

Alizel and his friends spent time in nearly every corner of Heaven. They danced in the meadows, swam in the rivers, lounged in the treetops, and sometimes just soared over everything, gliding effortlessly and taking it all in. Pretty much the only place they didn't go was the throne room of God. Although they worshiped the Lord without ceasing and loved him dearly, sometimes His love for them was almost too strong. Feeling such beauty concentrated into a single room was too much for even an ordinary angel. It seemed only the Cherubim and Seraphim could stand such intensity. Those two orders of angels weren't like the rest of them. Seraphim seemed more 'normal,' almost as if they were just a better version of the other ranks of angels. Cherubim, on the other hand...well, it was almost as if they were a completely different species.

All of the ranks did spend a great deal of time at the Portal, just looking at the Realm of Matter. As it expanded it became more interesting, if only for its differences with Heaven. They took to calling the Realm of Matter "the Universe." It had a completely different set of physical laws than Heaven. It had one energy like Heaven, but that energy could take many forms. It was the attraction of gravity, and the attraction charge between positive and negative, between matter and antimatter. The energy could be stored as matter or released with the splitting or fusing of tiny particles. Heaven's one energy, though, only had one form. The Father himself radiated out all that the angels needed to survive. It was food, drink, sleep, light, purpose, and love. Alizel and indeed every other angel craved it, yet were satisfied at every moment. It was the water of eternal life.

One thing that angels did have in common with the Universe was time. Angels didn't age— they learned from the past, and increased in wisdom, but their bodies stayed the same.

At least... that was true for most angels.

Alizel and his friends were able to watch time passing in that other world, often going down to the Portal to watch it for years in one sitting.

They were always disappointed.

"Is it just going to stay like that forever?" Verin blurted out once, leaning over the railing. "If God created our world in an instant, why is this one taking so long?"

Verin was a good friend, but he never seemed satisfied. Alizel wasn't sure how,

but Verin's curiosity was different than their friend, Mupiel's. Mupiel was a blond Unranked angel who questioned everything, always wanting to know why everything happened. Verin always seemed like he needed to *make* something happen.

"Perhaps it's supposed to stay that way," Alizel offered, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh, yes," Verin replied, sweeping his hand around at the bright columns, flowing streams, and fiery energy that was home. "God who could make this beauty has nothing better to do than to make a big cloud of particles."

Alizel had to admit that he did have a point. It didn't make much sense. "Well, some of them are sticking together," Alizel noticed, pointing. Although angels couldn't speed up or slow down time in the new world, they could zoom in or out, seeing the entirety or the insides of the small particles made up of other smaller particles.

"Hallelujah!" Verin cried out, voice dripping with sarcasm. "That world so far exceeds ours that I might as well leave home and fly down there!"

He stood up on the edge of the pool, a slow, smooth grin coming to his face as he looked down on it. He looked around to see if it was safe. No one else was around. "I'm sure it wouldn't hurt..."

Before Alizel could stop him, Verin shot up into the air, streamlining his body and raising his green wings for the flap that would propel him into a nosedive across the shining surface of the barrier.

A golden and platinum streak arced out of nowhere and slammed into Verin's body as his wings were in mid flap. The streak hurtled him to the ground and pinned him under the golden armor.

"What do you think you are doing?" the Power bellowed at him. "You know entering the Realm of Matter is forbidden!"

"How... dare you touch me," Verin stammered, shaking to get the words out. "I'm a Virtue." It was true; technically he was more highly ranked than the Power sitting on top of him. "Besides, I thought we were to go there."

Azazel's armor dug into his chest. Verin winced.

"I bow to no rank. As the guardian of Heaven, I am free to challenge any who dares set foot in the Universe."

Alizel cringed for his friend. Of all the angels to run afoul of, Verin had to pick this one. Azazel was not someone to get on your bad side. He was head of the Powers, the group of angels that guarded the borders of Heaven. They all wore armor and red sashes with a platinum “P” emblazoned over their shoulders. With the way that they carried themselves, a piece of cloth denoting their rank was unnecessary.

Up to this point, Heaven had never been under attack, but apparently they even needed to be protected from themselves.

“We are to go there,” Azazel informed, although by the tone of his voice it was obvious that he had not bought Verin’s excuse and did not really respect his authority. “But the time is not yet. The world is too young.”

He still had not relaxed his hold on Verin’s body.

“Do you have any idea what would happen if you went there now?” Azazel growled.

Verin shook his head. “I thought we couldn’t really change that world. Just in the tiniest ways.”

Azazel’s silver eyes hardened. “It’s too early. Even quantum changes now could throw the entire plan off course.”

He sat up, finally relaxing his grip on the Virtue. “Do you want that? Do you want to destroy everything God has worked to make?”

“No... no, sir. I’m sorry, sir. It won’t happen again.”

“Be sure that it doesn’t.” Azazel got up and straightened out his robes under his shining armor. “Next time I will not be so forgiving.”

Then he was gone, almost as quickly as he had arrived. The gardens were bright, the streams flowed and swirled, and peace was in the air. Except for Verin cowering on the ground next to the pool, it was like the whole incident never happened.

Verin put his palm to the ground and pushed himself up to his knees, visibly shaken. He turned to Alizel and raised his eyes without speaking.

Azazel had been so fast, so sure. If there ever were any threats, Alizel felt confident with him leading the defense of Heaven. Alizel shrugged. “At least it looks like they got the right angel for the job.”

