

*Now I am certain,  
That nothing can ever separate me from your love:  
Neither death nor life,  
Neither the messengers of light nor the demons of darkness,  
Neither today nor tomorrow,  
Nor any other power of this world  
Nothing can separate me from your love!*

Romans 8:38-39 (The author's own paraphrase)

# **The Day When Canaan Fell**

**1. The Pearl**

**2. The Qedesha**

**3. The Chosen**

**Rafał Kosowski**

**THE  
CHOSEN**



Vocatio Publishers  
Warsaw, Poland

Copyright © 2011 by VOCATIO  
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored  
in retrieval system, or transmitted in any form  
or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying,  
recording, or otherwise—without the prior written  
permission of the publisher. To request the rights  
please write:

Vocatio Publishers  
ul. Polnej Rozy 1  
02-798 Warszawa, POLAND  
e-mail: [ceo@vocatio.us](mailto:ceo@vocatio.us)  
[www.vocatio.us](http://www.vocatio.us)

ISBN 978-83-7492-191-6

ALL night long both groups didn't get near each other even by a bit. The fugitives were fleeing helter-skelter, perfectly oblivious of the battle raging in the realm inaccessible to their senses, though just a step away from them. Yet, if only they could see the silhouettes of the defenders and assailants, their faces, the burning eyes and the fierceness with which they launched and fended off the consecutive attacks, the escape would have turned into complete chaos, which anyhow was likely to happen all the way. For heretofore, in the history of the planet there had been very few such situations where the Bearer of Light himself had to get involved personally. Despite the assurances of the generals that everything was under control, he decided to handle the command on his own and he congratulated himself on that decision. Without his intervention the pharaoh would still be in Thebes, mourning his dead beloved ones, while the priests would have already incited the desperate nation to rebel against the ruler, killed him with the mob's hands, punished him for all the plagues that had befallen Egypt, especially for the last, most frightening one. By that time the damned fugitives would have made it to safety. But that hadn't happened, for it was only him—the Angel of the Abyss, Abaddon—who knew the power of hatred, pure and mighty like himself, the hatred able to rise above the despair and awareness of defeat, moreover, able to turn the defeat not into a mere success, but into a spectacular triumph, one to be praised in songs and

epics for the centuries to come. And only he knew what to do to make that hatred and power begin to flow in human veins, so that the proud pharaoh himself should become hatred and power.

But before the dawn two things happened, and they proved to be too much for the proud prince to handle. First he was faced by powerful *Mikajehu*, who up until that moment had been walking in the fore of the column and leading the escape, which the Son of the Dawn interpreted as the symptom of his fear and astonishment. But the messengers of the *Almighty* had never been surprised. True, they were often surprised by human decisions, they caused them grief and pain, but always were they ready. How could he have overlooked that again?!

And it was then, during the chase, when the prey was almost getting into their claws, that *Mikajehu* arrived and the memories came alive again. For long before it was the same: when the rebellion was raging in the Heavens and he was sure that nothing would possibly stop him from gaining control and power, his brother, *Archangelo Mikajehu*, instead of standing by his side defied him and spoke the words, after which the indecisive ones had no more illusions.

“Who is like *Yahweh*?” he asked then with the voice loud like a thunder. “Who is like *Yahweh*?” he repeated with same strength.

And when he barred his way now, he had the same question on his lips, and the Bearer of Light shuddered with anger; the hatred in his eyes exploded like a star being born. He darted at *Mikajehu* and fiercely attacked him like a hornet, and the dark squadrons followed their prince and charged at the Adversary. They beset the Guardian and his warriors with a tight semicircle, trying to break through the defense and take revenge on the enemy. But they prevailed not. *Mikajehu*’s sword effectively kept them away. For the human warriors rushing in the chase he was impenetrable darkness, for the legions of the dark he was an unassailable fortress. And behind his back, as far as the eye could see was brightness, which illuminated the way for the fugitives.

And so they were moving hurriedly, the hordes of hell blinded with hatred, bristled with fangs, claws and swords, ahead of them was the Guardian, whose name was *Who-is-like-Yahweh*, and his hosts, and in the fore were the ones he defended, still out of the enemy's reach. And then the road was far behind them, and they saw that they were moving in the middle of the sea; the tight walls of the waters on both sides, threatening to tumble down in the gusts of strong eastern wind.

The Bearer of Light took it all in one glance and he trembled. For it was not just them in this place—the spiritual beings for whom there were no physical borders and obstacles, but they'd brought their mortal tools there. When again he looked into the eyes of Mikajehu, he saw in them the glimmer of triumph and he already knew that he'd been defeated. Once again he'd let himself be carried away by his ambition, leaving common sense aside. Again, like a fool he got himself into a dead-end corner and he knew what would happen in a moment, which had to happen, for the *Speaking-One* opened His mouth and spoke, and even a single word of His made galaxies come into being.

The organized chase turned into total chaos when thousands of combat chariots started to fall apart under the masses of water falling down on them. In just one moment the horses that drew them either stood upright on their rear legs when they encountered the unexpected resistance of the vehicles' axels after the wheels fell off and the chariots started scraping the sandy sea floor, or—as they were suddenly freed of the burden—the swift animals broke the reins and rapidly gathered speed only to bump into the wrecks of the vehicles ahead, trampling over the infantrymen and upsetting the other horses. Those few moments were enough to cause the whole army to lose their main combat assets. But Tutmosis was again the same stone-hearted pharaoh, who—even if bending under pressure—remained humble just for a short moment, until the danger disappeared. Then he put on his usual implacable and derisive face, which he interpreted as the

evidence of his own wisdom and courage. Now he kept proudly silent, despite the fact that around him panicky shouts were heard, which painfully reminded the pharaoh about what he had been struggling against for the past months.

“Their God is fighting for them, we’re doomed!” shouted both privates and officers.

The *Angelos* like agile hawks were drawing the enemy into combat, maneuvering among the damaged vehicles, increasing the chaos as they appeared out of nowhere and dodged the demons’ claws by only a hair’s breadth, which drove the devils mad.

“Leave them alone!” the Bearer of Light was in vain shouting his orders at the generals, trying to prevent the worse. “Command the retreat. Retreat! Make the Egyptians go back!”

But Tutmosis’ fury was like an avalanche—easy to start but impossible to stop.

“Get organized, you fools!” the pharaoh roared at his commanders, furious that he had to get off the chariot’s platform and wade in the wet sand. “Tell them to get off the chariots, take their bows and chase that herdsman scum! It’s just a few miles, can you hear me? Are you afraid of the stinking shepherds?! Unharness and mount the horses!!!”

Eventually *Angelos* disappeared, leaving the demons in the state of boiling; now they resembled a swarm of hornets. Once set in motion evil either hit the target with tremendous momentum, or—once it encountered a strong barrier, it always turned against the ones who called it to being. The words of the ‘divine’ pharaoh were sinking in the clutter of terrified voices. Again everyone around the ruler saw what he couldn’t see himself. *Yahweh* had made bare His mighty arm and announced the judgment over the chasing soldiers. They knew they were doomed!

\*

Captain Ahmotes was leading his small detachment at the end of the column. He realized perfectly the senselessness



of Tutmosis' decision about starting the chase in the first place. He wasn't willing to pay for the ruler's folly with his own life. At dusk, all of a sudden, darkness had fallen upon them, as dense as before, in Egypt, while strong wind was flogging them mercilessly, like all the nature was favoring the one, whom the blessed Hatshepsut had taken out of water and made him her son and wanted to make him an heir to the throne. Why was it only him, modest captain and his most trusted soldiers who could see that obvious truth? The others let themselves be carried away by Tutmosis' madness, and the king had long been unworthy of being trusted for a long time.

Mosheh was a servant of God, the captain had always been aware of that, so he had marched with the army just to report on the defeat, which would be the best outcome anyway on the other side of the sea. But now he was certain that they wouldn't make it to the other side—they were trapped, he could almost see the hands of the mighty shiny beings holding the onslaught of the sea back, thanks to which they were at all able to walk into this most amazing emerald tunnel. What would happen when their God decided the time had come to deal the blow and the mighty hands let go?

Right behind the wall of the tunnel the water grew dark rapidly—terrifying depth started there. Only that narrow scrap of shallows was fit for passing to the other side. Yahweh perfectly chose the way for His people across the gulf.

Ahmotes was making preparing action plan in his mind, while rebuking himself for his own folly which told him to obey Tutmosis' commands. What to do now? Get back to safety on his own? No one would notice that, and even if they did, it was doubtful that they would start chasing him. But he couldn't just leave his men alone. Yet, was he allowed to persuade them to desert? Still, something had to be decided, it was now or never.

As soon as he heard the noise and shouting from the head of the column, he knew it was the beginning of the end and nothing could possibly stop the chain of events from happening. With a sonorous voice he called his

subordinates. Immediately they duly gathered around him. But before he managed to say something they heard the words fearfully repeated by almost everyone.

“Their God is fighting for them, we’re doomed! The chariots are shattered, we’re scattered!”

He beckoned his aide-de-camp.

“Do you remember our conversation?”

Nesmut nodded his head. The others must have been suspecting something. On the way to this place he’d heard them commenting the decisions of the commanders. He’d trained them well. Now they were looking around nervously, watching at the behavior of the other detachments, which instead of redeploying after losing the chariots they were tossing around pell-mell, increasing the already tremendous muddle. Ahmotes had an impression that hosts of mischievous genies took over the command the army of Egypt and were now driving the human pawns all over their chessboard, playing cat and mouse with them before dealing the final blow.

“It’s time for us. Tell them to follow me and no questions asked.”

He knew they’d obey. *Patriotism cannot be mistaken with folly*—he repeated in his thoughts. It was Mosheh who’d instilled it in him when the prince was still the commander of the army. This country would look different under his reign. And now they were chasing the foster son of Divine Hatshepsut and his people, breaking all the promises and agreements. Now it was hard to call it a chase at all. He’d always wanted a glorious death in a battle, while here all that could befall his detachment was a death of infamy: being drowned like cattle while chasing the unarmed!

His gaze swept over his men one by one and he spurred the horse. Nesmut shouted a command and they all moved like one man.

For a moment Ahmotes felt better. He’d found courage to make a difficult decision; he wasn’t walking like a sheep for slaughter and still had a chance. At the same time some obtrusive voice in his mind kept repeating that the time to make the right choice had long passed.

The demons of the Bearer of Light were still out of control and there was no power now that could restore order in the so-far invincible army. The veterans of the battles in Phoenicia and Nubia, the victors of the battle of Megiddo and in the Mitannian campaign, valiant and disciplined, glorifying the name of Re and Isis all over the region were now running aimlessly and without command like terrified children. Every now and then they tripped over the broken chariots' wheels and the bodies of the ones trampled down by the panicky horses.

The clamor built up, soon joined by another terrifying sound. Ahmotes looked back just once and he knew he wouldn't do that again. The sea was surging into the tunnel violently, shattering everything that still could move on its own. The captain urged the steed even harder, concentrating on just survival. The other soldiers did the same and a few dozen riders were darting across the wet sand towards the salutary shore, which was still over a mile away.

Too far to make it!

"Help me, gods!" The old habits still made him seek rescue with the powerless deities. A moment later he realized his own folly. *What can you do? You've been humiliated and defeated*—he thought bitterly, and the obtrusive voice kept repeating in his mind the grim augury: *It's too late, too late, too late You're doomed... doomed... doomed...*

He didn't believe anything now. Only the self-preservation instinct urged him onward. The noise intensified, along with the wave of air driven by the masses of the water surging in, overturning the wrecks of the chariots and tossing the soldiers around like they were dry leaves. Ahmotes had never been so scared as he was now.

At one moment he felt their steeds accelerate as they found the rock under the slushy sand. He felt a shade of comfort, which grew pale anyway just a moment later. The sea floor was rising more and more steeply towards the western shore, forcing the horses to make even a greater effort.

*We stand no chance*—he thought and stopped the horse.

The bewildered soldiers stopped next to him, thinking that something had changed to their advantage, but the roar of the water behind their backs smashed those hopes.

“We are still soldiers of Egypt!” he roared at them. “Death must be looked straight in the eye. We shall not run since it is futile anyway. We have fought together, now we shall die together!”

Their faces showed determination mixed with despair. They arranged in a compact line, though the wind rushing in front of the wave was almost picking the horses up. Still, they kept looking ahead till the very end, before the whitewater surge shattered them.

\*

On the opposite shore the stunned crowd of Israelites was swaying in a panicky manner, presenting a perfect example of the inconstancy of human feelings.

“They’re drowned! The Egyptians have been defeated! Lost in the depths!” the people standing right on the shore were shouting at the top of their lungs as they saw the bodies of soldiers and horses emerging in the surface together with the remnants of the oval shields and the red-and-white kerchiefs blown off the soldiers’ heads by the mighty surge of the element. “*Yahweh* has saved us! Praise be to the *One-Who-Is!*”

“Woe to us, we’re lost! Mosheh has led us into a trap!” yelled the people crowded a mile from the water, still unaware of what had just happened. “Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt that the old fool has led us all the way here just to perish in the desert?! And why at all did we leave Goshen? Even then we should have pushed back into Mosheh’s throat all his empty assurances and promises!”

\*

The surface of water was slowly calming, only here and there one were small busy whirlpools, while little waves

coming from opposite directions were wrestling each other like in a play. And if it hadn't been for the multitude of objects and bodies floating all along the distance they'd walked across the sea floor, one could say that the whole situation was nothing but an absurd illusion. But the people standing nearest the shore saw exactly that it had really happened.

Jehoshua standing next to the chief was watching not the water but the swaying human masses, shouting out all those groans and complaints, mixed with the wild shouts of joy and praise for the *Almighty*. He knew exactly that it wouldn't be easy to control that wildest of elements—the nation of stiff necks and changeable hearts! The caterpillar had slowly crawled ashore and still didn't know where it had come from and where it was headed. It wasn't able to embrace the magnitude of God's care, for the new creation within had only started to form.

"It will be a painful process, chief" he said as he turned his look at the people crowded densely ashore, covering dozens of acres of space. "We need a lot of support of *El Elohe Israel* before we get to our destination."

Mosheh didn't say anything, he just put his hand on his young aide-de-camp and squeezed hard, looking straight into his eyes. In his gaze Jehoshua read the confirmation of his own fears and predictions. They were about to start a very long walk.

\*

Standing on the shore of the gulf, the Bearer of Light screwed up his eyes and slowly started to calm down. They got away from him, that was a fact; Egypt would never more find courage to attack them, so that asset had ceased to count. But people were still people. Those damned animals bestowed with spirit and mind went onto the shore the same as of their own choice they had been all through their history—weak and stupid. In a moment they would forget about that night and its horror. And he knew how to take advantage of that.

He looked at their faces one by one, he saw the radiance of their emotions and thoughts. He'd find many who would gladly listen to the strange voice. He called one of the princes.

"Find it at any cost. Find the weak link."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Only one is enough. And focus all your might on it. You may leave now." He dismissed him without even looking at him once, then again he fixed his gaze in the human masses. "There always is a weak link and sooner or later it will break."

# 1 *The Camp*

*Even when winning a victory,  
People recklessly sow the seeds of the future defeat  
And on the path of salvation they take  
Heavy luggage of despair and disbelief.*

A LOT of time had passed before they ventured lifting their eyes up. Sprinkled with dust and splinters falling from the beams of the ceiling they looked like those characters from fairy tales who had spent the last century underground, sunken in a mysterious sleep. The building stopped swaying, but here and there they heard the crunching and crackling of the weakened beams and joints. The room was still full of suffocating dust hanging in the air, cut by rays of light as thin as sword blades, getting inside through the numerous slits and cracks. They cautiously opened their eyes and wiped the faces with the sleeves of their robes. In that cobweb of light they barely recognized each other's faces.

Although the deafening noise of the city walls tumbling down had long subsided, the sounds that replaced it were equally terrifying. From all directions they heard and felt the hurried steps of the multitude of warriors attacking the city; like a stream current washing the sides of a stone they were rushing past the inn-house that was still standing there, torn from amidst the walls. And death was following the soldiers' feet. The survivors didn't dare open the door in fear of the angels of annihilation, but the sounds of dying coming from all directions were enough to imagine what was going on in the condemned city. And Jericho was dying with a violent death, squeezed by the attackers from all sides, gasping in agony like it was running a hundred-mile race uphill. With no walls to keep it safe, with no

soldiers to defend it, as they got killed or trapped under the debris, Jericho kept bleeding with thousands of wounds and crying of terror and pain with thousands of voices. Against all expectations and the age long history—though in fact it had lasted for less than a thousand years—the city was being wiped from the surface of the ground within minutes, like a castle built of wet sand washed away by the waves of the coming tide.

*El Elohe Israel* was the first to deal a blow, then, when the dust raised by fallen walls went down, the wave of soldiers moved on and with murderous precision, like a deadly flood they started to penetrate every place wherever they found signs of life. In the south they dashed across the empty city square and started the onslaught on the castle, Those attacking from the east, despite the steep slope darted among the trees of the holy grave surrounding the temple of Yerach and Asher, where they encountered almost no resistance. At the sight of *Angelos* rushing onward in an awesome charge the spiritual residents of that place started to flee from their hideouts like black ravens and abandoned the terrified priests together with temple prostitutes of both genders and ordinary servants. The tower in the western part of the city fell down together with the inner part of the walls, out of which it rose, and as it fell, it almost cut the royal building in two, shattered the throne room and the treasury, though the most of the castle buildings were still intact. Hundreds of clay tablets together with all the multitude of magical accessories got mixed with the valuables of the royal treasury. Amidst that chaotic miscellany of priceless objects and ordinary rubbish there lay Arunu with his beautiful wife, both of them crushed by the broken ceiling. Half-conscious with the pain, in the last minutes of their lives all they saw were the conquerors' feet passing above them, and they heard the sounds of the slaughter amplified by the thud of bodies dropping dead here and there. They saw the faces of their courtiers and servants frozen in agonizing grimaces. At last they were also spotted by the assailants, whose merciful swords finished their torment.



The most difficult way of attack led from the north, as the hill was the steepest there, and if only the defenders had been able to get organized there somehow, the attackers would have found the resistance very difficult to break. But there was no resistance at all—the horror proved a thousand times worse than the most terrifying visions. The waves of the attackers soon met crowded on the castle hill and started methodical looting of whatever that was precious. It was then that among all the loud clutter the handful of survivors heard someone's steps approaching towards the inn. A moment later a few pairs of hands started to open the door. It came with great effort as the door got jammed in the frame deformed by the tremors. Shalma was the first to get inside. She recognized him at once, though his face, armor, arms and chins were covered with fresh though coagulated blood. Amram walked inside right after him, while outside a few more soldiers stopped. They were gasping heavily. Their muscles were still flexed, marked with a web of veins. Blood was oozing from the few scratches and got mixed with Canaanite blood.

The mother, Keshmi and Keyla, who had never seen them before, screamed fearfully, for the sight of the Hebrew soldiers coming straight from the storm of combat was terrifying. Rachabe's brothers and Rajehu jumped onto their feet, expecting anything to happen. They weren't sure whether the men were some executors searching the area for survivors. They might have just as well visited a few places like this to finish the work of death with their swords wherever they saw survivors. Only after Rachabe got up and made a hesitant step towards the soldiers, they all breathed a breath of relief.

*And this is our rescue?* she thought. *And what now?*

They looked at each other in silence, then Rachabe moved her gaze to what was behind the Israelites' backs. The door of the inn faced north and so far she'd always seen from there a bend of the street running along the wall. Now there was nothing to obstruct the view of a vast plain declining gently towards the Jordan, and in the closer perspective she saw the picture of destruction, to which she

wasn't prepared. The external wall, of which the inn was part had disappeared. The tremor had also damaged the feeble buildings across the street. What was left were just stumps of corners protruding into the air.

And further away it was even worse, as if some destructive hurricane had crumbled the inner wall and hurled the debris inside the city like it was just dry leaves. She grew pale of terror. She walked past Shalma and Amram and went outside the building. She wanted to walk further, but she tripped over the rubbles. Shalma held her in the last moment. And then she saw the bodies of the neighbors; the corpses were marked with bright red against the grey debris. Out of terror she covered her mouth with the hand.

"Come, Rachabe" Shalma said quietly. "Don't look at that. Call your folks, take your belongings and let's leave. The city will burn soon."

She hushed him with a gesture of her raised hand and climbed the nearest heap of stones careful not to stamp on someone's dead body. In the last weeks she'd hated that city with all her heart, but the immensity of destruction dazzled her. She heard Shalma's presence.

"It's horrible" she whispered through her tears.

"I know what you are feeling" he said. "Before they were just abomination to me, filth to remove."

She twitched. She thought the same way.

"And they died like people" she sobbed. "That's what you want to tell me?"

"Yes, in death everyone equal. If only they'd wanted to live like people. Now it's too late."

"Let's go. I don't want to see it."

The other thirteen of the survivors with pale faces also watched the dying city. Among the few buildings that still weren't demolished soldiers were bustling around. They knew they were a better nation, a more righteous one, they were the people of *El Elohe Israel*, but now they just looked like soldiers of any army of the world busy with looting the city seized.

Shalma must have noticed that, for he came to explain.

“The valuables will go to the temple. It’s the *cherem*, one mustn’t take anything like their own.”

He grew silent, for she wasn’t listening. Together with the others she started to take their belongings outside to prepare them for the journey. He felt clumsy. He had a different vision of that meeting, but he understood her feelings, at least he hoped he did. As he saw their bustle, he summoned a few soldiers from his own detachment and told them to help the survivors take their belongings. So far they’d pretended to be interested in something else, but he was sure they were watching them attentively. It happened when one was the brother of the chief of the tribe.

He called a commander of a thousand and told him to take the rest of the detachment to join his brother’s forces. Abinadab was the chief of the tribe of Judah and was now combing the city for the last centers of resistance. When Shalma saw Rachabe again, she was walking outside from the building with Menuel on her arms, while both her friends were walking along with her. The youngest children were still terrified and crying. The oldest girl, Elaya, looked pitiable. With Shalma’s soldiers’ help they smoothly prepared everything to leave the city. Rachabe saw the soldiers casting curious glances at her. She didn’t know what Shalma had told them about the prostitute from Jericho, but he must have described her as some heroine, for in their eyes she read admiration. But she didn’t feel better because of it anyway. On the contrary—so far it had been a nightmarish day, though it was just past noon.

Only one reflection really comforted her. Somewhere among the debris was dead Hetammu. This was the only thing she didn’t regret. She only found it sad that probably as in his life he spread death and destruction, also before death, in his last fight, with his back against the wall he must have taken with him many lives of Hebrew soldiers. Again he orphaned a child, turned a happy wife into a widow or killed some mother’s son. But she’d probably never find out about that.

She didn’t remember how they got onto the road to Galgalla. She was walking with a heavy heart and in her

mind she suddenly heard a sentimental song sung during the Festival of the Dead by a priestess playing the role of Anath, when the goddess was saying goodbye to her beloved one. And though the repentant qedesha wanted to bury her old life for good, the melody strangely suited the scenery. The sorrow aroused by the sight of death gave the song even a deeper dimension. The Heavens crying over the condemned inhabitants instead of celebrating the triumph after the city got rightfully punished. Before that she'd thought that the city would fall down and take all her bad memories with it for good, but the nightmare was only beginning, like one and a half years before on her way to Gibeon. The old tormentors hadn't left her; lurking in the shade they still weren't giving up.

Suddenly she heard the characteristic sound of raging fire. They all turned around like one man. Above the city dense smoke was rising to the sky as if from a sacrificial stake. Beshewi, who was walking next to Rachabe, was guessing what the daughter was feeling that moment. Rachabe's words confirmed that at once.

"That's just my life, mum" she said with her gaze fixed on the burning city. "A pile of rubble, flames and death."

"You've rescued us, remember that, Pearlette." Beshewi couldn't watch her anguish. "Don't torment yourself, darling. We will live."

She didn't answer.

\*

The day dragged on endlessly. First Padriya couldn't calm down for a long time. Time and time again she asked Ze about Manuel, and when he told her everything he knew and what he guessed, she alternately laughed and cried. She'd always believed that her daughter was safe and one day they might even reunite, but now they were so close to each other that waiting any further seemed unbearable. But Padriya had before managed to rise above the pain and despair, and now with her new faith she more and more boldly reached beyond that veil of mystery and uncertainty

that separated her from the little daughter. The unbelievable story of how Belea and Shil had been rescued, which she'd heard right after meeting Belea, strengthened her, for she knew that all that time Great *El* had been watching over them all. And as He had carried them harmlessly through hell, surely He wouldn't leave them to their own fate at the end of the journey.

And then, when Padriya was finally appeased and almost happy, she left both friends alone so that they could talk as much as they wanted. Time seemed to have stood still. Ze and Lape were drinking in each other's stories, they endlessly enquired about details, intertwined them with memories of the good old days, then changed the topic several times before again they got back to Rachabe.

"What do you think? What will happen to her?"

"Aberes?"

"Now she wants to be called Rachabe, remember that."

"Yes, I do. She still doesn't know anything about us?"

"No, she's deemed everything to be lost. During my last visit the things went so badly that I had to escape, and then there was no way to get her out of there. If only you'd known what was happening that time. As if that nasty city all conspired against her. Damned helplessness! At war we were able to change the course of battles, and in Jericho I just wasn't able to protect her. Prayer was the only thing left." Ze's face hardened. "Why didn't you try to find us? Do you have an idea what she's been through?"

"They told me she was dead. I could presume they were lying, damned villains, but on the other hand why would they do that? They had no reason to lie. Our own death was a matter of minutes. And then every day was like a steep climb, with a little baby, afraid that in every village someone would sneak on us and again we'd be trapped. And when eventually we found shelter with good people and it seemed that the danger was finally gone, my mother fell ill and I couldn't just leave her alone with Shil. And that's how it went on; we thought about Rachabe, how tormented she must have been, we begged God to let us meet her as soon as possible, but you see it didn't work.

We tried to plan everything somehow.” He covered the face with the hands. “And then the tidings crashed that war was coming. Good Lord, how could we make it so far?”

“God is great, my friend” Ze put his hand on the heart. “But His paths are so unfathomable. Just think, why was all that for? If He was able to get you out of the power of the flames intact, how much more easily could He bring Rachabe here with Shil safe and sound?”

“I won’t answer that question.” Lape got lost in thoughts for a moment, with his eyes fixed on Jericho, then a thought brightened up his countenance. “But no, that makes sense. Just think, what would have happened, if everything had gone as we planned? Would you believe in Him as strongly as now? During that skirmish at the crossroads of the highway I thought again that we were pretty good bullies as we managed to sock those bandits hard like we did before in the army. I’m just an old fool! I’d surely have kept thinking that way, if they hadn’t kidnapped my mother then. And now I know that They were still on our side. The *Almighty* was watching over us all the way.”

Ze listened attentively and nodded his head.

“You’re right” he said. “But just think about Rachabe. She really went through hell, I saw her despair. Then she tried to reunite with her family and that too went bad. At last she got herself in the mire in the temple of Asher and debased herself to the limit. Lape, I was in that city and know what I’m talking about. If only she’d known that her daughter was alive, that she’d meet her even years later, she’d have planned her life differently.”

“And haven’t you thought that for her it was also a test? That it still is a test?”

“Don’t exaggerate, Lape. Everywhere trials and tests? We still don’t know what’s happened to her, yet. And if she’d been stuck in that rottenness till the very end and God punished her together with the other sinners? For I warned her many times. That night she was at the end of her tether and I saw how she wanted to break free, but who knows what happened then? It’s like in a battle, either you’re a hero or you’re dead.”

“And I believe that she’d made the right choice. Look at you and me. We’ve survived, now you’re not only my friend but the faith in the Only God has made us brothers. Never in my life would I have thought that our paths would be bound more strongly than years ago in the army. The easy way we’d have never got that far.”

Ze didn’t answer; a tear appeared in his eye. Lape was moved too. A moment later he resumed the train of thought.

“Now even Padriya with her husband and children are with us. Even one and a half years ago those villains were strong and did whatever they wanted. And now? Just wait a little and you’ll see Canaan fall. If the Almighty has arranged it all so perfectly, I don’t think He’s forgotten about Rachabe. He never has mishaps, Ze.”

“You’re right, but her fate still troubles me. I’ve gotten to know her better than you or your mother has and I know what she’s been through. I still have pangs of conscience for sitting here with you in peace, while for her the past is still an open wound.”

“But a day will come, not so far away, when she’ll meet her Shil. Just think what a reunion that will be!” He beamed. “I don’t believe, I just don’t believe that after all that Shil should be an orphan. Surely they’d be reunited. And Padriya will again hug her Manuel to her chest. Just think, if our plans had worked out and Aberes still had her Rose, would she have ever paid attention to the *Almighty*?”

Ze shook his head.

“You see. I’ll tell you what it would be like, what it always is like, until you get to the dead-end street or touch the bottom. You always think you owe your rescue to yourself, and because of that you can never learn your lesson and in the end you’re crushed by even a greater calamity. Only in the belly of Molech I understood that it was only the power of the *Almighty* that protected me against the flames and it was enough for Him to just withdraw His protection and I’d have perished like that villain a step away from me. God got me out of the infernal heat, so how could I fail to trust Him till the end of my life? Never mind what else comes along, I’ll trust Him.”

“Rachabe can be stubborn. Only life slowly teaches her that it isn’t worth it.”

“I know something about that” Lape smiled sadly. “Sometimes for our own good God must break us, otherwise we’d never notice Him.”

“And one day she’ll understand that. Let’s pray for her, for this will be the hardest time for her.”

For a hundredth time that afternoon they got silent for a longer while. Then they started to talk about their future, for the war had just started. They knew perfectly what it brought along.

“We must think what to do when the Hebrews attack. I wouldn’t like to face their army in combat.”

“Me neither. I hope our elders will find some solution.”

“They can only ask for peace.”

“They have come here to conquer this land, not to look for neighbors.”

“Tomorrow or even today the council of all the four cities is going to gather. They’ll surely come up with some ideas.”

\*

In the meanwhile, Shalma secretly peeked at Rachabe every now and then. The woman put Menuel on the ground and the little one immediately joined Trish, and both girls ran forward. Indispensable Elaya was right behind them, watching attentively if the girls were safe. Naomi and Vni were walking a few steps behind the friend and like her they were exhausted by the traumatic events of the past hours. The closer they got to the camp, the more distinct was the worried and fearful expression on Rachabe’s face. The soldier himself was also wondering how the guests would be greeted. He’d already talked with Jehoshua about that. The chief saw no problems in the rescued Canaanites living among the tribe of Judah. Ever since they’d left Egypt, a lot of foreigners had been walking with them and though most of them were continual troublemakers that kept complaining and inciting his fellow Israeli people to rebel, there were also families which had fully integrated



with the nation, accepting their customs and putting their trust in God of Israel. The best example was Kenizzite Galibu, now known as Caleb.

But suddenly, at a distance of almost a mile they saw the camp stretching in front of them. Everyone instinctively stopped, captivated by what they saw. Even Shalma felt emotion, for even though he'd known the sight of the camp of Israel ever since his childhood, he'd seen it many a time while he was still wondering in the desert, it always had the same effect on him. Around they heard the quiet buzz of the insects and the gentle rustle of the wind playing in the grass and rocks, They also smelt that unique scent of the Jordan greenery. And on this endless fluffy carpet weaved of sounds and aromas there were numerous orderly arranged tents. Hundreds of thousands of tents. Shalma looked at Rachabe with a smile, showing her the camp, and like a child, he was filled with pride.

“How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob” he quoted Mosheh’s famous song, “your dwelling places, O Israel! Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the Lord, like cedars beside the waters.”<sup>1</sup>

She was impressed by the scenery, and so were the other Canaanites. Everybody was imbibing the picture with their breaths held. Canaan offered its inhabitants a lot of beautiful views, Jericho and Kiriath-Sepher were as charming as jewels, but they lacked that one unique thing: the reflection of the majesty that had its source not just in the vast dimensions of the camp. Such feelings could only be given by the living *Presence* of someone who himself sat in the place inaccessible to human senses. The cloud rising above a rectangular tent put in the center of the camp, much larger than the others, had something special to it. It towered above the whole area like a fortress.

---

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 24:5-6

When at last they took their eyes off it, they noticed that the camp was bustling with life, and as more groups of soldiers returning from the captured fortress appeared on the road, the people dropped their activities and turned outside, and soon great crowds gathered around the tents located on the edge of the camp. The tidings of the victory must have just reached their ears, for soon, first shyly, just here and there, then more and more numerous the sounds of cheering resounded together with laughter and music. Soon, the explosion of joy rolled over the camp like an impact wave, it intensified in a powerful crescendo like a roar of thunders, until it reached the ears of the travelers and almost knocked them down to their knees.

Shalma and his soldiers could hardly keep from running and joining the merry commotion. They had tears in their eyes and the hearts were beating with rapid joy. He looked at Rachabe. She was shivering. He didn't know whether the reason was the emotion or fear. She was guessing what he'd like to talk to her about, and when they were a few hundred steps away from the camp, she started the conversation herself.

"Tell me, Shalma, could you place us somewhere aside?" She was probing him with her gaze. His face and eyes made him look like Ze. They could communicate better and better, at least as far as the speech was concerned. Shalma was memorizing a lot of Canaanite words, she was also acquiring a lot. Their mother tongues weren't so much different.

"Why don't you want to live with us from the start?" he asked, though he knew the reasons very well.

For a while she was looking for proper words.

"For us all it's been a very hard day. You'll be celebrating your victory, while I feel miserable. And Naami and Vni would gladly run away, I can see that. Besides, we're terribly tired after all those events."

He was imbibing the look that was coming from under her long eyelashes.

"I don't want you to miss the merriment because of us. Besides, we have children, my father still feels weak, I don't

know how he can bear so many new things at a time. I hope you understand. All I feel is fear, for everything I knew has collapsed. And don't think I regret anything. I am grateful to your God for rescuing me, and I thank you..."

"Don't say anything" he hushed her. He was trying to understand what he was feeling for that woman. And that didn't make the return and the perspective of the nearest few days easy either. He was wondering how much he should get involved in organizing their life in the camp. In a moment he would fulfil his task, lead them to a safe place. On the other hand, he felt responsible for them. And he wanted Rachabe to like it there, he just wanted that and he'd rather not think why.

"Don't you worry" he said with a smile, which she returned. "We'll take good care of you all. Our families are very grateful to you. Remember that my and Amram's lives were in your hands back then."

She felt a hint of relief, but the question got out of her lips on its own, for which she immediately rebuked herself.

"Your family, means who?"

"Mother, elder brother, now the chief of the tribe. The father died just before we crossed the Jordan" he said with a brittle voice, but right away he controlled himself. "He was the prince of the tribe. You'll be well looked after."

"Do you have a wife? For I don't want her to see me and think that..."

"No" he denied a little too eagerly. "Though they say I should have long been married."

He lost the train of thought, and trying to mask his embarrassment he looked around to see the people from his detachment. Most of them had already run to greet their families. Laughter and joyous shouts were heard among the tents. He spoke to the warriors who were carrying the Canaanites' belongings. They were looking at him questioningly.

"Alright, let's think what to do next?"

Amram was walking next to Beshewi and Antu-Chete. Remme was helping the father as the journey proved to long for his strength. Shalma spoke to the friend:

“Amram, we’ll go to the edge of the camp. Are there any free tents among yours?”

“I’ll find some” he replied with a smile. “It’s a quiet place, though tonight it’ll be noisy everywhere.”

They went east, giving a wide berth to the camp, which amazed her with its dimensions. The crowds were still cheering. People were busy in the cattle pens place outside the quarters occupied by successive tribes. The men and youths were selecting the best animals from their herds for the feast to celebrate the return of the victorious army. The women were starting fires and preparing the dough to bake bread. Everyone was curiously looking at the group of scared travellers circling the camp.

From the south they could see the tents of the tribe of Ruben, Simeon and Gad under the banner showing a human face. They passed them and slowly started to approach the part inhabited by Shalma’s tribe. Now he also started to feel nervous. Despite the care and attention he displayed towards Rachabe’s family, he couldn’t be sure that voluntarily they would become part of their community and accept the customs, which were surely so different from the customs of the peoples of this land.

Beshewi and the rest of the family were looking around, curious about where they would end up, for that was the neighborhood of their old farm. At some distance there was the blackened patch of the ashes, once their own field, and behind it were the ruins of their household. She felt a sting of pain. She’d never have thought that she’d safely live among the conquerors after their own king allowed such glaring lawlessness to happen. As she saw the reaction of the mother and brothers, Rachabe asked Shalma to let them stop. With aching heart she watched them walk with sad faces through their former property. They walked around the house, pointed at something with their fingers, at the remnants of the life she’d never had a chance to participate in.

“What are they doing?” Confused Shalma was watching their behavior.

“They used to live here, then someone set fire to their field and the household.”

“They lived in Galgalla?” he was surprised. “What did they do?”

“Most recently they had a farm, before that my father was a swords-maker working for the king himself.

“He made swords?” Shalma wasn’t sure.

“Yes, swords and other weapons. He was a master. My brothers helped him.

Shalma raised his eyebrows in astonishment. Then he looked at Antu-Chete, who was hanging on the son’s shoulder. The old man, exhausted by the long journey in no way conformed to the picture of a craftsman shaping metal with strong blows of a hammer.

“But once he almost got killed by bandits and ever since...” Her lips started to shiver of sadness.

Shalma was looking at her in silence. He was getting to know that woman more and more. It struck him how sensitive she was. Once the words “a Pagan woman and a prostitute” painted in his mind a picture of a witch serving Satan himself, instead what he saw now was Rachabe, a beautiful woman of a mysterious mind.

At last they moved on. The Hebrews tents were arranged at a distance of a few dozen steps away from the burned property, but Shalma together with his soldiers made for the east, where olive trees grew densely on the balks between the fields. Among them was a group of empty tents. Some women were bustling about them. The oldest one with a smile walked out towards the newcomers.

“You’ll stay here” Amram said. “Just let my folks take the rest of their belongings.”

He walked up to the woman.

“Be greeted, mother” he said and kissed her on both cheeks.

“Praise be to the *Almighty!*” Tears shone in her eyes. “And how are your cousins?”

“They’ll be back with the rest of the army.”

“And this must be that Canaanite woman?” she pointed at Rachabe.

Amram confirmed that. Rebecca walked up to Rachabe, looking in her eyes attentively.

Shalma was curious, whether Rebecca would dare touch the Pagan woman. Before they returned from the reconnaissance across the Jordan he'd often witnessed the conversations in which the image of Canaanites and their women was somewhere between monstrosity and disgust. Especially after the incident on the fields of Moab, the Hebrew women had for them only fierce antipathy or even hatred.

But Rebecca walked even closer, held Rachabe by the hands and squeezed them firmly.

"May God bless you, child. You're very brave."

At that moment, Manuel's little head appeared next to them. She wanted to be held by mummy again.

"A gorgeous little girl." Rebecca stroked her on the head.

She looked at Vni and Naomi. She guessed who they were. She walked up to each of them and squeezed their hands as well.

"But you must be tired" She embraced them with a caring gaze. "Everything's almost ready. Come on."

As she saw that scene, Beshewi peeked at Keshmi with eyes full of astonishment. They both smiled and caught Rachabe's look. She was touched and surprised. Naomi and Vni were looking after Rebecca, like they couldn't believe in what had just happened.

Amram and Shalma also joined that sudden exchange of glances. The latter man breathed a breath of relief, the atmosphere immediately got relaxed. Everyone followed the elderly woman with lighter hearts.

*Could she be another Belea in my life?* Rachabe thought and then she remembered about Naomi and Vni. She walked up to the mother and they talked for a while. Then she addressed the friends.

"I'd like to live with you, will you let me?"

The expression of their eyes was enough to answer her.

"We're like sisters, whether you like that or not" she said, looking deep in their eyes. Keshmi wasn't anywhere around, so she didn't hear that.

"You must use some sleep and I'll take care of the children" Beshewi threw in. "You must all rest, and I don't

feel tired. The granddad also needs some contact with the grandchildren, it'll do him good" she laughed.

Then they started to organize their new place of dwelling, which took them a longer while. When at last they sat down in the shadow of the olive trees to rest after the day's toil and have their first meal among the Hebrews, the roar of cheering rolled over the camp with a tremendous wave, heralding the arrival of the victorious army.

\*

She woke up when it was dark outside. She still felt exhausted, but the sleep had refreshed her a little. Manuel wasn't in the tent. The camp was thundering with singing and merry shouting. Tambourines and drums were playing so loudly that the walls of the tent barely muffled them. She looked outside. In the light of the fire she saw the silhouettes of the people moving in circles with a dancing step. Nobody was sleeping. Numerous bonfires illuminated everything with lively colors. It was as bright as on Jericho's main square during night celebrations during festivals. Near the tent she saw Vni and Naami with both their daughters. It must have been only Elaya that had gone with the adults to the bonfires. Wherever she went surely she was safe. The light of the fire deterred predators effectively. It was the watchmen of the cattle that were busier that night.

Manuel immediately ran to the mother and clambered to her arms. Rachabe hugged her strongly. Again she felt she had someone to live for. She sat down on a blanket opposite the friends with the little one still snuggled into her breast. They all looked at one another uncertainly.

"Keep up your chin." Rachabe bent towards Naami and patted her on the shoulder.

"What are we doing here?" the friend asked with a gloomy voice.

"What do you mean?" she faked being surprised, though she understood the question perfectly. "Aren't you happy that it's all behind us at last?" She was listening to her

own words to get her mind convinced as to what her heart still wouldn't embrace. "We've survived as the only ones in that cesspit, that's what we wanted."

Naami smiled sourly. The light of the bonfire burning behind the neighboring tent gave her face a mysterious expression.

"Have you seen them all?" she pointed her hand at the Israelites celebrating the victory. "What are we doing among them? Soon it'll spread who we were. I can already see those gazes."

"Naami, look at me." Rachabe knew her all too well. "We'll survive. I also lived like a sinner and you see how Rebecca greeted us all?"

"Rebecca is Rebecca." Naami didn't give up yet. She probably needed to hear a good word a few times to believe it. "You don't know what the others will say."

"So they will, hard luck." Vni proved stronger in such moments. "What else can we do? Run and hide somewhere?"

"Naami." Rachabe had a surprise in her sleeve.

"What's up this time?"

"And when Ze returns, will you be so gloomy too?"

Naami twitched. A moment later she slightly raised her head and looked at the friend from under the long eyelashes. She smiled perversely.

"And will he get back?"

"For sure. If we have survived, he's safe too and he won't rest until he finds us."

"Us, us!" she bridled. "He'll come to me, TO ME ALONE, for he's fed up with you, you bad ape!"

Rachabe threw a small stone at her in feigned anger.

"Ok, keep sitting here, sourpusses, while I'll go to look around. Have you eaten something?"

"Yes. You should also, you look poor." Naami regained her good mood.

"I'm going to. Let's go, honey." She put Manuel on the ground and took her by the plump little hand. "We're going to see the grandparents."

They went a few steps towards the nearest bonfire burning in the field between a group of tents. Around it over



a dozen people were sitting, among them she saw her family, though not all of them. They may have been sitting backwards to her, but by the silhouettes she was unable to recognize them. Eventually she saw the mother and Keshmi with Rajehu, and Remme too. Besides, there were probably some of Amram's family. She saw him with some other women, and Rebecca was sitting next to them. She couldn't see her husband anywhere.

*She must be a widow*, she thought.

Some were singing, the others were commenting some battle episodes in a lively manner, wine cups were being passed around, she could smell roast meat and fresh bread. No one had noticed her yet. Something struck her: the atmosphere was very festive and the people wholeheartedly gave themselves over to celebrating the victory, still it was so different from the festivals she had partaken in Jericho or Kiriath-Sepher. There was not a vestige of bothersome lust or lecherousness, just vivid interest and celebrating life. In the light of the fire she noticed how beautiful, despite the modest attire, Hebrew women were. And their men and youths resembled heroes.

*The nation of beautiful and free people*, she sighed in her spirit.

The dance was full of energy, but there was no wildness in it. She understood that in a twinkle of an eye. That was a different world, though the ashes of Jericho were smoking only two miles away, and a dozen miles away was Urusalaim, a powerful stronghold ruled by determined and relentless Adoni-Cedek.

Rebecca must have noticed her. She moved closer to Amram and asked him something. Then she looked at her and waved a hand at her, pointing at the free place next to her.

"Rachabe, come and join us, there's a lot of room and food. And what's the little princess' name?"

"Menuel."

"Beautiful! Will you come to me, Menuel?" She held out her arms, but the little one slickly dodged her and ran to the grandmother. Everybody burst in laughter.

Rachabe sat next to Rebecca. Initially she didn't feel like eating, but before she'd noticed, Amram's mother offered her a cup of cool wine, while next to her suddenly there was a bowlful of food.

"To the victory!" she shouted. For an elderly lady she had a very lively temperament. Rachabe often noticed that Hebrew women, though normally quiet, were able to play and enjoy life with the force of the desert *chamsin*.

"To the victory!" the whole company roared.

Following their example she raised the cup. She'd gladly gulp it all down at a time, the old habits... That's what she needed now, despite the rest she'd had her heart still felt heavy and empty, while wine was to cheer the hearts up. But she decided to behave with greater moderation.

The food was delicious. She realized that her last meal was in the morning, but in the atmosphere of waiting for the frightening events no one felt like eating. She understood their conversations quite well. She noticed that tactfully they were trying not to describe the combat itself in too much detail, for which she was grateful.

She bent towards the mother.

"Where's the father?" she asked.

"He stayed with Shalma." She pointed somewhere west, where the center of the camp was.

Her eyes got round of astonishment. Even earlier she'd caught herself looking for Shalma instinctively.

"And what are they doing there?"

"You should see that too." The mother got up, left Manuel with Remme, who was very fond of his little niece, and she led her deep into the vast patches of the tents towards a little elevation. "The father likes it so much that he decided to stay there."

When she looked towards the place the mother was pointing at she got so impressed that she couldn't even move. The bonfires immediately went pale against the phenomenon which she found unable to compare to anything she had seen in her life, and she'd seen a lot. In the very center of the camp, where—as she'd learnt—was the temple of *El Elohe Israel*, there soared a column of fire,

stunningly beautiful, like the purest gold. And though it wasn't as huge as during the journey in the desert, which she couldn't see then, anyway the whole camp compared to it seemed to be a group of liliputian huts, and the bonfires looked like barely visible sparks.

"Is that...?" she didn't finish, stunned by the unearthly magnetism of that scene.

Beshewi nodded to confirm that.

"I've heard stories of their God, who is a Cloud during the day for them, while at night He's a Column of Fire, but until now I didn't treat it seriously. Do you want to go there? The father will surely be happy to see you" she added with a warm smile.

Something new was just being born in their family, something difficult to be named. Antu-Chete was distinctly coming back to life in her company; she was his prodigal daughter, the lost lamb, and though it was Keshmi who had always given him support and never caused him any pain or trouble, the return of his beloved Pearlette and what she'd done for them completely rehabilitated her in the eyes of the old swords-maker. Fatherly love walks mysterious paths: it joyfully greets the lost ones, expecting those lucky sons and daughters, ever safe under its wings, to move aside, though only seemingly, to let those who just barely escaped the claws of death and whose names were already engraved on tombstones be received with special fondness. If the worst had come true, then Fatherly love would forever remain an open wound and never ending pain.

The father was delighting in the presence of *Yahweh*, the old man, battered by the hardships of life could at last find some warmth in *His Presence*. Of course, she wanted to be in that place! Immediately, somewhere in her heart she heard the voice she knew so well. It wasn't THAT VOICE, for it spoke more on the level of emotions, but she sensed in it the same note, instead of speaking it was merrily waving at her in a greeting and smiling beamingly. *Yahweh* was calling her to come to His *Presence*.

"I'll ask Rebecca to lead you there, for alone you won't find the way. You must go one and a half miles" the mother said.

A moment later the elderly woman arrived, ever smiling. "I'm glad I can show you there" she said, taking her hand.

She had an impression that if she looked at Rebecca's face she'd see Belea. They walked a long while, the camp occupied the area of a few square miles. The biggest part of the way Rachabe walked with her gaze fixed in the column of gold fire, but she often looked at the Hebrew people having good time. Among her tribe Rebecca had to be well known, every now and then someone greeted her. She returned the greetings, most often they contained the name of their God or the words like 'victory' and 'blessing'.

From the gazes of many people Rachabe guessed that they were recognizing her, or at least they knew who the beautiful foreign woman is. News spread quickly here. She was relieved to find the anonymity among the tents of the other tribes, though there curious glances greeted her, from men in particular.

Then she looked ahead and twitched. She thought she was standing at the gates of the Heavens. With awe she was looking at the Tent of the Congregation. It combined perfect simplicity with neatness and beauty. The contrast to the richly embellished grotesque temples of Canaan was tremendous. The Sanctuary was placed inside a small rectangular yard big enough to house ten tents at the most. It was surrounded by a light canvass fence, into which one could get through a gate made of purple and crimson fabric as well as colorful canvas. Rachabe was familiar with fabrics and the way they were dyed, but she had never seen so perfectly matching colors and the neat style anywhere, even though her city was famous for superb textile produce. Also the Sanctuary itself was embellished by beautiful covers, while in front of the tent there glistened a gold tub, serving the priests for their ritual ablutions. There was the burnt sacrifice altar as well. The Temple and its surroundings emanated with peace.

"That place over there also offers a good view" Rebecca said and led her further. "There they are." She pointed at two men sitting under a lonely fig tree.

Shalma was sitting with his eyes closed, leaning against the trunk, while Antu-Chete's gaze was fixed in the fiery cloud of the *Presence*. Rachabe had that irresistible feeling that despite the closed lips her father was immersed in a lively conversation with someone.

She approached them carefully not to wake Shalma up, but he raised his eyelids anyway. He got up, surprised to see her. For a moment they were looking at each other. Then she noticed Rebecca leave. She wanted to shout to call her, but he stopped her.

"Take a seat by your father, I'll sit over there. When you want to go back..." He was trying to be discreet.

"Don't go" she interrupted him. "I just want to look."

She sat down by her father, who only saw her then. He smiled and pulled her to his side. She was surprised, for distinctly he had got stronger.

"Beautiful" he said looking at the living flame. "Just look, how lively and warm!"

"Amazing. Is your God always there?" she asked Shalma.

"Yes, but when the Cloud rises up from the Sanctuary, it's the sign that we should break camp and move on." He looked at her secretively. "Your father is a very interesting man. We've talked a bit."

"You have?" she was surprised. "After the accident he doesn't speak a lot, hardly at all"

"That's true. I was talking mainly, but anyway I learnt a lot from him."

Antu-Chete wasn't listening to them, still absorbed in this quiet conversation. He felt good, and she still got surprised by the fact that after all those years at last they were together, though the wounds of the past, the physical ones at least, were still a barrier.

"Are you missing your father?" she asked.

"He was a great man, but as one of the last he belonged to the old generation. It's a long story. The brother took over the leading of the tribe from him, but he isn't very comfortable in that role. I'm trying to help him, though... Never mind."

"You asked him about the sword" she stated.

“Huh?”

“Talking to my father you must have asked about the sword.

He was stunned.

“Yes, you’re right. We talked about that too. How do you know?”

“Well, you, men” she laughed.

“But only at the beginning” he defended himself. “Then he wanted to hear about how we left Egypt.”

“I’d like to hear it too, if you don’t mind.”

“No, why? I like remembering that.”

“Legends were circulating around Canaan. Bards sang songs about that. And now, guess what, I’m sitting next to a man who was in the middle of the events. Amazing!”

She moved closer to him to hear better. Shalma’s ego almost lifted him to his feet.

“I’ll gladly tell you about that.” he said proudly.

\*

In the quarter occupied by the tribe of Judah, in one of the tents belonging to the members of the house of Zerach, Shalma’s distant cousins, no one was celebrating. The atmosphere was tense, from time to time there was shouting, then wild laughter. The messengers of chaos were maundering around the tents like shadows. Sometimes they penetrated the walls of thick canvas like they were passing through thin fog. Other demons were looking around suspiciously to see if the Watchmen saw them.

At a distance of a mile from that murky activity all of a sudden the flame of the *Presence* shivered like in an angry effusion, though the reason could be different. Shalma stopped his tale, for suddenly he felt an unpleasant shiver overwhelming him.

“Has anything happened?” she asked, feeling cold running down her back too.

He looked around and his hair ruffled on the neck. That was how his soldier’s instinct usually warned him, but

that was something different. He got up and looked around but saw nothing suspicious.

Rachabe helped the father wrap with the coat more tightly. He'd had a nap, but now he woke up.

"What's happening, Aberes?" he asked with effort at the sight of Shalma's reaction.

"I don't know."

It was noticed by the people around too. For some time the songs faded out, like a wave of cold passed through the camp. Here and there they saw people get up from the bonfires and look towards the Temple. A moment later they decided it must have been an illusion and went on celebrating.

For some more time Shalma kept standing, then he sat down and sent Rachabe a warm smile. She returned it.

"Your father calls you Aberes?" he asked. "A pretty name. What does it mean?"

"A pearl. Old times" she forestalled his comment. "Some day I'll tell you."

"Some day?" he pretended to be dissatisfied. "And just how gladly did you listen to my tales from Egypt?"

She smiled, then grew serious.

"That was bad time."

"Sorry, I won't ask any more."

"Shalma, maybe your family needs you?" she asked tentatively.

"Nooo, they know well that I'm a loner" he laughed. "And I feel good here, with you. Unless that's how you want to tell me I should leave now?" He threw an angry glance at her, to which she burst in laughter.

"You're impossible." She elbowed him. "You should meet Ze."

"Ze?" His own reaction surprised him. She must have sensed that dissatisfied note, so he did his best to make the next question sound normal. "Who's he?"

"Easy, there's no man of mine somewhere in Canaan, who will come to snatch me back. Ze is kind of my big brother, he's helped me a lot. You have similar sense of humor. He's even the same posture. A big man, I mean."

She smiled coquettishly. “You may meet him some day. He’s a good man and a great warrior. He was in kenyt-nesu.”

“Uuuh.” He rolled his eyes in authentic astonishment. “You have interesting friends.”

They looked at each other, but she was first to look away.

“I’m afraid...” she started, looking at some point behind the Temple, “that when you get to know me better, you’ll start to avoid me.”

“I know who you were in Jericho.”

“And don’t you say you don’t mind.”

“If this world was perfect...”

“Shalma, please, dreamers learn life the hard way. And don’t try to be too kind just not to offend me. I know who I was, I can’t turn back time.”

“I’m not a dreamer” he protested, and eventually he gave up. “Alright, maybe I am a bit of a dreamer. And I guess that you have too perfect view of my nation. You see the great the *Kebod*—the Cloud of Glory, you look at all those people” he swept his hand around, “who will sing all night for the glory of *El Elohe Israel*. But it hasn’t always been so. Even a few months ago, on the steppes of Moab, the nation sinned gravely. Pagan women came, beautiful Midianites, and...”

“Some men got carried away” she finished for him.

He nodded his head. He couldn’t forget how close to that dangerous border he was himself.

“Those were beautiful women, but I don’t understand how you can do that in front of everyone, shamelessly...”

She had an impression that Ze was sitting right by her side.

“That’s the way the qedeshim are.” She grew sad. “They have that irresistible charm, and in my old life I didn’t see even one man who would be able to withstand. It’s more than just desire of the body, Shalma, it’s hellish power, and you weren’t prepared for that, right?”

He agreed.

The old tormentors were growling somewhere nearby.

“And how did that end?” she asked.



He gave off a deep sigh, not knowing if he should tell the truth.

“Over twenty thousand were slain” he said so quietly that she hardly heard him.

“Midianites?”

He shook his head. She was so shocked that she bent over to him and looked straight into his eyes.

“Your own people?” she was petrified.

He bent his head far back.

“You must understand, our nation is supposed to proclaim the glory of *Yahweh*, we must be different.” He gave her time to take it in. “Then they were killed to. Apart from the virgins we spared no one.”

She was silent.

“Now you see that we aren’t a troupe of merry jugglers. We’ve come to conquer this land. For over six months we’ve been leaving ashes and dead bodies behind, but when corruption and sin appear among us, we pay dearly for that. Our God is merciful, but in some matters He punishes us harshly. And it’s us who have to pull out the sword to punish the evil that dwells among us. Justice is not a colorful glass, it’s a sharp diamond.”

Behind she hear a hyena’s derisive laughter. Or was it something else? For the demonic giggle carried a clear message and she couldn’t disagree with it.

“Dear God” she moaned in resignation. “How can it be that I’m here, Shalma? Not so long time ago I myself pushed men straight into hell, they’re all either dead now or will be slain with your swords within next months. What right do I have to be here?”

She heard him breathing deeply, devastated with her reaction.

“Rachabe, you mustn’t think that way! They didn’t take their chance, and you...”

She interrupted him rapidly.

“They had no chance, you understand? And I did it out of ordinary fear of punishment.”

“You risked your life.”

She wasn't listening to him. She was afraid to look at the shining *Kebod*.

"Sometimes *Yahweh* uses fear to make us leave the wrong path." He tried to touch her, but she jerked.

"Stop, please, stop" she was moaning. "Just look at this dreamer. What I am doing here, stupid? If He punishes even His own so hard..."

He couldn't stand it.

"Don't you think that way!" he raised his voice. "He's chosen you, so He must have had a reason. And even if you don't understand that, He needed you then. Do you want to argue with Him? Who are you?"

"I know who I am, and so we get to the point." She was close to crying. She turned the other way. The father wasn't sleeping. He was looking at her with the same look she was so afraid of when she still lived in her family home in Kiriath-Sepher. He must have heard everything.

"Aberes" he said with emphasis. "Each day has enough trouble of its own... Take a rest."

"Your father is right" Shalma said strongly. "Use some sleep, for you're talking like..." he hesitated.

"Like stupid, yes?! For I was stupid to think that I started to understand your God" she stated with a harsh voice.

"If you think so" Shalma replied and got up ponderously.

"It's grown cold. I'll show you to your place."