

THE LANARK
CHRONICLES

BOOK THREE

HEAVEN'S WRATH

-W.D. McKay-

Chapter One

They said he would die tomorrow.

How could they say such a thing? So cold and callous, as if it didn't matter. Just something routine and ordinary, passed off with a shrug of indifference. Damn doctors. But it does matter – very much. He's my father. If he dies, what then?

Isokee Babani couldn't clear her mind, struggling night after night to get some sleep. It always turned out the same. Flopping around on her bed in the darkness of her bedroom on the second floor of her father's house. She'd already soaked the pillowcase and the floor was littered with soggy tissues; she wiped the flannel sleeve of her nightshirt across her face for the hundredth time, her eyes aching.

My father is going to die. Ali Babani. The war hero, the statesman, the gentleman . . . My dad is going to die. God damn it. Lying on her back, she stared across the room to the open window. The curtains whispered occasionally, catching the last of the cool night breeze. It didn't soothe her.

The doctors had said there was nothing more they could do. The tumours had ravaged him so, reducing this dynamic and vibrant man to a mere shadow. A wisp in the wind. It wasn't fair. Nothing was fair. *First my mom, killed by a drunk driver that almost killed me too. But, instead, only managed to cripple me. How fortunate some said...*

And now my father is at death's door. Damn it, he's only sixty-three. Still has his teeth, most of his hair, a razor sharp mind, and an ocean of friends. And instead of being here with me, he's in Lanark General, unconscious and looking like he's wired for sound. Just waiting to die.

She wiped her nose and grabbed a fresh tissue. Thinking of her leg made her think of Bobbi. *My wonderful Bobbi. My best friend. The one who healed my leg. I miss you so much. Gone so long with no word, what happened to you?* Isokee curled up under the thick green comforter. *3:14. Crap. I have to get some sleep.* She closed her eyes.

Outside, the crickets finally subsided their nightly chirping ritual and all was quiet. Inside, sheer exhaustion brought the desperately needed, though fitful, sleep to Isokee.

After a time, she rolled back to face the window, roused slightly, and opened the eye that wasn't buried in the pillow. Squinting into the dark, she realized someone was in the room looking at her. Her eyes flew open, but she felt too paralysed with fear to move, or even breathe.

"Sorry, I startled you," came the soft female voice. "It's me. Bobbi."

Isokee exhaled. "Oh lord, you scared the crap out of me." Her voice was shaking. "How did you get in here?"

“Through the atrium in the back. You really should get that lock fixed,” said

Bobbi, smiling at her friend. *That should satisfy her.*

“When did you get back?” asked Isokee.

“Just now,” replied Bobbi, crossing the room and sitting down on the end of the bed. “You don’t look so hot.”

Isokee welled up. “It’s my dad,” she choked. “He’s dying.”

“Kee, isn’t there anything they can do?”

“No,” she blubbered. “He won’t last another day.”

Bobbi was silent for a long moment. “I’m so sorry, Kee.” It was all she could think of to say.

Bobbi sat quietly for a long time, looking at her worn out friend. When she could see she was finally drifting to sleep, Bobbi bent over Isokee and gently kissed her cheek, whispering, “Kee, I made you a promise.”

Isokee heard the words but was too exhausted to respond as she drifted off.

Stretched out on her bed in her room on Fury, Bobbi yawned and smiled contentedly to herself. Rolling over, she pulled the covers up and whispered,

“Goodnight, Kee.”

The next morning, the wrens and jays were rejoicing noisily, welcoming the new day to Lanark. Isokee opened her eyes. The sun beamed brilliant shafts of warmth into her room. Normally this would have brought a smile to her lips, but not today. Stretching, she kicked off the covers and sat up, surprised at how refreshed she felt.

She glanced at the clock. *10:02. Crap. I was supposed to be at the hospital an hour ago.*

Jumping up, she raced through her shower, threw on some clothes, and grabbed her car keys. She pulled the front door closed behind her, locking it, just as the phone in the hallway rang. *Damn.* She pressed her ear to the stained glass and listened for the answering machine to kick in on the fourth ring.

“This is Lanark General Hospital calling with a message for Isokee Babani. You need to come to the hospital right away.” The machine clicked off.

Isokee closed her eyes for a moment, leaning heavily against the front door.

This is it. Blowing out a breath, she headed to her car.

Cross-town traffic was light and she pulled in at the General ten minutes later.

Dr. Michaels spotted Isokee immediately, just outside the Intensive Care Unit. Momentarily tied up with another patient, he waved a hand to usher her into the unit. Isokee pushed open the heavy double doors, heading to her father’s room at the end of the hall. It was strangely quiet.

Reaching IC-7, she stopped outside the door and gathered herself. The phone message had frightened her. It might already be too late.

Taking a deep breath, she hesitantly pushed the door open wide and stepped into the room. Her mouth dropped open as she gasped for air, her head spinning at the sight. Bracing herself against the wall with one hand, she thought, *I’m going to faint.*

Sitting up on the bed, with his long legs dangling over the side and a smile on his face, was Ali Babani.

Isokee blinked hard several times, certain she must be dreaming. She wasn't.

"Hi angel face," said her father.

"Hi . . . Dad." Isokee stared in disbelief. "What are you doing?"

"Just sittin'," replied the statesman. "And enjoying this beautiful morning sunshine."

Isokee rushed to him.

Ali swept her up in his arms, tears of joy overwhelming them. His hug was like it had always been. Strong, comforting, safe. She couldn't believe it.

"Here," said Isokee after a minute, reaching for the tissue box on the bedside and pulling several out for herself. "I'm going to get you soaked," she wailed.

"Don't care, sweetheart. They're the best tears I've ever known."

Isokee choked, "They phoned the house. Said to get here right away. I . . . I thought you were dead." She reached for another hug. "Oh Daddy, I've been so afraid."

"Me too, child. Me too."

"What . . . I mean . . . How is this possible?" asked Kee.

Ali shook his head. "Not really sure. I felt sure last night was going to be my last, and maybe it was. It's all very foggy. But then I had the strangest dream. A young girl in white came to me. She looked like an angel, all shimmery and bright. I thought she'd come to take me. But I knew that couldn't be right because angels – at least the ones I've heard of – have wings. So that means she could only have been a ghost."

Ali paused, lost in that thought for a moment. "Anyway, we sat and talked for the longest time . . . about what, I don't remember. When she got up to go, she said

'Tell Kee to finish the labyrinth.' That was all, just 'Finish the labyrinth.'" Ali shrugged. "And then I woke up."

Kee listened intently. "It was Bobbi."

"Bobbi? How can that be? She's not even here."

"Oh, she was. Somehow . . . she was."

"Well, be that as it may, as far as I'm concerned, it's a miracle."

Isokee relented, overjoyed at her father's recovery. "Indeed."

Just then Dr. Michaels flew into the room, brimming. "Ali, we just received all the tests back. They're perfect. The tumours have completely vanished." He paused to catch his breath. "I've never seen anything like it."

I have, thought Kee, beaming.

"So I can go home, Doc?"

"Absolutely. Isokee, you ready to take your dad home?"

"Am I ever!" said Kee.

Ali hopped off the bed. "Man this feels good." He strode to the curtains and threw them the rest of the way open. "A perfect day, brilliant sun and green sky," he said softly. Looking to the sky, he added a quiet, "Thank you."

Isokee blushed a little and turned away from her dad. "You'd better get dressed, that gown is a little too . . . a little too . . ."

Ali spun around quickly. "Oh my gosh," he blurted, grasping tightly to the flimsy hospital gown. "Sorry about that."

"I'll wait outside," smiled Kee.

“Your clothes are in the locker there,” said Dr. Michaels. “Are you sure you can manage?”

“After what I’ve been through lately, getting dressed is a piece of cake.” Ali stepped up to the doctor and extended his hand. “Thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.”

“Just take care of yourself, Ali. I don’t want to see you in here again.”

Out in the hall, Isokee asked Dr. Michaels, “Is he really alright?”

“Isokee, I don’t know how this happened but he is now in excellent health. Low blood pressure, normal cholesterol, strong heart, no trace of the tumours, all the blood tests check out. All in all, he’s in perfect health. Personally, I think he’s a medical miracle.”

“Thanks, Doc,” said Kee as the doctor turned and headed back up the hallway.

“Thank you, Bobbi,” whispered Kee as her eyes started to well, feeling a familiar, comforting warmth cross her mind.

Countless light years away, there wasn’t much to be thankful for. Tawni’s heart was pounding as she tried to slow her breathing, still unable to clear her mind of how close she’d come to dying. She had no idea how much time had passed. The images and feelings rained down on her incessantly. The most disturbing was the terror she’d felt as the view port began to splinter. And, moments away from shattering, it was only her instantaneous reaction, slamming the control panel buttons with her fist to close the metallic shutters, that saved her. She could still feel how the

pounding in her head had almost blinded her with fear as she shot across the escape capsule making sure the two other view ports were still intact. She closed the shutters.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she worked to push the images from her mind. *I wish Mom, and Bobbi, and Auntie were here. And I wish I knew why I had to be alone in this stupid thing.* Staring blankly at her left foot, Tawni was suddenly jarred out of her reverie by a sharp, intermittent alarm buzz.

“Shit,” she exclaimed, jumping up. “What now?”

The small control panel on the opposite side of the forty-by-fifteen-foot escape capsule was flashing at her.

Standing over the dozens of meaningless lights and read-outs, she focused on the red one, flashing brilliantly in the upper left corner. Bending slightly, she could read the digitally blinking message: *Proximity Alert!* She pushed the button beside the message and the alarm stopped.

She pursed her lips and pushed her bangs out of her eyes. “Proximity alert?” she muttered. “What the hell does that mean?” She continued staring at the light, thinking. *There’s nothing out here. Just me, all alone in this stupid spaceship. Drifting through space. Just—*

She gasped. *Something’s out there.* Her eyes widened, suddenly afraid. *Oh God! Something’s out there!*

She recoiled from the control console and reeled in her fears. *Hold it a second. Perhaps it’s Grandfather or a friend of his.* She paused. *That’s it—he’s come for me. At last . . . at long last. That must to be it. No one else knows I’m out here. Of course, he’s come for me. Who else could it possibly be?*

Crossing over to one of the undamaged view ports, Tawni took a deep breath and opened the shutter. She pressed her face to the glass and looked all around, as much as she could. Blackness. Nothing.

She glanced back at the control panel, still flashing red. *Maybe it's malfunctioning*, she hoped. Frowning, she began to hear faint clattering coming from outside the ship. Growing louder and harder, it reminded her of intense hail. Returning to the view port, Tawni watched as rocks and ragged chunks of ice slammed into the ship.

All at once, something caught her eye directly overhead. Something glowing. She pressed her nose into the glass. Her view quickly filled, shifting from grey to white. The hammering was almost deafening.

She didn't have time for another thought as, a second later, everything went black and she screamed.