

By the Waters of Kadesh

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*I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*

Psalm 91.2

One

8th day of Ziv, Spring
Wilderness of Zin

Tirzah slipped out of the tent, her bare feet sinking into the warm, coarse sand. She dragged the flaps down and tied them together to shut out the fading evening light, and tiptoed away. She cast a look at Gaddiel sitting on the other side of the campfire as she sank to the ground and reached for a cold manna cake from the stack on the plate. The sweet, honeyed taste filled her mouth as she bit into it.

She glanced past the rows of tents at the barren sand surrounding them as she chewed. Not a single sign of life broke through the gravelly sand; nothing could endure the blistering sun or evaporating winds of summer. Very little had survived the long, dry season of her life, either.

The setting summer sun cast long, twisted shadows of the flames onto her tent. The fire danced and skipped. When was the last time she had that much energy? She was tired... so tired. She could barely hold her head up to take another bite. How did she get to this point? Why did Yahweh let things get this bad?

She shoved the rest of the cake in her mouth. At least she liked the taste of manna, unlike most of those around her. One more and then a little goat's milk. Maybe she could get some sleep tonight.

She closed her eyes and let her head fall onto her raised knees, her long hair tumbling about her shoulders.

A plaintive cry broke the stillness.

Naomi. Tears pooled in Tirzah's eyes. She delayed one more moment before putting her hand to the hot ground to push herself up.

Gaddiel glared at her, his dark eyes flashing from beneath bushy brows.

"I'm sorry. I'll quiet her."

Her brother-in-law rose and disappeared into his own tent, pitched next to hers.

She hustled into the tent. The child sat on her mat, eyes darting about, breathing raggedly, tears streaming down her face.

"Hush, *habibti*. Back to sleep."

"I'm scared." Naomi rubbed her fists into her eyes.

"I know. But it's all right. I'm here now. Back to sleep." Tirzah eased her back down and lay next to her. She pulled her close and rubbed circles on the little girl's tummy to comfort her until the child, not fully awake, rolled over and drifted off.

Her twin sister lay fast asleep on the other side of her, undisturbed by the noise and movement.

But Tirzah stared at the green stripe around the tent's roof for hours.

Again.



Morning forced its way into the tent early. Tirzah peeked out and squinted as the sun bounced off the desert floor and into her eyes. A long-eared owl screeched as it returned to its nest after the night's hunt. She shaded her eyes and looked above her. The glowing cloud of Yahweh's presence hovered protectively over the camp, and the scent of burning wood and hot manna surrounded her. Sighing, she crawled out.

She gathered a few twigs of dry brush and started a small fire, just enough to boil water. After quickly gathering the day's manna, she tossed it into the pot and stirred it into a thick dough. She deftly formed it into cakes and placed them on a pan.

Keren stumbled out of the tent.

Tirzah turned from the fire and stretched out her arms. "Up first as usual, I see." She pulled her daughter to her. The best part of her day. "Your sister still asleep?"

"Uh huh. Should I wake her up?" Keren ran her hands through her hair, leaving it sticking out in several places.

Tirzah chuckled and tried to smooth Keren's locks, but the long, brown waves refused to stay behind her ears. "Yes, please. We have to go soon." She flipped the cakes over.

"Again?" Keren scrunched up her face and threw her head back.

"Don't whine, *habibti*. It won't help. You know we have to follow the cloud." Tirzah jabbed a finger at the sky with one hand and shoed Keren into the tent with the other.

Keren disappeared inside and a few moments later reemerged with her sister.

Naomi draped herself around Tirzah. "Morning, *Imma*." She pulled back and kissed her mother.

"Good morning, *habibti*. Did you sleep well?" She already knew the answer to her question. Naomi had awakened crying twice more.

"No. Had bad dreams again."

Tirzah pushed Naomi's hair from her eyes. "I'm sorry. Have some manna. We have to walk soon." She gave each girl a cake, wrapping their little hands around them. "I made them big again so you only have to keep track of one. Hang on to them. Both hands."

She stood to strike the tent. First she tossed out the sleeping mats and their other meager possessions, then the willow poles. Sounds of collapsing tents, braying animals, and crying children filled the air.

Thank Yahweh for the army tents Moses had appropriated for them at their first campsite fourteen months ago the night of the escape. Succoth was a large training ground for the Egyptians, stocked with tents and other needed supplies. There were more than enough tents for the Israelites, and they were easy to put up and take down, which was especially nice when no one was around to help. When the tent collapsed, she folded it neatly into a square and placed it into its pouch.

She loaded everything onto their donkey. “I don’t know what I’d do without you, Benjamin. I couldn’t possibly carry everything. I can barely keep up as it is.” She stroked his neck and offered him water. When he finished drinking, she tied the bowl to the last pack.

The rest of her tribe had started without her, including Gaddiel. She breathed evenly, resisting the anger rising within her. It didn’t do any good. He demanded she cook for him three times a day, but never once had he lifted a finger to help her. When her husband was alive, he never had either. Since Gaddiel inherited all of Jediel’s property upon his death, she had to do his bidding just to be able to live in the tent and keep the donkey and one sheep. And he made it clear he thought he was generous with that.

Tirzah slipped the girls’ sandals on their tiny feet, then picked up Keren and set her on top of the gear she’d strapped to Benjamin. She placed Naomi in front of Keren and the packs. “Hold on tight, girls.” After checking the ropes attaching the sheep to Benjamin, she picked up his lead rope and began the long, hot walk.



Kamose brushed the dust from his face, dust kicked up by hundreds of thousands of sandaled feet, hooves, and wooden wheels. He loosed the leather thong at the base of his neck and ran his hands through his thick hair; they came away covered in grime. Soldiers walked for

hours without kicking up dust. Why couldn't these people learn to pick up their feet?

His stomach growled and his legs ached. Eleven months in a lush valley at the foot of Mt. Sinai had made his warrior's body soft, and now days of desert marching had taken their toll. He retied his hair and smiled as he recalled the place that had been his home for nearly a year.

Ahmore tugged on his hand. "Uncle Kamose, will you carry me? I haven't asked for two days. Just for a little while?"

He grinned at the boy. "How old are you now?"

"Nine. Just for a little while? Please?"

Kamose swung the child onto his shoulders and grabbed his dirty feet.

"Can't we stop yet? It looks the same as where we camped last night." Ahmore rested his chin on his uncle's head.

"We stop where the cloud stops, you know that. Where's your pack?"

"Bezalel traded some of the jewelry he made for a donkey. He put all the packs and tents on it so he can help Meri carry baby Adi. You can put yours on it, too, if you want."

"Sounds like a good trade for him."

More and more brush appeared under their feet, and soon tiny, yellow desert flowers sprang up here and there. Tall treetops appeared in the distance.

"I think we're almost there, *habibi*. I see date palms, and it looks like the cloud has stopped." He gazed up at the glowing, puffy gift of Yahweh, thankful for its protection from the blazing late summer sun. "We should check with Joshua."

Up at the front of the group, Joshua's lean form was a stark contrast to Moses's shorter, stockier body. But even at eighty years old, Moses had no trouble keeping up with his young assistant.

Joshua dropped back from Moses and fell in step with Kamose.

“Moses says we’ll camp at Kadesh Barnea tonight. It’s an abundant oasis with four springs. There will be plenty of water for everyone, and all the animals, too. From there we’ll enter Canaan.”

“I know it well. I headquartered there many times when I was in the army.”



Kamose and Bezalel tossed packs from the donkey as they waited for the Levites to mark off the outer court of the tabernacle. Several of the Levites laid down silver sockets in an enormous rectangle, and others followed, attaching the silver-plated acacia wood pillars. Behind them came still more Levites, connecting fabric to the tops of the pillars and stretching it out to the ground at an angle, forming a wall around the moveable dwelling that housed the presence of Yahweh.

“Ever tire of watching them build it?” Kamose glanced at Bezalel as they stood on the edge of the activity.

Bezalel shifted five-month-old Adi higher on his chest, then shook his head. “No. I am still amazed I had anything to do with it at all. I think my grandfather was right, that Yahweh planned this to be my life from the start, and that’s why I spent so much of it enslaved as an artisan in the palace. I hated it, but I learned everything I needed to know.” He smiled. “And I found Meri. And Ahmose, and you.”

Moses’s tent was on the first row, facing the tabernacle with the rest of the Levites and priests. Leaving room for a walkway between Moses’s tent and the courtyard wall, Kamose pitched the tent he shared with Joshua and Ahmose with its back to Moses’s. Another row was setting up facing theirs with room for campfires in between. All around the tabernacle, in vast rectangles, the tribes set up their tents in neat rows. Judah was directly east, with Issachar and Zebulun on either side. Reuben, Simeon, and Gad were to the south.

Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manassah camped to the west and Asher, Naphtali, and Dan settled north of the tabernacle.

Kamose snapped the willow poles into place and stretched the tent over them almost without thought. After doing it eleven days in a row, he could do it in his sleep.

He grabbed the corner of Bezalel's tent and helped him finish. "Are we putting up a tent for your mother this time?"

"Yes, but I'm not sure if she'll stay in it. She's been spending so much time with the midwives. I think she likes it there, likes being needed. She'll be around often enough, though. She can't stay away from her granddaughter very long." He laughed as he glanced at Meri, who sat nearby with baby Adi.

"Uncle Kamose!" Ahmose bounded up to him. His dark eyes sparkled, and some of his straight black hair had escaped its leather tie. "They said there's a spring! Can we go see?" The child bounced on his heels.

Kamose chuckled. Where did the young get their energy? "Yes, we can go see. Where is your pack?"

Ahmose looked from side to side. "I don't know. I put it down somewhere . . ."

Kamose folded his arms over his chest and waited. "When you find it and put it in the tent, we can go."

"Yes, Uncle." Ahmose scurried away and returned almost instantly. He threw his bag in the tent. "Now can we go?"

Kamose chuckled and tousled the boy's hair. "Yes, habibi, we can go." They walked north through the neat rows of tents springing up, then out of camp northeast, toward the sound of rushing water. The terrain around them grew greener the nearer they drew to the water.

A massive spring bubbled up through the desert floor. Date palms soared into the sky, bunches of round, brown fruit weighing down long branches toward the sand. Scruffy, gray-green broom bushes bordered the water on all sides. Brown babblers with curved bills and

long tails bounced on tiny feet looking for insects, hopping around each other in an intricate dance. Petite scrub warblers hid in the brush, poking their streaked heads out for only a moment before pulling them back into the dull foliage.

Ahmore dropped to his knees at the edge of the spring and scooped handfuls of water into his mouth.

Bezalel grabbed him by the neck of his short tunic and pulled him back. "You'll make yourself sick. Slow down."

Kamose looked over his shoulder and pointed west. "There's another spring further west, then two springs south of here, to the east of camp. And several more on the south side of camp that are smaller and not as sweet that will serve the animals. Joshua says we'll be here only until we establish a camp inside Canaan."

"It's not as lush as Sinai, but it will be better than it has been the last two months." Bezalel wandered off toward the eastern end of the large pool. As he passed a broom bush, a group of babblers escaped from the shrub, and Ahmore chased them into the shallow edge of the water, their chirps mingling with his laughter.

Kamose smiled at his carefree nephew, then raised his gaze and scanned the horizon to the north. On the edge of the foreboding desert, slopes turned into hills, and those turned into mountains.

Bezalel returned. "There's a stream connecting this spring to the next one. It's not huge, but it's running water."

"Depending on the time of year, there's one running between all of them. This is a popular spot on several trade routes. It's been fought over for generations."

"Looks like the desert is coming to an end." Bezalel pointed toward the north.

Kamose nodded. "Yes, they'll have to choose wisely when they decide who will be first to go in."

Disappointment pierced his heart like a dagger. One thing was certain. It wouldn't be him.

10 Ziv

The shrill blast of the trumpet awakened Gaddiel after a restless night. He shook his head to dislodge the fog. His sister-in-law's annoying little girl had cried most of the night. Even in his own tent he could hear her. Couldn't they have called for a meeting some other morning?

One sounding of the trumpet. That meant only the tribal leaders were called to the meeting, not the entire assembly. Gaddiel sat up, stretched, then reached for the water skin. He took a long draw, tossed the nearly empty skin to a corner, then kicked aside the long-sleeved *tharwb* he used for a light blanket, and crawled out.

Tirzah had already arisen and prepared manna. He grabbed a bowl and filled it with the warm meal. He stuffed it down, but the sweet flavor couldn't improve his sour mood.

On the way to the gate of the tabernacle he caught up with Eliab. "Good morning, Gaddiel." Eliab's strong, deep voice belied his age.

Gaddiel looked down at the man. "Good morning, Elder. Do you have any idea what the meeting is about?"

"We are on the edge of Canaan. I assume we will discuss plans for entering the land Yahweh has promised us."

Couldn't Eliab walk any faster? Old age and short legs—not a good combination. Gaddiel wanted to get to the gate and find out why they had been summoned.

Palti of Benjamin and Shammua of Reuben joined them. From all directions, elders headed toward the tabernacle courtyard in the center of camp. Within moments, a crowd of seventy sat in front of the western gate. Moses and Aaron made seventy-two: six leaders from each tribe—a head elder and five others.

Gaddiel rubbed his beard as he surveyed the men. The head elders were generally at least as old as he was, except for Nahshon. When

Nahshon's father, Amminidab, died, the eldership of Judah passed to him. Nahshon had proved to be a strong leader at the battle over the golden calf at Sinai, and even at the age of twenty-one, all of Judah was willing to follow him. Of course the fact that his half-sister had married Aaron didn't hurt. Gaddiel scoffed. In ten years Nahshon might be a good leader, but now?

The other leaders were a varied group, some younger, like Gaddiel, some older. Together they ruled their tribes, settled disputes, and offered wisdom. Gaddiel was an elder, but only because of his lineage. If he were going to make a name for himself, this would be the time to do it. He needed to stand out. He shoved his way to the front.

Moses stepped out from the courtyard. He faced his leaders and smiled. His weathered face evidenced the struggles of eighty years as both prince and shepherd. "Generations ago, Yahweh made promises to Abraham. He promised to bless him, to make him the father of a great nation, to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the seashore. He said He would give him the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

"Fourteen months ago, Yahweh kept the promises He made to Abraham. He heard our cries and redeemed us from slavery at the hands of Egypt. He made us His people at Mt. Sinai. And now Canaan awaits us just over those hills." Moses lifted his right arm, pointing his staff north beyond the tents of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. "It has been a long journey, but it is nearly over. Yahweh has given us this land. All we must do is go in and take it. I have told Joshua to ready an army—"

"Wait, wait, wait!" Gaddiel stood and addressed the crowd, waving his arms.

Moses raised a brow at the interruption, but Gaddiel pressed on.

"We can't just go in there with an army. We have no idea what awaits us. We could be slaughtered. I insist we send in spies first."

Sethur jumped up. “I agree. I’ll not let any Asherites attack without advance information.”

Joshua rose, spreading his hands wide. “But Yahweh has already given us the land. There is nothing to fear. It doesn’t matter what we find. Yahweh has promised us the victory. Remember what He has done for us already. Has He yet broken a promise?”

Murmurs of assent bubbled up around Gaddiel. “Joshua’s right. We must trust. Yahweh parted the *Yam Suph*, killed the Egyptian army. He’ll give us this land.”

Gaddiel was not going to let Joshua—another child, like Nahshon—take over. Joshua had taken all the glory so far—at the battles at Rephidim and Sinai, going up Mt. Sinai with Moses, insinuating his way into prominence like a Nile viper. Even his tent was next to Moses’s. Everyone in camp knew the name “Joshua,” and Gaddiel had had enough.

“No!” He pounded his fist into his open hand. “We’ve been through two battles already. We all know what it’s like to carry a weapon and use it on another man. We’ve all had blood on our swords, our hands, our clothes. If there is something we can do to minimize the fighting, the killing, the dying, why wouldn’t we do it? Yahweh gave us the power to think and to reason. Surely He does not expect us to run in blindly and risk our lives, risk leaving our women and children widowed and fatherless. No, we must send in spies.”

Eliab stood. “He makes sense. I stand with him. Zebulun will not attack without information from spies.”

Nahshon took a spot near Joshua. “Judah stands with Joshua. We obey Yahweh.”

Moses raised his hand. “That’s enough. This will not be put to a vote. I must talk to Yahweh. Return to your tents until the trumpet sounds again.”

The elders dispersed.

Gaddiel winced. Perhaps he should have kept his mouth shut. He had taken a huge risk. But then again, without risk, nothing could be gained... and the gain he sought was status.

No matter what it took.

Two

Kamose slid his dagger down the length of the willow branch a final time, removing the last of the twigs and knots, making it as smooth as possible. He ran his fingers down the branch, then took an end in each hand and flexed it. Satisfied, he tossed it in a pile with the rest of the replacement poles. Anything to keep busy.

Nahshon strode toward Kamose. “We need your help.”

Kamose sheathed his blade. “Why?”

Nahshon picked up one of the poles. “I’ve just come from the assembly. It has been suggested we send spies into Canaan before we send in men to take the land.”

Fists on his hips, Kamose studied his sandaled feet. It wasn’t a bad idea. He would have made the same decision himself had he planned this conquest as a commander in Egypt. The problem was, he hadn’t planned it. Yahweh had.

He returned his gaze to Nahshon, and saw the same dilemma in Nahshon’s eyes.

“What do Moses and Joshua say?”

“Moses is bewildered. Joshua is angry.”

Kamose smiled. Anger was exactly the reaction he expected from his young friend. “What do you need from me?”

“They want to talk to you.”

“What can I do?”

“They want a professional soldier’s perspective. And you’re the only one we’ve got.”

“Lead the way.” Kamose followed Nahshon back to Moses’s tent. “What do you think should be done?”

Nahshon shrugged. “I don’t know. I’m glad it’s not my decision.”

They reached Moses’s tent and Nahshon pulled back the tent flaps. Moses and Joshua sat waiting for them.

Kamose sat on a cushion facing them, next to Nahshon. “I thought Yahweh promised to deliver the land to you.”

Joshua scowled. “He did, but the people are uncomfortable going in without information.” He threw his hand in the air and blew out his frustration. “They will not trust Him.”

Kamose turned to Moses. “What do you think?”

The strain of his decision showed in Moses’s eyes, and he raked his hand through the white hair that barely touched his shoulders. “I didn’t expect this reaction. I know the people have complained constantly since we left Egypt. But I thought once we reached here, where we can see Canaan, where we are two days from entering the land, that they would go in and take it as Yahweh said. I did not expect this delay.” He rubbed his hand over his clean-shaven face.

Kamose chuckled to himself. Moses had to be the only Hebrew who shaved every day—a habit he still practiced from his life as an Egyptian prince.

Moses interrupted Kamose’s thoughts. “What is your advice, Kamose?”

“Spies are a common military tactic. I have often been part of a scouting mission. But I cannot make this decision.”

Joshua repeatedly flicked his thumb across the tip of his spear as he looked north toward the hills. “Do you think it would help?”

Kamose studied his friend for a moment before he spoke. “You may feel it is not necessary. But perhaps the people don’t have the

faith you do. You can see a future that does not yet exist. Most men cannot.” He shrugged. “If you let them go and see the land first, maybe they will have the faith they’ll need when it comes time to attack.”

Moses sat silently for several moments. Then he stood, pulling himself up with the shepherd’s staff he was never without. “We will send in spies. We must begin immediately. Kamose, I want you to train them.”

Kamose nodded. “Who will go?”

“Joshua will be one of them. Any thoughts on the others?”

Kamose drew a deep breath. “I think you need to begin making distinctions among your elders between leaders and warriors. Joshua is a good choice. He is a fighter.” He paused. “I would not send Nahshon.”

“Agreed,” Moses said.

Nahshon jumped up, eyes flashing. “Why not? I fought as well as any of you.”

Moses crossed to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “You are a leader. Your people look to you for guidance. We need you here.” He left the tent.

“It’s not an insult, Nahshon.” Kamose spoke quietly. “You are too important to risk.”

Nahshon sat and huffed, resting his forearms on his knees.

Joshua leaned closer to Kamose. “I want you to tell us what we need to look for, how to get that information, and most importantly, how to survive.”

Kamose nodded. “When do you want to start?”

“As soon as possible.”

“Is there a way to meet the spies before training begins?”

Joshua shrugged. “Sure. But why?”

“Men act differently in the field, around other men. This will allow me to get to know them a bit before training starts. I can meet

with each one tomorrow, and the next day is the Sabbath. We can start the next day. We'll meet north of camp."

Joshua chuckled. "This is exactly why we need you."



Gaddiel paced in front of his tent. It could go either way. If Moses agreed to send spies, Gaddiel would look brilliant. It was, after all, his idea. But if not, he would appear a menace.

His thoughts were interrupted by the call of the trumpet. Judgment time. He headed toward the center of camp, willing himself to take measured steps.

He reached the entrance to the courtyard. Moses was not waiting. The time stretched out. Where was Moses? He called them here; he must have a decision. Sweat beaded on Gaddiel's brow. He clenched and unclenched his jaw, resisted pacing. His shoulders began to ache.

Finally, Moses emerged from the inner court. "I have spoken to Yahweh. I have considered the matter. I have sought advice." He paused—for far too long—and looked at the group assembled before him. "We will send scouts ahead."

Gaddiel bit his lip to keep from smiling too broadly. Tension flowed from his body.

"Each tribe will choose one scout, a leader. You will receive more instructions later."

One scout? The strain returned, wrapping itself around his body like a snake. Gaddiel cracked the knuckles of his right hand with his thumb.

Outside the tabernacle gate the seventy split into their tribes.

Gaddiel turned to Eliab, Jacob, and the others. "I should go from Zebulun."

Jacob snorted, fists on his hips. "Why you? Why not me?"

Gaddiel glared at him. "You have a young wife and a new baby.

What would Miriam say if you went home and told her you were going to spy out a land full of unknown dangers, and would be gone for who knows how long?”

Jacob folded his arms over his chest, lips pressed into a thin line.

One down. Four to go.

Eleazar shook his head. “I don’t want to go. My leg will not allow me to climb those cliffs.”

Matthias agreed. “Nor I. I also have a new baby.”

Two more out of contention. Eliab couldn’t possibly want to go. Gaddiel tried to keep his face blank as he looked to his leader.

Eliab eyed Gaddiel. “It does not have to be one of us.”

What? Gaddiel raised his hands. “Who else would it be? He said a leader! We are the leaders.”

“There are others. It’s a big tribe.”

“No!” Gaddiel’s voice rose in pitch with every word. “It should be me!”

“I worry you want it too much. Why is it so important to you? We only want to gather information.”

Gaddiel took a steadying breath. He was going to lose this if he wasn’t careful. *Keep calm, keep this focused on the mission, on the land.* “I just want to make sure we get all the facts we need. This is our only chance. We need to do it properly.”

Eliab stared at him for what felt like hours.

The screech of a hawk overhead echoed in Gaddiel’s ears as he awaited the answer that would define his future.

“All right. You may go. If Moses approves.” Eliab stepped closer. “Be sure that is your only goal.”

Gaddiel put his arm around Eliab’s shoulders as they made their way toward Moses. “Of course, Elder. What else would I want? I seek only the good of Israel.”



The morning sun burned off the night's chill as Tirzah pulled the pot of cooled manna off the dying fire and set it in the sand. She grabbed a spoon and ladled the mixture into three bowls.

After banking the fire, she turned to kneel in front of the girls, placing her hands on their shoulders. "I'm going to check on Benjamin, so I want you to stay here and eat your manna. Don't move, understand?"

"Can't we come, too?" Keren stuck her bottom lip out.

"No. It's a long walk, and I can't carry you both."

"Please, Imma? Please?" Four big brown eyes pleaded with her. Eyes she couldn't refuse.

She smiled. "All right. Eat your manna first. But I will not carry you." She scrubbed the pot with sand while they ate. Then she reached into the tent to put it away, grabbed their sandals, then laced them on her daughters.

The trio set off south through the tents of Zebulun toward the smaller springs that fed the animals. She felt eyes on her, heard whispers. She kept her gaze straight ahead.

They reached the flocks of sheep and goats, donkeys, even a few camels, and scanned the area for her beloved Benjamin.

"There he is!" Keren clapped her hands. "Over there." The little girl pointed toward an older donkey, watching them, his long ears pricked up at the child's voice.

Keren started to run but stopped short and looked over her shoulder. "I can't run, can I?"

Tirzah shook her head. "You might scare the sheep. Walk."

The girls approached the animal, Tirzah behind them. She let them greet the donkey first, but they grew bored quickly and sat to play in the sand. The docile flock ignored them.

Tirzah stroked the donkey's nose. "At least Gaddiel let me keep you. Otherwise, I think we'd still be stuck at Mt. Sinai." She combed her fingers through his mane, straightening the short hair. She drew her hand down his shoulders, his ribs poking up under her palm.

“Soon, Benjamin, soon. We’re almost there. All the grass you can eat. And you will never carry anything, ever again.”

Benjamin nuzzled her, his warm nose digging into her cheek.

She grasped his mane and led him to the water, pushing her way through other animals and taking him closer to the edge, nearer the softest, greenest grass. Fat, spotted sandgrouse scattered when his feet touched the water. “You need to be more forceful, Benjamin, or you will die of thirst.” She leaned toward him to whisper into his long ears. “You won’t do that, will you? I guess I’ll have to come here every day to make sure you get some water and grass. Until we get to Canaan, anyway.”

She waited long enough to make sure he drank his fill and ate some soft grass, and then turned back to the girls, who had dumped sand on each other’s head, and now sat giggling. It would take forever to get it out. She groaned. Then she took a deep breath, grasped their hands, and headed for her tent.

After combing out the sand, making three trips to get water, washing tunics, sweeping out the tents—hers and Gaddiel’s—cooking the midday meal, and cleaning up, Tirzah propped Naomi on her hip and grasped Keren’s hand as she headed east, looking for the meandering river she’d heard connected all the springs. Lined on both sides with date palms, grass, and soft sand, there were a number of places perfect to rest in the shade and escape the worst of the day’s heat. The river was scant enough the girls could wade in it without danger. On the other side of the water, the remains of a rock fall in the distant past were apparent in the felled trees and large rocks lodged up against them.

She dragged and shoved some crumbling fallen logs into a large, misshapen half-circle bounded by the water so the girls could run without getting out—she had no more energy to chase them today. They had napped after the meal, but she had too much to do. She leaned against a log and closed her eyes.

Squeals of laughter jolted her awake. A boy, about eight or nine years old, she supposed, chased butterflies with her girls.

They ran toward her, pointing at tiny flying creatures. “Imma! Look!” Naomi didn’t pay attention to where she was going, tripped over a fallen limb, and went flying.

The boy dashed to Naomi’s side before Tirzah reached her. “Are you all right?” He searched her knees for an injury. She touched a spot on one knee, and he placed a gentle kiss on it. She raised both arms to him, and he picked her up and carried her off to her sister.

Tirzah stood there, mouth open, as a little boy cared for her children. Who was he?

“Mose! ’Mose, come here!” Keren waved him over to another log. They peered inside a hole, and Keren poked it with a stick.

“Ahmose!”

The unfamiliar voice startled her. Tirzah turned to see a dark-haired young woman with a baby in her arms.

“I’m so sorry if he is bothering you. He makes friends with everyone he sees. And he loves little children.” The visitor shifted the baby to her other arm.

Tirzah returned to her spot by the log. “Actually, he’s been a blessing, to tell the truth. I must have fallen asleep. I have no idea how long he’s been playing with them.”

“I’m glad, then. I’m Meri. May I join you?” She stepped over the log and sat down.

Tirzah studied the girl as she settled herself and the baby. Her slightly darker skin and sharper features revealed she was Egyptian, but she dressed like an Israelite. She spoke decent Hebrew but had a thick accent. “I’m Tirzah. These are my twins, Naomi and Keren. They seem quite taken with...” She gestured toward the boy.

“That’s Ahmose. He’s sort of my husband’s brother.”

“Sort of?”

Meri giggled, her dark eyes shining. “My husband, Bezalel, lived

in the palace. Ahmose was a slave there and was often beaten. One day he was beaten so badly Bezalel took him home. Now he lives with us, and with Rebekah—Bezalel's imma, and with his Uncle Kamose, too."

"Bezalel, he's Israelite?"

"Yes, he is. He was a slave in the palace as well."

"And you, how did you meet your husband?"

"I... worked in the palace, too. I escaped and we married in Elim. This is Adi, our daughter."

"She's beautiful." Tirzah touched the baby's face. "Lovely name."

"Bezalel chose it. I'm still learning Hebrew, if you can't tell." She giggled again. "He's an artisan. So a name that meant jewel seemed appropriate."

Tirzah thought back to Mt. Sinai for a moment. "Bezalel—he's the one who built the tabernacle?"

"The furnishings. Oholiab made the tent and all the cloth articles. And they both had hundreds of helpers. I helped with the anointing oil. I learned to make perfume in the har—, in the palace." Meri spread a lambskin on the grass between them and laid the baby down.

Adi cooed, then sucked on her fist.

Tirzah yawned, covering her mouth with her hand. "Pardon me."

"Don't worry. I know the feeling."

"I don't sleep well at night, I'm afraid. Naomi wakes up a lot."

Meri glanced at the twins. "Really? She seems old enough to sleep all night. How old are they?"

"They were born three summers ago. She should sleep. But ever since we left Sinai, she seems to be plagued by bad dreams. She had them occasionally before that, but now it's almost every night." Tirzah studied her hands, playing with her fingernails.

"Can't your husband help?"

"He died at Sinai."

Meri's hand flew to her mouth as a soft gasp escaped.

“Imma! Bug!” The girls ran toward Tirzah with Ahmose close behind.

The boy held his hands cupped tightly together. When he caught up with them, he peeled them open. Inside were several round red bugs with black dots. He held one hand flat, and the creatures crawled on his palm.

The girls squealed with delight, fists waving. Petals from Keren’s handful of wildflowers flew everywhere.

“Meri, look.” He moved one hand toward her while he pointed with the other.

Meri poked at the insects. “They’re beautiful, Ahmose. Who are you playing with?”

“Oh, this one’s Naomi, and that one is Keren.” Keren had already raced off again.

Meri touched Tirzah’s shoulder. “This is their mother, Tirzah.”

Ahmose dipped his head. He smiled and looked at her from beneath long lashes. “Is it all right if I play with them?”

“Of course. It helped me, actually. I didn’t realize I had drifted off to sleep. You may play with them anytime you wish.”

“I can?” His eyes widened.

Tirzah chuckled. “Yes. After the midday meal they usually sleep a while, but after that, like today, they’d love to play with you, I’m sure.”

Ahmose grinned and ran off after Keren, Naomi scampering after them.

“He’s really good with them, isn’t he?”

Meri giggled. She seemed to giggle a lot. “Yes, he’s very attentive. We can hardly keep him away from Adi. He just adores her. He has many other friends he plays with, but he seems to have a soft spot for younger children.”

“So he grew up in the palace?”

“Until about two years ago. How he managed to keep such a cheery attitude, with everything that happened to him, I will never know.”

“He’s a sweetheart. And if he wants to play with the girls, he is always welcome. I’m exhausted all the time. I can’t keep up with two of them, let alone getting water, cooking, washing clothes, gathering manna. . . . When Naomi wakes up all night, I never get any sleep.” She frowned. “I’m sorry, I’m not usually a complainer. I’m just tired.”

“Don’t worry about it. I can barely deal with one little one. I can’t imagine two of them, with no one to help.” Meri looked up from her baby, a huge smile on her perfect face, framed by perfect, long dark hair.

Because your life has probably always been easy. Tirzah glanced to the west at the sinking sun. “It’s nice of you to say so, anyway. I had better go back and prepare the evening meal.” She stood and beckoned to the twins.

“I hope to see you again. I’d love to have someone to talk to. A lot of people don’t like to talk to me.”

Tirzah considered the girl. “Why not?”

Meri shrugged and made a face. “I’m Egyptian.”

“Well, a lot of people don’t like to talk to me, either. We’d make a good pair.”

“Why wouldn’t they talk to you?” Meri gathered Adi into her arms.

“I’m a widow.”

“That’s not your fault.”

“Yes, but the fact I’m still unmarried is.” Was it wise to mention this to her, this girl she might never see again, who couldn’t possibly understand? It would bring up more questions than answers.

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“If we see each other again, I’ll explain. For now, I have to go.”

Tirzah settled Naomi on her hip, grabbed Keren’s hand, and set off for her tent without looking back.

Three

11 Ziv

With the camp arranged by tribe, it wasn't terribly difficult for Kamose to find each scout. *Might as well start in my own section.*

Judah's spy was Caleb. A few inquiries led him to the man; he was obviously well known—and well thought of—in his tribe.

Caleb appeared to be a few years older than Kamose, yet still had a full head of dark hair and a strong build. He stood as Kamose approached his tent. "You must be Kamose. Joshua mentioned you."

"He asked me to train you before you leave for Canaan."

"I think that's an excellent idea. Please walk with me." Caleb strolled down the pathway in front of his tent toward Issachar, his hands clasped behind his back. "Joshua told me a little about you. Tell me more."

"I have been a soldier my entire life. I joined when I was very young. It's the only thing I've ever wanted to do. I was a charioteer, a foot soldier . . . I was even on a ship for a while, but I hated it."

Caleb laughed.

Kamose continued. "I've been on many advance missions in several lands. The basics are always the same, no matter the terrain or purpose. It's not complicated as long as you follow a few simple rules."

"It sounds like you could be of great value to us."

Kamose thought about his young friend. "Joshua does not seem to share your enthusiasm for the mission."

Caleb laughed again, a hearty laugh that seemed to come easily and from deep in his chest. "Joshua is young and full of faith. He will one day be a great leader, but he needs to learn patience with others. I, too, believe Yahweh has given us the land, but the men are not as confident. It will do no harm to acquire information. And if we are going to do this, we may as well do it properly. So, what can you teach us?"

"You will need knowledge of the people, the land, and the cities." Kamose counted on his fingers as he talked. "Egypt has not warred in Canaan since Ramses was a young pharaoh, but at that time at least some of the cities were walled. Maybe more of them, now."

Caleb scratched his beard. "That will be a challenge."

"Yes, but there are always ways to find out what you need to know." Kamose cast him a sideways glance. "Do you know the other scouts?"

Caleb gave a pensive nod. "They are all leaders of their tribes. Most will give you no trouble. A few think more highly of themselves than they ought."

"I'll find that out soon enough. For now, I have eleven more spies to meet."



Kamose had traveled all the way around the camp and the last on his list was the spy from Zebulun, camped on the south side of Judah. When he found Gaddiel's tent, he was greeted by a tall woman with long, wavy brown hair that fell loosely about her shoulders. She balanced a small girl on her hip, while another sat at her feet.

"Does Gaddiel live here?" he asked.

"He does. He should be back soon." She looked him over, a fact that amused him, as most Israelite women were not quite so bold around men they had not met. "May I offer you water?"

He nodded.

She set the child down and stepped inside the tent, returning with a cup of water.

He downed it in one gulp, surprised to find it cool. "Thank you. Do you bury your water?"

"Yes. Keeps it a little cooler, but not much."

He returned the cup.

"There he is now." She pointed to a man approaching then ducked inside the tent, pulling the children behind her.

Kamose tore his gaze from the woman to Gaddiel.

"Who are you?" The man halted before him, his arms folded across his chest. He appeared young and strong, but his frown and the glare in his eyes ruined what might otherwise be a pleasant face.

"I'm Kamose. Joshua has ordered that I give you training before you enter Canaan. We will meet tomorrow morning at the head of the spring."

"Joshua ordered?" Gaddiel glowered.

"Moses has put him in charge of the mission, along with Caleb of Judah."

"We don't need any training. Especially not from you."

Kamose suppressed the urge to sigh. This wasn't the first time today he'd heard this, but this man's attitude was the most openly hostile. "It's tougher than it looks. Have you ever gone on a mission?"

Gaddiel snorted. "As a slave? In Egypt?"

"I've been on several. Come or don't come; it's up to you. But if you are caught, you will be killed."

He strode away toward Judah quickly. His stomach wanted food and his body needed rest. It had taken most of the day and all of his patience to meet eleven scouts. He only wanted to help. Why was it so difficult?

He held a long broom bush stem in his hands, repeatedly pulling it though his fingers. His mind returned to the same thoughts that

had been plaguing him for weeks. He would give anything to be part of the contingent that would attack Canaan. He could almost taste the dust, the blood, the tension, the strategy. But this battle was not his.

If he was no longer a soldier, what was he to do for the rest of his life? He'd made peace with his decision to leave Egypt. He was, in fact, convinced it was the only decision he could have made. His life there was over. He could no longer continue as captain of the royal guard. The prince was dead. And while there was nothing he—or anyone else—could have done to prevent that death, he was responsible. The Egypt he knew, had loved and served his entire life, no longer existed. Yahweh had destroyed it.

He hurled the branch to the ground. He had given up everything to live a soldier's life. And he'd been a very good one. From charioteer to squad leader to division leader. Stationed in many lands. Head of the army and captain of the palace guard. There was nothing he had not done, no award he had not earned.

Now everything he'd ever wanted was gone. His glorious past was over. The present was uncertain. His future was ... empty.



Gaddiel yanked at the tent flap. "Tirzah! Get me something to eat."

His sister-in-law emerged with a plate of manna cakes and a skin of water.

He growled. "I should have been the leader. Instead, that child Joshua has been put in charge of the mission. Now I have to listen to an Egyptian tell me how to spy! I know more than all of them."

"Well, then perhaps the best course of action is to show up, listen, and wait for an opportunity to show them how much you know. If you stay here, how will they know how clever you are?" She filled his glass and wandered away with her babies.

Gaddiel paced in front of his tent. The water did nothing to quench the burning inside him. Caleb and Joshua. Joshua and Caleb. Why must it always be those two? Moses always played favorites. He would have sent his brother Aaron if he weren't so old. But he couldn't seem to see past the few people around him that flattered and wooed him. Gaddiel was above that. He was every bit as good a leader as Caleb, and much better than Joshua. Joshua was barely old enough to be considered a man! What was he? Twenty-three? Twenty-four? He wasn't even married yet. Gaddiel had killed more Amalekites than either of them at Rephidim. Moses only appointed Joshua commander of the Israelite army because his family was slaughtered by the Amalekites. What kind of logic was that? So he'd fought one more battle. A short one, at that, and he'd lost.

Joshua did a passable job commanding the army, but Gaddiel could have done better. He'd been one of the foremen of the brick-making teams in Egypt until they promoted a younger man. He knew how to manage men. Before the Hebrews were all kicked out of the place, he'd been a servant for a retired soldier. He knew a few things about spying. But none of that mattered to Moses. Only his precious favorites were rewarded.

This turn of events would complicate his plan immeasurably. He thought through everything again. He had assumed they would meet in a day or two and choose a leader together, and he had a speech ready. He'd planned to find out who the others were and visit them beforehand, get them all on his side. But that snake Joshua had used his connection to Moses to get himself named leader before the first day was even over. Gaddiel should have known. Now he was behind before the journey had even begun.

Tirzah was right, though. She was fairly intelligent, for a woman. He wolfed down his food, gulped the water, tossed the plate on the ground, and headed for his brother's tent farther down the row. He

had to come up with a plan. His brother would help—he was good at that sort of thing. He poked his head in the tent. “Nathaniel?”

“Gaddiel. Why so angry? What happened?”

“You heard we are sending spies up to Canaan? And I am one of them?”

“Yes. Is that not a good thing?” He gestured for his brother to come in and sit down.

Gaddiel dropped onto a cushion. “Of course. Very prudent. But Joshua is the leader. And Caleb.”

“Caleb? Of Judah? Why is it always Judah?” Nathaniel’s mouth dropped and his voice rose in pitch as he offered Gaddiel a cup of cooled goat’s milk.

Not much took Nathaniel by surprise, but apparently even he hadn’t counted on this.

Gaddiel waved the cup off. “I know that Egyptian had something to do with it. I don’t trust him. And—hear this—he’s training us.”

“That’s insulting.” Nathaniel’s upper lip curled.

“I know.” Gaddiel pondered a while. “I’ve got to find a way to discredit Joshua. He has been Moses’s favorite for far too long. If we plan to be rulers once we reach Canaan, we have got to remove him from leadership, one way or another.”

“Agreed. Any ideas?”

Gaddiel rested his chin on his fist, his elbow on his knee. “I hoped you might have some. I’m too angry at the moment. Tirzah says to go along, find a chance to show them how smart I am.”

“Not a bad idea. She’s pretty clever herself.” Nathaniel stroked his well-trimmed, light brown beard. His light gray eyes, the same color as Gaddiel’s, twinkled. “She still hasn’t asked you to marry her?”

“No, and I don’t want her to. Women aren’t worth the trouble.”

Nathaniel grinned. “Just because you had a bad one . . .”

Gaddiel shoved his finger in his brother’s chest. “I’m glad she died. And the baby she carried. Saved me a life of pain.”

“I wish she would ask you, so you could refuse and it would fall to me.”

Gaddiel scoffed. “Like she would have you!”

Nathaniel spread his hands. “Why not? I’m as good as you. Maybe better.”

“It doesn’t appear she wants anyone.” Gaddiel shrugged. “Which is fine with me. I keep Jediel’s sheep, and she cooks my food, and I don’t have a nagging woman in my tent.”

“Maybe she’d have me if she knew you would say no.”

“Leave her alone. I like this arrangement. I’m older and I say leave it alone. You’re young. Find a bride of your own.”

20 Ziv

Kamose walked back and forth before the twelve men who stood before him. His gaze quickly took in each one. He’d already met them and taken account of each. Most were young, quick, and strong—just what they needed. Caleb was a bit older, and brought wisdom and an ability to handle the others. Then there was Gaddiel. He was surly, arrogant, and divisive.

Kamose faced the scouts. “You have three jobs: to learn about the men, the cities, and the land.

“One. What kind of men inhabit the land? Are they many or few? Are they farmers? Are they warriors? What kind of resistance will they give us? Yahweh has given us the land, but we must still take it.

“Two. What kind of cities are there? Are they walled, or guarded in some other way? How many are there? How far apart are they?

“And three. How is the land? Is it fertile? Will it support us? What kind of crops does it bear now? What kind of livestock will it support? Moses asks that you bring back samples of the fruit of the land on the return journey.

“The journey will be difficult. You will sleep in the open. If you

are found out, you will likely be killed. Everything you do and see will be new to you. You must be on your guard at all times. Never be complacent. Never forget you are part of a team.”

He reached down to a pile of daggers, each with a belt and sheath, and passed them out as he talked.

“You’ve all fought out in the open, been in battle at Rephidim and at Sinai. Remaining unseen is altogether different. I’ll teach you. How well you learn determines whether you stay alive.”

He led the men to the first rise to the north of camp. “Most cities will be at the top of a hill since that’s the best way to defend against attack. If the city is fortified, the main part will be walled in, at the crest. The dwellings will be inside and the crops, animals, and anything else will be outside. Everything will be brought in at dusk and the gates shut. I know Hebron had walls the last time Egypt fought Canaan. I don’t know about anywhere else.”

“If it’s at the top of a hill, how can we possibly see anything without being discovered?” Palti asked.

“The land has many dips and rises. There will be places you can hide to view the city during the day. Then, at night, you can get closer to get more information. Now, you.” He gestured at four of them.

“Down on your bellies. Close your eyes.”

Gaddiel and three others dropped to the ground.

“Four more, go down on the other side of this ridge. Tell me if you see these men.”

Shammua, Gadi, Ammiel, and Geuel sprinted to the other side of the rise.

“Now, you four, crawl to the top, but keep your heads down.”

Gaddiel and the others crawled to the edge of the hillock.

Kamose strode to the top of the ridge and straddled it so he could see both sets of men. “When you reach the top, try to peek over to see the others without being seen.”

Palti poked his head over the top. “I see th—”

Shammua shouted. "I see him!"

"Palti, you're dead. Out of line."

Gaddiel looked at the other two.

Igal tried next. Same result.

"Igal. Out of line."

Was anyone going to try anything different?

Gaddiel backed up a bit and crawled sideways until he was below a broom bush. He scooted up and raised his head behind the shrub. "I see Shammua, Gadi, Geuel, and Ammiel."

No one beyond the rise called out.

Kamose nodded his approval. "Excellent, Gaddiel. You get to stay alive."

25 Ziv

A dry wind blew through the leaves of the date palms. Tirzah leaned back against the trunk of one of them and watched the branches sway, the gentle movement vaguely soothing. She closed her eyes.

Moments later, the girls squealed with delight. "Mose!"

Ahmose bounded over a log.

Meri followed him, carrying Adi wrapped in a blanket. She stepped over the fallen tree and settled in the sand next to Tirzah.

Tirzah drank the last of the sweet sheep's milk in her cup and offered the skin to Meri, who smiled as she accepted it.

The girls splashed in the shallow river, closely guarded by Ahmose.

Tirzah held out her arms to take the baby.

Meri gave her the babe. As she stretched her arms, three vertical rows of blue-black dots peeked out from the bottom of her short sleeve, ending just above her elbow.

A tattoo? Why would Meri have a tattoo?

"What a lovely spot. It's so much cooler here." Meri finished her milk and returned the skin. She eyed Tirzah for a moment. "Can you

explain what you meant when you said you are sometimes shunned because you have not remarried?”

Tirzah shifted her weight against the tree and recrossed her ankles. She couldn't tell the girl everything. She'd never understand. "It's just not very acceptable for a widow to remain alone. She's expected to remarry again soon. So they see me as a troublemaker, a woman who chooses to flaunt generations of custom. I'm considered a rebellious woman."

"Isn't it hard being alone?"

Tirzah blew out a long breath. How to explain it? "To everyone else, my husband, Jediel, seemed kind and generous. But he was cruel. I hate to say it, but life has been much easier—and nicer—since he is gone."

"So you didn't know he was so cruel before you married him?"

"I didn't know him at all."

Meri blinked. "What do you mean? How could you choose him if you didn't know him?"

"I didn't choose him. Fathers arrange the marriages."

"Why would your father choose such a man for you to marry?"

Tirzah played with Adi's blanket, adjusting and readjusting it as she studied the mountains in the distance. "Jediel was very good at appearing kind to others. Only in our own home was he so cruel. And to be fair, it was my stepfather, not my father who chose. I took care of my mother when she was ill, and by the time she died, I was older than most brides. And I am taller than men usually prefer their women. So he married me off to the first one who paid the bride price."

Meri gaped at Tirzah with her mouth open, eyes as wide as pomegranates.

Tirzah touched Meri's arm. "It's not as bad as I've made it sound. Almost all fathers give their daughters a say. Many girls marry the one they love. I just didn't have a father who cared."

Meri let the silence sit for a moment. “Why didn’t you leave him?”

Tirzah furrowed her brow. “Leave him?”

“Yes. Divorce him.”

“Wives can’t divorce.”

“They can’t?” Meri grasped Tirzah’s hand. “Tirzah, I am so sorry.”

Tirzah smiled. “Thank you.”

Naomi skipped up with a handful of purple flowers. “For you, Imma.” She pulled a few out and gave them to Meri. “You, too.”

Meri watched Naomi run away. “Your girls are beautiful, Tirzah. “

“I don’t know what I’d do without them.” She closed her eyes and sniffed the flowers. Time to change the subject. “How did you end up working in the palace?”

Meri fingered the blooms. “Like yours, my mother died, but I was much younger. When she was alive, we were very happy. I adored her. But after she died, there were too many of us. My father couldn’t manage. He couldn’t take care of the farm and all of us. One year, the grain taxes were due. We went to the temple, and a priest came and talked to him. I was told I was to go work in the palace. When I arrived, I found out I had been sold into the harem to pay for five years’ taxes.”

“Oh, Meri, that’s terrible!” Tirzah touched the dots on Meri’s arm. “Is that what this means?”

Meri fingered the tattoo. “Yes. The mark of a concubine.” Her face paled for only a moment. “It was a terrifying time. But to skip to the end, that’s where I met Bezalel. He had been brought to the palace and forced to live there as a child. That’s where he learned to make such beautiful works of art, and where he learned everything he needed to know to craft the tabernacle. I escaped with him, we married in Elim, and now we have this beautiful baby.”

“I wish my story could have such a happy ending, but I don’t see how it can. Anyway, now I am all alone, with these two little girls. They are exhausting, but they are the lights of my life. I thank

Yahweh every day for them. I may have nothing else, but at least I have them.”

Meri shifted to face her more directly and grabbed her hand. “I don’t think this is the end of your story. I’ve seen Yahweh change too many people’s lives to think that. I thought my life was over when I found myself in the harem. I was alone. No one there would even talk to me. But I found Bezalel. Bezalel spent his life in the palace away from his family, his people. He felt abandoned by Yahweh, but Yahweh had a plan all along. He had been chosen to build a dwelling for Yahweh, and Yahweh had just been preparing him. You can’t say it’s over already. I think you have a lot to look forward to.”

Tirzah pulled her hand away and shook her head. “Not me. This is all there is to my life. There will never be any more. Maybe there was for you. Maybe for Bezalel. Not for me. Not now. Not ever.”

28 Ziv

Kamose called for the evening meal break and reached into his bag for the manna cakes he brought with him.

He looked over the group of scouts before him. They were not professional soldiers, but they would have to do. If he could just get enough information into them to keep them alive, he’d be satisfied. They didn’t have to learn too many intricate espionage skills to bring back the knowledge Moses had requested. Anyone with a bit of common sense could find out whether the land was arable, the cities were fortified, and the people were armed. And Caleb and Joshua were more than capable of finding out far more than that. No, all he was worried about was whether or not they could keep their heads down and not be seen.

Kamose had not fought in Canaan himself. Those wars had ended before he was born. The most famous battle was fought on the very ground they now camped on. But the legends endured. Legends of

giants. Cities with walls that climbed into the sky. Iron chariots. Weapons never before seen. He could only pray to Yahweh for safety.

He noticed the wives bringing dinner to their husbands. The sweet kisses and whispered endearments before they returned to their tents.

Then there was Gaddiel. He snatched the bag from the woman with the beautiful, wavy brown hair and the girls who clung to her. He barely acknowledged her, let alone kissed her. She glanced at the desert floor as he snapped at her, then turned to go. Kamose stared a beat longer than he should have at another man's wife, and then he diverted his gaze, pulling it to the cliffs past the rolling hills at the edge of camp. They'd spent today working on climbing the steep limestone bluff west of camp. A lifetime on a delta did not prepare one for rock climbing.

One more run at the cliffs tonight, and training would be complete. Kamose had done everything he could in ten days. Tomorrow the scouts would leave for Canaan. He could only hope he had taught them enough to keep them alive, to bring them all back to the wives and children they were leaving behind. He'd seen enough soldiers leave and never come back.

He didn't want it to happen here.