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**RAHAB** studied the distant plain of Jericho from her window in the city wall, her heart stirring with fear and excitement. Out there, just beyond the Jordan River, the Israelites were encamped, only the floodwaters holding them back. Soon they would cross over and come against the king of Jericho with the same ferocity they had shown in battle against Sihon, Og, and the five kings of Midian. And everyone in Jericho would die.

The king had doubled the guard at the gate and posted soldiers on the battlements. But it would do no good. Destruction was on the horizon. The only hope was to surrender and plead for mercy. The king worried about the size of the invading army, but he failed to see the real danger: the God of the Hebrews. All of Pharaoh's warriors hadn't been enough to defeat Him forty years ago. Not even

the pantheon of gods and goddesses had saved Egypt. But all the king of Jericho could think about was improving the battlements, stockpiling weapons, and increasing the number of soldiers! Did men never learn?

Jericho was doomed!

And she was imprisoned inside the city, bound by a life she had carved out for herself years ago. What hope had she, a harlot? Her fate had been set in motion years ago, when she was little more than a child, a peasant's daughter summoned by a king.

"You must go!" her father had said. "As long as you live in the palace and please him, I shall prosper. He's arranging marriages for your sisters. And if you refuse, he will have you nonetheless, killing me to remove any obstacles. Think of the honor he bestows upon you. He chooses only the most beautiful girls, Rahab."

An *honor*? "And will he marry me, Father?" Her father couldn't look into her eyes. She knew the answer. The king had several wives, all of whom he had married for political advantages. She had nothing a king needed—merely a body he wanted to use.

Even then, young as she had been, she knew that lust burned hot but eventually turned to ashes. In a week, a month, a year perhaps, the king would tire of her and send her home wearing a beautiful Babylonian robe and a few pieces of gold jewelry her father would confiscate and sell for his own profit.

"When I return, will you allow me to sell dates and pomegranates in the marketplace again, Father, or will I end up like so many others? Selling my body for a loaf of bread?"

He had covered his face and wept. She'd hated him for taking advantage of her ruin, hated him for making excuses, hated him for telling her she would be better off in the king's palace than in the grove hut where he and her mother and brothers and sisters lived. She hated him because he had no power to save her.

She had hated her own helplessness most of all.

Even in her wrath, Rahab had known her father couldn't save her from the king's lust. A king could take what he wanted. Any gifts he gave were meant to dissolve thoughts of revenge. Life was hard and uncertain, but if the right opportunity arose, a beautiful daughter could make a father's way smooth. Tax exemptions. Land use. An elevated position in the court. The king was generous when it served him, but usually his generosity lasted only as long as his lust.

Rahab rested her arms on the window, gazing out. She remembered setting foot in the palace that first day, vowing not to end up as a discarded sandal. She intended to find a way to take advantage of her wretched situation and the man who used her. She'd hidden her fury and revulsion, pretending to enjoy the king's embrace. Every moment in his company, her mind was crouched like a lioness studying its prey, watching, waiting for his weakness to show. And she found it soon enough: the constant arrival of emissaries, spies, and messengers. Without their stream of information, he wouldn't know who his enemies were or what petty jealousies and rebellions were on the rise.

"Give me a house, and I'll gather information for you," she had boldly proposed, once her opportunity became

clear to her. How the king had laughed at her sagacity! She'd laughed with him, but continued to entice and solicit for further benefits. She was tenacious in her determination to have something tangible when she left the palace, something with which she could make her own way and sustain herself comfortably for a lifetime. She deserved it after suffering the caresses of that fat, foul-smelling, arrogant old man!

Well, she had gotten what she wanted: a house, a prosperous living, and the illusion of independence. The king had given her this house situated near the eastern gate so she could watch the comings and goings of Jericho. For twelve years she'd looked out this window and picked out men to share her bed, men who might tell her things that would protect the king's throne and increase his treasury. Every transaction she made brought a double payment. The men paid to sleep with her, and the king paid for the grains of information she gleaned. She knew even more about what was happening outside the walls of Jericho than the king did. And when she wanted to know what was going on inside the palace, she beckoned Cabul, the captain of the guard. He could always be counted on to spill out every secret while in her arms.

She owned half a dozen Babylonian robes, boxes inlaid with bone and ivory and filled with jewelry. Her house was furnished with objects of art, her floor covered with multi-colored, woven rugs. Her customers slept on the finest colored linen sheets from Egypt perfumed with myrrh, aloe, and cinnamon. She could afford tasty delicacies and rich, heady wines. Everyone in the city knew she was a friend

and confidante of the king. They also knew she was a whore.

But no one knew how much she hated her life. No one guessed how helpless she felt in the face of the plans made for her by father and king. Many would wonder why she had cause to complain. On the outside, she had an enviable life. The king respected her, men desired her, and she could choose her clientele. There were even women in Jericho who envied her independence. They didn't know what it felt like to be used, stripped of humanity. Even now, despite a house of her own and plush surroundings, she was helpless to change anything about her life. She was locked into it.

Yet no one knew the fierce heart that beat within her. No one suspected the stored resentment, the gathering fury, the aching hunger to break free and escape. She was in a prison others had made for her, a prison she had succeeded in filling with earthly treasures. But she had other plans, other dreams and hopes.

And they all depended on the God out there, the One she knew had the power to save those He chose. Somehow she had known—even as a young girl hearing the stories for the first time—that He was a true God, the only true One. When He brought His people across the Jordan, He would take this city and crush it as He had crushed all His enemies.

The end of everything she had known was in sight.

*We're all going to die! Doesn't anyone else see that? Are they all blind and deaf to what's been happening for the last forty years? People come and go as they always have, thinking everything is going to be all right. They think the walls we've*

*built will protect us, just as I thought the walls of my father's hut could protect me all those years ago. And we're not safe—we're not safe at all!*

She was filled with the terror of death, filled even more with a terrible longing to be a part of what would come. She wanted to belong to the God who was coming. She felt like a little girl wanting desperately to be swept up in her father's arms and saved from destruction.

Several months ago, an Egyptian had spent a night telling her stories of the God of the Israelites. "But everyone says those are myths," she had said, wondering whether he believed the tales he repeated.

"Oh, no. My father was a boy when the plagues came. . . ." He'd talked far into the night about the signs and wonders and about a man named Moses. "He's dead now, but there's another . . . Joshua."

She went to the king the next morning, but he was only interested in tactics, weaponry, numbers. "It's the *God* of the Hebrews you need to fear, my king," she said, but he waved her away impatiently.

"You disappoint me, Rahab, talking like a hysterical woman."

She wanted to shout at him. Moses might be a great leader, but no man could break the might of Egypt. Only a true God could do that! And He was out there, preparing His people to take all of Canaan.

But one look into the king's eyes and she knew pride was on the throne. Men listened only to what they wanted to hear.

Now, sitting at her window, she stretched her hands out

and waved them. *Oh, how I wish I were one of Your people, for You alone are a true God.* Her eyes were hot and gritty. *I would bow down to You and give You offerings if given the chance!* She put her hands down and turned away. She could wish all she wanted, but she was going to share the same fate as everyone else trapped inside these walls. This fortress would become a slaughterhouse.

Because the king was stubborn and proud. Because the king thought the walls were high enough and thick enough to keep him safe. Because he was too stubborn and stupid to put his pride aside for the sake of his people. The king was afraid of the Israelites, but it was their God he should fear. She had known men all her life, and they were all much the same. But this God, He was different. She could *feel* His presence in some strange way she couldn't define, and she was filled with a sense of awe and urgency. Oh, how fortunate were those who belonged to Him! They had *nothing* to fear.

Although she had told the king everything she learned, he refused to listen. Still, she kept trying.

"I never knew you to be so fainthearted, my sweet. Those Hebrews will tuck tail and flee the same way they did forty years ago when the Amalekites joined forces with us. My father drove them out of the land. If they have such a mighty god on their side, why didn't they prevail against us then? Plagues . . . seas opening . . ." He sneered. "Myths to frighten us."

"Have you forgotten Sihon?"

He paled, his eyes narrowing coldly at her reminder. "No army can break through our walls."



“Before it’s too late, send emissaries of peace with gifts for their God.”

“What? Are you mad? Do you think our priests would agree to that? We have gods of our own to appease! They’ve always protected us in the past. They’ll protect us now.”

“The same way Egypt’s gods protected her? Egypt bows down to insects, and this God sent swarms to destroy their crops. They worship their Nile River, and this God turned it to blood.”

“They’re just stories, Rahab. Rumors to spread fear among our people. And you add to them! Go back to your house and do what you do best. Watch for foreign spies. . . .”

And so she did, but not for his sake.

Cabul talked freely last night, boasting of manpower, weapons, and the continuous sacrifices being made to the gods of Canaan. “We’ll be fine. Don’t worry your pretty head.”

Fools! They were all fools! Surely the God who mocked the gods of Egypt and opened the Red Sea would find it easy to break down these walls! What good would stone and mortar idols do against a God who controlled wind, fire, and water? Rahab was certain that one breath from His lips would blow open the gates of Jericho. A sweep of His hand would make rubble of all the king’s defenses!

But no one would listen.

So be it. She had given her last warning. Let it be on the king’s head what happened to Jericho. She was going to find a way to align herself with those who would have the victory. If she didn’t, she would die.

How could she get out of Jericho without jeopardizing the lives of her family members? If she left, the king would have her followed. She would be captured and executed for treason, and every member of her family would suffer the same fate to prevent the spread of her rebellion. No, she couldn't leave Jericho unless she took her father and mother and brothers and sisters and their families with her. But that would be impossible! Even if she could find a way to leave without arousing suspicion, her family wouldn't come. Her father believed whatever the king said. It wasn't in his nature to think for himself.

Rahab raked her fingers through her hair, pushing the curly dark mass over her shoulder. "Rahab!" someone called from below. She didn't look down. She wasn't interested in a merchant from Jebus or the owner of a caravan taking spices to Egypt or another soldier from a vanquished army. They were all walking dead. They just didn't know it yet. Only those Hebrews out there beyond the river were alive. For their God was no stone idol carved by human hands. He was the God of heaven and earth!

*And I am just a rat inside a hole in this wall. . . .*

What a strange and marvelous God He was! He had chosen the Hebrews—a nation of slaves—and set them free from Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth. He had taken the lowest of the low and used them to bring down the mighty. She'd heard that He'd even rained bread upon His people. They had nothing to fear, for He was mighty in deeds and yet showed kindness and mercy to them. Who would not love such a God?

Her king. Her people.

*I would love Him! Her mouth trembled, and her eyes were hot with tears. I would serve Him any way He asked. Given the chance, I would bow down before Him and rejoice to be counted among His people!*

Cabul snored loudly from the bed behind her, reminding her of his unwelcome presence. She pressed her palms over her ears and shut her eyes tightly, filled with self-disgust and anger. If she gave in to her feelings, she would shake the man awake and scream at him to get out of her house. He hadn't told her anything new last night. Cabul was a waste of her time.

She watched the road again. She had one small glimmer of hope that had been roused by something her father had told her. Moses had sent spies into the land forty years ago. "We beat them back then." She had wondered about that, mulling over reasons for the Israelites' failure. They had been slaves, freed from mighty Egypt by an even mightier God. But perhaps they had still thought like slaves rather than men under the banner of a true God. Perhaps they had refused to obey. She could only guess why they had failed. But she knew it was not due to any failure of the God who rescued them.

Those who had rebelled all those years ago must surely be dead by now. A new generation had arisen, a generation who had been hardened by desert living, a generation who had been in the presence of Power from their birth. She could only hope that Joshua would do as Moses had done before him and send spies into the land. And she would have to be the first to spot them. With victory assured by their God, the Israelites didn't need to send anyone, but she

still hoped the noble leader Joshua would take nothing for granted. Even if it wasn't necessary, it would be prudent to send spies to view the land and evaluate enemy defenses.

*Please come. Please, please, please come. . . . I don't want to die. I don't want my family to die. Send someone. . . . Open my eyes so that I'll recognize them before the guards do. If they see them first and report to the king, all is lost!*

"Rahab!" a man called to her again.

She glanced down impatiently and saw an Ishmaelite merchant waving at her from among the throng gathered at the gate. He was eager to lodge with her, but she spread her hands, shrugging and shaking her head. Let his camels keep him warm. He held up a gold necklace to bribe her. Ha! What good would gold do when the day of destruction came? "Give it to one of your wives!" she called back. Those around him laughed. Another man called up to her, but she ignored the entreaties and flatteries and watched the road.

*Let them come to me.*

If the spies were ragged from wandering, she would give them beautiful robes from Babylon. If they were thirsty, she would give them fine wine. If they were hungry, she would serve them a feast fit for kings. For they would come as servants of the Most High God. She would show them the honor meant for the One they served. For mighty was their God and worthy of tribute!

Her chest was tight with yearning. She wanted to be safe. As long as she was inside this wall, inside this city, she was condemned. She had to be counted among the Israelites to survive. The gods of the Jerichoans and Amorites and

Perizzites and a dozen other tribes who inhabited Canaan wouldn't come to her rescue. They were stone tyrants with corrupt priests who demanded constant sacrifice. She'd seen babies taken from their mothers and placed on an altar, their little bodies boiled until the flesh fell away so the bones could be put into small bags and buried beneath the foundation of a new house or temple. As though murdered children could bring good fortune! She was thankful she had never had a child.

*But if I did have one, I would give my baby to the God out there, the unseen One who dwells with His people, who shades them by day and keeps them warm at night, the One who protects those who belong to Him as though they were His children. A God like Him could be trusted. . . .*

"Ah, the light." Cabul groaned. "Close the curtains!"

Rahab clenched her teeth; she kept her back to him. It was time the man was gone from her bed and her house. "The sun is up," she said in a pleasant voice. "Time you were as well."

She heard a muffled curse and the rustle of linen. "You're hard-hearted, Rahab."

She glanced at him over her shoulder and forced a sultry smile. "You didn't say that last night." She looked out the window again, searching, hoping to see someone who looked like an Israelite spy. What would one look like? How would she recognize one if he did come?

Cabul slid his arm around her waist and reached up to lift the curtain from the hook. "Come back to bed, my love." He pressed his lips to the curve of her neck.

She caught his hand before it could move to caress her.

“The king will hear you’re missing from your post. I wouldn’t want to get you into trouble.”

He laughed softly, his breath hot in her hair. “I won’t be late.”

She turned in his arms. “You must go, Cabul.” She put her hands against his chest. “Your absence at the gate will be noticed, and I’ll not have it said that Rahab caused a friend trouble.”

“You are causing me pain right now.”

“You’re man enough to survive a small discomfort.”

He caught her hand as she moved away from him. “Is there a rich merchant below?”

“No.”

“I heard someone calling your name.”

“And what if you did?” Did he think putting a few coins in her hand meant he owned her? “You know what I do for a living.”

He frowned, his eyes darkening.

Stifling her annoyance, she brushed her fingertips down his cheek and softened her tone. “Don’t forget I came out of my house to find you.” In her business, it was always wise to send a man away feeling he was someone special.

He grinned. “So you love me a little.”

“Enough to wish you no harm.” She allowed him to kiss her briefly and then disentangled herself. “A crowd is waiting at the gate, Cabul. It’s time you opened it. If the merchants are annoyed, the king will hear about it.” She crossed the room, leaned down, and swept up his clothes. Opening the door, she tossed them back at him. “You’d better hurry!” She laughed as she watched him dress hast-

ily, then closed the door behind him. Dropping the bar to keep any would-be visitors out, she hurried back to her post at the window.

Solitude was a luxury. She stepped up and sat in the window, one leg dangling out. Ignoring the whistles from below, she watched the plain. Was that a column of smoke in the distance? She couldn't be sure. She had heard that the Israelites' God accompanied them as a column of smoke during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

When the heat became oppressive, she closed the curtains, left the window, and brushed her hair. She ate bread and sipped wine. But every few minutes, she parted the red-dyed linen and looked out again, studying every stranger who walked along the road.

+ + +

Salmon had waited all his life to set foot in the Promised Land. He could see it from where he was camped. He was eager for the battles ahead, his confidence strengthened by past victories the Lord had given His people. It was the waiting that was difficult. Salmon felt like a horse reined in, prancing, champing at the bit, ready for the race to begin. He laughed, excitement coursing through him as he sparred with his friend Ephraim. It was early, the sun just rising, but every day was an opportunity to train, to prepare for God's work of taking the Promised Land.

Gripping his staff, he made a thrust. Ephraim parried, turned, and struck, but Salmon countered him. *Crack! Crack! Crack!* Ephraim came at him with fierce determination, but Salmon was ready. Turning, he swept the staff in a hard circle and swept Ephraim off his feet. Salmon was too

confident, for he didn't expect Ephraim to make another swing at him from the ground, which landed Salmon on his back in the dust. Both lay in the dust, panting and grinning.

As soon as Salmon got his breath back, he laughed. "I'll be less smug next time."

"When do you think we'll attack Jericho?" Ephraim said, rising and dusting himself off.

Salmon sat up and looked toward the rise where Joshua stood each day, praying. "The Lord will tell Joshua when the time is right."

"I hope it's soon! Somehow the waiting is harder than the battle itself."

Salmon stood, his staff gripped in his hand. The desert wind stirred Joshua's robes as he stood on the rise. Since Moses had died, Salmon had turned his full attention to Joshua and Eleazar, the priest, for leadership. Whatever they said was law, for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly and spoke only what God instructed them to say. As a boy at his father's knee, Salmon had heard the story of how Joshua and Caleb had spied out the Promised Land and said it could be taken. They'd believed God's promise to give them the land, but the other ten spies had convinced the people—even the great leader Moses himself—that victory was impossible. The people had lacked faith and lost their opportunity, so the promise was deferred to the next generation. Salmon's generation. Salmon hadn't even been born when the Lord had passed judgment and sent the people back into the desert, but he'd been affected by it. He had grown up in the shadow of his father's shame and regrets.



How many times had he heard his father weeping? *“If only we’d listened. If only we’d believed Joshua and Caleb.”* Over and over again, year after year. If whining could wear down the Lord, his father’s surely would have. *“If only we’d listened, we wouldn’t be out in this wilderness, wandering like lost sheep.”* Salmon grimaced at the memory of his father’s complaints and self-pity, for they hinted of the old rebellion and the unchanged attitude of a man’s heart.

*Lord God of mercy, save me from such thinking, he prayed. Make me the man You want me to be—a man of courage, a man willing to step out immediately when You say go.*

It was too easy to sneer at the mistakes of others. Such arrogance. Salmon knew he was no better than the man who had fathered him. The danger was in looking too far ahead. He must *wait*, as Joshua was waiting. The Lord would speak when He was ready, and when God did speak, Salmon knew the choice would be presented to him: obey or disobey. He didn’t want to hesitate like his father had. Better to fear God than men. No matter how frightened he might be of the battle ahead, he knew it was a more fearful thing to displease the Lord. Therefore, he set his mind on obedience. He wouldn’t allow himself to give in to his human weaknesses, his fears. How could one fear men and please God?

Jehovah had promised the land of Canaan to His people. The day would come when He would call them to take hold of that promise. It would be up to Salmon and all those of his generation to obey.

So far, none had weakened, but a few were grumbling at the delay, and a few questioned.

*Lord God of heaven and earth, I beg You to give me the confidence of Joshua. Instill in me Your purpose. Do not let me weaken. You are God and there is no other!*

“Prepare yourself,” Ephraim said.

Turning, Salmon brought his staff up and blocked Ephraim’s blow.

When the Lord called him into battle, Salmon intended to be ready.

+ + +

“Salmon.”

He recognized the deep voice immediately. Jumping to his feet, he pulled back the tent flap and gaped at Joshua.

“I have work for you,” the elderly man said calmly.

“Please, enter.” Salmon stepped back quickly and bid his commander welcome.

The old warrior ducked his head slightly and entered the tent, looked around briefly, and faced Salmon once more. Salmon shook inwardly with excitement, for what greater honor could there be than to have Joshua seek him out?

“Please sit here, sir.” He offered him the most comfortable place.

Joshua inclined his head. Setting the bundle he had brought with him to one side, he folded his legs beneath him as easily as a young man. When he looked up at Salmon, his eyes were dark and intent, ablaze with purpose.

Under normal circumstances, the commander would have summoned him rather than come to his tent. “What can I serve you, sir?” Salmon said, curbing his curiosity in order to show respect and hospitality. Joshua would explain when he was ready.

Smiling slightly, Joshua held out his hand. "Nothing. But you can sit."

Salmon did so. Leaning forward, he clasped his hands and said nothing. The old man closed his eyes for a long moment and then raised his head and looked at him. "I need two men to go on a mission of great risk."

"I'll go." Salmon straightened, heart pounding. "Send me."

Joshua tipped his head to one side and considered him in amusement. "It might be prudent to hear what the mission is before you volunteer."

"If you want it done, it needs doing, and that's all I need to know. The Lord speaks through you. To obey you is to obey God. I'll go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you need done."

Joshua's eyes glowed. He leaned forward. "Then here are your instructions. Spy out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho. See what defenses they have in place. Discern the mood of the people."

Fear caught Salmon unaware, but he set his mind against it. "When do you want me to leave?"

"Within the hour. Caleb is giving instructions to Ephraim." Joshua raised his hand. "I can see you're ready to grab your sword and go now, but hear me out. Other than Caleb and Ephraim, no one knows you're leaving camp. You'll be going in secret. You're young and on fire, my son, but you must be coolheaded and wise as a serpent. Do not stroll into the city like a conqueror. Keep your head down. Seek out an establishment that will know the mind of the people. Blend in. Keep your eyes and ears open. The

battlements aren't as important as what the Jerichoans are thinking. Find out everything you can, and then get out of there as quickly as possible. Waste no time. Do you understand?"

"Yes, commander."

Joshua took the bundle he'd set aside and placed it between them. "Amorite clothing and a weapon."

The clothing had undoubtedly been taken from the body of a vanquished foe, for Salmon saw a stain of blood. He knew he would have to be careful when wearing the tunic. It would be difficult for him to blend in naturally among Jerichoans if anyone saw that stain. Anyone looking at it would know the last man who wore the garment had died a violent death. He would have to wear a mantle to cover it.

Joshua rose. Salmon sprang to his feet. Joshua turned before going out, put his hand on Salmon's shoulder, and gripped him strongly. "May the Lord watch over you and keep you safe!"

"Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Releasing him, Joshua swept the tent flap aside, stooped, and went out. Salmon held the flap open long enough to watch Joshua disappear among the other tents of Israel. Letting it drop back into place, he let out his breath sharply and dropped to his knees. Throwing back his head, Salmon closed his eyes and raised his hands, thanking God for this opportunity to serve. Then he prostrated himself and prayed for the wisdom and courage to complete the task.

+ + +

By moonlight, Salmon and Ephraim girded their loins by drawing up the backs of their tunics and tucking them into

their belts. Thus unencumbered, they ran, reaching the eastern bank of the Jordan well before daybreak. Gasping for breath, Salmon dumped his bundle on the ground, grasped his tunic, and hauled it up over his head.

"The river looks swift," Ephraim said, stripping off his clothing and catching the Amorite tunic Salmon tossed him.

Swollen by spring floods, the river rose over its banks. And Ephraim was right—the current was swift.

Salmon shrugged into the Amorite tunic. He nodded toward a sloping bank as he strapped on a leather belt. "We'll go in down there and start swimming."

Ephraim's mouth curved sardonically. "I hate to mention this now, friend, but I don't know how to swim."

Salmon laughed mirthlessly. "And you think I do? The desert hasn't exactly afforded us much opportunity to learn, has it?"

"So what are we going to do?"

"Cross over. Stop worrying. If God wills, we'll make it."

"And if not, we'll drown," Ephraim said flatly.

"Do you think the Lord has brought us this far to let us be defeated?"

Ephraim watched the river. "I'd feel better if I had a tree trunk to hang on to."

"The Lord will uphold us." Salmon spoke with more conviction than he felt. *Give me courage, Lord.* "Fill your lungs with air, keep your arms outstretched, and kick like a frog. The current will carry us."

"All the way to the Salt Sea."

Salmon ignored his friend's grim sense of humor and pointed. "Aim for those willows on the other side." Tying

the sheath to his belt, he jammed his dagger into it. "Let's go."

Despite his bravado, fear shot through Salmon as the river's current tugged hard at his legs. Overcoming his fear, he waded into the Jordan until the water was to his waist. Perhaps he could make it this way, one step at a time, using his own physical strength to keep himself on his feet. But the next step proved he couldn't. He slipped on some slick rocks and lost his footing. Panic gripped him as he was sucked into the current. He was pulled under briefly, but he fought his way up long enough to fill his lungs with air. His body rolled and turned, spun back. He hit something hard and almost lost his breath. Salmon fought his fear and the river, as the spring flood carried him along.

*Lord, help me!*

He saw the trees and kicked hard. Clawing the water, he used the current to steer his body. He kept his neck arched and stiff so that his head was above the water and he could breathe and see where he was going. He heard a shout behind him but didn't have time to turn and see if Ephraim was doing any better than he. Making a lunge for an overhanging branch, he caught hold. Reaching up, he got a better grip and looked back. Ephraim was still standing on the far bank.

"Come on!" Salmon called to him.

Ephraim entered the river with obvious uneasiness. Stretching out his arms, he went in face first. Seeing how fast Ephraim was swept along, Salmon stretched out his body as far as possible so that his friend could reach his ankle. "Grab hold!"

Ephraim succeeded, but the jolt almost yanked Salmon free. His body swung hard around and jerked against the strong pull of the river. Water rippled violently over Ephraim's head. Clinging to the branch with one hand, Salmon reached down and grasped Ephraim and pulled. "Climb!" Ephraim reached up, his fingers biting into Salmon's thigh. Pulling himself higher, his head emerged from the rushing water. He gasped for breath. Salmon grabbed Ephraim's belt and hauled him up farther. Salmon shoved him toward the west bank.

When he made it to shore, Ephraim reached out and gave Salmon a hand and threw himself back as far as he could before the limb broke and toppled into the water. Gaining his footing in the rocky bottom, Salmon slogged his way out of the Jordan and collapsed to his knees. Ephraim was coughing violently.

Chest heaving, Salmon drank in the air. He dug his fingers into the soil and held it up to breathe in the scent of its richness. "The Lord has brought us over," he said in a voice choked with emotion. They were the first of their generation to set foot in the Promised Land. "The Lord be praised!"

Ephraim was still coughing up murky river water, but he managed to rasp, "May God grant we live long enough to enjoy it."

"Amen." Salmon rose. "It won't be long until daybreak." He was eager for the mission ahead, anxious to be on the move, but it wouldn't be wise to arrive wet and muddy from the river—or too early in the day, making them appear anxious to enter the city. Hunkering down by the

Jordan, he washed. "If we hurry, we can make it to the palms before full daylight."

"Just give me a few minutes to rest, will you?"

"We've no time to waste. Rest while we walk!"

As they crossed the arid stretch of land west of the Jordan and gained the road, the sun rose behind them. Even from a distance of several miles, the lush green spring-fed oasis was visible, as were the high, thick walls of the City of Palms that blocked entrance into Canaan. Salmon's heart sank. These walls were so immense, they would be insurmountable by frontal attack. Nor could they be taken from the west, for behind the walled city was a towering backbone of steep, jagged mountains. "The city is well situated."

"And impregnable. How will we ever conquer such a city? Never has there been such a stronghold!"

Speechless, Salmon studied the walls. They were at least six times the height of any man, and there were battlements on both sides of the gate. Guards standing watch would see an army coming from miles away, giving them plenty of time to close the gates and prepare for battle.

Would Joshua have them build ladders to scale these walls? How many would die in setting them up and keeping them in place until enough soldiers could get over the wall? Could those immense gates be smashed or burned? How many would die in the battle for this city? Thousands! Would he be one of them—if he didn't die here today, on this mission?

"May God protect us from such an end," Salmon said under his breath.



“What should we do now?” Ephraim said. “Join the throng waiting for the gates to open?”

“We’ll wait until late in the day. Better if we aren’t inspected too closely. The guards will be less attentive then.”

They found a grassy place not far from a spring-fed stream and slept in the shade of the City of Palms.