

THE REMNANT TRILOGY | BOOK 3

NOAH

MAN OF GOD



TIM CHAFFEY &
K. MARIE ADAMS

THE REMNANT TRILOGY | BOOK 3

NOAH

MAN OF GOD



TIM CHAFFEY &
K. MARIE ADAMS

First printing: May 2018

Copyright © 2018 by Tim Chaffey and K. Marie Adams. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles and reviews. For information write:

Master Books®, P.O. Box 726, Green Forest, AR 72638
Master Books® is a division of the New Leaf Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN: 978-1-68344-105-2

ISBN: 978-1-61458-662-3 (digital)

Library of Congress Number: 2018939633

Cover design by K. Marie Adams; cover illustration by Ben Iocco

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

Scripture noted NKJV is from the New King James Version of the Bible, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Please consider requesting that a copy of this volume be purchased by your local library system.

Printed in the United States of America

Please visit our website for other great titles:
www.masterbooks.com

For information regarding author interviews,
please contact the publicity department at (870) 438-5288.



Thank You

The Remnant Trilogy has been quite an adventure for Noah and the authors. Crafting a novel takes a considerable amount of time and energy, and often involves many more people than those whose names appear on the cover. We wish to say a heartfelt “thank you” to all those involved, especially to the following people.

Tim Dudley and the great team at Master Books. Thank you for your patience with us, for taking a chance on some novels, for being so easy to work with, and for turning out a great product.

Reagen Reed, thank you for lending your editorial expertise. Our stories are so much stronger and cleaner as a result of your efforts.

Casey, with the amount of work you put into this series, your name could easily appear on the book covers. Thank you for all of the brainstorming, editing, rewriting, and everything else you did to bring these stories to publication.

Ben, thank you for another outstanding cover. We know that people should not judge a book by its cover, but if they decide to make such judgments, we are certain they will like these novels.

Janice, thank you for your prayers and proofreading.

To our great, great . . . grandfather Noah, thank you for your faithful example in walking with the Lord. Without it, we would not be here. We hope our stories have done justice to your godly life.

Finally, thank You to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank You for the gifts You have given us and the opportunity to write these stories. We pray they will bring honor and glory to Your matchless name. Thank You for the gift of salvation You have offered through Your sacrificial death, burial, and Resurrection.

CONTENTS

Dear Reader	7
Chapter 1	9
Chapter 2	15
Chapter 3	22
Chapter 4	28
Chapter 5	35
Chapter 6	40
Chapter 7	46
Chapter 8	51
Chapter 9	57
Chapter 10	63
Chapter 11	75
Chapter 12	81
Chapter 13	89
Chapter 14	95
Chapter 15	105
Chapter 16	114
Chapter 17	120
Chapter 18	129
Chapter 19	138
Chapter 20	145
Chapter 21	151
Chapter 22	159
Chapter 23	165
Chapter 24	172
Chapter 25	178
Chapter 26	187

Chapter 27	196
Chapter 28	205
Chapter 29	215
Chapter 30	221
Chapter 31	228
Chapter 32	234
Chapter 33	244
Chapter 34	254
Chapter 35	263
Chapter 36	272
Epilogue	279
Behind the Fiction.....	283
Answering Questions Raised by the Novel.....	285
Encounter This.....	301
Borrowed from the Bible	305
Animals in the Series	307
Dear Reader	309
About the Authors.....	311

DEAR READER,

Thank you for reaching the third and final volume in *The Remnant Trilogy*. We hope you have enjoyed reading them as much as we have enjoyed writing them.

As we have mentioned in the first two books, our intent has not been to add to Scripture while sharing this imaginative retelling of Noah's life. In fact, our goal has been practically the opposite in that we want to help readers discern between the fiction we have created and the facts recorded in the Bible.

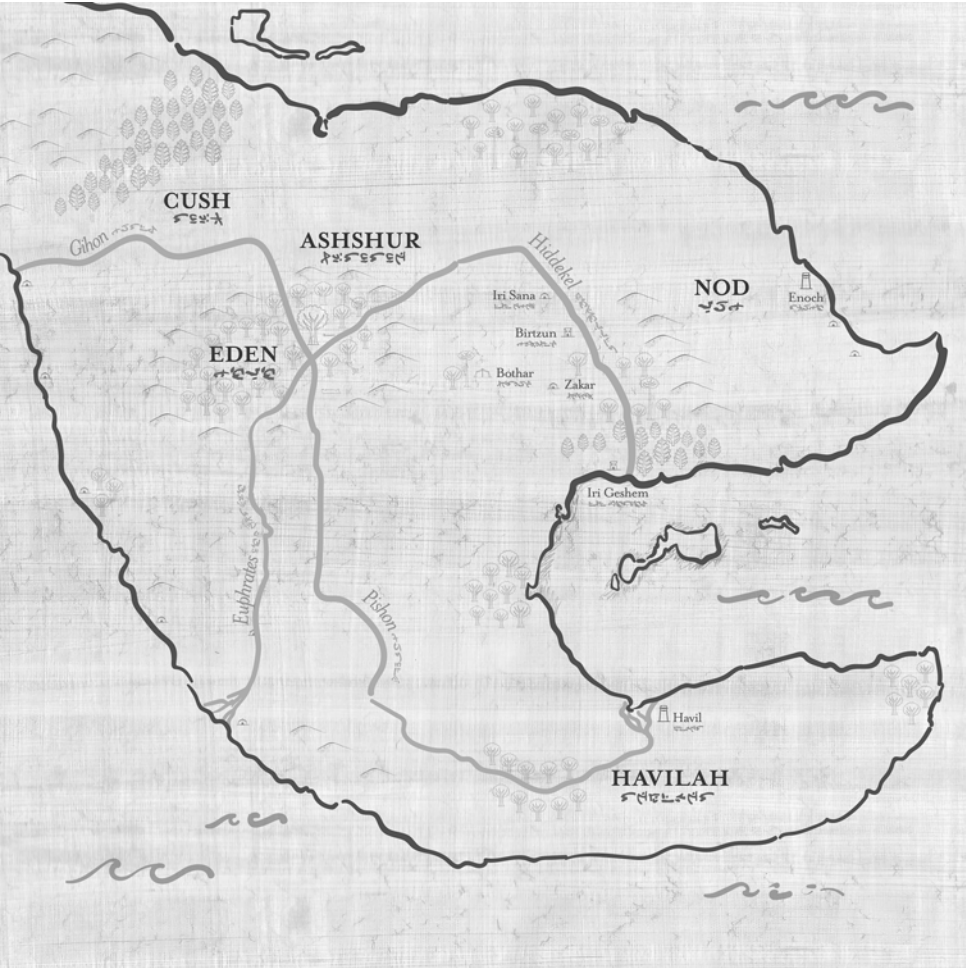
So far, our story has traced Noah's life from his youth up until the months before his oldest son is born. Can you imagine waiting hundreds of years before the birth of your first child? Can you envision working on the same construction project for decades, knowing that once you finish, the world will be destroyed? Now imagine what it would be like to do those things as one of the few godly people remaining, while the world around you becomes more and more wicked to the point that God was grieved that He had made man (Genesis 6:6). These are just a handful of many unique aspects of Noah's life that we pondered as we developed this work.

If you read the preview of this novel at the end of the second book, please be aware that the first chapter in this book is extended. So if you skip the first chapter here, you will be missing some important details in the story.

Settle in and get ready for the exciting conclusion of *The Remnant Trilogy*. Thank you again for joining us on these adventures.

Sincerely,

Tim Chaffey and K. Marie Adams



CHAPTER 1

Iri Geshem — Noah's 499th year

Turning her head to dodge the brilliant reflection of sunlight off the glimmering façade of Iri Geshem's town hall to her right, Naamah marched toward the guest mansion reserved for foreign dignitaries. Jaw set in an angry line, she twisted the oversized iron bracer covering her left arm from elbow to wrist and stared at its intricate patterns.

Led by Nivlac, the quartet of guards flanking her increased their pace to keep up. Even after her many protests, they still accompanied her. Iri Geshem's seedy characters always posed a slight threat, but the soldiers had remained on high alert since the day before. A mixture of outrage and grief had overtaken the town after the debacle in the arena, and the chance remained high that someone might seek revenge for loved ones lost. Still, being surrounded by overprotective men at all times did nothing to improve her mood, and she maintained a stony silence throughout their trek.

Two soldiers manned the doors into the residence. Normally, the gold trim along the frame, a sign of Havil's influence in this city, would bring her happiness, but she was in no mood to be amused. The guards pushed the doors open and stepped inside as she approached.

The bearded man on her left nodded. "Welcome back, Princess."

Ignoring him, Naamah stormed ahead into the spacious foyer. She glanced around, hoping there would be no delay. To her right, a small

group of people spoke quietly around the low table in the sitting room. They fell silent at the sight of her, but she turned away without acknowledging them. The lavish dining hall to her left sat vacant except for a servant girl preparing the place settings. Other than Nivlac, the guards remained near the door.

Naamah moved to the stairs and ascended to the second floor. She turned left and hurried to her guest room at the end of the hall.

“Princess.” Nivlac gently touched her arm. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

She opened the door, jerked away from his touch, and glared at her loyal guard. “Just wait out here.”

He drew himself upright and faced the hallway. “As you command.”

Naamah shut the door behind her and tossed her green-hemmed cloak on a bench. She slid her shoes off and dropped onto the bed. As she loosened the strings on the bracer, regret and sadness filled her entire body. *How long has it been since I've felt this way?* She adjusted the metal and retied the cords, fitting it more comfortably, even though it was clearly made for a man's large forearm. Studying the remarkable craftsmanship, her thoughts raced back to her brother's final moments in the arena. She shook her head in an attempt to rid herself of that memory. Thankful for the opportunity to spend some time in Tubal-Cain's shop earlier in the day, she stroked the one memento she had found to remember him by.

As she repositioned herself, an object pressed against her stomach. Withdrawing the small dagger from the pocket of her wrap, Naamah held it in front of her eyes and slowly twisted it about. For a brief moment, the thought of plunging it directly into her own chest raced into her mind. She raised the knife and gripped the handle with both hands. Taking a deep breath, she recalled her father's smile as Tubal-Cain died. She lowered the blade and inserted it into its slot in the bracer. *Not while he is still alive.*

As she stared at the armband her brother had crafted, Naamah said, “And I'll wear this until he's dead.” She fell back onto the bed and closed her eyes. *Why wouldn't you bow, Tu?* Her lip quavered and she squeezed her eyes tight, successfully preventing a tear from escaping. *All because you came to this city with Noah.*

Gathering her wits, she sat back up and gazed out the large window to her right. In her mind she watched the giant drag Noah into the arena,

leaving him standing helplessly beneath her as the grendec entered and the crowd roared. No matter how many times she replayed the next moment, the outcome never changed. Brimming with a quiet confidence, Noah looked at her and said, “I will not die today.”

Her heart pounding, she clenched a fist and slammed it into the bed. “How did he know?” *What if he’s right? What if the Creator is more pow—* “No!” Impossible. Noah was just lucky. *No matter. He’ll soon be back in our custody, and there will be no escape. How dare he try to make a fool of me in front of everyone!*

Naamah stood and moved to the reflective plate on the wall. She ran a hand through her hair, pushing all of it over to the right. After straightening her gown, she held up her left arm to examine how the bracer looked on her. A hint of a smile grew on her lips as she focused on the hilt of the dagger. *I like it.*

A knock at the door ripped her attention away from her reflection. “Not now, Nivlac.”

The door creaked open. “Princess, the king told me to update you on the search.” The voice was not Nivlac’s.

Naamah briskly straightened her shoulders and lifted her chin. “Enter.”

A guard stepped into the room and knelt before her. Keeping his head down, he said, “Every exit to the city has been blocked since yesterday. As you know, we stopped him from fleeing the city by boat. Our—”

“Where is he?” Naamah tapped her foot.

The guard hesitated and dropped his head even lower. “Still no sign of him, but he must be in the eastern part of the city. Our men have been searching every home.”

Naamah grabbed a small vase off the shelf beside her and smashed it onto the floor, shattering it into dozens of pieces. “Find him!”

The man flinched. “Yes, Princess.”

Glaring at the back of the man’s neck, she slid the dagger part way out of the armband. Letting out a breath, she replaced the blade with a clinking of metal. “You weren’t sent out to come back empty-handed. Return without him again, and you’ll be fed to the grendec.”

He nodded. “Yes, Princess.”

“Get out!”

The soldier stood and bowed before spinning around and hustling out of the room.

Naamah kicked a clay shard across the floor. *Tubal-Cain is dead and Noah's free.* "Ah!" Her breathing quickened as her anger kindled. Trying to shake the image of Tubal-Cain's bloodied corpse from her mind, she paused and let it fuel her temper instead. She scratched an itch near the top edge of the bracer, the irritation increasing her rage even more. Her eyes locked onto the handle. "This comes off today."

Stepping carefully over shattered pottery, she reached for her shoes and pulled them on. "Nivlac!"

He stepped into the room, and his eyes darted from the mess on the floor to her. "Yes, Highness."

Controlling the tone of her voice, Naamah asked, "Do you know where my father is?"

"I believe he's in a meeting with leaders from the city."

Biting her lip, she contemplated how to take revenge. *Yes, that should work.* "Very good. That's all."

Nivlac nodded. "Would you like me to inform the king that you'd like to see him?"

She strode past him. "That won't be necessary. Follow me."

Rushing down the hall, Naamah allowed the memory of Tubal-Cain's murder to drive her forward while ignoring all the warnings that rang inside her. *I don't care if this is a deadly mistake. It's worth the risk.* As she reached the middle of the passage, she turned left and pushed the double doors open, then stepped confidently into the spacious meeting hall. The city's councilmembers reclined on lush cushions around a low table loaded with colorful fruits and vegetables along with a variety of meats. Skimpily clad male and female dancers twirled and twisted near the musicians on the far side of the room.

Seated at the opposite end of the table, her father handed a tray of food to a young woman dressed in a tawdry outfit standing at his side. His eyes lingered after her as she stepped away. Only when the girl had disappeared through the servants' entrance in the corner did he turn to face his daughter. "Naamah, please join us."

Nivlac remained at the door as she glided around the councilmembers and stopped about ten cubits before the king. As she bowed her head slightly, she glimpsed the hilt of the dagger at her forearm. She raised her voice for the benefit of everyone in the room. "Father, why did you murder Tubal-Cain?"

The music stopped and Lamech raised his eyebrows. “Murder?” He snorted. “That’s called justice, my dear. He disobeyed direct orders from both of us. He needed to be punished for his treason.”

“But he was your son, and my brother!” Her tone grew sharp and accusatory. “You never should have put him in that situation.”

“He sought to undermine my rule.” The king raised a finger and pointed at her. “And you’d better watch yourself.”

“Pah! Are you threatening me?” Naamah stepped closer, defiantly challenging his authority and anticipating a blow to the face as he had dealt her several times before. But at over 700 years old, he was weaker and slower than he had once been. He would never see the dagger until she had planted it deep into his chest in an act of self-defense. “Without Nachash’s followers, your rule would crumble.”

Anger burned in his eyes as he glanced at the councilmembers, many of whom wore shocked expressions. He stood and took a step toward her. “If you ever speak to me that way again—”

“What? You’ll kill me just like you’ve killed your son?”

“Enough!” Lamech raised his hand to hit her, but he froze when the twin doors burst open.

Jolted by the interruption, Naamah turned to see two guards dash into the room just as she placed her hand over the bracer.

“Sir!” The guard who entered first dropped to a knee, and his companion followed suit. “Please forgive the interruption. I have urgent news!”

Glaring at Naamah, the king said, “This had better be important. What is it?”

“The Nodite army,” the first guard said.

Lamech broke eye contact with Naamah. “What about the Nodites?”

The second sentry lowered his gaze. “They were spotted one day’s march from here and are headed this way.”

A few gasps and nervous chatter broke out from the others in the room. Lamech raised his hand to silence his guests and turned to Iri Geshem’s new chief councilmember. “Get your security commanders here immediately.”

Ashur nodded once and whispered something to the man next to him, who abruptly stood and dashed out of the room.

Glancing again at the dagger hidden against her forearm, Naamah dismissed the urge to stab her father while he was distracted. *Patience. It*

must be in self-defense or in private. She cautiously stepped away, hoping the news would make him forget her insubordination. Upset that her plan had been foiled, she clenched her jaw tightly until she remembered the small vial tucked inside a hidden pocket of her gown. She spotted the drinks on the table and the faintest of grins tugged at the corner of her mouth.

Lamech barked a command, causing Naamah's heart to skip a beat.

The first guard shot to his feet. "Sir?"

"Find Commander Tsek and tell him to gather my war council right away. The city gates and the river shall remain closed and guarded. No one enters the city without inspection and no one leaves. Noah is the least of our problems now. If the Nodites have any spies here, we cannot allow them to get out."

The man nodded and raced toward the door with his companion on his heels.

"King Lamech," Ashur said as he climbed to his feet. "Might I suggest that we reconvene in the city planning hall downstairs? It's larger than this room and has a model of Iri Geshem that may be useful in planning our defense."

Lamech's gaze shifted to Naamah. His lip curled, as if promising retaliation to come, but then he turned away. "Very well. Prepare the room."

CHAPTER 2

“Ashur.” Naamah grabbed the councilman’s shoulder as she watched her father stride out of the meeting hall. Gesturing toward the table with a tip of her head, she said, “The defense meeting will take a while, so it would be wise to have the drinks brought to the room.”

Ashur nodded. “Understood, Princess.” He signaled two servants with a snap of his fingers. “Help me take the food and drinks downstairs.”

Naamah released his shoulder. “Have you ever defended the city from attack?”

The determined look of a man who had spent his life advancing his career through any means necessary gave way to wide, fear-stricken eyes. “We’ve never had the need. What will we do? Can we win?”

A smirk crossed her lips. “Have no fear, Councilman.” She emphasized his title to remind him that he was beneath her. “Our king, my father, has never lost a battle.”

Gathering himself, he let out a breath. “Thank you. I must hurry.” Ashur scurried across the floor and picked up two large trays of food with the practiced ease of a former innkeeper.

While everyone busied themselves with the change of location, Naamah discretely withdrew the small vial from her hidden pocket, removed the cover, and slipped it under the wrist end of her bracer. Holding her hand up so that the powder would not spill out, she pretended to study the metal armband as she marched to her father’s place setting. She leaned forward over his cup only to freeze upon hearing Ashur’s voice.

“Don’t do that,” he said.

Momentarily seized by fear that her scheme had been uncovered, she recovered herself, then straightened her shoulders and glared at the councilman. He shrank back and nearly dropped a tray. “I’m sorry, Princess. I didn’t intend to issue an order to you.” He took a breath and gave her a half smile. “I only meant that you don’t need to carry any of this. My servants and I will handle it.”

She nodded. *I should’ve known the fool was too blind to know what I’m doing.* “Thank you, Ashur. I was only reaching for this fruit to take to my room while I wait for everyone to assemble.”

“My apologies. Help yourself.” He steadied the platters and headed for the door.

Naamah leaned forward again and grabbed a ripe green malid. Glancing around the room, she pulled back and carefully passed her wrist over her father’s cup, the most ornate one on the table, and allowed the vial’s powder to fall into the intoxicating beverage. After replacing the cap on the poison, she bit into the crispy fruit and grinned. *Father, today your pride will serve me well.* She cupped the malid with both hands. *You’ll soon be avenged, Tu.*

Holding her head high, she exited the room and returned to her private chambers, where she closed the door behind her and placed the tiny container back into her hidden pocket. Allowing a slight chuckle to escape her mouth, she whispered, “Goodbye, Father.”

* * *

A short, stout soldier pointed away from the part of the model representing the city’s main gate. “Do you think the Nodites will attack from the sea too?”

The king set down his cup and wiped his mouth. “They might. But we’ll be ready for them. If Tsek ever gets here, that is. Where is he?”

“He’s here, sir,” called a guard who stood near the door. He stepped aside as the mountainous commander hustled past him.

Tsek stopped a few paces before Lamech and bowed his head. “My king, the messenger told me about the Nodites. What’s your plan?”

“Send our fastest ship to the islands.” Placing a hand over his mouth, Lamech stifled a cough. “Get the reinforcements here immediately. No time to spare.”

“Yes, sir.” Tsek spun and lumbered out of the room.

“What defenses do you have in the eastern city?” Lamech asked a middle-aged officer from Iri Geshem.

“We have sentries at each watchtower along the wall and two battalions at the ready. But even if the Nodites breached the eastern barrier, there’s only one bridge to the main city. Our concern has always been to protect this side.”

“A wise decision,” the king said.

As Lamech and the war council worked out the details, Naamah listened closely while gazing about the space. The city planning hall gleamed with white stone walls stretching high above to a ceiling that continued to climb upward to a central peak. Six metallic concentric rings dropped from the middle, each successive circular piece hung about two cubits lower than the one above it, and all flickered brightly with dozens of burning wicks. Naamah guessed that oil flowed through the middle tube and the armatures that held up the rings to provide a steady fuel supply. She envisioned reworking the piece as one large coiled serpent.

Beneath the grand chandelier, an extravagant scale model of Iri Geshem sat on a dais encircled by over a dozen men who excitedly pointed at various sections of the city as they deliberated. Her half-brother Jubal sat among them but never spoke. His musical abilities were unmatched in the world, but he had little aptitude for leading men into battle. Nivlac occasionally participated in the discussion, although he was better suited to serve as chief of security than war strategist. Still, despite his shortcomings in this setting, she valued having a loyal servant in the king’s inner circle.

A hint of a knowing smile crossed Naamah’s face as her father coughed again and took another swig. Beads of sweat appeared on his reddened forehead. As she turned away to hide her delight, a twinge of regret threatened to overshadow the satisfaction. Memories of a few enjoyable times with her father flashed into her mind, but she quickly dismissed them with thoughts of her imminent ascension to the throne. Focusing again on the conversation around the miniature replica of the city, she forced herself to consider how she would take charge when the poison finished its mischief.

“So our main objective is to delay the Nodites’ attack until our reinforcements arrive.” Lamech reached for his stomach and grabbed the edge of the model with the other hand.

Nivlac lunged to assist him. "Are you alright, sir?"

The war council fell silent as the king dropped to his knees and retched repeatedly. He reached for his throat and gasped for air. "Help me." His weakened voice barely exceeded a whisper.

"Father!" Naamah knelt next to him and placed her hand on his back. "Call a healer!"

Jubal stood and echoed her command before joining Naamah at their father's side, carefully stepping around the vomit. Other councilmembers stood at a distance, watching the king with great concern. Ashur sprinted out of the door, yelling for a healer to hurry.

Groaning, Lamech attempted to stand, but he lost his balance and tumbled forward. Despite Naamah's best effort to catch him, he spun as he slipped from her grasp and fell into the foul mess on the floor. Eyes wide open, he stared at Naamah. "Help." The breathless word barely escaped his throat as the muscles in his neck constricted.

"Help me sit him up so he can breathe," Naamah said to Jubal.

Jubal bent down to help her, but the stench caused him to turn away and cover his nose. He gestured to Nivlac to take his place.

Nivlac knelt and slid his arms under the king's shoulders as Lamech struggled for air. The guard's eyes met Naamah's for an instant, but in that briefest of moments, they told her he was aware of the situation. "I've got him, Princess." He lifted the king to a sitting position and dragged him to a clean area of the floor.

Having witnessed the effects of this particular poison on victims many times before, Naamah knew what to expect. Typically, the poor soul would suffocate in moments. She glanced at her father's cup. Her heart sank when she saw that it was still over half full. Had he consumed enough poison to kill him? Staring at the drink, she knew what she needed to do next. She pointed to the cup. "Nobody touches that. I think he's been poisoned." She stood tall, but before she could say anything more, Ashur rushed into the room followed by a short, gray-bearded man carrying a large bag. Ashur directed him to the king as Nivlac and others made the pathway clear. Ashur caught Naamah's attention. "This is the master healer."

Naamah stepped in front of the short man. "This is your king. Save his life or you will lose your own. Understand?"

"Please." The man peered around her to see his patient. "I'll do what I can, and you should probably call on Nachash for his intervention."

“Of course.” She moved aside, caring little to ask for the deity’s help in this matter. “Hurry.”

The little man stooped beside the king, who writhed on the ground still red-faced and fighting for each breath. “Sir, if you can understand me, please open your mouth.”

Lamech moaned in agony before his whole body went limp and his eyes shut.

Naamah strove to suppress her anticipation of her father’s final breath.

The healer glanced at Nivlac. “He must open his mouth or I can’t help him.”

Nivlac looked for Naamah’s approval, and she nodded in return. He placed two fingers from each hand into the king’s mouth and pried it open.

After a brief examination, the little man dug into his bag and pulled out two small, covered clay jars. “Don’t let him close his mouth.” He opened the first vessel and withdrew a pinch of fine black powder and placed it on the back of Lamech’s swollen tongue. “Give him a sip of water and make sure he swallows that.”

“Here.” A Havilite commander lowered a cup to the king’s lips and poured a bit of its contents into his mouth.

Nivlac closed the limp ruler’s mouth and tipped his head back.

Lamech gagged, and a few spurts of water escaped his lips despite Nivlac’s efforts to prevent it.

The healer opened the second jar and hastily smashed the tiny green leaves in it with a pestle. Satisfied with his progress, he gestured for Nivlac to repeat the process.

Shortly after the administration of the second dose, Lamech’s body contorted and then suddenly stiffened. The king remained motionless.

Naamah’s silent hopes were dashed yet again when her father’s chest slowly rose and fell.

“He’ll need to rest,” the healer said. “I think he’s going to live.” He turned to Naamah. “Princess, I believe someone has poisoned your father. If you don’t mind, I’d like to stay with him until he wakes. He may yet need some more treatment.”

“Of course. Thank you for saving his life. You’ll surely be rewarded.” She took a deep breath and imagined dumping the poison right into the healer’s mouth as his reward. “Ashur, have two of your men take

the king to his room with the healer. I want them to stay there until further notice.”

“Yes, Princess.” Ashur called the guards near the door and relayed Naamah’s instructions.

The two men lifted the king up and carried him out of the room. The healer followed closely behind them.

“What are we going to do now?” Ashur asked.

Jubal cleared his throat and stepped forward with his chin held high. “I will lead us in my father’s absence.”

Naamah fixed an icy stare on him. “You will do no such thing, little brother. Go back to your music and parties and leave the war to those of us who are qualified to discuss such matters.”

Jubal looked around the room for support, but no one dared to challenge Naamah. He shrank back and sat down.

“No one else leaves this room without my permission.” Naamah picked up the king’s cup. “We need to find out if this was poisoned, but first—” She snapped her fingers. “Nivlac!”

Just as overeager to please her as he had always been, Nivlac hustled to her side and stood at attention.

“Go fetch Commander Tsek. Make sure that ship is sent to the islands, just like my father wanted, but in light of the circumstances, we need Tsek here to help us plan the battle.”

“Yes, Princess.” Nivlac turned and headed toward the door.

“We have no time to delay.” Naamah directed the remaining members of the war council to return to their positions around the city model. She scanned the faces of each man to ensure their full attention. “We have a lot going against us at the moment. The Nodites are at our door, and from what we’ve just seen, someone in our midst does not wish my father to be the king. This is no time for fear or division.” Her voice rang out in confidence, and the expressions in the room revealed a general willingness to follow her. “We must go forward in honor of the king. We will see to it that in this darkest time, with foes all around, we shall not be overcome.”

Ashur beat a fist against his chest. “So be it. Princess Naamah, the one who will lead us to victory!”

She feigned humility, smiling softly and shaking her head while exulting on the inside.

“Hail, Naamah.” The man to her right, a respected guard from Iri Geshem, bowed his head toward her.

The rest of the council followed his lead, and she longed to savor their praise, but an attack was imminent and required everyone’s full attention. She held up her hand, and they quieted. “As the king said before, our main objective is to delay the advancing troops until our reinforcements arrive. The Nodites will undoubtedly approach the main gate, so we’ll need most of our forces there to give the illusion of a vast army. That will give them pause and buy us time.” She held her arms out to the side. “Ashur!”

He straightened and then bowed low. “Yes, Princess.”

“You’re a leader of Iri Geshem. You’ll lead the investigation into who tried to topple our great city from within by poisoning the king. The rest of us will defeat the Nodites. Victory will be ours!”

CHAPTER 3

Iri Dekkel — Noah's 499th year

Emzara stared blankly at the wall opposite where she sat on a large woven mat. The golden hue of the evening sun cast shadows from the surrounding foliage onto the sand-colored canvas of the tent. Sighing, she played with the band tied around her upper left arm. The carved medallion carried the same rainbow design as the wooden one Noah had tied on her when he had asked her to marry him. *How long before you get here, my husband?*

At Garun's insistence, they had moved across the wide river from Iri Dekkel for protection in case some of the people who decimated the city returned. Lamech's former guard had silently taken in the surroundings and selected a small clearing in the undergrowth. Using ropes and wooden pegs from the ship's supplies, he created a framework to support the large piece of fabric. Now Emzara and her still-unconscious charge rested under the tent while Garun busied himself with the finishing touches.

Small breaks in the trees allowed them to watch the river without being seen from the opposite shore. The surrounding forest also served to block much of the cool wind that had picked up earlier in the evening. Thankfully, Garun's shelter intercepted any stray drafts that occasionally made their way into the clearing. Biting a nail, she glanced at the severely injured man lying on elevated bedding about three cubits from her. A large purple-and-black bruise on the side of his chest stood out like a gold pikka among a pile of silver piks. Dried blood coated parts of the

fabric under a pair of wooden braces holding his lower leg in place. Although hidden by a cloth at the moment, thoughts of the large gash and bump on his head made her wince.

Grateful that he remained asleep after he stirred slightly, Emzara sighed. *Everything in my life is about waiting right now. I don't know if I can take much more of just sitting here until the next thing happens.* A beautiful pattern from the shadows of the leaves danced all about her. Fluttering, they crossed and then moved apart from one another in the breeze. *I wonder if this is how the Most High views our lives: events slowly unfolding as we run about interacting with each other.* The wind ceased and the leaves stood still. She stared at the silhouette of a lone leaf. *And then we're alone while we wait for more movement. But I'm never really alone, because the Most High sees me.*

O Creator, waiting is hard when you think you have the answer but you have yet to see proof. You chose Noah to build Your ark, so I know he will be safe, but I would be happier if I could see him, hold him. My view of life is obscured, just like I only see the shadows from within this tent, but You see all the detail and colors of the leaves as if from the outside. And You know just how it will all unfold.

Feeling movement inside of her, she looked down and the corner of her mouth rose. Emzara placed both hands on her belly. *I guess not all waiting is bad.*

“One more thing.” Garun stood at the opening of the tent. He held up a thick, dark cloth. “I just need to attach this to the top so that you have a little privacy curtain. I’ll hang a second one on the other side for me and Laleel. That way we can still hear if he makes a noise.”

“Do you need me to get up?” She put weight on her hand and moved her feet out, readying herself.

With shoulders hunched and knees bent, Garun began attaching the fabric to the apex of her dwelling. “Thanks. I’ve got it.” He carefully stepped by the back of the tent, making sure not to disturb the bedding near Purlek’s head, and continued his work. “There, that should do it. You’re sure you don’t mind looking after him tonight?”

“Of course not. He’s like my son; I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Garun looked as if he were going to respond, but with his stooped posture and the tilted angle of his head as he avoided the top of the tent, his focus quickly returned to his task.

Em suppressed a laugh. “Thanks for doing all of this.” She gestured to their temporary lodging.

He dropped his head even lower. “Well, I have much more to do.” He stepped out from under the flap, straightened up, and stood tall. Arms crossed, he sternly glanced around. Emzara guessed that he was imagining their camp from the vantage point of any potential enemies. But as each chore merged into the next, she wondered if something else was behind his busyness.

After a short jaunt into the woods, Garun returned with his arms laden with branches. He placed the wood beside the campfire, sat next to Laleel, and the two talked in hushed voices while she stirred a clay pot resting above the coals. Laleel frowned and looked over at the tent quickly before turning her attention back to the meal.

Emzara shook her head to clear her thoughts and knelt beside Purlek. Slowly she removed part of the stiffened bandage on his head, taking care not to reopen the wounds. She poured some water into the shallow dish and gently cleaned away some of the dried blood. Sensing a flicker out of the corner of her eye, she looked at his closed eyelids. *Had they moved?* She focused on his face but saw no change.

“I brought you some dinner.” Laleel’s voice was soft as she made her way inside the tent. “It’s a light broth in case he’s able to have some. Any signs of waking?”

Emzara sat back on her bed and accepted the bowl. “Well, I don’t know. I thought maybe he opened his eyes, but I must’ve imagined it. What if he’s like this for a while? What will happen if we have intruders intent on harming us?”

“Garun said we’re to run to our boat and he’ll move Purlek as quickly and carefully as he can.”

“Good. I wouldn’t be able to face Adira knowing we hadn’t done all we could to rescue him. But what if he—”

From where she still stood at the tent’s entrance, Laleel held up a hand. “Let’s not think about that. So far, we’re hidden and safe.” She swept her arm toward the campfire behind her and laughed, although it came out slightly forced. “I mean, look at this. Garun is so restless he may have a whole village constructed by the time Purlek wakes up.”

Emzara returned a small smile, appreciating her friend’s efforts to be cheerful. “I don’t blame him at all. I’m just as restless on the inside. I’m

thankful for all that both of you have done, but it's not easy just sitting here. I know I could do more."

Laleel leaned forward and patted her hand. "Yes, of course you could. But that's not the point. You're helping by letting Garun do all the work, believe me." Both laughed, Laleel's deeper tones melding with Emzara's higher ones.

"Now, you need to eat something." Laleel pointed to the utensil on the bed between them.

Emzara obediently raised a bite to her mouth. When the tiniest sputter of a cough caused both women to look down, Purlek shifted a bit to the side but didn't wake.

* * *

Emzara bolted upright at the sound. She struggled to make sense of her surroundings in the semi-darkness. Heart racing, she blinked several times, willing the fog of sleep to subside. Another quiet moan was all she needed to put together the pieces and rush from her bed, flinging aside the curtain that separated her from her patient.

She bent low and tried to keep her excitement at a whisper to keep from waking up Garun and Laleel. "Purlek. It's Emzara."

His wide-open eyes and a large grimace revealed his pain. He thrashed violently, but winced and lay back. Only the tiny spasms from his limbs told her that this mostly motionless state was purely due to his will.

She used the moonlight to find a tiny bottle in her care bag. Holding it up, she unhinged the cap and dumped a portion into her hand. "Here, this will help. Chew it." She placed a small bark bit in his parted lips and his jaw moved slightly.

"Don't talk, dear, and try to stay still. I know it hurts." She wanted to reach out with a reassuring touch, but she pulled her hand back, afraid to cause him more pain. "You're going to be alright, but it will take some time. Your leg is broken, and I think you broke some ribs, too." She paused and studied his face for understanding. "I'm here on a journey up the river with friends, Laleel and Garun. Do you remember them?"

Gritting his teeth, Purlek nodded slowly.

"It's gotten pretty bad in Iri Geshem, and Noah's taking care of a few things before joining us. We came to see you and pass along greetings

from your parents, but found Iri Dekkel in shambles — you as well.” Holding up a waterskin, she gave him drink. “We’re safely hidden in the trees across the river now.”

The tension slowly eased out of his face as he raised his head barely a handbreadth to manage a few swallows before lying back. “Ma-Zara.” His nickname for her came out low and weak.

“Yes, dear.”

“They attacked. Suddenly.” Each word was measured.

As much as she wanted to know the details, she shushed him. “Never mind that. What’s important right now is your recovery. You need your strength.”

“It helps. To talk. Helps me not think. About pain.”

“Very well then, go ahead.” She blinked back a tear as she recalled the morning Purlek had been born. The youngest child of Tubal-Cain and Adira had grown into the spitting image of his father, except for his eyes. *Those are definitely Adira’s*. His broad shoulders, muscular arms, and sturdy frame made it seem as if he were born to follow his father’s profession. Yet despite his strength, here he was before her, helpless, just like the first time she met him.

“So fast.”

“Who were they?”

“Nod—” He blinked hard. “Nodites.”

A pit suddenly formed in her stomach. “Nodites?” *So far west?* “Do you know why they attacked you?”

“No. Barely any warning at all.”

Her mind flashed to Noah and Iri Geshem. “We didn’t hear anything about an attack.” She rubbed her forehead. *Noah could be in danger*. “Why would their raiders travel so far? Why now, after centuries of peace?”

He slowly shook his head. “Money? Slaves? Sport?” His eyes dulled.

She sighed. “What do you remember?”

“Hit him.”

“Him who? A Nodite?”

“He. Attacked. Home.”

Piecing this story together was slow going, but now that he had begun, she was determined to get as much of it as possible before he fell back asleep. “He attacked you. And you were at home?”

“Uh — no.”

“We found you at your smithy, is that where you were?”

“Yes. Just started . . . the day.”

“How many showed up?”

“Don’t know. A lot.” He shifted gingerly and closed his eyes.

A pang of guilt assailed her. “Purlek, you don’t have to talk. You should rest.”

“It’s alright.” He took a slow breath between each sentence. “Not. Much more. They burned . . . place.”

She gently placed a hand on his arm, the need for contact outweighing her fear of hurting him. “Oh, I don’t know how you survived everything. We saw the charred remains.”

“Forge.” He chuckled, coughed, and then winced.

“Huh?”

“Fireproof.”

“Yes it is! So you crawled in there and waited for the flames to pass?” The image of the wrecked building and his body lying under the rubble filled her mind. “But we didn’t find you there.”

“Came out early. Roof fell.”

“Of course. That’s the beam we found you under. It must have knocked you out. Thankfully, they’d left by then, but of course you wouldn’t have come out until you were sure they were gone.”

His labored breathing smoothed into a more peaceful rhythm. He placed his hand on top of hers and forced a smile. “Thank you.” He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Emzara mused over this new information. She considered heading back to her own pallet for some much-needed rest, but dwelled on Purlek’s abbreviated retelling of the attack. She shuddered in the dark. With concern for Noah and the possibility of marauding Nodites in the region, sleep would be impossible.