angels, they’re idiots,” he hears as the door closes.

*If this is the worst, then it shouldn’t be hard to overcome whatever.* *Except if this is my temptation it makes no sense.*

After a time, a man walks in and Anak expects him to leave as the others had but this one remains, watching him.

*Who is this*? he wonders. “My name is Anak,” he said to the very tall man who looks slightly familiar. “And you are?”

“I’m your father, Andras,” he says. “Who in hell would I be?” He accuses. “I have to wonder how smart you are to have stayed in this room so long and not left.”

He looks at Anak and says, “You look like me. Though I’d not expect you’d lie about it. Who’d want a fallen for a father?”

“It’s not like I had a choice,” Anak said. “Having you for a father or being here. One day I was freeing the City of Hope or trying to and...”

“No one in hell gives a damn.” Cutting him off. “I’ll show you where I live, if you can call it living. You can meet She.”

“Where you live! Who’s she, my mother? Is this where she came at her death and didn’t go to heaven after all?”

He seems shocked. “That goodie-two-shoes. your mother messed my life up. She’s in Heaven or I’d seen her down here by now.”

“Oh, I suppose you didn’t mess up her life leaving and not helping to care for me as I was growing up.” Anak could not understand Andras. “It’s not my idea to meet and do battle, you know.”

“What do you mean, do battle?” Eyebrows shot halfway to his hairline of which he had plenty. *Likely, that’s where I got my hair.* He runs his hand through his hair. *I look more like him than my mother. Yet he towers over me, even when I was a Nephilim*.

“Stop thinking about what makes no sense and answer me!” Andras grabbed his arm, “What do you mean battle you who couldn’t even beat a rat demon.” He laughs, lip curling.

“The conflict isn’t with swords. I don’t really know.” Anak rambles. “All I know is, you were seduced by sexual sin, though you already were fallen and I did too. After becoming an angel not human.” He paused. “I fell but repented so was accepted back. It’s different somehow.” Anak stopped talking. “Now they say I’m bound again, whatever.”

“Never mind, Lucifer has a way of making things work to his benefit. I’m not sure after hearing your story.” Andras turns away. “Come on. I’ll show you the place. Then I have to leave.”

“I can’t get out,” I said as he walks toward the door.

“Of course, you can. Just follow me.” Andras opens the door and walks out shaking his head and chuckling and Anak followed. *I guess you stay until it’s time to leave.*

Then he said, “You can stop laughing at me because I don’t know my way around hell. After all, I killed a dragon of Lucifer’s.”

Andras came to a sudden halt and Anak nearly ran into him. “You what? You’re the one who killed his dragon, Azrael, the one he’s been grousing about for longer than I remember?”

“Yup. That was me,” Anak said brightly.

“You may have something going for you after all.” A thoughtful look crosses has face. “I’m beginning to see why he sent you to me, or to stay in my place.” A smile curves his lips, one of amusement.

“Let’s go.” He grabs Anak’s hand and the next thing he knows both are in front of a door to what Anak supposes is Andras’ home. Red rock run through with silvery fire all around.

“She has no idea I went to get you, so don’t be surprised if She doesn’t give a warm welcome. She wouldn’t anyway.”

Opening the door, Andras called, “I’m back with someone to keep you company.” Laughing he flops down on a couch.

Anak looks around. *Everything seems off for some reason, from what I’m used to. He couldn’t put a finger on the difference.*

Just then, a woman came around the curve of a wall and stops, staring at him then at Andras. Her eyes wide, face flushed. “What in hell - why is he here?” She whispered in dread.

Chest heaving, looking from one to the other, upset seeing Anak. “Do you know him?” Her eyes flash with the same silvery fire he’d seen throughout; it gave her violet eyes a peculiar look.

“Yes,” He said, looking at her oddly. “He’s my son, Meira’s kid and he’s here at Lucifer’s bidding.”

Andras seems not to notice Anak gasp as the temptation he will face stands in front of him. For she is either Clio or her twin and he trembles with trepidation.

*How could I live with her and him gone?* Cringing at the thought, Anak’s pulse began to race and he feels the same desire being in the same room near her. *This is impossible.*

Considering Anak’s thoughts, but not understanding, Andras says, “It’s not impossible.” To Clio he says, “Show him a room.” Not a question so much as a command.

Clio glares and walks past him. “You’ll destroy us both,” she whispers so only Anak hears. “You have no idea what you’ve done.” She leaves the room, ignoring his command.

Andras shrugs, “I’m leaving in the morning,” he said. “She’ll be fine. Stay as far away as you can. The place is big enough.”

He looks thoughtful, “I’ll show you where you can bunk. Come on.” He walks in another direction from Clio.

“What do I call her? I mean, she does have a name?”

“I’ve called her ‘She’ from the start.” He shrugs. “She came several centuries ago. Lucifer gave her to me and She’s been here since. Leaves occasionally doing her thing or Lucifer’s.”

“You can have the room next to mine.” He said. “She keeps mostly to that hall and won’t bother you. Damn hard time finding her anyway. Not that I ever go there. It’s a labyrinth.”

“You don’t share a room?” curious about their situation.

“No way. Lucifer gave her to me, but she’s no mate. Besides, why choose one when there are so many?”

Chuckling to himself, “I tried it with your mother you know and look who it got me.” He frowns. “There’s more to that story as well. Maybe we’ll talk about it later.”

“She doesn’t mind, you sleeping separate?” He asked more curious, wondering if it was before or after the Nebula when he’d first met Clio and had an affair with her.

“Yeah, that’s strange.” Andras rubs his jaw and considers. “He doesn’t do this sort of thing. So, I never understood.” Andras walked away saying no more about it.

*A peculiar place.* Anak looks around, *it doesn’t seem too bad. There’s a bed and hooks for hanging clothes.* Glancing in another room he sees a bathroom. *The toilet auto-flush as is the shower, I imagine it turns on as you step in and off as you step out.* “Nice. Not bad.”

“We’re not complete barbarians, you know,” Andras said, walking by on his way back down the hall.

*So, he can read minds too.* Anak surmised. *Is that why he gave her to Andras?* Laughing at the idea, *He’s not omniscient, of that I’m certain. Only Adonai is omniscient and Omni whatever.*

Anak walked down the hall into what he imagined was the living area. *Looks like there’s food. That’s a plus, if it’s edible.*

Lucifer laughs at the impossible situation he’d placed Andras and Anak and Clio. *How will it end?* he wonders, not omniscient he has no clue. He’d hoped one day Anak would come. He’d tried to imagine it, given his binding with Clio. That alone ensured he would fall again.

*Andras doesn’t like Clio or he’d have bedded her long ago. Still, he has an eternity.* Lucifer considers the situation. *He won’t mind his son partaking of her.* Snickering at the thought. *Clio can tempt; it’s her specialty and she is so good at i*t. He remembers his time with her and is glad she’s with Andras.

*He won’t resist her.* He snickers. Didn’t *then and won’t now.* Lucifer walks into the lower halls of hell, chuckling in anticipation.

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## 5. Down the Trail

Miriam and the women, on their way to free Anak and the others, found a trail left by them but it did little good. “We’ve followed this path through the hills; it’s all black volcanic rock but where does it go?” No one had an answer. “It’s looks hopeless,” one of the women said. “We have no idea where we are so how can we find the men?”

“It won’t be hard to find our way,” said Abby. “Leave it to me for I’ve been around the nearby forest before.”

One of the others remarks, “It seems there are several ways if this is the way. My guess, it all depends not on who but what you are! Only demons can go where men cannot.”

“Wait a minute,” Miriam says. “Someone’s coming.” But she’s the only one who sees not a human but a demon on its way to hell. *Unless that woman can. From her remark, I wonder.*

“Who did you see?” Abby asks. “I saw no one ahead of us.” Looking confused as she gazes about.

“My mistake,” Miriam said, then takes her to one side, and says, “Don’t mention it to the others but I can see demon spirits while the others cannot. “Keep them occupied and I’ll be right back.

Abby leaves Miriam and as soon as she’s out of sight, Miriam approaches. “Where do you go demon?”

“Who calls to me from the earth realm?” The demon glances back and sees Miriam and heaven’s light. “You’re a celestial.” It moves closer to Miriam, close as it dares without being subject to heaven’s fire. Some demons long to return to heaven and try to get as close to celestials as possible to savor the taste of heaven.

Miriam says, “I am an angel seeking a friend, three friends who were taken by Lucifer and his demons. One is a mortal soul, the other two are angels like me.”

“Entry into Hell has levels, but if Lucifer gave them entry, it’s hard to know where they’ve gone, or to which level. It could be any of the lower levels. Are you certain you want to know, or go there? Pausing, he rubs his chin. While you are a celestial, it’s not likely you can enter hell, not without Lucifer’s consent, and likely your Lord. While I can tell you of the levels, you cannot enter therein.”

“I’d still like to know,” said Miriam. “If you’d be so kind.”

“Kind is not in my nature, but as you will.” And the demon spirit shows Miriam those levels to which they may have gone, and he gives them each by their number:

1. Those who never knew Yeshua.

2. You must pass this one to go on.

*Is this a catch-all* Miriam wonders? “What do you mean, you must pass this one to go on?”

“It could be most anything Lucifer decides will amuse him,” the demon says with a smirk. “Usually, some lust of the flesh or an eons-long repeat of some unpleasant sin and thee mortal experienced on earth and prefers not to repeat, but does down here.” The demon chuckles at the thought, then continues.

3. Overcome lust of the flesh, mainly sex.

*Lucifer may have taken Anak here as he still desires Clio.* But she nods for the demon to continue.

4. Again, overcome lust but this one is for food – gluttony. It’s disgusting watching these people gorge on food.

5. Greed: it’s the same only lust for wealth and power

6. Anger: The ‘Furies’ give eternal torture, spiritual fire

“What do you mean, spirit fire?” She asks. “I’ve never heard of such a thing. How can there be a spirit fire? What does it do?”

Chuckling, it’s eyes light with malevolence. “It’s a fire that devours not the flesh, but the soul; it’s a flame that never goes out.” Laughing in glees, Miriam can see the joy this demon gets from torture.

“Okay. Please go on. I think I get the picture.”

7. Heresy: Those who reject beliefs about Adonai

8. Violence: toward others & self – suicide is one

9. Fraud: deliberately defraud people.

Miriam chuckles thinking of the Fae and how they defraud or trick people. *Should be a lot of them in there,* she muses.

10. Treachery: against the innocents

“In hell’s Center is our master, Lucifer. If Anak entered as his guest or captive the only way in is for you to go as his guest or his captive.” His eyes gleam as he looks Miriam over. “He may find you pleasing.”

“No thank you,” she says, appalled at the idea of entering hell with Lucifer, as his guest. “I’ll do without. I hope my friend finds his way out or the Lord finds it in his heart to free him.”

“I’ll let him know, but I doubt the master will allow it.” The demon walks through a wall of rock and Miriam saw it no more.

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Andras is gone – in what Anak imagined is morning. With no sun they cannot tell. The walls seem to know the sun is up; they began to illumine with silvery-green iridescence brighter than the night when they darkened. *It’s eerie without the sun. Will I get used to it?*

Finding his way down the hall, Anak found what he hoped is food, for he is starving. As he looks around, hearing a sound he turns, ‘She’ is standing in the entry looking at him.

“Andras calls you ‘She.’ Yet I knew your name as Clio or Clíodhna,” he said, trying for serious. “Which do you prefer?”

“Clio is fine,” she said. “It’s time he learned I have a name, anyway, at least when he gets back.”

*Brown eyes, full lips the color of* *pomegranate*. Anak smiles to himself, drinking all of her in, *gorgeous, simply gorgeous*, continuing unaware of the binding upon himself.

It’s a second before he recalls his experience with Lucifer earlier and he says, “Are you for real or an illusion?”

“What do you mean, illusion? I’m here in front of you, am I not?” She frowns. *What game’s he playing now?*

“I saw you earlier with Lucifer. You were an illusion then and a demon, as on the nebula. Only I didn’t know either time until I’d made a fool of myself. Are you a demon and now merely an illusion?”

“What - a demon and an illusion?” she scowls. “With Andras’ gone, I’m the power here. And keep your thoughts to yourself so I don’t hear them.” *All I care about is obeying Lucifer’s wishes* *and there’s only one thing he wants, your destruction*. *Sad to say, it’s bye-bye, baby.*

He glimpses a slight smile on her face as she turns away and Anak wonders what she’s thinking. *About us, I hope.*

“It’s possible.” She gives him a flirty look, her eyes gleam with lust. *It’s up to me to see he’s tempted and fails. Such fun again.*

*What?* Anak drops down to sit on the floor. *Did she flirt with me? Oh no. I am damned for sure.*

“I heard.” She sniggers before walking off with a wiggle of her hips and flick of her hair over her shoulder as she glances back.

*Not to think; it’s impossible. If she’s my test, my temptation, how will I overcome?* Panic sets in.

Anak wonders, *If I’m to battle to* overcome *her temptation then I must be tempted first.* Finally, he sits down to relax on a black leather couch. *This at least is comfortable.*

Anak lies back. *Isn’t life fascinating*? He cares not if she hears him. *How it intersects, crosses over and separates, then pulls back on itself. Here we are, Clio and I, together. Temptation or not, it’s possible we are meant to be?*

“Hell no, we’re not,” Clio shouts down the hall. “Remind me to teach you how to block your thoughts.”

*She’s a force of nature. Again, I’m victim to her spell.*

He falls asleep and dreams. Only this dream is different.

*In a strange place, a woman enters. He feels compelled to her and ask, ‘Will you go with me? She says, ‘no.’ Still, he can tell she’s thinking about the question, and regrets having said no. Finally, she decides, ‘If he were to ask me again, I would say yes,’ and doesn’t understand why. Still, she smiles delightfully to herself and goes about her work.*

*Later, her friends arrive. Clio joins them for a good time and Anak walks to the table and again asks, while ignoring all the others present, “Will you go with me?”*

*She considers a moment, remembers her earlier decision, looking at his handsome face. His mouth a work of art, all sensuality and softness, and very kissable. She smiles, “Yes. I will go with you,” she said and got to her feet, then followed him out the door.*

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As hell’s master, Lucifer knows Anak’s dream, he interprets his own distorted way and is furious, “It’s impossible. She cannot be falling for him and leave me. How else could he have the dream?” He shrieks. “No. Sending her to tempt him was a mistake.” Lucifer is nearly tearing his hair out in frustration.

I didn’t know she’d fall under his spell! I should’ve known. “Argh,” he moans in misery, then quickly looks around to be sure no one is listening. *If only I didn’t have all these frustrations.*

“What to do? Adonai will not defeat me!” Lucifer agonizes. “He cannot use his power here! Maybe it’s not him. Hmm.”

Roaming about hell, Lucifer forms a plan to defeat Anak and Adonai. Delighted with his inspiration, he sends for his demons. To ensure his success he plots to defeat his adversary. Drawing his minions to him, he shares his plan. “You’re part of the perfect plan. Aren’t joyful to help your ruler defeat his enemy, you know the one you failed to help before who sent here?”

The demons nod in agreement, wringing their hands. In their minds, fear dominates at any potential failure.

“If any warns either Clio or anyone else and reveals my plan you will find yourself in tiny little painful pieces, at least until you can locate and pull you together. So, be warned.” Pointing then at one demon, he says, “You stay a moment.”

Trembling in abject terror, certain its existence was about to end, the demon waited to hear his sentence but is surprised to hear Lucifer share the unexpected with him.

The warning for the others was not necessary as most had suffered under his hand. And none had ever forgotten the agony. Lucifer took joy in reminding them of the pain they could suffer, sometimes for not doing anything wrong. Such was the problem living in hell; you just never knew.

“Now get out of here and do what you’ve been told.” He snarls at each one. And each hurry to carry out their part.

One demon, Clio’s friend, if there were such in hell, whispers Lucifer’s plan and his part. “Is it not delightful?” He chortles. “Lucifer is so creative, is he not. But he also warned us to ‘*keep it to ourselves’* or … terror grips him as he grasps his error.

“Tell me, you’re not conspiring against him?” He gasps. “Oh no. Don’t tell him. Oh dear, oh dear.”

Panic engulfs him. Muttering to himself, Clio watches the demon scurry off. *Why did he share with me if he’s so afraid*? She wonders.

Clio, has done nothing wrong, and knows she must do nothing to win his ire. *if Lucifer ‘thinks’ I’ve plotted against him, for any reason I’m in trouble.* *Anak had the damn dream and Lucifer surely knows about it. With his damnable paranoia.* Clio shudders. *Now, what am I to do?*

Lucifer chortles in amusement, Let’s see what she does. Will she flee with Anak or remain faithful?

The ‘traitor’ demon had played his part in Lucifer’s plan and enjoys his pleasures for doing so. Down in hell, gurgling in delight, he shreds a soul, watching its dream renewed in hope, then fall apart, repeatedly, only to reap more failure. “Only now, in hell there’s no sex, alcohol or drugs to dull your pain, is there?” he scorns.

“This would be my punishment, if I failed,” he laughs at the soul’s agony. “Don’t you wish you hadn’t?” He cries, renewing the dream and its failure, continuing the torture.

Clio ponders what to do, suspicious*. I know his devious mind. He thinks of every possible option and always assumes the worst. Knowing Anak and I were close, he doesn’t trust me.*

Frowning, she paces the halls, debating her next move. *It may be the reason he gave me to Andras, knowing this could come about.*

Clio returns to her rooms, she looks over the lavish furnishings. *I see why he gave me all this when he was so angry; it didn’t make sense, given our relationship troubles.*

Clio continues to thinks, and knows she must decide. *He knows Andras avoids my temptation. I wasn’t unable to bind him; however, his son is already bound to me.*

She smiles at the image of Anak on white sands, stretched taunt, skin bronzed from the sun. *So different from his father and so easy to seduce.* The image excites Clio. “Stop it!” She rebukes. *If Lucifer were to know my feelings for him.* She considers. *Lucifer put me with Anak for a purpose, to fall prey to me and fail the temptation as his father did with the mother. Ah, most enjoyable.*

Clio ponders how to fulfill what she imagines is Lucifer’s purpose. Clothing is changed by imagining the look she needs. And a silvery gown sea-green, barely enough to cover more of less covers her. She looks at herself and feels her own passion stir imagining Anak.

Running her hands over her body to feel its silky smoothness she knows how Anak will respond. *He’ll see and desire me* she reasons to herself, walking out and down the hall. Clio can hear Anak’s thoughts and tempts him with images she sends of the Sea-green gown clinging, silver threads flow over every curve. The gown falls away to reveal her bare thighs and a tantalizing peek between her legs. Arching her back so he can see her breasts thrust out, nipples peaked.

Anak’s heart races fiercely as the images come. *No. I can’t have these thoughts*, he whispers to himself. *Clio’s Andras’* *woman*. Anak starts rise, then sits back down, as Clio enters the room, or prowls like a cat in heat would best describe her.

“Oh.” Anak gasps, as his vision of Clio comes to life before his eyes and he cannot help but respond to her. “My Lord.”

“I doubt your ‘Lord’ has anything to do with me,” Clio says with a smirk as she glides near, gazes down at him through dark violet eyes, seduction in every move, hands play over her body. “Andras is not here and even if he were he would not care, lovey.”

“What are you doing? You… no. You can’t be here….”

“Is this not your dream?” She asks, imagining her gown wet and clingy on her body it becomes so. Allowing the shoulder straps to slide off the gown slips down revealing all he’d imagined, images she’d given him. “Do you dream of what you desire? What you know I’d love you to do, the young rutting deer as you come to taste the spices.”

She sees his eyes slide over her softly rounded belly, down to her thighs and between her legs. “The curve of my thighs like jewels, you once said. Exquisite to behold, to stroke, and to taste what’s between.” Her hands move down her thighs stroking between her legs; they come away wet, and she licks her finger tips. Anak is mesmerized.

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Lucifer watches as Clio enters the room, gown clinging, her hands touch herself to excites even his carnal longings. *Ah Clio’s doing her job. So, she is faithful, doing what she was born to*.

*~~~*

Anak can barely breathe. He reaches to touch her everywhere, to feel her heart beating next to his, the pleasure of being with her, in her, and the joy of her wash over him.

“I have many pleasant things for you, lover.” Her tongue peaks out, to slide wetly over her lips to penetrate his mouth. He continues to gaze at her with longing, moving toward her as in a dream. Recalling how she came to him that night, after Azrael or Lucifer had sent him.

*I’d watched her in the pool first. If I’d known she was there for me, and she knew I watched. I’d have gone to her sooner if I’d known.* His heart beats in rhythm as he recalls her walking to him as she does now. His body responds as it did that night. Anak forgets his purpose in being in hell, in overcoming the temptation.

*If she is mine, and she is mine.* He moves toward her, to take her fiercely as he had before in the forest on the nebula. Tearing his robe free he stands naked. Anak sank to his knees on the rough stone, as Clio came near, a slight smile on her face. He pulls aside her gown, grasps her buttocks, and pulls her to him, his face in her rich flesh the salty taste of her in his mouth as his tongue pierces, and she moans. *Ah, my desire for her lush femaleness now fulfilled? I so delight in* *her flesh*, he muses as he plunders her sex in heated passion.

Pulling her to the couch, he rises to enter her, and takes delight in his own passionate release, feeling her again pulse with orgasm. Anak smiles as he lies back, and looks at Clio as she rises to her feet, her gown falling into place around her. He sees a look of sadness in her eyes and grows confused for he does not understand. Anak pulls on his robe.

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## 6. Seeds of Wrath

Anak's delight had increased as Clio shudders in orgasm. Then, she pulls away as dark seeds of wrath explode. Long-held they’re now rage since she had first arrived, and comes to full bloom in her heart. Anger flares and Clio does something she’s never done before.

“Is this all you want? You’re the same as any I’ve tempted and there are many who’ve given into lust and bedded me.” She looks at him with revulsion. *Look at him. Thinks he pleasured me like no other. He’s no different than any man. No, his father, Andras rejected me.*

“You know, the only one who ever said no was your father, a fallen!” Clio snickers as she pulls her robe tighter. "I admire him for his strength though it used to anger me, his not seeing me as a woman. It wasn’t that he didn’t desire me.” her voice harsh. “He simply wasn’t willing to be used, as I’ve used you.” A laugh of incredulity emerges. “Can you imagine?”

Her lips thin-lined. “I’ve allowed men, even you to use me. It’s the reason I was brought into being, to tempt men and women, use them. Let myself be used, as their vehicle into hell.” She leans close, snarling. “Are you delighted to be here– in hell fulfilling your lust? Did fornicating with me satisfy you, fulfill your desires?”

Moving away, she laughs. “It’s funny, this time, I imagined for some bizarre reason, it was different. I thought, surely he cares; he comes for me as a woman and not as a sex object.”

Reaching she tears her gown open again. “You want to fornicate or make ‘sweet love’?” she snarls. “Unable to speak? You enjoyed spying on me as you crept through the woods to seduce me, me who seduces! I knew you would come, as you did now. I expected you, yet hoped you would not. All you wanted was to fornicate.”

Anak, stunned by what she said, he cannot move. The desire and moment of pleasure he had felt vanished*. Should I get a wrap to cover her*, he wonders? He rises to stand numb. Shame rushes over him like boiling water and he burns in humiliation.

“It’s all you offered,” he said, wanting to apologize. Anak can feel the anguish she expresses and isn’t sure he understands.

“I’d never been with a woman on earth as a Nephilim. The idea of it repelled me, especially what Andras did with my mother. Though, I only knew her as my mother. He spawns a child, me, and abandons us.”

Anak hesitates. “I didn’t want us in that position,” he explains, “My mother suffered. I was told, an angel cared for her. Still, no one cared for her sadness and loneliness. Adonai was there. I’m not discounting it, but I didn’t know what to do. It was new to me. The first, no other woman, attracted me as did you and still do.

“There is one correction I’d make. I spied on you bathing, yet I’ve never seduced and would not have known how. And this time, you came to me, and yes to fornicate because I desire you so.”

Anak doesn’t know what more to say, silently waits for Clio to say something. Yet, he is embarrassed by her nakedness, so grabs a wrap off the back of the couch, he moves over to place it around her, then backs away to wait until she’s ready to talk.

Clio moves to the couch. Her heart begins to soften toward Anak. Pulling the wrap closed, she’s aware of her nakedness and imagines a gown less revealing covering her. Yet, uncertain, the doubt in her heart lessens as he speaks, and like a broken shard of glass freed, it falls away and the wound in her heart heals, revealing a tenderness.

“Anak, your innocence I corrupted on the isle.” Seeing he wants to speak, she said, “No. Don’t ease my conscience. I know your thoughts. Thoughts of peace and not seeing the evil I have done. And you’re right, of course, while you spied on me, I went there so you would see me and have Azrael send you to be tempted. So, yes, I seduced you then.”

“Clio. I’m responsible for myself choice, no matter who’s at fault in what happened between us.” Anak explains.

“I knew you were innocent. Yet I did it and yes, took great pleasure in it. I’ve tempted many people for centuries, so it’s I who’s to blame.”

“How can you say you’re to blame?” he cries heatedly.

“Blame, it’s all the same.” She says. “No one has the right to take another’s innocence. Lucifer, as you know is Azrael, pushed us to advance Adonai’s boundaries. In the 21st century, few innocents were about, as you know, right?”

“Many hated Adonai, preferred intellectual pursuits and the sexual freedom. Heaven be damned, as many said.”

Anak shook his head recalling his frustrating. “None, not one, was innocent, nor did anyone want to return to a state of innocence.”

“It has been centuries; I’ve stolen many innocent souls, including yours.” She whispered the last.

“So, where do we go now?” Anak sees Clio’s dark violet eyes and soft full lips without the sexual allure. “I love you, you know.”

“I wish I could love you, Anak, but it cannot be.” Taking his hand, she says, “Love requires sacrifice. Andras left your mother−to protect you for he did love her then. She perhaps didn’t tell you all?”

“He is a fallen,” Anak said. “No matter. What to do next?”

“You return to Adonai. While you did not overcome your battle with temptation, yet you came to a new understanding, so I break the binding. “Lucifer has no hold on you now. Be grateful.”

“Go with me! Don’t stay.” Pulling Clio to him. “Adonai...”

“You’re letting your feeling take over. Listen to yourself? You can take me out of hell, but you cannot take hell out of me. It’s over.”

Anak feels sadness and his heart breaks.

“It’s my sacrifice to make. Gladly I make it for you.”

Lucifer enters the room, expects to find them in ‘flagrante delicto,’ and is astounded to see nothing of the sort. “What have you done? You wretched, demon!” he shouts.

Anak moves to protect Clio. “You can’t stay. Please come.”

“No. Lucifer’s mostly hot air. I can refuse to do his bidding to tempt, or please him, even.” She looks slyly at Lucifer.

Anak sees Lucifer look away and knows she speaks truth; no other is like her, and he can see Lucifer’s ready to explode in an epic rage.

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Michael and Ariel waiting at hell’s doorstep, appear upon hearing the last remarks, “Finished with your little fit?” Taking Anak, the three disappear from hell, leaving Lucifer to rage on.

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Meanwhile, Clio also vanishes but she’s gone to earth, for a time, until Lucifer gets over his outburst. Her disappointment and hurt have taken a more sinister turn for she uses her skills to seduces men who prefer to deal in death towards women.

Clio looks down the hall at the man who’d just noticed her. Dressed very proper for this temptation, clad in a tight lavender suit, she waits, then turns to him and pouts. “Looks like I’m alone for the day,” she says, “but it doesn’t have to be boring.” Her eyes glance at him and she licks her lips, then turns to walk away, full hips swaying a bit, delicate feet clad in tall spiked heels, her firm ass jutting just enough.

He licks his lips as if savoring her taste already, then follows her to a door at the end. Breath short, he’s hard in anticipation. *Calm down boy,* he admonishes himself. *This won’t be a flash bang. We get to take our time with this one and enjoy it first.*

Entering the room, Clio removes her clothes one piece at a time, slowly as he shuts the door. His hands take hold and turns her around, eyes drink in her figure-eight body, voluptuous. *She’s quite beautiful*. Full breasts, a small trim waist, and full hips. *Hmm*. He breaths out and notes the dark triangle between her legs. His nostrils flare. No one has spoken a word since entering.

She gives him a little shove and he stumble back and falls on the bed and stares as she opens his fly, then she takes his hard-on in her mouth. It swells in response and begins to throb and harden even more. Unable to do a thing as she works he doesn’t resist. Releasing him she gets up, walks about the room, then slowly walks back to him.

Reaching up, he pulls her down on top of his hard-on. He’s inside her pulsing, and feels her orgasm as she cries out.

“Oh, my; it was nice.” She snickers still riding him. His hand tightens around her throat. “Oh, no. Let me show you how it’s done,” Clio says easily removing his hands to place hers around his throat and tightens as he gasps for air. His orgasm peaks as he breathes his last. She asks, “How many lives have you taken? Well, no more. I’ll see you in hell, and we can play some more.” Clio disappears from the room to find another to prey upon. Her sorrow in losing Anak almost satisfied.

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## 7. Seduction

**Meanwhile, the women had searched** looking where Lucifer had taken Anak, but to no avail. After speaking with the demon, Miriam prayed for guidance then, tells the women, “Return to your home, and families. I’ll let you know when there is a trail to follow.”

“Miriam. You’ll be alone here. One of us should remain.”

“I’m never alone. Besides, I have ways of letting you know. I’ll send a message through the father, if all else fails.” She said.

“I forget your ‘talent’ but will keep it in mind and trust you’ll be okay, though, I’m still nervous.” Abby said. “You’ll be lonely.”

“I’ll be fine. I’ll go to the forest and make friends of the wild critters, companions at least, and I’m quite fond of them.”

Not convinced, yet unable to sway her, the women gather their belongings and head home. Miriam, knows to remain where she is with no food and little water, is not practical so, she returns to the forest to search for shelter, and food and water. Within the edge of the forest, she sees a treehouse way up in the branches of a giant oak. “Someone made this long ago. It looks sturdy enough from down here.”

Climbing carefully, Miriam makes her way up to the treehouse. *It’s sitting here waiting for someone. If anyone wants their home back, I’ll give it up, but until then, it’s mine!*

Searching for nuts and berries and the roots familiar to her, Miriam spies some wild sweet potatoes. Going closer to examine them she sees, stem is green and its leaves and some a light to dark purplish tint. *Thank the Lord it’s not the toxic morning glory,* she muses, *and the potato is larger too so it’ll make a fine meal.*

Later, hearing what she imagines is the sound of water she follows it to a nearby stream. Two deer stand drinking, heads down. Both look as she approaches, sensing no danger they continue with what they’re doing. Then, they turn and leave bounding lightly through the grasses. Miriam steps into the icy water, bare foot, splashing in its coolness. In returning to her tree house for the canteen, then at the stream she fills it, sits for a while to enjoy the forest quiet. “It’s so different from earth’s conflict or even heaven’s tranquility,” she says to herself, laying back on the soft earth, she sighs.

Being alone in the forest, back to nature as she calls it, was a human experience a very pleasant one. Miriam delights in watching the birds and mimicking them. They seem to enjoy her joining in at dawn, or so she imagines. Regardless, Miriam sings along mimicking the clicks, chucks, whirrs, and liquid notes she hears, then seeing a flash of long blue tail feathers, she knows at least one is a blue jay.

Time passes, Miriam thinks less of Anak, and is less anxious about finding him as well. She had long ago got over her attraction to him and caring whether he liked her. His arrogance and other negative traits she found equally difficult. Praying to Adonai, Miriam continues to trust Him and waits for a sign.

While rummaging about inside the tree house, which contained a lot of what someone left behind, she found an odd assortment of items, one a fishing hook. Stripping the bark from a thin sapling, Miriam climbs into the tree house, takes the hook and string she found earlier; *it looks strong enough.* Attaching both to the sapling, early the next morning, she digs some worms out of the damp soil, and into a leaf basket she’d woven from some reeds. With her newly acquired fishing pole in hand, Miriam heads to the creek.

Eating nuts and berries was great, as were sweet potatoes, but after a while, some fresh fish sounds better and Miriam is not disappointed. Sitting by the stream, line cast into the waters, she waits, but when no fish readily bites, she grows bored. Just as she’s about to give up, Miriam feels a tug on the line. Though cleaning and fileting the fish was awkward and messy.

One morning while fishing, the birds began twittering and fluttering frantically like moths in a spider’s web, Miriam starts to pay attention and realizes, *something is wrong.* She grows fearful as the sky darkens, then a black roiling mass of clouds seem to reach down to the earth and it becomes almost like night.

Not having caught any fish yet, grabbing her fishing pole she turned to head back to the treehouse when a deep rumble shook the ground. She nearly lost her footing.

Lightning flashes in the forest setting a nearby tree aflame. The crash of thunder seems to vibrate the very air around her. The ground beneath shudders and shifts, only its vibration this time throws Miriam down. As she scrambles to her feet, a great crack appears in the earth. Watching in awe as a darkened chasm opens before her.

Then came a deafening crash, a hiss of steam, and inky-black clouds of smoke billow forth. A heartbeat later Lucifer appears out of its depths. *What in the stars is he doing here?* In shock, unable to move she stares; she cannot believe her eyes.

Lucifer with eyes gleaming, towers over Miriam, he leans over and grasps her about the waist, nuzzles her neck, as he easily picks her up and pulls her firmly against himself. Struggling fiercely, Miriam is no match for his strength. Turning, Lucifer disappears into the earth with Miriam in his powerful arms. She pleads, “Please, Lucifer, release me.” Clutching at his arms, she strives to pull them from her, as they travel downward past massive black shining rocks shot through with silver.

Trembling chin and lips, tears run down her cheeks. Miriam’s fists beat at his broad muscular chest, but he barely gives her a glance as he pulls her tighter, reveling in her lithe firm body, face streaked with tears, and he chuckles to himself. *Won’t this be fun.*

Upon arriving in hell, Lucifer releases Miriam from his powerful hold. Crumpling to the ground, she curls up cringing, terrified of being violated. Lucifer moves toward her and she screams, grabbing for anything to hold onto, refusing to go one step with him. Miriam recalls the demons who’d captured her and fears the worst.

“Be still,” Lucifer says with an amused grin. “No one is going to harm you, Miriam. You’re here for a brief stay with adorable me.”

*Oh, Lord. Will this nightmare never end? Adonai help me*.

Lucifer lives in the depths of hell and this is where he takes Miriam. Anak had not overcame Clio’s temptation, so she broke the binding, and he was set free. In retribution, Lucifer decided to kidnap the lovely angel who’d escaped him earlier, thinking she was Anak’s true love. Although, kidnapping her wasn’t his idea alone, not this time. Another had a hand in it, one who’d called to him from heaven.

“Lucifer, you asked for Miriam, which fits nicely with what I’d like to see happen. Perhaps it will help Anak get over his trauma.”

“You imagine I care anything about Anak?”

“Of course not. I know you two have been at each other’s throats ever since. Well, we don’t need to discuss that unfortunate event.”

“So, what is it you do want dealt with, if not Anak?”

“Something you might find to be a challenge. While Miriam was smart enough to escape your demons, now is a better time for what I’d like to see happen.”

Now, fully captivate by the idea, Lucifer said, “What exactly would you like me to do with the lovely Miriam>” Together the two of them discuss Lucifer’s plans and modifications that need to be made.

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After entering hell with Miriam, Lucifer carried her into the chamber prepared for her. He’d brought creative designers from their former earth lives, and instructed them to make it a place of beauty and comfort, whatever would give Miriam pleasure. His intent was to make her more compliant and willing to remain with him.

“Here you will be comfortable for a time, and soon forget Anak,” Lucifer said. Not understanding, Miriam says nothing to dissuade him of any mistaken ideas he may possess, yet her fear dissolves.

Disguised as less than his cherub self, Lucifer’s looks are humanly deceptive but only one word describes him, luscious. Looking into his deep green eyes, she sees they’re like fresh dew glistening on moss in the sunlight. His sensual lips full and moist flush ruby red. His cruel smile never reaches his eyes yet it is charming, and seductive, so very alluring. Yet everything she knows about him repels her at the same time. Strong jaw and sinewy muscles shape his powerful body: strong neck, chest, muscular arms, well-defined thighs, and a firm abdomen.

“Come, my modest dove—let me see your face, hear your voice. For it soothes and your face ravishes me. I delight in your beauty like the loveliest of flowers until dawn breathes and the night slips away. Turn to me, dearest one, and do not reject my loving appeal.”

Miriam’s struck by her attraction to him despises herself for it. One word from his red lips and she flushes several shades of crimson, heart quickening, she warms at his seemingly heartfelt words and quickly she hides her blushing face from him. Even with reassurances of no harm to her, she knew he was trying to seduce her. Yet before he even touched her she could almost feel his strong hands on her. His words soft, the kiss imagined, then, from deep down came the desire.

Time and again, Miriam turns her back on Lucifer. The days, weeks and seemingly months go by and she is confused by his persistence. She said to Clio who comes to visit on occasion. “He comes to me daily and I turn him away, yet he returns. I never took Lucifer for a fool. He must have a dozen or more beauties who’d gratefully bed him.”

Clio laughs and said, “No one here understands what’s going on in his mind right now. I’ve never known him to pursue any woman. Yes, he has a host of female companions, even a Faerie queen he professed to love one time, but for them it was nothing but lust. She’s returned to him here after rejecting Anak. . .”

“What? After rejecting Anak. When was this?”

“Oh a long, long time ago. Can’t really remember but when he was on the earth, with one of the Nephilim. So it’s been centuries. Anyway, she returned and they spent all their time together for a space, then he tired of her and came back to me. Sex only. I’m a succubus and that’s what I’m made for, you know. Now he even ignores me.”

“No, I didn’t know. Are you okay in this role as a succubus?”

“Why not? Lots of different men and women, so I’m never bored by one encounter, though no one could ever call Lucifer boring.”

“Certainly not. Each time, he brings something new and different, to tantalize me, I suppose. I don’t care about the baubles he brings, jewelry and such. Fancy clothes. Though it is fun to wear some of them just to keep myself from being bored to tears.”

“Why not look around? You don’t have to remain here, do you?”

“I tried taking a walk around once, but those demons are terrifying, and nothing I want to be near.” She tells Clio about the first time she was captured and the demons terrorizing her.

“Lucifer would never allow them to harm you.”

“I know, but it’s easier to stay here. He’s left me a woman who was a maid on the earth, and there’s Darius, the seraph.“

“Hush.” Clio said, looking around. “Lucifer doesn’t know what he is. Darius is safer if Lucifer is not aware of his origin. And don’t let the maid know either.” Clio glances out of the room they’re sitting in. “Where is she, by the way?”

“I sent her out some time ago. Told her to stay away a while. She’s so depressed, it depresses me. I can’t get her interested in anything fun or interesting, not even simple card games.” Miriam sighs. “I’m truly glad you find the time to visit once in a while.”

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Lucifer hesitates in the corridor outside Miriam’s rooms. He wants to be indifferent, not let her know how much power she has over him. So, he doesn't want to seem too eager. He brushes his hair back, then knocks briefly, before entering. He stops, seeing Clio. “Good to see you, but you must have other things to do, don’t you?”

Grinning, she winks at Miriam and hurries out, glancing back once to see Lucifer move close to her, his warmth heating her. He's already imagined their lips touching and leans in to caress her neck, slow and gentle, and feels her tension. He knows she cannot bare his touch and a slight frown draws his brows together. He strains toward her, pressing closer, wanting his lips on hers now, her kisses. He imagines his hands moving over her, and his desire fulfilled. Except Lucifer pulls back, not wanting to alienate, yet catches a look from her that surprises him.

Miriam, appalled by her attraction to the god of the earth, turns her face away, so he does not see her desire, other than a rare glimpse, and his heart thuds in hope. And so he pleads, “Come, for the night is gone; it is time for romance. Let me hear you singing, my beautiful precious dove! I love the sound of your voice.”

Miriam blushes from her neck up, cheeks flame and the tips of her ears redden. “Lucifer, you ask too much.” *He’s unable to love and tries to deceive me.* Hearing her heartbeat pulsing in her ears as he comes nearer, his lips fleetingly brush her cheek, he smiles and leaves as he’d come, hope in his heart. Miriam is disappointed to see him leave.

One day, her heart races anticipating his arrival, and Lucifer in all his splendor comes to mind. She is embarrassed to feel so drawn to him. “I cannot yield to him; it’s not right.” Still, Lucifer does not come that day nor many other days. “What have I done wrong?” she asks. Darius shrugs and goes on about his business. Each passing day, Miriam looks toward the door at the smallest sound, looking forward to Lucifer.

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Clio knew Lucifer had kidnapped Miriam and she knew the other one involved in the ploy and wonders. “What’s going on? You kidnap an angel then visit her daily in the gorgeous chamber you’ve prepared. Now you’ve acquired jewelry to give her. I’m truly shocked. What is it you two have planned for her?”

“Leave me alone,” he said. “I was utterly happy until you showed up to ruined my good mood. Why do you visit her?” he said, accusing, and turns away, admiring the necklace he’d gotten for Miriam, as he fingers the intricate gold, set with rose pearls.

“Take heart. I’ve heard it said, the man who’s loved by a woman is lucky indeed, but the one to be envied is he who loves, however little he is loved in return. It seems you’re getting little in return.” Clio chuckles, trying to keep her mirth to herself.

“What would you know? How do you know she spurns me? Do you eavesdrop?” His brow furrowed, yet his face flushes scarlet.

“Stars no. I assume because you don’t stay long, not much could be happening.” She said with a smirk. “I do know what you enjoy and how much time it takes.”

Sullen at being so obvious, at least to Clio, Lucifer’s determined to avoid Miriam, and only visits occasionally to limit Clio’s curiosity. But in a casual moment, upon leaving Miriam after a visit, Clio glimpses Lucifer on his way to see Miriam. Smiling at nothing, his face beaming, he takes a deep breath as if savoring the time to come. Footsteps light, as though he’s walking on air, he stops, seeing Clio, face flushing.

“Good grief. You’ve fallen in love with her, with a celestial and an angel. Are you out of your mind?”

“I’ve done no such thing,” Lucifer says in protest. “As soon as it’s time, she’ll return to Adonai and hell will return to normal. I’ll be able to get on with my usual routine.”

“Oh sure,” she says with a smirk. Nearly beside herself with laughter, Clio muses. *No wonder he no longer calls me to his bed.* “Hell will never be normal again.” She walks away chuckling.

Lucifer questions, *What am I doing?* *Why does she captivate me so? If she would give in one time, but she’s so obstinate. It’s that damn Anak.* A slight growl emerges from his throat, and he clenches his teeth. Still, he continues his visits, content merely to be near her. One day, unable to tolerate the idea of Anak, he asks, “I see why Anak loves you, but why do you love him?” he said. “I don’t understand.”

﻿Snorting, she bursts out laughing. “What are you talking about? Why do you imagine I love him or he me? Anak and I, we’re friends, not even close friends.” Chuckling at the absurd thought of her and Anak. *So, he is jealous.* She smiles, inwardly pleased.

Warmth radiates throughout his body at her words of denial. Heart racing, he cannot contain his smile, and moves toward Miriam, wanting to take her in his arms. She pulls back in surprise, not knowing his intent. “What are you doing?” she said.

“Nothing.” He turns away, “I should leave I’ve many things to do.”

“You just got here.” A slight frown on her forehead. She blinks and looks down, disappointed. “Go, if you must,” she said, her voice ice cold. “I won’t hold you back.” *Why do I care?*

﻿Grinding his teeth as he leaves, tense all over, muscles quiver, and his heart pounds. *What am I doing? Who cares if she desires me?*

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Again bent on avoiding Miriam for a length of time, Lucifer left for the earth, so her only company was Darius, and Clio on occasion. “Darius, how long have you been with Lucifer, as a servant?”

“Since leaving the woman’s womb.” Eyes downcast, he seems to never look up at her, or Lucifer. Yet she senses a strength in him that belies any genuine humility or weakness on his part.

“The woman’s womb, you mean leaving your mother’s womb?”

“No. It was not my mother’s womb for we are normally not birthed in such a manner. Rather, I passed another, the woman’s kin as she was removed, and I was presented for delivery.”

“I don’t understand,” she said, running her hands through her hair as she tries to make sense of what Darius told her. ﻿ “Are you sure?”

“I know it’s difficult to understand. It is a long and involved story and I’ve no doubt one day, before long, it’ll be made clear to you.”

Blowing her cheeks out as she expels a breath of air, while frustrated she’s even more curious. “Does Lucifer know?”

He suddenly turns his eyes upon her, wetting his lips. “Clio said once, I believe, it’s best for all of us if he does not know.”

“I’ll have to trust you and keep your secret for whatever reason.”

“Thank you.” And that ended the conversation, of which Miriam never again mentioned to Clio or Darius.

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Several months pass before Lucifer returns, eyes glow as he thinks about Miriam. Licking his lips, he smiles, feeling like butterflies flittering around to be released from his stomach. Breathless, he determines to go and see her. *I’ve been too long away.*

Entering her chamber one day, his heart skips a beat as his eyes fall on Miriam at the sight of her. “Miriam, how I’ve missed you. You know how you excite me, more than all the beauties who have come to me. Your lips like ripe berries, how your perfume tantalizes.” He can barely breathe. “I’m enchanted by you precious dove. Among all the women, you are a lily among thorns!”

Lucifer holds out a present. “See what I have for you, a lovely golden necklace with rose pearls.” Placing the adornment on her neck he softly kisses her skin. His breath shortens as he leans in and finds himself truly desiring her. Indeed, he forces himself to move away, else he might take her violently. *What am I doing?* He gasps to himself then smiles.

“Clio, indeed all the others believe me to be crazy, and I am for you, my dove. If I could have twenty queens, though many desire it, you are the only one for me, majestic as the morning, glorious as the moon, and more beautiful than the sun! You put all the stars to shame. I desire not only you, but for you to rule with me."

Miriam admires the necklace, her fingers run over the pearls, feeling their warmth, admiring the rose color. Hearing his words, speechless, she turns away in confusion, not understanding her own feelings much less Lucifer’s protestations of his desire, not just lust.

Seeing her face, ﻿he pulls back, and in a quiet voice says, “I’m sorry to be so forward.” Hands trembling, he touches her shoulder. “You need not answer. I just wanted you to know how I feel.” Having trouble breathing being so near to her, he turns away, and quietly leaves.

Several days later, Lucifer returns. As he enters her rooms, Miriam looks upon Lucifer, to see him for himself, not as hell’s ruler, but as a man. His handsome face, green hypnotic eyes and his smile, one of happiness deep within. She heard it in his voice and in his words. It was beautiful. *He is beautiful,* she muses to herself.

Miriam glows with happiness. Lucifer seeing her response to him, is overwhelmed by fear and quickly turns away. He knows his attraction has gone beyond the usual lust and is mystified for females always had but one use then he’d discard them. *Why does she affect me so? She indeed has captured my heart.* And Lucifer makes a life-changing decision.

Turning back, heart beating fiercely. “You are so beautiful! Your eyes dark and lovely. You excite me more than I’ve ever believed possible!" Drawing close, he whispers, “You’ve stolen my heart, my dove." Passion quickens his spirit and his breath flees and Lucifer knows he speaks truth. *I do love her, my Miriam.*

“Miriam, your lips are honey-sweet. You’re a locked garden, a closed fountain, and yet, I plead with you to open to me my adorable one."

Looking deep into his dark green eyes, she sees his passion and yes, his love for her. Breath catching in her throat, Miriam is swept away by Lucifer’s passionate appeal, and not giving it a second thought, she turns to him and surrenders to her own passion.

Together they sink onto the couch as Lucifer covers her with kisses. “Oh, my love. I have waited to hold you so long.” Miriam responds with equal fervor, clinging to his firm muscular body.

He brushes her hair back, then off her shoulder, his lean body near, his warmth heating her, lips pressed together. Lucifer caresses her neck, slow and gentle, and feels her tension. She pushes ever closer, wanting his lips, his kisses, indeed all of him, and his hands move over her, softly caressing, then more persistently, intimately in heated passion, and soon their mutual desire is fulfilled.

Later, Lucifer rises from the couch, holds out his hand and Miriam slowly puts hers into his. Wrapping a soft robe about her, she feels his strong firm grip, the touch of his sensual lips. Her heart is consumed by love. And all thoughts of heaven vanish. Miriam does not understand it; all she can see is this adoring god of the underworld and knows she loves him and he loves her.

“Come, let me show you my domain and the world to which you bring such light.” Smiling with tenderness, as he takes a deep shuddering breath, feeling fulfilled for the first time in his very long life. Lucifer ceases to question, how can it be, and accepts he finally has found true love.

Miriam looks at Lucifer and butterflies do their best to escape her stomach as they flutter about. The corners of her mouth lift into a smile to round her cheeks and she laughs in delight.

Lucifer wraps an arm about her shoulders and laughs along with her deliriously happy. Together they walk the halls of hell all eyes upon them, though not all are delighted, neither in hell nor in heaven.

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## 8. a Love Affair

Anak returns to heaven. To search for Miriam, he must go to earth. Yeshua gives him permission. Yet he cannot find her and is beside himself with grief. Anak wonders, *does she know or even care I am freed? Where is my dear friend?*

At first his fury turns to sadness then despair, *why did she not say where she’d gone?* He met the women who had traveled with her; they have no idea where she is, and tell him of the last place she was seen.

Anak searches the forest, finds the tree house and her fishing gear, chuckling at her ingenuity. One day as he wanders searching the forest, he comes upon a tree split by lightning and nearby a blackened hole deep into the ground. Peering down it, finally Anak believes he knows where Miriam may have gone. He returns to heaven and demands answers.

It was then, Adonai took pity on her distraught friends and sent Ariel to tell them about Miriam’s disappearance.

“Lucifer has taken Miriam into his realm with the Lord’s consent. You may not agree but it was done for a purpose.” Ariel explains to Anak and the others. “She resides with the Dark Lord, until it is time for her return.”

Anak not hearing the truth, says, “He dares to steal an angel and take her to hell? How could Adonai allow it?” Anak storms about, agonizing over Miriam. None are aware, other than Adonai, she has fallen for the Dark Lord and he for her.

Ariel isn’t unsympathetic but is confused by Anak's concern. “You know nothing about her purpose. Can you not imagine she could endure temptation? Or even make a choice you would not. It’s not like you’re in love with her, after all. As you say, you’re simply friends. Miriam has free will. Adonai allowed her to be taken to fulfill her purpose.”

Unable to grasp much less respond to what seems absurd, “What purpose with Lucifer? That’s ridiculous!”

“Anak, I tell you what I know. I am sorry, but Adonai agreed to her going with Lucifer. He needs not ask your consent. You’ve been in heaven how long and still have not learned to accept others are as deserving of the Lord’s love as you, even Lucifer? The Lord does not show favoritism. Do you not trust the Lord?”

“What are you saying? Am I to leave her?” He sputters. Anak’s wrath knew no bounds. Anger flares in his heart. “Why do I bother?” he rages and turns to leave, “Never will I set foot in heaven until my friend whom you all conspired to steal from me, from us all, returns to heaven. Anak disappears into far space.

Adonai, hearing Anak's words, speaks with Ariel. “How is it Anak not accept what is. You encouraged him toward love of all, yet his arrogance keeps him at a distance. What do you imagine the problem is?”

“Lord, having listened to Anak who met Miriam long ago, he’s always seen her as a friend and nothing more. I imagine it’s not about Miriam, but Lucifer and Anak’s fear. He must know you would not permit Lucifer to harm her, one who sins not, or did not before she fell in love and into temptation, and a love affair with the Dark Lord.”

“Yes, the love affair, while I’d seen it long ago, it astonishes me still. He is so prideful and Miriam so selfless, it leaves me speechless when I see them together.” Adonai smiles in pleasure.

“What do you want to do about Anak?”

“He needs to resolve his fear so he can move on in the heavens. An event is about to occur, soon. Therefore, let’s bring Miriam home so Lucifer’s purpose can forward as well.”

“Is there anything you’d like me to do?”

“No, Ariel. Michael can manage. You have your work awaiting.”

Ariel leaves the court of heaven and returns to her duties, fostering a young white wolf who’s soon to be born.

“Michael! I desire you in the underworld to visit Lucifer.” Adonai said. “See to Miriam and to her return, for a time.”

Obeying Adonai always, Michael agrees to go.

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Daily, Miriam walks with Lucifer throughout his kingdom. Her inner sunshine lights his world and her kind heart, moved by the plight of souls lost and bewildered upon arrival, she desires to help them and as far as Lucifer is concerned, she can do as she likes. His outwardly patient ways touch Miriam's heart.

She enjoys the company of this adoring god of the earth and his passion. Entranced with Miriam who Lucifer discovers has no interest in ruling as queen. She merely finds pleasure in Lucifer himself, which he finds perplexing. Yet, the demons terrify her, and so, Lucifer instructs them to avoid her at all cost.

The effect of this is hatred and resentment, while Lucifer, filled with Miriam’s spirit of love and compassion is unconcerned. All Lucifer’s bitterness and wrath, clamoring for retribution has left, along with malice he’s long held toward anyone in the heavens."

Lucifer holds out a pomegranate, “Miriam, I worry about you, that will fade away,” for she refuses the food brought by demons. “Eat of the garden’s sweet fruit. Taste just a little,” He pleads, concerned for her welfare and gaining her commitment.

Looking into his adoring eyes, Miriam reaches out to bring the ripe fruit to her lips. Taking a taste, she slowly chews the fruit, the juice drips, staining her lips and fingers. Swallowing, Lucifer knows he has not only won her heart but her commitment to him and the underworld. He is pleased more than he imagined.

Michael arrives in time to see Miriam partake of hell’s table. *Oh no! I'm too late. Miriam is committed to Lucifer and to his world.* Michael reminds himself: *harsh words arouse anger but a gentle answer can turn away wrath and the Lord is pleased with the gentle way, causing our, even my enemy to make peace with me.* Taking a deep breath, finally, Michael advances into hell’s muted light, “Hello, Lucifer. I see you have company. Might I join you?” Hesitantly he approaches.

“Michael, of course. How wonderful to see you,” Lucifer said with a smile, holding his hand out palm up to indicate he take a nearby seat.

Lucifer turns to Miriam, “My love if you will return to your chambers while we talk. This won’t take long.”

“Of course,” she says and does so without hesitation yet wonders, *what is discussed of which I cannot be a part?*

*Michael, I suppose wants to discuss Lucifer’s kidnapping of myself, an angel, no doubt.* She laughs to herself. *It matters not for I remain of my own freewill, captive only to love.*

Michael, dazed by the intimacy he sees between Miriam and Lucifer, hardly knows what to say, looking from one to the other as she departs.

Not shy on words, Lucifer says, “Miriam has eaten of hells table, as you likely saw. Also, I know you desire her return. No doubt because of Anak’s sniveling interference.” *Be at peace, Lucifer,* he reminds himself.

“I have not spoken to Anak but the Lord has,” Michael says. “I know not of what they spoke.”

“Regardless, let’s cut to the heart of the matter. Adonai doubtless desires Miriam’s return. Should she agree, I request she have nothing to do with Anak. Although, my heart cries for her loss, still, I must be assured of her ability to return to me for a time, at her discretion.”

“Adonai may not agree. It is unprecedented.” Michael frowns and rubs his chin, as though thinking carefully.

Lucifer huffs. “Nonsense. Adonai sent you to arrange her return, just as he arranged for her arrival though she knew it not. He wanted the two separated and they are apart. Besides, my offer is perfectly acceptable as you well know, so let’s not play games shall we. As long as she returns to me, then I am pleased.”

“What do you have in mind?” Michael not expecting any of what he has seen and hears, wonders, *What Lucifer will demand*.

Lucifer pretends to think a minute, to let Michael stew. He wants to make certain Miriam returns. Finally, he says, “Let’s say one day each month−twelve days out of the year−Miriam returns or any other time she chooses, of her own free will.”

“So, monthly or oftener if she desires!” Michael repeats. “Anak and Miriam are but friends. Yet she must avoid him, correct?”

“I’m not sure he’s just a friend, still, it is agreed,” Lucifer said. “Now, we must see if Miriam agrees.” Lucifer invites Miriam to join them.

“Dearest one,” he says without embarrassment, Michael observing and clearly astonished. “Adonai it seems desires your return.”

Michael says, “You are one of his angel’s and Adonai wishes you to return to the heavens.” He notices she’s about to object, so says, “I know you prefer to remain with Lucifer, still, Adonai has need of you, and your friends, they do miss you.”

Miriam stared at Lucifer, certain his expression mirrors her own, her heart breaks*. I don't want to leave. I don't want to turn into a random image that floats in his memory like so many others he once described, nor be the smile or laughter that squeezes his heart from far away.*

“Indeed, I adore my friends, but to leave Lucifer,” she pleads. “I see no need.” *Please Lucifer. Do not make me leave,* Miriam agonizes silently. Michael interrupts her thoughts.

“Yes, Miriam, I see you have become attached, yet you may return monthly, or oftener if you want. No matter, Adonai prefers you in heaven with hell your home-away.”

Lucifer knows this will be hard for Miriam. *It will be difficult for me. Why does Adonai do this? He wanted her here. Now he wants her back.* His mind’s in disarray.

As she is about to object, again, Lucifer says, “Miriam, you have work and friends. I have work and it’s not what you agree is desirable. So, this solution gives you time away from those stressors.”

Miriam considers Lucifer’s work, its uneasy nature. *Yes, his demons and the torture of souls. It doesn’t seem right. Still, he has a point. Yet to avoid Anak who’s merely a friend is senseless. Although Lucifer does not believe it so I can see his reasoning.*

Michael leaves as Miriam and Lucifer discuss their impending separation with time together to bid each other farewell. Together they cling to one another in a last passionate embrace, for Miriam knows what the Lord desires, once she leaves and returns to heaven.

“Lucifer,” she says. “Do not fear. I am with you in spirit. I will return my love, always to be with you.”

Taking Miriam in his arms, Lucifer holds her for several moments then she vanishes. Distraught the moment she leaves, he begins to plan revenge. Then remembers Miriam. *She’d hate me forever.*

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Upon her return, Miriam realizes how much she missed her friends and the bright atmosphere. Yet she imagines Lucifer and she misses him also and longs for his company. Soon, she’s looks forward to visiting him, eagerly awaiting a time when she may return.

Meanwhile, Miriam attends to Lord Adonai and any task he may have assigned her, and shortly after her arrival, Adonai sends for Miriam. Approaching the throne room, nervously she enters and bows before Adonai. “My Lord, you asked to see me.”

“Indeed, Miriam. How was your sojourn in the Otherworld? I hear you and Lucifer have quite a love relationship, which is one reason you’ve been requested to return to heaven.”

“Lord. Could you please clarify? From what I’ve heard, while Lucifer may have taken me to hell, it was not exactly his idea. If I’m not mistaken, you also had a hand in it.”

“You’re not mistaken, Miriam. Yet, the trek wasn’t as Job on ancient earth so Lucifer could know you were faithful as with Job. Even with Job’s afflictions, he did not depart from his faith.”

Miriam falls to her knees. “Lord Adonai, I have failed you. I did not remain faithful to my calling. I indulged in lust and, Lord, I fell in love with the one seen as a monster.”

“If I’m not mistaken and I do not believe I am, Lucifer has also fallen in love with you Miriam.”

“Yes, Lord. So, it seems.” Her lips spread into a wide smile, cheeks rounded; it lightens the whole room and Adonai is pleased.

“Do you not see this as equal to Job’s faith? Lucifer, Lord of the Otherworld, god of the earth, in love with an angel and not just any angel, but a special one Miriam.”

Miriam slowly stands before the Lord to consider his words, a slight frown upon her lovely face. Eyebrows raised, head tilts as she thinks upon all that transpired between her and Lucifer. She nods as understanding dawns. His anger and bitterness replaced with love and concern for her if not others change yet to come.

“Lord, honestly, I’d not considered it. At first, I thought he came to violate me. But when he did not and instead, he pursued me, even wooed me as a lover might. I found it very confusing, at first. Not at all what one would expect of Lucifer.”

“Indeed. In doing, you fell in love with him and he with you. It’s an amazing thing, Miriam.”

Miriam says, “You knew, didn’t you? For such a time and purpose, was I not sent to Lucifer?”

Adonai chuckles. “At first, I did not countenance it, not until Lucifer asked for you, to challenge Anak. I could not allow him to take Anak again. Still, he was sure Anak would fail any test were it to involve you. Lucifer believes Anak is in love with you. And he is in a way, but not as a lover.”

Frowning, Miriam heaves a sigh. “At one time I desired him to look upon me in such a way, but that time passed, long ago.”

“To answer your question. It was for this reason you were sent for you were meant for another from the beginning before time.”

Astonished at Adonai’s words. “Before time? Nothing about Lucifer did I find attractive, though he lit the heavens. All the beauty he brought into being and I wondered how anyone so talented could be so evil.”

“No one did Miriam, so do not feel alone in your ignorance. It was meant to be known when the time was right for all things to fall into place and for Lucifer to realize he’s not all evil.

“Oh no. Of that I can assure you Lord.”

“Our time is up, and I must be off. Do as you will with Lucifer and your visits, but try to keep it to heavens standards.”

“Yes Lord.” Smiling, Miriam leaves the throne room.

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Upon hearing Miriam had returned to heaven, Anak returns from the outer regions. “Miriam would not agree! She cannot be with Lucifer!” Anak storms about for he cannot understand Miriam nor Adonai!

“She did partake of hells table, and has fallen for him and he for her! Miriam returns to Lucifer monthly or oftener if she chooses. Also, she may befriend any angel, just not you.”

Anak can barely speak he’s so hurt and angry. “Lucifer is with her, still. You know he’s only doing it for revenge on me.”

“Why so upset? You’re not in love with her. She can love whomever she chooses or whoever is destined for her to love,” Ariel said. “Why are you so upset about it?”

Ignoring the ‘destined for her to love,’ he says, “It makes no sense. He had her at the City of Hope when we were captured.”

“Exactly. And what happened after that?”

“Well, she escaped,” Anak said. “We went to hell. And, ultimately, Jacob and Malek were freed.”

“After I overcame the temptation and was set free, he took her! It was to get revenge on me. He influenced her, tricked her.”

*Except you did not overcome the temptation. Clio did and broke the binding between you two.* But she says, “Are you sure he tricked her?” *Does this idiot—sorry Lord—truly believe Lucifer could trick someone like Miriam into loving him?*

“What else can it be? There’s no way she could ever love him unless she was tricked into it in some way?”

Ariel shakes her head. *Adonai is right. Anak hasn’t a clue. He’s as dumb as a post when it comes to love. Too bad he never fell in love.* Then she recalls when Anak was on the nebula. *Oh, but he did. Perhaps Clio’s deceit is the reason he doesn’t trust the love of Miriam and Lucifer.* Ariel says nothing about it, however, leaving well enough alone.

“You have your answer to one question, now what will you do?”

“Let me think about it.” Anak goes off to think and to plan.

Soon, Anak seeks Adonai’s approval. *He didn’t really like it. I wonder why? Surely, he can’t believe Miriam and Lucifer are in love*. *No matter,* he sets his plan in motion.

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“Lucifer, I would like to request to meet with Miriam this one time to convince her not return to hell. You’ve had your time and I’m certain it had nothing to do with love.”

“Why would I allow such a thing? She is mine, once a month. She comes to my chambers and spends her time with the one she loves, me, delighting in pleasure. She adores me and I her. There is hardly anything to compare in your heaven above with the love we share.”

“Oh, I doubt it. However, if what you say is true, then it should be no hardship for you to allow Miriam to speak with me. How could I influence her away, in so little time, after she supposedly fell in love with you?” he taunts.

“You always think to trick me. Must be the Fae you hung out with so long. So, I’m going to have to think about it for a space, say one or two millennia?” Lucifer wonders, *what if she’s back in heaven and changed her mind. Could she have fallen out of love? No. She promised to love me forever. She would not lie.*

Anak tries to remain calm. *The wretch is trying to provoke me. If he doesn’t consent, my plans are ruined.* “The great god of the earth and you need a millennium to decide. What if I sweeten the pot, so to speak?” *What am I doing? I must be insane.*

Lucifer’s interest peaks, “And that is?” *What could he possibly offer that would make me give up Miriam and return her to heaven, forever away from me?* Lucifer refuses to consider the possibility.

“Let me take her to sin city, Las Vegas, for a day, if I cannot convince her to stay in heaven I will return to hell with Miriam as long as you like.” Anak sighs, tense. *What will he do, accept my offer or not?*

Lucifer nearly faints when he hears what Anak offers. *Is this not what I’ve desired for so long? It couldn’t be a trick or could it?*

Still, he imagines Anak with him and Miriam. *Ha, I no longer must pretend to love her.* *She can be cast into the dungeon with the others, and given to the demons she so despises.* Though he hesitates a moment, at the thought of Miriam preyed upon by demons.

“You would stay!” Lucifer chortles, overcome with elation. *Anak in hell for eternity.* *A dream fulfilled. Miriam won’t leave. Have I not given her everything?* His mind in turmoil Lucifer pauses to reconsider.

Anak shudders as he envisions hell. *What if I’ve made a mistake? What if I cannot convince Miriam?*

“You’re concerned. Yes, Miriam sees me as the one who adores her, gives her pleasure. *Though since she’s in heaven, we’re celibate.* “I adore her as you did Clio, though you don’t believe it.”

*I do adore Miriam and will miss her terribly. What will I do if she gone for good?* Lucifer snarls to himself, *no demons will have my lovely Miriam.* In a moment of panic, Lucifer thinks, *Was I too hasty? Yet I’ve struck the bargain. She won’t agree to leave me forever surely not.* Lucifer fears the loss of the angel he truly has grown to love.

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Lucifer envisions himself in the wilderness of hell’s vast nothingness without Miriam. “Was I destined to love her, someone I could not have? Is this part of my punishment Adonai?” There is no answer, not because the Lord didn’t hear, but because Lucifer still was without faith.

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## 9. Returning

**Miriam** is with Anak in the desert, one suggestive of hell it’s so hot and dry. “It’s Las Vegas,” she murmurs seeing people immersed in every imaginable sin: addictions, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality, every perversion under the sun Lucifer’s demons could possibly provoke. *It's business as usual for earth. The sun comes up and goes down, then does it again, and again—the same sins, repeating.* She shakes her head.

*One day and not a second longer is all I have left to convince her.* “Miriam, all these souls will go to hell because each has chosen hell over heaven; in other words, they chose Lucifer over Adonai. Why sorrow for them? This I do not understand.”

“How can you say such a thing? I’ve chosen Lucifer yet serve Adonai. And see how naïve, unaware of the harm they’re doing. Even Yeshua said, “they don’t know what they do to themselves; they’re hurting, longing for love and acceptance.”

“Do you see innocents?” he challenges. “Only the children are innocent and go to be with Lord Adonai. Miriam, what covers our sin and makes us innocent in the eyes of Adonai?”

Walking, Miriam sees prostitutes accost men and woman. Drug dealers openly peddle their wares. Nothing is illegal in the Sin City, not now. *Everything is acceptable* *and it’s rampant in many of the other cities as well, if not all of them. Yet why?*

“I’ve not thought about it” Miriam said, gazing around not seeing what Anak would like her to see. While she sees what he sees, prostitutes and dealers, just not the reasoning. “Other than children, the way to innocence is Yeshua, believing in him then, sinning no more, like he told the adulterous woman.”

“Believing in Yeshua, and following him Miriam, love washes sin away, so they are innocent in Adonai’s eyes.

These may not choose hell, but they chose Lucifer when they chose not to accept Yeshua and persisted in their sin life.”

“So, by sitting on the fence and not deciding for him they made a choice against!” Miriam said. “I see, by their indecision, they chose hell over heaven.” *Still, there must be a reason.*

“Can you think of one soul in hell who’s an innocent? Forget their pain and sorrow a moment. You’ve seen men and women go to jail or prison without genuine sorrow for their crimes; they sorrowed at being caught. Few repented and changed their lives. When released, they went right back to crime, to their sin.

“Do you see any innocents who are truly worthy of heaven, who should not go to hell when they die? And remember, some persist in their sin and others outright deny Yeshua; they don’t want to leave the sinful life; they enjoy its fleeting pleasures too much to leave.”

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In a blink, Miriam is with Anak in hell’s corridors. He’d arranged with Adonai an example to allow Miriam to see for herself the sinner’s folly. “Chose whom you will, any here you believe has seen the error of their ways. Adonai has agreed they may return to earth for a time.”

Miriam chose a couple, a man and woman, acquaintances of Anak century before, though she knew if not. “You have a chance to redeem your life,” she told them. “For a space of time you will be upon the earth again. Do what you will with your time.”

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Gleefully the woman took her husband by the hand and ran down the streets of Las Vegas, thrilled to be free from the fires of hell. He too was ecstatic, and encouraged his wife , “Let us go before the Adonai and ask forgiveness so we can enter heaven when our time here is over,” he pleaded. “I don’t want you in the fires of hell.”

“Are you crazy? We have a chance once again to have some real fun and enjoy life. He’s not gonna take us back to hell. Come on. Let’s find a motel and enjoy ourselves for a change.“

“No, wife. We must first turn from our evil ways.”

“Oh go to hell.” She laughs for the memory of hell-fire has dimmed. “Or I’ll go without you but in the meantime, I’m enjoying myself.” As she enters a casino, she began flirting with various men. Her husband seeks for her and finally finds her in a back room, fornicating with whoever would have her, and there were always eager partakes of sexual favors.

“What are you doing? We have a chance to redeem ourselves and not return to hell. Why do you persist in this vile behavior?”

“You wretched man,” she snarled. “What did I ever see in you? You’re pathetic. Whatever time I have, I will enjoy it, and I will do it my way, not your way or anyone else’s.”

Turning her back, pulling her clothes about her, she began to walk away. It was then, an undeniable rage rose within him. “Once you were my adorable wife. Now, you’re a miserable whore, but no more.”

Turning, her lips curve in a sneer, she said, “Adorable wife. You were never a real husband to me. Had you been I wouldn’t found my pleasure in other men and more enjoyable ones.”

“Never again will I tolerate your sick outrageous behavior.”

“What do you think you’re going to do about it? My life is my own and you can’t change me. Leave me be, pathetic wretch.”

Blinded by shame and his growing rage, he stalked up to his wife and said, “What’ll I do? I’ll put an end to it.” As his hands closed around her throat, for the first and last time he saw with satisfaction, not lust in her eyes, but absolute terror.

“No need to say what happened to them,“ Miriam said with a sigh, deeply disappointed to have her hopes dashed.

“Thomas Watson centuries ago speaking on the fate of those who deny Adonai said, ‘If all the earth and sea were turned to sand, and all the air up to heaven were but sand, and a little bird should come every thousand years, and take away but a tenth of a grain of that sand, a vast number of years would pass before all the sand would be gone! Yet, we know their torment is forever.

Upon seeing a headline story Anak picks up a newspaper. “Here, read this,” He said, handing Miriam the paper. ‘Archbishop says, “I will not worship a homophobic god,’ A UN Human Rights Chief commented, ‘everyone is born free and equal… no exceptions, no one is left behind,’ and ‘the biggest foe of the gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex equality has been invisibility and silence.

‘Those who follow Yeshua are enemies. As homophobes and vicious hate mongers, they have no rights. We have laws against such religious beliefs, they are jailed for their hate crimes!’

“Oh my.” Miriam said. “To see people in rebellion and sin.” Tears fill her eyes. “Yes. I sorrow, but they chose hell over Yeshua, so there is no need for me to return. Sadly, they chose where they will go forever.”

“So, what are you saying, Miriam?” Anak asks.

“While not all refuse the Lord, they did make their decision for evil. I’ll stay with Yeshua, but we are no longer friends. You manipulated me, which makes you no different than Lucifer and the Fae, deceivers one and all, only concerned for your own feelings.”

Anak stares at Miriam confused when moments before as she explained her decision he was pleased with himself. “Miriam, I don’t understand. Not your friend? Deceiver? How can you say such a thing? Have I not always been your friend?

“You used me. Friends don’t deceive another. Before I return, I’ll see Lucifer, and you need to know, I will never stop loving him.”

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Miriam re-enters hell the next day and speaks with Lucifer. She feels a pain in her throat as she tries to still the tears that threaten, “Oh, love. You know I love you even without the intimacy, you know.”

“Yes, of course. What is it my dearest,” he said. “I hear you intend to return to heaven and no longer wish to spend time with me. Tell me this cannot be true.”

“Lucifer, you know I adore you. I love you, but after I’ve seen those mortals on the earth, those your demons tempt into sin. I tried to make life easier for them, when I was here, but I’ve seen how they prefer to remain in their sin, even knowing hell fire awaits.”

“Of course, but you knew for what hell was intended. Well, it was for angels who followed when Adonai threw us out. Now, it includes mortals who choose to sin. Yes, part of our work is providing a place for sinners. What’s the problem?”

“If you don’t know what the problem is, how can I tell you? I’ll try to explain. While you provide a place for sinners and Adonai is absent from them, which itself is torture, and the spiritual fire they endure is one thing, but your demons inflict even further suffering upon them. This is unconscionable. How can you allow it?”

“But dearest one.” *It’s true. She’s leaving me for good. How can she give up our love? No. She can’t leave!*

“And stop calling me ‘dearest one.’ It’s unseemly given the current state of our relationship, my being absent.”

“Sorry.” *What can I do to convince her to stay?* His breathing accelerates, heart beats rapidly, Lucifer’s near panic. His lips a thin line pressed together, the skin on his face tightens and his eyes narrow as he rubs them. He crosses his arms and pulls back. “What do I call you, then my harlot-once-upon-a-time,” he says his tone angry, challenging.

“Harlot? You’ve got some nerve.”

“Well then, what in heaven’s name, or hell, do you want me to call you? No darling, love or dearest for, clearly, I’m no longer any of those. You knew when I agreed, convinced you to return to heaven and to only visit me occasionally, it was because of the stress my work caused you. What’s changed, if anything? Nothing.”

“You’re right. Nothing has changed.” Miriam gazes at Lucifer, her heart breaking. “I want what you’re not willing to give.”

“It seems you’ve decided return to heaven and stay, unless I repent is that it? You want me to change. What you’re saying is, you don’t love me as you did, for who I am.”

“No. Of course I love you. However, I don’t believe this sadistic creature you pose yourself as is the real you. But I’m filled with conflict. Let me think it over and talk to Adonai.”

Lucifer shakes his head and turns away. *It’s never going to end with Anak.* “No,” he says, his back to her. “We may as well end it now.” *Anak will soon find my revenge far worse than any he’s suffered at my hands.* Yet Lucifer knows to behave so would disappoint Miriam. *Damn. This is the reason love can be such a pain.*

As Lucifer walks away Miriam knows she may never see him again and while she wants to call to him she remains silent, thinking, *Yes, love is a pain when you’re unwilling to give 100% of yourself.*

*~~~*

Continually having to battle Lucifer, at home on earth and in the heavens, Anak said, “Ah, peace at last, at least until Lucifer causes more conflict. He took me into hell with you two to torture me or us.”

Malek sits with Anak and Jacob as they discuss what to do to end it. “He kidnaps my friend Miriam, all because of a ridiculous dragon!” Anak doesn’t tell them what Miriam said to him, not being a friend now.

“You beat him every time, Anak. He’ll never win against you with Adonai on your side.” *If he is on your side.*

“Except Adonai agreed to Miriam in hell. I don’t understand what he was doing. Lucifer also keeps coming back. It’s tiring. I’ve overcome every temptation. *Except the last one in hell.* He continues to carry a grudge about the dragon. What’s the big deal?”

“You’d think he’d get over it,” Jacob said, “It’s not like you can change who he is. He is Lucifer, after all.”

“Do you suppose he actually loved the darn thing?”

The three looks at each other. “Stop being ridiculous. Lucifer’s incapable. Adonai is love, he’s not Lucifer, not even close.”

Malek considers: *Lucifer loves Miriam and she loves him yet Anak refuses to admit it, which is a quandary itself for he loves Clio, a demon!* Malek keeps his thoughts to himself though. *Maybe his love of Clio and her deception is part of the problem.*

“Wait.” Anak held up his hand for silence. “I’ve a solution. We can’t change him, but. . .”

Anak paces, pursuing an idea that had come to him, He waves off his friends when they ask about it. “I need Yeshua. Wait here.”

In a blink, he disappears.

Anak laughs. *Imagine Lucifer where he cannot bother us again, me or my friends. Of course, it could go wrong; nothing’s ever certain.* Still, Anak’s decided to try this new strategy.

“What’s up Anak,” Yeshua said, walking up and slapping him on the shoulder. “Heard you were looking for me.”

“Thanks for coming. We’ve come up with a plan for Lucifer. Well, I came up with it, and I need you to convince Lord Adonai.”

Yeshua smile. “What exactly did you have in mind?”

Anak shared his idea with Yeshua, who while troubled by Anak’s need for retribution, agrees to speak with Adonai. *He’s more like Lucifer than he’ll admit*. Yeshua muses. *Miriam was right about him.*

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After listening to Anak’s plan Adonai said, “We can do it. Perhaps it will help heal his broken heart, though I’m not sure it’s the best idea. Still, let’s see if he willing.” And Adonai sends for Lucifer.

Adonai said. “I’ve called to ask your help with a predicament, and need you to help solve it.”

“Another to rain disasters upon, so you can rescue him?”

“Ha. That’s a good one. You’re speaking of Job. A long time ago. Can’t believe you remember it. Speaking of which, that dragon, the one finally killed after it created so much havoc. You’re still causing Anak grief over it. You hold grudges too long. I’ve mentioned forgiveness and you might want to reconsider”

“Forgive him!” Lucifer sputters. “After what he did to Miriam, convincing her not to see me anymore.”

“It’s not Anak alone. And Miriam made her own choice. There are others you need to ask forgiveness and to forgive them.”

Lucifer stood up tall, arched his eyebrows, looked down his nose, nostrils flaring. “It will be a cold day. . . Is this why you called me? It’s about Anak isn’t it! You’re rescuing ‘him’ again. Like he’s an innocent. You know he’s not, so why?”

“Let me be clear. You sent a dragon to destroy his crops. How long ago? In anger, he slew the dragon. It was quite a feat for a Nephilim. What was the name of your dragon?”

Lucifer’s eyes flame hot. “It was Azrael!” *More humiliation,* Lucifer rumbles within. *He knows its name.*

“So, like it or not, I am your creator, which you do not like; still, this folly is now over. It ends, this minute, and not one eon, century, minute or one second more.”

“It was my dragon. It was perfect. Glorious to behold and He was magnificent. You should’ve seen him. He was precious to me, as was Miriam, whom he schemed to take from me.”

“You were magnificent too as you walked among the stones of fire on my holy mountain – also perfect in all your ways. Lucifer, *you were precious to me too -* until the sin of pride rose up in you!”

“You call it sin.” Lucifer cried. “I call it being me, wanting to express myself and be proud of what I did. You created me with certain desires, then blame me for having them.”

“One day, you’ll understand. Regardless, Yeshua has a solution. If you’re willing, we can take care of it right now.”

“What’s this marvelous idea of his. He is so very creative.” Lucifer smirks then blinks. “Oh, I see the look. Okay. No sarcasm.”

“I think you will like the idea.” Adonai smiles and shares the idea with Lucifer, not telling him it was Anak’s idea.

Lucifer loves it. *Azrael will live! I’ll never see Miriam again for she could never love a dragon. Still, it’s over anyway.*

Yeshua enters the throne room right in time to see Lucifer become a magnificent fire-breathing dragon, free to roam the corridors of hell for all eternity, where Lord Adonai immediately sent him. Yet, Adonai wonders how long his joy will last.

Anak and his companions enjoy time without Lucifer who’s bound for eternity in hell, or so they hope. He is now his beloved dragon, by which name he was known on the earth, Azrael.

Miriam hears and she’s outraged, not understanding Anak and his conniving ways, her one-time friend, so she thought. Now, she’s in love with Lucifer and he takes any hope of that away as well.

“You’re worse than Lucifer−you and your retribution,” she shouts at him, storming out on her way to where only Adonai knows.

Never known to forgive, Lucifer lives for revenge and, as usual, its Anak who’d slain Azrael, the closest he’d come to a friend until Miriam. Though, most would not call a dragon friend.

Anak fails to see anyone’s point of view but his own and Miriam is no longer his friend for she misses Lucifer whom she loves and she longs for their time together. In her sorrow and feeling guilty for abandoning Lucifer, Miriam leaves to wander the universe and mourn her loss.

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Andras returns from a war in heaven−in which he and the demons lost−to find much has changed. Anak is in heaven, for which he’s glad, though he’d not admit it even to himself.

He heard about Lucifer falling in love with an angel and she with him. Then the angel returned to heaven though she avoids Anak, and everyone wonders. After what happened to Lucifer, Miriam left.

His home is empty. Clio’s in second-hell, tempting mortals with a desire to ensure her home in hell is secure.

Andras finds two notes covered in a fine dust layer. ‘She’ the name by which he fondly called her, wrote, ‘My name is Clio and you’d best not forget it, in case I return one day.’

He muses on future possibilities and enjoys the idea of a more intimate relationship with her. *So, she prefers the name Clio. She is gorgeous*, which he had noticed, *I just never told her.*

His son, Anak’s brief note said, “You Are Forgiven.” And Andras felt his eyes moisten but rapidly blinks them away.

He must report to Lucifer, who is not himself, he hears. An image of the dragon he had seen upon his return brings a smile. *Life in hell is not so dull after all.* And wonders, *What’s next?*

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Lucifer roams hell as a dragon and has a grand time, at least at first but after a thousand or so years his fun does not last and he longs again as his thoughts turn to Miriam. *She abandoned me, foul woman. This is the reason I never trust women.* Flames pour forth. *Yet, she did love me for a time.* Closing his eyes, Lucifer the dragon enjoys his memories of a grander time when love was his. Angry for being so sentimental he tries to get back to his theme of retribution.

His snorting throws out flashes of light, eyes are like the sun’s rays of first light. Flames stream from his mouth and sparks of fire shoot out as smoke pours from his nostrils like a boiling pot over burning reeds. His breath and its flames set everything ablaze before him.

Feeling the strength in his loins, the powerful muscles in his belly, and he flicks his tail, knowing he ranks first among the works of Adonai: *first as a cherub,* *now as a dragon in hell,* he muses, thrashing about in the halls of hell, knocking demons aside from his path.

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# Part Eight

## 1. Renewal

W**hen Miriam first met Lucifer**, one word described him, luscious. His eyes were green glistening like dew on the moss in sunlight. Lips full and moist they flushed ruby red, and his Roman nose well-defined. *Such a firm jaw*, Miriam recalls his sinewy body: strong neck, powerful arms, chest, thighs, and firm abdomen. *I swooned at the first sight of him*, she smiles. *I despised myself for it too. One word from him and I* *blushed like a school-girl*. Miriam imagines Lucifer and heat pools in her belly.

*I excited him; a lily among thorns! he said. He surely aroused me and I him.* Touching the gold necklace of rose pearls stirs the memory of his kisses. *Who else loves as did he, yet I thought him incapable of love? He desired me above all and I wanted only him.*

Miriam recalls: *His almost handsome face, was it not for that look of cunning at times, and eyes filled with longing, affection, even passion. Crafty as he played me, caught in his own game.* She giggles to herself. *Lucifer’s attraction for me mystified both of us, yet drawn to me he was, a locked garden, until I surrendered to my own passion.*

*But he’s not here and he’s a dragon!* Confusion piles up along with questions. Miriam cannot understand how it came to be. *While I would not call what Adonai did, a deception, for He deceives no one, but who gave him the idea? It was Anak, of course. I knew it then.*

Miriam flushes as she realizes, *my one-time friend,* *Anak, he was the* *only one to contrive such a thing.* She berates herself. *How foolish to leave and* *abandon him! I did not protest his sentence. Why I abandoned Lucifer instead of Anak is a puzzle to me? It’s time I set things right.*

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Excited to return to heaven, Miriam isn’t paying attention. All she can think of is speaking to Adonai and freeing Lucifer, the dragon he has become and break the binding.

*Hopefully, he will recognize me*. Instead of heaven or hell, however, Miriam finds herself in a peculiar place, unsure where she is.

“Why do you imagine this place has anything to do with your Lord Adonai?” Miriam looks about and sees no one. “Mayhap, you need to adjust your thinking.” The voice unpleasant sounding.

“Who are you? Where is this?” Miriam looks about this strange place, her pulse pounds. Looking all around, yet she sees nothing familiar, not the universe she knows.

A snicker, “You’re not asking the right questions. Where you are is where I am. Your Lord may call himself the great I Am, but I am who I am, and there is no one like me. Put aside all thought of Him and now focus on who I am.”

“Not that it makes sense, but if you are who you are, then maybe you can show me who or what… I speak to?” Lips pressed together, the skins around her eyes tighten as she seeks to make see. But there is no one. Crossing her arms, she taps a foot and demands answers. “Who are you and where am I?”

When there is no answer, she sits and crosses her legs, then restless she uncrosses them, unable to sit still. Silent she waits, knowing whoever it is will engage soon enough. Muscles tense her chest tight she waits but nothing further is said.

“Whoever it is, is no one worth listening to anyway,” she taunts. “Soon enough I’ll be out of here and on my way home.” Still, the silence stretches on, a desire to talk moves her to speak. “You must have something to say, else why am I here?”

An eye appears before her, blue, unblinking, and seeming to clear its vision as it moves about. Focusing on Miriam, a second, the eye stares at her, “Hmm and there you are.”

Miriam wonders *how can it see; it’s attached to nothing?*

“If you were to put aside sarcasm and pay heed to what you ‘see’ – it being the operative word here – you would realize, I Am the all-seeing-eye and have no need of anything else.”

“What is it you see? You certainly don’t see where or what I’m about, or you would not have hindered me. Is it because you have nothing to see, but where you are, and it seems alone?”

“Humph. You have no idea what I see, the all-seeing eye in my universe, which I believe is the word you know.”

“All I know is, the eyes of Lord Adonai are every place, watching over all the universe. What does your eye watch over? So far, I’ve seen little to suggest there’s anything beyond you and who you are,” Miriam scowls. “So, for what purpose have you brought me here?”

“You imagine I have a purpose. Perhaps, I merely desire to see what you are about and this Adonai of whom you speak and wonder, will he oppose me?”

The eye rolls around again, changing to a deep blue-green, *the color of envy*, Miriam thinks. “Oppose you? What are your intentions? Do you envy Him and plan to invade His universe? If so, you’re in for a rude awakening. One already attempted and was evicted from the heavens.”

“Ah, we’re getting somewhere. Tell me what opposition does this Adonai of yours pose?”

“You do plan to invade Adonai’s universe! If you’re all-seeing how do you not know what He is and what to expect?”

The eye narrows briefly, seeming to lower an eyelid then, opens wider. “I know what I know. I am infinite and eternal. Yet, to not remain here, instead, I seek new horizons.

You I need to assess his world or defenses. Yet, it would not be necessary to… Hmm.

“Clearly, you left this Adonai for a reason. So, I look to you. Were you not content? Come now, share your dissatisfaction. Surely we can come to some arrangement amicable to both.”

“I have no reason to arrange anything against Lord Adonai, not with you or anyone else, regardless of my discontent.”

Miriam glowers, rummages through memories of Lucifer and what Adonai had done. *Still, part of the fault was his. Even so, had Anak not convince Adonai to do his dirty work, Lucifer would yet be with me. We would have each other still.*

“Ha. I see. You indeed have a grievance for this Lord. He took someone from you and you long for him, desperately, else you’d not be here. True? Where is he? What have they done with him?”

*Surely it* *won’t hurt to say.* Miriam considers Anak, vengeful as Lucifer, incited Adonai to turn Lucifer into a dragon, returning him to hell eternal.” Tears well at the memory.

“As a dragon, he may not remember our love, devour me. Yet, I desire him with me roaming the universe together.”

“So, your love could overcome? If Lord Adonai is love and invincible, could not love conquer all? Either you do not love this Lucifer, or he does not love you. Or you do not trust your Adonai, to care for you, as you say he does! Come now, which is it?”

Eye narrows, waiting her response, where her loyalties lie. Miriam is confused and doesn’t know what to say, “Leave me be to think this through. You’ve asked questions I’m not sure of the answer and need to consider each before I reply.”

Scowling, Miriam is tired. “I’ve traveled a long way and need rest. Mayhap then, I’ll have an answer for you.”

“Surely. Take all the time you need. I have plenty of it and am glad to share what I have with you.”

In a blink, the eye closes, a cottage appears, one resembling the place Miriam had stayed once with a friend on the earth. The cottage is old and dusty. Weathered grey stone climbs to a low slate roof out of which sprouts a chimney.

Honeysuckle vines surround the windows, growing over the arched door. A white gate, paint chipped and almost falling off opens to the property, a narrow-pebbled path leads to the front door made of plain wood planks with a rusty lock. To one side she sees a tiny pond with lily pads floating.

The grass green and yellow with two huge trees, barren. Inside, a tiny stove with a chimney to the roof. Outside, tendrils of smoke rise forth into the blue sky to blend with the white clouds overhead. The warmth from its fire brings her peace. Nearby, two upholstered chairs with embroidered cushions, and she lightly trails her fingers over them. A mattress under the slanted roof remains on the floor, just as before. Miriam lies down upon it and soon is fast asleep.

*A dragon has her in its grasp. Intent on swallowing Miriam, she cries in terror and struggles against him. The dragon is Lucifer who smiles tenderly, then reaches to comfort. In panic, Miriam flees his grasp but the faster she runs, the closer the dragon comes and it’s about to devour her. She struggles to scream only to find herself awake.*

*Why fear? Would Lucifer as a dragon devour me? Do I love a dragon? Is my love not perfected? In perfect love there is no fear Adonai has often said. Does this mean my love for him is false?*

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Miriam scrubs the sleep from her face as she exits the small cottage, which vanishes as it had appeared. She notices the eye reappear. Miriam imagines it has a look of amusement, though it’s just an eye with no face. S*trange to see an eye and no face. Oh well. At least now I have my answer.*

“Indeed, it seems you do have an answer,” the eye queries. “for your look of uncertainty is gone.”

“Truly, you see me rightly. I imagined a dragon or I dreamed of such and thought it Lucifer, which terrified me. In the dream, he was a dragon trying to devour me. It was Lucifer wanting to hold and comfort me, but fear ruled. I didn’t trust him and tried to run but could not escape. I cannot escape my fear. It’s the one thing I’ve learned to face. What I must do is return and face…” Miriam realizes “Not Lucifer but Adonai. He is my challenge. Will he help me restore Lucifer or abandon us?”

“Still, in ruminating, you said perfect love casts out fear. So, is Lord Adonai’s love not perfect, or your love for him?”

The eye, bland in appearance, yet its tone mocking.

“You have no sense of His perfect love.” Miriam said. “It’s not my love that needs to be perfect, but Adonai's love is perfect. His decision will be the perfect solution for Lucifer and myself.” Miriam says, “One thing still bothers me.”

“And that is?” the eye rolls around to look at Miriam.

“You need me to do something for you, while with Adonai, he doesn’t need me for anything. He’s quite independent though He works interdependently with all of us, but you do not.”

The eye began to roll, “No, not true. I enjoy giving people who help me something to do to feel useful.”

Miriam thought first, “What I hear is, if I were to leave, you could manage the problem you seem to be having, by yourself?”

“Of course, I’m the gold standard for getting things done. I’m worthy of approval. You should want to serve me. Have I not provided for you in need? So then, what of payment?"

“One thing of Yeshua. He came to serve not to be served. He didn’t ask us to pay him. Freely you give and freely you receive.”

“Your Adonai might be not good; else why did he create hell if he’s infinitely merciful? Eternal torture with no escape for sin in a finite lifetime. Very unjust, wouldn’t you agree?”

“No indeed.” *But you do distract me from my purpose.*

“You say Adonai never sins, does no wrong, which is absurd. I’m far more perfect and a good reason for following me.”

“He is the epitome of holiness and is unable to sin; Adonai simply is incapable; it’s not a choice; it’s who He is.”

“Ah, He does have limits!” The eye seems to roll around rapidly in a delighted manner.

“Adonai directs all things while giving free will—no person or any force can stop Him from fulfilling his purpose, to save us from sin and restore His creation as in the beginning. This doesn’t include you, or forces like you.”

The voice of the eye sputters and then it blinks out.

Miriam hears, “You are free to go. Go the way you came, you’ll be home in a blink.” Then silence.

“Adonai has the answers you seek.” Not the whisper of a breeze and the ground vanishes, Miriam is traveling through space and time, on her way home. *Most peculiar.*

~~~

Andras is back in hell and Clio has returned, “Where in the universe have you been?” he snarls, not expecting an answer.

“That’s a fine welcome,” giving him a peck on the cheek.

*Clio has never been so friendly.* *What is she up to?* “Why so friendly?” Suspicion is his best friend since Lucifer has lost Anak and Kai and the Tuatha while in the otherworld and blames everyone, doing what he can to trick even the demons into making mistakes so he can torture them.

Andras muses, *Miriam, since losing her it’s like Lucifer’s lost his mind and for sure his good sense. He vacillates between evil and good, not knowing what to do.* Laughing to himself he shakes his head in wonder. *Never did I imagine the day would come when hell’s ruler and god of the earth would fail to sin.*

“Don’t be so cranky. Haven’t you heard?” Seeing Andras’ look, “Not about Yeshua. I see you haven’t heard about Lucifer and Miriam.”

“Don’t be so damn smug. Miriam is gone. What’s new about it, or is there something else I don’t know?” he says, “Drag it out, as usual. What a drama queen! Get on with it.”

Clio laughs out loud, “Lucifer tires of being a dragon it seems. Miriam has returned and petitioned Adonai for his release.”

Clio giggles like a child, a rarity in hell. She wraps her arms around Andras. “Imagine what it means?” Kissing him on the lips, Clio moves away to glance over her shoulder flirting.

Shocked by her intimacy, Andras finds himself attracted to Clio for the first time and watches as she walks, *no prowls though the room.* But he knows *she’s also fierce and cunning elsewise she would not have survived Lucifer.* He muses.

*The ghost of hell they call her and she’s already stalked out her prey.* Andras chuckles to himself and finds himself excited by her.

*She imagines only hell knows what,* he thinks in amusement. *This will have an effect felt in more places than hell.* Excitement builds within him, for he imagines with Lucifer gone, hell will be his.

Clio watches Andras’ smirk, pleased to see hell’s next ruler for she’s already made her claim. *Damn, he’s hot. Lucifer gave him to Meira once, but now he’s mine and worth the wait.* Clio had hungered for this fine- looking angel man, as long as she can remember.

Hair midnight black, curling slightly, eyes chocolate brown framed by black graceful brows. Prominent cheekbones are striking and add to his well-defined nose and chin; they shape his face, always clean shaven. Muscles ripple across every part of his body, skin tanned. He obviously is a seasoned warrior and has the scars to prove it. But he’d never need to prove anything to her.

She’d seen him have sex with the woman in the temple and later, he’d made love to Meira the first time. Clio almost orgasmed watching them. She’s never seen an angel such as Andras but she knew, without a doubt, he was hot and she could not wait to get him into her bed. She felt her passion stir thinking about it. Yum.

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## 2. Unchanging

**“Absolutely not**. You think to change my mind when you know I Am unchanging,” Adonai fusses with the fringe on his robe for He knows what Miriam wants, though she has yet to ask.

Miriam expects this reply and has an answer, “You are unchanging. Thing is, this was not your idea, if I’m right. The plan presented by Yeshua, but the scheme was Anak’s,” Miriam’s nostrils flare, lips thin. “He thinks only of self, Lord, and his pride. He’s more like Lucifer than he admits.” Miriam waits to hear his decision with grim resolve.

Lord Adonai, looks pensive. “Hmm.” *I’ve been keeping an eye on her and am comfortable knowing she’s secure in her faith, yet idolizes Lucifer. Perhaps idolize may be too strong a word,* he reflects. *Admire him and yes, she has even come to love him.*

Adonai smiles, “Let me consider, Miriam. I will give you an answer once I’ve thought it over carefully.”

“Thank you.” Glancing at Yeshua, she sees He’s watching. *Yeshua will have his say. I wonder if the two will speak to Anak?* She chuckles. *I care not about Anak, only the Lord’s decision.*

Miriam is pleased Adonai will consider her request. Yet fear flickers as she wonders. *What if He doesn’t agree?* *Trust the Lord*, she whispers to herself then shakes off her fear.

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“Surprised to hear from Miriam?” Yeshua asks. “I was not pleased with Anak’s request, as you know. She had a real impact on Lucifer. Giving Anak the power to decide another’s fate, was it wise?”

*Yeshua is quite a romantic.* Adonai muses. *I must consider if My son is the one to confide in, regarding this situation.*

“She certainly has and what a turn that has taken. Miriam kidnapped to break a bond between her and Anak, which wasn’t much, now she and Lucifer form a more powerful bond.”

Adonai chuckles at the outcome though he’d seen it coming long ago and for eons had eagerly looked forward to it.

Yeshua couldn’t believe it, “Of all the celestials. I wouldn’t have believed had I not seen, Lucifer and Miriam in love.”

*Adonai is love and even I’m awed by the power of love, at times.* Yeshua muses as he leaves the throne room. *How much power will he give the two to explore their love?* Yeshua wonders, leaving to consult on a different matter with His angels.

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Lucifer, a fire-breathing dragon, paces hell’s passages in vexation. Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, and burning coals blazed out of it as he spoke. “Never would I have agreed to this if I’d known it would be so boring and for all eternity! There must be another way!” He grumbles. *Still, there’s always hope! Good grief, what am I saying!*

Continuing to pace and consider. *If I see hope as an option my brain must have suffered in the fall to earth!*

Then, Lucifer heard a rumor: *Miriam has returned and spoken with Adonai, though no one knows about what, or they’re not saying. Why would she return? It’s not like she stood up for me when Anak proposed this ridiculous idea to Yeshua.*

I wanted to lie down beside her again, wrap my arms about her, not to have sex, simply be with her. Sadness overwhelms him, as he recalls Miriam and the love they shared, *Adonai would never believe me about our love.* Lucifer’s imagination leads to scenes of humiliation and he grimaces. *No, he’s the last I could go to and ask a pardon.*

Smiling he thinks, *Miriam would say,* ‘*lose the pride, Lucifer,’ for to stop being a dragon and leave hell would almost be worth it.’*

~~~

Adonai listens as Lucifer ruminates! *Well. Perhaps, it’s time for the time is right for them to reunite*. Chuckling, Adonai imagines His favorite Cherub returning and joy fills his heart. He knows what the future brings. “There’s so much to do!”

~~~

Adonai send Yeshua to the trio whom he’d successfully mentored: Anak, Jacob, and Malek, perhaps Kai and Isobel. He doesn’t consider their opinion in the Lucifer matter. Adonai has plans for them to take care of business elsewhere.

“Since you returned to heaven Yeshua, these mortal souls abound. It’s glorious having their praise and worship, knowing so much love flourishes. Nonetheless, get them busy exercising their faith. A universe of solar systems awaits and the planets beyond earth need our care.

“Perhaps we can do something to help the Tuatha tribe! Why don’t you take Michael and the others into the universe to the Pleiades to solve that demon problem on Celaeno?”

~~~

Yeshua, after speaking with Adonai, leaves to visit a certain cherub and those who supervise the human souls. Right now, the two race their chariots of fire. Mighty, golden-silvery horses, pull the archangels across the ethereal clouds of heaven.

Roaring in glee, Amandine's gaiety is suddenly quieted. Mirth erupts from the other angels as the Cherub, turns too sharply and finds his horses losing their footing, sliding. The chariot nearly parallel the ground cannot contain its rider who suddenly finds himself cartwheeling through the air to spill out upon the landscape of mist and cloud.

Face red in embarrassment, heart pounding from the unexpected flight, Amandine gets to his feet, brushes himself off and goes over to his horses and chariot standing nearby, pawing the cloudy turf. Taking the reins, he leads them off the raceway, shaking his head.

Michael laughs merrily and calls out, “Amandine, you should have slowed for the curve. Ariel always knows what you’re doing and tricks you each time. How often do you have to fall for her?” he winks. While angels and other celestials may not marry or bear children, they enjoy close friendships with one another.

Adonai watches from afar, enjoying their sport. *At least it’s not war and they’re having fun for a time*.

Ariel, the Lioness of Adonai, goes to Amandine and takes his hand, “Poor dear. How can I make it up to you?” she says leaning into him. Feeling his warmth pleases her; he is a good friend.

“You could let me win, once in a while,” he complains nursing his wounded pride. Looking at Ariel, lips curve up slightly in amusement.

“If I did, you’d know and not like it,” Ariel chuckles. “It seems I can’t win for losing, not that I ever lose.” She gives him a peck on the cheek and runs off to care for her horses.

Michael comes to Amandine, “Come, Adonai would like a word. It seems he has a new project in mind.”

Ariel waves at Dragon. “You move more like a cheetah, not a lion,” Dragon smirks as he walks by her, amused by Amandine, who rumbles in irritation hearing the comment.

Adonai surveys his fine warriors, Amandine and Michael patiently await instructions. Tannin, known as Dragon, has agreed to take part in this mission and follows the other two into the throne room.

“Anak, don’t be downcast,” Laila exclaims. “It could be good news.” *He’s hurt by Miriam rejecting their former friendship.*

“Come on,” she teases, “Let’s see the games - all the strong muscled warriors with their swords flashing in the light.

“Warriors with sweat gleaming,” Anak rejoins, smirking at Laila who is not attracted to the archangels so much as the swordplay and would like to learn how. However, Michael is a bit of a chauvinist.

“Females, are never to take up swords even in play,” he says. “They have other talents better suited to those whom they are responsible for watching over.” Michael has few female friends, himself, the reason for which he shares with no one, not even his best friend, Dragon.

“Dragon!” Anak exclaimed when he heard of the warrior angel who had fought alongside Michael. Always by his side, defending. “Where did he get that name? Reminds me of Lucifer, the dragon.” Anak smirks, still hostile toward Lucifer though the thought the angel intrigues him.

A nondescript sort, as a human he would’ve been mistaken for a homeless man with mental health issues. Indeed, Dragon has been to earth in such a role, which he plays to perfection.

Like the angels who race their horses across the skies, others tended to form groups enjoying related activities. Some race one another while those with artist skills paint landscapes upon the new worlds. Of course, there was Michael, the archangel and his like-minded warriors who engaged in war games. Although he would never call them games. Still, fun was had by all, even in their more serious ventures.

While Anak’s heard of Dragon and another angel joining up, he’s doesn’t know Amandine. Nervous about following these mighty warriors, Anak hesitantly walks over to meet them.

Amandine, Dragon, and Michael, with Ariel, greet Anak as he arrives. Relieved to see Ariel though surprised too, for Michael doesn’t let females accompany them on these journeys.

Michael speaks, “As you know, females usually do not go with us on these trek’s however, Ariel is coming to assist with the refugees those we’ll free if such is the case.”

“Who exactly are we freeing,” Amandine asks, eyebrows hiked, “I’d thought those taken were destroyed by the demons. They seldom take prisoners Fae or human mortals.”

“Good point, Amandine. We don’t know if the Fae are alive and won’t know until we go in there and route the demons. If they are alive, no one knows what living with demons has done – how they’ve been affected by the evil.

The humans are another matter and may not have survived if they were taken underground. They’re not as resilient and few have magic, which the demons usually seek.”

“As to the Fae,” Ariel clarifies, “the Tuatha de’ Danann are a superior race, as such, the demons likely bound them to use their magic surely for no good purpose. We need to see if their magic has been stolen or distorted by evil.”

Michael was not happy Ariel had spoken, but he ignored her for now. He has more to worry about, *I’ll deal with her later*,he muses, *though she made a good point.*

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## 3. a New World

**Tuatha de’ Danann** had returned to a new home in the stars. Later, Oisin and Niamh’s sons are born, twins Oscar and Finn, followed by a daughter, Plor na mBan "Flower of Women". Oisin and Niamh of Tuatha de’ Danann in the new world find it lovely, more so than their previous home. Yet, beneath the landscape, a far different world exists. Seeping from the rocks, deep from underground poisonous fumes emerge into the air to destroy the surrounding plant life and even some animals.

“Keep all children away from those caverns until we discover what’s causing those fumes. We don’t know what effect they’ll have. Maybe nothing, but still,” admonishes Oisin. Niamh is more lenient with the boys and is unconcerned. “We know the humans on these planets, this one anyway, have been severely affected. Some have died but none of the Fae so far.”

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Left alone, their boys went into the caverns to investigate on their own. “This is nasty smelling,” Finn grouses, “we should return home. Mom will be worried.”

“She’s always worried. Besides the council wants to find out about the smell. What if we figure it out first?” Oscar glances at his brother and snickers. Finn cautiously follows Oscar who’s one minute older at birth and came out screaming, while Finn from day one has been hesitant fearful even.

Leading their way into the darkness. Oscar enters the caves, while Finn is slower, hesitant, as usual.

“Oscar, slow down, will you?”

“Oh, stop whining and walk faster . . . huh,” Finn hears, the sound of a crash and a dust cloud rises to obscure what little vision there was to see by, then comes silence as the dust settles. “Oscar!” Finn shouts, what happened?”

Heart beating like a frightened hare, his eyes widen, trying to dilate to see better, to no avail. “Oscar,” Finn begins to weep, “Oscar.”

Sobbing, Finn crawls forward in terror and stops as he feels only a gaping hole before him, in the surrounding darkness.

Trembling in fear, Finn slowly makes his way around the rim, until he meets up with a wall, then slowly edges the other way, again meeting the wall. Finn realizes there’s no way around and the only option is to go back the way he came. *I can’t leave*, he moans, unsure what to do.

*If I go for help, I may not find my way back. Oscar will be lost and never found.* He’d heard his parents’ as they discussed these caves. ‘No one returns. They think demons may be responsible.’ Finn begins to shake violently, unsure what to do he curls into a ball and waits. *Surely someone will miss us and come searching. They’ll find us.*

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As the light outside turns to the dark of night, Finn doesn’t see the demonic Faerie rise out of the mist to hunt. In exchange for dark powers the Fae give the blood of mortals to the demons. She sees Finn asleep in the dark as the moon rises.

The demon Faerie is pleased. “What have we here,” snickers the Faerie? *His power’s too faint for the demons but perhaps enough for me.* She moves closer only to see Finn awaken.

“Who are you?” Finn cries, “Have you come to rescue us?”

“There are two of you?” the Faerie asks, delighted at the rich-sounding harvest set before her.

“My brother fell, earlier. I don’t know if he’s alive even.”

She sniggers. *And the demons have their* *portion already. How nice.* She reaches to touch his face, her eyes alight with green fire.

Finns powers may be weak but he senses evil well enough and she reeks of it. Scrambling away, he runs into the wall.

In fear, he loses his sense of direction not knowing which way to go. “Go away, leave me,” he cries, “Oh, somebody, please help,” Finn cries piteously.

He hears a scrambling sound then, “What in the devil are you sniveling about?” his brother snarls.

Relieved to hear Oscar Finn sees the creatures all around him. Black spiders, their legs clack loudly to echo along the walls, dozens of them surround his brother. Finn’s heart beats rapidly and his breath short, he gasps in terror.

“You could have helped but you ran off. My friends helped and they shared. Hel-lo.” Seeing the Faerie, Oscar watches her curiously, “Who is your Faerie friend, Finn?” he asks.

“She’s no friend,” Finn’s panicked voice shook with fear. “I didn’t run off. I’ve been right here.” But Oscar ignores him.

“Coward,” Oscar says as he walks toward the Faerie; the spiders with him. “What is it you have for me, sweet Faerie?” he enquires but she backs away, fearful then turns to flee. Before she can move the spiders swarm over the Faerie. Oscar watches as they made short work of her, leaving nothing but an empty lifeless husk. The horror of it reminds him of how close he came to the same fate.

Finn watched in horror for a different reason and is sickened as the spiders insert a peculiar appendage down Oscar’s throat. *What are they doing to him?*

Oscar with a satisfied smirk said, “What a treat the lovely Faerie. What do you say we leave, brother and quickly? Before you become a nice snack for the spiders, too.”

Finn scrambles away from Oscar, the one he thought was his brother who’s fast on his heels. “Slow down. They’re not going to eat you like the Faerie. They usually share with the Faeries, and not take their entire essence.”

Nearing the village, Oscar turns and speaks in a venomous tone, “Keep your mouth shut, about us being in that cave and the Faerie.” Then adds, “You don’t want mom worried, do you?”

“No, I won’t say anything. I promise,” Trembling, Finn has no idea what happened to his brother. “How did you get out of the cave-in?” he asks and his brother told him a most unusual story.

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“When the ground opened before me,” he said. “I thought surely it was the end. At once, a web hung across the hollow down which I fell; it caught me up. What seemed to be spiders eased me to the ground in a dark cavern.

From what I’ve seen, the floor has tunnels carved into it they cover with a close-woven net and disguise as ordinary dirt flooring. When Fae or human walk across, they fall into the demon’s trap.

“Again, I thought myself doomed and pled for mercy. But they came at me, prepared to do as they did to the Faerie. One pierced me with something sharp and the others came to partake, then stopped, whispered to each other and they fell away.”

Finn’s eyes wide in amazement. “Why would they cease feeding on you? It’s odd from what I know of spiders, even if they are demons.”

Oscar looks at him with disgust. “I suppose you still study the nasty crawlies.” He looks around to see if the demon spiders overheard, but sees no one. “Anyway, they sensed something and decided to use me instead.” *They decided to use me for their own purposes.* He shudders inwardly and a tremor wracks his body at what they’d done. He feels a need to vomit, but swallows to repress it.

Finn knew, this was no longer the brother with whom he grew up but was something else now. Finn grew more terrified for himself, for his family, and for their entire community.

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## 4. His Resolution

**Miriam reasons**, “Please reconsider, Lucifer. It’s what you desired, in the beginning. Now, it has come upon you! Is this not exactly what you wanted such a long time ago?”

“Maybe.” *It’s what you wanted, not what I wanted, I don’t think.* He recalls their talks and how he’d voices exactly such a thing. *Of course she’d remember.* “Yes, I recall now, but. . .” he starts to say

“But, but, but. There is a better word, Yes, yes, yes!”

Lucifer turns away and Miriam sees him swallows convulsively. *He’s likely thinking of a way to ignore what I’ve suggested. He’s frightened.*

Interrupting her thoughts, Lucifer says “Stop a minute, Miriam. Let me think for my mind is a whirlwind.” *Yes, it’s what I wanted but never thought it would happen. It was easy to want but another thing to find it before me, within my reach.*

*He’s terrified. What I’ve asked of him is a huge change, though he hungers for what could be.* She waits a space, then says, “Can I share my thoughts, my own experience?”

Seeing he’s calmed down, Lucifer nods his willingness.

“When I first thought of returning, my fear was, will Lucifer love me, want me?” Seeing him about to speak, she said, “Wait. Then, I had a dream about you and my fears; it was fear of you as a dragon and the dragon devouring me. Your dragon self is fearsome, love,” she smiles, gazing at the dragon. "But you also love fiercely." She smiles again.

Miriam put a hand up to stop any protest as he opens his mouth to speak. “My biggest fear I soon realized was not you, but Adonai. Will he love me and want me after giving into lust and giving my love to Lucifer; will Adonai still love Lucifer and want him back, or will he put both of us away in hell? Yes, my fear was not simply for myself but both of us. Dare I come before Him and make my request?”

Looking at Lucifer Miriam sees the naked fear in his eyes, “Oh, love. I too had to leave my pride and ask Adonai, trusting His answer would be for the best−for both of us, but I would have to trust his love for us. Still, He is love at its finest.”

Miriam knows Adonai long ago had asked Lucifer a question he’d been unwilling to accept the wait.

“’Will you *trust me, Lucifer?’* is the question Adonai once asked you said, ‘*a little while longer*,’ but you refused because of your impatience. Look where your choice has taken you. Now you have another chance at happiness, at having what you desire.”

Miriam moves close to the great fiery red-gold dragon and puts her hand on his scaled shoulder, fingers move up to his face, and her fingers trail down from jaw to chin. “It’s up to you always, and I’ll be with you, regardless, heaven or hell.”

“I’d not expect you to give heaven up, Miriam.”

“Yes, I know. Still, I will not abandon you again.” Her lips press to his scaled hide near the mouth and he trembles in delight.

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Adonai observes the two. *Lucifer always thought he needed power but it was confidence in Me and obedience he lacked. The dragon gave him power of a sort but not what he truly desired. He’s learned power isn’t everything. Love is the answer of course; it’s more powerful than anything else in the universe.*

Adonai decides, *who to carry it out*? Chuckling, *I do wish they wouldn’t get so upset with my decisions. Let go fear, trust in Me and my purpose.* Shaking his head, Adonai calls for Meira, the earthly wife of Andras, mother of Anak, one of Adonai’s warriors who thinks he’s Lucifer’s enemy. *This should be interesting.*

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As Meira approaches the throne room of heaven, a tightness in her chest, mouth dry, she wants a drink, anything. Upon entering the throne room and seeing the Lord in all his glory, she becomes lightheaded, her stomach twists then she hears, “Greetings Meira.” It’s not a deep voice booming throughout the room, as she'd imagined, but gentle, smooth, and soft as melting butter.

"A soft gentle voice, smooth as melting butter?" Amused, as Meira looks around to see if anyone else had spoken, but no.

“It’s always a shock for most everyone, not hearing what they think I should sound like,” He chuckles.

Silent, Meira scratches her arm which now has acquired an itch. “Yes, Lord,” knowing he nailed her right on.

“You have no idea of why you’re here?” Adonai says, and Meira shakes her head, no. “The reason I wanted to meet with you is because, while Michael could have done it, he’s not available. Still, you’re a better choice for this particular task.”

Adonai waits quietly for a moment, giving Meira a chance to calm down. “You’re here because there’s something I’d like you to do for me. Would you like me to go on, to hear what it is?”

Meira doesn’t know what to say so nods, chews her cheek, then exhales the breath she’s been holding and puffs her cheeks. Trying to focus on Adonai’s words, missing most of what he said. *I couldn’t have heard right?* Meira apologizes, “I’m sorry, you want me to do what?”

“I’ve assigned you to release Lucifer from his current dragon binding, his repentance, which he’s already agreed to do.”

*That’s what I thought he said the first time.* Meira rubs her brows with pinched fingers. “I’m sorry, did I hear right?” Totally baffled, heart racing, short of breath, and now terrified Meira is unable to respond and stands mute and trembling.

Meira recalls the one time she’d seen Lucifer*; at Anak’s birth and Lucifer eagerly awaited my presumed death, when I’d go to hell as an unbeliever. He was pure evil.* She can’t wrap her brain around the idea, not comprehend it. *How can Adonai ask such a thing of me, and believe Lucifer would or could ever repent?*

“You have nothing to fear. He’s eager to comply with our request and poses no threat to you. Although, facing a dragon may seem a bit overwhelming.” Adonai waits, watching Meira as she strives to calm her breathing so she can give an answer.

“Lord, I don’t know if I can do what you ask, release Lucifer from his dragon binding. Are you certain this is what you want? Of course, you are or you would never have asked me.”

Her breath short, Meira’s eyes roll about as she strives to figure out how to do as he asks or just say no.

“While a mortal soul, the power to produce this change is not beyond you; it’s there if you so choose.”

Taking a deep breath, Meira exhales, smooths her clothing.

*What I’m asking is a challenge, but one she can do.*

“Oh, I feel so much better.” She remarks, lightly sarcastic.

Adonai chuckles. “Yes, in your place, I too might hesitate,” He says, his voice soft with compassion.

“Um, would it be all right if I have some time to think it over?”

“Of course. Let me know by the turn of earth’s new moon.” Meira finds herself outside the throne room, her meeting with Adonai over. Stunned, she leaves with uneven footsteps.

“I have until the new moon. That’s in two earth days!” She says to her friend. “What would you do in my situation?”

“Wow, if Adonai asked me, I’d jump on it. What an honor. He’s giving you the ‘power’! What more do you need?”

“You have no concept of Lucifer, hell’s ruler and a cherub. I’m sorry but you’d want to meet up with a fire-breathing dragon!”

“What you went through was hell.” She said: “But Miriam petitioned Adonai, Lucifer wants out of hell. The problem, *it seems to me*, is your fear.

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## 5. The Request

Two days later, Meira finds herself, once again outside the throne room, having agreed to do as Adonai asked.

“Great,” he said, in a booming voice more like what she’d expected the first time. “I knew you could be depended upon for this mission.” In a heartbeat, before she can think, Meira is in the corridors of hell. Ariel is with her for support in case of untoward actions from Lucifer. While he may be repentant, they know change does not occur overnight.

Heart racing Meira feels dizzy, her legs weak, she holds her breath in expectation of meeting hell’s very own dragon.

Hungrily she gulps air to quiet her nerves and calm down.

“How’re you doing?” Ariel casually asks with a smile, watching Meira and wraps an arm around her in a brief hug.

“What I want to do is to run off and hide,” Meira says, with a sense of impending doom, she knows is imaginary. *How did this happen? One minute I’m with Adonai, the lord of heaven and then I’m in hell to meet Lucifer*. Images of a dragon devouring her flash through her mind. Then, she recalls Miriam who had similar fears when going to face Lucifer as a dragon and speaking with Adonai. That realization helps Meira now.

Face ashen, Meira wipes her sweat dampened hands on her clothes and glances at Ariel. “How come you couldn’t do this?”

“Adonai didn’t ask me.” she snickers. “He had reasons. Imagine what good can come of this, not just for Lucifer, for you as well and the rest of all heaven.” Rounding the bend in a corridor, Meira is startled to see the dragon before them. Rooted to the spot, frozen, her eyes widen, she’s unable to speak. Blinking to clear her eyes is the creature, but all she sees is his fiery scales blazing bright as a flickering flame. Its eyes flare, claws clench the ground, able to lacerate to ribbons human flesh and bone; its nostrils smell her dread, its tongue tastes her fear. When it brought death all would be gone, she would be gone.

The dragon, smirks. “Well, look who’s here?” Lucifer’s eyes sparkle, then he recalls Miriam’s words when last they spoke, “Cease to do evil; learn to do good; it’s a learning process and Meira is the first lesson.” *She’s afraid,* he muses and Lucifer ceases his snarl at her.

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*Miriam knew I was the one to make the request of Lucifer but didn’t tell me.* *Adonai has a sense of humor*. Meira ponders as she gazes upon the creature before her. Reddish-gold scales gleam in hell’s fire light, his eyes a bright green. *An odd color for a dragon’s eyes,* she muses almost with humor. *But I’m not here to approve of his eye color,* Meira reminds herself, fear trembles her entire body.

Taking a deep breath as she looks at Lucifer, her back to the wall, barely able to speak clearly, Meira whispers: “Lucifer Morningstar.” She stops and takes a deep breath, puts fear aside, and in a firmer voice says, “Lucifer Morningstar, Son of the Dawn, I come before you to ask, are you prepared to repent to Lord Adonai−to rend your heart, and turn to the Lord your God who’s gracious in mercy, full of compassion, slow to anger, and so, to repent before him of all your evil?” Meira huffs out a breath. *Thank the Lord I got the words out.* Meira’s panting in fear still and takes a deep breath to calm herself.

Lucifer almost laughs at Meira’s fearful faltering, until he hears the words from her lips. Suddenly terrified, he’s rendered speechless. Heart pounding, lips frozen, unable to say a word, sweat breaks out, though dragons do not normally sweat, and finally Lucifer inhales a deep breath and sets aside his fear, then expels the breath he held a moment.

Meira waits, holding her breath, knowing this is the most difficult time for him. Beads of sweat appear on her upper lip and forehead. She wipes it away and trembles in anticipation. Meira licks her lips, takes another deep breath, and expels it.

Lucifer breathes deeply. *In perfect love there is no fear and Adonai does love me,* he reminds and puts his fear firmly aside as he focuses on Miriam not on himself and trusts in Adonai.

Meira, in the moment almost doesn’t hear him speak. “I, Lucifer Morningstar, Son of the Dawn, repent before my Lord Adonai and rend my heart, as I turn to him and plead his mercy and gracious compassion upon me.” He heaves a great sigh of relief.

Not believing, hearing the words this incredible creature has spoken, Meira barely notices the change and sinks to the ground, needing to catch her breath, wondering, *what next?*

What happens next is so unexpected, Meira is unprepared to see what was but is no longer a dragon standing in the corridor and rather than wings and a red-gold scaled body with faces of what she imagined evil to be are no longer. No flames or lightning flash forth to devour her.

What she perceives to be human in appearance stands in its place, a man and a gorgeous one. Meira is shocked: *I can see why Miriam fell for him. He looks nothing like the vile apparition who had gloated over my impending death at the birth of Anak.*

*This gorgeous creature is the love of the angel Miriam* and realizes, *this powerful god of the Otherworld, ruler of the earth, no longer a slave to his fear, now is a child of Lord Adonai.*

Meira’s breath hitches, awed at the transformation. All the fear and hatred she long-held vanished. Meira takes a hesitant step forward and a deep breath to gather her courage, she then comes to a decision, walks over to Lucifer and says, “Lucifer, *I forgive you*.” She turns away.

Later, Ariel told her, Lucifer gaped after her totally taken aback. What neither one saw was Andras who watched as Meira spoke the words Lucifer then repeated.

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“I can’t believe it. I heard Lucifer repent!” He stares at Clio open-mouthed and in awe, “Can you believe−he did it!”

He knows Clio also had seen Meira for she asks, “Do you hope she comes to free you? If not, then let’s be about our business.”

Andras walk away, unseen by Meira until then. Turning, she saw Andras pull Clio to him in a tight embrace and say, “Let’s go,” he runs his hands over her body. “My lovely one. Now, we can rule hell to please ourselves with Lucifer gone.”

Andras puts Meira away in the recesses of his mind as he and Clio return to enjoy their lusty passion.

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Meira had observed, *Hell had quite an impact as has Clio,* she muses. *Looks like he’s picking up where Lucifer left off. Would Adonai have released Andras had I asked?*

Meira had pondered the question a long time after speaking with the Lord Adonai about Andras’ possible release, earlier.

“What do you think?” Adonai asked as He waited for her response, knowing she’s not given to fanciful stories based on foolish whims.

“Andras blamed Lucifer for his own choices though he told me Michael had warned him. He knew the risks yet, followed Lucifer. Andras incited deception in heaven, deceived me with the pregnancy, knowing he would leave. He tried to deceive Lucifer. Andras did not need Lucifer to become a deceiver.”

Later, Meira considers what she saw from Andras and Clio. *He loves being the commander, not having to answer to Lucifer.* She muses. *I see why the Lord is not eager to release him.*

“One thing he did worthwhile,” she says, “was convince me to claim Adonai as Lord.”

“So, what did you learn while in hell?” Ariel asked.

“Adonai sent me when anyone else, including you could have done the work. He may have wanted me to see Andras.

What I saw, aside from Lucifer’s change, was Andras with Clio, and the power to rule he enjoys claiming. But the best; it turned my world upside down, was Lucifer himself speaking the words of repentance.”

“I heard since Lucifer left, Andras runs hell. I suppose he’ll continue doing so, unless Adonai sends someone else.”

“Do you think he will?” A shiver of trepidation coursed over Meira. *It will mean war, only this time in hell,* knowing Andras. “We’ll find out, sooner or later. Let’s hope it’s later.”

~~~

“Now, we can travel,” Miriam says to Lucifer as he returns to the heavens. Before long, Adonai calls Lucifer to the throne room. Fear like lightning strikes Miriam.

While he repented, Lucifer still desires his own rule in this universe or another. And so, he went to meet with Adonai for the first time since his release from the corridors of hell.

“Lucifer, how wonderful to see you. Michael is pleased to hear of your release, as well.”

“Yes, Lord. Glad I am to have returned,” Lucifer said, still unhappy, feeling he has to please Miriam and everyone but himself*. I suppose self-sacrifice is doing for others,* he muses striving for right thinking, which is not easy for the once-ruler-of-hell.

Adonai looks at his favorite cherub, the first created who use to bring such light into the universe. Saddened, Lord Adonai knows problems will not end unless Lucifer is honest, “Tell me, and I asked this once before; what is it you desire? All pretense aside. Forget Miriam, myself or anyone else; Lucifer, what is it *you* desire?”

*Can I be honest, without pretense?* Terrified to speak the truth, yet he recalls, *He is love perfected without fear.* *Why,* Lucifer questions, *why do I fear his answer?*

Adonai answers the fear in his heart, “In the before, you thought the way to have your heart’s desire was to take it by force. Your fear spoke, for your love was not perfected. ‘Mine is. I know what is in your heart. Now I need you to speak it.”

“Lord, you formed me before the foundation of the earth or the humans. I feared you had lost your love for me and replaced it with those mortals. I forgot your love is enough. Forgive me.”

“Lucifer, beloved. Yes, I created you. I know what you desire. Now is the time to speak it, what is your heart’s desire?” Love flows out warming Lucifer and his fear fades like mist in the morning.

“Lord, you know me, you created me, so you put within me the desire to have my own place. Perhaps, I wanted too soon, before its time, your time. If that time is now, then I desire a place of my own to rule – where I can be a light bringer, as before, but in your image.” *What am I saying. Is this me even?*

Adonai laughs. Reaching to clasp Lucifer in love. “Oh, how I longed for you to return to heaven.” *All that time in hell has served its purpose, and I see he is almost ready for what is to come.*

Lucifer’s fear fades, and his eyes sparkle with delight. Struggling to grasp this new feeling, for with acceptance, a lightness in his heart makes him want to dance, until his thoughts interfere. *Can I trust?*

“It will all come about in time. It’s all about faith.”

“Yes, Lord,” Lucifer acknowledges Adonai’s wisdom, likely for the first time. *I’ll try for Miriam’s sake and my own. Anything but hell. I could live forever without that misery.* Chuckling to himself.

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## 6. In the Spirit

**Not everyone is joyful** about Lucifer. Anak struggles to put aside his doubts. *What if he comes after me?* He sees himself in hell fires, again, Michael and Dragon gone. Heartbeat races, stomach in knots with throat dry, he tries to swallow, breaking out in a cold sweat. *Will this vile evil at last overtake and destroy me*?

“Anak, what are you doing? Focus. You’re new at this, which means you have to stay on task,” Michael’s voice like sharp steel slices through Anak’s thoughts and he quickly steps back as though the archangel were about to slay him. Yet he says nothing.

Ariel said, “Don’t take it personal. Like he said, just do your job.”

“If you’re finished babysitting the newbie, Ariel,” Michael growls, “maybe we can get on with the lesson.”

Dragon walks over to Michael, “Being a bit harsh. Are you nervous about what we’ll find on the planet, what’s its name?”

“Anak is fussing over Lucifer. Doesn’t trust his atonement. He needs to learn to trust Adonai as does Lucifer.” The two turn and look at Anak, who’s gazing off into nothing again. To answer your question, Celaeno is the 4th planet on the Pleiades seventh star. We’re after the parchments, the Celanese Fragments.”

Seeing Dragon’s look, he says, “They’re real and they’re there.”

“Those Adonai had the ancients write. We need to find them before the Tuatha or the demons, if they haven’t already.”

“Most definitely.” Solemnly, the two head to Adonai’s throne room with Ariel, Anak, and Malek. Michael smiles, “This you’re going to love, my friend,” he says, seeing Amandine come alongside.

“What’s that?” Amandine looks curiously at Michael.

“I’m leaving it as a surprise for everyone.” He chuckles now Dragon’s curiosity is aroused, as well. Yet Michael is concerned with Anak and how he’ll react. *Not well, would be my guess.*

Entering heavens throne room, all celestials stop short. Lucifer is the last they expected to see with Adonai, different than they’ve ever seen. Except for Michael, all fail to see the change in Lucifer.

Earlier, Lucifer had entered the room with Yeshua to meet with Adonai who’d not told anyone what was happening. Something strange of which he was familiar was taking place, but he’d never been privileged to observe. Now it hovers, seeking a place; its presence mystifies Lucifer. Yeshua’s spirit, given to Adonai’s followers after his death and ascension into heaven, Lucifer did not receive, being alienated at the time.

“Do you recall, Pentecost, Lucifer, Yeshua’s men, his disciples all gathered in one place after His ascension?”

“Yes, Lord. I remember.” He smirks. “Another of my finest moments as evil incarnate.”

Adonai chuckles. “You were there.” Looking from Yeshua to Lucifer He asks, “What were you feeling?”

“Rage. My usual response when I’m feeling left out.”

“Now, Lucifer you will share in the joy of the Lord.” Then, the sound of a mighty rushing wind filled the room. A flame of fire then came to rest upon Lucifer who fell before the Lord and Yeshua and flowing throughout the *Ruach Ha Kodesh*; he is overwhelmed with joy.

“Astonishing!” Michael said, while Dragon, also incredulous, leans on Michael, weak in the knees at the sight. Taking a deep breath, Dragon bows before the Lord. “What a mighty God is our Lord,” the three spoke in unison while Ariel and Anak stood frozen, mouths agape.

Ariel is confused while Anak fumes, his rage building seeing Lucifer after so long. *I thought he was gone for good into hell. He’s here, in the throne room with Adonai and Yeshua. Has hell come to heaven?*

Anak turns from one to the other in disbelief. Unable to imagine any good from Lucifer. *Ruach Ha Kodesh, my foot*. His eyes narrow in suspicion. *It’s another of his tricks*. Anak’s rage blinds him to the truth, and he refuses to accept it.

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Miriam awaits Lucifer’s return, more annoyed by the moment. Arms crossed, her foot tapping. “Why’s it taking so long?” A muscle twitches in her cheek. Miriam imagine the worst-case scenario, *I help him and he’s off on his own. My usefulness is over. That’s all I was, get free and get even with Anak. It figures. What a fool I am*. Yet in her heart the spirit speaks truth; still she paces.

Shaking her head, lips thin, a glassy stare when Lucifer’s returns, she opens her mouth to criticize, then stops. Eyes narrow she takes in Lucifer who’s gorgeous as ever, but also different, a light seems to glow within him and Miriam doesn’t understand and feels left out.

Taking a deep breath Miriam expels the air in a short huff. “Well, something happened as I waited.” Chewing her lips, scowling she rubs her brow to ward off a headache, Miriam turns away to avoid Lucifer’s eyes. Then turns back, sees his confused expression, and says, “Sorry. You’ve been gone what seems forever heaven knows where, leaving me to wonder, and feeling left out of everything!”

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Lucifer knows how she feels and smiles as he goes to Miriam and takes her in his arms. “What is it you say, mine is not to question the Lord but *do or die*. Neither of us has died; we’ve gone to heaven.”

“I’m sorry love. I’m feeling possessive and don’t want to share you. Yes, it’s unrealistic. I’m sure Adonai has something in mind for you to do, maybe both of us?” Miriam looks at Lucifer.

“What happened in the throne room?” A smile curves her lips as she tugs him over to the couch, “Come sit and tell all.”

Lucifer’s eyes dance with a new light as he shares the story and his receiving the *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* and says, “guess who shows up?”

*Why was I excluded from the celebration?* Miriam pouting at again being excluded and not knowing what happened.

“Michael and Dragon, they knew right away. It wasn’t long before Malek did. Ariel is still trying to figure it out. Anak though, I’ve not seen such rage, other than my own.”

He chuckles. “I shouldn’t laugh, but it is hilarious him so upset. He liked me as a dragon in hell out of his way, for a long time.”

She can’t help but chuckle too. “You’re evil.” Miriam said, lightly punching Lucifer’s arm. “But it is funny, after the stunt he pulled.” She gets off his lap and faces Lucifer.

“Yes, but it gets better.” Lucifer laughs outright and restrains himself before he can tell Miriam the rest of the story.

Miriam knows Anak’s vengeful nature, but encourages, “Come on, out with it. Tell me the whole story. I can’t wait.” She sits down cross-legged next to him, and leans toward Lucifer.

“Miriam, I’ve been in rebellion on the outside and alienated from everyone so long, none of this seems genuine.” Looking at her earnestly, eyebrows drawn together his face tightens, then he clears his throat, and asks, “Is it real? Am I different from what I was before?” Running a hand through his hair, longer and slightly mussed now, a hesitant smile appears on his lips, but it seems off a bit. Then he swallows several times waiting for Miriam’s response.

Miriam looks at Lucifer for long moments. *What do I say? Not the wrong thing, whatever it is. I suppose honesty is best.*

“There will be moments like this when you doubt yourself. We all have those, not as profound as yours. After all, it’s been eons since you fought the war in heaven, lost, and became estranged from the Lord, and everyone else too. Now you’re together again.” She pauses.

“You felt abandoned. Except, you were the one who abandoned the Lord and the celestials. He never abandoned you. He welcomed you back. So, if I may be so bold, get over yourself and this pity party you’d like to immerse yourself in and tell me the rest of the story.”

Shocked by Miriam, Lucifer gapes open-mouthed. “You sure know how to get to the heart of the matter.” Shaking his head, he chuckles. “Okay. I suppose it’s time to move on.”

“You’ll get over it one day, in a few eons.” A bemused expression on her lovely face. “Now get on with it.”

Lucifer needs no more encouragement, sitting up straight he said, “You know the Tuatha needs help with demons, right? The angels who went before said my help would be welcome. Those demons are the one I sent into the outer darkness; they are the troublemakers who aligned with an evil force on Celaeno.

“Eons ago, Adonai had the ancients, humans transcribe knowledge vital to the universe on manuscripts. Those parchments contain the law, history, and prophecy over several centuries. There’s nothing left now but the Celanese fragments.”

“Yes, I’ve heard it was lost long ago.” Miriam said. “What does a parchment have to do with you? Why not have scribes rewrite it?”

“Evidently it’s on planet Celaeno. The scribes who wrote the original are not available. While we’re quelling the demon problem, the parchments must be found and returned.”

“No small task.” Miriam ponders the difficulties in finding them. “Who is Adonai sending on an archeological dig?” Amused at the not-so-fortunate person.

“That would be you.” Lucifer sniggers and grabs Miriam around the waist lifting her into his lap as he tickles her until tears flow.

Tears of laughter stream down her face as Miriam finally gets Lucifer to let her go. Wiping her eyes, she asks. “Why does he want me find the parchments? It may not even exist, though He says it does.” *I suppose Adonai would know better than I about a lost parchment.*

“It seems, you’re the ideal angel while we get rid of the demons. Adonai said you were the one most likely to find it. I don’t know the whole reason,” Lucifer shrugs, not grasping everything.

*Who knows what He’s up to? It bothers me and I fear for Miriam. Yet it could mean having my heart’s desire, he prodded me about. Still, it’s about that trust I’m still a bit short on.*

“Why do I get the feeling there’s more to it? What did he say about your heart’s desire – if you had the nerve to tell him?” Miriam knows Lucifer’s rather cowardly nature at times, and grins expecting denial.

“I told Adonai – well, he insisted. When we’re done, we can go, if we want,” a broad smile splits his face, however, he sees her hesitation. *Does she not want to go with me? Could or would I go without her? We’ll find out one day, I suppose.* Fear grows in his heart and he must remind himself, *relationships too are about trust*.

“So, discovery and recovery?” Miriam’s aware of Lucifer’s unasked question, but says nothing. *He doesn’t know I can read his thoughts as easily as any of the angels or cherubs.*

“You’ll go with Kai and Ériu, those who’re familiar with what you’re after. I’m kind of clueless and no help.”

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Michael with Anak, Malek, Amandine and Dragon join the souls and angel Ariel, unhappy she is part of the group. Michael knows Dragon is insecure after centuries on earth as one of the homeless. *His place in the hierarchy was at the top but his steps here seem uncertain.*

“Dragon, after leaving earth, you were there a long time, it must be a challenge. I mean, you’d become used to life of a kind. What’s it like now, to have a purpose”

“Sometimes I wonder how much use I am. Do you trust me or feel sorry for me, Michael, like the counselors on earth?” Not waiting for an answer, he continues. “They did little good, mostly because they didn’t accept the street people. Always wanting to change us into them.”

“No worries. I trust you to do what you do best, knowing it will be the right thing. You have good instincts.”

“Thanks,” Dragon says. Michael walks away as Ariel heads in their direction, leaving Dragon with her. *Another to help me*, he fumes while watching her walk up to him.

*“*Dragon, what’s up?” Ariel asks, “Must be a bit different from what you’re used to. I can’t imagine. Well, a little. When they put me on what I call the ‘A’ team, it was. . . awful. Didn’t know what was up or down,” she smiles. “I know it’s not the same for you; they let me take the lead only with new ones like Anak, showing him the ropes as I knew how to do that much, at least. You’ve got the lead on this team.”

Dragon looks at Ariel, surprised by her openness and asks, “You think it’s not the same, seriously?”

Ariel blushes “You seem capable; I can’t imagine you having any difficulties. What’s it like? Unless you’d rather not say. Like Michael for instance, he never talks about his shortcomings. Not that he has any, of course.” Ariel rolls her eyes.

Dragon laughs for the first time, and it feels good. “Ariel, we all have shortcomings. As commander of Adonai’s army, he must cover his butt, however he doesn’t do it intentionally. Yet, new ones expect him to be invulnerable. I do know once they get to know him, they realize how open he can be, like the rest of us.”

“Never seems open to me,” she snarls. “He makes it clear I’ll never be a warrior. Yet, look at my skills–I beat Amandine.”

Dragon silently decides what to say. “You may not know it but he respects your skills,” brushing her attempt at denial away. “Seriously, he wants you to use the valuable ones, those others don’t have. If you go into battle.” He stops and takes a breath. “Do you know how difficult it is to replace someone like you?”

“Someone like me! What’s so special about me?”

“Special? You’re one of the few closely connected to animals and elemental forces few angels have. Losing you would be tragic; it would take a long time to recover from the loss.”

*She isn’t aware of just how special she is,* he thinks *especially as a lioness and a force of nature.*

“I can be replaced by anyone with a sword,” he says. “Even if they’re not as good. If they can swing a sword they can take down the enemy.”

Ariel’s flushes from her neck up as she fumbles for words, “You’d be missed,” she says, unable to voice her heart. Scraping a hand through her hair, she tucks a loose strand away and says, “Thanks, you wanting to make me feel better.”

Frowning, “No, it’s about you recognizing your worth. There are thousands of warriors but only one Ariel.”

Dragon smiles as he stands, “You have to believe and not dismiss it. Go play in the war games when Michael’s not about. Have fun, but remain who you are.” Dragon says as he turns and walks off, thinking how he can apply the same lesson to himself.

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## 7. Celanese Fragment

*In the valley of Acor a ruin.*

*Follow the steps of a bruin.*

*Its entrance is at the east,*

*Forty cubits from the beast.*

*The purest gold you will find.*

*After the words that do bind.*

*In heaven it’s been cast*

*As it’s meant forever to last.*

The group sits around reading the prophecy and what it’s about and how to make sense of what they need to do with it.

“What is it?” Kai asked. “I know a bruin is a bear, but what does a bear have to do with anything?”

Ériu smiles at her husband, “In the past we had brown bears in Ireland. Like those in Northern America, shaggy hair, almost no tail, and they have flat feet.”

Noting her husband’s look, she says, “I was curious and looked them up,” she said. “This bruin, if a demon could be such. It’s what we’re looking for; it’ll be a statue of one the demons.”

“Some artifacts were recovered from the Cave of Letters,” Niamh adds. “It may be the place to start looking. If made of clear gold, it’ll be disguised, covered in clay, or buried in sand, or some other method used to hide it.”

“Another place to look is under the temple steps, in the cave of the old ones,” Miriam said. “I read about it in the archives.”

“The first temple,” Oisin says, “is an ascetic brotherhood, who doesn’t hoard treasures, not if they know what it is.”

Miriam nods. “Yes, thank you for reminding us and because there’s more than one temple, we need to decide which to search - which temple or area is the most likely place to start?”

“If the fragment is in the first temple, once identified, it was destroyed by the King,” Kai said. “Whoever had them during the exile, possibly secured them before the temple’s destruction.

“Also, if hidden, it could be in an underground chamber,” Miriam said. “Okay, all this is well and good, but the scroll is clear, we start in the valley of Acor in a temple ruin. Go to the eastern entrance or what’s left of it. If there’s a bruin, demon, or statue, it’s forty cubits from the beast.” Miriam looks around, “We go forty cubits down into the temple if available, or head in whichever direction the beast or its statue faces!”

“Two questions, what if this beast is not the same as the statue or Bruin? And it’s possible, if there is a statue, it could have been knocked over,” Oisin said. “If so, then what?”

“You’re right. We’ll decide once we locate a bruin, bear, or statue. Still, I’m curious about this second part, *the purest gold you will find, after the words that do bind.*

*“*Any Fae around who know an unbinding spell?” Miriam looks at Kai and Ériu, “What about you two?”

They look at her then each other, “It’s no binding spell. If it were that simple, we’d easily break it.”

“we’re looking at it wrong, Niamh said. If Fae, we would need to break the spell, but the Lord wouldn’t use magic!”

“You’re right. It doesn’t specify. So, if the Lord bound it to keep it hidden−like the Ark of the Covenant–how did he do it?”

“Once we arrive, let’s find Yeshua and see if he can help,” Miriam said. “Still, we know where to start, so let’s go!”

*We find the remnant. A* thought occurs: A*donai is all-seeing, yet sends me after a piece of history, a lost remnant.*

“What if the remnant is people His people who’re lost?”

Everyone looks at her like she’s lost her mind. *Why did he share this with me? Curious. if it’s a remnant of His people.*

Everyone looks at her like she’s lost her mind. *Why did he share this with me? Most curious. if it’s a remnant of His people.*

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Yeshua stood with Michael and Dragon, looking at the map; it came in the hands of an angel who’s unable to explain where it came from. “At first I didn’t know what it was. It was just there with the other documents.”

Yeshua senses nothing unusual as she explains, “I’d not seen a map before, as they’re often in the older archives.”

“Why in the older archives?” Dragon inquired.

“No one bothers with maps. If we’ve been to a place, even marginally, all you need is to imagine the place and you’re there.”

“Yes, of course,” Dragon mutters, though he found transport in such a way odd. He’d been a mortal so long, he’d forgotten.

“Some are less familiar,” Michael’s eyes wander over the map, “what is it we’re looking at - in this star system I presume?” he says, pointing at a cluster of stars.

In apology, the angel says, “We know few of you have been so, we brought the map. To find what you seek, this is where your skills come in, all of which you possess. I’m told a couple familiar will the planet will join you later; it’s their home world.”

“Celaeno, 4th planet on Pleiades’ star, Alcyone. Other than Tuatha who chose it as their home, few of us have been there,” Michael goes on, “An exploding star destroyed their home. Now, because of the problems on Celaeno, they’ve asked our aid.”

Lucifer comes over to gazes at the map, “I had no idea those powers had been sent so far into the dark of space,” he shakes his head. “I never gave it a thought at the time. It wouldn’t have changed anything of course.”

Michael puts his hand on Lucifer’s shoulder, “My friend. It’s behind us now.” His hand grasps, pulling him in close, to reassure. Others nod their head upturned lips smile in agreement.

“Celaeno is the planets name where we’re headed,” Michael says. “The rest we can figure out once there. They know we’re coming. All we need do is get onto the eastern continent and they’ll find us once they arrive from Taurus.”

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Yeshua and the others are standing on the hot dry soil of Celaeno, an unfamiliar part, barren as any desert.

“Michael and I’ll scout around,” Yeshua said. “Lucifer can get acquainted with Anak now they’ll be working together,” Yeshua smiles, while Anak glowers but says nothing, ignoring Lucifer who chuckles to himself, enjoying Anak’s displeasure.

“Dragon and Ariel can set up camp. It’s hard to say how long we’ll be seeking what is lost.” He walks off talking with Michael.

Miriam wonders about his comment, ‘seeking what is lost’ but does not ask. *Adonai would have told me if I need-to-know.*

Lucifer ponders how to deal with Anak and is glad Adonai did not return him as a cherub. *What would Miriam do if I were a Cherub?* Although, Lucifer is perfectly capable of transforming should he choose and wonders*, does Adonai know of possible problems or does he not trust me in a position of power again? I suppose this is my test of faith.* Sighing, he lies back on the hot sand and considers the sky.

Anak glowers at him, *He’s the man Miriam adores,* fuming yet he admires Lucifer. *He is a fine specimen. Knowing her, there must be more to him that a body and a damn handsome face.*

Anak’s long legs eat up the distance as he prowls to a stand of rocks, seeking shade. Lucifer responds to his thoughts.

“I’m not sure what she sees in me. I’d disguised myself when first coming to her, to entrance and to look desirable. Adonai gave me the same form when he transformed me. Something happened between us,” He turns to look at Anak. “Sorry about reading minds. I’d have thought Clio taught you to block yours.” His lips curve up a bit.

Anak turns away furious, *having a laugh at my expense*!

Lucifer laughs silently for Anak is both wearisome and funny*. Hmm. Suppose patience is a lesson I’ll need to learn being with him*. He sighs and walks to Michael. *Yeshua had left on his own to pray, His favorite past time, speaking to the Lord, as* *it should be for m*e, Lucifer muses.

“Haven’t spoken to Anak about Andras have you?” Michael asks, looking expectantly at Lucifer.

“He’s angry right now. Figured I’d leave him be awhile. You think maybe I shouldn’t wait?”

“How much time is there? Though it’s up to you,” he shrugs. “Still, it would help him understand you, his dad and himself. I’m thinking Yeshua would like to get it settled though. Forgiveness is important. ‘*If someone has anything against you,’* he says, ‘*go and make amends, then I’ll accept your prayers.’*”

“Okay. After dinner when it’s cooler and our tempers aren’t as hot and as likely to flare up, I’ll approach him.”

Michael smiled, “Sounds like a good plan.”

Lucifer decides to take a walk and pray, speak to the Lord, use Yeshua’s example. *There’ll be more to my being here than just Anak*, he considers, *yet no one knows when or how we are to approach the problems with the demons, to name one of many. Most curious this entire situation. I suppose common sense dictates much.*

Lucifer considers the planet and remnant of which Adonai’s uneasy. *Is it a parchment or is there more? The prophet Jeremiah once wrote: ‘I will gather the remnant from where I drove them and will bring them back; so, they will be fruitful and multiply.*’“And so, it will come to pass,” he spoke aloud.

“Sounds like you’ve figured it out, Lucifer?” Yeshua spoke out of the dusk. Lucifer is startled for he hadn’t seen him coming. “What do you make of it?” Not waiting for an answer, he says, “Miriam also senses there’s more to it than a parchment, though that too is being sought.”

“So, a remnant of His people also exists and a parchment, which contains the ancient writings.”

Yeshua chuckles. “It’s odd how everyone assumed it would be a parchment, once one was mentioned. You and Miriam are the only ones so far who’ve connected the dots.”

“You say ‘so far’ so I’m assuming others may as well?”

“We’ll see. Give it time.” Yeshua walks away leaving Lucifer to ponder the information he’s gained.

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## 8. Anak & Lucifer

After everyone’s eaten, Anak left to make a bed for himself: *At least 12 inches off the ground to protect against scorpions. Never mind having to worry about Lucifer and demons, what else could there be? Wastelands are the same no matter where*, he mutters to himself, not noticing Lucifer’s arrival.

Turning around for his bedroll, Anak startles seeing Lucifer nearby. “Good grief, a little warning would be nice,” he says with a snarl, yanking his bedding to the cot he’d set up, his heart beats like a triphammer. *What does he want? Why doesn’t he go away and leave me alone?* Anak’s anger builds, aware of Michael and the others pretending not to watch he takes a deep breath.

“Yeshua put us together. So, the sooner this hostility ends, the better for everyone,” Lucifer calmly remarks.

Anak’s heart thumps heavy in his chest, pushing all thought out and he’s unable to think of an answer so, remains silent.

“Let me start.” Lucifer sits, noticing the sand’s still hot but starting to cool and will be more comfortable, later, though he knows it will become chill in the night.

“I know you’ve been friends with Miriam a long time. Some imagine you’re in love with her. Is that the problem?”

“Lord no!” Anak says, startled. He risks a look at Lucifer who seems genuinely concerned. “Miriam’s a friend, like a sister, which is why we seem so close I imagine.”

“Okay.” Releasing a breath, he didn’t realize he was holding, Lucifer relaxes. “Because I love her. So, if you do, romantically, I’ll get out of the way.” He pauses at Anak’s surprised expression. “You know Miriam, so you know how she loves, patient and kind, all that’s awkward for me. I’m learning all the time, from reading the old text, but Miriam is the one who opened my heart.

“Other women tried but I knew she was different. Strange, to be the spider thinking to trap her, or so I thought, instead, she caught me in her web. Very subtle.”

Stunned to hear Lucifer share, Anak realizes he’s hearing a love story and he’s in awe for no such love had come his way, not even the Faerie queen whom he thought loved him. *Surely not Clio though we had a passion for each other.* *First a succubus then an unfaithful faerie. Best not to fall in love.*

“Enough of my story,” Lucifer says. “Andras is interesting, my commander who rules hell in my stead. I doubt he knows how to rule effectively, but he’s a good commander, gets the demons to do whatever is needed, whatever he wants.”

Lucifer hesitates. “Andras was a commander in heaven and on earth, though he hated it. No doubt he loves the idea of ruling though, kind of like me back then.”

Anak finally found his voice, “Why associate with you in the unholy war, if he hated what you were doing? Or was it he hated you doing what he wanted? He could’ve said no.”

Eyebrows raised, Lucifer said, “Anak, you did not know me. I was a deceiver in the heavens and the world. On the earth, very little of what I did was about you. My deception and rebellion began long before I was cast out but with Adonai and my jealousy of Yeshua’s coming and His humans. Your fear and anger simply made you an easy target for my rage; it made you weak.

“Pride intruded on my good sense, someone said. I deceived the angels who listened to me, urging them to accept evil as a way of life or being, thereby deceiving them. Cast to the earth, my deception of mortals began, along with the Fae.

Sin is a choice, but my deception encourages the choice. Adonai knew and is the only one who knew me. Andras chose to follow, as did the mortals and many still do on earth though I’m here now. They prefer their sinful lives. I was merely their excuse to sin. Truth is they enjoy their lusts of the flesh.

“As you know Andras and Clio, for instance, with me gone, now enjoy each other and the power of ruling in hell.” Lucifer sees Anak flinch. “Sorry. You and Clio shared not love but a close connection, still she’s made for hell as she told you.”

“Clio forgot me and the closeness we shared,” Anak said. “Just as Andras forgot my mother, the woman he said he loved!” Anak realizes the truth. “Now I see the Lord’s love is the only love that truly endures.”

“Anak, you don’t forget the one who loved you. However, the lusts of the flesh are demanding and easily replace everything and everyone else in one’s life, human or celestial.”

“I met Andras in hell and he called her a goody-two-shoes,” Anak said. “Then left me with Clio. She seems to be a real friend of my mom.” Anak reflects on the past. “Was she pretending, do you imagine?”

“As she said, Clio’s made for hell and hell for her. Doesn’t mean she didn’t care for your mother. But as a demon of lust, she’s compelled by her nature to do what she does. She enjoys being Clio just as you enjoy following Adonai and Yeshua, being compelled by their love for you.”

When Lucifer said this, Anak understood and his bitterness fell away like cracked ice melting, freeing his heart.

Finally, he understood Clio. *Our love was not meant to last,* Anak realizes and envies Lucifer for Miriam’s enduring love.

Yeshua and Michael are aware of the drama unfolding. “Who would have thought, Lucifer of all celestials, would be the one to set Anak free,” says Michael and smiles at Yeshua.

“Yes, a miracle.” Turning, the two prepare for the night for the next day, the Tuatha would arrive in early morning.

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Anak and Lucifer turned in, exhausted, yet satisfied a new potential friendship was forming, which surprised both.

Adonai saw the change wrought by Lucifer’s willing heart and Anak opening his heart. While He ponders Anak’s envy, He recognizes, *Anak doesn’t begrudge Lucifer Miriam’s love, and so, their friendship will prosper. And one day, his unfulfilled longing may prosper as well.*

Adonai is satisfied with the way His plan is unfolding. Just a nudge in the right direction helped them fulfill their purpose and make the right choices for good and not evil.

“I will gather a remnant of My flock out of the places where I have driven them and will bring them home, and they will be fruitful and multiply. And so, it has begun.”

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Soon another remnant of his flock would rejoin the host of heaven, and they would be a surprise to the angels no doubt and the humans.

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# Part Nine

## 1. Ariana

**When Miriam** petitioned Adonai for Lucifer’s release, not only from his dragon self, but from hell, Andras had wondered why Meira did not do the same for him and his envy swells.

*At least I have a purpose now with Lucifer gone and Clio surely is a delightful companion*, turning to her, Andras realizes he enjoys her far better than Meira who *no longer seems to care. I command, not Lucifer, so who knows what the future brings? Clio and I may bring our kingdom to the earth, what Lucifer never fully accomplished*.

Andras settles in within the confines of hell, his craving satisfied. “Give them what they desire,” he tells his demons. “They were warned to flee passions of the flesh, now let them lose their soul as warned.”

“Does tempting souls on earth no longer serve a purpose?” Clio pouts, which intrigues Andras as he reaches for her. “Passion is another word for desire or lust, lovey, of which you’re familiar. These souls lost the war. Now we watch what was on earth now come to hell; they’ll repeat the cycle, endlessly.”

*Clio also will torment those souls with their unsatisfied lusts,* he muses. *After all, one form of torture is as good as the next and surely, she is pleased as am I.* He laughs quietly.

*“*Clio, you and I need to plan for long term rule so things don’t get out of hand as they did with Lucifer. You can’t trust the demons to do what they’re told. Someone needs to command and rule them!”

Andras recalls how Tam tricked Lucifer with the Fae female and received a changeling instead. *She would’ve made a valuable addition. Now he’s gone, I’ll get rid of the changeling. It serves no purpose, and he needs no reminder of his own failure.*

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**Tam and Isobel**, centuries before had left hell behind along with his half-brother, Kai, and friend Anak only to find they were too old to bear children. Time passes differently between hell and the chasm so, Tam had made a bargain with Lucifer, their firstborn in exchange for a longer life. Isobel and Tam, bargained for the child with the Tuatha who agreed but only if they raised the child.

“How dare they exchange a child for a demon changeling,” he raged. “There’s nothing I can do now, but one day she will be mine, then the agreement will be fulfilled.”

As the changeling grew into an extremely tall and gold-scaled male, so they thought, Clio asks, “What do you want to do with the changeling, Lucifer? We could destroy it,” Clio suggests.

“Leave it as my personal servant, as a reminder to never bargain again with the Fae. One day, the child will be mine, and I’ll make sure they know.”Lucifer vows.

When Andras became hells ruler, seeing the golden scaled creature roaming about he asked Clio about the demon or whatever it was. “Does he have to be around? I’ve no use for the changeling or a servant.”

“Lucifer kept it for some perverted reason. You know him,” she said, watching the changeling who didn’t seem like the other demons. “You could send it away into lower hell or heavenward, for it’s not a demon. It’s one of the Fae changelings who survived.”

Andras viewed its gold scaled skin and incredible height and shivered in revulsion. “You’re right; it’s no ordinary demon so get rid of it. I don’t care how you do it. I trust you.”

Clio feels sorry for the changeling and considers its disposal for a time. *Why destroy a thing of beauty and clearly its powers are daunting should it ever learn to use them?* Laughing quietly. *It’s good Lucifer didn’t know it’s a seraph, or he’d have destroyed it.*

“Demon, follow me.” She leads the changeling to an outer doorway and says, “Darius. You are free to go where you will.”

“Thank you, mistress. Your reward will be great one day.”

The changeling was a seraph the Tuatha kept with them. Lucifer then had no idea of its powers or he may not have kept it as a servant, certainly not so close to him.

In his time within Lucifer’s habitat the seraph changeling quietly went about life, learning whatever would assist him one day. Darius was present the day Lucifer repented and transformed and while he’d formed no prior opinion of the Dark Lord, this change he admired greatly.

Upon being freed, Darius sat out under the stars one night and considered his people, sending his thoughts into the heavens. Before long, his patience was rewarded and he was enabled to return to the stars and the Tuatha to serve the Lord Adonai.

When the Tuatha left the chasm, they found their planet destroyed by demons, so sought a new home on Celaeno on the seventh Pleiades star. Darius left Celaeno and traveled to the Planet Taurus and accepted a position in the household of the prince of Taurus who would one day be Ariana’s mate. This he knew and much more.

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Tam and Isobel trusted they would unite with their daughter, Ariana, who’d been named by the Tuatha. To honor her day of birth after the first sixteen years, Ariana was told, “You knew we were not your birth parents but what you did not know was after sixteen years you are to meet your birth parents.”

Flinching as her father spoke, Ariana’s lips curl in disgust. “You’re saying my parents gave me up at birth. After you’ve raised me, taken the responsibility and expense of seeing me into adulthood, now they want to step into my life.”

Her eyebrows draw together as she expels a breath trying to process what she heard. Swallowing, she asks, “What in the stars gave them the idea I’d want to meet them?” *No. Not going to happen.*

She backs away, turns, and raises a hand to fling it out as if to ward off some nuisance and shakes her head. Arms tossing about Ariana tries to speak, her mouth dry, she feels disoriented. *Unbelievable. Now they tell me. What, to ruin my life completely?*

“What were they thinking; what were you thinking to agree to such a thing? I’m really trying to imagine it,” she says as a flush of heat colors her face to her neck, then rage is all she feels until it was replaced with disappointment as her anger evaporates.

“You I’ve known all my life.” Ariana feels a need to blame someone. “I went to you, for answers to the abandonment, or to understand how they could do as they did, yet you were silent,” she shouts. *Now you want to make it right!*

Ariana’s eyes grow hot and tear up. She becomes incapable of speech. Hearing the words over and over in her mind Ariana thinks, *I should have seen this coming. I knew they weren’t my real parents but this is unbelievable.*

Ariana takes a deep breath, for she’s been holding back her Fae powers screaming to be free. Exhaling she releases them and disappears in a flame of fury.

Oisin and Niamh of Tuatha raised Ariana, a stunning beauty. Because of her unusual birth, she has the Tuatha’s ability to shape-shift and her Fae mother’s power over fire and ice. She has powers even she does not know about.

Upon her return, Ariana speaks to her adopted parents and says, “I will have nothing to do with those who claim to be birth parents and resent their abandonment, regardless of how much sense it made at the time. I’ll never speak of them again.”

In the beginning, Ariana was able to travel between the Fae and mortal worlds, but since Lucifer left hell, her power to travel from one place to the next has vanished. Nonetheless, her other powers remain intact. Hair like fire and eyes aflame few dare to approach her.

Yet, one Fae, a brave fellow, at times, finds her fascinating and has no problem pursuing this illusive and dangerous woman after he meets her for the first time.

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Eoin saw Ariana on a hunt when she took down a beast he’d hunted for hours. Both embarrassed and angry, for she made the kill with such ease, he searches for her but the elusive Ariana is in a tavern nearby, innocently playing knives with friends. Focus and accuracy are especially important when aiming for the target, so she notices little else and has no idea she’s being hunted herself.

Painted on the floor are thirty-two numbered squares; a thrower tries to stick a knife into the designated field and do it in specific order. If the knife doesn’t stick in a selected square, it’s the next throwers turn. Scores accumulate and monies won and lost in this game of skill.

Eoin spies Ariana taking aim, not caring if he interrupts and Ariana unaware of Eoin, doesn’t see him until he shouts at her.

“You conniving witch,” he approaches the area, a knife lands next to his foot. Startled, he catches her eye.

She sees the beautiful Fae but is astonished he approached so rudely, “Have you no etiquette,” she scowls, then recognizing him, she laughs. “Well, if it isn’t the forest prince!” She looks Eoin up and down, kissing him on the lips, “If that be what you were after, you’ve your payment. Leave, boy.” she says with a sneer.

Eoin grasps her about the waist, “You want to play games.” He looks into her fiery eyes, lips graze her cheek to rest upon her lips and he says with a snarl, “Where is my buck, mistress?”

“I’d be no mistress to the likes of you.” Pulling away, aware of the problem her eyes narrow in fun. “He who cannot take a kill and blame your poor skills on a girl. Ptah.” She spits.

Eoin smolders, outraged at her next comment. “If you be a hunter, then take the shot or lose the lot!” She scolds turning away, knowing she shamed a prince of the realm. Horrified with herself what she said, and what he could do, *she* lashes herself inwardly. *If he retaliates, my parents would be furious with me.*

Humiliated, Eoin storms out. *I’ll get even*. *How dare she say such a thing. She has no right.* Stumbling he’s unable to finish the thought. Eoin jumps upon his horse, lashes it into a gallop, taking his anger out on the poor beast, so caught up in his anger he does not hear hoofbeats from behind approaching.

He sees a blaze of fire, horse golden bronze, black-smoke mane, it’s a magnificent beast and astride it, a fiery-haired beauty, long hair whips about in the wind. Seeing her, he strikes out, while Ariana easily avoids his whip and grabs its reins bringing the horse to a halt.

Further shamed. “Not satisfied in humiliating me, are you?” His fury knows no bounds as Eoin jumps down. “Clearly, I’m not man enough to ride my own horse, so take it as well.”

*I’m acting like a fool. Who cares? She’s beautiful but vile and not one I care to know.* Ruminating as he stomps away, embarrassed by her shaming him at the tavern, and now brings his horse to a halt, so easily. *How did she do it?*

Eoin, known for hunting and horsemanship, he’s no match for Ariana and is furious with himself for even being angry.

Ariana laughs, gets off her horse and follows Eoin. “Come now,” she walks up to him with a glance from the side, “You’re a prince? I’d have thought your royalty would agree to terms with the enemy.”

Eoin stops and turns. Ariana waits, watching him as he walks back toward her.

“If you’re a prince, so you have food and are in no need of a small buck.” Ariana says, “You’d not care if it feeds a family in need.”

An eyebrow arches over clear green eye and he takes a breath. “There are rules you know, when another is hunting in the area. Yet you don’t care whom you insult. No doubt a poacher, which means being on the king’s land could end in prison.”

Ariana face pales, then her cheeks flame. Eoin notices. “You didn’t know it was the king’s land?”

Shaking her head no. “It was early morning when I left and I’d no idea how far I traveled in the hunt.”

“You were deep in the king’s forest. How’d you not know? That’s far from anyone’s home wherever it may be.” Eoin frowns and she can tell he’s trying to understand.

“Maybe, what you say is true, prince. But often, my sense of time in the hunt vanishes. I’ve been known to roam for days.”

Eoin interrupts, “Roam for days? Oh.” He stops and she sees him looks her over, glance at her horse, then recognition dawns and she can see he’s figured out who she is.

You travel between Fae and mortal realms are daughter to the king and queen of the Tuatha de’ Danann tribe, right?”

“Humph, that’s me, though the Fae realm now is closed, also, they are not my parents, but raised me after… well, it’s not a tale I’d tell just anyone.”

Eoin curious, encourages. “Go on, after what? You know I’m not just anyone. But I am a curious sort.” A grin stretches his mouth for Eoin wants her to remain, and asks for the story.

*So, he wants a story?* Ariana’s not shy in sharing and jumps into the telling. “Lucifer wanted my dad, Tam’s powers and demanded him as a tithe by the Fae. Tricked by the god of the Otherworld into believing her future husband would destroy her, Isobel, my mom, fled to avoid Tam who then went into the chasm between hell and earth to find her.

“Once found, Tam persuaded her of Lucifer’s deception so they wed. Upon returning to earth from the chasm, they learned several centuries had passed and the two were now very old, long past childbearing.” She stops for a moment. “This is the first I’ve told anyone. My birth parents, and pray you do not ask of them again.”

Eoin nods to acknowledge agreement. *Lovely. She plans to see me again else I’d have no need to ask about it.*

“Time passes in the Otherworld different. So, Dad made a pact with Lucifer who agreed to give them youth and long life in exchange for their firstborn who he thought would be powerful. But Tam had a plan to trick Lucifer and made a bargain with the Tuatha de’ Danann.

“The Tuatha exchanged me in the womb before my birth for a demon changeling, using magic. The agreement made with my parents was to raise me. Said I could meet them when grown. It’ll not happen.

“Here I am, raised by the queen. I have my parent’s magic and the Tuatha, as well as whatever came from past generations and from the changeling whom I was told is no demon but a seraph the Tuatha had kept for such a time. I know not how Lucifer dealt with the switch.”

Eoin says, “The daughter of a king and queen and excellent qualities for sure. For what do you need a small buck? You’re not needy surely. Are you telling me a tall tale here?”

“Are you calling me a liar?” Ariana demands, her anger rises, then she pauses. *Nay I see why he might think so; tis an odd tale.* “Never mind. Yet, the story’s true. The buck was for a family in need who’re unable to hunt for themselves.”

“Tis for a good cause so the buck’s yours, which you already have anyway. I’m glad to have met you.” His eyes sparkle as a soft glow arises to indicate his attraction, though she’s unaware.

“I hope to see more of you.” He flushes, embarrassed by the glow, *Drat. I wish my attraction to her weren’t so obvious.*

Ariana again sees his golden glow and wonders, *what in the stars causes the glow?* Not asking, she ignores it and teases him saying, “Even after nearly losing a toe?”

Eoin laughs as Ariana puts her foot in the stirrup, preparing to mount her horse. Leather breaches pull tight over her firm buttocks. Above a small waist and flat taunt abdomen she turns toward him before pulling herself up. Breasts full and firm against her jacket, blouse opens to reveal not enough as far as he’s concerned. *Oh my, is she gorgeous.*

Ariana smiles, watching his eyes travel and she suspects the reason for his golden glow, which seems to increase as his eyes caress her and she takes a moment to observe him and likes what she sees, but does not indicate so to him.

“You want to hunt?” He blurts. “I don’t mean to scare you, but I find you likable and would enjoy seeing you again.”

“Let me think about it.” Throwing her leg over the saddle, she turns her mount to ride away.

“How’ll I know,” Eoin shouts after her.

“You’ll know.” Leaving him in a cloud of dust.

*I wish she’d stayed.* He groans*.* His light dims slightly though Eoin cannot put her out of his mind and her image renew as he envisions her mounting her horse to rides off leaving him to eat her dust and again his desire glows.

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Later, Eoin seeks out a hakam or wise woman who’s known to have secret teachings of the Fae and other cultures. She holds an influential position with his parents because of her vast knowledge and wisdom.

Asking about Ariana, Naomi, the hakam replies, “For what reason do you seek to know this woman, is she to be your wife, a consort, or merely a plaything in your bed?”

Astonished she would ask such questions, he stares several seconds then says, “You’re the wise one. Why don’t you tell me who she’s to be in my life and future kingdom?”

Naomi chuckles, “Your future is of a kingdom you know not and she will be no part of it. You do have a future with this one for a time, still she will endure many trials only to enter the same kingdom one day.”

Thoroughly perplexed, Eoin demands. “What does it mean? Are you a wise woman or what? Information is all I ask, not mumbo-jumbo of kingdoms to come.”

“She a woman of flame who rode between human and Fae on her horse of smoke and dark fire. Aye, she be tenderhearted when it comes to those in need, but can be ruthless with others such as parents who gave her up before leaving the womb. ‘Them I’ll never forgive,’ she’s said to many; it’s common knowledge as you know by now.

“Ariana has deep magic to bring her dreams and desires to pass. Still, she wisely leaves the magic only for when it’s needed, believing it should not be a crutch. She is a wise woman, yet another power haunts her of which she knows not, likely from the seraph she passed by in the womb.

“One dream she will realize and questions its worth. Ariana knows she has value to any kingdom so, tread carefully my prince but decide the ending yourself. All will be as it was meant to be so do not fear whatever comes. All will be well, if you trust in your god.”

As Eoin leaves, the Hashem shakes her head sadly for she sees a tragic future for the prince so does not share what she has seen for him. Still, it leaves an ache in her heart.

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Her visions often occurred within seconds yet seemed to span months if not years and on a rare occasion, eons. His opened within her mind’s eye as he put a needle in his arm and injected a drug into his body. The euphoria Eoin experienced seemed amazing, for the glow on his face was like what she’d seen in visions of celestials. Eoin looked like he was on top of the world or floating on a cloud above wherever he was then.

Risking a look inside him, she could feel his mind get slow and fuzzy, like he was sinking into the floor. After a time, the look of angels passed for he didn’t know if he was asleep or awake, and time just passed by. He looked terrible. Eyes sunken, skin as a dead man’s, he became skeletal, his clothing shabby, filthy and falling off his shrunken frame.

As the vision moved quickly on, after a while, his constant need for the drug just to get by left him screaming for more. She shuddered, for when without the drug, it was like he was dying in every awful way you could imagine, all at once. His pain seemed excruciating, all over his body: bones aching, throwing up, chills, and he didn't sleep for days.

He tried to control the drug use, but control for him never happened and soon he gave up trying. Seeing his wife, or the one who’d become his wife and leave him, rebelling against his god, started his descent into hell, or the closest to it. Eoin wanted to remain in oblivion. His longing for Ariana drives him deeper into drugs.

Finally, his sister, the queen, refused any more money, then, he walked the streets, whoring himself to whatever pervert would give him what he needed in drugs or the money to buy more.

As the vision began, so it ended, suddenly. The Hashem wept at what she’d seen but said nothing for she knew it would do no good, And likely he would not believe her anyway OK.

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## 2. the Search

Weeks pass and Eoin wonders if he’ll ever see Ariana again. Finally, he sends scouts to locate her but she’s slipped away. Her friends deny knowing her whereabouts, “Will-o-the-wisp,” they said. “Ya never know when she’ll show up. Tell your prince to be patient,” and laugh, knowing who sent them.

Striding into his parent’s throne room, weeks after he’d last seen her, with a shock, Eoin sees Ariana. *What is she doing here*? he wonders and waits to see what transpires next.

His parents, the king and queen greet Ariana. “This is most unexpected though delightful, Ariana. How can we help you?”

“Your majesties, I know how busy so don’t want to use up your time. However, there is a matter of concern for you and my king and queen of Tuatha.” She pauses.

“Indeed,” the queen says, a knowing smirk on her face. “Whatever could it be my dear?”

“Yes,” the king says. “We are most interested in hearing about this−concern of yours−is it?”

Arching an eyebrow, she slyly looks at Eoin and winks, seen by both the king and queen, “Thank you majesties,” she says with an innocent look on her face, “Your son, Eoin, has been hunting me like a hungry wolf for a time. For the good of our kingdoms I need a resolution; either feed his hunger or slay the beast.”

Eoin, mouth open in astonishment at this appraisal, turns pale then flushes crimson and swells turning purple in anger, “Mother, Dad, this is the absurd… Why I never… how can she say….” he sputters before Ariana sharply cuts him off.

“Do you deny you sent your lackeys to search, or yourself prowled through the forests near my home in pursuit of me?” Ariana eyes Eoin curiously, waiting to see how he’d respond.

Humiliated, Eoin had no clue how she knew. *She’s done it again. How could I have wanted to ever see this witch?* he fumes.

King Orion scowls, “Take care your thoughts son and tread carefully. Have you indeed pursued Ariana in such a manner?”

Eoin flushes crimson and truthfully must answer the king, for to do else wise, would bring further shame upon him.

So, Eoin answers, “Yes, I did, but only because she led me to believe it was acceptable and not unwanted.”

“Let’s not make this into an orchid war.” His mother placates for she refers to the last battle fought between two gardeners. “What Ariana has shown,” his mother says, “is there is a proper means to go about it. The example she has set by coming before us. Do you understand, son?”

Eoin bows as he humbly turns to Ariana, “I truly sorrow at having caused you distress and will not bother you again. Pardon me.” Eoin quickly withdraws, angry. *And, damn, even now she’s lovely as a doe in the forest but no hunting this one.*

Ariana says, “It went well. While interested, could he not have come and requested consent to court me?” *No, for he* *thinks to attract me like a common harlot. Though he is a handsome one and worth considering.*

“Clearly Eoin had no idea our families are so close. He never attends the gatherings, always off hunting.”

King Orion chortles. “Yes, but a wolf after a doe, really.”

“I’m glad you came. Perhaps he’s learned about diplomacy,” chuckles the queen. “Would you like to stay for supper?”

“No. It’s best if I avoid Eoin, until he comes to a decision.”

“A grand idea,” said the king. “We look forward to seeing you, in the near future.”

Eoin, listening, has his own strategy. *More like she’s the wolf in a doe’s hide*, he growls. *She won’t stop, until she brings this ‘wolf’ to heel or so she imagines,* “It’ll never happen,” he rumbles quietly, more determined than ever.

Eoin ceases all pursuit. At the next social gathering Ariana is surprised to see Eoin. He sees but ignores her. The king sees the two of them and Eoin’s scheme and silently applauds.

Walking about the event his mother had planned, instead of Ariana, Eoin seeks the most beautiful women who may not be as lovely as Ariana, but are a lot safer. Prowling near a lovely one, “Would you like to dance?” he asks, then swirls her around the dance floor. *I suppose those lessons have come in handy after all,* Eoin muses to himself.

Throughout the evening, he moves from one young beauty after another dancing. Eoin notices Ariana’s wounded look and smirks in delight. Then sees her quietly leave he wonders; *Did I perhaps outplay my hand.*

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“Oh, dear,” hearing Ariana’s story, her mother says. “Don’t give it a second thought. He’s taking a stand and assuaging his wounded pride. He’s a man and needs to feel as one. It sounds like you wounded his pride yet, taught him a lesson, from what you said. Still, I suspect he’ll come around eventually.”

Ariana’s mother doesn’t mention the prophecy. *It’s best left alone, or she’ll run from it.* Instead, she wisely remarks, “Patience rules a kingdom and the patient is better than the proud.”

“Yes, with pride comes strife. Thank you, mother, I’ve seen his pride and mine and the conflict is has brought between us.”

“Ah, one day you will make a wise queen.” *The Hashem, seems to think the two will marry but disaster will separate them. If I had to guess, it’ll be Ariana’s pride getting in the way.*

Ariana considers her words and let go her pride for the sake of the kingdom. *Pride brings shame but humility wisdom.*

Waiting a couple of weeks, to give the prince time, Ariana goes into the forest to where he hunts. Ariana a better hunter watches Eoin pursue his prey then let fly an arrow which he did swift and accurate. *I’ve misjudged him.*

Stepping into the open, “A well-aimed arrow, my prince,” Ariana says, “And I had not even loosed my bow.”

Eoin heart jumps in pleasure seeing Ariana. He’d again ignored her at the last two parties. Thinking to snub her this time, he does the unlikely, “You’re too kind,” he says. “It’s more than lovely to see your fine self.”

He looks her over and says, “Though as much as I’d like to pursue such a lovely doe, she might flee this wolf.” His lips curve into a smile seeing her eyes twinkle. “Truly I’m sorry for not courting you properly. I wish not to disrespect you, my lady.”

“Your apology is accepted.” Ariana moves closer and now stands by Eoin then hands him her knife. Working side by side, the two skin the buck. Eoin carries it on his broad shoulders most of the way. Afterward, using her magic, she sends the meat to a family as they head to her parent’s palace.

“What’s it like, raised by the Tuatha?” he asks. “They are a mighty but different Fae culture I’ve heard.”

“Like many families. Overprotective. My mother watched out for me so I didn’t do any harm to the caregivers.”

“As a child, you could do harm! What about now?”

“I live a disciplined life thanks to them. My parents have their own children. It suits. I visit them, but they live on Celaeno. That planet is a fair pace from here, as you know. And I choose not to use magic frivolously, including travel.

“What about you? Why search for me persistently? Are my powers so important?” Ariana hopes he finds something about her worthy of pursuit other than her powers. “It seems that’s all some care for,” she says.

*She’s had too many kingdoms seeking her for all the wrong reasons, not herself.* Eoin knows what the others were after and it was usually her powers, which had not pleased Ariana.

“Perhaps, we can get to know one another so I know if you are the one I want to pursue. Your powers are desirable, however there’s more to want in a woman, more I want in a woman.”

“What is it you desire?” Looking at him, snickering she runs her tongue over her lips wetting them. “What is it men want, for rulers it’s power, but as a man, what it is you value?”

“Beauty, brains and depending on me for some things yet being independent too. Also, willing to communicate, listen and share ideas, not her opinion being the only one of import.”

Eoin sees she’s surprised by his answer. “Would you like me to say−well, I don’t know what you think I might say.”

“What I think is your idea is most agreeable. We get to know one another for a time. The truth is always revealed in time.”

“Then if I pursue you as a thoughtful caring man, you’d find it more desirable than my seeking you as a hungry wolf?”

“Let’s not get carried away.” She smirks. “There’s nothing wrong with a bit of the hungry wolf as long as you don’t bite.”

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Time passes with Eoin and Ariana together at the gatherings, dancing and having fun as well as hunting together.

Eoin wonders, *what does she want, to move our relationship forward? I feel stuck in this dance and she may not see me as the one for her.*

Ariana’s mood becomes more distracted and Eoin considers, *perhaps, she tires of me and though we seem to get along. I do desire more from her.* Ruminating forever, Eoin finally approaches Ariana and nervously asks, “Do you tire of our relationship? You seem distracted of late and I wonder if another has captured your attention.”

“I thought you’d never ask. Have I not given enough hints?” Her exasperated tone startles Eoin.

“Sorry if I seem a little dense. I’m not sure what you mean.” Then he recalls: *she brushed against me, but I thought it was the crowded room. All the questions I found offensive and thought she was being nosey. Teasing and making fun of the way I carried my hunting bow offended me.* Looking at Ariana as he watches her fingers twine through her hair, tongue teases her lip and he realizes. *She consumes me.* His face flames scarlet. “Good grief. It seems I missed it every time, didn’t I?”

“Oh, yes. Here I thought I’d have to do a strip before you noticed me and wanted more than a dance or a deer to hunt and all I wanted was to get naked with you.”

“You alone without your magic or because of it; there’s no way to tell. No matter, to me you’re a most fascinating woman. You’ve noticed the females at the events? I saw the looks you gave them,” Eoin chuckles, knowing what she desired.

“Ariana, were you to lose your powers today, I would pursue you like a hungry wolf and bring you to ground howling then, before the queen and king beg for your hand.”

Seeing Ariana’s frown, Eoin is confused and wonders, *what did I do wrong this time?* Then light dawns.

“If it’s all right with you that is. After all, you are adorable, mean at times, and all else I could want. I also wonder, imagine even a fiery passion, or do I hope too much? I’m babbling for fear you’ll turn me down or stab me with that wicked knife you carry.” He comes to a stuttering stop, waiting for her reply.

*Stab you with a knife? I’d rather you stabbed me fiercely but not with a knife,* she mused to herself.

“The wicked knife I’d put away for a promise from your fine lips of equal passion.” Ariana’s words softly slide over her lips and she smiles seeing Eoin glows a golden light. “Perhaps we should consider doing something about it soon.” She leans close, clearly intent on a kiss. *Then we can get on with the real fun.*

Eoin smiles wickedly. “Yes, indeed we should speak with our families, perhaps in haste complete the hunt.” With a shuddering sigh Eoin obliges his lips commanding him to taste Ariana’s and he’s not disappointed.

*Stars but she’s a woman of passion,* he gasps pulling away from her but not wanting break the kiss and he can tell she feels the same way for her lips linger more than a moment.

*Hooray. He’s a man of passion,* she considers as her lips fail to break the kiss in a timely fashion. *The wedding night cannot be too soon for me.* And she smiles in anticipation.

Within a short time, Fae time, the wedding Banns published for the Fae frown on long courtships so, within a fortnight, as soon as family and friends congregate the couple wed. Then, Eoin is off to bring his bride to his home world for a time.

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## 3. Honeymoon

Their honeymoon takes them to the city of Taurus, home to the shape-shifters, human souls with “special talents” and even a demon or two. The original land of the Fae.

“Ari,” he gently rubs the sleeve of her tunic between his fingers, the lavender silk contrasts nicely with her fiery red hair. The platform is open to the warm summer weather, and*—*unlike him*—*Ariana, or as he calls her Ari, needs the lightweight garments to keep cool while they wait.

Before she can respond the transport arrives, and the two enter. “Why not use your own powers?” she asked, “Or let me use mine? We’d get there faster.”

“I’d have to uncloak and your powers can be awkward for a number of reasons, he smiles. “We can speed travel later and faster, after we’ve settled in.”

Facing forward, he tells the navigator. “This is my wife’s first visit to the city. Let’s reach the palace as quickly as possible,”

“Yes majesty. We’ll be there shortly. It’s not far from here this time of year. And the demons are no problem.”

“What do you mean, the demons are no problem,” she said in a lowered voice. “Demon? Have they been a problem?”

Eoin said. “I’ll tell you later. No worry. We’ve plenty of time,” catching the porter’s eye, the elf lowers his eyes for he should’ve been subtle. “The royal household moves at intervals to avoid demon attacks. The elves make the most reliable and trustworthy navigators, as a rule, and are never known to deceive.”

*What is going on?* “It seems there’s a lot of ‘I’ll tell you later’ remarks, so how about right now, tell me something, anything,” she says, her eyebrows raised expectantly. *He’d best not think to keep a houseful of secrets from me,* she thinks exasperated.

Eoin searches to explain the porter’s remarks, then says. “Demons are on strict visas and the Fae set those rules so they can remain. At least it used to be that way. Things have changed recently. Demons, hearing of Lucifer’s transformation, rebelled, and have become a problem. I’ll find out more once we arrive.”

Ariana lapses into silence for now. *I certainly hope so and to ask my opinion would also be nice. He spoke of communication in the beginning, we’ll have a wee talk about it soon as well.*

Eoin knew she was off balance and reached for her hand as the porter swung the transporter into a long drive lined with very unusual trees. Tall, they reached high into the cobalt blue sky, higher than any Ariana had ever seen. Massive broad branches with brilliant orange leaves clung in great clumps with scarlet flowers scattered here and there among the leaves.

Ariana had never seen anything like it, “What are those?” Her eyes wide with wonder as she points at them.

They’re the Madagascar Trees, brought from earth centuries ago by Fae. They grow here year-round and are colorful, thanks to the land and the minerals in the soil, the scarlet flowers are likely Fae magic.

Suddenly they come to a stop. Sighing in relief she says, “There at last.” The door opens and Ariana steps out. The porter quickly has their luggage out, and is waiting for Eoin to exit.

“Thanks Mick,” the elf gets into the transporter and swiftly leaves, heading back to who knew where.

Ariana turns back, “That was a short trip…” she starts to say, then stops to stare up at an eight-foot-tall man, or a demon, whatever he is noteworthy. Firmly muscled and whipcord lean, his clothes seem to be snakeskin, golden-scaled and smooth, yet he seems mostly human. His eyes of gold glitter. Ariana cannot read any emotion, a blank slate, yet she doesn’t sense any evil.

“Darius,” Eoin said, “This is my wife, Ariana.”

Stepping over to him, she says, “You are amazing. You could lift me with one hand I imagine and I’m no small woman.”

A deep melodious voice rang like a bell from his lips, “Yes, mistress, no doubt I could.”

“Well then. Don’t just stand there,” Ariana challenged. “Let me see what you can do.”

Without a glance at the prince for consent, Darius reached down, his hands easily span her waist and he gently lifts Ariana into the air, setting her upon one broad shoulder. She realizes what he’s wearing is his own skin and it’s not cold like she’s imagine a snake but quite warm, indeed.

“If this isn’t fabulous.” she croons, “Darius, I’m in love,” looking down at Eoin, “Except I have a husband, so it’s best you put me down,” which he gently did.

Eoin shook his head, shaking with laughter at the scene and said, “Darius, a friend for life, you’ve made.”

“Yes, my prince,” he said. “Do you need anything?” *She’s the one. I’d know my womb-mate anywhere. I can smell and taste her power mixed with mine and another. Marvelous.*

When Eoin shook his head no, the giant creature bowed and gracefully turned to leave. His eyes met hers, with a knowing look Ariana could not fathom. His alien nature was hard to grasp *Is this a demon*? she wonders, trying to wrap her head around the idea yet, knowing his soul was not cold and evil but wild and fiery and she felt an affinity for him, not realizing its source.

“All right?” Eoin asked her. “He’s a seraph, not a demon.”

Eoin leads her through the palace gates up the gravel path. Before them, broad double doors, twice the height of a man, open. A woman and man exit, hurrying down the wide curved stairs. Not marble but more like a granite, polished smooth by many feet upon them. “The second king and queen. They’re different you’ll find.”

Ariana looks and smiles as the woman reaches them first, clasping Eoin in her arms, tears leak down her cheeks, a smile glued to her face, like she’d been practicing for a long time.

“We are so glad to see you home and with a bride,” she gleams at Ariana. “What a beauty,” the queen steps back to look her over. “Ah, my dear, Ariana, is it?” *The king will enjoy the show tonight.*

Before Ariana could answer, the king arrives, looking Eoin up and down he pulls him into a strong embrace. “Take your hands off,”Eoin says so softly Ariana does not hear. The king steps back quickly.

“Eoin, we’re so glad to see you.” His smile seems cruel and unable to reach his eyes yet, it was charming, even alluring as he glances at her, aware of his effect on her. *Very nice choice he made.*

Eoin stiffly says, “We stopped so you could meet my wife, nothing else. There’s another demon problem, on Celaeno.” *You’d best keep your hands off her too.* He looks with meaning at the king.

The king nods, obviously knowing, “Of course, you’re not to discuss it so I won’t ask, but we wish you well.” Again, the cruel smile.

“Thank you,” Eoin said, as they enter the royal home. The second king and queen depart. Eoin shows Ariana to their room, “We won’t stay long,” he said. “We’ll leave in the morning, so we have only this evening and night.” He grins in delight.

“When did you learn of this demon problem and I’m just now finding out?” She asks, turning to him. “If the situation is so bad they request us, why am I the last to know?”

“It’s not on purpose, love. Lucifer now redeemed, though once hell’s ruler and god of the earth, the woman responsible, his former lover, she’s lost or captured by demons on Celaeno. The message came while on our way here. Mentioning it in the transporter would have been unwise.”

Ariana nods in understanding. “They need us?”

“They need our help yes, to quell the demon uprising and prevent an inland invasion. Darius left moments ago.”

Ariana considers: *If he’s in the rebellion why would a seraph from this household go? Something else to learn about as soon as possible from my secretive husband.*

“The demons erupted onto the surface as the angels appeared on Celaeno.” Eoin looks at Ariana, “Just so you know, you may get to see your real parents!” *I wish she needn’t have met mine, the so-called second king and queen. The evil bastards.*

Ariana ignores the comment and warns, “I have questions about the demons,” then says, “I’m starving and do not intend to stay that way. Is there any chance of food?”

“Here you are,” said the queen entering the suite. “The food on those transports is awful. We had a meal prepared knowing you might be hungry. If you’ll follow me,” she says to Ariana and leads the way down to the dining room.

Smiling ear to ear at the sight of food. “I love you,” Ariana says looking at the food. She doesn’t hesitate to help herself to the delicious and spicy foods, tingling her taste buds. “Yum,” she. garbles between mouthfuls. “I’ll have to learn these dishes.” Smacking her lips and wiping up, she notices the astonished look the queen gave her.

Blushing, she said, “Sorry, but I was hungry. Travel does it, especially interplanetary and he insisted on the transport.”

The queen chuckles. “I chew my nails when nervous.”

Looking at Eoin. “What will we do with these bags? They’re not exactly the clothes we’ll need on Celaeno. If I recall, it’s hot. Well, maybe it is similar, a desert. We’ll need different clothes, anyway,” she says and quirks an eye brow at him.

“They have everything for us, food and clothing. All we need do is get there. We can retrieve these later.”

“One night and we’re off,” she grins, heading upstairs.

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Upon arriving, Ariana had met Darius and found him intriguing and not a demon. Demons did not have power such as his, even if they were once, as some believed, celestials. *Now my husband, tells me these are not demons but seraphs. They certainly look different?* And she senses within a formidable power.

*Darius’ skin is unusual. Demons usually are rough-skinned and dark as burnt roast, whereas Darius is gold-bronze scaled, his eyes burn with fire* *and he can shape-shift.* When she asks Eoin he laughs. “You imagine too much. Seraphs or demons, neither can shape-shift.”

“While I’ve never met or even heard of a seraph until I came here to Taurus, still, something’s odd about him.”

“Yes, he’s different, taller than demons who are darker in appearance and his color also differs.”

“I suppose,” she agrees, thinking, Eoin is blind to What is obvious to me or he chooses not to see. Perhaps he simply cannot sense what I do. Soon all thoughts of Darius vanish.

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Later, Eoin sees Ariana in a maiden’s gown; it covers her from neck to ankle. He is disappointed. *I imagined something sheer and revealing. What an odd woman. Not interested in tantalizing me?*

“Is there some reason for the covering darling, my bride, are you not?” He eyes her, yet remains at a distance, wondering.

She smiles and says, “Oh, you imagined the chase is won the prize yours so soon.” She turns away to glance back over raised shoulder then bends to remove her slippers. Setting them aside, slowly, one at a time.

Eoin watches the fabric of her white gown pull taunt over firm buttocks. His lips curve up to spread into a generous grin as he begins to get a glimmer of what could transpire.

Lifting a leg to pour sweet oil on her feet, one at a time, her hands smooth the oil on feet, up over calf, behind the knee, and up the thigh with long slow strokes. Head thrown back to expose her throat she hums to herself, a melody.

Eoin approaches from behind, places his hands over hers as they glide slowly up her leg one at a time, he follows her movements, slowly and gently moving higher as she sings:

You enchant me so

Yet you take it slow

Still my only desire

Is to be set on fire

The moon to the tide

Let me feel you inside

To surge like the sea

And find pure ecstasy

His hands move on her inner thighs, Ariana short of breath now unable to sing. Eoin guides her down to lie on the coverlet, letting her gown ride slightly higher.

“Cover me with your kisses for my love is sweeter than wine and I welcome you to taste of me,” she whispers.

Eoin pushes her gown up over her belly and sucks in a quick breath as she moves her hips slightly upward inviting him in and he inserts his tongue between her legs also sucking gently.

A few moments later, pausing to slide her gown off, he moves above her. His lips trail kisses over a firm smooth belly up to full breasts as she yields to his touch.

“Your taste is sweeter than wine. I adore every part of you,” he says resting between firm breasts peaked with desire and he suckles first one nipple then the other, his passion almost more than Eoin can bear and he notices Ariana’s wetness flow. .

Ariana moans. “Take me now my love. Fill me my stallion.” Hips rising, seeking to join with him she can barely control her own raging passion and nearly forces the union with her power.

Knowing what she wants yet he pulls away to gaze down at her. “You desire I take you as a stallion and not the wolf? Is that what you want, my young doe?” Slippery with the oil from her legs he moves down, licking from breasts to belly and into the cleft between her legs his tongue again penetrates to suck her juices.

Pausing again he asks, “You prefer this mighty wolf take you howling into the ending you truly seek?”

Ariana looks down and groans. “Do what you will my fine prince of wolves for I am ready to howl.”

Eoin, hard and more than ready, with gentle repeat thrusts he slowly penetrates and with all consuming passion the two moves as one until he feels a powerful orgasm spasm within Ariana and finally lets himself release his passion into her.

“The prince of wolves has satisfied me and we rejoice in our bonding.” She smiles and is content as is he.

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Throughout the night the two enjoy one another’s passion and speak of what they’ve not shared before.

“You’ve been with the Tuatha a long time,” Eoin says. “Will it be difficult to live apart from them?”

“I’m a woman who depends upon not my parents or a husband. Would you prefer a woman, a wife at your, beck, and call, one who cannot live without you?” She smirks. “If so, you will be disappointed, my wild wonderful wolf.”

“Never could I be disappointed in you,” he whispers. “I am pleased as long and you are pleased?”

“I’m feeling the need to be pleased,” she smiles as he reaches to love on her until the morning when sleep at last takes them. Neither one saw the eye from an opening as the king watched them throughout the night, enviously reporting all he saw to Lucifer on the morrow.

The queen had anticipated receiving pleasure from the king, once the night was gone, but he instead sought out a young maiden, one who resembled Ariana. The maiden would not live long enough to regret, for the queen would make sure of it.

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## 4. On Celaeno

In the morning, as the sun rose over the desert, the king being indisposed, slept in while the queen bid the two farewell and they leave Taurus to appear on the planet of Celaeno, Michael waiting.

Blue robes cascade about a tall muscular form, clearly the physique of a warrior. His facial expression, captures the emotion of the moment. Ariana has no trouble envisioning this mighty warrior angel in battle and she catches her breath at the sight of him, her eyes wide.

“Come along and I’ll introduce you to the rest of the group,” he said, his princely face serious.

A moment later, she comes face to face with an array both of angels, and human souls who’ve passed on into heaven. One figure stands out from the rest. He’s not particularly handsome, nothing like the archangel, but neither is he not handsome. Yeshua. She gazes at him and finds his eyes entrance her. Dark amber with bits of gold glint in the early morning sunlight; they are stunning. Ariana feels both comforted and uneasy as he gazes upon her.

Yeshua gathers everyone around: Michael, Dragon, Malek, Ariel, Amandine, Anak, and Lucifer. As Ariana and Eoin join the group, she eyes the angels curiously, then turns her own golden eyes to Yeshua again. Ariana and Eoin are not of the One God, Adonai and the others are confused by the sudden appearance of these unbelieving Fae.

“Well, hello and who are you?” Ariel asks.

Ariana likes this angel who’s upfront with her curiosity.

Michael introduces everyone for he and Yeshua are the only ones familiar with the couple. “These two are newly-wed and Fae. Ariana is of the Tuatha de’ Danann though her family of origin is mostly Fae with other factors thrown in.”

*Other factors,* Ariana muses, *What in the stars is he talking about, other factors.* She glances at Eoin who shrugs,and dismisses the remark as meaningless, but it’s not to Ariana.

“Now we’re all here,” Yeshua says, “Let’s begin. We thought to rout the demons and return them to hell. But it won’t be that easy.

“Okay, what we need to do is find Miriam and those who went with her seeking the Celanese Fragment. Kai and Ériu are her companions as are others.” What he doesn’t mention is Tam, Kai’s half-brother, and his wife, Isobel are with them. Ariana’s birth parents and her adopted will also be present.

Yeshua decides to share this with Ariana, privately and later. “They have not returned from their mission and we need to find them as quickly as possible.”

All eyes turn toward Lucifer who looks lost fearing the worst and he blames himself. *If Miriam’s never found how can I live knowing the very demons I’d sent into the outer darkness long ago are responsible?*

“Let’s do what we can to bring all of them home, Miriam and the others," Michael admonishes. “It is by faith we are saved and all else is done by the spoken Word.

Ariana raises her eyebrows at this, even more curious now about this strange group of angels and mortal souls.

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Yeshua takes Ariana to one side later. “Your parents, Tam and Isobel, are on Celaeno as well as your adoptive parents. As I understand from Oisin, you wish to have no contact with your birth parents?”

Looking into his gold-flecked amber eyes, she senses peace and contentment yet rebels against the idea of meeting her birth parent. “Is it necessary to discuss this now?”

“My concern is for you. I wanted you to know of their presence and to suggest forgiveness is a good thing.”

“Forgiveness. What possible good could come of this philosophy? I’ll forgive them when the universe turns into a block of ice.”

Yeshua laughs, “As I understand it, you have the capacity to do so, perhaps not the whole universe but a goodly portion of the planet upon which we stand.”

*A sense of humor. A man worth knowing if he weren’t who he is.* She chuckles. “Yes, so I’ve been told though never did I attempt it.”

“I’m pleased to hear and pray you restrain yourself should you run into either party. One day, however, you may recall our conversation and change your mind.”

“Anything is possible but I doubt it.”

“If you decide to forgive, perhaps it can be done without you turning the world into a block of ice.”

Ariana says, “I’ll see what I can do.” She walks away thinking, *Damn. I really like him, son of Adonai, whoever he is. He’s a worthy opponent. Now why would I see him thus?* The question confounds her for a long time to come, every time she hears his name.

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“What were you and Yeshua talking about?” Eoin asks as she walks over to join him.

“He let me know the same thing you mentioned earlier about my parents, both sets. What about you?”

“We’ll speak with Michael the archangel, later.”

“Goodness, he looks like a warrior angel, magnificent.”

“Now jealousy stirs me.“

“Oh, husband. He’s an angel and doesn’t like the Fae but he would be a challenge for some female angel.” Ariana had seen the way he and Ariel had squared off against each other.

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# Heaven’s Redemption

## Lucifer Unbound Book 2

## Excerpt

## 1. In the Before

“What is it you desire Miriam?”

“Lord Adonai, I come to beg for Lucifer’s release who was unjustly imprisoned at Anak’s request.”

“You believe Anak requested this imprisonment?”

“No Lord. As I understand it, Anak asked Yeshua’ and He proposed the idea to you. Soon after, Lucifer entered hell as a dragon and there he remains!”

“Do you believe Lucifer is an unwilling participant who did not agree to the arrangement, at least as far as you know?”

“Lord, as you know, I was not there. Still, after much consideration, I’ve concluded, the only one bothered by Lucifer’s actions and who would make such a request would have been Anak.

“No one else takes his behavior personal. Why should they? After all, he’s Lucifer. One would expect, given his role within the universe, he would differ from the other celestials. As for myself, I like to think it’s possible for Lucifer to – not change but to become.”

“Become? Interesting choice of words.” Adonai’s amused by her logic and says, “Miriam, I find no fault in what you say, but again I ask, what is it you desire of me?”

“Lucifer’s release from his dragon binding and hell. Naturally, this would depend upon Lucifer repenting and changing his ways. We both know how difficult this decision might be for him.”

*Is seems Miriam has thought this through,* Adonai muses, though he knew what she would ask and He also knows how it will turn out if he agrees to her request. “Tell me, what do you believe is needed?”

“I love Lucifer, as you know, still, being an angel, living in hell with him is not realistic, nor do you want me to be there. If Lucifer repents and returns to heaven, we can be together−not as intimate but still.”

“If he repents, your purpose may not align with his. It is possible you may not be together, for a time. You know time is not linear here?

*His purpose? So the Lord has another purpose.* “Yes, Lord. I know universal time is cyclical. But even if we’re not together, fate’s peculiar.” She smiles, delighted by the idea. “One must be ready for those moments of great joy that take us by surprise.”

Adonai roars with mirth. “No better answer could you give, which says you are ready. Let’s see if Lucifer is as ready to do his part to fulfill his destiny.”

“Who will you send, Lord?” Miriam asks, curious, and Adonai shares who will go for Him. “Let’s not tell everyone.”

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It would be many years later before Meira would again recall the events that took place and share them with a companion.

“Did you know what he would ask of you?” The friend asks Meira as they sat together, talking.

“No. When called before Adonai, the Lord of heaven, I didn’t know *what* to think.”

“Well, tell me. What happened?” And Meira shares her experience with her friend.

“I’ll never forget being called by Lord Adonai then to approach the throne room of heaven. Entering I saw the Lord in all His glory.” Taking a deep breath, she says. “Just thinking of it makes my stomach twist.” Meira smiles recalling not the voice as she'd imagined but gentle, and soft as melting butter. She repeats the words he spoke to her: ‘There’s a task I’d like you to do, if you’re willing.’”

“I assume you said, yes.” The woman’s deep sea-green eyes light with excitement at the thought.

“I was speechless and didn’t know what to say. All I could do was focus on Adonai. And wait.”

“What was it he asked of you?”

“If you’re willing, I’d like you to request Lucifer’s repentance to release him from his current binding as a dragon and leave hell.”

Seeing the shock on the other’s face she said, “I too was speechless and asked Adonai to repeat himself. He assured me I had nothing to fear from Lucifer, yet the thought of going before hell’s dragon terrified me. Who wouldn’t be?”

“But if the Lord was sending you to do something Lucifer was in agreement with, why be afraid?”

“Lucifer’s evil nature accosted me as I was about to give birth to my son, Anak. Not a believer at the time, he eagerly awaited my death to take me into hell and ravage me, no doubt forcing Andras to watch then turn me over to his demons when he was through.”

“Oh no,” says her friend. Meira didn’t know she’d been with Andras’ fiery dragon self, using sex to gain advantage only she’d found it exciting and incredibly stimulating. Still, Meira was human and a mortal soul.

“You can imagine how terrified I was then, and now had to fight to calm my breathing and give an answer. ‘I don’t know if I can−ask Lucifer to repent so he can be released from hell. Are you sure this is what you want? Of course, you are or you would never have asked,’ I said.

“Patiently Adonai waited my answer. Though He knew what I’d do. Still, I asked Him to give me time to think it over.”

“I’d jump at the chance to do the Lord of heaven a favor. Though I understand your reticence too.”

Meira nods. “The day after meeting with Adonai in the throne room, I agreed to do as He asked. Ariel went with me, for the feeling of doom took my breath away. All I could see was a dragon devouring me. Miriam had similar fears when she faced Lucifer as a dragon and that helped me get through it.”

Excited to hear the rest, she exclaimed, “What happened when you approached the dragon?”

“Eyes flash with flames and a cruel smile curls his lips yet his voice, tremulous bespoke his anxiety. ‘Greetings, Meira,’ he said. ‘It’s been awhile.’” She chuckled at the memory.

“One look at the creature who approached with his sharp-toothed smile and I nearly fled. He must have known I was afraid for he stopped a snarl threatening. I didn’t know if his intent was righteous, however, Miriam told me later, the transformation would not have taken place had he not been true in agreeing to repent.”

Mesmerized by the tale. Had Meira seen into her friend’s mind, the image envisioned would have shocked her, for the image of the powerful magnificent beast overtook her; it was all she could see.

“Seeing him terrified me. With my back pressed to the wall, Lucifer almost laughed for I could see it in his fiery eyes.” Meira gasps for breath as the scene again unfolds before her.

“Barely able to breathe I whispered words I’ll never forget: ‘Lucifer Morningstar.’ I hesitated to calm down, and said, ‘Lucifer Morningstar, Son of the Dawn, are you prepared to repent to the Lord Adonai, to rend your heart, turn unto the Lord who is gracious, full of compassion, slow to anger and plentiful in mercy, and repent of your evil ways, now and forevermore?’

“It’s odd, but as I spoke, I saw the terror in his eyes at what the Lord asked of him. Compassion for him overwhelmed me yet all I could do was hold my breath as he made the decision; it must have been the most difficult choice he’d ever had to make, and a most humbling one.

“I saw Lucifer take a deep breath as he seemed to put aside his fear and spoke, ‘I, Lucifer Morningstar, Son of the Dawn, do repent before my Lord Adonai, and rend my heart as I return to him and plead his mercy and gracious compassion upon me.’”

Seeing tears spring to Meira’s eyes, she too felt tears well. “I could not believe hearing the words fall from his lips graceful and full of beauty. Who could have imagined?

“It was but a moment, and I barely saw the change in the dragon as I sat upon the ground in shock and needed to catch my breath. I was unprepared to see what happened next. No longer a dragon stood before me in the corridor rather, someone quite different. No wings and scaled body, with faces of what I knew evil to look like; they were no longer. No flames or lightning flash forth to devour me.” She chuckled.

“Instead, before me, human in appearance, stood a man a gorgeous one. It was easy to see why Miriam fell for him. Though she told me later, some serious courting took place for him to capture her heart.

“He looked nothing like the vile apparition who gloated over my impending death at the birth of Anak. This gorgeous creature, the love of the angel Miriam, was someone else. I realized in a heartbeat, this once powerful god of the Otherworld, ruler of the earth, was no longer an evil a slave to his fear, but was now a child of Lord Adonai.”

Meira’s breath hitches, how awed she was at the transformation as it had taken place. All the fear and hate she’s long-held vanished.

“What did you do?”

“What did I do? I took a deep breath to gather my courage and made a decision, walked over to Lucifer and smiled at him.”

“I can hardly believe it.” Her friend says in wonder.

“Lucifer, *I forgive you*.” It felt so right as I turned away, and only later did Ariel, who was with me say, Lucifer gaped open-mouthed, completely taken aback by my words.”

Smiling in delight, her friend thought for a moment and asked, “Did you ever consider asking for Andras’ release? As you were speaking, I thought about it, the one you love or loved once.” *Of course, if she had, I’d never have met him and gone through my trials.*

“Yes. Adonai and I discussed Andras’ possible release earlier. He asked me what I thought about it.”

“And you said?”

“What bothered me was Andras blaming Lucifer for his own pitiable choices. Michael had warned him of the dangers of the rebellion, so he knew the risks. Still, he followed Lucifer, even incited the powers of deception. Later, he deceived me, getting me pregnant, knowing he was leaving. He tried to deceive Lucifer even! Andras did not need Lucifer to become a deceiver.”

“Yes, it makes sense.” Unknown to Meira, her friend recalls her own time with Andras and knew how deceptive he was, what he contrived to do to her, but she remains silent for she is a different person now.

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Andras heard Meira asked Lucifer to repent and return to heaven. *Why did she not request my release?* He wonders, clenching his hands, hell fire burning in his chest, disappointed. *Yet if she had I’d not be hell’s ruler.* A grin spreads across his face, eyes gleam with pleasure.

Andras accepts Lucifer is in heaven, and hell and Clio are his, and she is a delightful companion, though not Meira. “It is my kingdom.” Lips curl in a snarl, at the passing demons who scurry off in fear to get far away. “I will bring all hell to earth! Lucifer will regret leaving.” Then, Andras resumes his walk around the rooms as Clio watches.

“Instead of using demons to torture, send them to the outer worlds as did Lucifer.” Andras pulls her onto his lap. “Leave the souls here in silence to consider theirs sins; that is enough.”

Andras observes Clio as she looks at him a coy smile on her lovely face. Violet eyes and red-gold hair tumbles in curls over her shoulders to lay against her voluptuous breasts.

Her breasts excite him as they swell above her gown, a soft shadow underneath emphasizes. He noticed earlier how she walks without false modesty, long legs reach out, the rest of her following, like music it was to watch her. Andras finds his desire mounting, *beautiful, sleek as a cat and this one is in perpetual heat*.

“The gown is unnecessary,” he said, smoothly sliding the straps off her shoulders, the gown pools at her feet. He playfully cups her breasts to admire then suckle them, teasing the nipples into hard peaks.

A demon succubus of lust, Clio pleasures Andras as she had Lucifer. A female demon she seduces women and men stealing their soul, which pleases Andras who enjoys hell filled with souls. *And now I am captive to her and my lust.* He cares not.

Clio devises ways to ensure her position in hell and one way is to seduce and keep Andras pleased*. I will rule with Andras, which will be easy to have until Lucifer returns*.

As if reading her mind, pushing her off he tosses the gown at her. “Get dressed. We’ve all the time in hell for this.” Andras pulls his clothes into place and slaps her bottom then, stands up thinking*, now I can do things my way*.

Clio slips her gown on, disappointed she pouts, her fingers stroke her neck to scrape a curl of red-gold hair, she twists the strand around her finger and sucks on the tip, her sea-green eyes gleam.

Andras watching feels himself harden again. “Stop! We will get back to that later. I know what you want, as do I. Take some time out, at least for now, my adorable succubus.”

Clio drops both hands into her lap and sits down crossing her long legs. The tip of her tongue glides over full rosebud lips, her eyes sparkle, pleased to have made her point.

“As Commander,” he says, “wisdom wins the war. Seduction can be effective to manipulate, my dear, but it will not win a battle.”

“There must be more than wisdom and sincerity to win in anything,” she says, her eyes narrow at his seeming insult to her.

“Benevolence, courage and discipline are vital. You are wise in seducing mortals and immortals, and have much wisdom. Still, a hoard of demons needs far more than seduction. Not only in the heavens but on earth did I command, as you know.”

She scowls. “As commander you make certain rules and the underlings follow them, do they not?”

“Right.” He agrees. “Military rule is vital on the new worlds, if they become democracies, like earth. To allow demons control, can lead to a military coup. The result is absolute disaster. Is this not Celaeno’s problem, the demons given free rein?”

“A sole ruler is not always best. Leaders have confidants and others offer practical advice and do not just follow rules.” Clio argues. “They offer wise guidance.”

“So, you disagree and believe the ignorant demons should have a voice?” ﻿His eyes widen for a moment, and he raises an eyebrow, shaking his head, disturbed by what she said.

“Andras, not all demons are ignorant some have wisdom, so it never hurts to listen, at the very least.”

“Perhaps, but an established kingdom with free voice will not work with mortals. Seduction may be effective but it’s mainly to manipulate not command. With so many planets to rule, it is not efficient.”

“Many planets? We brought no planets under our rule other than earth.” She uses the terms ‘we’ to suggest the two are co-rulers. Andras aware says nothing. “What’s wrong with seduction to encourage a ruler or to manipulate a leader?” She argues, now furious.

Andras scowls. “Your ways are unproven, while mine have been proven time and again over the centuries with many kings.” He laughs. “You cannot raise an army and command unless you have proven yourself. Soldier would not follow. So, yes, one must prove a command or form of rule or doing as one intends.

“The Art of War contrived long ago by a mighty ruler proved itself, time after time on earth, and is now my form of rule.”

Sputtering and incoherent she grows more furious. Lucifer allowed her to rule parts of hell and to make decisions to better hell. “You make no sense, and you’re not hearing me. You’re not listening!

“Let me put it this way.” Andras argues back, his black eyes gleam. “Both of us are sovereign rulers with an idea of right and wrong else we would not argue so. What works within my system of rule differs from your way of rule, okay?”

Clio nods. “You have your ideas. I have mine. My rules guide the spirit of lust to sway mortals. But they’re not arbitrary rules.”

*How can I show Clio what is necessary?* Tapping his fingers to relax and clear his mind, he rubs the back of the neck. “Clio, your seduction has a place. What I propose requires more than sex. “Now then, we are both rulers, so which of us has the ability or experience to lead an army?”

“You do within your field.” She takes a stand and argues, “as do I in my area of expertise. I lead even generals in a certain direction.”

“Seduction is not war!” Andras rubs his forehead and thinks. *She doesn’t understand.* Grinding his teeth, Clio being so obtuse he’d like to wring her neck but also desires to bite it.

*He is a chauvinistic as Lucifer*, Clio rages. “How did I defeat politicians and rulers over the centuries if I did not use my sex or their lust to battle? Did they not do as I desired, to their loss and my gain?” Clio knows she has won her point this time.

“Ah, yes. I concede.” Andras enjoys the debate, however he’s irritated. “Answer me, with whom lie the advantages gained from war between earth and hell, not the outer planets.”

Clio smiles, for she has won this argument. “It depends on the situation. Let’s look at earth long ago. Meira took advantage of you and used her seduction to win you over and you wed her. Though you were not aware of her ploy.”

His face flames as Andras memories reveal truth: snuggled close, Meira rubs against him, his lust inflamed. Her tongue slides over sensual lips to bite his lower lip, teasing. Helpless in his lust, at the time Andras did as she asked.

Clio sees his physical response at the memory and brought him out of the recollection into the now to remind him also of his son, Anak.

“I seduced Anak on the nebula, enticed him to sin. He fell from grace, did he not? I did the same when Lucifer brought Anak to hell yet, halted my temptation using self-discipline! Although Anak takes credit, saying he overcame the temptation. He did not. Now that was out of character for me. Yet, he was helpless before me when I tempted him.” Clio’s eyes brighten as she recalls their fornicating.

“Lest we forget our ruler Lucifer who kidnapped Miriam to seduce her and is himself seduced. He falls in love, repents, and now leaves hell!”

Andras annoyed, decides to win he must concede. “I’ll give you the point. Whose side is discipline rigorously enforced?” *Here is my strength for Clio relies on seduction without discipline, which works in war only limitedly. It’s useful in daily life to tempt men to cheat and lie.*

“Okay,” she says, not liking how the debate is going. Determined to make her point and align with Andras, for she desires to rule with him, not in opposition, which would spoil her plans.

“Which is stronger, men or women? I’m thinking of amazon women who fight by might not seduction, which has never won a war. Even in the battle of Troy eons ago, it was by might the men won the victory.”

“True and each time seduction weakened soldiers or commanders, yet their warrior skills won the battle, as you say,” Clio concedes.

“I agree, male or female require training no matter each one’s skills. Practice to hone a skill to achieve in their area of expertise is vital.”

“Answer this,” Andras says. “How is loyalty gained?”

“While women learn to discipline emotions, men are more constant in self-discipline mostly.” *Damn he’s made more points than I,* Clio knows she’s lost. “I concede the running of hell and will remain out of your way.” *Damn. I’ve lost more than a debate.* Then Andras says.

“No, precious,” his arms reach to enclose her. “Our debate helped me become more aware of how well suited we are, not only in play but to rule. Both can aid the other. Yet I insist upon having the final say when we cannot agree. How say you?”

Clio, looks at Andras under long lashes, a glint of lust lights her eyes, for she is playful now. “And do you imagine we can seal the bargain using seduction skills, my lord and master for I so delight in serving you.”

Andras continues what he had halted earlier. *I’ve made the choice for a fun and intelligent partner, constant in battle as on the playing field.* Smiling and pleased with Clio*.* He places Meira on a back shelf of his mind and forgets her as the two engage with one another.

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## 2. In the Desert

A series of sand dunes, silhouetted against the dark cobalt sky, its pool fathoms deep and icy cold reflects the light of the sun low in the sky. The water provides for the nearby palm trees and travelers who stop for a rest. Meira enjoys the shade of the palm trees during the day, but needs water before continuing her journey. Walking to the water’s edge, her mind not on the task at hand she takes her canteen with her.

Sinking the empty canteen into its calm surface, a few moments later, lifting the now full canteen, she doesn’t see the bubble break the surface as she turns away. The first bubble followed by a second, then another until the pool appears to boil. A sucking sound draws Miriam’s attention. Turning back, she sees a bio-engineered beast surface, the kind she’s only heard of before. Water cascades off its silver hide. *Good grief, it’s a monster.* Meira races for the nearest sand dune, slipping and sliding upward, frantic to reach the top, to get far away from the beast.

Unable to survive long out of water, its tendrils reach to ensnare any unwitting victim before it returns to the icy depths, but Meira is now out of its reach. Serpent in design, metallic-scales layer its body with fins, clawed hands, and fangs for teeth; it is deadly.

The beasts live underwater and surface only at night usually, except this one had scented her presence during the day, and now, sensing her preparing to leave, it attacks, except Meira made it to the top of the dune. *Thank goodness,* as she breathes a sigh of relief, and sees the beast as it sinks into the waters.

Deep beneath the sand, warrens of water-filled tributaries make it possible for the creatures to travel from place to place and faster than those who travel above by day in the heat, and at night they endure the cold and dark. The pale solitary moon, at a standstill, its faint light makes travel in the desert difficult.

Meira longs to return to the safety of home. To get back, she must make haste to the next oasis, or the creature could arrive a head of her. It has her scent, and next time, she might be less fortunate. Shouldering the pack she had left where it was reachable far from the pool, she heads into the desert, moving as fast as possible.

*What would my friends have done had I died? They know not where I am.* She swallows a lump of sorrow, brushing tears away as they well up. *I owe them an apology if I see them again.*

Later, as the sun rises, the purple of night vanishes with the dawn to leave a clear sapphire sky. On her knees Meira prays: “Lord, you know my needs and desires. Whatever help you send would be good. Yeshua, you made it through the wilderness, please be with me.”

Readying for sleep, Meira digs into the dune on the lower side, away from the sun’s daytime path, pulls a heat shield from her pack, climbs in, burrows deep into the sand, then zips it closed. Soon she is fast asleep. No tossing and turning in this snug bed.

It’s not the sinking sun’s dimming light, she cannot see, waking her, rather a sound in the desert stillness. Edging from the bed-sack, visiting the last heat of the day as it cools and the dark of night approaches, Meira strains to hear. *What or who is it?* Stretching up, tense, the sound seems close and high above her.

Hearing the huff of a camel’s snort, the tinkling of a bell as the camel moves its head. Imagining the bell as it flops about, annoying the beast, Meira stifles a laugh as her mind conjures an image, then considers. *Camels do not wander the desert alone with tinkling bells.* She feels cold-sweat and icy fear skitters up her back.

Heart racing, pounding loud against her ribs, she fears whoever it is will hear. Taking a shallow breath, shutting her eyes, clenching her hands she wonders, *Is it* *friend or foe, bringer of care, or danger and death?* *Will he remain or move on? Lord, what am I to do?* Out of the stillness, she hears a familiar voice.

“Meira, why so anxious? You asked for help. Now you shrink in fear. Oh child, where’s your faith?”

Shocked into silence briefly, she cries, “Yeshua. Is it you?” Pulling herself all the way from the sleeping bag, Meira scrambles to the top of the dune, joy lightning her heart.

Yeshua’ watches, amused. *Her faith is as slippery as striving up the shifting sand. She is not alone; many with shallow faith need strength.* Meira crests the dune as he opens his arms. She launches herself at him. “Yeshua. Never did I imagine the Father would send you.” Taking her in his arms, together the two enjoy a moment of laughter.

“Tell me,” his mirth gone. “Why are you here in the desert far from your friends?” Sitting on the cooling sand, Yeshua takes her hand, pulling her down beside him. His amber eyes, a glint of gold catch the light of the setting sun. Meira sees the love and peace settles in her heart.

“Ariel asked me to wait for travel with an angel is far easier than on foot alone in the desert.” Fumbling for the words Meira feels inadequate. “I heard about the beasts of Eden, that’s what they’re called, like the one at the oasis, I saw for the first time. It seemed important to learn more about them. Celestials travel about by imagining where we want to be, but not everyone can move in such a way.”

“Can you not also travel thusly?” he asks.

“Well, yes. However, the mortals cannot. I wanted to see what they were up against. If they must travel by foot; they’re easier prey.”

“What did you discover?”

“The beasts like the one I saw yesterday, to come out of the water, it might die after a time in the sun, but. . .” she hesitates a moment.

“When captured or out of water for a time, it dries to a silvery sand. If a villager were to walk through the sand and carry it home on his feet, then wash the sand into a well, the beast could renew. You can imagine the disaster it might create!”

“Yes, I see the havoc such a creature could wreck if it came to life, in the community well.”

“So, you understand?”

Not answering her question, he asks, “What did you hope to achieve entering the desert alone? There are many of these beasts, not just one. Why put your life in danger when you are helpless? Help me understand.” His countenance kind, voice gentle.

Meira runs both hands through her hair, tugs an ear, and stumbles to find the right words, “I’m not sure.” Frowning she tries to recall her reason. “What did I hope to achieve?” she repeats and answers her own question, “I’ve no idea.” Palms out, Meira shrugs and looks at Yeshua, feeling foolish. “It seemed like a wonderful idea, a worthy adventure.”

Yeshua’ wraps an arm around her, chuckling, “Yes you enjoy your adventures which end in trouble often. Taking on life challenges will be invaluable one day.

“Still,” he says, turning to face her. “This is not the time. Do you not know your friends worry about you, and Adonai needs you elsewhere?”

Realizing again the pain she caused, tears well up to course down her cheeks. “I didn’t mean to cause my friends pain. I was so excited and not thinking. I just wanted to help.”

“You always want to do good but consider the potential outcome of an action as well. Recall Andras and his good intentions?”

She chuckles. “Yes, do not remind me. While our marriage wasn’t a mistake – at least until. . .”

Meira shakes her head as though she to dislodge an unpleasant memory. She recalls Andras contriving to impregnate her knowing Lucifer could call him back to hell, anytime. He’d left her ‘barefoot and pregnant’ to raise a child, a Nephilim.

*Thanks to the angel who came to help*, and she remembers long ago when she was then a mortal.

“Remember the good and not only the hardship and sorrow you experienced,” Yeshua’ said.

“It’s been so long. I forget.” She asks, “How is everyone? What about my son, Anak? I know he grew up into a fine man, or he’s an angel now. I wonder what he’s up to since passing into the upper heaven.”

“He wonders about you. Adonai keeps him busy so he’s not had time to overthink it and pursue you.”

“How would pursuit of me be a problem? Do you imagine he’d not complete the Lord’s plans for him?”

“He wouldn’t be the first. You know what happened with Lucifer and Miriam and his plans for them?”

Laughing delightedly. “When Adonai sent me into hell to ask Lucifer to repent, I was terrified. When he appeared as a dragon, I nearly died of fright. To hear him repent, to say the words was inexpressible. Now he’s returned to heaven. How are they?”

Yeshua’s not laughing but looks solemn.

“Oh, no. Don’t tell me they split up, after all?”

“Not in the way you mean. In heaven relationship are not as on earth or other planets. The Lord has plans, which could pull them apart. Consider Andras, taken from you before Anak’s birth. While it was painful, are you not stronger as a result?

“Anak has his path and you yours, just as Lucifer and Miriam each have their own to follow.

Rising to his feet, Yeshua’ takes Meira’s hand, pulling her up. “Come. There’s time to talk later. We’ve guests for you to meet. An adopted daughter of the Tuatha de’ Danann and her husband; they’re newly-wed. Neither is a believer, still, they’re needed to help with a certain task.”

Meira’s eyes light at the prospect. “Meeting the Fae will be exciting. I know they look different with elf like ears and many have magic.” Meira babbles in her excitement imagining what the Fae are like.

“I cannot wait to see my friends and meet the Fae. I am sorry for worrying everyone.”

“You’ll not error the same again. I’m confident. If you’re ready let’s take the easy way back.” Yeshua grasps her hand. In a blink, together they vanish from the desert, on the way home, the night flashes by, unnoticed by anyone, or so they thought.

In the shadows the watcher wonders, *What are they up to? She’s interesting one, alluring as well. Is this why I was sent? I’d enjoy having her.* He snickers then shrugs, knowing it’ll not happen. He grabs his bag and, in a blink, is on his way to the next assignment.

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END OF PREVIEW

# Appendix

“New Jerusalem” and “Three Heavens” are from articles on the web. I’m not convinced are totally accurate. However, they’re included to simply offer a bit of insight into Scripture and how it’s interpreted by some. It’s up to each of us to allow Adonai to speak to our heart then, decide where we stand.

“Dragons in the Bible” some may dispute. Still, I fancy it, for it made my ‘dragons’ or seraphs more real to the story, at least in my imagination. So, take what you will from it.

Regardless, I hope you enjoyed the read. If so, leave a review on Amazon then, visit my website for your FREE e-book.

[www.brandymarks.com/angels&demons/](http://www.brandymarks.com/angels&demons/)

God bless, Brandy Marks

## Cast of Characters

Lucifer: ‘Light-bringer’ the first Cherub starts a war in heaven. In losing, Adonai cast him to earth. He seduces Miriam [for revenge on Anak], falls in love with her and she with him. His enemy Anak connives to have him bound to hell as a dragon.

Miriam: An angel, Lucifer kidnaps and seduces her. They fall in love. She was Anak’s friend until his arrogance and being too protective ruins her relationship with Lucifer.

Andras: archangel followed Lucifer in the war in heaven and Adonai casts him to the earth with Lucifer and his angels. Andras stays on earth for a while and meets Meira.

Meira: A human fell in love with Andras a fallen angel. They marry. Anak, their child is born after Andras returns to hell at Lucifer’s command. Meira raises Anak alone.

Anak, a Nephilim, after the death of his mother, leaves the land of his birth and travels to Ireland. Slaying a dragon who was once a cherub, he learns it was Lucifer’s friend. Now Lucifer’s out for revenge and causes Anak all kinds of problems.

Clio: a demon succubus and temptress, once mortals engage in sex with her, she steals their soul. Celestials fall for her, and they must find their way back to Adonai.

Kai: a Fae and Anak’s friend travels through hell, the chasm, and beyond to rescue Anak’s love, a Fae queen who denies him. Kai married Ériu of the Tuatha after they rescue her.

Laila: An angel and helper of angels has a special role in the story, which continues to evolve.

Oisin and Niamh of Tuatha de’ Danann remain in the chasm and return to the stars after Anak and Kai save their daughter.

Tam-Lin: rescues his bride-to-be, leaves after they wed now ancient. He bargains Lucifer for their firstborn so for youth then bargain with the Tuatha to save their daughter from him.

Isobel: A mortal falls in love with Tam-Lin a faerie.

Tuatha de’ Danann: “Tribe of the gods," are a race of supernatural beings from the stars who live in the chasm and help Anak and Kai to rescue their daughter Ériu; they return to the stars and become immortal as they had been in the past.

Archangels:

Michael

Amandine:

Ariel, Lioness:

Tannin aka Dragon:

Yeshua: Son of Adonai

Seraphs: they once served Adonai lost their way in Lucifer’s rebellion, now worshipped as fire-dragons, they repent.

Darius: Seraph or fire-dragon strives for good

Mi’reu: Darius’ mate and a seraph also.

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## The Chasm

### Between Heaven & Hell

October 1, 2018, Sim Chen Ning

When the only Person, Jesus, who came from heaven (John 6:38), tells you about heaven and hell, you’ve got to pay close attention… Even if it is only a parable he tells.

Now, in the parable about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) communication between heaven and hell is permitted. The only restriction is the freedom to cross over to the other side.

“…between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so *those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.*” – Luke 16:26b, NIV

It’s unclear what Luke meant when he wrote this. It is uncertain if the word used fully captures the meaning Christ intended. Nonetheless, given the limitation with our languages, we’ll try to understand what his intent was regarding the complex border separating the two extremes of eternal life with the word Luke used, chasm.

**Great Chasm.**Original: χάσμα μέγα — (read as: chásma méga)

Literal Google Translation: Mega Gap.

Some of the modern usage of the word χάσμα:

χάσμα can be used to refer to a gap that affects understanding.

“This gap can turn out to be very confusing for interested parties and the public at large.” – Official Journal of the EU.

χάσμα can be used to refer to a gap in digital stratification / digital divide; “…bridging the digital divide.”

χάσμα can refer to a gap in opinions (of the political nature)

“A significant divergence remains between EU legislation on the one hand and national legislation and practices on the other.” – Official Journal of the EU.

χάσμα can be used to refer to a gap between people in the form of socio-economic status; “…national poverty risk gap…”

I am not a linguist, so I can only assume the χάσμα (or chasm/gap) Jesus spoke is something of a similar nature.

Assuming χάσμα is an accurate description of the “gap” between heaven and hell, we can deduce the differences separating heaven and hell isn’t on a superficial level. Rather, the “chasm” between heaven and hell appears to encompass one’s beliefs, opinions, choices, and one’s worldview.

To understand the this “chasm”, we must understand what brings people to hell in the first of all. place. This took me to Jesus’ teaching about the unpardonable sin.

“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.” – Mark 3:28-29.

There are many explanations about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. The best description is the hardening of heart while recognizing the Truth in Jesus but still turning away from Him. Such a hardness of heart will render a person incapable of repentance (Mathis, 2018).

While we know the hardening of the heart can shape one’s worldview. We know some Jewish leaders were constantly at odds with Christ during His ministry on earth. Their hearts were so hardened everything they did was simply to disprove Christ or to bring Him harm.

This was what Jesus said to them:

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the start, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” – John 8:44.

The hardening of hearts will shape one’s innate desire. These desires will then shape the way a person will live one’s life. With their minds fixed on following “the prince of this world” (another name for Satan in John 12:31, NIV), their entire person will be socialized into the being of Satan to do what he desires. This constant denial of Christ solidified their hearts to the point of no return that even in hell, they would find that there’s no purpose of repentance. *I can only infer this might be the reason for the rich man’s lack of repentance in hell in Luke’s narrative.*

Despite the door between heaven and hell being open (Revelations 21:25, NIV), no one will cross over to one side or another even if they “want” to (Luke 16:26).

Indeed, the very nature of sin is the “chasm” that separates heaven and hell as Paul taught:

“Do you not know wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, [homosexuals], nor thieves, the greedy ones, drunkards, slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” – 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

While these sins can be forgiven, one who has seen the richness of Christ and still turns away towards the temporal pleasures of such acts, these acts will be the chasm that separates them from God, forever.

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Phil Wickham wrote a song that comes to mind. It’s the theme of a church I attend, Living Hope Church, Vancouver Washington.

How great the chasm that lay between us  
How high the mountain I could not climb  
In desperation, I turned to heaven  
And spoke your name into the night  
Then through the darkness  
Your loving kindness  
Tore through the shadows of my soul  
The work is ﬁnished, the end is written  
Jesus Christ, my living hope. . .

## ‘Dragons in the Bible!’

By Rabbi Harvey | August 4, 2018 (paraphrased)

In the final speeches from Moses to the Israelites he says, ‘Let not your heart grow proud and you forget Adonai—who freed you from your bondage in Egypt; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its seraph serpents . . .’

Ah, the word: seraph. The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain with varied meanings.

Moses speaks of seraph serpents in the wilderness, he refers to Numbers chapter 21; a “complaint” scene. In similar scenes the Israelites complain to Moses, asking why he made them leave Egypt only to die in the wilderness.

Verse 6. To punish the Israelites for this behavior, Adonai sent seraph serpents against the people. The serpents bit them and many died. The people came to Moses, “We sinned speaking against Adonai and you. Intercede to take the serpents away!” Moses interceded.

Adonai’s solution, “Make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard. If anyone bitten looks at it, he will recover.”

Moses obeys; when bitten by a serpent anyone who looks at the copper serpent recovers.

Now, this scene is problematic because God tells Moses to be a serpent charmer, it appears, which is an abhorrent practice of the neighboring nations.

Also this passage doesn’t help to understand what a seraph is; we know they bite and those bitten die. Adonai solved the problem by having Moses make a copper serpent staff for people to see, which healed them.

In commentaries and exegesis, a common explanation is the word seraph… which means “it burned.” Most therefore infer the word seraph means “burning one.”

Well, Seraphim, defined as fiery serpents apparently are serpents whose bite causes a burning sensation.

Jewish Study Bible commentators and Gunther Plaut on the Torah, said ‘the word seraph can be defined as “fiery” - a reference to snake bites which cause a skin inflammation.’ So, seraph is a snake.

The word Seraph appears elsewhere, Isaiah, Ch. 6, wherein he has a vision of God sitting on a throne described as:

‘The year King Uzziah died, I saw God seated on a high and lofty throne; the skirt of God’s robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance upon God. Each had six wings: with two it covered God’s face, with two it covered God’s legs, and with two it would fly.’

And one would call to the other:

‘Holy, holy, holy!

The Lord of Hosts!

His presence fills all the earth!’

The door posts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke.

Forget seraph can talk, and consider the image you conjure when you hear this scene.

This is not like Numbers or Deuteronomy where the word seraph precedes the word “serpent.” No, an image of a seraph with wings, comes it mind, enough to cover God’s face. See the seraph “burning one” or “fiery,” and it’s a fiery creature with wings who appears to be a flying fiery serpent!

This is what you might call a dragon. It’s no wonder the room Isaiah saw was full of smoke! Dragons breathe fire. So when you have fire breathing dragons you have smoke.

Thus, God used this fire-dragon to punish the Israelites, and it’s why the bite caused the Israelites to die. Not because of a burning sensation, but because dragon bites probably did some serious damage. And the threat of a dragon did intimidate.

The source of the word seraph, is angelic being, one of the alleged hierarchies. [the bible never says celestials are angels and describes them different from seraph and cherubs]. Even so, for our purpose, the answer is simple: dragons in the Bible!

Dragons appear in prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah who say the attack by Nebuchadnezzar is “swallowed like a dragon,” Ezekiel compares Pharaohs of Egypt as “dragon in the seas” and Job asks, “Am I the sea or Dragon You set to watch over me?”

Now, when you read Moses telling the dangers the Israelites faced in the wilderness the plague of seraph serpents, you now think bigger than snake bites. Your imagination can run wild at the possibility the Israelites knew Adonai sat on a throne guarded by dragons, and when they sinned, God sent those dragons. This story merely reminds us how fun Torah can be.

[[1]](https://rabbiharvey.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/dragons-in-the-bible/#_ftnref1) Jeremiah 51:34

[[2]](https://rabbiharvey.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/dragons-in-the-bible/#_ftnref2) Ezekiel 32:2

[[3]](https://rabbiharvey.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/dragons-in-the-bible/#_ftnref3) Job 7:12

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A delicious commentary on seraphs. And in paraphrasing, my intent is to simplify while keeping the intent of the author in mind. And, it fit with my story and dragons in the bible.

Here’s the reference where I gleaned the idea for my novel.

https://rabbiharvey.wordpress.com/2018/08/03/dragons-in-the-bible/

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While dragon may or may not be in the Bible, sex certainly is as we read in the Song of Songs or Song of Solomon. This book is from where I derive my ‘sex’ scenes.

## Hell in the Bible

*The following was obtained from an article on the internet some time before I wrote the book, Lucifer Unbound, and so, I no longer have the reference whence I obtained it. But the author did a lot of in-depth work in defining hell in the Bible, in the Scriptures.*

“... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ... (2Th 1:7b-9)

So many people today don't believe in a literal place called Hell that burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8), where all who die in their sins without Jesus Christ go to be punished for all eternity. Sadly, there are countless people who twist the Scriptures to try and teach that Hell is other than what the Bible says... a place of flaming torment.

The Bible contains an overwhelming amount of irrefutable evidence that Hell is indeed a literal place of torment, where those who die in their sins without Jesus Christ are punished in flaming fire ... (2Thessalonians 1:8,9).

Here are many Scriptures to consider...

“The wicked will be turned into hell, and all the nations who forget God.” — Psalm 9:17

Notice here, "hell" cannot mean "the grave" as some teach. If "hell" means the grave, then where do the righteous go? The Bible plainly teaches the righteous and the wicked do not go to the same place. The wicked are turned into Hell; but the righteous unto life eternal.

“If I ascend up into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” — Psalm 139:8

These hypothetical examples are of where David might try to escape. He first asserts the Lord is present in the heavens above and in sheol (hell) below. These opposites signify all areas in between (a third merism in this psalm; cf. Psalm 139:2-3) are in the Lord’s presence.

These are hypothetical because as 2Thessalonians 1:9 says, in being punished in hell they are “forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power.” (NLT)

The contrast here is between Heaven and Hell; not between Heaven and the grave. Also, notice this phrase... "If I make my bed in hell." Everyone who goes to Hell chooses to go there by rejecting Jesus as their Christ. It is the sinful person who makes their bed in Hell. No sinner must go to Hell. The gift of eternal life is freely offered to all mankind through faith in Christ Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 10:43; Revelation 22:17).

“Therefore hell has enlarged itself, and opened its mouth without measure: and their glory and multitude, and pomp, and he who rejoices will descend into it.” — Isaiah 5:14

Therefore hell has enlarged itself to receive the dead is not as God intended for He made hell for the devil and his dark angels. Clearly, Hell is for those who die in their sins, and for the devil and his angels. The righteous go to heaven to be with the Lord (2Corinthians 5:8).

This Scripture defines "hell" as being more than the grave. The Bible speaks about "descending into the pit" and speaks of being "cast into Hell," implying there is judgment of a holy God. Only the wicked will be thrown into Hell, a bottomless pit, where Satan is "the angel of the bottomless pit" (Revelation 9:11).

“But I say to you, whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye offends you, pluck it out, and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not your whole body should be cast into hell.” — Matthew 5:28, 29

The Bible teaches all [without Christ] are condemned to Hell. If "hell" simply means grave, then what harm or worry is there in fornicating, getting drunk, raping, murdering, partying with illegal drugs and committing all other sins?

If there is no place of punishment in eternity, there is no justice for all the crime victims in this earthly life. So why bother being righteous? To believe the Bible is God's Word, you must believe Hell is a literal place of torment and anguish, burns with flames of fire and brimstone, where sinners are punished for their sins against a holy God.

There are no second chances once a soul leaves this earthly life. There is no such place as Purgatory or limbo, and no amount of prayer or contributions to a church can lessen God's vengeance upon those who die in their sins without Jesus Christ.

Scripture plainly teaches the Church's arch enemy is Satan and the forces of Hell. We also see this in Ephesians 6:12. Our battle is not against flesh and blood (humanity); but against principalities, powers and spiritual wickedness in high places (satan and his demon angels).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” — Matthew 23:15

The Bible speaks of being "a child of Hell." Matthew 5:9 speaks of the "children of God." Galatians 3:26 clearly says, "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

“You serpents, generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." — Matthew 23:33,34…

Jesus warned about the "damnation of Hell," and He spoke about "escaping" the damnation of Hell. What is the damnation for the Pharisees and scribes? Common sense tells the honest student of the Bible that Hell must be a literal place of torment and fire, i.e., damnation.

“If your foot offends you, cut it off: it is better to enter life crippled, than to have two feet and be cast into hell, into the fire that never is quenched: Where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.” — Mark 9:45,46

The same Scriptures says hell's fire will never be quenched. The "worm that dies not" may refer to our conscience which will eat away at us for eternity. The worst part about Hell won't be the flames of torment, it will be knowing in your heart Jesus paid your way to Heaven, and you could have gone to Heaven; but you loved your sins more and refused to come to the Savior to be saved.

To clarify, a person does not have to forsake committing sins to be saved; but one's love for sin prevents them from coming to Jesus... "lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:20). Jesus said in John 5:40, "You will not come to me, so you might have life." To be saved, one must admit they are guilty before God of violating His holy Word (Romans 3:19). Most people are not willing to repent; but instead choose to continue denying and making excuses for their sins. God only requires us to admit our guilt and to seek forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ.

“And you, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, will be thrust down to hell.” — Luke 10:15

Jesus prophesied imminent judgment and doom upon the wicked citizens of Capernaum. Notice the Bible continually speaks of being "cast down to hell", "thrust down to hell," which clearly indicate hell is below while heaven is above. Psalm 7:11 says "God is angry with the wicked every day."

Oprah Winfrey has publicly denied that Jesus is the only Way to Heaven. Do you think God is angry with her? The world is filled with billions of Christ-rejecters, God must be One angry God. John 3:36 tells us the "wrath of God" abides upon all who reject Christ. Again we see that "hell" is more than just a symbolic term. Although one's life may seem like hell on earth, it cannot be compared to burning in the torments of fire and brimstone for all eternity.

“I will forewarn you whom you will fear: Fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, Fear him.” — Luke 12:5

“In hell he lifts up his eyes… in torment…” — Luke 16:23

In view of all the Scriptures I've shared concerning the reality of Hell, who could honestly say Luke 16:19-31 is merely a parable? Jesus never used specific names in His parable; but he speaks of a specific man, and Lazarus and Abraham in this Scripture. It is clearly not a parable.

Yet, if it was a parable, what was Jesus trying to describe? It would be misleading for Jesus to speak of Hell as a literal place of "torment" and "flames" if it weren't so. Consider Jesus' Words in John 14:2... "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you..." Jesus was a Man of His Word—He meant what he said, and Hell is a place of torment and fire.

“The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” — James 3:6

Again we find a Biblical reference to "fire of Hell."

“If God spared not the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment…” — 2nd Peter 2:4

If "hell" is merely the grave, then how could God cast the fallen angels into hell (Greek: Tartarus)? Angels do not die in the human sense. You don't bury them six-feet under. We read these fallen angels (i.e. demons) are reserved in chains of darkness awaiting judgment.

There are three different Greek words for our English word "hell" today: Hades, Gehenna and Tartarus. Gehenna is the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). Tartarus is a special jail for demons reserved unto judgment.

Hades is where lost sinners go when they die (a terrible place of fire, torment and suffering). For a comprehensive examination on the subject of Hell, please read: A Biblical Examination of Hell.

“I am he that lives and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forever, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” — Revelation 1:18

Here we see that death and Hell are two separate things. I always capitalize Heaven and Hell because they are literal places and these are their proper names. If "hell" meant grave, there would be no distinction between the two.

“The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged everyone according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” — Revelation 20:13-15

How can you argue with the Biblical term "second death"? Clearly there is a punishment that goes beyond the grave. The Bible teaches sinners will stand trial and be sentenced to the Lake of Fire based upon their works. Also, the Bible teaches that death and Hell (Hades) were cast into the Lake of Fire. This plainly shows hell means much more than the grave. The Hebrew word "Sheol" is the Old Testament is equivalent to "Hades" in the New Testament meaning "hell." Sheol doesn't strictly mean the grave. It can mean a lot more, and often does. Psalm 9:17 is an example:

"The wicked shall be turned into Hell." Obviously this means more than the grave alone, because that's also were the righteous go. It would make no sense. The clear interpretation is that the wicked and all those who forget God will be punished in eternity.

### Verses Specific to Hell

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” — Revelation 21:8

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ — Matthew 25:41

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” — Matthew 25:46

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. — Romans 2:6-8 45

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. — Revelation 20:15 29

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 6:23 29

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. — Mark 9:43 25

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ... — 2Thessalonians 1:9

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. — Matthew 10:28

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. — Revelation 20:14

Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. — Deuteronomy 28:4-48

Come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. — John 5:29

‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ — Mark 9:48

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. — Jude 1:10

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. — Rev. 20:6

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. — 1John 5:12

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ...

And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ — — Luke 16:19-31

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise? — Psalm 6:5

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More people believe in heaven than in hell, yet hell is an actual place. There can be no heaven without hell. Jesus spoke more about hell than heaven and He described it as a real place. He used vivid descriptive language when He spoke about it. Hell was not intended for humans but a place of eternal punishment prepared for the Devil and his followers, the demons (Matt. 25:41). The Bible clearly describes hell.

### Words that Describe Hell

Fire and brimstone Furnace of fire

Judgment by fire Fiery oven

Lake of fire Eternal punishment

Pits of darkness Flames of fire

Burning wind Unquenchable fire

Judgment by fire

### Physical Nature of Hell

“The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” — Revelation 14:11

“And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” — 2Thessalonians 1:9

“The cowardly, unbelieving, vile, murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” — Revelation 21:8

“He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.” — Matthew 25:41

“”And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” — Mark 9:47-48

“The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” — Rev. 20:10

“The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” — Matthew 13:41-42

### Who Goes to Hell?

Revelation 21:8 says: “the cowardly, the unbelieving, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic arts, idolaters and all liars–their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.”

The "cowards" are those who abandon Christ, fearing persecution so badly they choose safety over eternal life. These cowards are the same as the unbelieving, the corrupt, the murderers, the immoral, the idolaters, the liars, and those practicing magic arts.

By contrast, people who are victorious "endure to the end" (Mark 13:13). These true believers do not give into pressure to conform to the world, so they will receive the blessings God promised: To follow Christ requires boldness to stand in courage with oppression. Pray for courage to do what is right no matter what pressure you face. Those who can endure the testing of evil and remain faithful will be rewarded by God.

A critically important word in this list is “the unbelieving.” Who are the unbelievers? John 3:18b says those who do not believe in Jesus Christ suffer eternal punishment; “whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they do not believe in the name of God’s one and only Son.” Anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ, who does not repent of their sin, and who does not ask for forgiveness is doomed to eternal separation from God and His holy angels.

Every human who has ever lived, anyone who is alive today, and anybody who will yet live in the future who does not believe in Jesus are destined for hell fire.

The way to avoid this torment is to choose to trust in Christ, place your faith in Christ, and ask for forgiveness from our Lord. Everyone has a choice to make in this life, either eternal life or eternal damnation. No one is saved by being a good person or doing good things. Many people who say they are a good person will end up in hell because they placed their faith in their own good works.

Many who believe being good will get them into heaven. This is not what the Bible says. And so, many say they are a “nice person”, but even so, there will be a lot of “nice people” in hell someday because they rejected the only One Who had God’s wrath placed on Him (Jesus). Either take God’s wrath on yourself someday or ask Jesus to forgive you and believe in Him because He has taken upon Himself our sins and God’s wrath. Good works are like filthy rags to God – but belief in Jesus sends you to heaven. Let Him impart His righteousness on your behalf.

### What Sends a Person to Hell?

God has never sent anyone to hell, and will never send anyone to hell. People choose hell by their unbelief. The good news is God desires no one perish and suffer eternal torment (2Peter 3:9).

People choose hell by choosing not to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Jesus can save you today (John 3:16). You have to believe in Him and place your trust in Him (Rom 10:9-13). There is no way to escape hell except through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). You may be reading this because this is your day of salvation (2Cor 6:2). That is my hope and prayer for anyone that reads this. Just believe in Him and you will be saved (Act 16:31).

### Conclusion

The Bible contains an overwhelming amount of evidence showing that Hell is a literal place that burns with fire and is eternal. Those people today who scoff and deny the existence of a literal Hell that burns with fire are calling God a liar. You believe the Bible is God's Word or you don't. There is NO middle ground.

“Beloved, remember the words spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus; how they told you there would be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These are those who separate themselves, having not the Spirit" (Jude 1:1-19).

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## Song of Songs:

### a Sensual Journey and a love song of redemption

**Introduction:** Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) . . . is very graphic. Solomon concealed his sensuality in figurative language . . . [like we haven’t figured out what he was talking about.] And it helps to have a modern Bible to better identify the speakers.

Regardless, Song of Songs is the Bible’s book on sex with sexually colorful if not erotic images; it is sexually tempting and stimulating. Yes, Song of Songs is highly sensual in a biblical way.

The story involves Solomon, who owned vineyards (8:11), and a peasant girl from Shulam (6:13), who works among the vines (1:6). When Solomon came into the area to check on his flocks (1:7), he saw the girl in the vines and it was love at first sight.

The Couple Falls in Love: 1:1 – 2:7

The book opens with the Shulamite longing for the handsome king to kiss her (1:2); he is smitten with her and declares her beautiful . . . (1:9). Cautioned not to be physically intimate until they are married (2:7).

The Couple is Engaged: 2:8 – 3:5

“Come with me . . . Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me” (2:10, 13).

She accepts, “My beloved is mine, I am his” (2:16). Again, the two are cautioned not to yield to sexual temptations (3:5).

The Wedding: 3:6-10

Solomon arrives (3:7) on “his wedding day” (3:10).

The Honeymoon: 4:1 – 5:1

He describes her body in exquisite detail (4:1-7), and calls her his “bride” five times (4:9-15). The bride invites him to “come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.” He does. “I have come into my garden, *my bride . . .”* Imagine the choice fruits of which he tastes.

The Falling Out: 5:2 – 6:3

One night, they have a falling out. Solomon wants to enjoy his wife, but she is tired (5:2-3). He leaves and she goes after him (5:6-7) fearing he has “gone down to his garden [his harem], to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens among the lilies . . .” (6:3).

Humm. Naughty boy. But they Make Up! 6:4–8:4

He returns, “my dove, my perfect one. . . unique.” Another graphic description of her body (7:1-5). He longs to enjoy her pleasures (7:8-9). She reciprocates (7:9-10); they resume a passionate relationship (8:1-3).

Paraphrased from an article by Robert J. Morgan © 2020

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Song of Songs is about Love, Marriage and Sex. The sexual elements used in my novel are suggestive but biblical, suggesting sexual temptation and not obscene. Many novels erotic scenes are vulgar and unappealing, pornographic, at least to me. I’ve tried to use discretion in writing these scenes. However, every person will view the temptation and sex scenes differently.

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### Song of Songs \_ Redemption

This is another way of beholding the most amazing song of all, by King Solomon, the Passion Translation.

1:1 Let him smother me with kisses—his Spirit-kiss divine. So kind are your caresses, I drink them in like the sweetest wine! Your presence releases a fragrance so pleasing—over and over poured out. Your lovely name is “Flowing Oil.” No wonder the brides-to-be adore you.

Draw me into your heart. We will run away together into the king’s cloud-filled chamber. We will remember your love, rejoicing and delighting in you, celebrating your every kiss as better than wine. No wonder righteousness adores you!

Jerusalem maidens, in this twilight darkness I know I am so unworthy—so in need. Yet you are so lovely! I feel as dark and dry as the desert tents of the wandering nomads. Yet you are so lovely—like the fine linen tapestry hanging in the Holy Place.

Please don’t stare in scorn because of my dark and sinful ways. My angry brothers quarreled with me and appointed me guardian of their ministry vineyards, yet I’ve not tended my vineyard within. Won’t you tell me, lover of my soul, where do you feed your flock? Where do you lead your beloved ones to rest in the heat of the day? For I wish to be wrapped all around you as I wander among the flocks of your shepherds. It is you I long for, with no veil between us!

Listen, my radiant one—if you ever lose sight of me, just follow in my footsteps where I lead my lovers. Come with your burdens and cares. Come to the place near the sanctuary of my shepherds.

My dearest one, let me tell you how I see you—you are so thrilling to me. To gaze upon you is like looking at one of Pharaoh’s finest horses—a strong, regal steed pulling his royal chariot. Your tender cheeks are aglow—your earrings and gem-laden necklaces set them ablaze. We will enhance your beauty, encircling you with our golden reins of love. You will be marked with our redeeming grace.

As the king surrounded me at his table, the sweet fragrance of my praise perfume awakened the night. A sachet of myrrh is my lover, like a tied-up bundle of myrrh resting over my heart. He is like a bouquet of henna blossoms—henna plucked near the vines at the fountain of the Lamb. I will hold him and never let him part.

Look at you, my dearest darling, you are so lovely! You are beauty itself to me. Your passionate eyes are like gentle doves. My beloved one, both handsome and winsome, you are pleasing beyond words. Our resting place is anointed and flourishing, like a green forest meadow bathed in light. Rafters of cedar branches are over our heads and balconies of pleasant-smelling pines.

(2:1) I am truly his rose, the very theme of his song. I’m overshadowed by his love, growing in the valley!  Yes, you are my darling companion. You stand out from all the rest. For though the curse of sin surrounds you, still you remain as pure as a lily, even more than all others. My beloved is to me the most fragrant apple tree—he stands above the sons of men. Sitting under his grace-shadow, I blossom in his shade, enjoying the sweet taste of his pleasant, delicious fruit, resting with delight where his glory never fades.

Suddenly, he transported me into his house of wine—he looked upon me with his unrelenting love divine. Revive me with your raisin cakes. Refresh me again with your apples. Help me and hold me, for I am lovesick! I am longing for more—*yet how could I take more*? His left hand cradles my head while his right hand holds me close. I am at rest in this love.

Promise me, brides-to-be, by the gentle gazelles and delicate deer, you’ll not disturb my love until she is ready to arise.

Listen! I hear my lover’s voice. I know it’s him coming to me—leaping with joy over mountains, skipping in love over the hills *that separate us*, to come to me. Let me describe him: he is graceful as a gazelle, swift as a wild stag. Now he comes closer, even to the places where I hide. He gazes into my soul, peering through the portal as he blossoms within my heart.

The one I love calls to me: Arise, my dearest. Hurry, my darling. Come away with me! I have come as you have asked to draw you to my heart and lead you out. For now is the time, my beautiful one.

The season has changed, the bondage of your barren winter has ended, and the season of hiding is over and gone. The rains have soaked the earth and left it bright with blossoming flowers. The season for singing and pruning the vines has arrived. I hear the cooing of doves in our land, filling the air with songs to awaken you and guide you forth.

Can you not discern this new day of destiny breaking forth around you? The early signs of my purposes and plans are bursting forth. The budding vines of new life are now blooming everywhere. The fragrance of their flowers whispers, “There is change in the air.” Arise, my love, my beautiful companion, and run with me to the higher place. For now is the time to arise and come away with me. For you are my dove, hidden in the split-open rock. It was I who took you and hid you up high in the secret stairway of the sky. Let me see your radiant face and hear your sweet voice. How beautiful your eyes of worship and lovely your voice in prayer.

You must catch the troubling foxes, those sly little foxes that hinder our relationship. For they raid our budding vineyard of love to ruin what I’ve planted within you. Will you catch them and remove them for me? We will do it together. I know my lover is mine and I am his; I have everything in you, for we delight ourselves in each other.

But until the day springs to life and the shifting shadows of fear disappear, turn around, my lover, and ascend to the holy mountains of separation without me. Until the new day fully dawns, run on ahead like the graceful gazelle and skip like the young stag over the mountains of separation. Go on ahead to the mountain of spices—*I’ll come away another time*.

(3:1) Night after night I’m tossing and turning on my bed of travail. Why did I let him go from me? How my heart now aches for him, but he is nowhere to be found! So I must rise in search of him, throughout the city, seeking until I find him. Even if I must roam through every street, nothing will keep me from my search. Where is he—my soul’s true love? He is nowhere to be found.

Then I encountered the overseers as they encircled the city. I asked them, “Have you found him—my heart’s true love?” As I moved past them, I encountered him. I found the one I adore! I caught him and fastened myself to him, refusing to be feeble in my heart again. Now I’ll bring him back to the temple within where I was given new birth—into my innermost parts, the place of my conceiving.

Promise me, O Jerusalem maidens, by the gentle gazelles and delicate deer, that you’ll not disturb my love until she is ready to arise. Who is this one ascending from the wilds in the pillar of the glory cloud? He is fragrant with the anointing oils of myrrh and frankincense—more fragrant than all the spices of the merchant.

Look! It is the king’s marriage carriage. The love seat surrounded by sixty champions, the mightiest of Israel’s host, like pillars of protection. They are angelic warriors standing ready with swords to defend the king and his fiancée from every terror of the night.

The king made this mercy seat for himself out of the finest wood that will not decay. Pillars of smoke, like silver mist—a canopy of golden glory dwells above it. The place where they sit together is sprinkled with crimson. Love and mercy cover this carriage, blanketing his tabernacle throne. The king has made it for those who will become his bride.

Rise up, Zion maidens, brides-to-be! Come and feast your eyes on this king as he passes in procession on his way to his wedding. This is the day filled with overwhelming joy—the day of his great gladness.

(4:1) Listen, my dearest darling, you are so beautiful—you are beauty itself to me! Your eyes glisten with love, like gentle doves behind your veil. What devotion I see each time I gaze upon you. You are like a sacrifice ready to be offered. When I look at you, I see how you have taken my fruit and tasted my word. Your life has become clean and pure, like a lamb washed and newly shorn. You now show grace and balance with truth on display.

Your lips are as lovely as Rahab’s scarlet ribbon, speaking mercy, speaking grace. The words of your mouth are as refreshing as an oasis. What pleasure you bring to me! I see your blushing cheeks opened like the halves of a pomegranate, showing through your veil tender meek.

When I look at you, I see your inner strength, so stately and strong. You are as secure as David’s fortress. Your virtues and grace cause a thousand famous soldiers to surrender to your beauty. Your pure faith and love rest over your heart as you nurture those who are infants.

I’ve made up my mind. Until the darkness disappears and the dawn has fully come, even in shadows and fears, I will go to the mountaintop with you—the mountain of suffering love, the hill of burning incense. *Yes, I will be your bride*.

Every part of you is so beautiful, my darling. Perfect is your beauty, without flaw within. Now you are ready, my bride, to come with me as we climb the highest peaks together. Come with me through the arch of trust. We will look down from the crest of the glistening mounts and from the summit of our sublime sanctuary.

Together we will wage war in the lion’s den and the leopard’s lair as they watch nightly for their prey. For you reach into my heart. With one flash of your eyes I am undone by your love, my beloved, my equal, my bride. You leave me breathless—I am overcome by a glance from your worshiping eyes, for you have stolen my heart. I am held hostage by your love and by the graces of righteousness shining upon you.

How satisfying to me, my equal, my bride. Your love is finest wine — intoxicating and thrilling. Your sweet, perfumed praises—so exotic, so pleasing. Your loving words are like honeycomb to me; your tongue releases milk and honey, *the Promised Land flows within you*.

The fragrance of your worshiping love surrounds you with scented robes of white. My darling bride, my private paradise, fastened to my heart. A secret spring are you no one else can have—my bubbling fountain hidden from public view. What a perfect partner to me now that I have you.

Your inward life is sprouting, bringing forth fruit. What a beautiful paradise unfolds within you. When I’m near you, I smell the finest spice, for many clusters of my exquisite fruit grow within your inner garden. Here are the nine: pomegranates of passion, henna from heaven, spikenard so sweet, saffron shining, fragrant calamus from the cross, sacred cinnamon, branches of scented woods, myrrh, like tears from a tree, and aloe as eagles ascending.

Your life flows into mine, pure as a garden spring. A well of living water springs up from within you, like a mountain brook flowing into my heart!  Then may your awakening breath blow upon my life until I am fully yours. Breathe upon me with your Spirit wind. Stir up the sweet spice of your life within me. Spare nothing as you make me your fruitful garden. Hold nothing back until I release your fragrance. Come walk with me as you walked with Adam in your paradise garden. Come taste the fruits of your life in me. I have come to you, my darling bride, for you are my paradise garden! Come walk with me until I am fully yours. Come taste the fruits of life in me.

(5:1) I have gathered from your heart, my equal, my bride, I have gathered from my garden all my sacred spices—even my myrrh. I have tasted and enjoyed my wine within you. I have tasted with pleasure my pure milk, my honeycomb, which you yield to me. I delight in gathering my sacred spice, all the fruits of my life I have gathered from within you, my paradise garden.

Come, all my friends—feast upon my bride, all you revelers of my palace. Feast on her, my lovers! Drink and drink, and drink again, until you can take no more. Drink the wine of her love. Take all you desire, you priests. My life within her will become your feast.

After this I let my devotion slumber, but my heart for him stayed awake. … I dreamed. I dreamed of my beloved—he was coming to me in the darkness of night. The melody of the man I love awakened me. I heard his knock at my heart’s door as he pleaded with me: Arise, my love.

Open your heart, my darling, deeper still to me. Will you receive me this dark night? There is no one else but you, my friend, my equal. I need you this night to arise and come be with me. You are my pure, loyal dove, a perfect partner. My flawless one, will you arise? For my heaviness and tears are more than I can bear. I have spent myself for you throughout the dark night.

I have laid aside my own garments for you. How could I take them up again since I’ve yielded my righteousness to yours? You have cleansed my life and taken me so far. Isn’t that enough?

My beloved reached into me to unlock my heart. The core of my very being trembled at his touch. How my soul melted when he spoke to me! My spirit arose to open for more of his touch. As I surrendered to him, I began to sense his fragrance—the fragrance of his suffering love! It was the sense of myrrh flowing all through me!

I opened my soul to my beloved, but suddenly he was gone! And my heart was torn out in longing for him. I sought his presence, his fragrance, but could not find him anywhere. I called out for him, yet he did not answer. I will arise and search for him until I find him. As I walked throughout the city in search of him, the overseers stopped me as they made their rounds. They beat and bruised me until I could take no more. They wounded me deeply and removed the covering from me.

Nevertheless, make me this promise, you brides-to-be: if you find my beloved, please tell him I endured all travails for him. I’ve been pierced through by love, and I will not be turned aside!

What love is this? How could you continue to care so deeply for him? Isn’t there another who could steal away your heart? We see your beauty, more beautiful than all the others. What makes your beloved better than any other? What is it about him that makes you ask us to promise you this?  He alone is my beloved. He shines in dazzling splendor yet so approachable—without equal as he stands above all others, outstanding among ten thousand!

The way he leads me is divine… so pure and dignified as he wears his crown of gold. Upon this crown are letters of black written on a background of glory. He sees everything with pure understanding. How beautiful his insights—without distortion. His eyes upon the fullness of the river of revelation, flowing so clean and pure.

Looking at his gentle face , such fullness of emotion. Like a lovely garden where fragrant spices grow—what a man! No one speaks words so anointed as this one—words that both pierce and heal, words like lilies dripping with myrrh. See how his hands hold unlimited power! But he never uses it in anger, for he is always holy, displaying his glory. His innermost place is a work of art—so beautiful and bright. How magnificent and noble is this one—covered in majesty!

He’s steadfast in all he does. His ways are the ways of righteousness, based on truth and holiness. None can rival him, but all are amazed by him. So sweet are his kisses, even his whispers of love. He is delightful in every way and perfect from every view. If you ask me why I love him so, O brides-to-be, it’s because there is none like him to me. Everything about him fills me with holy desire! And now he is my beloved—my friend forever.

(6:1) O rarest of beauty, where then has your lover gone? We long to see him too. Where may we find him? We will follow you as you seek after him. My lover has gone down into his garden of delight, the place where his spices grow, to feast with those pure in heart. I know we shall find him there.

He is within me—I am his garden of delight. I have him fully and now he fully has me! O my beloved, you are lovely. When I see you in your beauty, I see a radiant city where we will dwell as one. More pleasing than any pleasure, more delightful than any delight, you have ravished my heart, stealing away my strength to resist you. Even hosts of angels stand in awe of you.

Turn your eyes from me; I can’t take it anymore! I can’t resist the passion of these eyes that I adore. Overpowered by a glance, my ravished heart—undone. Held captive by your love, I am truly overcome! For your undying devotion to me is the most yielded sacrifice. The shining of your spirit shows how you have taken my truth to become balanced and complete. Your beautiful blushing cheeks reveal how real your passion is for me, even hidden behind your veil of humility.

I could have chosen any from among the vast multitude of royal ones who follow me. But one is my beloved dove—unrivaled in beauty, without equal, beyond compare, the perfect one, the favorite one. Others see your beauty and sing of your joy. Brides and queens chant your praise: “How blessed is she!”

Look at you now—arising as the dayspring of the dawn, fair as the shining moon. Brilliant as the sun in all its strength. Astonishing to behold as a majestic army waving banners of victory.

I decided to go down to the valley streams where the orchards of the king grow and mature. I longed to know if hearts were opening. Are the budding vines blooming with new growth? Has their springtime of passionate love arrived? Suddenly my longings transported me. My divine desire brought me next to my beloved prince, sitting with him in his royal chariot. We were lifted together!

Come back! Return to us, O maiden of his majesty. Dance for us as we gaze upon your beauty. Why would you seek a mere Shulamite like me? Why would you want to see my dance of love? Because you dance so gracefully, as though you danced with angels!

(7:1) How beautiful on the mountains are the sandaled feet of this one bringing such good news. You are truly royalty! The way you walk so gracefully in my ways displays such dignity. You are truly the poetry of God—his very handiwork.

Out of your innermost being is flowing the fullness of my Spirit—never failing to satisfy. Within your womb there is a birthing of harvest wheat; they are the sons and daughters nurtured by the purity you impart. How gracious you have become! Your life stands tall as a tower, like a shining light on a hill. Your revelation eyes are pure, like pools of refreshing—sparkling light for a multitude. Such discernment surrounds you, protecting you from the enemy’s advance.

Redeeming love crowns you as royalty. Your thoughts are full of life, wisdom, and virtue. Even a king is held captive by your beauty. How delicious is your fair beauty; it cannot be described as I count the delights you bring to me. Love has become the greatest. You stand in victory above the rest, stately and secure as you share with me your vineyard of love. Now I decree, I will ascend and arise. I will take hold of you with my power, possessing every part of my fruitful bride. Your love I will drink as wine, and your words will be mine. For your kisses of love are exhilarating, more than any delight I’ve known. Your kisses of love awaken the lips of sleeping ones. Now I know I am filled with my beloved and all his desires are fulfilled in me.

Come away, my lover. Come with me to the faraway fields. We will run away together to the forgotten places and show them redeeming love. Let us arise and run to the vineyards of your people and see if the budding vines of love are now in full bloom. We will discover if their passion is awakened. There I will display my love for you.

The love apples are in bloom, sending forth their fragrance of spring. The rarest of fruits are found at our doors—the new as well as the old. I have stored them for you, my lover-friend!

(8:1) If only I could show everyone this passionate desire I have for you. If only I could express it fully, no matter who was watching me, without shame or embarrassment.

I long to bring you to my innermost chamber—this holy sanctuary you have formed within me. O that I might carry you within me. I would give you the spiced wine of my love, this full cup of bliss that we share. We would drink our fill until . . .  His left hand cradles my head while his right hand holds me close. We are at rest in this love.

Promise me, brides-to-be, by the gentle gazelles and delicate deer, you’ll not disturb my love until he is ready to arise. Who is this one? Look at her now! She arises out of her desert, clinging to her beloved. When I awakened you under the apple tree, as you were feasting upon me, I awakened your innermost being with the travail of birth as you longed for more of me.

Fasten me upon your heart as a seal of fire forevermore. This living, consuming flame will seal you as my prisoner of love. My passion is stronger than the chains of death and the grave, all-consuming as the very flashes of fire from the burning heart of God. Place this fierce, unrelenting fire over your entire being.

Rivers of pain and persecution will never extinguish this flame. Endless floods will be unable to quench this raging fire burning within you. Everything will be consumed. It will stop at nothing as you yield everything to this furious fire until it won’t even seem to you like a sacrifice anymore.

My brothers said to me when I was young, *“Our sister is so immature. What will we do to guard her for her wedding day?”* We will build a tower of redemption to protect her. Since she is vulnerable, we will enclose her with a wall of cedar. But I have grown and become a bride, and my love for him has made me a tower of passion and contentment for my beloved. I am now a firm wall of protection for others, guarding them from harm. This is how he sees me—I am the one who brings him bliss, finding favor in his eyes.

My bridegroom-king has a vineyard of love made from a multitude of followers. His caretakers of this vineyard have given my beloved their best. But as for my own vineyard of love, I give it all to you forever. I will give double honor to those who serve my beloved and have watched over my soul. My beloved, one with me in my garden, how marvelous that my friends, the brides-to-be, now hear your voice and song. Let me now hear it again. Arise, my darling! Come quickly, my beloved. Come and be the graceful gazelle with me. Come be like a dancing deer with me. We will dance in the high place of the sky, yes, on the mountains of fragrant spice. Forever we shall be as one!

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## The New Jerusalem

Within the walled city, the Lord did as he promised; he made everything new. A new way of life arrived, one available to all who enter the city. Yet, murderers, liars, thieves, and those who live in sexual freedom, as they see it, as well as worshipers of power and greed, they do not allow inside the City.

How is this even possible?

The new Jerusalem may not be a real city, as many imagine, so says one writer; it does not descend onto earth literally. If it did, it would stretch miles beyond earth’s atmosphere into outer space. People there could not breathe! Thus, it’s likely spiritual.

One author says, what John describes in the Book of Revelation is a *spiritual* world, not a material world. To interpret the Revelation of Jesus to John does help us to understand “heaven” and “earth” as “sky” and “land” possibly. What John saw visually was not a new heaven and new earth, but perhaps a new sky and a new land: *the sky and land of the spiritual world.* Still, the angel is the one who measured the city, not John so, possibly the city is more than spiritual. If literal, then how *big* is the New Jerusalem according to Revelation 21:15-16?

The angel who was talking had a gold measuring rod with which to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city laid as a square its length equaled its width. He measured the city with a rod 12,000 stadia. Its length, width, and height equal.

Convert the ancient “stadia” into modern units, the city is about 1,400 miles in length, width, *and height!*

In the US, the New Jerusalem would stretch from Boston to Kansas City - halfway across the country.

Still, the best way to think about it and understand the 12,000 stadia, is to think of it as John and others in Bible times may have thought. These people lived in the ancient Near East, not North America. The horizons of their world were much smaller than ours.

Yet there was an awareness of more distant lands. John’s world stretched from the Persian Gulf and Red Sea in the south to the Black Sea in the north. To measure its distance, the world John lived in was about *1,400 miles across* from east to west and 1,000 miles from south to north, give or take a few feet.

John saw the new Jerusalem as 12,000 stadia (1,400 miles) long and wide and tall; it filled his entire world!

Is the New Jerusalem a spiritual era for everyone on earth with no religion, sect, no exclusion? That answer depends on what you believe from the Bible. It’s more like John Lennon than apostle John: *No hell below us, above us only sky; no religion . . . living life in peace*.

Even if this means no man-made religion, we still need Yeshua as Lord and Savior. Scripture says every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord. Those who confess this are the only ones allowed to enter the City of Light wherein Adonai dwells.

So, let the Spirit speak into each heart. Do not allow pride to rule, as did Lucifer. Ultimately, Lucifer ends up in the lake of fire, because it seems he never repents. Or, in my novel this seemingly impossible scenario, with God it is possible. Lucifer Morningstar Son of the Dawn does repent and return to heaven!

## Three heavens

The first heaven is our atmosphere wherein we live and serve the Lord one day. The Psalmist says, “therein fowls of the heaven lodge and sing among its [tree] branches” (Psa. 104:12).

The second heaven is the solar system: the sun, the moon, the stars, and planets (Gen. 1:14-18). The Psalmist says, “The heavens keep telling the wonders of God, the skies declare what he has done. Each day informs the following; each night declares the next.” (Psalm 19:1,2).

Some believe Satan dwells in the second heaven, yet there is no clear revelation as to when Satan fell, but here are possible time which can help us deduce from biblical evidence.

Based upon information of Ezekiel 28:12-19 compared with Isaiah 14, Jude 6, and 2 Peter 2:4, and others, two occasions occur where the Lord cast Satan out of Heaven; once with his angels, and once in the future. Since the ultimate fall of Satan is yet in the future (Revelation 9:1) Lucifer, himself, will one day fall under God’s judgment and be taken to Hell in the final judgment [Rev. 20:10].

A study of the passage of Revelation 12:7, 8, reveals the beginning of the ultimate doom of Satan. In pre-time (before creation of time), Satan’s early fall was from the immediate presence of God to the second heaven (cf. Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15; Eph. 6:10-12. Neither was there a place found in Heaven where he will never again have access to Heaven.

Regardless, in eternity, the Body of Christ occupies the second heaven and its seats of authority (Eph. 2:6).

The third heaven is God’s home. In the Scriptures it’s the heaven of heavens where angels worship and serve the Lord. As Nehemiah said, “You alone are the Lord, Creator of the heavens and all the stars… of the earth and those who live on it… of the ocean and its creatures… the source of life, praised by the stars.” (Neh. 9:6).

Caught up to the “third heaven” Paul received a revelation from the Lord of ‘the Mystery’ (2Cor. 12:1-4; Eph. 3:2,3). This realm he calls Paradise where we look to be absent from the body and to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-9), in the heaven of heavens.

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## Who is He?

Who is he really: Angel or Cherub, fallen or . . .?

In writing Lucifer Unbound, many ideas came after I’d written one of my first nonfiction books, “Angels and Demons, Principalities and Powers on earth as in heaven.” Curious about Lucifer, the bad-boy, I wondered what would happen if he were to repent and return to heaven, become a not-so-bad boy?

Well, that led me to seek out other opinions, many were people who refuse to give any credence to the idea of how hell’s ruler and first created cherub, could ever possibly find redemption. But I believe in the impossible for Yeshua once said, “With Adonai, all things are possible.”

If you’d like to know more about angels and demons and the real Lucifer, I’d like to offer my e-book to read for Free.

To get the Free e-book “Angels and Demons” send the request to my email: [brandyamarks@gmail.com](mailto:brandyamarks@gmail.com)