

Egyptus

by Tatum Este'l

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Introduction

Egyptus is a novel taking place in the time of Noah, within the period just after Noah and his ark land on top of Mount Ararat to the time of the establishment of Egypt. This includes the Tower of Babel as it is later called. (At that time, they call it the Great Tower.)

It's main characters are Noah, his family, and Ham and his family, plus Khan, a stowaway on the ark, the same son of Adam and Eve who killed Abel and established the first secret society of assassins. Shem and his sons are mentioned as well as the grandsons of Shem, Jared and the Brother of Jared. Ham, his wife Egyptus or Afra, their children Egyptus, Mitz-Ra, and Kish play the major roles.

I don't apologize for the names I use in this novel. Names like Egypt, Egyptus, Pharaoh, etc. may not be the original names of the characters (in fact, they are Greek), but they are common and well known. It is also understood that the Greek language came from the common language spoken just after the great flood. It says in the *Pearl of Great Price*,

that Egyptus, the daughter of Egyptus and Ham, found Egypt under water. (*The Pearl of Great Price* was translated by Joseph Smith from original papyri found in a sarcophagus brought from Egypt.)

23 The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden;

24 When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land.

25 Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal.

(*Pearl of Great Price* Book of Abraham 1:23-25)

I take these names from this scripture.

I found in Wikipedia.com that Afra was the name of Ham's wife. Africa must have been named for her. So, I have Afra declining to be named Egyptus, which was what Noah called her after cursing Ham.

Other names that are common such as Kush, the land of Kush, Canaan, the land of Canaan, and Cain, I have changed to Kish, Kana'an, and Khan. The last two are Hebrew pronunciations. My wife and I a few years ago took a class on the Welsh language. I found that the “u” is pronounced as an “i”. Therefore, I changed Kush to Kish. It seems more authentic since Welsh is a very ancient language. Other than that, forgive my ignorance. After all, this is just a story. It is only based upon mythology mixed with scripture. All of it isn't true.

Interpreting mythology, and knowing it is an ancient custom to give people a “new”

name in temple ceremonies from studying many different cultures, mostly ancient, I gave Egyptus, Mitz-Ra, and Pharaoh the new names of Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Kish, I gave the name of Seth. Then I fit the story to match the Egyptian mythology. It then becomes clear that Egypt was founded by Isis, Osiris, and Horus after overcoming Seth in war.

Part of that myth was Hat-Hor or Hathor, the cow. I can see Egyptus calling someone she didn't like a cow, using the name of Hat-Hor. Now, the morals of the ancient peoples were completely different from Christian and Jewish tradition. They mated mostly for the end result, to have children with good genes. So incest and fornication was very common, but that would be our interpretation, not theirs. Temple virgins were not necessarily virgin, but were prostitutes to express the laws of Nature. So I portray Hat-Hor as a whore because she didn't have a very good self image. She was kidnapped along with other girls for wives (a practice very common among primitives), and she wanted people to like her, especially Egyptus. People finally came to worship her as the "Holy Cow! Batman." Where do you think that expression came from? Cows in India are today thought to be holy. Hathor's headdress was the horns of a cow with a moon set in between them. Today, if you put your wrists together and put your hands in cupping shape, you have a worshiping stance and the sign of Hathor. I have seen that painted on the walls of Egyptian temples.

There have been many different tales told about Noah and the ark. Some do not use the name Noah. One such tale is that of Gilgamesh. There is a story saying that Ham laughed because he saw his father naked. Another says that he undressed Noah and therefore saw him naked. One says he stole the garments of Noah to take for himself. Another says that he

copied the pattern of the garment Noah was wearing. Ham also gave Japheth and Shem the pattern, but Noah only cursed Ham for having the pattern and not his brothers because of their righteousness. So what I have written is my own tale adapted from the many other tales I have read.

Khan comes into the story because he stands for civilization which can only be sustained by war and plunder. This is the knowledge the snake offered to Eve in the garden of Eden. He teaches this to Ham, and as Ham follows Khan, he dies a lonely and broken man after having been taken captive by his grandson Nimrod in a civil war. Egyptus falls to the cruelty of Khan and becomes a queen without mercy and slaughters all who live in the Nile valley so that her people, driven from the great tower of Babel, can occupy the land.

Then there is the story of Nimrod and Sammur-amat. He is the great hunter. He saved his people from the lions by a gift from God, the bow and arrow. (All this comes from the study of mythology.) He marries Sammur-amat whose land is Sumer, the area between the Tigris and Euphrates. He builds up a great kingdom, getting the reputation of being a hunter of men. He is killed by Shem, and reincarnated as Sammur-amat's child. She becomes the figure of the Madonna and Child that you see throughout history in several different cultures. In this story, I cannot see Shem, the father of the Hebrews, and a very righteous man, according to Joseph Smith, as someone who would murder, even to save a nation, so I say that Sammur-amat killed Nimrod in a new year's sacrifice and blames it on Shem. Of course, Shem escapes with his family and goes south where Abraham is born, living in the Land of Shinar.

There is an element of science fiction in this story of Egyptus. This comes from the *Earth Chronicles* written by Zecharia Sitchin. He tells of the planet “Nibiru, an outer planet that orbited the sun every thirty six hundred years. The inhabitants of that planet, headed by the ruler Anu, came to Earth looking for gold. En-Ki, the son of Anu, found gold in the oceans of Earth from an orbital probe. He set up cities to mine the gold from the ocean. At first, a city was built under the ocean. Then other cities were created between the two continents of Asia and Africa, that is, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to process the gold. There were cities designated to be a complex, called a space port, to accommodate shuttle craft that flew back and forth to an orbital space station where a giant space craft in the shape of a log, tapered at both ends, came and went every time Nibiru came near the sun between Mars and Jupiter to collect the gold.

Gold was needed to dust the atmosphere of Nibiru to protect it against radiation and gamma rays. The gold on the home planet had been depleted, but now they weren't getting enough from Earth, which they called Shu. Therefore Anu sent his second son, En-Lil, En-Ki's half brother from a concubine, to find another source of gold. He added to the number of astronauts, called the Nefilim, already processing the gold. He found gold in the underworld, the lands below the equator, and took astronauts to dig it out of the earth in a mine called the Abzu.” This gold mine became synonymous with Hell. In some circles, this is where the idea for Hell came from.

Have you ever seen an obelisk? There is one in Washington, DC called Washington's Monument. Zecharia Sitchin reports that this is a replica of the shuttle in which the ancient

astronauts flew from the earth up to their orbital space station. The body of the obelisk is called a shem and is the rocket that propels the little pyramid setting on top, called a ben-ben, in which the astronauts sit. It is like the space capsule of the 1960's, except they used no liquid fuel. It was propelled by electricity and sound. In his books *The Earth Chronicles*, Zecharia Sitchin, tells of several ziggurats in Mesopotamia and the Middle East, pyramid-shaped structures that were the launching pads of these ben-bens. One of these was at Sippar along the Euphrates River. Just below that was the city of Babylon, once called the City of Nimrod where story of this novel hits a climax.

I had to balance this story of blood, war, and pillage with the story of Jared and his brother who came from the family of Shem. They represent a righteous influence. They were led by the Lord to occupy the North American continent which had been swept clean by the great flood, and was called by the Lord, the Promised Land. They also represent several of the branches of humanity who fled from the great tower when it was destroyed by hurricane winds and earthquakes. Therefore, I only take them to the valley called Nimrod, as this story is only about one group who fled the tower. They are the army of Egyptus and all that followed after her.

There is included in this story a giant wagon called a juggernaut. The name has been handed down from very ancient times. In India to this day people carry the images or statues of their gods on very large wagons by that name. The people of Jared carried their homes, bee hives, water tanks with fish in them, aviaries with birds to eat on the way, and other supplies like graineries on these wagons as they fled the Great Tower. They may have had to

have fifty, sixty, or eighty oxen pulling each heavily loaded wagon. I make it common in my novel. Their first use is in hauling great stones for the building of the Great Tower, then everyone uses them as they escape the storm and earthquakes that break up the tower.

Lastly, let me say something about the name of the Nile River. According to Zecharia Sitchin, ancient names were usually two syllable hyphenated words. Therefore, I used the Arabian name for the Nile, which is En-Nil. And since the Arabian or Hebrew languages are of a most ancient date, they tend to preserve the most ancient names.

Book One
The Long Trek

Chapter One

They called it the third age of man. Clouds no longer covered the earth, and those few people left from the flood could see the stars for the first time. At First Dawn, Noah would not let his children look upon the sun. He did not want them to fall down and worship it as he knew they would because of its brilliance. He commanded them to never look upon it. “It will burn your eyes,” he said, “And you will be forever blind.” He commanded them never to bow down to it. He knew from talking with the gods that it was just another star, that the earth indeed revolved around it, and they received life from it, but the gods made it, therefore, they should worship the creators and not the creation. Other stars they were free to look upon and measure. They were the glory of the gods. But the sun's glory was too much for man to look upon, and it would dazzle his mind and he would become lost.

It was for good reason that Lamech had called his son Noah. It meant “the rest provided by God.” His personality was like unto he who would come in the meridian of time to save the world. He proved true to his name and spent centuries caring for his people, trying to get them to come into the rest of the gods. But they rebelled and went their own ways. The floods came and washed the Earth clean. Now they were gone, and Noah could start over with his own family. He had hopes for them.

The sun dried up the waters of the flood, and Noah let the animals out of the ark to fend for themselves. He, his sons and their families were the last to leave after they cleaned the ark and gave thanks to the Lord upon an altar with the sacrifice of a lamb born on the ark. They followed the animals down the mountain. Near the bottom they found caves to

house themselves. Each of the four families took up residence in a cave, walling up the entrances with stone and plaster, leaving an open door in the center. They whitewashed their caves inside and out which would bring more light into their homes.

The first year they planted hay, corn, wheat and barley upon the hills, for the plains were still covered with water. They slept on the ground in their new homes. The second year there were grasses and fodder enough, which they used to make mats to cover their floors. They planted all kinds of fruit and nut trees. God made sure the forests grew again. Exploring their new world, they saw little trees growing everywhere, along with some very old ones continuing to sprout. Noah also planted the grape vines he had brought with him from the old world.

As the years passed, the cattle multiplied. Grasses grew below the mountain where the rivers spread out onto the marshes around the lake, and the children led the cattle down to the lower hills to graze and then back up again. Sacrifice was kept to a minimum to let the herds grow. There were black bovine and white, several kinds of bleating sheep, and camels wandering and getting lost. In fact, the children complained that a lot of the cattle were being lost, but Noah said that it was their nature to wander off and populate the world. "Leave them alone," he said. "We only need what we can use."

Grandchildren played among the hills, running and chasing each other and hiding in the tall grasses. At night everyone gathered around the common fire, to tell stories and stare at the stars in amazement. Ham and Japheth made up stories of heroes fighting in great battles, and for their rewards being changed into stars and constellations. Noah and Shem

would tell stories about Adam, Seth, Methuselah and all the great patriarchs. The four formed two parties vying for the children's attention. At the end of the day before they dispersed and went to their different homes and to bed, Noah took their discussions and turned them into gospel principles. Then they had prayer.

* * *

Ham lingered in his doorway one night as his family bedded down. He shut the heavy gopher wood door to his cave and strode away, looking at the river of stars above in the night sky. Egyptus, she who was forbidden, poked her head out the door and asked, "Ham? Are not you coming to bed?"

"I will be a while," Ham said wistfully. "A strange spirit has settled over me. I am going for a walk."

"I will wait for you," Egyptus said in a soft voice.

Ham wandered off to a cliff overlooking the wide lake. Sitting upon a large rock he stared out at the stars resting above the vast expanse below. The black outline of another mountain range could be seen on the horizon separating the stars above from their reflection below. A cool breeze brought the moaning of the cows close to his ears. He imagined the spirits of the dead drowned in the flood, crying for their loss. A civilization had vanished. He remembered the days at the great school where he had studied. All was gone now. He lamented the loss of the libraries. He was thankful though for the handful of books he had hidden in his stuff. He would have to start over with his own children ... with his grandchildren. He knew he wouldn't live as long as the old people. The sun would prevent

that. They taught at the school that the sun's rays in pure form were deadly. He couldn't stay here. He would move his family to a lower altitude where the atmosphere would add protection for his children.

His father Noah didn't agree with the learning of the world. It taught, in Noah's mind, a paradigm that was completely false. He had called it magic. Ham knew it as knowledge as things are now, how solid objects act and react with each other. Noah was a farmer. Ham, an architect. Ham meditated upon all that had been lost. But one thing comforted him. Egyptus. She had always encouraged him to learn all he could.

Ham's wife was tall, slender, and shapely. Her dark skin, mysterious. She had deep set eyes resting upon a nose whose line was straight. Her kiss was with full lips. Her black hair with its quill sized braids tickled his face. He, on the other hand, was not quite as tall, but muscular with a square chin growing a beard already gray streaked. His black curly hair was crowned with gray around the ears. She had told him he grew more handsome each year. Somehow, she remained young and never turned leathery as her sister had done.

When the marriage had been solemnized, Noah changed his son's name to Ham, the dark one. His children would be dark and preserve the seed of Khan* and the Kana'anites.

Ham pondered the conversation he had with his father the other day. It had driven a greater wedge between them.

* * *

Ham and Noah were watching the grandchildren bring up the cattle from the marshes and bed them down for the night in the corrals. Ham mentioned how crowded the corrals

were getting, and added, “We could build bigger corrals across the lake and the children would not have more room.”

Then his father said, “What would follow? The children would want to build houses far away, and they would not come home again.”

“But Father,” Ham explained. “It's getting crowded up here on the mountain, and I could build them beautiful houses.”

“I know you could, Ham. But here you go again putting yourself first and above everyone else. You should let things be and let the gods guide us. If they want us to go and live down on the other side, they will tell us. We will wait on them.” Noah could see consternation building up in Ham's face, so he added, “Let things evolve naturally. We can always reduce the number of cattle. You are all my family. I want you to be with me until it is my time to leave. I could not bear for anyone to depart and live down there. You are all my children.”

Ham knew what that meant. Everyone was under his thumb, under his control. With a wave of his hand, he said, “Look at this world before us. It begs for a city to be built. We do not have to live in these caves. You could come with us.”

To contradict one's father was tempting his anger, and when Noah raised his head

* The English pronounce it as Cain.

and looked down his nose at his son, Ham realized he was in trouble. In other families, before the flood, one could lose a hand, an ear, or a nose for angering one's father. So, Ham bit his lip and left, whereupon Noah called his name. “Ham!”

Ham turned, bowed his head, and said between his teeth, “By your leave, Sire,” and left for his cave.

* * *

Pondering the good times they had together at the city of Akkadia, which was now on the other side of the world, under water perhaps, fear passed over Ham like a dark shadow. Within the fear he felt a presence so strong, it choked him. Ham turned and looked upon the countenance of a giant, his bronze form lit by the rising moon. He stood a head taller than anyone else. He had a full head of hair, all curls, tied in the back with a leather thong. His beard was braided and shaped like the trunk of a tree, cut straight across on the bottom. His massive shoulders were bare. He wore half a linen tunic, which covered him midway down his thick thighs with a leather girdle bound about his loins.

Ham gasped for air.

“You feel my power,” the giant said in a deep guttural voice. “I will release you.”

Ham felt his throat and chest open. He could breathe easily now. He was so astonished that another could have such power over him that he melted, falling to his knees and clasping his hands. “What do you want with me, Lord?” he asked.

“I want to make a covenant with you,” the giant said softly. “If you make me second in command in your kingdom, I will give you the world.”

“I have no kingdom.” Ham quivered.

“You have not been given the priesthood?” the giant said, spreading his hands.

“No.”

“You must obtain the priesthood.” The giant folded his arms over his muscle-bound chest.

Ham also folded his arms and bowed his head in sorrow. “I do not know why,” he said. “My father has never given me the priesthood. I guess it is because of my worldliness. I am a builder and a student of the arts. I have much knowledge which he says is useless. He says I do not have what it takes to be a priest. Therefore I cannot be a king.”

“I can give you that kingship and a kingdom.” The giant turned and looked at the lake below all lit up with starlight. He waved his hand over it, saying, “look at the world below. It waits for you. All you have to do is go down there and claim it. You can cross this lake and travel far away from here. Your wife and children will support you. They will be your kingdom. But you must have the priesthood.”

“I must have the priesthood,” Ham echoed.

When Ham looked up, the man was missing, but he heard a voice from far off in the breeze saying, “I will return and talk again of important things.”

* * *

Ham returned to lie with his wife Egyptus. As he embraced her, she asked, “Did you have a marvelous time looking at the stars and the land whence we shall wander?”

He didn't answer right away, but afterward when he lay by her side, he said, “I had a vision. I will get the priesthood from my father, and we will have a kingdom.”

“That is good,” she said, caressing his face.

He turned to face her, giving her a kiss. “How did you know we shall be leaving?”

“I saw a vision also,” she smiled. “It is in your face. It is turned to the south, is it not?”

“Yes. We will need land for our children. The earth must be replenished. We cannot stay here on this mountain. It is getting crowded already. Besides, what I want to teach our children I cannot in the presence of my father. He does not agree with the schools I went to.”

They embraced and made love again.

* * *

The leaves on the deciduous trees turned to red and yellow. The wheat and barley turned to gold. Harvest came, and Noah made a wine press in which he danced. There was singing on the hills as the scythe slew the grain. Behind the men cutting, the women followed and tied up the sheaves. After the grains dried the threshing began, and the wheat and barley were stored in bags.

Harvest festival began with Noah offering up on the altar the fruits of the earth and freshly-ground flour formed into patties. They spilled the blood of several lambs upon the sacred stones followed by the roasting. Noah brought out jugs of new wine and passed them around as the men handed out pieces of lamb, the bread and herbs. Noah gave thanks to the gods. After the eating, there was gaiety and laughing, singing and dancing. Everyone locked their arms together in a great circle and moved their feet to the lute, the drum, and the lyre. More eating and drinking continued under a canopy of stars as night fell.

Ham thought, while Father is in such a good mood, I will talk to him about obtaining the priesthood.

“Father,” Ham approached the old patriarch with a smile. “The the gods have richly

blessed and sustained our families and taught us how to grow the barley and the wheat on these mountains.” The two embraced, and Ham continued. “It is good that we rejoice. Each family has been blessed with so many children, our community is beginning to burst and flow over its bank, and there is little room to hold us. We already have arguments over grazing land.”

“It is indeed true, Ham,” Noah exclaimed with his hands spread out, one hand holding a jug of wine, “that we cannot be a happier people upon the face of the earth.”

“Father, we are the *only* people on the face of the earth.” They both laughed. “We will spread over the earth and build up many kingdoms.”

Noah became somber for a moment and said, “And hopefully, we can teach our children and their children to walk in the ways of the gods, so these kingdoms may be happy kingdoms.”

“Yes, Father. Happy families walking in the ways of the gods.” Ham put his arm around his father and they continued walking. “Father,” Ham said. “I hope soon you will give me the priesthood as you have given Shem and Japheth. Then I will be able to bless my families the way you bless all of us, and the way my brothers do bless their families. Then we will be united under one priesthood, and the Lord will be able to bless us all.”

Noah stopped and embraced his son Ham. “It is good,” he said, “that you want the priesthood. You want to give yourself to the right gods and obey them and keep all their commandments? You want to live by the revelations of they send us? You will give up your magic and settle down and be a farmer and live off the land, no buying and selling? No

building of cities that choke a man so he cannot move around and live?”

Ham stopped. His face became numb, and his throat constricted. He choked on his father's words as he said, “Yes, Father. That is what I want.”

Noah let go of his son as they approached Noah's cave. He opened the door and faced his son. “That is not what you want, is it? You are a liar from the beginning. First you go to a school that studies the things of the world and not of glory. Then you marry outside the clan to a woman who has twisted your thoughts and your beliefs. No. You shall not have the priesthood until you comply with what is in my heart. When you want what I want for you and what the Elohim want for you. Then we will see.” He looked at his son sternly and said, “By the gods of Heaven, you need to repent. Then we will talk about Priesthood.” Noah turned and slammed the door.

Ham grimaced. Anger welled up in his face. He yelled as he pounded on his father's door. “Father! I need the priesthood or I have no kingdom!” No sound came from behind the door. Ham left, breathing heavily. He staggered away from the caves and out to the ledge overlooking the lake. Kneeling by a large flat rock he clasped his hands together and wept.

Ham could not give up the truth as he knew it. He knew that the other gods would not curse him because of his much knowledge and education. He could do much good with what he knew. But his father was an obstinate man and would not bless him. He put his face on the stone and sighed. He could not pray. Nothing would come from his mouth. It was sealed by anger and resentment.

As if it had been a dream, Ham heard a whisper in his ear. He felt the presence of the

giant. It said, "Go now to your father. He is drunk with wine and is asleep. Remove from him the garments of skin and bring them to me."

Ham looked around, but all he could see was shadows. Nothing moved except the stars rotating over the earth imperceptibly slow. He got up and went to his father's door. Turning his head, he could see no one except those who had fallen asleep beside the common fire. He opened the door slowly. His mother was not within, and his father lay upon his mat snoring.

Ham undressed his father. He held the garments and pressed them to his chest, looked at the naked man and laughed softly. He left and went back to the ledge. He sat on the flat stone and meditated upon the lake below. Now he would have to cross it.

Ham heard someone behind him clearing his throat. He turned and saw the giant standing over him. He could feel the giant's strength radiating from its body. He handed the garments to him. The giant handed them back to Ham, saying, "This is your priesthood. It has come down from the fathers to you. Wear them. It is your authority."

Ham took off his clothes and put on the leathern garments. As he stood there, feeling the soft dark leather against his chest, stroking his chest with his hands, the giant put one hand on Ham's shoulder.

"These are magical garments, Ham. It is your right to rule and reign over your family and over the rest of the earth. They come down from Adam himself and carry his essence, his power. With these garments you can command the elements, and they will obey you. Now go. Wake up your family and leave. I will go before you and mark the path you are to

follow.”

“Who are you?” Ham asked as the man turned down the path.

The giant turned back to face Ham and said, “I am Khan, Master Mahan, Keeper of Secrets and all Knowledge.” Then he disappeared into the shadows.

“How ... ?” Ham hesitated. “How did you survive the flood?”

A whisper came upon the breeze. “I held on,” it said, “to the ark.”

* * *

Noah woke with pleasant memories of the night before with yet a thirst in his mouth. He searched for the jug of wine that should have been nearby but wasn't. He fumbled around on the mat and began to feel odd, maybe a bit cold. Maybe the jug was under the blanket. There. That was the odd feeling. He could feel the blanket on his skin. He lifted the blanket. The breath from his nostrils landed on a naked chest, something he hadn't seen since he was a young man when his father Lemech had given him the Priesthood. His blood began to slowly simmer and then to boil into a rumble deep down inside and then rising up to his face, contorting it and finally bursting out in an angry yell: “Ham!” It couldn't be anyone else. He knew it instinctively. Ham would be the only one that could do it. He ground his teeth. He remembered it as a dream. Ham had seen his nakedness and had laughed. He had taken the garment.

Noah called for his wife. “Mama! Mama!”

Na'amah came into the cave apologizing. "I am sorry Dear. I hoped to have come in earlier. I am finished now. Here." She handed Noah some leather garments made from the sacrifices of the lambs from the night before. "A new life calls for new clothes. I had hoped to cover your nakedness before you awoke. I got up early."

The sun's rays turned the old woman's gaunt figure into a shadow. Noah squinted to see her. He grabbed the garments and put them on.

"They don't smell right. They're not my garments, but I can't go naked. I would be struck down by the gods." He felt his chest and arms and legs. "It is the right pattern. It is a good fit. How you know me. Come down here and give me a kiss and then call for Ham."

Na'amah sat down beside him on a pillow. She kissed him. They both sat cross-legged on their mat and looked at each other.

"What shall I do with him, Mama?"

She said in a sad tone, "He is gone. He and his family took their belongings and their cattle and left in the night. I watched them go. I hugged the grandchildren each one."

Noah jumped up. "Where are my clothes?"

Na'amah looked around and picked his tunic and coat off the floor where Ham had thrown them. She handed them to him and he got dressed as fast as his old body could move. He ran out the door. Na'amah rose up and went to the door and watched Noah run down the path that led to a ledge that looked out over the lake. She followed him, but a little slower.

Noah came to an old log that had been hollowed out by the flood. It was in the shape of a large horn with the bottom of the trunk flaring out. At what was left of the top of the

trunk was a branch cut off to allow a mouth to fit. It was used to call the children when they were down in the marsh and were needed at home.

Noah didn't need to search to find the errant family. There was a large brown patch down below moving west across the lake very slowly. It consisted of a line of reed barges tipped and tied at the ends and a drove of cattle surrounding them, swimming along side.

Tears filled the old man's eyes as he watched them go. He bent down, and putting his mouth to the stump of branch on the tree, he called, "Ham! Ham! Come back! Ham!"

Noah's voice bellowed out over the lake below. The brown patch continued sliding across the lake. He yelled through the trunk once more. "My children! My children!"

One barge broke loose from the others. Some of the cattle followed it as it followed the current pushed by the wind. There must have been a swimmer that rescued it, because it made its way back to the huge brown patch, a caravan escaping into the wide world.

Noah sobbed, "You have stolen my children."

Na'amah put her hand on Noah's shoulder. "They will all leave sometime. We will see them again. They will always be our children. We are as Adam and Eve. We will watch over them from up there." She lifted her eyes to the morning sky.

Noah rose to his feet and hugged his dear wife and cried on her shoulder.

Chapter Two

Little Egyptus could hear her grandfather's voice coming from the calling tree. "Father Noah is calling us." Instinctively, she climbed out of the barge and cut it loose from the others. It seemed to race across the lake.

Her mother called after her. "Egypt! Egypt! Come back here this minute!" She jumped into the water and caught the rope the little one had cut and reeled it in, retying it to the other barges. She poked her head inside the barge and asked, "Where do you think you're going?"

"Father Noah," the little girl pointed.

"No. We don't go back. We are leaving." Her mother tugged at the rope to make it secure.

"I didn't get to say goodbye." Tears flowed down Little Egyptus' face.

"That old man doesn't love you. He only wants control. He is a tyrant. We leave for our freedom." She paused to breathe. "We have to be courageous now. You will stay with us. We are your family. We are the ones that love you."

Egyptus the mother took her daughter from the barge that held the sheep (she had insisted on staying with them) and brought her into the other barge. The daughter complained all the way, saying that Father Noah did love her, and that she would never watch the sheep again, but the mother's face was flint.

* * *

Reaching the other side of the lake about mid afternoon, everyone made sure all the animals were safe. The lesser cattle were let out of the barges. Some of the cattle had to be hauled out of the lake; some had to be rescued as they swam downstream. The camels having been brought ashore, they were loaded with all the stuff. Each person's luggage was put on their own camel. Some of the girls refused to ride a wet camel. They said they stank. But by evening, the girl's feet were getting sore and the camels were all dry, so the girls gladly rode them.

The camels plodded along the edge of the lake, swaying and rocking their riders in a rhythm known only in the desert.

Egyptus studied her daughter's face as it rocked in and out of her field of vision. In a few years, no one would be able to tell them apart. She didn't like that. She swatted her camel with her rod and caught up to Ham who was discussing something with the giant that had joined them. Ham turned his head toward her.

“Ham,” she called through the dust. “My name is Afra. It has always been. I will not be called Egyptus. It was your father that gave my that name. From today, my name is Afra.”

Afra turned back to be with the children. Ham and Khan looked at each other, smiled and then burst out laughing. “Afra it is!” Ham yelled, still laughing. He kicked his camel calling, “Get up there!”

* * *

Sunset came emblazoning the sky with swaths of rich orange. The mountains on each side of the lake reflected the warm colors. Cattle surrounding the caravan sang their

mournful song. The travelers rocked back and forth on the backs of their camels who plodded lazily along. Ham breathed in an eternal moment and meditated upon the changing scene where the shadow of night threw its robe over them. One by one, the stars peeked out until, over a wasted evening, a heavenly river flooded the darkness with its light.

Khan whispered his spells and mantras as if his words brought the whole wonder come to pass.

Ham heard his young daughter singing behind him. He listened and smiled.

We cross the sandy sea,

What will be,

What will be

To a sea of stars

for you and me,

for you and me.

Atom and Eva

Swam the sea,

Swam the sea

To bring us birth

Under a tree,

Under a tree.

Noah crossed the sea

with you and me,

with you and me

To a land of promise,

And here we be,

And here we be.

Afra answered with another song:

Is it a turtle dove I hear

Or the laughter of a child?

It is the fruit of sweet love,

A sound to drive you wild.

The moon I think has driven

us like an ass under burden

to sing the song of loved ones

and drum on something wooden.

We left our beautiful homeland,

all under the deep water,

to save our flesh and wander

And have a fair skinned daughter.

The men laughed, and Kana'an sang forth a manly song:

The men do hunt, and plant, and feed the flock;

Women do bake, and sew, bear and give suck;

Knights do war and fight and smash the enemy;

Queens do woo, and rule, and soar to infamy.

Kish cut in to end the song:

The king doth reign and bestows upon men
 Taxes for gain to support his queen and train;
 The Priest doth pray and lisp and says “Give”
 To prey upon them who follow the path of stars;
 All, he tells his acolytes, will eventually be ours.

All the men laughed and the women came back with a chorus:

Starry paths follow our feet as a river above,
 to wash over us as water, a baptism of fire.
 Noah's wave pushed the ark around a rock
 and washed ashore the mill stone that cracked.
 Around and around the ark did swirl and twirl
 Till all the merry men did drink of light and ale.
 The dove he let came back from a long flight
 with peace in his mouth and a stick in his feet,
 and Noah knew he had landed safely on the tree.

It put everyone in a thoughtful mood. They watched the river of light above as the
 beasts followed the lake along the side of the path they took to somewhere only Khan knew.
 Soon, their eyes closed, sleeping in their saddles as the camels trod on into the night.

Chapter Three

Kish and Kana'an complained that they had been taken from their home to die in the wilderness. They passed by a beach where the only available water came from a stagnant marsh. Once a river bed, the beach and the land above it was dry with little vegetation. The herd moaned with thirst, and the flocks kicked up the dust.

“We could have retired in comfort day by day,” Kish called out, “and slept in safe beds with full stomachs and grown fat.”

“We could have enjoyed our labors in the fields,” Kana'an grumbled, “knowing we would always have food to eat and could drink the cool mountain waters. We had stories at night around the campfire and sang in our happiness.”

“Yes,” replied Kish. “The walls of my stomach have dried up. My insides have become an empty pocket, and my tongue, a dry piece of leather. I choke on the desert winds.”

“Babies, all,” Khan shouted back at them. “The winds blow to dry the earth of the flood you were saved from.”

Little Put with great optimism said, “We have meat on four legs all around us. We haven't starved yet.” He waved his hand in an arc, pointing to the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats as he bobbed slowly up and down on his camel.

Khan laughed. “We eat those, boy, and we will starve.”

“We are all tired and hungry,” Ham said. “We should stop and rest and search for

running water.” Ham's eye caught a difference in air currents on the horizon. He stood up on his saddle and put his hand over his eyes. “Look! Ahead! I spy a brook far away emptying into the lake. We can stop there, and perhaps there are fish.”

Ham fell back into his saddle, swatted his camel, and raced ahead to quench his thirst. The cattle followed in a stampede for water. Everyone yelled, “Hi Ho!” and followed the cattle. They had run out of water days ago. He had warned them not to drink the lake water. It was contaminated. Most of them had gotten sick the last time they tried it.

Arriving at the brook running down from the hills to the east, Khan said, “We will make camp here.” No one paid attention to him. They were on their knees busily drinking out of the brook.

The women gathered the tents and poles and applied their backs to the task of setting up home. They pushed the poles into their sprockets, lifted the tents, then drew the cords and tied them around the stakes. After the tents were up they gathered clay jugs full of water at the brook and brought them back to camp.

The men went fishing, leaving their clothes on the beach. They took out their nets and waded into the lake where the brook emptied its clear water. There was no contamination there. Holding the tops of the nets, they let the weighted bottoms sink into the water. Walking out, stretching their nets into a straight line, they sang, calling to the fish.

“Pock pock pock,

Pock pock pock,

Come come come,

Fish fish fish,

Pock pock pock.”

They came back into an arc forming an enclosing circle, brought the circle closer and closer to the shore until there were dozens of fish flopping up and down, splashing the shallow water, trying unsuccessfully to escape.

Their song turned to

“Swish swish swish,

Fish fish fish,

Swish swish swish.”

The children gleefully gathered the fish using nets made of rushes and reeds and carried them to the women in the camp.

That night they had fried fish and marsh tubers. They sat around the fires and told stories of heroes rustling cattle, abducting women, fighting in battles, and journeying among the stars to find Heaven.

“What do you children yearn for?” came the whispering voice of Khan. The campfire made shadows dance across his face.

Kana'an, Kish and their wives answered, along with Ham and Afra, “The cities left behind. The people and the markets. The schools and libraries. Civilization.”

“We did not come out here to be wanderers in the desert,” Khan said in a long breath. “You shall have your cities and markets and even temples to the gods we see above shining their lights down upon us.”

Ham was silent. He stared at the night sky, dreaming of the buildings he would build, grand and inspiring. Afra put her head on his shoulder and kissed his neck. It was time to have another baby. His name would be Mitz-ra, and he would be a god.

When everyone singled off to their tents Egyptus stayed with her parents. She couldn't sleep. "Tell me more stories of heroes." Her moist eyes reflected the stars above. It was a moonless night, and all the stars of Heaven arched overhead.

A meteor streaked across the sky near the king of stars Shagreel. Ham said, "Look, a ben-ben. A god is traveling to Earth."

"What is a ben-ben, Da," asked Egyptus. She hugged her knees and looked longing at her dad.

"It is a capsule the gods travel in," Khan volunteered.

* * *

Next morning, after fried fish for breakfast, the women set about drying the leftover fish for the journey ahead. The men went fishing again, and after two netfulls went hunting, following the brook to where trees had begun growing again. They didn't expect to find much game. They mostly wanted to spy out the land ahead to find a pass over the approaching mountains, for Khan had said, "We will need to pass over that mountain range to find E'din, a land fed by two rivers."

The women had plenty to do with the amount of fish the men gave them. They made

racks of green branches of the bushes found above the beach and made a long smokey fire underneath. Gutting the fish, they flayed them and lay them in rows in tiers above the coals and burning brush. They had to sprinkle the coals with water from time to time to make them smoke.

Children played and danced. Their laughing voices could be heard upon the hills and on the beach. Egyptus practiced her acrobatics. She would flip backward standing on one leg, stretch down, put her hands on the ground, and then swing the other leg over, touch down and swing the first leg over. Next, she ran, hopped, flipped over and did several somersaults. When she landed into one of the racks of fish drying in the sun, all the women chased after her with sticks. None caught her though. She was too fast for them.

From the top of a hill, Egyptus called down,

“Run as you may, you can't catch me.

Big fat women running up the hill,

Follow me all around the mill,

You can't catch me,

Running down the hill.”

Egyptus ran down and through the women laboring after her. They tried to swat her, but she only laughed at their gauntlet. No one could touch her. She continued with her somersaults.

From the top of a hill far away Khan spied Egyptus. Her sinuous movements attracted his gaze. His bowels yearned for her. He would have her to wife when she came into

womanhood. Ambitious, he thought of how he would give her the world. He turned himself around and rejoined the men.

“Did you spot a deer?” Ham asked.

“A young one.” Khan looked straight ahead above the trail. “We will wait until it is full grown before we eat it.”

“We won't be here that long, surely,” Ham said surprised.

“Never you mind, Ham. Never you mind.”

Ham shrugged his shoulders. He thought Khan very odd but wise and powerful, so for this, he admired and followed him.

At the end of the day the men returned to the camp. They drew maps in the sand.

“I spied a trail this way made by the descending waters.” Kana'an scratched a line on the map.

“We could go around this way.” Kish scratched a different line going around the mountain.

“We have no time for such foolishness,” Khan said. He made a zig zag line that led over the mountain. “We need to get there ahead of the snow.”

Ham squatted, thinking. “There is a lot of fertile land here on this side of the river. We could build in any number of places. Surely, the mountains will continue to feed this lake for many years.”

Khan looked at him and breathed in his face like a bull. “Look, old man. You are unwise. You know not the land I speak of. There is a land of the gods. They built a great

civilization before the flood. They left in the great ben-bens like the falling stars you see at night. They left all that land to us. These rivers will dry up into wadis. The two rivers I speak of will never dry up, and the land will always be fertile.”

So it was decided. They would prepare and make their journey.

Ham wanted the blessings of the gods. He commanded an altar of stones be built and a ram be brought. That night they ate of the sacrifice and drank the last of the wine they had brought with them.

In a week, they had collected enough fish with a couple of deer and antelope and a few berries and dates they found to last them across the mountains. They filled all their jars and pots with water even though they would have enough fresh water. “You never can tell when we would need it,” Afra commented.

Chapter Four

Camels carrying heavy baggage weren't meant to climb over mountains. They complained all the way. They knew sandstorms, not blizzards. With frozen noses they pushed blindly against the icy wind. It was hard not to slip off an icy cliff side or narrow crest where the mountain sloped steeply on either side. The cattle and flocks stupidly followed.

There had been no trails to follow that day, only mountain stream beds or rocky ridges.

It had begun as a temperate, sunny morning. The women took down the tents, folded them, and packed each animal carefully, tightening all the cinches. The tents, trunks of clothing, bags of seed, dried fish, berries, and the utensils were neatly secured into place with ropes. The way the women fastened the saddles, no one would fall off.

People sang as the camels, flocks, and herds headed up the lazy slope.

“What little camp is this, is this, that slowly walks and walks?

What little camp is this, is this, that rocks and rocks on camel backs
and treks up the spine of Mother Earth?

What little camp is this, is this, that slowly walks and walks?

What little camp is this, is this, that strolls along with cattle din and tired men
that can't look back to where they've been?

What little camp is this, is this, that slowly walks and walks?

What little camp is this, is this, that huffs and puffs and strains against the rising hills and rocks that block their way?”

Day after boring day the sun rose, crested and set with the world hypnotically swinging back and forth in front of the eyes of Egyptus. The buzzing of flies filled her ears. At night the starry river arching overhead swung gently, pulling the bored passenger into sleep. Each day Egyptus would have to think of some new song to keep her awake, or chew on a piece of dried fish which she would finish off with a date. When would it end? All she could do was wait until someone would yell, “Let's make camp.”

The days grew colder. It began to snow. At first, there was just the powdery stuff that the wind blew into little swirls along the ground. Then the heavy snow came, and the ground grew slippery. The camels slipped and slid along uncertain pathways. One camel fell to his knees. They had to stop and help it up. It didn't die or fall off a cliff, but Egyptus thought surely, it would. Another camel decided to kneel down and sleep. That was hers. It took some switching, beating, and yelling to wake it up and get it moving again.

Days melted into weeks until the slope turned downward, the sun came out and warmed their frozen hands, faces and feet. The camels bellowed for joy. The flocks and herds that had been silent bleated and mooed. Down below, everyone could see the green of a pine forest and broke into song.

“Heaven's sun is shining!

Glory be the day!

Heaven's sun is shining,

And warm is the ray.
Our faces, they are smiling;
It's time to stretch and shout!
Our faces, they are smiling;
We sing a song of happiness
and put away our doubt.”

It was true. Everyone had doubted and complained, thinking they were being led astray to an ignoble death on the mountaintop where they would remain frozen forever, only to be found by one of the descendants of Japheth or Shem. Now they forgot the frozen heights and made camp among tall pines and cedars whose perfume filled their lungs and invigorated their spirits.

* * *

“We don't have enough women,” complained Kana'an. He stopped chopping the wood his wife needed and squinted at Kish with his arms loaded down with the cuttings.

Kish answered with a question. “How does our father think to build a civilization, let alone a city, with only a handful of children?”

Put walked by carrying a spear in one hand and dragging a deer by its antlers. “How are we going to have children without a wife? Shall I marry this base animal?”

Khan followed Put, carrying a stag over his shoulder. He laughed, halted, and said, “You won't like *my* suggestion.”

“I was afraid of this,” Kish put his ax down to listen.

“I know what you're thinking.” Kana'an pulled on his beard and grimaced.

“We need to send someone back to the dear mountain home.” Khan winked. “Capture some girls and persuade them to join us.”

“And if they don't want to join us?” Put asked with a grunt, as he pulled the deer another yard.

“Bring them to me.” Khan squatted down to be eye to eye with Put. “I will persuade them.”

I bet he could, thought Kana'an.

That night around the campfire, it was decided that Kana'an, Kish, and Put would go back and capture some girls and bring them back.

Afra cried out, “You bring us out into this wilderness only to take away my children? Who knows when they will be back, or if they will ever come back. A giant bear will have them for dinner, or they will be captured and put to death for their crimes. And what would be worse than they come under the influence of their grandfather and stay with *him!*”

“Now, Mama,” said Kana'an with his hand thrust out to comfort her. “Nothing will happen to us. We passed over the mountain without harm, we can do it again.”

“That will be once going and once coming,” she said in tears. “Then you have to watch over the girls and protect them and yourselves from wild animals and from the treacherous landscape and the cold winds on top of the mountain.”

“And who will look after us women when you are gone?” Kana'an's wife Entela asked.

“You will have our father and Khan,” Kana'an said with the wave of his hand. “Two very powerful men.”

Entela pulled on her long black curls and shuddered. She said under her breath, “I ... and be alone with him?” She stared at her husband. “You are a cruel man.”

Afra sighed and put her head on Ham's shoulder. She looked thoughtfully through the diminishing fire towards her children. “It is true. We can't have children fast enough to fulfill the dreams of our husbands. We need more sisters to share the load, and our sons need more wives. Our grandchildren need wives.” A chuckle rippled among the grandchildren.

* * *

The next morning, three camels started back towards the heights of snow and ice carrying three complaining men, not understanding why they had thought of this in the first place. They should have kept their mouths shut, at least until warmer weather.

Nothing much happened on the trip back across the hump of Mother Earth except the expected boredom and freezing cold. Their frozen brains prevented them from thinking too much. They plodded along in silence for most of two weeks until they hit the drier slopes. Then the complaining returned, each one blaming the other for their hardship.

At the mouths of fresh water streams they fished when they could and filled gourds and bladders with fresh water for the trip across the deserts and marshes. When they spotted the barges they had left they rejoiced with song and dance, set up camp and settled down to discuss their plans.

“We can hide in the barley fields,” Put said, “and snatch women as they work.”

“We can gather them in their sleep at night,” Kish said. “No one will see us.”

“It is the time of the new moon.” Kana'an looked into the night sky at the round orb shining blindingly, its white fire rippling across the lake. “They will be dancing and singing in celebration as girls do when they are away from the men.”

“That's true,” Kish said. “It will be easy for us to sneak up and grab them.”

“There are only three of us,” Put said. “They can overwhelm us.”

“We will have to prepare a corral for them,” Kana'an said. He rubbed his hands and spread them in front of the flames of the campfire. “It will be like the time we hunted the gazelles. We scare them, run after them, and herd them into the corral.”

“We will have to do something to hush them up ... tie them up ... control them somehow,” Kish said. He scratched his head. “The men will hear them and come running.”

Kana'an got up and went over to the baggage he took off his camel. He came back with a vial of liquid. “This will keep them quiet. It was prepared by our mother. She knows of these things. Put some on a rag and cover their mouths. It will stop their screaming.”

So it was decided. The three men boarded a barge and crossed the lake in silence. They visited the place of dancing and prepared a corral covered with branches to look like bushes. They crawled under the bushes and waited for morning.

* * *

There was a small clearing in a grove of trees near the lake where one of the mountain tributaries emptied into it. It originated as part of a barley field, but it was found that barley planted there grew poorly, so at the end of harvest, the girls danced the barley into the

ground. It became their place to play.

Men were allowed in there only to construct a bower on the lakeside with a stone floor and stone pillars to support the lathe roof. At the edge of the stream they constructed wooden benches and a small arching bridge so the girls wouldn't have to get their feet wet.

Only twenty four girls could participate in the dance and singsong antiphonals, verses they would toss back and forth to each other. They would line up in two lines, twelve in each and face each other, dressed in nothing but thin linen tunics draped over one shoulder. Each double set of girls represented one of the twelve moons or months having to do with menstruation and birth and all the troubles women have. They sang about these things laughingly, as though throwing jokes at each other, their way of living with it.

After their rounds they danced in circles, starting out with a large circle and ending in concentric circles moving in opposite directions, singing of angels and heaven and gods making love to mortal women. They were like the planets orbiting around the sun.

It was during the end of the dance that Kana'an, Kish and Put showed themselves. The girls and the women with them began screaming in surprise and in anger that men would disturb their time to play. But when they recognized that these were not ordinary men, that they were hairy and wild, dressed in nothing but leaves and branches, growling at them, and brandishing spears, they screamed in horror. They wanted to run across the stream to home, but the men blocked the way.

The three wild men herded the girls into the corral and closed the gate. Some of the older women escaped, but the men didn't pay attention to them. They concentrated on

grabbing girls from the outside of the corral and covering their mouths with the scented rags that made them faint. Half the girls fought their way out and over the corral, but the men had as many as they could handle, which was four each. They hurriedly carried them to the barges and were on their way across the water when they saw other boats full of yelling men approaching them.

“Row faster!” Kana'an called out.

They hadn't had time to divest themselves of their disguises and looked like demons to the men of Noah who shouted all manner of curses at them. Kana'an trembled as he heard one curse. It was his grandfather Noah using the giant megaphone made from a log. It sounded as thunder from Heaven.

“Kana'an, I recognize you. I curse you. You will never obtain the Priesthood, you, or your descendants like your father before you. You are cursed. Do you hear me? You are cursed. Your people will live in darkness all the days that come upon the earth.”

How could he recognize me from such a distance? Kana'an asked himself. Maybe it was one of the women that escaped. She told him. Whoever she was. Maybe it was my grandmother.

The other boats grew near, but Kana'an had a surprise for them. He took out a horn of a bison prepared by Khan. Standing at the back of the barge he blew it as hard and loud as he could. Then Kish and Put pulled out their horns and blew them also. As their barges formed a triangle with their pursuers in the middle, the sound waves from the three horns reverberated and produced a drumming sound. It put to sleep all who chased them. They fell

into their boats in a faint, as though choked and unable to breathe.

Kana'an laughed and commanded the others to continue rowing. When they reached the shore, they took off their disguises, got dressed and tied their prey onto the camels, covering the girls with blankets and rugs. They ran alongside their camels until out of breath and out of sight. Knowing they would be followed, they didn't stop to make camp until noon the next day.

* * *

Upon waking, most of the girls sobbed. They didn't know if the wild men were going to eat them, rape them, or sell them into slavery. If the latter were the case, then they could be eaten or raped.

“What is to become of us?” Comrase cried. “My hands and feet hurt. I am sure they are bleeding.”

“Shut up Con-Ass,” Napsut whispered. “Do I have to escape and rescue you? Can't you take care of yourself? You are a cow!”

Comrase sobbed. “Be civil, Napshit. My name is Comrase. It means beautiful hand or the hand of God.”

“Sounds like Con-Ass to me. You can't pronounce anything right.” Napsut struggled against the ropes that bound her. She growled and hissed and then cried out.

“What a rescuer!” Comrase said disdainfully.

At that moment the camels stopped and bleated. The girls could hear running water. Each one stuck out her dry swollen tongue, wanting to lap the water they couldn't reach.

Then a blinding light appeared as the men pulled off the rugs and blankets. The air was cool and sent goose bumps over their nearly naked bodies. The girls' brains were numb after being tied to the camels and going without food and water for two days. They looked at the the stream emptying into the lake with longing as though the water was a magnet that attracted eyes.

After the men tied collars onto the girls, tied the collars to a line, and tied the girls' hands behind their backs, they were let down from the camels. They ran to the cold water and lapped it up like dogs. By the time they had their fill they were shivering because of the cold.

Put started a campfire. The girls were pleased and formed a circle around it, kneeling down to sit on their haunches and warm themselves.

“They could make us quite warm in bed,” Put suggested.

Kana'an called back from the camels he was unloading. “Shut your mouth, Put. These are for our children. We have wives back at the base camp waiting for us. They will make us warm and we will have many more children.”

“You have a wife,” Put said as he brought in more firewood. “I have none.”

“Have I not promised you Lyly?” Kana'an approached Put and pounded a large stake into the ground, attached a brass ring to it and tied the line that held the girls.

“She is as ugly as one of the camels, Kana'an, begging no disrespect.” He added more wood to the fire and got bit on the leg by Napsut. “Ow!” He kicked her.

“Yes, but she is an excellent cook and very strong. She will make you a fine wife and

give you many children.”

Put looked at the girls with his mouth watering. “There is more to life than that.” And we have it all here, he thought.

“Get out your harp, Put,” Kish said as he got the net out of a saddlebag. “Kana'an and I will go fishing. The girls need to be calmed down while we are gone. And don't get too close. They will devour you.” He laughed about the bite and went away with the net and his older brother.

Put took out his harp and sang to the girls. There were a few frowns, but most of them liked the music. It calmed their nerves even though it was a ballad about knights in shining armor whose glory blinded the soldiers on a castle wall being stormed.

* * *

It wasn't long before everyone's hunger was satisfied with fried fish and lake tubers, and then Napsut started in with her complaining and threats.

“My father and uncles will catch up to you and then you'll be sorry!”

“Your father doesn't care about daughters,” Kish said with a smile. “He only wants sons.”

“My father cares about ME!” Napsut slammed her foot onto the ground.

Comrase sobbed, and tears squirted from her eyes, pouring down her face like rain.

“Shut up, Con-Ass!” Napsut kicked Comrase over, and that made the chubby little girl cry even louder. Soon, all the girls were sobbing and trying to soothe each other.

When the men tied up the girls for the night, Napsut, lean with long black wiry hair,

continued her tirade. "I will escape during the night and come back with the men."

"Then," Kana'an said, taking her by the wrists, "we will make a special bed for you."

Whereupon he dragged her away from the other girls and tied her wrists and ankles to tent stakes.

"You will rape me?" Napsut cried out.

"No one is going to rape you, girl," Kana'an said as he threw a blanket over her. "I'll let one of my boys have the honor ... after he marries you."

Napsut grumbled, but was too tired to do anything. The two day trip had been hard on everyone, and she fell asleep.

* * *

After enough fish and game had been gathered and dried with the help of the girls, the camp was abandoned and the three camels with their feminine loads were guided up the far reaching slope. Soon everyone suffered from the numbing cold. Kana'an, Kish, and Put grumbled harder than the girls who huddled under the blankets and made each other sweat.

The time seemed long for the girls, but for the three men, it seemed shorter because they had done this before and knew the way. The weeks of freezing were soon over, and they arrived back at camp and warmer climate.

When the girls were uncovered and let down from the camels they looked around. Four large tents were set up in a clearing surrounded with pine and cedar trees. The smell of venison roasting on the fire mixed with the smell of the trees in the cool air made their stomachs growl.

Napsut knew who the men were that had captured her. They were the sons of a great uncle, Ham. She knew the family. Therefore, she looked around to see if she could see – and yes! There she was staring at her. It was Egyptus! Her life-long friend and companion. They had grown up taking care of the cows. They had named each one and played upon their backs. They were the same age, and everyone thought they were twins the way they were always together. And there she was.

When Egyptus spied Napsut she bounced and turned flips, over and over until she landed right in front of her friend. They embraced and kissed and kissed and kissed. Then all they could do was bounce and giggle while holding onto each other. They laughed, and when Kana'an walked by, they knocked their pubic bones together several times, shouting, “Pic pic pic ... pic pic pic. That's all men are interested in is pic pic pic.”

Ham had come with Kana'an to inspect the girls to make sure they were in good shape. He turned towards Egyptus and Napsut and said, “You girls should be ashamed of yourselves.”

They only jumped up and down and laughed. “Pic pic pic ... pic pic pic.” They ran off together laughing. They understood why the girls had been brought, and they were going to hide.

Ham shook his head.

Afra put her hand on his shoulder and giggled. “They are just children, my love.”

After making sure the girls were all healthy and hadn't been abused, they were given over to Afra. She took them to the tents, fed and clothed them.

Chapter Five

Napsut and Egyptus ran through the forest of fir and cedar. Many of the trees had been broken and gnarled, damaged by the flood. Half the trees lay on their sides, some of which had saplings growing out of their trunks like limbs that had sprouted roots.

The laughter of the two girls came to a sudden stop when they heard a crack in the bushes. They froze, perfectly stiff like statues. When they heard another crack like the snapping of a dry twig, they rushed behind a thick cedar. They took a brave look to see what animal was stalking them. Would it be a bear that could eat them, or a deer with its fawn that would delight their senses?

What they saw was an even greater surprise. Parading before their eyes along the side of a rocky hill were dirty little men with dark bushy hair and beards and wearing only furry loin cloths. They were bent over with spears at the ready, stalking something.

Suddenly the girls were grabbed from behind, their mouths covered with, dirty little fingers. They wanted to scream but couldn't. They looked at their captures with wide eyes. The men's eyes looked straight across into theirs. The girls became angry, hitting, kicking and biting. They squirmed until the men shushed them, shaking their black bushy heads. These men had the look of complete innocence.

The girls relaxed as their captures slowly removed their grip. They shushed them again and pointed with their spears. In the distance, the girls could see a small flock of deer. Smiles grew across their faces as they understood. These men were hunting.

When the men told them to leave by pointing with their fingers in the direction of the camp, the girls shook their heads and pointed towards the herd. The men grew angry and shook their heads. They took each girl and pulled them by their arms back towards camp then nudged them with the points of their spears. They got the point and ran back to tell their family.

* * *

Back at camp, Napsut and Egyptus ran up to Ham.

“Pa-pa!” yelled Egyptus. “There are men.” She pointed back towards the forest.

“Father Noah said we were the only ones left, but there are men in the forest.”

Ham drew the two towards him and held them close. “What are they doing? Did they hurt you?”

“No, Uncle,” said Napsut. “They are hunting.”

“They speak a different language, Pa-pa.” Egyptus squeezed her father with both arms around him. “But I’m not afraid.”

Ham thought a moment as he peered towards the direction the girls had come from.

“Come. We will talk to the family ... and to Khan.”

Ham's family sat around in a circle as was their custom when it was time to tell stories, or discuss problems that arose from time to time. Right now, they had a big problem.

“Egyptus tells me,” Ham addressed the group, “she and her friend Napsut came across a group of men hunting deer. We were of the opinion that the Lord God destroyed all of mankind, and that we, the family of Noah, are the only ones left.”

Khan whispered loudly, "Let us examine the word destroyed. God surely destroyed all of mankind, but Noah nor God himself ever said that the Great Creator slayed all mankind except us. Look at me." Khan stiffened his neck. "I am not of your family, and yet, I survived."

"That's true," Kana'an remarked. "As far as we know, all the nations of the earth have been destroyed, but have you ever tried to empty a bag of salt? Surely, some of the grains cling to the sides of the bag ... so, it is possible."

"The question is," Put interjected, "what are we going to do about it?"

"I want to know," Afra wondered, "are they a danger to our family?"

Others murmured. "Yes, yes, we want to know."

"May I suggest," Khan said, "that I go and talk to these fellows. I am sure I know their language. I have been in this area before. They may be friends."

"Invite them to join us," Ham said. "We can talk to them and learn their history. They may be friendly. If there are many survivors, we may need more numbers. We could help each other."

So, it was decided by the family council, from the many ayes and nodding of the heads, that Khan would search out the hunters and invite them into the camp to talk. The women would prepare a feast for them.

* * *

Kin-Nu sat hunched upon a rock overlooking a ravine, counting in his head the deer he had slain and thanking the gods for sparing his family another day. He watched his wife

Kin-Tu begin work with the other women of the tribe, skinning and cutting up the meat for drying, when he felt a presence of great power behind him. He turned and saw a giant reflecting the sun's rays upon him. His glory astounded him and Kin-Nu quickly lay prostrate at the feet of the god, for he assumed that one of the gods had appeared to him.

“What is your name, man?” asked Khan.

“Kin-Nu,” he said, getting upon his knees and bowing several times. He waved his hand behind him. “And these are my kindred and family preparing a sacrifice for thee.”

“Come, Kin-Nu. Bring all your family with the meat you prepare. Come to a feast. There are others who have come. They want to talk and share family histories and stories ... great feats of valor and the hunt.”

Khan slipped away as the man bowed several times more. When Kin-Nu looked up, the god was gone. He ran quickly to tell his family and clan all that was said, felt and seen.

Nak-Tak told of two girls he had found during the hunt. He kept saying, “Bless my soul!” and running his hands over his forehead, heart and abdomen. “I have seen the daughters of the god. I have shamed myself. I am ashamed.” He ran around in circles.

Kin-Nu took a hold of Nak-Tak's arm and stopped him. All bowed down to Kin-Nu for he had seen the god. They listened to him.

“Come now, Nak-Tak. Show me where you saw these girls. We will follow their trail and find them, perhaps their whole clan, and we will bring our meat and barley corn to feast and talk the good talk.”

So Kin-Nu gathered up his clan, the men and their women and children, the day's kill,

and their grain, which they made into bread, and took all they had and went to the feast.

* * *

People at camp were calling the newcomers “the wild men of the forest” as the hunters and their families filed into camp, carrying on their backs the day's kill and bread in baskets. They were a dark people and wore only loincloths. They smiled, revealing missing or brown and black teeth. They showed no shame and only seemed interested in sharing what they had with the people they called “the newcomers.”

Khan knew the language of these natives, since he had visited them before the flood. He introduced them to Ham and his sons and told them these dark people were the Tiki, the survivors. That's what they called themselves. Khan told the leaders of the Tiki, particularly Kin-Nu, that they also were survivors from the north. They sat down around the campfire and shared their stories while the women prepared the food.

Kin-Nu spoke and Khan translated. He said, “The Tiki once lived with the gods along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, existing in the marshes, living off fish, and making everything they needed out of rushes. They wove their homes and vessels out of leaves. They were a happy people and cultivated the gardens of the gods and served them food in their castles. Now we hunt in the forests here in the mountains. For a long time our homes were under water. So, we learned to live up here.

“One day the gods got tired of men and left in their great sky ships. Then the waves came and washed us all out of our homes and fields. We caught hold of trees and logs. Many of us were apprised of the coming flood by prophets and climbed the great tree in the north

up into a cave, but we never saw them again. Are you those people returning to us?"

Khan told them they were not. "We come from the west very far from here across a great ocean. We came in a boat."

"The gods have boats that go under the water and into the sky," Kin-Nu said through Khan. "They fight with each other. But now they are gone. Their cities and their temples where we worshiped are covered in mud."

Khan talked privately with Kin-Nu about the great sky ships and did not translate. Ham asked, "What did you and he say?"

"We were talking about the old times before the flood. Nothing important." Khan smiled and returned to his conversation with Kin-Nu. The others talked among themselves.

The Tiki women and the daughters of Noah worked well with each other. They didn't know what the other said, but they knew the way of the kitchen and only had to motion to each other with their hands and fingers. They prepared venison, pigs, fish, and roots in harmony. Some meats were roasted while others were steeped in pots along with the roots which were like carrots and potatoes, except not so well formed.

The daughters of Noah sang, and the Tiki women harmonized because they didn't know the words.

"Fields and gardens grow, and The Sun God gives us life.

Wheat and barley play under the wind-swept Summer sky.

Women gather grain in the golden covered plains, and

Bread is laid before our men at the end of the day.

Here we lay with our men as the day turns to night,
and the Moon God rules and calms our Summer strife.”

Women danced around the men and served them meat and pottage and bread. The circle around the campfire opened up as three Tiki women continued to dance before the men, clothed only in fire light. The Tiki children came and sat in their father's laps and were given their portion of the meal at their father's hands. The daughters of the sons of Noah came to their fathers and danced before them and then flopped down into their laps. Ham and his sons wanted to tell their daughters they were too old for such foolishness, but held their tongues for the sake of the guests.

Egyptus teased her father Ham by snatching meat out of his mouth with her teeth. She laughed and he tickled her ribs. Napsut sat on his other leg and laughed, but when she tried to do the same as Egyptus, she got pinched.

The feast lasted long into the night with stories of heroes and star ships that took those who died in battle up into the Milky Way Galaxy to tread the Mill of Time. Wine that was saved from the time they were with Noah was brought out, and berry wine brought by the Tiki people was passed around until everyone became drunk. Men lay with their wives around the campfire, and some of the girls were dragged off into the bushes and made love to. By morning, everyone was hugging the person beside him, the Tiki thanking the people of Noah and visa-versa.

As the Tiki prepared to leave, Khan stood in their midst, the sunrise shining on his copper chest. The Tiki bowed to him in reverence and thanked him as though he were a god.

“Come,” he said. “Stay with us and we will be one people. We travel back to your homeland. We will build up the old places for the water has receded now. We need each others help to build a new world.”

Kin-Nu talked to all his people, and they agreed. They would stay with the new ones and go down into their homeland and rebuild.

After that, Khan talked to Ham. “They said they would stay with us, but they want to be a separate people. They will be our servants. They are used to serving the gods, and they desire to serve us.”

“That is well,” Ham said. “We need all the people we can get.” Ham thought for a moment and asked, “Does that mean I have to be a king to these people?”

“I thought that's what you wanted,” Khan said with raised eyebrows.

It was settled in a ceremony with each side facing each other dancing and singing, and a contract was carved on a cedar plate, one used in the feast. A tally was taken and the names of all the Tiki people were placed in one column, and the names of the people of Noah were placed in the another column. A copy was made and given to the Tiki. Then everyone hugged everyone else, slapping each other on the back.

Soon, it was time to move on. A hunt was organized, meat gathered, smoked and dried, camels loaded and off they went, singing merrily down the eastern slope of the mountain.

Oooh Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah me ...

Oooh Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah me ...

Come walk with me.

Oooh Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah me ...

Come walk with me.

Let's climb a mountain and a tree ...

Let's climb a mountain and a tree ...

Oooh Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah me,

Let's climb a mountain and a tree ...

Tree-tree tree-tree tree ...

Let's climb a mountain and a tree.

Come see, come see, come see ...

Come see the world with me.

Oooh Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah, Aaaaaa wah me ...

Come see the world with me.

They sang for hours, changing verses and tempo, with the Tiki harmonizing in the background, providing the music as though their voices were musical instruments. Later in the evening, Put took out his harp and played music he saw in the heavens. He made it sound as though the stars were tinkling like tiny bells.

Chapter Six

Mountain valleys were left behind with all the cedar, pine, and rocky streams as the travelers made their way down. There were no paths to follow except what nature provided, and those were steep stream beds and craggy cuts in the mountainside. The Tiki guided them so as not to get lost in the brush, which was easy to do. Many stream beds led nowhere, and there were detours caused by the camels finding a different way. Sometimes they ended up in a saddle between two peaks where they rested for a day and then headed down again. They finally followed a small river which became wider as the weeks passed into months. It was the Tigris or Idiqna, as the Tiki called it, “the swift river”.

As the Idiqna spread, the land became arid, the hills turned to lumps of sand, and the river was encompassed by a different kind of marsh as though the bushes crept into the river and stayed there. In some places there were a thirty foot drops to the river. The trees became twisted relatives of the ones in the mountains. They had been shaped by the constant wind. More prevalent were the date palm and other palm trees that straggled along behind them. There were many water fowl and fish to feed upon. In the mornings and evenings, and if ever there was a sudden noise, the sky filled with clouds of birds, shrieking so loud it would sometimes start stampedes. It was all the Tiki could do to keep the cattle together. The girls would cover their ears, scream, and laugh.

Khan called out “Camp!” when he came to a large flat area with many odd looking stones sticking up out of the ground. He consulted the Tiki who assured him this was the

place of the secret city.

“What place?” Ham asked as the women began unloading the tents.

“There is a treasure buried in this place.” Khan scanned the area with his hand shading his eyes. A sudden gust of wind pushed at the camp as if some unseen spirit tested the people. The cattle became restless, and the Tiki had to calm them down with many hushes. “I have been talking to the Tiki. They have talked about an important city along this river that was a port.” He caressed one of the odd stones that almost came to a point, having been weathered and rounded on top. “There is also a library.”

Ham's countenance brightened. A wide smile swept across his face. “A library! Where?”

“It was near the port ... or did they say portal?” Khan thought a moment. “The truth is in the inflection.” He turned to Ham smiling. “Anyway, it is near this spot, and we shall find it. We can dig through the roof.”

One of the girls screamed. Everyone came rushing to her assistance. It was Egyptus. She had stubbed her toe and was eager to see what she had bumped into. Bending down, she scraped away the sand and uncovered a skull. It wasn't ancient because some of the skin and hair remained. The older people remained silent. They had memory of the flood. They knew the devastation it caused. One of the Tiki men bent down and recovered the skull with sand using his cupped hand. A strange guttural chant emanated from his throat. He shook his head and breathed deeply. It could have been a relative.

“Oh, it's just a skull,” Kana'an said. “They're all over the place.”

“Maybe,” said Khan. “But the Tiki come from these people. We must respect them.”

Ham took Egyptus by the arm and gently lifted her to her feet and said softly, “Go help your mother.”

Some of the stones were obviously building stones torn off main structures from the onrush of mud and water, but others were definite cornices or capstones of buildings that likely remained intact.

Ham followed Khan like a puppy following its master. He asked Khan many questions as his master peered over the landscape, looking for a particular spot, sometimes scraping or tamping down the sand with his staff.

“Could the library have withstood the great wave that tore down this city?” Ham strolled behind Khan, cocking his head at the giant, waiting for his response; but Khan was deep in thought.

“Wouldn't the library have been built of stone? It seems to me that most of the buildings around here have been built of clay brick. They are strewn here and there.” Ham had an important thought for a builder and architect. “They can be reused.”

Khan turned to Ham and said, “The most important buildings were built of wood. It had deep meaning to the previous inhabitants.”

“Of course,” Ham said, scratching his hairy chin. “Wood ... a source of life.” Ham thought a moment, stopping as Khan stopped. “But wood doesn't have the strength to withstand a tidal wave.”

Khan's staff hit something. It had a different sound to it. “Sounds hollow,” was all he

said. He called to Kin-Nu and talked to him in Tikian, the language of the before-time. Kin-Nu called other Tiki men, and they began digging with wooden spades.

Ham watched. The Tiki didn't just throw the sand and clay into a pile. They spread the sand and dug through the clay as though making brick. They lay the clay bricks out in rows, covering them with a thin layer of sand. When they uncovered the roof, Ham saw that it was made of logs. A stairway was cut into the clay leading down to the roof. The men brought out axes and hatchets and a large hole was cut, but sections of the logs were preserved and cut length-wise. They made a ladder from the pieces, tying them together with ropes, then let it down into the dark hole.

Bringing a torch from the campfire, Khan descended into the blackness. Ham and Kin-Nu followed. The rooms below were filled with a stench like rotten vegetation and sewage. The fire of the torch reflected off the water that covered the floor.

“River water,” Khan said. Still hanging onto the ladder, he swung the torch out as far as he could reach. He saw that the walls were too short. “The place is filled with water and possibly more clay. We will need to build a water pump. Everyone back up.”

As Ham climbed the ladder, he could see alcoves of clay tablets. His heart leaped. It must be the library they were looking for. What information they could contain! He would read of their history and their science and literature. What stories do they hold? What was their mathematics like? And what kind of architecture? He could stay here for years. He would rebuild the city and their civilization.

Work on the water pump began immediately. Two bovine were sacrificed to feed the

camp and to make leatheren buckets. Palm trees were cut down and made into a treadmill and a wheel to carry the rope that would hoist the buckets from below.

Khan put Ham in charge because he knew engineering and thus the mechanics needed.

When a smaller wheel was in place in the mud floor of the library and a drainage ditch dug on top, leading to the river, everything was in place.

Tiki men walked a treadmill that ran the wheel that pulled the buckets up from the bilge of the library and through the hole in the roof. When the full buckets reached the top of the wheel and back down the other way, they spilled the water into a trough that carried the water to the ditch that took it to the river.

After most of the water had been drained from the library, a crew of Tiki men with their wooden spades began the arduous task of removing the mud and clay, and a few skeletons that were found. They were buried outside the confines of the city on a hillside. More bricks were made from clay that covered the floor, each one sent up in a bucket to be retrieved and laid out on the roof.

After the removal, Khan and Ham investigated the inner sanctums. Ham took samples of many clay tablets and poured over the ancient pictographs. Khan was searching for something specific. He went from room to room, looking at everything that resembled a box. He broke large pots and raked a lot of clay tablets onto the floor upon Ham's protests, but he ignored Ham. He studied decorations on the walls to find some clue as to what he was looking for. He found nothing in the end. Then he had the men dig around the library to look at the monuments that would be on the outside.

When all was done and the land cleared, it had taken several days, and the men were famished, so they had a feast. They ate, drank wine, danced and sang the whole day until they dropped. After a sound sleep that crept into the noon hour the next day, Khan arose and surveyed the monuments.

Around the library stood twelve tall stones that had peeked up over the sand. It explained some of the stones they had seen days earlier when they had arrived. There were other smaller stones that integrated the taller stones into the structure of the library. As Ham and Khan investigated, Ham understood why the library had the strength to withstand the tidal wave that struck the area. The stones appeared to go deep into the earth and acted as a barrier. Looking at the carvings on the stones, two fish, scales, twins, a bull, a ram, etc., and the positions of the stones, Khan and Ham knew it was an astronomical observatory.

Khan studied each stone as he circumvented the structure. He looked puzzled. He scratched his forehead, went back to camp and lay down in his tent. He didn't come out until night.

Ham studied the clay tablets all the next day. He sliced some of the clay bricks and made tablets of his own which he lay on a wooden tablet. Using the personal reed he always kept with him, he took notes. At the end of the day, he was able to translate. The pictographs were not unlike that which he had learned when a youth. Then he was able to read account books, stories, mathematical treatises, letters, philosophical discussions and histories. All of these, of course, were religious texts and had been kept by priests.

Meanwhile, the children played among the ruins and rocks. Afra and the other mothers

were afraid the little ones might fall into a hole. They said it wasn't safe, but instead of rounding them up, they just complained about Khan making camp in such a dangerous place. Imagine! Camping on top of a city!

That night, everyone sat around two common fires eating, drinking and telling stories. Ham's camp had their circle, and the Tikis had theirs. Khan, not at either, studied the stars as they moved through the sky, crossed the tips of the stones, and passed between other stones. To him it was computational, a message written by the hand of the gods. He tied reeds together to form patterns which he held up against the night sky. If the pattern didn't fit, he would take it down and adjust it. After several tries and several hours, he was satisfied. The stars pointed to a certain location among the stones in the library garden.

Ham had been staring at the stars, laying on his back with his family around him when his thoughts turned to the observatory. He stood and strolled over to the library just in time to see Khan digging in the garden. He walked down the clay steps to investigate.

“What is it you have found?” he asked Khan.

“It is a book.” Khan lifted a heavy box from a stone enclosure.

Ham looked into the ground. There was a stone box that had been made with slabs cemented together. A stone lid lay on top of the clay that had been dug from around it.

Khan set the box down on the walkway that surrounded the library. Ham knelt on the other side of it. They both studied it. It was wooden with metal bands around it from side to side as well as from front to back. It was not meant to be opened, at least not for a long, long time, perhaps millennia.

“How do you know it's a book?” Ham asked.

“What else do you find at a library?” Khan smiled at Ham. “The Tiki told me ... plus all the signs on the walls and stones.”

“What book is it, then?”

“It is *The Rites of Ascension*.” (The Path of to Ascension)

Khan took hold of the heavy box and lifted it to his shoulder and climbed the steps.

Ham followed, expecting to be shown the book.

“Yes,” Khan said. “I will show it to you, for I need your help building it.”

“Building what?” the little puppy dog asked.

“In the morning,” was all the reply Ham received.

* * *

Morning came. Ham, Afra, Kana'an, Kish, and Put came out of their tents and sauntered over to Khan's tent. The Tiki lords came from their frond huts and joined the group. They waited patiently without talking, staring at the entrance to Khan's tent. There was a small murmur when they heard movement inside. The Tiki kneeled down behind the white people, the new comers.

Khan pulled a camel saddle out and went back in while the crowd made way to either side to make room. He brought out the box he had found and sat on the saddle with the box on his lap. Khan looked at the crowd with somber eyes. As he sat it on the sand in front of him, it was evident that he had already opened it. The metal bands that had encased it were gone. He lifted the lid and brought out a book of thin metal plates bound on one side with

rings.

“It's made of brass,” Khan said matter-of-factly. “It appears to be a history.” He motioned to Ham to have a look, but everyone crowded around to see. Some of the Tiki dropped to their knees bowing.

As Khan turned the plates, Ham saw that the characters were like those on the clay tablets, pictographs, a story told in pictures. Ham had seen many cylinder seals that when rolled in clay drew a picture of a scene on a stage. These leaves looked like that except in metal. Khan called a couple of the Tiki elders, Kin-Nu and Nak-Tak to identify the main figures.

“Anu!” Kin-Nu pointed to a figure of a man with horns sitting on a throne. “King of Nibiru.” He pointed to the sky.

“En-Lil!” Nak-Tak pointed to another. “Digger of gold ... Lord of the underworld.”

“En-Ki!” Kin-Nu pointed again as a leaf was turned. “Lord of the two rivers.”

These Tiki elders spoke in the newcomers' language, having picked it up quickly.

As the Tiki spoke to Khan and the other white men, a story unfolded. They first showed him a genealogy of the kings which lasted twelve thousand three hundred years. Then there was over sixty-four thousand years before that time when the gods reigned.

The brass plates told of Nibiru, an outer planet that orbited the sun every thirty six hundred years. The inhabitants of that planet headed by the ruler Anu came to Earth looking for gold. En-Ki, the son of Anu, found gold in the oceans of Earth from an orbital probe. He set up cities to mine the gold from the ocean. At first, a city was built under the ocean. Then

other cities were created between the two continents of Asia and Africa, that is, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to process the gold. There were cities designated to be a complex, called a space port, to accommodate shuttle craft that flew back and forth to an orbital space station where a giant space craft in the shape of a log tapered at both ends came and went every time Nibiru came near the sun between Mars and Jupiter to collect the gold.

Gold was needed to dust the atmosphere of Nibiru to protect it against radiation and gamma rays. The gold on home planet had been depleted, but now they weren't getting enough from Earth, which they called Shu. Therefore Anu sent his second son, En-Lil, En-Ki's half brother from a concubine, to find another source of gold. He added to the number of astronauts, called the Nefilim, already processing the gold. He found gold in the underworld, the lands below the equator, and took astronauts to dig it out of the earth in a mine called the Abzu.

But Khan was not interested in the gold. That was nothing to him except to be used in electrical instruments. What he was interested in was the space ship called a shem. It was the shem that transported the gods and the astronauts between Earth and Nibiru. He coveted it. It would give him power over the whole earth. It would also give him control over the plant that gave everlasting life found only on Nibiru and was needed for the long life of the gods who ruled the Earth for thousands of years. Before the flood, En-Lil had promised him that plant, called by some the Tree of Life. But the flood came and En-Lil along with the rest of the gods had escaped in a shem and left mankind to be destroyed. He had been betrayed. But he remembered that there was a book.

As he turned the plates one by one, he saw how to construct a shem. He slammed the book shut and smiled. He had it. It was his. With Ham's help, he would make one.

* * *

The warm morning was filled with screaming and laughing children as they played along the shore. The rising sun reflected its heatwaves across the sands and its light in ripples across the river, throwing up black silhouettes of palm trees, running children and tents against the white light reflected off the river, turning everything black and white.

Egyptus and Napsut had joined the natives. They wanted to be like the other people's children, so they dressed like them, or undressed, so they would fit in when they played with them. They had been playing near the shore of the river, and when the little dark ones went into the river, Egyptus and Napsut shed their colorful cotton dresses and followed after. But when they came on shore to dry off and continued playing hunting or house making, they didn't put their clothes back on. When Afra found them she felt a wave of embarrassment. With fists on her hips she confronted Egyptus and Napsut and scolded them.

“You are too old to go without your clothes young lady! You're not a baby anymore. And I can't make out who is my child and who are the natives.” She waved her finger at her daughter and then turned it to the other girl. “And you Napsut! I'm sure your mother brought you up properly.”

Egyptus and Napsut looked at the ground almost ashamed. Egyptus spoke up with an excuse. “You didn't want us to ruin our new dresses that you spent so much time and labor on, did you?”

Afra knelt down to be more intimate. “I expect you to keep your clothes on. If you were at home I wouldn't mind. There would be no one else around.” She looked around the camp and pointed. “You see, there are too many young men around. You should keep yourselves away from them.”

Egyptus and Napsut covered their mouths and giggled, whispering, “Pic pic pic, pic pic pic.”

Afra was about to slap the two when she felt a tug on her dress. It was Comrase who announced with a wide smile, showing one tooth missing, “I kept my clothes on.”

Afra turned to the chubby little girl with her golden braids that covered her head. “But you're all wet, and your skin shows right through.” She turned to the other two. “You girls be good. Don't be like these black children.” She took up their dresses from the sand and handed them to the girls. “Here. Put these back on.”

After Afra walked away, Egyptus and Napsut picked up sticks and chased Comrase trying to switch her for showing them up, calling her a bad girl. She ran screaming.

* * *

Khan allowed everyone to rest a couple of weeks while they spent time gathering fish and hunting antelope to dry cuts of meat in the sun. Ham and the older men spent their time digging in the ruins and uncovering the civilization that had preceded them. Ham was filled with joy at his work and considered it but play. He could build a school with all the knowledge he was discovering, and adding the books he had saved from his previous life, a university of higher learning. But the night came when at the family's campfire that Khan

announced they should gather their tents and supplies and leave for the lower lands.

“Why go lower downriver?” Ham asked. “We have everything we need here to build a wonderful city and civilization. We can rebuild on top of the old city. We will call it Akkadia after the place we came from.” He took a bone out of the pot set over the fire and chewed the succulent meat from it.

“We cannot build the new on top of the old, my friend,” Khan said, emptying his wine cup, spilling some of the contents down his square beard. “Besides, this place has been given to your grandson and will be called after his name.”

“Which one of our children will inherit this land?” asked Kana'an, licking his fingers and grabbing a honey comb from a plate passed to him.

“His name will be called Nimrod, for he will push his people together,” Khan said, filling his cup again.

Ham lifted his cup to drink. “How do you know these things, Lord Khan?”

“If you know the right principles, all things are made known to you.” Khan winked at Ham.

“Are these principles those once taught by our scholars and priests in the universities?” Put asked.

“Not all things are taught by men,” Khan bent forward to look at Put. “Some are taught by the spirits that have gone before us, those whose minds are not restricted to the flesh.”

Ham stopped chewing a piece of meat long enough to say, “They know the things of

the gods.”

Khan showed his agreement as he smiled on Ham, his protege.

“But,” Ham continued, “there are many things in the library here that we can learn.”

“You want to stay,” Khan said angrily, “then stay. To those who will come with me, I will show greater things.”

Ham shrunk from Khan's anger as from a blast of fire and heat, covering his face with his arm.

The men around the campfire became sober for a moment, listening to Khan's outburst and then somber, for the wine began taking effect.

“We will remove our camp in the morning and travel south,” Khan said, rising, taking a whole hind quarter of the antelope with him. “ There are other cities to be investigated.”

* * *

Again the camels formed a train, one following another with the survivors, the dark people, coming up the rear, herding the cattle, sheep and goats. They followed the river for another year, camping only when they were too tired to go any further, Khan cussing under his breath for people being so lazy.

They gathered fish, antelope, dates, honey, and honey bees in abundance as they traveled. Then there came a day of separation, as they called it, where they left the river. Khan told them they needed to follow a straight course to the next city. The old cities, he said, were lined up from the sea to Mount Ararat to act as beacons for the gods who came down to men from the heavens.

They conversed as they rode upon their camels under the canopy of stars which seemed to sway back and forth as though they were on an ocean voyage.

“The gods appeared unto Noah and feasted upon his sacrifices,” Khan told them.

“They came when men were asleep.”

“Or they put us to sleep,” Ham said.

“Don't interrupt,” Khan said out of the corner of his mouth. “It was then they communed with me and told me to follow this line of sight, this straight and narrow way, and I would be rewarded again with the plant of eternal life.”

“But you told us, Khan,” Ham said as he raised his arms above his head and stretched, “that they had already given you immortality.”

“Yes, that is true,” Khan said, turning his head towards Ham and raising his eyebrows. “But this immortality comes at a price. It leads a man to become an animal. What they teach is the way to Nibiru where life is grand all the time. That is why I needed the book. It leads the way to ... the heavens.”

Every night, Khan tried to teach them the principles of the shaman, how to get in touch with the spirits who knew all things, how to gain the knowledge they needed to manipulate the elements to do their will. It would lead them into a golden age once again.

“There was a golden age long ago, before Noah, before Methuselah,” Ham said in reverie.

“There have been many golden ages,” Khan said. “Many ages of man. But the true golden age was before man was created, the age of the gods. It is all in the book.”

Conversations with the gods, thought Egyptus. She looked up at the carpet of stars in the sky and wondered where the trail would lead. In her contemplation, she listened to the adults and to the stars above. She broke out into song:

“Circles within circles as the waves upon the shore,
Families around the campfire, telling stories of ancient lore,
Of heroes marching across the sky at night and
Winning exotic cities and nations with sword and might,
Singing songs of champions in the hunt and in the war,
Passing down to children all traditions they have in store.”

The Tiki and other children joined in the singsong and chant.

“Circles within circles, touching circles more,
Waves over the ocean climbing high above the shore,
Charging like bulls above the cities with all their might,
With horn and hoof and bellowing charge do right
To turn many cities and sunlight into eternal night,
Sending many souls as screaming ghosts ascending.

“Circles within circles as two peoples join together,

Bring their traditions in song and in lore on a tether,
Of knights in shining armor, bright with swords and shields,
Who go clashing and dashing, the blood of heroes they spill;
Then sing the songs of heroes around the campfires above,
The starry trail where all the souls go tramping o're the shore.”

Chapter Seven

Another camp was set up among the mud flats between two sandy hills. The wind blew constantly, whipping the tents and twisting the few trees into grotesque shapes. There was a small marsh in the middle with no sign of any rivers. Perhaps it was the last vestige of the great flood, and it was drying up. In another year it would be gone. The winds would make sure of that. Little water remained, so the camp would stay only a few days, enough to get a good sleep and to hunt.

This was the only watering hole for the antelope. They came and stood on top of the hills, saw the camp and then ran away every night to see if the people had left. Some of them got thirsty enough to sneak down to the water's edge only to be trapped by nooses on poles.

Before the people came, there were a couple of vicious alligators that fed on any unwary antelope. The men caught one and tied it up. Egyptus, Napsut, Comrase and Tik-Tik, one of the dark boys, squatted naked under a bush to watch the men search in the mud. They used long sticks. Egyptus took one of the long sticks that had been laid aside, scooted back under the bush, and sat between Tik-Tik and Napsut. She slapped the alligator with the stick, making it shake its mouth and hiss. The kids laughed and yelled at the tortured creature.

Comrase waved her arm like a sword at the alligator. "I'm not afraid of you!"

"You're nothing but a pillow to sit on!" Tik-Tik pretended to growl at Comrase.

Napsut pushed Comrase towards Tik-Tik. "Go sit on his lap, Cone-ass."

Tik-Tik caught Comrase as she fell over. "Here," he said, handing her a smaller stick.

“Use my stick, little girl and hit the 'gator with it.” Everyone laughed but Comrase. She hit Tik-Tik instead, making him let go of her.

“I'm going to tell my mother,” Comrase said with her nose in the air.

“You don't have a mother anymore, Cone-Ass,” Napsut said, screwing up her face.

“I'll tell *her* mother.” Comrase pointed to Egyptus who kept slapping the alligator.

“Let's play a game,” said Tik-Tik.

“You can play with Napsut,” Egyptus said with her eyes on the alligator. “That 'gator's my boy friend. I slap my boyfriends.” She slapped the alligator several times in a row.

Egyptus and Tik-Tik surrounded Napsut and Comrase and began tickling them.

“What are you doing under there!” boomed Afra's voice.

Tik-Tik bolted out the other side of the bush.

“Come out of there!” Afra's brow bent down. “And stop beating the alligator.” Afra grabbed Egyptus by the arm, making her drop the stick and then grabbed at Napsut who stepped out of the way. “Girls! Where are your clothes! By the gods! I can't keep you dressed one minute.”

“ Tik-Tik,” Comrase spoke up, “was going sit on me!” She stood with contempt on her face and fists on her hips.

Afra wanted to laugh. She pursed her big lips to prevent it. Slapping Egyptus on the bare bottom, she said, “You three go get your clothes on. You'll be really sore when your skin turns red.”

“You won't turn my skin red!” Comrase said, putting her hands on her bottom and

scooting ahead.

“It's the sun, you idiot!” Afra then murmured to herself. *It's the sun will burn your little hide.* Then she let out a small laugh.

“Now you're laughing,” Egyptus said indignantly.

“You girls! I don't know what to do with you ... spank you or tickle you.” She tickled Egyptus' ribs as they walked back towards the tents flapping in the wind.

* * *

Egyptus caught Napsut embracing Tik-Tik under the bush. The alligator had long been slaughtered, its skin turned to leather, but Egyptus kept her long stick. She poked Napsut with it. “What are you doing?”

“What do you care?” Napsut asked, withdrawing her arms from around Tik-Tik. She sat up. “He's nice.”

Egyptus turned red in the face and stomped away before turning back. “Mama said we gotta help take down the tents. We're going again.” She didn't like Tik-Tik.

That night, Egyptus didn't sing. She rode her camel with the important men. She didn't look up at the stars, only stared ahead. She had loved Napsut. They had always been together keeping the cattle. They grew up under the feet of the cattle. They played on the tops of the cattle, jumping from one back to another. They would always hold hands and sing together. They kissed and hugged each other often. People would never see the one without the other. It was as though they were twins. Napsut, light-skinned, Egyptus, dark like her mother (but not as dark as the Tikis.) Egyptus' face was as stone, as was her heart which hung in her

chest like a lead weight.

Napsut looked around and saw her friend Egyptus way up at the start of the line with the men. She whipped her camel, making it run ahead. She came alongside Egyptus who looked like a statue.

“Egyptus!”

Egyptus didn't turn one way or the other. The expression on her face didn't change. She kept staring ahead into the horizon.

“Egyptus, why are you so angry?” Napsut knew what was wrong, and she felt sorry and heart stricken, but she also felt that she should have a life of her own. Since Egyptus' family had taken off on this trek, she had found herself alone for the first time. Angry at Egyptus, she sought new friends among her other cousins, and then she had been taken away. But when she found Egyptus again, they were in bliss for a time, until the Tikis came on the scene. Now she felt such a strong attraction to Tik-Tik. Why didn't Egyptus like boys?

“Egyptus?”

Egyptus turned on Napsut. “Little darling! Had to play with the boys! Did you enjoy it? Do you love how smooth their lips are? Do you love Tik-Tik more than me? Aren't I your friend anymore?”

As Egyptus went on wailing, Napsut saw the starlight reflecting off the tears streaming down her face. Napsut's heart burned for Egyptus. She had to stop her and tell her how sorry she was, so she joined the chorus.

“Egyptus! Egyptus! I'm sorry! We were only playing. I love you, Egyptus. Do you

hear me? I love you. I've always loved you. I don't love anyone else.”

“Tell me I am the only one in your life!” Egyptus yelled.

“You are the only one in my life. I promise!” Napsut yelled back.

The men became silent and turned their heads towards the two girls. The singing in the background stopped. Everyone had paused to listen.

The two girls looked at each other and reached out their hands as their camels came along side. Then they noticed the silence. They looked around. They bowed their heads when they realized everyone had heard.

Ham came over. “Come. Get down. You have stopped the whole caravan. You need to embrace each other and be reconciled. Get off your camels and do it so we can go on.”

So Egyptus and Napsut slid off their camels and hugged each other, kissing each other through the tears and wiping each other's face dry. After doing a little dance while embraced, they climbed onto their camels and the caravan continued lopping along.

* * *

Khan watched how Egyptus loved Napsut. It enraged him, but he couldn't and didn't let the others know his feelings or his designs. He wanted Egyptus for his own purposes. She would be his queen. Their offspring would rule the world.

Love and hate, he thought to himself, are just different sides of the same coin. He needed to flip that coin, and make Egyptus his own. The key to unlock the power of hate within Egyptus that would bind her to him was, of course, Napsut. If He led Napsut away, or if he made Egyptus hate Napsut, or if Napsut were to die, Egyptus would be lost. He would

come to her and offer his strength and his kind of love. She would fall away from any other influence but his.

* * *

Forest was a welcomed sight, especially for the Tiki. Even though it was a young forest, they desired to hunt as they were used to. Khan called to make camp on the borders near the trees and immediately the Tiki ran off, disappearing among them.

Children are natural explorers and desired to follow the Tiki and would have if it hadn't been for their mothers. Egyptus and Napsut were caught up helping the women raise the tents and start the campfires. They were sent off to gather wood, then Afra had an afterthought and sighed. She had better get her own firewood. She didn't expect the girls to return. She had lost them to that force inside a child that grows with boredom while riding on camels for weeks on end.

The two girls had fun gathering flowers and eating berries, looking under rocks and climbing rocks and trees to see where they were. When they ran into Tik-Tik and his friends, they were told they made too much noise.

“If you want to join the hunt,” Tik-Tik said as he bent down below a boulder, “get down and shed yourselves of those dresses. You can't move through the forest in dresses.”

They quickly disrobed and joined the hunt.

Tik-Tik's friends complained. “Women are not allowed on hunts.”

“It will be bad luck.”

“They will scare away the deer.”

Tik-Tik said nothing. He only pointed his spear to where a deer stood. Everyone shut their mouths. Egyptus and Napsut watched as the boys stalked the deer and noticed how they always stayed downwind. The boys spread out in a semicircle and Tik-Tik threw his spear. It caught behind the animal's right shoulder. The deer leaped into the air. One by one, each boy threw their spears. One landed in the throat, one in the chest, and one just before the right hind leg into the bowels.

The seconds that it took to kill the deer seemed like minutes to Egyptus. She walked over to it, watched it struggle for breath, and saw its eyes grow dim. It was a young female.

Tik-Tik instructed his friends to carry it back to camp and for two of them to give their spears to the girls. They objected.

“She will steal the spirit of my spear!”

“They will put a curse on my spear if they touch it.”

“Our spears will no longer work for us!”

Tik-Tik soothed them. “You always lose your spears in the hunt. You make new ones for yourselves and Nak-Tak blesses them. Make you new spears. Nak-Tak will put new spirits into them. They will serve you. Now go.”

They took up the deer and carried it back to camp. Two spears lay on the ground. Tik-Tik picked them up and gave one to each girl. He motioned them to follow. “We will seek a deer of our own.”

As Egyptus, Napsut, and Tik-Tik crept through the forest stalking deer, Khan stalked them.

Khan sent out bird calls and guttural sounds. He sang songs under his breath and whispered chants of magic.

“I feel funny,” Napsut said, bringing her arms across her chest.

Tik-Tik shook his head and placed his fingers on Napsut's lips.

“Me too, Tik-Tik,” Egyptus said as she squatted on the ground. “Let's rest.”

“If you are to learn the hunt,” Tik-Tik warned, screwing up his face, “you must not act like females. You must be like the cat and sneak about in the bush so you can pounce on the unwary prey.”

“I don't feel like it right now,” Napsut said as she sat by Egyptus. “And what are those weird sounds? They make me frightened.”

“They are forest spirits who are angry,” Tik-Tik said, squatting down to talk to the girls face to face. He thought his vision was failing and rubbed his eyes. “They do not want you to act like girls anymore. You must act as hunters.” He paused and grabbed Napsut's hand. “Come. We must get up and act like men.”

“We are not men!” Egyptus poked Tik-Tik with her spear. “Let go of her.”

Egyptus stood and took Napsut's hand, lifted her up and brought her to her side in an embrace. “We had better get back to camp.”

A fog had set in. It was getting difficult to see.

“Tik-Tik,” Egyptus asked, stepping softly through the grass, “do you know the way back?”

“I agree,” Tik-Tik said, ignoring the question. Feeling quite lost himself, he put his

arms protectively around the girls. "It must be an evil spirit approaching. Let us go."

The three headed back the way they had come, listening to a humming and a grumble which made the hair stand up on the back of their necks. They crept low to the ground to try to hide from the malevolence, but the humming wound around into their brains like a screw. They found it hard to concentrate on what they were doing.

"Uh ... I think it's this way," Tik-Tik said, swaying his head this way and that. "No, it's this way."

"We've been here before," Napsut said. "Every time we pass this bush, I take a berry. I'm sure I've eaten five berries already."

"Let's go this direction," Egyptus said. "We've never been over there. We'll climb these rocks and see where we are."

Climbing the rocks didn't get them out of the fog, especially the fog in their minds. Tik-Tik kept hitting his ears, trying to get the buzzing out. Egyptus tried singing, but a dark shadow crept over her.

Napsut suddenly wasn't there. It was as though she had been yanked off the rock. They heard her scream.

"Tik-Tik," Egyptus cried. "Napsut!" Her chin shuddered.

They climbed slowly down to the ground, feeling their way with their hands, timidly putting down one foot at a time. When Egyptus put a foot on the ground, she got down on all fours and searched for Napsut. She crawled around in the grass and through bushes, fighting the need to close her eyes and sleep. She took deep breaths. Again she tried to sing, but only

sobs came from her mouth.

“I'm coming Napsut,” Egyptus sobbed. “I'm coming.”

The fog grew darker. The sun was setting. *Must it take such a long time?* Egyptus thought. *And where is Tik-Tik?*

“Tik-Tik! Napsut!” she cried out once more.

Egyptus felt a hand. It was Napsut.

“Napsut, Napsut. I'm here. You're safe.” Egyptus patted Napsut's hand and arm, found her shoulders and head and lifted her to her face. “Napsut. Napsut. Wake up. Wake up. I'm here now.” Egyptus felt her body. Napsut's head hung at an odd angle. “Napsut, why are you so wet?” Egyptus brought her own hand up to her face. It was wet with blood. Egyptus screamed.

* * *

Ham and Afra worried when Egyptus and Napsut didn't come back from exploring as the hunters returned. They asked some of the boys, “Have you seen the girls?”

“Yes,” Til-Tik said as he and the other boys carrying a deer came to a stop in front of Ham and Afra. “We have seen them. They are with Tik-Tik. He is a good hunter and will keep them safe.”

Still, Ham and Afra got together a small group of men to look for them. A strange fog or mist had arisen, so they took torches.

“This is not a moist climate,” Ham said as he brought his sword down against a bush. “I don't understand this mist. Where is it coming from?”

“It obviously came from the rivers,” Afra said, putting her hand up to avoid a branch from the undergrowth. “There is a wind coming across the land.”

“I wonder where Khan disappeared to?” Kana'an asked. He joined his father in trying to hack their way through the forest.

As the fog grew darker, Afra remarked in a low voice, only to be heard by those around her, “This is an evil omen. I am sure of it. It tastes of murder.”

“Don't get lost in your imagination, dear wife,” Ham answered.

They continued tromping through the forest, calling out the names of the two girls. After an hour, they heard a scream.

“It came from this direction,” Ham cried out.

They rushed through more undergrowth and the torch light opened a bloody scene. There was Egyptus holding Napsut in her lap, sobbing and crying and rocking her dead friend. From the way Napsut's head hung and waddled back and forth, they could tell her neck had been broken, but what shocked everyone was the blood which had spilled over both girls' chests and arms.

As they approached Egyptus, there was a groan that sounded behind her. They moved the torches a little way and found Tik-Tik lying on the ground on his back. He raised on his elbow holding a bloody dagger. He looked at it as though it were a snake, quickly dropped it, giving out a startled cry, and ran off into the darkness. His father, Kin-Nu was there among the search party. He called to his son and ran after him.

Afra tried to gently pry the dead girl out of Egyptus' clutches, but she screamed and

tried to beat back her mother. Ham helped. He got the dead girl and laid her on the grass. He could see a slash just below her right rib cage. Egyptus kept screaming and beating her fists against her mother.

The dark mist dissipated as mysteriously as it had appeared, and Khan stood in their midst.

“What has happened here,” he said in his deep voice, almost like a growl. He bent over Napsut's body. “Who stabbed this girl?”

He stood up and Ham walked over to him. “I think it was that boy Tik-Tik. He was holding that knife there on the ground. I believe God struck him down so we would know who it was.”

“Now who's imagining things?” Afra called out over the screams and sobs of Egyptus. “The boy was in love with Napsut. He seemed startled when he saw the knife.”

“He was startled because he saw us,” Put said. He held out his torch and grabbed the knife off the ground to inspect it. “This is a Tiki knife.”

“Probably the boy's,” Kana'an said, joining his brother. He took the knife from his brother and inspected it, gave it back to Put, and wiped his hand on his skirt.

Afra held Egyptus tight to her breast, kissing the top of her head. She lifted her off the ground and carried her like a baby. Egyptus sobbed out Napsut's name all the way back to camp.

The men decided that since the fog had lifted and there was still an hour of light, they would go search for Tik-Tik, but Afra told them she saw the boy's father Kin-Nu run after

him.

* * *

Kin-Nu caught up with his son. He found him crouching behind a rock under some bushes. He grabbed his arm and pulled him out.

“Da,” Tik-Tik cried, covering his head with his arm, “I didn't do it!”

“Then why did you run?” Kin-Nu said in anger. “That tells me and everyone that you did.”

Having said that, Kin-Nu slit his son's throat. He held him in his arms and cried out, “My son! My son!”

Later that night, Kin-Nu returned, carrying his son in his arms. When the people saw that Tik-Tik was dead, they asked no questions. A funeral pyre was built sending Tik-Tik's soul to the stars. The Tiki formed a circle around the fire and sang:

“Rest now my son, rest my boy.

No longer do you play with toys.

You are a man and stand above

In the stars, and you are ours.

You have come to the hunt

And wield your starry spear.

Those you left behind are here

To guide you and to defend,

Until you reach your journey's end.”

In the background could be heard the wailing of a young girl for her friend Napsut as another funeral pyre burned. But there was no family to sing Napsut a song of glory. The only companions to accompany her to the stars was sadness and grief.

End of Book One

Book Two

Nippur

Chapter One

Egyptus sat up in bed, crossed her legs, and yawned. *Oh! What an awful dream!* She hadn't dreamed of Napsut in years. She took a deep breath to clear her head, and dropped her feet down to touch the woven rug on the floor. The dream had been so real, the trek from Mount Ararat, the kidnapping of the girls, Napsut and her death. Oh! It wrenched her nerves. Taking a survey of her surroundings helped bring her mind back to reality.

The linen curtains billowed in the breeze coming through the two large square windows in front of her. The pink stucco of the room was painted with a garden mural of pink and yellow flowers with green and blue leaves. Slim dogs and hogs played among the shrubbery with men following. It was a hunt in which each wall showed a different frame of time as the dogs and men caught up with the swine and slaughtered them. Now, where was that dress of hers?

Getting up to reach the bowl of water on her bedside table, she called for her maid. "Lil-Lil! Lil-Lil, get in here!"

As she splashed water into her eyes to wash out the sleep, a slender black woman wearing a skirt of broad leaves, entered. "Yes, Mistress. I'm here."

"Where is my dress?" Egyptus patted her face with a cotton towel. "The one my mother made special for the parade."

"It's right here, Mistress." She lifted the dress covered with yellow flowers from its stand it had been draped over.

Egyptus took the dress and sat back down on the edge of the bed. She crossed her legs and stared at the ugly flowers that had been sewn on supposedly with love. She frowned. "I don't like it." She threw it at Lil-Lil and stared at the billowy curtains, breathing deeply from the breeze that filled the room. It would be warm soon, too warm for that cotton dress.

"Lil-Lil," she said, rising from the bed and taking hold of the nearest curtain. "I want this curtain to wear."

"Mistress?" Lil-Lil popped her big eyes open and covered her mouth because it was about to laugh.

"You heard me. Take this curtain and make me a dress."

Lil-Lil grabbed the curtain, put it over her face and giggled. "It's see-throughy."

"But it will be cool."

They took down the curtain, and Egyptus draped it over her naked body. Lil-Lil held up the hand mirror from her bedside table. Egyptus swirled around in front of it, looking at her reflection and wondering. "It will need to be pleated."

"Yes, Mistress." Lil-Lil took the curtain, held it to her breast, wishing she could wear it.

"I know what you're thinking." Egyptus pulled the other curtain down. "Here! Make one for yourself. I won't have my servant appearing before the city in rags."

They both laughed and danced around. Then Lil-Lil stopped. "Do you want your barley cakes and wine?"

"No. I have some fruit here on the table." Egyptus picked up a pomegranate and put it

to her mouth. "I will make my lips red for the parade. Go! Make my dress."

* * *

Afra had waited long enough for her errant daughter. She walked up the mud brick stairs to the bedrooms. Pushing past the curtain door, she spied Egyptus decorating herself with necklaces and bracelets. She had covered her neck, hips, arms and ankles with a plethora of beads in all the colors of the rainbow.

Afra was piqued. "Why haven't you got dressed, young lady?" She put her hands on her hips with an appalling expression on her face as she watched her daughter dance around. "You can't go naked! I won't let you."

"Mother, please. I'm having a dress made." Egyptus put up the palms of her hands to her sides and smiled. "I am just biding my time. It will be finished soon." Egyptus copied her mother and put her hands on her hips and jutted her lower lip. "It had better be!"

"Is that what Lil-Lil is doing? She ran downstairs to the sewing room." Afra poked her head out the door and looked downstairs. "I thought she would be headed for the kitchen."

"I'm not hungry," Egyptus said as she popped a grape into her mouth. "I'm too excited." Chewing her grape, she smiled and said, "I remember when we celebrated my becoming a woman. I was so embarrassed." She raised her hand to her hair to feel the small braids covering her head. They felt like little snakes. Other girls had larger ones. "Everyone celebrated me with dancing and singing. Then everyone decided to celebrate this girl and that girl. Now it's only once a year for all the girls with this silly parade. I like it better when all us girls go outside the city into the groves and dance by ourselves."

“Well, we have that too.” Afra picked up the dress she had made for her daughter from the bed. “What's wrong with this dress? I made it specially for you just for the parade.”

“Oh, Mother.” Egyptus sat on the bed and lifted the skirt of the dress. “You're so old fashioned. It's time for something new.”

Afra blinked as she stared at the open windows. “Where are the curtains?”

Egyptus laughed.

* * *

Afra wasn't pleased with the dress Egyptus had chosen to wear, but she couldn't help reasoning, making the excuse of how beautiful her daughter looked.

Mitz-Ra entered the house bearing a gift covered in linen. He approached his mother, saying, “Hello Mother. I have brought this gift I made to my dear sister Egyptus. It is for the parade.” He said this as part of the ceremony.

Afra took the gift and said, “I accept this gift in behalf of my daughter and your sister, Egyptus.”

Then she handed the gift to Egyptus who said, “Thank you brother. I accept this offering of your good will.” She hefted the gift. “What is it?”

“Open it,” Afra said with expectation and excitement.

Egyptus calmly removed the string and the linen which she let drop to the tiled floor. She smiled. It was a silver crown with golden flowers and copper leaves soldered to the ring. The flowers and leaves wound around, coming to a point in front.

Afra placed the crown on her head. “You will look like a proper queen and reign

royally over the parade.”

Egyptus stepped over to her brother and embraced him, giving him a long lusty kiss, staring into his eyes.

Mitz-Ra sighed as she released him. “You look very beautiful.” He took her hand and the three of them left the house with Lil-Lil following behind.

Descending the broad steps in front of the house, Mitz-Ra took the hand of each woman and helped them into the back of a small wagon pulled by four black asses. The wagon was made of the finest wood with solid wooden wheels and was covered in leather and draped with flower garlands. Inside palm fronds made a bed for their feet.

Egyptus breathed in the smell of new leather and heavenly flowers. Mitz-Ra took the reins from the driver who stepped out the back with many apologies. If his black face could turn red, it would have as he rubbed against Egyptus wearing her fine linen dress with its pleats and jewelry covering her shoulders, hips, wrists, forearms and ankles.

Mitz-Ra flicked the reins and the wagon moved forward. It wasn't long before they turned a corner and joined the parade. The wagon was thronged by people shouting praises to Queen Afra as well as the queen of the parade, fanning the wagon with palm fronds. It rained flowers as people dumped buckets full from their balconies. Mitz-Ra led the parade out through the city gates to march around the city three times.

Ham and Khan came out last in their wagon with Ham's sons and their families in their own wagons, so that when outside the city with everyone marching in a circle, no one could tell if the king and his councilor vizier or the queen and Egyptus was leading the

parade. All the girls riding in wagons or dancing in the parade were dressed like queens with garlands as crowns.

* * *

Shem, followed by two of his sons, El-Am and Ass-Hur, were stopped in their tracks as they heard the noise.

“It is the sound of battle with trumpets blowing,” Ass-Hur cried.

“What people could be at battle,” El-Am asked, stopping his pack ass, “unless the sons of Ham are fighting among themselves?”

Shem left the pack animals behind to stand upon a rock ledge on top of the hill. He placed his hand above his eyes and peered down into the valley, and indeed saw a walled city surrounded by a host shouting and blowing trumpets. “But it is not the sound of war I hear, my sons, but the sounds of celebration, rioting, and drunkenness.” He gripped his staff and grabbed the reins of his ass and led the two over the hill.

As they approached the city, they saw a beautiful young lady adorned in jewels and a crown being drawn in a wagon with four asses. The people around her waved palm fronds and shouted, “Eva! Eva! Thou bearer of all mankind. Bless our bowels with the fruit of the womb. Bless us with sons and daughters to fill the earth.” The young girl gave out blessings from her mouth and little clay idols from her hands, leaning down and placing her hands upon the heads of the women.

Shem and his sons stood in awe at the proceedings. He recognized his brother Ham standing in another wagon alongside a giant holding the reins. He looked old with his white

hair and long gray beard. He also wore a crown, a single silver ring bearing a diadem above his forehead, not as elaborate as the one the young woman wore. He tossed gold and silver coins to the crowd.

Two large lazy oxen pulled Ham's wagon matching the muscular giant holding the reins who was immaculately manicured with braided hair, braided and waxed beard and wore the skin of a jaguar over a white toga. His head was decorated in olive leaves. He waved at the people as though in blessing. His face radiated a great smile. Behind him were other men in wagons dressed similarly in jaguar skins.

The three visitors saw a black race among the light-skinned people. They wore little clothing, less than a loincloth. Little children wore nothing but garlands. And everyone danced and sang to the music of lutes, harp and drums. He recognized Put playing his harp.

Every now and then they saw a dromedary braying in harmony with the music decorated in flowers.

* * *

Ham was proud of his children. They were happy and prosperous. The gods had blessed their fields and their beds. He enjoyed life. Kingship was his. He had servants to wait on him hand and foot. His children were multiplying as well as the number of wives and concubines. His grandchildren numbered in the hundreds. They were breaking off to start other towns and cities along the corridor of the gods. Khan had blessed him in giving him the opportunity to fulfill his dreams. He had begun schools, mining interests, metal works, farms, and a great marketplace where everyone was growing rich.

Now in this celebration, he was full of wine and satisfaction. His face, though red, beamed with happiness.

Ham saw three men standing outside the parade circle. He wondered why they weren't celebrating. Were there dissenters in the ranks? Or were they visitors? They did not dress like those of the city, but of wanderers of the desert. Covered in long robes, they held the reins of asses. He waved at them to approach and the parade stopped. Everyone became silent as they saw the strangers. He sent his servant Ash-Bub to invite them into the circle. But when they were within his failing eyesight, his happiness turned to chagrin and bitterness. His laughter turned to a frown. *My brother Shem. Oh well.* Ham had to be hospitable, even to one from his previous life which he disdained. All the memories of his father Noah and the battles he had fought with him returned. He sighed. Yet, this is a day of celebration. *I have a responsibility to put on a happy face for my children. Then why not for a brother?*

As Shem and his sons approached the wagon, Ham smiled cheerfully. With outstretched arms he welcomed him. "Shem! El-Am! Ass-Hur! Welcome. Welcome to my city and kingdom. Welcome to my family." He motioned to those around him. "Make room for my brother." He turned to Shem. "Come. Step up. We will feast together." As Shem stepped into the chariot, the festivities continued.

Kana'an, dressed in a white toga like Khan, left his chariot to see the visitors and joined them in walking along side Ham's chariot.

"Kana'an, is it?" El-Am asked as he pushed the hood off his head.

“El-Am. Ass-Hur. I would recognize you both anywhere.” Kana'an smiled. “What brings you down here? Have you left your cattle and grain to go wandering in the wilderness?”

“We came,” El-Am said, tugging on his ass, “searching for our daughters whom you stole from us.”

“Why?” Kana'an asked with raised eyebrows and upturned palms. “They are doing wonderfully. Many many children for your enjoyment. After the parade, we will feast and you can see your daughters again.”

“Why didn't you ask?” El-Am hit the air with the back of his hand. “We would have made arrangements.”

“We had to be swift in our escape. We are sorry. It was a long time ago. Cannot we let the past rest?” Kana'an tried to smile and placed a hand on El-Am's shoulder, but he shrugged it off. He noticed the parade passing them by. “Come, let us walk, sing and be joyful.”

“What of Napsut, my daughter?” Ass-Hur hurried up to catch Kana'an. “Is she well?”

This question slapped Kana'an in the face. It cast a pall over the whole party. Kana'an stopped and let the parade pass. He grabbed Ass-Hur and wept on his shoulder. Tears filled Ass-Hur's eyes as he assessed the meaning. He took Kana'an by the shoulders. “What has happened to my daughter?”

“She never made it across the mountains. I am sorry.” Kana'an grabbed Ass-Hur again. As he wept, he lied, “She fell from a rock while playing ... broke her neck. We had a funeral

pyre for her and sang beautiful songs.”

El-Am interrupted. “If you had let us alone, she wouldn't have died.”

Kana'an waved his hands at the parade and the city. “And we would not have had all this!” He paused, put an arm around El-Am and cried, waving the other arm, “Look. Look at what your daughters have done. This is all their work. If it hadn't been for them ... and we celebrate them all today. We celebrate them. Come. Join in the celebration of your daughters and granddaughters.”

El-Am and Ass-Hur were caught up in the celebration, their surprise and their grief were turned upside down as they comprehended the lives of their children and what they had done. It had been a hundred years and their great-great grandchildren were dancing all around them.

* * *

The feast took place in the open air of the market in the center of town, a square plaza in front of three temples. In back a large pyramid supported the main temple housing an altar with steps rising to the top. The two side temples had small windows around the roof and inner courtyards in front which faced the houses on both sides of the main street that led to the city gate. Each of the simple temples had peaked slate covered roofs with a central hole to let out smoke and incense sending pungent odors over the city.

Canopy covered tables surrounded the plaza on its perimeter. The king, vizier, and the king's family sat at the bottom of the pyramid. Vendors stood on the outside of the other tables serving all kinds of meats, breads, wine, and barley wine. The center was dedicated to

the roasting pits, ovens, acrobats, and musicians. People filling in the empty spaces ate, sang and danced.

Shem and his sons sat to the right of King Ham. Ham's sons sat intermingled with Shem's sons so they could talk. Khan, the vizier, and all the women of the family sat to the left of the king.

“Why,” asked Kana'an, continuing their conversation, “did you wait all these years to come and visit?”

“We tired of following you,” El-Am said, taking a bite off a leg of lamb.

“We,” Ass-Hur said, licking his fingers, “came to a town in the process of being excavated. As we started to investigate, we became so interested in the dig that we stayed.”

“We hadn't planned on staying,” El-Am chewed a bit and continued, “but to follow you until we caught up with you. Your camels were faster than our asses. Longer legs, you know.”

“We became interested in what you were trying to find.” Ass-Hur grabbed a hunk of meat with his teeth and continued, talking with his mouth full. “We came to the same conclusion that you had come to. There is a book missing from the town library.”

“Not us,” Kish interjected. “It was Khan looking for it. Our dear father wanted to stay there and build up the city again.”

“Khan,” Kana'an said, biting a piece of beef on the bone, “wouldn't have it. Said that it belonged to Kish's boy Nimrod. He would inherit the land.”

“But he hasn't.” Ass-Hur paused in his chewing. “Arphaxad is now king over the

land.”

Kana'an took a big gulp of wine and asked, “Isn't my father the true king over the land, since he discovered it first?”

“Your father,” El-Am said, “does not have the Priesthood. You need the Priesthood in order to be king, and our father Shem gave the Priesthood to each one of his sons. Arphaxad is king over the land.”

Kana'an rose, holding a bone like a club. El-Am and Ass-Hur both rose to defend themselves. Kish, on the other side of the two, rose and drew his blade. Khan, sensing a commotion, left his seat and grabbed Kana'an and Kish by their necks.

“Is that any way to treat your guests?” He pushed them down into their seats. “Now hold your tempers. Be kind. Make friends. Don't let me see another disturbance.”

Khan walked back over to Ham, patted him on the shoulder and sat down. “Children. They have had too much wine.” He continued gnawing on his beef ribs.

Ham faced his boys, frowned, pointed a finger at them and laughed, turning his attention back to the meat on his plate. When he glanced at Afra, she said, “They're your sons.”

Khan commented. “Don't worry about these, Ham. The real glory is in your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They will populate the land and become kings and mighty men of valor.” He pointed to all the people in the town square with a wave of his outstretched hand.

Ham leaned over to Shem. “My glory is in all my children. Have some more wine.”

“I have enough, thank you, Ham.” Shem dipped his bread in the juice from the meat on his plate, put it in his mouth, squished it with his tongue, and savored it as it ran down his throat.

“You have hardly touched your food, Shem. And your wine,” Ham said, slapping Shem on the back.

“It is filling my belly as it is,” Shem said, sipping his wine. “And I thank you for such a feast. We are not hunters, but farmers, and we were running out of supplies. We are very thankful.”

Khan spoke up. “Tell me, Shem, of your settlement. Do you plan staying there long?”

Shem stared at Khan before he decided to answer. “We do. But we have come here to open up trade negotiations with you and your people. Some of us dwell in the city, but we are an agrarian society. Most of our tools are quite good, but homemade and do not last long. We do not sell them. They are only for personal use. We trade very little among ourselves. But we do grow different crops, and these we trade. We have much surplus. The Lord has blessed us in abundance. We have enough to exchange with you.”

Khan whispered in Ham's ear. “We could just take what we need.”

Ham turned to Khan in surprise. “You jest of course. We are civilized. We wouldn't think of it.”

Khan laughed under his breath and turned to watch the dancing girls.

Ham put his arm around Shem and said, “We would be glad to open up trade with you.”

“What do you think, Shem,” Khan asked, “of our girls?”

Shem looked at the girls and then stared at Khan again. “I think they need some clothes on.”

That made Khan and Ham's sons roar with laughter.

Egyptus leaned over to catch Shem's eyes. “Uncle. I'm wearing a dress. Do you like it?”

Shem eyed her with objectivity and noticed the thin material of the dress. He smiled. “It is a beautiful dress, dear. Appropriate for a very hot climate.” He then turned to Ham.

“As we were rebuilding our city, we found that someone had dug up an artifact. We studied the markings and pictographs and statues. Of course, everything has changed now, and many of the stones used for decoration have been put to better use as building blocks.”

Shem saw a remarkable change in the countenance of Khan. His appearance became sober and a bit angry as he stared at him.

Shem continued. “Some of the artifacts may have been important to understanding the history of this area before the flood. The books we found were mostly ruined, but the ones we did find in good condition and translated mentioned another book that has become of interest to us. Perhaps it is the missing artifact.”

Khan's face was expressing more anger as well as interest.

“We did find a book,” Ham replied. “It was ...”

Khan placed a hand on Ham's arm, and the power emanating from Khan's touch made Ham speechless.

Khan told Shem, "We have very few books here that came with us except some journals and a history that are now being written. Of course, most of what we write is business records."

"It was called, I believe," Shem said slowly and deliberately, "*The Rites of Ascension*." He looked at both Ham and Khan. "We would like to see it just to satisfy our curiosity."

"Out of the question," Khan said. "It is our Holy Book and resides in the temple atop the pyramid behind you. You must have the priesthood in order to even see it."

"I know what my father Noah told Ham here and Kana'an," Shem said, leaning forward to peer around Ham and more squarely into Khan's face. "The priesthood belongs with us."

"We do not recognize your authority here," Khan glared with pride. "Ham is king!"

Khan's anger began to be felt as a dark cloud, an influence that made men's minds numb. Everyone at the table thought they had been drinking too much wine, all except Shem and his sons. They were still sober and held their heads high while everyone else let their heads fall to the table. The women behind Khan were unaffected and laughed as though it were a joke.

"I recognize you now, Khan," Shem said. "How did you survive the flood?"

"Never mind that," Khan said. "You cannot have the book. You come here to rob my king and his family. You will not. You had better leave now while you still have your heads."

Shem and his sons rose. Ham managed to raise his head a little, saying, "Leaving so

soon?” and plopped back down onto his plate unconscious.

* * *

Shem, Ass-Hur and El-Am strode back into the desert hills to the west of the city.

“How are we going to get the book?” El-Am asked as he sat himself down on a rock, still holding the reins of his ass.

“We will draw lots,” Shem said. He tied his ass to a bush, took out a cylindrical box from his saddle bag and sat down with his sons. He took the lid off one end of the box to expose a handful of thin rods. Each one had letters written on it. He threw the rods from the box onto the ground and read them. “El-Am, they are pointing to you. You will sneak back into the city and steal the book. Don't climb the pyramid. The book is not up there. Let the Spirit guide you, but it is probably in the house of Ham.”

“Yes, Father. I will obey if it is that important to you,” El-Am said. He rubbed his nose. “It will be a challenge I will accept.”

Shem rose and clapped his hands onto his son. “God go with you.”

El-Am stood and gave the reins of his ass to his father. He took a deep breath and felt the assurance of God. He walked to the top of the hill, viewed the city and turned around. “I will bring you the book, Father.”

Shem and Ass-Hur watched him descend down the other side of the hill until he disappeared over the edge.

“Why don't we go with him?” Ass-Hur asked.

“It will be too much of a distraction. One mind can be more concentrated.”

* * *

By the time El-Am reached the city, the crescent moon had risen over the walls and houses. A star, brighter than the carpet of all the stars in the heavens, shone just below the moon to show the way. As he walked through the gate, he noticed the guards were all dead drunk. The streets were lined with people that had dropped in their tracks, sleeping where they fell. Some were on the steps of their houses. Some were embraced by their lovers or loved ones. The city, which had once been alive with singing and dancing, was now silent as a grave. *This makes it easy for a thief*, he thought.

The pyramid was before him, standing as the tallest building, but he had a feeling he should go to his right down a side street. He came to a house with a chariot standing in front. No one attended the asses. They hee-hawed and jerked their heads as they waited impatiently for someone to bed them for the night. El-Am looked at the people sleeping on the stairs. He recognized one of them as the king himself. His crown had slipped from his head and lay on the step beside him.

He then heard someone singing in a low base voice coming down the street. He looked beyond the chariot. It was the giant. He was still drinking from a jug and stumbling along, coming towards him.

El-Am looked around on the street near the house. He spotted a nice round stone, almost polished. He picked it up and took the sling that had been wrapped around his waist. He slowly walked out into the street and let the giant approach a little closer.

“Hey friend,” Khan called out. “Join me in a drink.”

El-Am slipped the stone into the sling, whirled it above his head and let one tether loose. The stone shot forward and hit Khan in the middle of the forehead. He fell over backwards and lay in the street looking dead drunk, blending in with everyone else. El-Am walked over to him, took his sword and was about to cut off his head when he was overcome by the Spirit of God.

“I have covenanted with this one,” it said, “that he should wander the earth until the end of days. So shall it be.”

El-Am dropped the sword and went back around the chariot to the entrance of the house. He felt he should go into the house and he would find the book. Climbing the steps, going around the sleeping bodies of both women, men and children, he entered the open door. One single lamp hanging from the ceiling lit the entrance room. He grabbed it and began searching the rooms.

All he found downstairs was the clothing or sewing room, the kitchen or table room where people ate, and the front room and entry way. He had searched the trunks in the clothing room but found only clothes.

Upstairs were the bedrooms, and as he was peering down at some boxes against the south wall, he felt a tender hand upon his shoulder. He jumped and turned around to see a most beautiful naked girl about the age of his daughters.

“Lost?” she asked.

She put her arms around him. He became stiff. He had a wife who loved him back home. Should he run or stay. He lifted the lamp to see her face more clearly. “You're

Egyptus, aren't you? I saw you earlier today at the feast.”

“Come to my bed and drink a little wine.” Egyptus played with a curl on his forehead.

El-Am pulled her arms down and stepped away. She gave a small laugh.

“Do you know where the book is?” he asked.

“Books, books, books.”

She lurched forward to grab him and drag him to her bed. He stepped back and she fell to the floor.

“I'm sorry.” El-Am hesitated. She looked like such a helpless child. He reached down and picked her up. “Let's get you onto your bed.” He carried her to the bed and lay her down, though he had to unwrap her arms from around his neck.

She laughed and asked for “Wine. More wine. Can't get enough.”

El-Am left to examine other bedrooms. He hadn't found the book in her room and she was too drunk to hold a conversation. In the next room he saw a wooden door on the opposite wall. He could see a faint light coming from the bottom edge. He opened it slowly. The leather hinges sagged, so he had to lift the door a bit to open it. He couldn't let it scrape the floor and alert anyone on the other side.

He poked his head inside. He saw a young boy about nine years old sitting at a desk, staring at the plates of a metal book as he lifted each leaf one at a time, raising them to the top of wire rings and placing them down into a second stack, one after another. He was so engrossed in his study that he didn't notice El-Am. When El-Am's light reflected off the plates, the boy was startled and jumped away.

“I was only curious!” he wailed. “I wasn't hurting it. I was only looking at it.” The boy covered his body with his arms drawn against his chest almost covering his face with his hands. He backed up against the wall and arched his back as El-Am approached.

“Tender boy,” El-Am said softly. “I won't hurt you.”

He held up the lamp to the boy and then over to the plates. There were clay tablets next to the plates that had been recently impressed. Someone had been taking notes. He turned to the boy. “These yours?” He knew they weren't. He just wanted to calm the boy. “Are you studying these plates?”

“No, Lord. I was just curious. I was just looking at the pictures.”

El-Am knelt down. “I guess to you, every adult is a lord. What's your name?”

“Nimrod, Lord.” The boy had put his arms down and put his hands behind his back.

“Kish's boy. Hmmm.” El-Am thought a moment. “You want to study this book?”

“Yes, very much. But it is the holy book and no one is allowed to go near it.” Then he said laughingly with his hands in fists against his heart, “My father and all the men were drunk, so I went exploring and found this room. The book was open and it had pictures in it. I was just looking at it.”

El-Am stood and offered his hand to the boy who cocked his head, gazed up at the kind man and took it. El-Am thought it best to take the boy because he might tell the others where the book went.

“Come with me, boy, and you can see the book often.” El-Am looked around. There was a bag on the table. He let the boy go and took hold of the brass plates, closed them and

shoved them into the bag. He took the boy by the hand again and said, "Come, follow me. You will learn much."

El-Am hefted the plates and put them on his shoulder, took Nimrod by the hand and led him downstairs where he deposited the lamp on a side table. As he led the boy down the front stairs, Nimrod pointed to a man sleeping on the steps.

"That's my father." He smiled, but El-Am pulled him along.

They left the city and walked across the fields outside the wall and up and over a small hill.

* * *

Nimrod stopped and puckered his lips when he saw two other men standing near their pack animals. El-Am could not pull him any farther until he kneeled down and said, "These are your friends. The old man with white hair is my father Shem. The other is my brother Ass-Hur. You probably saw them at the feast eating with your father and uncles, and the King."

"Why did you take the king's book?" Nimrod pulled on his lower lip.

"Do you see the stars in the heavens above?" El-Am pointed upward.

"Yes." Nimrod put his hands behind him and swayed back and forth as he looked up.

"The Great Creator made all these things. He made you and me. He has command over all his creations just like your king has command over his city and the lands around about. Does it seem strange to you that the Creator can command his creatures as a father commands his children?"

“No.” Nimrod looked down at the ground still swaying back and forth as if remembering those times his father scolded him or commanded him to do something.

“Well, the King of the heavens and the earth upon which you stand, the Great Creator, commanded us to take these plates for his own purpose.”

“Oh.” Nimrod then allowed himself to be led down to Shem's camp.

When they reached the camp where the two men sat on rocks next to a campfire, Shem rose and asked, “What is this you brought back? Is it your servant and laborer?”

El-Am walked up to his father with his new friend. “This is Nimrod. He is the one that made it possible for me to give you this.” El-Am took the plates from his shoulder and handed them to Shem. His father hefted the bag, took out the plates and smiled.

* * *

Comrase felt a great weight on top of her and a blinding pain in her head and along her back. She was crushed between someone's brick steps and a man half clothed, snoring away gleefully and at peace with himself. She shoved him off and he rolled over onto the steps, grunted, jerked and then went back to sleep. His filth was all over her dress along with the wine they had been drinking. She pushed against the steps and raised herself up, shook herself and grabbed her head. *Oh! What a headache. Got to wash myself off.*

She walked two blocks to the center of town stepping over the half dead. Reaching the well, she leaned on it with her elbows and looked around. The square looked like a graveyard on resurrection day with people rising up, holding their heads and shaking themselves awake. They had trashed the place last night, meats and wine jugs strewn all over the

ground.

Letting down the bucket several times, she brought up enough water to fill two empty wine jugs that were close by. She took one, hit it against the edge of the well, braking the neck off, and made a large bowl. Pouring water into it, she stripped her dress off and washed it in the bowl. With the other jug, she poured the water over her head and down her body to wash the filth and wine off. Then she wrung her dress out and put it back on.

Several other women came to the well and followed her example. Some just used the bucket and poured the water over their heads.

Comrase took a piece of swine meat and bread as she passed a table, so with meat in one hand and bread in the other, she ate her breakfast while walking over to the king's house. Ascending the stairs, she noticed King Ham waking up. She said, "Good morning," and he grumbled something while scratching his butt. He rubbed his face and grabbed his crown which sat next to him on the step. Looking like a sotted king, he followed Comrase into the house.

When she came into the main room, she sat down on the bed and yelled out, "Nimrod! Nimrod, I'm here."

Egyptus strolled downstairs squinting at the light coming from the open front door. "Don't yell," she whispered.

"Have you seen Nimrod?" Comrase asked as Egyptus sat down beside her.

"I haven't seen anyone. I just woke up." Egyptus jerked as though she had been shocked and scooted away from Comrase. "You're all wet."

“I bathed at the well.” Comrase braced herself with both hands against the cushion of the bed. There was no back to lean against. “You should try it.” She took a deep breath and sighed.

Afra came into the room drinking from a glass goblet. “Hello, Comrase. Fun night, huh? You want some medicine for your head?”

“Sure,” she said.

“Me too, Mother,” Egyptus added.

Afra turned towards the table room behind them. “Lil-Lil! Two more!”

Egyptus covered her ears. “Mother, don't shout!”

Lil-Lil came into the room with a tray of goblets and gave the two cousins their medication.

“This really works,” Egyptus said, taking a goblet.

Comrase took one and they both gulped down the bitter liquid. “Eew!” they both said, wrinkling their faces.

“So, Cone-Ass,” Egyptus said, adjusting the clamps in her braided hair, “how many men did you have last night? You were playing pretty wild.”

“You're just jealous, sister*.” Comrase took one of the clamps from her shoulder,

*Their language did not have a word for cousin. They used 'brother' or 'sister.'

letting her dress fall on one side and put it in her hair to make a pony tail. “You are much too lean for men to make love to.” She stared at Egyptus. “When are you going to call me by my true name?”

Egyptus turned to face her cousin. “You are such a cow, Comrase, a fat cow. I think I’ll call you Hathor. Hathor, the cow.” She giggled.

“Men like plump women, I’m afraid.” Comrase pushed her breasts together and took the hem of her wet dress and stretched it out over her knees.

Afra put her hands on her hips. “I don’t want any arguments this morning. No one can stand the contention ... not after such a night.” She turned as though to go and then faced them again.

Egyptus said, “Oh, Mama!” as her mother pointed her finger at them.

“I have to go upstairs and help the king.” Then Afra started up the stairs. “You two behave.”

Comrase sighed. “I have to find Nimrod. I left him here last night.”

“I have to go exercise,” Egyptus rose, stretched and yawned. “... do some gymnastics.”

“I do remember someone upstairs last night,” Egyptus said, turning her face away from Comrase. “Can’t remember who it was.”

“Maybe it was Nimrod.” Comrase rose also. “Maybe he is still upstairs.”

“He was one of them,” Egyptus proffered.

Halfway up the stairs, Comrase said, “I thought you saw only one person.”

“Well, there was a man, but I also remember hearing a little boy.”

Comrase searched all the bedrooms and had to apologize when she came upon the king and queen in bed. She hurried downstairs and through the table room and opened the

back door. “Nimrod!” she yelled. All she could see was the beehive shaped ovens and the garden beyond. She came back inside and had to back away from the front door when Khan came in, rubbing his sore forehead. It was badly bruised. When he cleared the door, she left Egyptus with the words, “Maybe he's home. I'll go there and find him.”

But she didn't find him. When she came home, she found Kish and his second wife Quanabil making love on the floor. She asked, “Have you two seen Nimrod?”

Kish raised up enough to see her face and growled, “Have some respect!” and went on with his business.

Comrase poked her head into all the rooms upstairs and downstairs. He wasn't home. She left with a heart that felt like a heavy stone. She sighed holding back the tears. She would have to search the whole city.

She started with his cousins' homes. They weren't there. By the afternoon, she couldn't hold back the tears and wept all the way around the outside of the city wall.

* * *

Khan stood in the middle of the main room and called out, “Ham!”

Ham staggered down the stairs pulling his robe over him. He was so nervous that he started hick-upping.

“What – hic – happened to you?”

“Come here,” Khan ordered. “I must have fallen and hit my head.” When Ham stood before him Khan placed his hand over Ham's chest. Ham calmed down and his hick-ups were gone. “Now sit down beside me.”

Ham obeyed while Khan took deep breaths. "I recommend you do the same. Breathe as I do. It will calm you and give you back the life you lost last night."

They both sat breathing for a while until Khan decided that was enough. "Let's go upstairs. I'm worried about the book. It should be in the temple."

As they ascended the stairs, Ham said, "Are you taking it back? I'm not quite finished with it."

As they entered Ham's bedroom, Khan gazed at the beautiful woman in the bed. "You may study it in the temple."

When they entered the antechamber, Ham placed his hand on the table where the book used to be. He looked around. Khan stared at him. "Ham. Where is it?"

"I ... I left it here." Ham continued to peer here and there around the table and sighed.

"Didn't you lock the door?"

"I thought I did." Ham scratched his hairy chin.

"You thought! You thought!" Khan said with disgust. "You'd better leave the thinking to me from now on."

They stood there with their hands on their hips, staring at each other. Then realization struck. "It was "Shem!" they said in unison.

"Shem wasn't getting drunk like the rest of us," Ham said.

Khan fumed. They both rushed downstairs. "Command the chariots!" Khan ordered.

Kana'an came in the door at the exact time they were racing downstairs. "What is it?"

"We've been robbed!" Khan yelled. His voice shook the whole city. Within moments

all ten chariots were lined up outside the city gate.

“We will catch them before they reach Sippar!” Kana'an reported to Khan. “We will have the book back before tomorrow.”

The chariots charged forward.

* * *

No one saw Comrase sobbing just inside the gate. She ran back to the king's house and into the arms of Egyptus.

“Now, now, dear cow,” Egyptus soothed, embracing her, “haven't you found your boy yet?”

“He ... he's gone,” Comrase sobbed, hitting Egyptus against the ribs. “He's gone. I searched everywhere.”

Egyptus winced and then thought a moment. “Sit down.”

They both sat on the sofa. Egyptus held her close. “Do you remember the guests that came yesterday to the festival?”

Comrase tried to speak through her sobbing. She finally got out a “No.”

“You were too busy as usual.” Egyptus frowned. “It was your uncle, Shem and two of his sons. I believe one of them was your father.”

Comrase straightened. She sobered up. “My father? You saw him?”

“Yes. He along with his brother and father were eating at the king's table.”

“Oh.” Comrase's face was ashen. “I was too busy. I was having such fun flirting and dancing.”

“I saw your father again last night in my bedroom. He took me to my bed. I remember now that I'm awake.” Egyptus put her hand over her head for a moment. “And my headache is gone.”

Comrase blinked with her wide cow eyes. “And?”

“Your boy was here last night, and I'm sure your father took him.”

Egyptus let Comrase sob on her shoulder until her eyes were dry.

Chapter Two

Ten four wheeled chariots raced away from Nippur, the seat of Ham, for the city of the Shemites, Sippar. They fled on wings of furry across the plains as fast as their little asses could carry them. Their asses gasped for breath and frothed at the mouth. Their legs and the wheels of the chariots were a blur of motion. The wind-swept men holding the reins whipped their steeds for speed and roared commands. They were not letting Shem and his two sons have the holy book.

Night overtook them. There was no moon, and the starlight brought only creeping shadows that frightened. Yet, over hill and plain they drove their asses from one oasis to the other. Finally Khan knew the asses would die if they didn't stop, especially his because of his weight. That night, they watched men of valor as constellations cross the sky, seemingly walking a road of stars to their reward at the end of the heavens. Khan told stories of all the battles he had won and the mighty men that had fought by his side. When the sun rose, it was immediately daylight, and in the heat of the day, they rode again.

What they ate on the road was the swine and beef that was left from the party two nights before.

“We should have overtaken them by now,” Kana'an shouted into the wind.

“Maybe they went to the river,” Kish added.

“If they did,” Put yelled as he whipped his four asses, “they may get to the city before us.”

Khan roared, "This is the straightest way. If they have gone another way, we will get to Sippar before them. It doesn't matter. We will take the city and get the plates."

The journey that took weeks on lazy camels took only days with the chariots. When they arrived, the asses were almost dead. Several of them collapsed.

The men arrived at the city, but they never saw it. They stepped out of their chariots and exclaimed things like:

"Holy Gods!"

"Holy Mother of the Gods!"

"My mind is struck asunder, and I cannot breathe!"

"I cannot think of what it is!"

Even Khan said, "It takes my breath away. I've never seen anything like it before."

Kana'an asked, "What shall we do?"

"What can we do?" Put asked.

"We cannot scale it," Kish said. He went up and touched it. "It is too smooth."

"It is magic," another said.

"If only we had brought ropes and hooks," Khan said. He stood there with his hands on his hips, panting for breath and staring at the height of it.

Before them stood a smooth white wall that was taller than the pyramid at Nippur. It swept the land from the horizon on the southwest to the horizon on the northeast. It went from the Euphrates River to the Tigris. At every league was a tower so that the wall went from one tower to the next.

Even though the wall and towers were sloped, it was too steep to climb. And they had brought neither ax, adz, nor hook. When Khan took a spear from his chariot and jabbed it into the wall, the spearhead broke. There was only a small dent in the wall. No one had brought a shovel. Even so, the ground was too hard. Khan tried to dig with a wooden shield, but it shattered.

“Damn them all to the Ab-Zu!” Khan cried.*

The men walked over to the most western tower and sat up against the wall for there was a little shade there. They had to rest their eyes for the wall was too bright to look at. They stared into the southern horizon and looked at the blue sky. A couple of buzzards circled above on the hot air currents.

Khan marched towards the men shouting, “We will make ladders and storm the wall!”

Kana'an stood and asked, “Trees for wood are leagues away, and our animals are exhausted. What are we going to do?”

Khan just said, “Ha!” and walked over to an ass that had collapsed. He began chanting and rubbing the ass. It soon shook itself and stood. He went to another one, chanted, rubbed, and it stood. He went on to heal all the animals and stood before the men and asked, “What say you? Shall we continue our task or cower back to our homes?”

The men went back to their chariots and headed back to the nearest clump of trees at the last oasis. There, they took the only sword which Khan provided, pulled down palm trees and chopped up underbrush and spent the next day building ladders. But when they

*Ab-Zu is the Sumerian underworld and is the root of our word abyss. It refers to the gold mines in southern Africa where men

worked in the most horrible of conditions as slaves.

returned to the wall, the ladders were not long enough.

Khan made them lash with grass twine two ladders together and then two others.

When they got to the top of the wall, they were met by a barrage of stones thrown by men swinging slings. Two of Ham's men fell to their deaths. The others clamored down and abandoned the ladders. When they got to the ground they saw an army of men lined up on top of the wall. They took poles and pushed the ladders down. One broke apart.

Khan put his hand up and rubbed his forehead. "Now I know what hit me that night."

He commanded, "Back to Nippur. We need an army!"

"And more chariots," Kana'an added.

* * *

Khan and the king argued about the definition of what constituted an army.

"You are so proud in your heart," Khan sneered. "You want to send all the men in Nippur to their deaths?" Khan paced the length of the upstairs room which had no windows and therefore concealed their secrecy. The oil lamps hanging from the ceiling cast ghostly shadows of Khan across the floor and walls.

"You said we could go around the wall," Ham motioned with his right hand while the other held his aching hip. "We could easily take their city then."

Kana'an who was standing next to his father said, "We could spend our energy breaching the wall with a battering ram like the one you used at one of those ancient castles you're always talking about. That should get us ..."

"You don't think in terms of power and strategy, my dear boy." Khan stopped and

faced the two. He slammed his finger at the air to emphasize his point. “The wall can be breached, yes. But we have to have ten times the number of soldiers they have. If we don't have a numberless host, they won't be afraid of us, and we will be cut down. No. We have to wait until we can make them tremble at our presence.” He shook his fist and bit his bottom lip.

Ham threw up his hands. “I thought you wanted the book!”

“Be patient.” Khan pulled his braided beard and thought a moment. “It will take us a hundred and fifty years to raise the kind of army we need.”

Ham and Kana'an both dropped their lower jaws. They turned to each other asking, “That long?”

Khan placed his hands on his hips. “We will start immediately having babies. Command all the young men to gather up all the young maidens. We need to get everyone pregnant who can get pregnant.”

“Now wait a minute!” Ham demanded. “What do you mean?” Now Ham began pacing up and down. He stopped and turned towards Khan. “It is immoral ... unless you are thinking of many many marriages.”

Kana'an laughed at the idea.

Khan shrugged his shoulders. “Who said anything about marriage? We just want the babies. We will raise them as soon as they are weaned. We will train them to be fighters. The only father and mother they will see will be us. We will teach them all they need to know.”

“They will be as ants,” Kana'an proposed with a large smile.

“Army ants!” Khan jested.

“No!” commanded Ham. The room became silent. Khan and Kana'an stared at their king.

Khan calmly walked up to Ham and confronted him, pressing his face down into Ham's personal space. “You are king. You can command them.” An aura of evil emanated from Khan. Ham bent backwards to avoid Khan's face.

“He is your king!” said Put, who had been sitting silently at the table all this time. He rose from his place and approached Ham and Khan. Khan slapped him down as if he were a fly.

All three men cowered away from Khan.

Ham stuttered, “How ... how shall we do this?”

“First,” Khan said calmly, turning to stare down each man, “we will build a theater.”

“How will that help?” Kana'an asked.

“Anyone not following our plan will wind up in the center of it. It will become an incentive.”

“How?” Put asked, rising from the floor.

“They will have to face the bull, of course.” Khan grinned.

* * *

“No, no, Tik-Tall” cried Abu-Zhan. “You will splinter that stone all to pieces.” The journeyman stone cutter stepped up to his apprentice, taking his tools from him. “Remember what Ham taught us in the Temple of Light? He said to use your ears to cut stone. Your

hearing must be sensitive. That is why we use copper chisels and not iron. Iron is used only for magnetics. Look. You take the handle of the chisel and tap it along the line you want to cut. It rings. At the right place it will sound hollow, and in all the wrong places, it will sound dull.”

Abu flipped the chisel over and tapped the flat granite rock with the handle in several places until he heard a hollow ring. Then placing the edge of the chisel against the rock, he said, “You tap the rock gently at an angle. If the sound is solid, you strike it hard. If it doesn't, you try a different angle. With experience you will know the angles and rings of the different stones.” Abu struck hard against the chisel and the stone split open revealing clean cut edges.

“Let me try,” Tik-Tall said excitedly.

Abu placed his hand on Tik-Tall's shoulder. “Consult the plans first. This is not a trial to see if you can do it. We are building a theater for the king.”

The theater they were building was located behind the main temple built on top of a step pyramid. They had to tear down some of the city wall and a few houses to make room for it. The residents were upset until they were made caretakers of the theater. But until it was built, they had to live in tents.

All the buildings in the town were made of mud brick mixed with straw, but the king and Khan, the vizier, wanted a stone foundation for the theater, now that they had some stone cutters that had graduated from the Temple of Light.

* * *

Egyptus caught the arch of the back of one of her students and let the momentum roll the girl around her hand so that one leg swung down. Her foot touched the ground. “Now follow your other leg. Let it swing down. There. You are standing upright. Try it again.”

The Temple of Light had an open courtyard with a smooth floor large enough for acrobats to practice in. There were a dozen girls wearing only thin loincloths doing cart wheels, somersaults, and running flips throughout the area. Egyptus went from one girl to the next to show them how to improve, or to the younger ones demonstrating the movements.

Little Teel-Tak walked up to Egyptus and tapped her bare leg. “When will I get to play with the cows, Mistress?”

Egyptus put her hands on her bare hips and peered down at the cute little brown girl. “When I think you are ready. Show me you are an expert and then I'll take you out to see the cows. Only then can you play on their backs.”

Teel-Tak had been referring to the other day when she took her girls on an outing to a herd of cows in back of the town. She and the older girls ran across the backs of the animals and did flip flops on top of them from one cow to the next. The outing was cut short when a large bull was spotted coming to protect his heifers.

After the girls were safe and out of the pen, Egyptus had an idea. She let the bull charge, grabbed it by the horns and let herself be flipped over his back. She bounced off his haunches, did a somersault in the air and landed on her feet behind the bull. Then she escaped by running across some of the cows and jumped over the fence. The girls were all in

awe of her and were cheering. She had quite a time calming them down.

Chapter Three

Khan and Kana'an set out to organize an army. All the young men were selected to go through arduous training in the temple across the plaza from the Temple of Light. They would train the next generation. Some of the men dubbed their training center the Temple of Darkness. The name stayed. It was a temple of agriculture, but the central courtyard turned into an arena for war games. Boys and men fought with wooden swords and clubs, and some fought in boxing matches. The throwing of rocks with slings was forbidden inside the town. Anyone who wanted to learn to use a sling had to go outside the town into the fields. Straw dummies were set up and many rocks were thrown, but the dummies for a while showed little bruising.

Mitz-Ra, the king's younger son, was among the young men being trained. Long black curls framed his thin face. In all his eighteen years, he had been slim, and he was swift and agile like his sister Egyptus. Khan took a liking to him. *It must come from his mother's side,* he thought, *because his father seems to be sluggish.* The young boy could out-maneuver all the other boys when it came to sword fighting or boxing. Swinging a club was a joke to him, hitting the other boys on the head quite often.

One morning Khan approached Mitz-Ra. "Come with me boy. I will train you personally." When the boy came near, Khan knocked him against the wall.

Mitz-Ra shook his head and got to his feet. Khan walked over to him. "What's wrong boy? Can't stand on your feet?" Khan smiled and offered him his hand. The boy took it and

Khan swung him across the court, bowling over several others as they fought.

“Hey!” Mitz-Ra became angry. “Have you gone mad?”

Khan marched towards him. Mitz-Ra walked in a circle trying to avoid Khan.

“Come on, boy! Come get your punishment.” Khan trotted and Mitz-Ra ran around the court, but they never took their eyes off each other. Khan stopped and laughed. “Coward! You have no fight in you. How do you expect to be a soldier?”

That's the way it was every day. Mitz-Ra woke up each morning wondering if he should show up for training or run away. He wasn't a coward, so he came back day after day, ending up running from Khan's fist or staff. He tried to get a punch in now and then, but without effect. Bruises on his body accumulated. Sometimes he came home bloody. His mother worried. She would lay him down, wipe away the blood and pour on oil and wine.

“You need to stop this fighting,” she would say every day. “I didn't give you birth only to be beaten to death in your youth.”

* * *

One day the king stood beside his son's bed as Afra knelt beside Mitz-Ra and bathed his wounds.

“It's Khan,” said the king. “He seems to have it in for the boy. He teaches the others, but he beats on our son.”

“Don't go back,” Afra pleaded.

“I must!” Mitz-Ra called out, his face contorted in anger. “I must get the upper hand.”

“You are swift, my son,” Afra soothed. “You can keep out of his way.”

“I doubt it.” Mitz-Ra let out a long breath.

“Don't doubt, my son.” Afra lifted the wet cloth and looked at Mitz-Ra. “You have a strong soul. You can beat this bull.”

“He is a giant,” Mitz-Ra said, wincing at the pain as his mother touched his chest.

“Giants just fall harder,” Ham offered. He took hold of his beard and stood there thoughtfully. “I have been building something in the pyramid. I want you to come with me tonight. It will have a healing effect.”

* * *

That night Ham and Afra took Mitz-Ra to the pyramid temple. He had one arm around his father and one around his mother. There was only one way inside the temple, and it was hidden from the rest of the world.

When Ham started going down a side street, Mitz-Ra said, “I thought we were going to the temple.” But when they went into someone's house, Afra and Mitz-Ra halted.

“Come on in.” Ham motioned with his hand. “This is the home of one of the priests. In his basement is a tunnel to the pyramid.”

“But won't we wake him?” Afra whispered loudly.

“He was informed and is down there waiting for us. He will assist me.”

Descending the stairs in darkness, the royal three saw torchlight at bottom of the stairs to their left. There stood a priest in his white vestments and a long white braided beard holding a torch at the entrance to a tunnel. A wooden panel had been taken off the wall and set aside.

“Ptra-Pah,” Ham greeted with a raised hand.

“My king.” Ptra-Pah nodded his head. He waved his hand towards the tunnel and started the trek ahead of the royal family who followed.

The tunnel, hewn from white sandstone, looked yellow in the torchlight. The walls were painted with horrible monsters, platitudes and warnings to anyone who entered without permission.

“He who enters here will be drowned in the blood of Tiamat.” Two streams representing the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flowed from the eyes of a giant snake, Tiamat.

“He who treads this tunnel will have his flesh peeled and eaten by the Anzu bird.” A giant bird with a lion's head feasted on the flesh of a trespasser.

“He who makes his way through this tunnel will be consumed by the Bull of Heaven.” A person was depicted being eaten by a giant bull.

“He who steps foot on this path will be torn in pieces by the Mushhushshu dragon.” The dragon looked like a snake with four legs and had huge tusks like a boar with which it was slashing a person to death.

“He who follows his pride will be taken, his body cut in pieces and distributed throughout the land.” Pieces of a human body were shown on a map of the land between the two rivers.

When they entered the precincts of the temple, they stepped into a large yellow square room lit by torches hung on each of the four walls. The walls were lined with gold. There were no drawings or engravings. A golden sarcophagus lay in the center of the room with

tubes coming from the ceiling at different angles emitting rays of light into it. The inside showed sides of bare granite.

Mitz-Ra was instructed to lie down in the cold stone coffin whereupon Ham and the priest Ptra-Pah began chanting. They walked around the sarcophagus making signs with their hands, chanting and ringing bells and cylinders and bars of metal that surrounded this last resting place.

The chants harmonized with the metallic sounds. Mitz-Ra became surrounded by a blue light that shimmered and rippled as if it were water. Afra just stared at the proceedings and whispered prayers on behalf of her son.

After what seemed forever Mitz-Ra was helped out of the stone coffin and back onto his feet. He took a deep breath and smiled.

“That was refreshing,” he said. “Let's do that again tomorrow night.”

So they continued night after night until Mitz-Ra, sparring with Khan at the Temple of Agriculture, began to dodge Khan's swinging fists. He once laughed because Khan missed him, but that made him vulnerable, and Khan caught him with the other fist, knocking him out cold. Yet, day after day, Mitz-Ra learned which way to turn, when to duck, and when to hit back. He was gaining an instinct, an intuition, a feeling in his gut. This warned him ahead of time when Khan was going to strike. This was due partly from experience, but also from his treatments in the temple.

Then the tide turned. Khan saw the boy's increase in expertise and lack of wounds. He knew some magic was being applied, so he would hide and catch him off guard in an alley,

behind a bush, or jump on him from a tree. He would come in the middle of the night and punch him in the face as he slept.

Mitz-Ra became terrified. He watched his every step. He became weary of shadows, corners, alleys, trees and bushes. He slept with one eye open. He would never sit without scanning the whole room. The hairs on the back of his neck warned him of pending attack. He would jump aside or turn around and duck at the slightest feeling.

As soon as Mitz-Ra avoided most of the attacks, Khan came to him and said, “Now it's time for the next step ... how to disarm your opponent. Then we will show you how to hurt and even kill.”

* * *

Khan taught a class on the body and its make-up in the Temple of Light. He demonstrated the different bodies that covered the soul and the energy that flowed through it and its layers. He took a young girl about fourteen years old, had her disrobe and lay on a table. He showed the boys that if they de-focused their eyes, they could see the aura of her body. He said that girls were more spiritual and their auras were stronger and easier to see for the acolyte.

He had them run their hands over their own arms so they could feel the ka or ki energy of their physical bodies.

So, seeing and feeling, using all their senses, they could become even as Mitz-Ra. Khan had him demonstrate as he tried to hit him or throw him. Mitz-Ra could avoid Khan, and even trip him, though the giant caught himself before he fell.

Khan showed them a diagram painted on sheepskin that displayed the energy levels surrounding the body. There was physical energy, ethereic, emotional, mental and spiritual energy layers. The physical he called the Ka which was like a bull. "It is completely animal, but controllable." Then there was the Ba which acted as a bird. "It can lift and inspire, tell you things you didn't know before, intuition." The next was the Akh, the effectiveness. "Intelligence allows you to do as Mitz-Ra in overcoming your opponent. It is your glory." Then there was the mental layer, the name or the word, sound. "What is said can be just as powerful as what is done." Next was the shadow. "It is your speed as well as your connection to the Earth. Once lost, you are in darkness. Avoid the shadows of others."

"Last is the spiritual layer." He pointed with his stick to the diagram and swat it as though a fly had landed. "It is the most important. It keeps you awake and gives you the truth. It is consciousness. You move in truth, you walk in truth, you act in truth."

* * *

Ham argued with the architect Yem-Lak and crew foreman Sim-Tak about the placement of the foundation stones for the amphitheater.

"You don't understand what we're doing here," Ham explained, holding the plans in from of Yem-Lak's face. "See this fluting? You haven't carved them into these stones."

"But what are they for?" Yem-Lak asked, hitting the papers with the backs of his fingers. "They don't add to the structure. They might even damage the foundation."

"Believe me. They won't," Ham argued back. "They are sound tracks. The foundation is built on sound ... vibration. Not just brute strength."

“My crew has built many buildings. Now they are all confused because we don't know how these stones are supposed to fit together properly.”

“Haven't you ever played with puzzles?” Ham asked, pointing to the plans. “Look at the way I have drawn these blocks. This one fits this way. This one fits that way. It's easy.”

Ham went over to the foundation wall where the workers stood scratching their heads. “No no no, it's all wrong. See the plans?” He showed them the papers in his hand and pointed to the drawings. This one goes on top, not the bottom!”

Khan heard the commotion and came over to see what he could do.

“What's happening here?” he asked.

“They just don't understand what we're doing.” Ham turned to Khan to explain. “They expect to do things the way it's always been done.”

“I see.” Khan looked around and saw that nothing was getting done. “Shall I slap them some?”

“You know better than that. Force will never accomplish our task. You should go back to what you do best training the army.” Ham sat down and grabbed his beard.

Khan approached close and bent over, putting his face close to Ham's. “You know what this theater means to me.”

“Yes, yes, I know.” Ham blinked several times. “You want to get their attention. You want to teach them things.” He paused with his mouth open to get some breath. “It's mind control you want. That's what it is.” Then Ham's eyes lit up. “I'll get Afra. She'll know how to explain these things to the workers.”

Khan stood. "I'm going over to your house to see Egyptus." He turned to go and threw back the words, "I'll send Afra over to you."

"Thank you."

* * *

Egyptus finished bathing. Lil-Lil and Ta-Mar helped her out of the tiled pool and wrapped her in a towel. She sat down on a stool and let the girls braid her hair. When the ten foot giant came into the room, the girls fled.

"What are you doing here?" Egyptus demanded. She pushed her hand against the stool to turn and face him. She wanted to look him straight in the eye. "These are my private quarters. You have no right!"

Khan sat on the floor near the pool. "I thought I would come and see how you are doing. Are you ever going to get married?"

Egyptus frowned and grabbed the towel tighter around her breasts. "That is none of your concern."

"I hear the reason you don't is because you are very fond of your brother," Khan remarked with upturned hands.

Egyptus turned her head away from Khan. "Don't speak of him." She sobbed. "Is that why you abuse him?"

"I have been training him to be a soldier ... a fighter." Khan placed his hands on his knees. He looked like a pyramid with his legs crossed and his arms spreading out towards his knees. "You should distance yourself from him. Soldiers die, you know."

“He won't die in battle. There is no war.” Egyptus put her feet up on the cross bar of the stool, brought her knees together, rested her arms upon her thighs, and then leaned forward to put her face nearer to Khan's. “Unless you kill him. Then I will kill you.”

Khan leaned back roaring with laughter. When he stopped, he put his face an inch from Egyptus' face. “Lie with me. We will make giant babies.”

Egyptus drew back. “Pshaw! Don't even joke! Why, I would burst.”

Khan laughed again. “You know your mother has a potion that prevents childbirth. You should take it.” Khan put his hand on her leg. “Then we could have a lot of fun.”

Egyptus stood up so fast the stool fell over. She darted to go around the giant, but he was too fast for her and, still sitting, blocked her way. She darted the other direction, but he blocked her again. He arose and grabbed her by the arms and brought her against his body. She trembled.

Suddenly he dropped her onto the floor; he felt the point of a spear or blade upon his back. Egyptus scooted away from him, stood and backed against the far wall. Khan turned around, grabbed the spear away from Mitz-Ra, and swung the spear at the boy, but he wasn't there. Khan looked around. Mitz-Ra's feet came down from the ceiling and bounced off Khan's face.

Khan growled and tried to grab the boy, but he was too quick and flew between Khan's legs. Khan received a kick in the rear from both of the boy's feet and he toppled into the pool. Khan climbed out, wiped his face and head with his hands and yelled out, “Enough of this!” He snorted. “I will see you tomorrow in training.” He stood near the door. “If I didn't

need you, you would be dead.” He stomped out.

Mitz-Ra approached Egyptus. “Are you harmed?”

“No,” she said, embracing him. “Thank you. I thought he was going to rape me.”

“I’ll make sure he never touches you again.” He leaned down and kissed his sister. He felt her naked back. “You have lost your towel. Let me get it for you.”

“No.” Egyptus looked up into his eyes. Now it was Mitz-Ra that trembled. She kissed him passionately.

* * *

“Now he wants us to stop growing our leeks and rice and grow more barley,” Arphax complained as he lashed out at his oxen with his whip. They plowed the fields too slowly for their master. “It’s hard enough not to have any leeks to sell, but he wants twice as much barley as last year.”

“The king wants everyone to increase their yield of barley,” Toe-Tak said as he walked behind his master, broadcasting barley seeds into the plowed areas. “It’s for his army.”

“I’m sure the army wants leeks with their barley bread.” Arphax cracked his whip again. “Get up, you slugs!”

* * *

Ham and his architect Yem-Lak looked upon the rise of the amphitheater with pride. Tier after tier of seats of varnished gopher wood rose from the whitewashed semicircular foundation. Held up by a frame of pine struts, a roof of grey slates slanted over the seats like a protecting hand. The roof was painted red and sectioned into three parts with the central

part rising high above the other sides for the king and his family.

“What is it for?” asked Yem-Lak. He viewed it with his hand shading his eyes, twisting this way and that to take in the whole.

“It is a theater, Yem-Lak,” said Ham. “It is for games and orations. And perhaps to tell the old stories.”

“That is good. This town can do with some recreation.” Yem-Lak put his hands on his hips and then scratched his head. He turned as he saw Khan approach.

Khan strolled out into the earthen ground of the arena.

“Yem-Lak,” Khan applauded. “You have done an excellent job.” He also put his hands on his hips and turned to view the whole structure.

“There are a few details and finishes to complete,” the architect said, “but it should be done by the end of the week.”

“Then we will celebrate,” Khan replied. “... have some games.”

Khan placed his arm around Ham's shoulder, but addressed the architect, “Pardon us ...” and led Ham away.

“We are ready now to start growing our soldiers,” he said.

“How are you going to accomplish this?” Ham frowned and furrowed his brow.

“You know all those empty rooms in the Temple of Agriculture?” Khan grinned.

“Yes.” Ham pulled on his beard. “I thought they were for the storing of grain. But we've been storing the grain along the northwest wall in those giant bins you had us build.”

“Those empty rooms will house the temple maidens. It will be part of the celebrations

to satisfy the gods of life ... the life givers.” Khan stared at Ham waiting for a reply.

“How does that ... what do you mean?”

“You old goat.” Khan smiled and hugged Ham affectionately. “You are playing dumb, but I know you know what I mean ... getting the girls pregnant.” He raised his eyebrows showing his teeth in a broad grin. He grabbed Ham's arms. He then let him go and turned serious. “I know you don't approve, but it must be if we are to retrieve the plates.”

The two strolled back towards the town square. “With the notes I made from the plates,” Ham said, “I am sure we don't need them. I think there is enough information in the notes to build our own shem and the ben-ben where the pilot sits.”

“You are quite educated, Ham,” Khan commented nonchalantly. “But there are many things on those plates you don't understand. Remember, I was there when those plates were written. I can give you a better translation. Besides, they are my plates.”

Ham asked, “What if they have read the plates and start building their own ben-ben?”

“I doubt your brother knows the meaning of those writings. They don't know how to interpret them. Besides, if the thought ever did cross their mind,” Khan stopped and took a good look at Ham. “ ... they would dismiss it immediately, thinking it shameful. They are too good to think that the gods would allow them into the heavens.”

* * *

Ham, upon the advice of Khan, announced the New Year, the opening of Spring. He sent his crier of the news into the town square.

“Crops are being planted. Seeds are broadcast into the earth. Green leaves and flowers

are budding. Snow melt brings flooding to the two great rivers. Warmer days are ahead, and with it, celebration.”

There was a response of cheering from the crowd.

“Make the Temple of Agriculture clean.” Referring to the training of the soldiers and the mess they made. “Prepare the town square with food and dance. Play the harp and the flute and sound the drums. Today, Du-Mu-Zn escapes the Ab-Zu and makes love to his wife In-An-Na. Come. Let us celebrate their reunion where all life begins.”

And so the story of Al-Lo-Tu, the queen of the Ab-Zu, the underworld, was replayed upon the stage within the temple precincts. In-An-Na, the daughter of Sin, Al-Lo-Tu, but the queen of the Ab-Zu tricked her into taking off one piece of clothing at each of the seven gates that led down into the queen's chambers. By the time In-An-Na arrived, she was naked and thus stripped of all her powers. (The actress on the stage took off one piece of clothing after another until she was in the nude.) Thereafter, she could never leave her sister's presence and return to life on the surface of the Earth.

There was only one way she could return, and that was if someone could take her place. She chose her husband, Du-Mu-Zn, the Shepard King. He was taken by the Nefilim and dragged down into the Ab-Zu to mine the gold for the gods all the remainder of his days. But En-Lil took pity on him and allowed him to return in the Springtime of the year to bring life to all the plants and crops.

At the ending of the story, the nude figures, In-An-Na and Du-Mu-Zn, made love on the stage while embracing in front of the enamored audience of the town's people. They felt

the power of the copulating bringing life to all things planted. Each seed planted in the Earth was symbolized by the seed Du-Mu-Zn gave to In-An-Na.

During this ending, there were priests who approached all the young maidens and invited them into the temple to live there in all the chambers that lined the central courtyard. There were many who were filled with the romance of the whole idea, wanting to be In-An-Na, or the closest thing to it, a temple maiden representing her. She would be available to the great hero Du-Mu-Zn when he would come and make love to her and bring life to the world.

But there were some who refused. Their names were given to Khan. Egyptus was one of them. The others were students of hers whom she advised to refrain from this foolishness.

Hathor on the other hand promoted Khan's ideas. She was the actress who played In-An-Na. She remained on the stage and rehearsed the romance and the fame of the heroine.

“The glow of love sent forth from above,
The music soft and lulling,
The magic of life ever fulfilling, sending
The daughters of men into the grove;
They dance and play and tell the old stories,
The embrace of Du-Mu-Zn and In-An-Na
Granting every wish and dreaming.”

Chapter Four

Night fell upon Nippur. The streets were filled with shadow, and darker shadows with black hearts marched through the town looking for virgins to rape. Khan headed the team of soldiers he had personally trained. He held within his hand a list of names of girls that had refused to join the temple maidens. He didn't know where they lived, and Egyptus had refused to tell him, so he went from house to house looking for them. When he found a girl at home, he pushed aside the parents and older brothers and ordered one of the soldiers have his way with her. Then they put the girl in a cage outside on the wagon they carried with them. That night filled the town with screams of terror.

Sarah was one of the girls that had refused to comply. When Khan pushed the front door open and slammed it against the wall, she and her mother screamed. Sarah ran into a back room.

“What are you doing here?” Sarah's father demanded.

Khan knocked him against the wall.

Sarah's brother drew a sword, yelling, “By the Gods! What animals are you!” But one of Khan's soldiers cut him down.

All the children ran into other rooms to hide under beds and tables, behind trunks. They whimpered silently.

Khan caught up with Sarah, grabbed her by a leg and pulled her from a window through which she was trying to escape. He ripped her clothes off and threw her to the

nearest soldier behind him. He raped her and then handed her to the other soldiers who carried her outside where she was caged up with four others who were sobbing and crying, lamenting their lot in life, saying, "Oh, that we were men and had a sword!"

Thus did the cruel angel of death creep through the town leaving behind screams and shudders and blood. When the families of the town heard the commotion, they huddled in cramped quarters wondering if they would be next. Some escaped over the walls and ran into the wilderness.

When Khan had gone through the whole town, he held up his list to a torch and then counted the bodies in his cage.

"There are three who have fled into the wilderness," he told his soldiers. "We will track them in the morning. They will not escape us."

After depositing his girls at the temple and locking them up in the empty chambers, Khan went to the king's house.

"It is done, Sire." He placed his hand on the king's shoulder. "You have your brood mares. We will create a great army."

Ham scratched his head, turned away and paced in a small circle, wrinkling up his face. He peered up into Khan's face. "What shall we do? Command every girl, when she comes of age, to join the Temple?"

"That would be a great idea," Khan laughed.

"I was only talking. How many girls do you need?"

"All of them." Khan showed Ham his list. "Three of them escaped. Where is Egyptus?"

I want to talk to her.”

Ham went upstairs and called out. “Egyptus?” When she didn't come, he went into her room. He reappeared at the top of the stairs. “She is not here. She is gone.”

“Then there are four I will hunt.”

* * *

Morning found the sun rising upon the heartache of a dozen families. At dawn a small contingent left the city headed by Khan. They marched around the city to search for tracks.

“Look here,” Tool-Muk said, pointing his spear to the ground. Like the other soldiers, he wore only a loincloth and a red rag around his head. His hair was dark and flowed just past his ears.

Khan counted the pairs of footprints. “Four girls ... barefoot, so they can scamper like mice. Footprints are shallow. They carry nothing.”

Khan and ten youth walked out among the barley, trampling down the young stocks. They went out beyond the grazing cows and up into the hills.

* * *

Egyptus had second thoughts about going barefoot into a land of dirt and rocks, scorpions and scratching bushes. She told the three girls, all lithe and sprightly, having long dark hair and tanned skin, that they would do best if they had transportation. So Egyptus, Lil-Lil, Sira, and Lic-Lak, traveled down the hill they were on and around it to the northwest to come upon the north side of the town.

Lil-Lil asked, “Why do we go back this way? Isn't the way we came much shorter?”

“We go this way for those who may be looking for us,” Egyptus said, quickening her pace. Bare feet required one to move faster. “We must get back into the hills before sunrise. Please keep up.”

They arrived in a field where the cattle grazed.

Egyptus crouched and pointed, not wanting one of the cow herders to wake up and spot them. “Each of you take a cow,” she whispered. “We will ride them into the hills.”

Each girl mounted a cow and followed Egyptus' example and kicked them in the ribs to make them move, holding onto the horns to guide them. The cows complained, giving out long and loud moos, and thus it was more urgent they get away fast.

Egyptus and her girls, the ones she favored of all the girls she taught, climbed hills strewn with broken rocks, boulders, and old trees that had long rotted and dried ... remains of the flood. Between the hills they rarely came upon a stream fed by springs. *There must be a water shed in the higher hills*, she thought. *There may be caves to hide in*. She remembered the caves that were found in the mountain from which they escaped, the abode of her grandfather Noah, when she was a young teenager. It was her intention to hide in a cave by day and hunt by night. She didn't have any plan that extended into the far future. They couldn't go off and start another city or form a wandering tribe without men. She just wanted to wait out the time when things would settle down, like a runaway child hoping its parents would not be so angry and accept her back whenever she decided to return.

They came upon a washed out cave in the rock strata at the top of a hill. Its shape reminded Egyptus of an eye that seemed to be stare at the girls. They stopped. The cows

became agitated and bellowed, refusing to go forward. The cows turned around, and no amount of kicking and turning their heads would change their minds. Then a roar came from the cave, amplified by the cavity. The pupil of the eye, they now realized, was a lion, and as it leaped forward, they knew it was after their cows.

Before they were able run back down the hill, the lion had knocked off two of the girls as it bounded across the backs of their cows. Egyptus jumped from her cow and the lion landed on top of it. The cow bellowed, terrified, and the lion roared at Egyptus who had flipped onto her back. She and the lion glared at each other. The lion bit the cow in the neck, making it fall, and then jumped on top of Egyptus in a second, roaring into her face.

The lion then roared at the sky, looked back at Egyptus, crawling slowly away using her elbows and heels. He shook his mane, left and grabbed the cow by the neck, pulling it back up to his pride who were now peeping out of the cave.

The first thought that came to her was, “Who is Judah?” It seemed like the lion was trying to tell her something. In her terror, something in her mind jumped back into childhood. She remembered that Noah had spoken about Judah, who was the Lion of the Lord. Was it a revelation or a memory of things? It had happened in a split second, and then she was on her feet about to be trampled by a cow.

Two of their cows had run off, but as soon as the girls got off the ground, Egyptus grabbed the horns of the cow in the rear of their retreat. They hopped onto it and bounded away. They decided to retreat back to town. Encounters with lions were not what they expected.

As they road back to town, they saw the other two cows, and as they raced about trying to catch them, Khan and his soldiers spotted the girls. They sprang out from under bushes and behind rocks, grabbed the two girls and pulled Egyptus and Lil-Lil off their cow. They screamed and kicked, but to no avail. They had been captured, chained, and were made to march in line with the soldiers. Khan held the chain that was connected to the collar put around Egyptus. Her collar was chained to the next girl's collar and so on, their hands tied behind their backs.

Khan yanked on the chain whenever the girls slowed down. Egyptus just growled. The march back was made in silence except for the sobbing of the girls, except for Egyptus. She never cried. She was absorbed with thoughts of the lion. She had to tell her mother when she got back ... if she wasn't thrown into the prison. *Naw!* They wouldn't throw the king's daughter into prison ... would they?

* * *

Ham was outraged. "I am the king! I told you to release her." He stood with his wife, hands on their hips, in the front room confronting Khan.

Khan tried to soothe him. "Yes, she is your daughter, and therefore, she needs to set the example for the townspeople. But look what she has done. She has defied the king and inspired others to do the same. We must make an example of her. Otherwise, we will encourage chaos. The people need to be pacified. Everyone has their place in society. It is a woman's place to stay at home, keep quiet and weave cloth. A man needs to go out and work at his profession. It is his hunting instinct to provide for his family. The queen and her

children are to stand solid by the king in whatever he deems fit.”

“Does that mean,” chimed Afra, “that I am not to have a say in all this? See what you are doing. You are the one who is taking away the future mothers. There will be no society.”

“And,” added Ham, “are we to be a military state? All I have ever wanted was a peaceful kingdom set up for learning and trade. I didn't want to get rich or conquer other people. I just want my family and friends around me ... my children.”

Khan placed his arms around the two. “You will have all of that. But it is important that we placate the gods more than placating man. They are the ones in charge here. They want what is theirs.”

“What do you mean?” Ham asked, sitting down on the bed, following his wife. “What is it those so called gods want? Is it for us to war against each other and thus make room by killing ourselves off so they can come back and live on the earth as before? I read the plates. The Nefilim occupied these cities before the flood and used men as slaves. Is that to be it again?”

Khan sat on the floor before the two and folded his legs. “War is necessary. Without war, man will forever be slow and dull as a blade that has never been sharpened ... one that is useless.” He emphasized this with the palms of his hands turned upward. “They will devolve back into animals eating what they can gather from the trees and ground. With war will come technological advances. Man will learn to think faster and smarter, those who are left. All the dull ones will be cut off from the face of the earth. War makes man evolve.”

“Do you think us dull?” Ham asked.

Khan cocked his head and smiled. He had gotten them off the subject of Egyptus.

* * *

Egyptus and her three friends had been dragged into the main building of the amphitheater. There were empty cages and rooms, each with a door that locked from the outside. The opposite wall was made of metal bars that looked out into the arena. She hadn't seen the bars before nor the openings to the outside. What she had seen was only one continuous wall. Then she noticed hinges above the bars. A door to the outside that was now propped up had hidden the bars.

She looked back at her friends huddled together on the dirt floor strewn with straw. The room had no furniture. It was built for animals. She thought that over. No, it was for prisoners. The cages in the hallway outside were for animals. *Why*, she thought, *would the two be put together?* In her imagination she saw men and women being sent out into the arena to be eaten by lions, tigers, and perhaps bears. She shuddered. She returned to the other girls and put her arms around them. But there were no animals there now. Maybe they were just being kept in a holding cell for trial.

“What will they do to us?” Lil-Lil asked softly.

“I imagine,” Egyptus said, trying to think of something, “they will set us before the people to be judged.” She didn't want to say what she really thought.

* * *

Ham hadn't built himself a palace with a throne room, and as he looked over the seating arrangements for his family at the outdoor theater, it looked like he had. All the

people could see the royal family, and if anyone were to be judged, they could stand out in the arena to face their accusers and the tribunal. They were used to presenting their disputes to the king outdoors anyway, as he had always held court in the town square.

There were two lesser seats next to the throne. The chairs were gilded but not ornate. He sat down in the throne. The arm rests were smooth and rounded, and it had a cushion for his bottom and one for his head. He put his head back and let it rest. He sighed and ran his hands over the arms of the chair to feel the smooth lacquered wood.

Khan sat down in the chair to the right of him. The other chair was reserved for Afra, the chairs below for their children.

“Do we have to go through this embarrassment?” Ham cocked his head towards Khan. “You will not harm her will you?”

“She must be judged, Your Holiness,” Khan responded. “But no. I will not hurt her. Egyptus is so strong, you know. She will be able to take care of herself. I cannot say anything about the other three. They are not of the royal family and may have to be sacrificed to pacify the people.”

“To be a king was harder than I thought.” He brought his fist up and rested his head.

Chapter Five

Citizens of Nippur gathered behind the temple pyramid with a great clamor and entered the double doors of the amphitheater. As they took their seats, hundreds of voices talked, laughed, and shouted to each other. They had been summoned to a town meeting. Everyone commented on how beautiful the new arena was or how wasteful and extravagant. Some could not understand why they had to sit down to hear the king when they had always stood in the town square. The older ones were glad to have a comfortable place to rest from the day's work, to sit on smooth varnished wood. Everything smelled of wood sap and cement.

When everyone was seated, they all stood, some with a grumble, as the king and his family came up to their chairs and sat down. Then the vizier motioned with his giant hands to sit down. He disappeared for a moment and was seen walking out into the arena. He turned and faced the crowd. He wore a clean white tunic and his hair and beard had been manicured to show structured and controlled curls.

“We have come here today to make a judgment and to review a few things that are important to the safety and prosperity of this city.

“First, I want to testify to you that Ham has the right to be a king over you. He wears the garments of the Holy Priesthood that were handed down to him by his father Noah. He has ordained priests to administer the holy sacraments to you that were left to us by the gods.

“Then Shem, the brother of Ham, came here on the pretext of friendship but claimed

only he had the authority to kingship. And now, Shem has built a wall between us. He has not only denied the giving of his daughters to be our wives and our daughters to be his wives, but has denied free trade between our peoples.”

There were a lot of boos and clicks, whistles and the stomping of feet.

Khan continued. “If this were all he did, we could forgive him. But Shem and his sons came in the middle of the night and took advantage of us during our Celebration of Life and stole the Holy Book.”

More whistles and the stomping of feet roared through the amphitheater.

“When we went to his city, our sister city of Sippar, in order to make reparations, he attacked us with his army. Yes! He has even raised an army against us. Here we are, a small farming community raising hardly enough to feed ourselves, and Shem and his sons have raised forts and an army. What are armies for except to take away what is yours ... your wives and children and your homes and farms. He started that first night he paid us a visit. He stole one of our children. Is it Hathor? Hathor ... stand up.”

Comrase stood, accepting her new name she obtained from Egyptus.

“Hathor. Come and stand by my side and tell the people of this town what happened to your boy Nimrod.” Khan beckoned with his oversized hand. While she left the royal family, he said, “Hathor has become the priestess of the Temple of Agriculture. She is in charge of the temple maidens and cares for them to make sure all their needs are met.”

Foot stomping sounded like drums throughout the arena as Hathor stepped out onto the dirt floor to stand beside Khan.

“Go ahead,” Khan said, engulfing her gently with his arm.

Hathor scanned the audience and swallowed to get her voice. “As you all know, I have been crowned Queen of Agriculture. I serve in the Temple thereof. I have no small reputation among you as a gentle and considerate mother ... not only of my own child, but of all the children in the city.”

There was a small amount of laughter and women slapping their husbands. When Khan scanned the audience with his frowning face, everyone became quiet.

“The festivities,” Hathor continued, “Khan referred to was one to honor not only the first human mother Eva, and the goddess mother In-An-Na, but also the king's brother Shem and his two sons. We respected them and received them. But to their dishonor, they came as thieves ...”

There was a pause as more stomping occurred.

“... and stole the Holy Book which tells us how to get to Heaven. They also abducted my son Nimrod. I did not know it at the time. I thought, because of the feast he had gone to a friend's house. I looked all over town for him. No one had seen him. I was in tears as I circled the whole city, even looking out into the fields of grain and of cattle. My heart was broken. My spirit was slain. The only thing that has kept me going was my service and labor at the Temple. My life is now a sacrifice. And I owe all my strength to you.”

“Thank you, honorable Hathor.” Khan lifted Hathor's hand to present her to the cheering crowd. She left and went back to sit with the king.

“There are others here,” Khan said with a wave of his hand, “who do not consider the

danger our city is in from these Shemites to the north. They do not consider the sacrifice that has to be made in order to protect ourselves from them. They will let you make your daily sacrifice and toils, but they themselves will not lift a finger.”

Everyone in the audience cried, “Shame! Shame!”

“We sacrifice to In-An-Na and to Al-Lo-Tu and Enlil, the father of Atum and Du-Mu-Zn. Will our sacrifices go unknown to the gods? Are we expected to sit and relax ourselves and enjoy life without labor? Are we expected to lie down under the feet of our conqueror? Are we to put our nose on his sword and turn our backs to his spear that it may pierce us in our cowardice?”

“No!” roared the crowd.

“Then look upon these girls!” Khan commanded that Egyptus and her three friends be brought out into the arena. Drums sounded their arrival. “... and judge them, for they sought to escape both sacrifice to the gods and to prevent themselves as being mothers to the soldiers we need to defend ourselves.”

The crowd demanded punishment. They wanted their heads cut off, their bodies drawn and quartered, their spleens fried, and a number of other things, but Khan said that he had a better idea.

“Bring out the bull!” he commanded.

Drums sounded a hard constant rhythm.

There was an audible surprise from the audience as a bull that ran from his pen into the arena and began prancing around. He had been named Ares by his owner. Egyptus'

friends screamed, but she held her breath and stood upright, her pride radiating like a bright star. The bull advanced at the one he saw as a threat. Not the three cowards who ran, but the one wearing nothing but a red sash she had been given around her waist, standing still in the middle of the arena.

Ares charged. The Drums sounded harder and louder.

Egyptus stood her ground. When the bull ducked his head to ram her, she grabbed the tips of his horns. Ares threw up his head, tossing her into the air. She let go of the horns and flipped over his back, landing on the ground behind him. The crowd roared, cheered and stamped their feet. It was deafening, but Egyptus didn't hear. Her attention was on the bull. She quickly turned as did he. He charged again. She flew over his back several times. The huge beast stopped, pawed the ground and snorted.

Ares was not satisfied with this game. He wanted to kill someone. He looked around the arena and went after the three girls.

“Do as I have done!” Egyptus yelled.

Sira, and Lic-Lak were both successful at flying over the beast. But when it became Lil-Lil's turn, she slipped. She grabbed hold of Ares' right horn with both arms and tried to hold on, but when he began running over her feet and legs, she screamed and let go. He gouged her with his horns, throwing her dead body up into the air several times and then trampled her into the ground to make sure. He stood by Lil-Lil's body and dared anyone to come get it. The drums became silent.

Khan jumped down into the arena from his seat by the king. Lifting his hand, he said,

“The sacrifice is made. You!” He pointed to the three girls. “Go back to your cage. I will deal with you later.”

The girls didn't move. All they could hear was the roaring of the crowd. But Ares did move. He charged Khan who drew out his sword. Just as Ares would have rammed him, Khan stood aside and raised his sword. He let it sink between the shoulder blades of the bull. Ares slumped. His tongue hung out as he bellowed and licked the dry ground. Next, Khan took his sword, and with one fast swoop, cut off Ares' head.

Khan held up the head to the crowd. The crowd roared. Khan then took the sword and carved out a hole in the bottom of the head, slipping the bloody mass onto his own head. The stomping of the crowd doubled the noise as they cried “Minotaur! Minotaur! Minotaur!” The shouting and stomping went in sync with the drumming. It was hypnotic. The three girls felt planted where they stood and remained silent. Khan turned slowly. He would have fun with them.

He chased Sira, caught her and raped her. Throwing her to the earth, he went after Lic-Lak. When he raped her, Egyptus screamed. She searched for Khan's sword. He had dropped it by the bull. She ran, picked it up and sped towards the half-man, half-bull. She would kill it. She yelled and jumped, throwing her full weight into the sword. Her feet made an arc over and above the monster while she twisted her lithe body to keep facing him. The sword swung at his neck.

As the blade swung down in an arc towards Khan's neck, Khan swiftly caught Egyptus by her sword hand, slammed her in the chest with his other hand, let go, and she fell to the

Earth on her back. It knocked the wind out of her, and when she returned to consciousness, she found an ugly beast with a bull's head and the body of a man on top of her breathing hard. To her surprise, she was connected to him like two dogs in heat. He was holding her wrists and bull blood dripped down onto her face. She shook her head, but it kept coming. She tasted it in her mouth. From a gaping mouth a giant bloody dead tongue like a giant sea slug hung out. Two large black eyes stared at her from the bull's skull. Khan's vicious grin shown from within the bull's gaping mouth.

“It was I who killed Napsut, not the boy. I grabbed her foot in the dark and pulled her down from the rock then stabbed her.”

Realizing what Khan had said, she screamed and screamed and screamed, “Napsut! Napsut! Napsut!” She was powerless to do anything. The weight of the world was on her. It was like an earthquake in which she was caught under a building and crushed. She couldn't breathe. Her screaming had let out all her air, but she couldn't pass out, and she couldn't feel anything but this huge mountain of anger. She was a trapped animal frothing at the mouth, growling and snapping this way and that way. All she wanted was to kill that beast on top of her, but she couldn't reach anything with her mouth. She jerked her head and barked a few times, whimpered and then fainted.

* * *

Four men came from under the stadium and dragged away the bull. That night there was a feast. The bull was cooked in a pit with coals and was very tender. Everyone ate meat and got drunk, especially Egyptus, but not at the festivities. She she had slipped away, went

to the temple, found a large urn of barley wine, went into a dark alley and got dead drunk. She never knew how she got into her own bed, but when she woke in the morning, the night remained in her eyes. A light had gone out. There were no stars in her eyes, no tears, just emptiness. She lay in bed the whole day. Her parents nor the maids could arouse her, not even Mitz-Ra. Her soul had been stolen.

* * *

As Egyptus lay in her bed, her only thoughts were of Napsut.

“When I was young,” she thought, “I had always been agile and bright, and knew how to improve my talent. I was not an ugly girl, but wasn't a beauty like Napsut. I made up for that in friendliness and caring for others. Yet, it was hard for me to make friends. The other children made fun of me whenever I started bouncing up and down or doing flip-flops and somersaults. If only I hadn't done it all the time, maybe they would have liked me. Even so, I did acquire a small following when I walked on the backs of the cows and rode them.

“Napsut was envious me, admired me, wishing she could be like me. Maybe if Napsut hadn't been so clumsy she would never had befriended me.

“I remember the day I caught this little frizz-head with a wide white-toothed grin staring at me from underneath a bush. I asked her, “Would you like to come join me?” She nodded her head yes. I said, “I'll teach you.” And I did. I taught Napsut to become confident in herself by showing her how to do the flip-flops and somersaults and walking on the backs of cows.

“When Napsut was able to do that with ease, one day I ran away, jumping from one

cow to the other, laughing. Instead of scaring Napsut, this broke all the self-doubt in her mind. Because of her attachment to me, Napsut automatically followed, jumping from one cow to the next laughing gleefully. We two were so excited that they became fast friends. We were often seen hugging and kissing and jumping up and down in an embrace.

“All the other children envied us. A small group of them threw stones and sticks at us until Grandfather Noah reprimanded them. But they still would not be our friends.

“Having a common enemy became fun. We would run, scream and hide from the children that didn't like us. Sometimes we would run and leap over their heads, laugh, and run away to our hiding place in an empty cave.

“I remember how soft Napsut was. We would lie together at night with our arms around each other under the stars, pet each other, tell ghost stories and giggle.

“I miss Napsut!” Egyptus sobbed.

“It would have been very hard for me to leave Napsut. If my father hadn't whisked me away in the early hours of the morning when I was still asleep, I would have run to Napsut and held onto her for dear life. When I realized that my family was going away for good and never coming back, I cried and tried to run away and swim back across the lake, back to my friend. But Mother held me and wouldn't let me go until we were so far away that it was impossible to return.

“Mother hadn't been mean. No, she soothed soothed me. I remember she said, 'Is it true you are very close friends?'

“ 'Yes, Mama,' I told her. I had to wipe the tears off my face. And she said, 'Then can

anything in all the wide heavens keep you two apart?'

“I remember that camel rock us back and forth. It was comforting. Then I said 'No, Mama.' I sat up straight and said, 'Nothing can separate us!'

“When my uncles went back and captured the girls and brought Napsut back with them, I believed my mother and was very happy. But when Napsut was killed by Khan, I never believed another word her mother said ... not one word!

“Over the years Mother and I drifted apart. I was filled with resentment. I still am. I couldn't stand the memories of Napsut. When I found out about barley wine, and that only the priests could use it to gain visions, I went into the temples and sneaked some. When I was found out, Mother and Father and I had a big argument, but they backed down and allowed me to have the barley wine. They had the priests bring it to me because I was a princess ... a priestess by royal birth.

“They did everything they could to make me happy. They even went along with me being overly affectionate with Mitz-Ra. But when I came into puberty, I had to be watched. Boys became exciting. I loved to lie with them and pet them, get drunk with them, but never have sex. Mother never believed me, even when I told her. She called me a whore, so I did all I could to gain a reputation of being a drunken whore. Everyone wanted to have sex with the princess, but they were all disappointed in the end. I laughed at them! All men are animals.

“I always made fun of Comrase, calling her a cow, and giving her the name of Hathor. But this chubby maiden, driven by the want of love become a true drunken whore, but she

befriended me. Yes, we became friends. We even hugged and kissed once, but we were drunk. I can never have any friends. The pain of losing Napsut hurts too much. It's like an abscessed tooth ready to burst.

“I found I could train girls in acrobatics, and I picked some good students, but the memory of Napsut began floating to the surface. I had to drink more to make it go away. I got drunk every night. I couldn't sleep any other way. Oh! I got so angry when my students were taken away from me and sent to the Temple of Agriculture to be temple whores. I boiled when I and Lil-Lil, Sari, and Lic-Lak were caught. I sat in prison for days and fumed. Then when that hairy beast showed its face, the abscess exploded. Now here I am all unwound. There's nothing left but bitterness ... there's nothing left. I can't even cry. Then why does my heart shudder so much? I'm cold.”

Chapter Six

Khan was proud of what he did and went to the king to brag.

“Your architecture worked magnificently,” Khan exclaimed and clapped his hands.

“The crowd responded as I expected. They loved me!” He patted the king on the back and laughed.

“Anyone with the knowledge of acoustics could do the same.” Ham popped a grape into his mouth and offered Khan the plate.

Khan put a cluster into his mouth and pulled out the stem then screwed up his face.

“Sour!” He handed the plate back to the king. “It is time for wine!”

A man servant overheard and brought Khan a jug, whereupon he downed it in one gulp. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and said, “More!”

Khan turned back to Ham and whispered loudly, “How are the experiments coming under the temple?”

“Without the book ... ” Ham sat on the lumpy bed. “ ... I'm afraid we can go just so far with the information we have, before discovering for ourselves what the gods knew about traveling to the heavens.”

“We will work on two fronts,” Khan said, sitting beside Ham. With Khan's weight the bed became a lever and almost launched Ham into the air. “You discover what the gods knew. I will advise you from time to time, and ... we will build up our army to invade Sippar.”

After talking awhile about plans to travel into the heavens using a shem supporting a ben-ben propelled by sound alone, Khan turned to a more tender subject.

“How is Egyptus?”

Afra, walking down the stairs, answered him. “She is very depressed in spirit.”

Ham and Khan turned to look at her.

“What do you expect she would be like?” Afra sat on a stool next to them and joined in on a refreshing drink of wine.

Ham answered, showing the palm of his hand, “She had to be punished.”

“But did you see how she flew over that bull?” Afra took another drink.

“It was magical!” Khan smiled and clapped.

“I knew she was athletic,” Ham added, “but I didn't know she was that good.”

“We can use that in the festivals,” Khan said. He would take every opportunity to keep the people hypnotized with entertainment. “How did you like my head dress?”

“It was obscene.” Afra turned away from the giant and sipped her drink.

Khan laughed.

* * *

“I want him out of my house!” Egyptus yelled. “Or I leave!”

“How can we ask him to leave?” Mitz-Ra demanded. “We owe him our lives and our civilization. Our father owes him his kingship. He's the one that knows how to run things.”

“He is a beast! He will destroy us all!”

Mitz-Ra approached Egyptus with outstretched hands.

“Don't touch me!” She folded her arms and stood there like a queen commanding an army.

Mitz-Ra had come into her bedroom to try to reason with her and be affectionate and calm her down, but she wouldn't let him. No one else had been able to talk to her. He shrugged his shoulders and turned to leave.

“Where are you going?” Egyptus asked, arms still folded. “I'm not done with you.”

Mitz-Ra turned around. “Who do you think you are? You're not the ruler of this house.”

“I need your help.” She stood there like a goddess. Her fine linen dress with its pleats and drawn thread-work of thin vertical columns, half reveled, half hid all her charms.

“What do you want?” Mitz-Ra acquiesced.

“You have friends you can trust?” she pointed at him while keeping her arm close to her breast. “The ones that train with you?”

“Yes, why?”

“I want you to gather them and meet me in the Temple of Light at midnight.”

Mitz-Ra folded his arms and frowned with the right side of his mouth. “What are you going to do?”

“I need protection ... from *him*.”

“You mean Khan.”

“Yes.”

“I can protect you.” He offered his right hand.

“Don't!” She drew a dagger. “You didn't protect me in the arena! No one did!” she yelled.

“We couldn't. We were all entranced by some magical power.”

“Khan's power!” She leaned over to emphasize her words. “He and our loving father. They don't care about anyone else. They have an agenda to get to Heaven and leave the rest of us here to rot.”

“I don't know about that.” Mitz-Ra put his hands on his hips. “I leave religion to other men. I am a soldier.” He sighed and emphasized, “I *will* protect you. I *can*.”

“No!” She put her hands on her hips in imitation of her brother. “Now will you promise me those men?”

“I will speak to them.”

“You have to make them come.” Tears flowed down her cheeks. “I will lie with them if I have to.”

Mitz-Ra approached her. “They will come just to behold your beauty.” He put his hands on her shoulders.

“Don't!” She began trembling and dropped the dagger.

“You are my sister. I love you.”

“Please don't.” She lost control, melted into his arms and embraced him in a passionate kiss.

He held her in his arms. “Where will you go?”

“Just meet me tonight. I will go to the temple until I can think of something.”

* * *

Egyptus sat in her father's temple library with its pots of clay and stacks of clay tablets. She read from *The Rites of Ascension* her father had translated and found passages on how to gain power among men. “And it came to pass in those days ...” There were secret oaths and covenants made among families and friends long ago before the flood. She would do the same to keep people close to her who would protect her. Her finger ran across the incised images as she read the oaths and covenants. Chills ran up her spine. First, she would seek out Ptra-Pah, her father's closest priest.

* * *

Ptra-Pah had been eating supper with his wife and children when his servant brought Egyptus into his house. He left his table, wiping his mouth with his hand, and pardoning himself. He welcomed the king's daughter and was surprised that she needed his help. He offered her a seat and she began talking very fast.

“This is most unusual,” the priest said, assessing the situation. “You should bring your father into this.”

“My father is part of the problem.” Egyptus noticed she was wringing her hands and quickly sat on them.

“I can't do this without your father's permission.” He had brought some barley wine with him and offered some to Egyptus as he himself took a drink.

“No, thank you.” She really wanted some, but she needed a clear head tonight. “All I want you to do is officiate for me in these ancient ceremonies. I have read of knights in their

shining armor. I have heard the songs of glory all my life. Now I need to organize them for protection. It requires a priest, and you are the only one I can trust.”

“No, no. You can't trust me.” Ptra-Pah leaned over and offered her the drink again. She refused and he scratched his bald head. “I will have to report this to your father. You know that. I cannot go against his will. Yes, we have done secret things in the past with your family, but I have included everyone.”

Egyptus left feeling embarrassed and resentful. She would liked to have cut his throat, but she didn't want to kill the whole family. She would just have to leave sooner than expected. She didn't tell the priest that she wanted to use him that very night.

She went back to the temple, entered the library, took the necessary tablets, then returned home. While everyone was downstairs, she went into her room where she packed a small bag and escaped out the window.

* * *

Egyptus sat on the white alabaster altar waiting for the men to show up. When they arrived, she had them place four high-backed chairs overlaid with gold around the altar in the four cardinal directions. There were large brass pots on each side of the altar, north and south which were used as torches. A clay nameplate was placed on each of the four seats. They read Mitz-Ra, Put, Kana'an and Kish. Then she had the men line up on the west side, facing the altar.

Egyptus walked by each of them, inspecting their strength and the character of their eyes. She placed her hand on the chest of each soldier and shoved. One took a step back.

“Watch it soldier,” she said through clenched teeth.

She went to the end and found someone who was too frail. She pushed on him and he almost fell. She turned to Mitz-Ra.

“What is he doing here? He looks like a girl!”

“He's very swift and agile,” Mitz-Ra said.

She grimaced. “So are my girls.”

Egyptus backed up behind the chair where Put's name had been placed.

“I don't know what Mitz-Ra told you to get you here, but you cannot lie with me ...”

There was a shuffle of laughter among the men. “... or even touch me on the penalty of death!”

The men stopped smiling and straightened their shoulders.

“When I was a girl I admired the beekeeper and how he took care of his bees. The honey was sweet, and he said that it was a life-giving substance. I've studied much about the bees and how there are always drones surrounding the queen bee to protect it. They also die for her if the occasion requires. I hope that will not be the case for you. I hope you are trained well enough to keep your lives ... as I call upon you to protect me. I don't want you dying off.”

There was a small amount of laughter. They weren't taking her seriously enough.

“Quiet!” she growled.

“These are the best pick of the men, my love,” Mitz-Ra defended.

“From now on, I am your queen. My emblem is the bee.” She pulled out her dagger.

“If you don't take me seriously, you will find my stinger in your breast.”

“Don't think she won't do it, either. You saw her confront the bull in the arena.” Mitz-Ra smiled with his hands on his hips and his chest extended.

“Do you understand why I have brought you here?” Egyptus peered into each of their eyes. There was no answer.

“You are to become my knights. You will fight for me and protect me, and do anything that is required of you.” She jerked her head back and forth as she talked to emphasize what she was saying. “Is that clear?”

Each of them said, “Yes.”

“You will take a solemn oath to my family and to me that you will do as we ask or your throats will be slit from ear to ear. Is that clear?”

“Yes,” the men said solemnly.

“If any of you breathe out anything that is said in this meeting or give away any of the signs and symbols I will show you here tonight, your life will not only be forfeit, but your guts will be strewn onto the streets.” She eyed them again and then said, “Let's do this.”

Egyptus had memorized the clay tablets bearing the oaths and covenants. She took one man at a time, walking him from one chair to the other, starting with the east chair, pronouncing these words:

“Mitz-Ra, the image of man; his name is Elkenah, Enki, Hadad, Ishkur, a fist that holds the lightening and the storm. He is the east. This is his sign.” She grabbed his hand and shook it in token, making the sign that went with it. He repeated it back to her, then she took

him to the other chair.

“Put, the image of the ape, whose name is Libnah, Anu, Amurru, and Martu, a spirit of innocence and a shepherd. He is the west. This is his sign.” She likewise gave him the token and sign.

“Kana'an, the image of the jackal; his names are Mahmackrah, Enlil, Anatolia and holds the key to the Tablets of Destiny here in Nippur. He is the north. This is his sign.” She gave that to him.

“Kish, the image of the hawk; he is Korash, Ninurta, the slayer. He makes war with his brother. He is the south. This is his sign.” She gave him the last token and sign.

Then she took each man, having given him the tokens and signs, and had him kneel before her with arm raised to the square and take an oath that was written on the tablets, committing him to honesty and fidelity, showing different ways of execution by cutting himself with her dagger across his skin, letting the blood drip onto the altar.

She wiped her dagger clean by first pouring holy water on it and then wiping it on her apron which she took off and burned in one of the pots situated on each side of the altar.

“There is one other thing.” She peered at each one of them. “This is your first commandment. You shall follow me out into the wilderness. We will find a place for my hive ... all except one of you.” She had made her way to the lean one. “Place this one on the altar and hold him down.”

There was a scuffle, but four men took the one who hadn't been able to withstand Egyptus' shove and placed him on the altar. His eyes went white, gripped with fear. Egyptus

took a scythe, leaning against the altar, and cut out his heart. She held it in her hands until it stopped beating. “No one who will fall behind can follow me.”

* * *

Everyone remained silent as they helped Egyptus over the wall and down onto the ground. They walked northwest towards the Euphrates River. When they got there, three boats waited. They crossed swiftly.

“Where we are going?” Mitz-Ra asked. “We all agreed to follow you, but we are puzzled.”

As the waves lapped against the boat and the full moon reflected itself in hundreds of tiny wavelets across the river, Egyptus said, “I consulted with the oracle in the Temple of Light before I planned this venture. She said we would find my future to the west upon the banks of a large river, that it would be my habitation forever.”

“Then it must be the Euphrates.”

The boat rocked back and forth slightly as four of the knights paddled in unison.

“No. It isn't. She said that we must go to the land of the date palm and beyond. I consulted the holy book, at least the clay tablets Father has written, and they say that the land is west of these two great rivers the Tigris and Euphrates and west of a triangle with many mountains where the gods extracted ore for their machines. It is beyond that. It flows out into the fountain of all waters like a giant fan.”

“A delta, then.”

“Yes, a delta.” Egyptus took a jar from her bag. Opening it, she dipped in her finger

and pulled it out covered with honey. “Only the royal family can eat this. She licked her finger and put it into Mitz-Ra's mouth. He sucked on it pleurably until the boat stopped. They were across.

* * *

When Khan found that Egyptus had again left the city and with a guard of his choice men with her, he became enraged.

“I want her back now!” he yelled, pounding his fist on the bloody altar where they found one of his bastard sons.

Ham who had come with him rubbed his hands in joy knowing what was going on with his daughter. He was pleased that she would be kept safe. He knew Mitz-Ra would protect her, but if, as Khan had said, there were others that left with her, he was not worried.

Khan confronted him. “What are you happy about?” He held his fists to his side, his muscles in his chest and arms rippling in anticipation to action.

Ham bowed slightly and frowned. “I'm not happy. Not one bit. My daughter has misbehaved badly. I hope you will bring her back. I will reprimand her.”

Khan growled. He left the Temple of Light and recruited ten of his soldiers at the Temple of Agriculture (Temple of Darkness) and sent them after Egyptus. “Bring her and Mitz-Ra back alive. Kill the rest.” Kish led the contingent in anger against his brother.

End of Book Two

Book Three

Sippar

Chapter One

Shem felt a wave of fatigue pass over him. He had to take a deep breath as he ushered Nimrod into his home.

“We live in a house,” Nimrod said as he stuck his head into the darkness of the tent. There were lamps hanging, but each lamp had only one flame. The night sky gave more light with its innumerable stars and bright moon than what these little flickers gave. He waited to enter until his eyes adjusted.

“Go ahead,” Shem urged. “It is warm and comfortable inside. And yes, some of us do live in houses, but as for me and my family, we have grown accustomed to living in tents. We are shepherds, so we carry our home with us wherever we go.”

Nimrod entered, but his boyish imagination could think of all kinds of things that could go wrong. He could be hit on the head and then slaughtered for the night's meal. He could be grabbed and stuffed into a cage and become a pet. Yet, he took courage and remembered how kind Shem and his sons had appeared so far.

He saw a gray haired woman standing in the middle of the tent covered from head to foot in a loose fitting tunic, and her smile was like a boat in a sea of wrinkles.

Shem greeted his wife with a kiss and introduced Nimrod. “He will be spending a time with us.”

He turned to Nimrod. “We are all family here. Look, there is a bed already made for you.”

“We don't sleep on the floor,” Nimrod remarked as he stared down at the pallet and pillows.

Shem put his hand on the lad's shoulder. “If we had to carry high beds with us when we moved, it would kill our camels. Try the bed. It is soft.”

Nimrod pulled off his shoes and coat and laid his tired body on the pallet. He was asleep as soon as he lay his head on the pillow.

Shem embraced his wife, Aysha'lib, and squeezed her a little bit. “Please bring me a cup of wine. I am exhausted. The trip down to Nippur was quick and hard on an old man.”

“Not too old to give me children.” She smiled slyly. “I'm not fat, you know.”

“Another one?” Shem smiled and descended upon their bed with a long sigh.

Aysha, as she was called, poured a small cup of wine and knelt down and handed it to him. He took one gulp and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Ah!” He breathed deeply and pulled a pillow under his head. “Thank you. We will celebrate tomorrow.” He closed his eyes and was fast asleep. Aysha leaned over, picked up the cup and kissed his temple. After putting the cup away, she too lay down and slept, wrapping her arms around her old lover.

* * *

Arphaxad brought the book they had taken from Ham to Shem as he sat on his saddle in the front of his tent. Everyone in the immediate family gathered around as Shem leafed through the brass plates.

“It is indeed what it says it is.” He looked around at his sons and their families. “It is a

book in which the principles of life are given. If they are lived, you will get to Heaven to where the gods live. It tells the story of the Son of God and his rival brother and the creation of man who was planted in the Garden of Eden. Look.” He turned the book around so they could all see the engravings and pictures. “It also tells of the fall of the man and his wife and the result. They had a family.” He settled the heavy plates back on his lap. “There are depictions of angels instructing Adam and there are lists of commandments that were given him. It gives our relationship to God and to the Son of God, and it warns us against the snake who thought to usurp the authority over this world which rightfully belongs to the Son. I know they were both sons as we are all children of God, but I refer to the chosen, the Lamb who was to be sacrificed. That is why, and it explains it right here ...” He pointed his finger to the place on the plates, “ ... that the sacrifices we place upon the altar are symbols of the sacrifice of the Son of God in the meridian of time.”

Nimrod had never heard these words, and he stood in the door of the tent enthralled. He heard what Shem called the Gospel or the Word of God. Then someone caught his eye. He glanced at a girl standing near Shem who must be her grandfather. He felt his heart leap and skip a beat. He quickly turned away as she glanced at him. A connection between the two had taken place. He slipped back into the tent to listen to those strange words, but his mind kept going back to the girl. She must have been about eight years old. He was a year older. He peeked out of the tent door. She looked soft, still covered with baby fat, and with clothes. He wrinkled his face. It was true. Everyone here wore a loose fitting tunic, even when it was hot. He couldn't understand it. He was bare chested and wore a short skirt. Only

their faces, feet and hands showed.

Shem concluded his teaching for the day. He said to Aysha, “Now we have the Holy Book, and I can teach our children the words of the gods. We will be stronger than Ham and his vizier Khan.”

He looked back to the tent and called Nimrod over to him. “Sit.” Nimrod sat in front of him and Shem handed him the plates. “There is a box in the tent next to my bed. When you're done with them, please place them in the box.”

Nimrod's eyes grew large and round. He took the book and anxiously went from one plate to the next, devouring each engraved picture, running his finger over the figures.

“What are you doing?” a soft voice intoned.

“Huh?” Nimrod looked up to see the girl he had been staring at earlier. He stopped breathing, held in trance. He couldn't rise, much less run. How could such beauty exist except it destroy a man?

The girl approached and asked again, “What are you doing? Isn't that the Holy Book?”

Nimrod decided it wouldn't hurt to answer. “Yes.”

She stooped down. “Can I see it?”

“Yes.”

She sat down beside him and rested her chin on her fists. At first she stared at the book and then seeing that the silly boy did nothing but look at her, she said, “Turn the page.”

“Oh ... yes.” He turned the page and she smiled.

They sat there in silence looking at the book with the girl's head on his shoulder.

Every now and then he let her touch the engravings.

When El-Am walked by and saw the two with the Holy Book, he hadn't known that Shem had given it to the boy. He jerked his head, said "Miriam," and the girl got up and left.

Nimrod rose, clumsily trying to heft the book. El-Am took it from him. Nimrod then felt lighter than air and stumbled. He bowed his head. "My Lord."

"Did my father give you these plates?" El-Am took the blue felt cover that had been left on the camel's saddle and placed it over the book.

"Yes, my Lord." Nimrod folded his arms and staggered, trying to keep on his feet.

El-Am thought a moment. Maybe the boy was telling the truth, but he wanted the plates in their rightful place. "Wait here." He took the plates into the tent and placed them in their box then came out and knelt on one knee in front of the boy. He lifted Nimrod's chin with one finger. "Have you eaten?"

"No."

El-Am rose and placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Then come with me. We'll feed you, then there's work to be done."

Work? Nimrod hadn't worked a day in his life. That was for men or for the peasantry. As they walked over to another tent, he asked, "What work, Lord?"

"There are no lords here. You will call me Uncle."

After eating a bowl of pottage, a dish with lamb and lentils, El-Am took Nimrod to a building site where the boys were busy clearing it, picking up pieces of lumber and brick. He followed the others, hauling baskets away and dumping them into holes where houses had

been. He saw Miriam off in the distance, puffed out his chest and put a little more effort into his work.

* * *

Nimrod came to the town's well at the end of an arduous day. He felt like he was dying. Working all day made him want to scream. He thought of escaping and returning to his mother. She would let him play with the other children. *I don't know what to do. I might get lost*, he thought, wiping the sweat from his brow. He stood leaning against the wall that hid the well from the wind and panted.

Then he saw one reason to stay. He saw Miriam walking toward him. She wore a red and black dress with red borders and covered with red designs lined with gold. Part of the dress wrapped around her head like a scarf, but he could see it was all one piece of material. She walked very carefully, holding a clay jug atop her head. It was almost as tall as herself. An older girl walking with her. She wore the popular white tunic with a hood making her look like a ghost. It seemed two sizes too large and flapped about her in the breeze, allowing her dark hair to escape, half covering her face.

As Miriam approached the well, she recognized Nimrod. "You look thirsty. Let me get you some water." She went on the other side of the wall to the well, which was a hole cut into a large square granite stone. Picking up a rope, she tied it to one of the handles of her water pot and let it down several feet and into the water. When she tried to haul it back up, she turned to her friend. "Mia, I need help." The other girl pulled with her so Miriam could think she was doing most of the work and grunted as she pulled it out of the well.

Miriam took the metal cup she carried with her on a rope she wore around her waist, filled it with water from the jug and handed it to Nimrod. The water was cool and quenched his thirst. He wanted more, but he knew that water was meant for her family. He returned the cup and said, "Thank you."

Nimrod leaned on the wall with his elbows and stared out into the desert. He could see the river, palm trees, and people far away, working at who knew what through the heat waves. The red sun was huge. He didn't know if it was engulfing the earth or if the earth was engulfing it. He tried to ignore Miriam. She made him nervous. He wanted to hold her close to him and that frightened him. He imagined she was the sun enveloping him under her spell.

"What are you staring at?" Miriam asked as Mia placed the jug on Miriam's head.

"I was just thinking," Nimrod said staring straight ahead.

"About what?" She squinted and walked back around the wall holding onto the jug with both hands.

"About you."

"About me?" She started up the small incline that had led to the well.

"Yes. I thought about going home, but ..."

"What?" She turned slightly to face him.

He turned to look at her. "I might lose a friend."

Miriam giggled and walked carefully back up the road with Mia.

Nimrod sighed as he watched her go.

* * *

Nimrod met Hathor while cleaning up building sites. He was slightly taller and a year older. He wore a white cloth around his black head of hair and a short white linen tunic tied with a rope like most of the boys.

As they were carrying baskets to unload in the fill, he asked, "Why do you wear so much clothing? Doesn't it make you hot?"

Nimrod wore only the short skirt he came with. Shem had given him a tunic, but he ignored it.

Hathor threw his load into the hole and Nimrod followed with his.

"We like to keep modest. Besides, it keeps us cool."

"What's that?" Nimrod swung his basket with his arm as they walked back toward the building site.

"What?"

"Modest."

"You know," Hathor said with an upturned palm, "you feel shame when you're naked."

"You do?" Nimrod chuckled. "Babies don't. Why should I?"

"You'll find out when you reach puberty. My older brother Shamesh became afraid of girls. He couldn't stand to look at them." Hathor bounced his basket against his knees as they arrived at the site.

"I love looking at girls. They are so beautiful," Nimrod said, smiling, as he bent down to fill his basket again.

“Well, you shouldn't. You will find only trouble with their families.” They loaded their baskets and headed back to the fill. “Listen to Grandfather. He will help you understand.”

* * *

Nimrod waited again at the well and watched the sunset. He thought about how different the people of Nippur were from the people here at Sippar. They had a different countenance, and they all worked together on projects whether it was building houses or working in the fields. They were a happy people. He didn't see a central market where people bought and sold, yet, everyone seemed to have food and the things they needed.

People at Nippur were sullen, garish, braggers, and drunkards. They had friends and families, though their families worked separately for the most part. They were selfish and complained a lot if someone got more than they had. They were always in a race to get more than their neighbors. Everyone was poor except for the royal family. He didn't see any of that here in Sippar.

Miriam and Mia showed up right on time just before the sunset. Miriam took the pot from her head and skipped over to Nimrod.

“Don't be too long,” Mia said as she went around to the well to fill her jug.

“What you doing? Thinking again?” Miriam looked up at Nimrod squinting against the sun.

“I was just wondering,” Nimrod said, resting his chin on his hand, “why your people are so happy. They're so different from my people back down in Nippur. They have to drink wine to be happy. And look at Sippar. There's really no city except what they're building

now. Everyone's living in tents.”

“Well look at that.” Mia pointed to the great white wall that stretched from river to river.

“Yes, look at that,” Miriam echoed.

“It took ten years for our fathers to build.” Mia had filled her jug and took Miriam's and filled hers. “Now they're building a city because they can defend it.”

“From who?” Nimrod wondered, staring at the great white wall that was awash of orange from the sunset.

“From you,” Miriam laughed, pushing Nimrod in the stomach with her finger.

“Not me,” Nimrod objected. “I didn't do anything. And I'm already here.”

“Not from you,” Mia said, placing Miriam's pot on her head. “Your people. They attacked once before just as predicted. Grandfather said they will do it again.”

When the two girls turned to go, Nimrod followed. “How does he know?”

“He is a prophet,” Miriam said proudly. “He talks to God.”

“Which one?” Nimrod asked, raising the corner of his mouth. He kicked a rock out of the way.

“The father of all the gods,” Mia said staring straight ahead.

“Oh, Anu.”

“We call him Eloï,” Mia said.

Arriving at Miriam's house, he found that Mia lived there also. “I should have guessed you were sisters.”

“She is my sister,” Miriam said as Mia helped her set her jug down. “Only, she had different father and mother.”

Nimrod followed the two girls into their tent without asking.

“My father and mother were killed in an accident while coming down from the mountains.” Mia set the jugs in another room separated by a curtain.

“My parents adopted her,” Miriam said as she sat on the floor.

A woman came from the other room and slapped her hands together. “Miriam! Help with dinner.”

Miriam jumped up and tugged on her mother's dress. “Mommy, Mommy. Can Nimrod stay for dinner?”

She glanced at Nimrod sitting where Miriam had sat. “He is already in our home. If he doesn't run away, yes, he will eat with us.”

Nimrod noticed that her mother's accent was stronger than others he knew, but especially from those at Nippur. Her hair was blonde, almost white, with eyes the color of the sky at noon day. Her name was Tiama.

“Nimrud, if you will stay,” she bowed to Nimrod. “You will please wash outside the door. You will find a bowl with water.”

Oh, yes, thought Nimrod as he rose to leave, *these people wash a lot.* “Thank you, Mistress.”

“You may call me Aunt.” She bowed again.

Nimrod bowed in return to be polite and went outside. After washing, he moved to go

inside but was turned back. “We will eat under the tabernacle with the families,” Miriam's mother directed.

Nimrod was led to a large table (a rug covered with all kinds of food) laid out under a tent with its sides rolled up. Torches surrounded the area and hanging lamps spread light across the table. Spices that would make a strong man swoon wafted the air. At least three families sat around as prayers were said. He was surprised that they were in almost a different language. It must have been one of the older languages from the before-time of the flood.

Everyone talked and ate at the same time. Miriam served him. His plate, made of a flat round bread, was covered with lamb, lentils, corns of wheat mixed with cucumber and mint, and barley cakes. The wine was freshly pressed, and no one got drunk. Afterward, he felt half asleep and had to be led back to Shem's tent.

He did have a lively conversation with Miriam, both learning what the other did all day. He wondered if these people ever played, but after the night meal, they all rose up and danced. Everyone danced, adults and children. Miriam and Mia had to show him how to join in the circle. By the time he contacted his bed, he was sound asleep, dreaming of Miriam.

Chapter Two

Nimrod attended reading from the Holy Book each morning before breakfast. He learned to keep himself dressed in the proper manner, be a help to his neighbor, speak kindly to family members, and worship God, by attending the sacrifices and to pray. He didn't know at first what to pray for. He had all he would ever need living in Sippar. So, he gave thanks for all his blessings and asked for only two things, the safety of his family and friends and the hand of Miriam. But he didn't expect God to bless him without he himself doing a little work. Every time he passed the tent of Miriam's family, he placed a gift at the door, not for Miriam, but for her mother. The Holy Book said that to woo a woman, you must first woo her mother. It was full of little wisdoms.

The day came when Shem thought it would be useful for Nimrod to come along and learn to care for the sheep. Shem watched him constantly and saw that he was respectful and did his duty. He would accept any assignment given him and fulfill it faithfully, and he was always happy but not boisterous (at least not around the adults).

When the mountain snow caps had melted, camels were loaded with tents and supplies, and everyone headed for the hills with the sheep following behind the goats.

As he walked by Shem's side, Nimrod asked, "Why are so many of us leaving to tend sheep? Who will protect the town if Khan comes with his army?"

"We have left the natives there," Shem said. "There are enough of them to protect the town. They have the wall."

“What if they are overwhelmed? Will not the Holy Book get taken? Is it hidden well enough?” Nimrod noticed Shem's walking staff. It was gnarled dark wood but straight and polished so that it reflected the light of the sun like a mirror. He wanted one like that.

“Don't worry about the Holy Book.” Shem bent his head down to look at the boy.

Nimrod wondered if all prophets had long shaggy hair and beards of white.

“Why do you think we took so many men with us?” Shem smiled as if he had a secret.

“The Holy Book.” Nimrod got excited. He knew it was safe. “You brought it with you.”

“Of course. I can't be without its daily wisdom. It is like a compass that shows you which way to go.” Shem kicked a rock out of the way and sent it tumbling down the side of the hill. The sheep answered “Naaa. Naaa.” They didn't like being disturbed.

“What is a compass?” Nimrod took a deep breath, grabbed his nose, and popped his ears. He wasn't used to climbing and changing altitude.

“It hasn't been invented yet,” Arphaxad joined in the conversation as he came to walk next to his father. He was probably worried that his father was getting old. “But he tells me it is like the north star. It is a piece of iron that constantly points north, and if you know where north is, you know where everything else is.”

“Oh. Then how do you know ...” Nimrod was perplexed. He looked back and forth from Shem to Arphaxad. “ ... about things that haven't been made yet?”

El-Am strode up and slapped Nimrod on the back. “He is a prophet of the living god, just like our grandfather Noah. He talks with God and walks with him. He shows him many

things.

“Even how to fly in the air?”

The three men laughed as if to say, “What a silly thing.”

“Birds fly,” Arphaxad said.

“But angels move on a beam of light,” El-Am added.

“That is enough,” Shem said. “Angels are holy, not to be confused with birds.

Although, we should treat all creatures with respect.”

“I remember,” Nimrod announced. “Just the other day, I heard you read from the Holy Book. It said that God created all things, and if so, then are they not holy that have been touched by the hand of God? Besides, I was asking about the air ship I saw in the Holy Book. I think Khan and Ham were working to build one.”

Everyone took a deep breath and remained silent for a moment. Nimrod had struck a chord of disharmony. He hadn't known, but then Shem said, “You are a wise boy. Just keep reading the Holy Book. It explains all things.”

They walked on until near sunset when they made camp in a low valley near a stream that fed the Euphrates.

The shepherds put away their walking sticks and took up willow sticks shaped with a hook on one end. Nimrod thought it a wonderful idea. He was assigned to watch over a section of the flock on a certain hillside facing west. Other shepherds took their positions all around the flock.

El-Am approached to give Nimrod instruction and give him an assignment. He was

caught carving himself a walking stick.

“What will you do when a lion comes? Bash him on the head?”

“Yes, Uncle.” Nimrod took hold of the end of the rod and pretended to do some bashing. “I will kill any lion that tries to harm the sheep.”

El-Am sat on a rock and brought out a sling. “I’m afraid your lion will be long gone before you get close enough to do that.” He lifted the sling to show his nephew. “Here.” Nimrod took it with a puzzled expression. “This will kill a lion from a long distance away.”

It was evident that Nimrod had never seen one before.

“Have you been too distracted by your work to notice other youth practicing with their slings?”

El-Am rose and took his own sling, dipped his hand in a pouch he wore on his waist and retrieved a small smooth stone. “Watch.” He put the stone in the middle of the sling, a piece of leather onto which two tethers were tied at each end. He let the sling hang and then twirled it around until it got up to speed and let go of one tether, holding to the other. The stone fled and hit a rock fifty strides away. It was the fastest thing Nimrod had ever seen.

Nimrod, excited, had to try it. He stooped down to pick up a stone.

“No,” El-Am objected. “This one.” He pointed to one that was smoother.

Nimrod picked it up, put it in the crotch of the sling, let it drop, and the stone fell out. El-Am only smiled. Nimrod tried it again until he could keep the stone in, twirled it, and let it go. It missed its target.

“Keep practicing, but away from the sheep.”

* * *

Nimrod became a responsible shepherd, able to thwart lion, bear, and wolf attacks, find lost sheep, and keep them corralled. He also learned to be kind to them up to a point. He never became acquainted with them. It wasn't his desire to become a shepherd. He had a secret desire to become a soldier like the other boys in Nippur. He often wondered how the sling would do in battle and became very proficient in using it. When he met an animal that might harm the sheep, he imagined that it was another soldier and he was in a battle and had to kill the enemy.

Winter approached. Nimrod had taken the sheep out for the third summer now, and it was time to take the sheep back to Sippar. It rained in Sippar, but never snowed. Nimrod had seen snow in the mountains and had experienced a light snow fall that melted as soon as it hit the ground, but never a real full blowing snow. He longed to stay just to experience it. Yet, he wanted more to see Miriam. When he thought of her, he was happy to go.

Having become proficient with the sling, he would show off so she would see what he could do. He knew the Holy Book said not to boast, but it was beyond his ability to control himself in that matter in her presence.

The first thing he did when he got back was to take her to the great wall. It was higher than all the trees or any house they had yet built and was sloped slightly in the back as well as the front.

“I bet I can throw a stone all the way across the wall.” He strutted in front of Miriam.

“Pride goeth before the wall,” Miriam parodied the ancient parable and then giggled.

Nimrod took up a stone, put it in his sling, motioned for Miriam to stand back, swung the sling really fast and let go. The stone indeed sailed all the way over the wall.

“Behold the proud warrior!” Nimrod spread his chest like a cock spreading its wings.

“Behold the warrior!” Echoed Miriam. “Let me try.”

She reached for the sling, but Nimrod pulled it back. “Slings are for boys.”

Miriam bent her head and pouted. She picked up a stone and threw it at his feet, almost hitting him. Then she put on the ugliest face she could think of, looked down at the ground and went stiff with her arms next to her sides.

Nimrod wasn't expecting such a response. He pressed his eyebrows down and peered at her and wondered. *Is she really hurt, or is she just playing?* He decided to repent and handed the sling out as a peace offering.

Miriam smiled, all her white teeth showing, and took the sling. She picked up a smaller stone than Nimrod had used, put it in the sling, swung it around and threw the stone all the way over the wall.

Nimrod's jaw dropped. “What?,” he said slowly.

“You mustn't tell the other boys.” She drew a half circle with her right foot and tilted her head. “We girls have a secret.”

“Where did you learn that?” He asked in alarm, putting his hands on top of his head.

“Silly.” Miriam grinned. Her eyes sparkled in the sunlight. “What do you think we girls do when you are away? Just dance?” Nimrod nodded. “No. We practice.”

Nimrod and Miriam spent the rest of the afternoon hitting targets.

“I got more than you did,” Nimrod said as they decided to head back to town.

“No you didn't. I let you win.” Miriam turned, ready to run.

Nimrod chased her, and she screamed with delight as she darted off.

Suddenly, Miriam ran into her mother who stared at her sternly. “What have you been doing all day? Why haven't you done your chores?”

Nimrod walked up with his head down. “It's my fault. I persuaded her to come see the wall.”

“We can see the wall from town. Why do you need to see it up close?” His Aunt Tiama put her hands on her hips.

“I was showing her how I could throw a stone across the wall.” Nimrod kept his head down.

Tiama touched his shoulder. “I see. Look at me.” Nimrod looked up. “I'm not angry. I am only concerned about your safety. Now go home. Dinner is almost ready. Our families are waiting.”

Nimrod held Miriam's hand as they walked back. Tiama walked behind them.

* * *

Miriam ran to where Nimrod was working.

“I heard that a girl got killed,” she said anxiously, holding her fists to her throat. “I haven't seen Mia all day.”

Nimrod put his arms around her and she buried her face in his chest. “No one knows yet. A wall fell on her, and they are still taking the stones away. She was passing by, giving

water to the workers, and it just crumbled. No one knows why. They know how to build houses in Nippur. They have many palaces and temples. People here are just shepherds.”

The two waited until the men uncovered the body and carried it away on a blanket. Everyone followed to see who it was. She was placed on a board between two saw horses. Shem came and looked at the girl. “It is Saar-Mat.”

A woman screamed, walked forward and embraced the girl. The women knelt down, threw dirt onto their heads and wailed. A man came and stood by the woman and caressed the girl's face, bent down, and kissed her forehead.

“The mother and father,” Nimrod said, squeezing Miriam's shoulder as they both looked on.

Miriam was relieved it wasn't Mia, but shed tears anyway. She had known her. “I wonder where Mia is.”

Nimrod watched the proceedings holding Miriam's hand. They saw men make a bier to carry the girl on. They used two long polls with cross pieces of gopher wood and laced the bed of it together with reeds. The body was then placed on the bier and was carried by four men. The wailing women followed next and then the whole village. They stopped at the house of the girl, took the body in, and when they returned, they were carrying something rolled up in a carpet. The parents accompanied it. Then the procession, looking like a parade of white ghosts or angels in their long white tunics and hoods, marched outside the town to the small cemetery, singing songs, chanting, and wailing all the way. Nimrod and Miriam took a parallel path, keeping a respectful distance.

A hole was dug deeply into the earth, and the bier was lowered into it. The mother and father bent over the grave and placed all the girl's possessions around her. Shem said a prayer over the grave.

“We thank our great God that he has received this lovely girl up into his bosom ... there to rest from her labors and sing in the choirs of angels. We look forward to the time when she and her parents will be reunited, never to part. We now dedicate this holy site for a place of rest and meditation for the deceased and all who come to visit until she shall come forth in the morning of the resurrection to be united with all her loved ones in the flesh. We say in the name of the Son of God, Amen.”

“What is the resurrection?” Nimrod asked, not expecting an answer.

“Haven't you heard?” Miriam grabbed his arm with both of her little hands.

“Heard what?” He smiled and looked down at her large round dark eyes.

“About the Son of God, that he will come in the middle of time and die for us and rise from the grave.”

“I guess a god can do all kinds of miracles.”

The funeral procession started back and they followed. Nimrod noticed other children watching.

“But this is to be a special miracle. Everyone will rise from the grave.” She hugged his arm.

“Sounds scary to me.” He kicked a stone out of his way and shivered.

Miriam giggled and looked up at him. “Silly. It won't be scary. All our families who

have died will be together again. That's how Shem explained it. He learned it from Great Grandfather Noah.”

* * *

“Mommy,” Miriam said, approaching her mother. “Have you seen Mia? She wasn't at the burial.”

Tiama, gathering up clothes to wash at the river, had come back from the funeral. She stopped in her busy schedule and knelt down to look Miriam in the eye.

“Miriam, Mia is in the way of women now. She is outside the city with other girls in the same condition.” She waited for Miriam to soak this in just in case she had questions.

“Oh.” Miriam smiled. “She will be getting married soon?”

“Yes. Her father and I will be looking for a suitable family for her to marry into.”

Tiama paused and smiled. “It won't be too far in the future that I will lose you too.”

Mother and daughter hugged, and then Tiama stood. “Come help me with the wash.”

On the way to the river each carried a large bundle atop their heads. Tiama walked with years of experience. Miriam steadied the bundle on top of her head with both hands.

“Mommy, can I marry Nimrod?”

Tiama almost froze at the thought. “We will see.”

“I like him very much.”

“I believe you are too young right now to consider such things. He is a nice friend, and you can play with him until you become a woman. Then we will see.”

“He is very nice.”

Tiama beheld the river and how it flowed. “The years will tell.”

The Euphrates lapped against the flat rocks. Women gathered there in droves, set down their loads, wet their clothes, and slapped them against the tide.

Chapter Three

Nimrod noticed Miriam was growing into a young woman. She was more beautiful than most girls. Her skin was olive like her fathers, her eyes large and dark, and her smile still held the laughter of an innocent child. Nimrod grew more in love with her by the day and sought to be with her more often. Instead of playing childish games, though, he used his spare time to help Miriam with her work. Whenever she took laundry down to the river, he snatched the bundle of clothes off her head and playfully applied his own head to hold it up in the air. Walking like a drunk man, he would make her scream. She thought he was going to drop the load. Then when she went to the well, he would take her water jug and carry it in his arms, and they would talk a lot and make plans for the future. Sometimes, she would approach him close enough to be kissed and then turn away coyishly. Her eyes would say, "Later." But Miriam's mother, Tiana, watching them, would call her to do some small chore she thought of on the spur of the moment to separate the two. Tiana never smiled at Nimrod and sometimes scolded him about doing woman's work.

* * *

Nimrod ran to catch up with Miriam as she sauntered down the way to the well. "Your mother doesn't like me does she?"

"She talks behind your back." Miriam glanced up and smiled.

"Oh?" Nimrod skipped a step to march in along side her. "What does she say?"

"She tells me what a smart boy you are, and what good work you do. My father tells

her about you.”

Nimrod whistled a few notes of a song and took the water pot from Miriam. “Does she have an opinion of her own?”

“Yes. She does.”

“Then what does she herself think of me?”

They turned at the well, and Nimrod let down the jar into the water.

“She doesn't like you. She says you are too black.” Miriam leaned against him as he drew the water up, putting her hand on his shoulder. “I think you are beautiful. Someday I would like to kiss you.”

“Now?”

He grabbed her by the waist, but she turned her head and giggled. “Not now.”

“We go to the mountains soon.” Nimrod hefted the water jar onto his shoulder. “It would be a good memory for me to take with me. It would make me dream of you every night.”

Miriam tiptoed and made as if to kiss him, but she said, “If Mama found out I was doing that, she would send me off with the sheep and keep you here tied to a tree.” She bit her bottom lip, smiled, and turned away and up the sloping road. Nimrod followed her with the water sloshing out of the jar.

* * *

El-Am walked up to Nimrod as they led the sheep into a mountain valley covered with grass and yellow and blue wild flowers amongst outcroppings of limestone with ribbons of

gypsum. Further up were folds of schists and slates.

“You look unhappy, Nimrod. Don't you like your work anymore?”

Nimrod kicked a rock, and didn't look up. “I love your daughter, Uncle. But I think my aunt doesn't like me. I leave a present with her every day. She doesn't acknowledge me. I even do chores for her.”

“She doesn't like men who think they have to do women's work to please. She likes a man to be a man. I never do women's work. You should do like me. Men do not talk to women of another family, you know. If you want to give her a message, you talk to the baby or the small child. Talk to me when you come for dinner. Don't associate with the women. They won't like you. This is good advice.”

El-Am ran to tighten the herd. Nimrod followed behind him and continued the conversation.

“But how do I woo the girl I am in love with? I mean, we have played together since we were children. Now we are man and woman. I would like to marry her ... if I may be so bold.”

Taking in a few breaths, El-Am then said, “We will talk about this when we return. We will meet with the Elders.”

Nimrod agreed.

That night, no one could sleep. The roaring of lions echoed from mountain to mountain. They watched the sheep closely. In the morning, two brave lions approached the herd but got chased away by a barrage of stones slung by the shepherds.

Nimrod dozed off throughout the day, but in between catnaps he had to sling stones at so many lions, that by evening, everyone decided that they had better move the herd.

It got worse. No matter where they moved, the lions followed. They lost many sheep.

The shepherds came back early that year and had to hand feed the sheep. They cut the tall grass along the river and laid it in piles along the inside of the sheep pens. Even some of the flax found its way into the pens which brought up arguments between the farmers and the shepherds. “If it weren't for the large numbers of lions ...” complained the shepherds. “But that does not mean you have to steal our flax,” defended the farmers. “You have enough grass for your flocks.”

* * *

“But Mama, I love Nimrod. We've been together since we were children. We've grown up together.” Miriam helped her mother hang up the rugs to slap the dust out of them in back of the tent. The wind changed direction and threw dust back into her face.

“I don't care. He doesn't have any family. And besides, he's black.” Tiana directed her to go around to the back and hit the rugs from there.

“What does that mean? He's beautiful.” Miriam hit the rugs with a big stick a few more times before her mother answered.

“He's of the seed of Ham, that scoundrel. He went off and left Grandfather. He will never be forgiven. And he likes men. That's the gossip.”

“Hah!” Miriam stopped beating and put her hands on her hips. “I can't believe you. Ham has nothing to do with what kind of person Nimrod is or will turn out to be. Father

taught me that God gives to all men their free agency, and Nimrod is a good man.”

Tiama looked straight ahead at the rugs and beat them even harder until she started sweating. “He still doesn't have a family. We can't go to Nippur and deem what kind of family he comes from. We know they worship Sin instead of the Living God. They trust in fables. I don't want that kind of influence for my daughters.”

“Oh, Mama.” But what Miriam said in silence was *you're going to break my heart.*

“He has Uncle Shem as a father.”

“Enough. The decision has been made. Besides, Hesh-Ur-Bala is a nice boy and comes from a good family.”

A single tear ran down Miriam's face. She wiped it off and continued beating the rugs. The winds of change brought a thought to her that chilled her to the bones. What if he took her to Nippur away from her family? Would she lose her faith? She had to go back to the other side of the rugs now. The dust was flying into her face again.

* * *

“What do you mean?” Nimrod had waited for her at the well. He was going to ask for her hand.

“I said I can't marry you.” Miriam lowered the jar down into the water while Nimrod leaned over the wall to watch.

“But I know you love me.”

“Yes.” Miriam lifted the heavy weight onto her head and walked away, balancing the jar after years of practice. “I do love you. But evidently, we don't marry for love. Love is for

children. And, they tell me, I will learn to love my husband. It's the way it has always been done.”

Nimrod followed her up the road. “I can appeal to the Elders.”

“Father has already spoken with them. They agree that you are not the right boy for me or for any other maiden in this town.” Tears filled Miriam's eyes.

“Then come away with me.” He emphasized with his hands. “We can go to my family in Nippur. They will accept us there.”

“Mother said you would say that.” Tears ran profusely down her cheeks. She wiped them with both hands. “Leave now.”

Miriam's jar had become a part of her spine and head. She walked, even in grief, like a straight pole. She was beautiful beyond compare, and Nimrod stood still and watched her supine figure walk away. He sighed, holding back the tears and walked back to the well to stare out at the river and the great white wall.

* * *

Like Mia before her, Miriam stood in the tent of her mother and let herself be draped in a veil in black with gold thread-work among the red. There was a window she could look through. The edges were overcast in gold thread with eight twisted threads evenly spaced across the window. The veil covered her completely.

Nimrod sat in a tree far enough away that he wasn't noticed and watched the proceedings. Music from flutes and harps floated through the air. She was led from the tent by her mother and Mia and brought before an altar made of unhewn stone. It was covered

with a deep blue cloth. A young man was escorted by his father and married brother from the watching crowd to stand on the other side. Shem stood in a long white robe at the head of the altar. He caused the two to kneel and hold hands across the blue cloth. Nimrod couldn't hear what was said, but afterward everyone got up and danced. They danced for hours, eating and drinking. The newly married couple danced with their hands together in the air around and around in the middle of a circle of other dancers. They would go in one direction and then the other.

Nimrod stayed in the tree for a long time after everyone else had gone to bed. He wept. The tears were hot with anger. He felt like killing the boy who was making love to Miriam. But of course, he wouldn't. He would just go back to Nippur and marry a temple whore.

Chapter Four

“Don't let this marriage upset your life, Nimrod,” Shem pleaded as Nimrod stuffed his clothes, bread, and lamb into a bag. “There are plenty of girls that would love you and be your wife.”

“I don't want other girls, Uncle.” Nimrod stood and faced his kin. He grabbed the bag and a camel bladder full of water. “And none of your family will let me marry any of their daughters. I don't have family here. I will go where I do have family. No one in Nippur would deny me unless I did something to offend the father. I have offended no one here except to be from Nippur.”

“Son. I beg you to stay. We will find a way. You have loved your life here.”

Shem stood there with a bag in his hand. He looked down at it and then to Nimrod. He handed it to him. Nimrod took it but ignored it.

“I am not your son.”

“But I have loved you as a son. I have treated you decently, have given you work. You seemed to love the Word.” He motioned with his nose to the bag in Nimrod's hands. “That's the Holy Book. Take it with you. You can read it whenever you want.”

Nimrod hefted the bag. “You have been a good father, Uncle. I appreciate that, but I have to go. My heart is broken. I cannot stay here lest I kill the husband of my heart and love.”

Shem put his hands on Nimrod's shoulders. “Then you must go if it prevents such a

sin.”

Nimrod allowed a hug. He looked down at the bag. “It isn't heavy. How can it be the Holy book?”

“It is called paper.* It is a copy of the Holy Book. I have spent many hours at it. There will be other copies later.” Shem stepped back to let Nimrod depart out of the tent.

Shem's wife stood to the side with her hands in the air ready to put them on his shoulders. Nimrod turned to her, and she hugged and kissed him.

“Mother ...”

“My son ...”

Then he left.

When he approached the wall, Nimrod halted. The moon was bright and he could see a woman standing in the space between the wall and a buttress. She took a step toward him. He took a step back.

“We mustn't,” he said.

“I had to say goodbye.” Miriam wiped tears from her eyes.

Nimrod dropped his baggage, took a step forward, and she ran into his embrace, giving him the kiss he had so wanted years before. He took her by the arms and held her away from him.

“I will never forget you. You have seared my heart. But you have made your choice.”

“But my mother ...”

* The work paper came from the word papyrus, and comes from Egypt, but there is evidence that the Egyptian culture started in

Mesopotamia.

Nimrod grabbed her again and held her against him. “No. You can't blame your mother.” He dropped his hands and touched her shoulder one last time. “You had better go. We will be true to our God.” He turned toward the wall and didn't look back. She, however, had to watch him go.

Nimrod had learned years ago where the secret door in the great white wall was. He went to it and squeezed through its passage. On the other side, the moon painted a white wasteland. He tied the bags together and hung them from his shoulder.

He walked an hour and the moon became very bright. He covered his eyes with his hand and looked up. *What is happening? The moon is burning as bright as the sun!* Nimrod felt a familiar spirit, the same one he had felt at the altar of sacrifice and at the morning reading of the Holy Book, except it was stronger, so strong that he felt weak, and fell to his knees.

There was a presence standing above him in the air as though in a pillar of light.

“Go back,” it said. “The lions are coming. They followed the sheep.”

Nimrod decided it was one of the Nefilim, a watcher from the sky. It handed him something. It was like a harp with one string. A bag followed. It contained straight sticks with feathers attached to the ends of them.

“What is this?”

“It is Lion Killer. It is the Tooth of God, the Hunter of Man, the Strength of My Arm.”

“Who are you?”

“I am Sin*, Son of Enlil. I shine upon the earth to save mankind and give light by way

* The angel that appeared to Nimrod showed only what Nimrod could see. Also, the words sin and zen are the same word, just different languages, so Nimrod was given the bow and arrow in the spirit of zen or by the spirit of zen.

of dreams.”

The angel instructed Nimrod in the way of the bow and arrow and then left. The light receded back into the moon, and Nimrod was left to himself. When he awoke dawn was peeking over the Tigris with its red eyebrows, then the sun with its full strength gave him the will to rise and return to Sippar.

* * *

When Shem left his tent, he saw Nimrod with his bow and quiver of arrows sitting on the camel's saddle. “What is this I hear from the mountains? And do my eyes deceive me? I thought you left last night.” Shem's hand went to wave away a thought but stopped motionless in the air.

Nimrod rose and embraced Shem. “Father. I have returned. There is a danger coming. I have been instructed by Heaven above to save this town from the lions.”

They both heard the roaring of lions in the distance. Shem turned his ear toward the wilderness.

“Lions,” Shem said. “I have been bothered by them all night in my dreams. Go to my sons. Bring El-Am, Ass-Hur, Arphaxad, Lud, and A-Ram, and all their sons, shepherds all, and good fighting men.”

Nimrod ran from tent to tent calling out to all the men to meet at their father's tent. When they had a puzzled look on their face, he yelled out, “An army of lions have followed

the sheep.”

The men assembled at their father's tent, and Nimrod came and stood with Shem. When they noticed his bow, the men laughed. It indeed looked like a harp with one string. Everyone had seen a harp, but not this thing.

Arphaxad asked, “What is this?” ... pointing to the bow ... “What are you going to do? Sing to the lions?”

Everyone had another hearty laugh.

Nimrod retrieved an arrow from his quiver which he had slung over his shoulder and demonstrated. He placed the arrow into the bow string, pulled it back and let go. The arrow suddenly appeared in the trunk of the palm tree behind the men with a twang and a thud. Everyone turned to look at the arrow then back at Nimrod. They looked stunned. Arphaxad approached him. He took hold of the bow and examined it.

“How?”

“The Spirit of Sin gave it me to kill the lions.” He took the bow.

Arphaxad slapped Nimrod on the shoulder. “It will do it all right!” He smiled and turned to the men. “We will use our slings, and he can use this ... this ...” He looked at it again and said, “bow.”

Shem marched at the head of the men and led them away from the town and the tents and out into the fields. The roar of the lions were ahead of them. They stood between them and the safety of their families.

* * *

Del-Tor, a black servant of El-Am wondered. He held his chin in his fingers and reviewed in his mind the demonstration of Nimrod's bow and arrow. He studied the image of it and went to work. He found a dry branch well aged and carved the ends to be thinner than the middle and tested its flexibility. He tied a camel sinew from end to end and remembered the point. It had been nothing but a piece of hardwood. He found a flake of black ironwood that had come off a chest, a bit of decoration and formed it into a an arrow head. Next, he went near the river and took some reeds that were old and tough. He took a reed and attached three feathers on one end and the black arrowhead on the other, tightening them with wet string. From there he went from tent to tent showing other servants what he had made. He encouraged everyone to follow his example. He said that lions were coming and they had to protect the families.

* * *

The lions roared in anger. They had eaten all the deer, and whenever they came upon a rabbit they chomped it down. Two bites and it was gone. But the smell of the sheep drove their savage hunger. That and their numbers gave them the courage to face man. They met them among the rocky outcroppings in the hills as they came down from the heights above. When they found a barrage of stones thrown at them by the shepherds, they tried to go around them. Still, the presence of man persisted.

Sometimes a shepherd would make a kill with his sling, but Nimrod slaughtered one lion after another until he ran out of arrows. Then he had to join the others using his sling.

One lion found a son of Lud who walked up a small ravine. The lion peered at him

from the rocks above and jumped him from behind. The boy fell into euphoria as the lion crushed his neck and shoulder and his life's blood gushed out. The weight of the lion flattened his face against a rock, leaving a red smear as the lion dragged him away. Lud in agony yelled at the lion and sent a stone through its skull. He ran to his son and in tears carried him off.

Nimrod saw Jed, son of Arphaxad, carried off by a lioness, sent a stone into its flank, only to have the lioness drop the boy and charge him. He got off another shot. It entered her brain right between the eyes. He took a deep breath and jumped off the outcropping he stood upon. He looked at the boy's injuries. He was still breathing. He called for his uncle who came running. Arphaxad carried his boy home.

It was a losing battle. The men had to regroup and get to higher ground. When they found a place they could breathe, Shem passed out some dried mutton that had been prepared with many spices. El-Am passed around a camel bladder of wine. After a small rest, they went again to hunt the lions. They feared that many of them had passed behind them and would be a danger to their families. They decided to retreat back to town.

* * *

Tiama, Mia, Miriam, and other women were washing clothes on the shores of the Euphrates. A boat sailed into view as it passed the great white wall. There was a woman standing next to the single mast shadowed by a triangular sail. A bare chested black servant wearing a white turban held the helm.

Tiama stood and watched the boat as it headed for the fishing docks. When she saw

the woman come into full view, she said, "Behold the whore."

All the women began chattering, left their laundry and followed the boat. As it docked, the servant tied it to a piling, and the woman stepped ashore. The women covered their mouths aghast at the lack of clothing on the woman. Some of them turned away and went back to their tents or their laundry. The woman was blonde, her hair in tiny braids, with fair skin like Tiama, but her big nose and full lips revealed a direct descent from Afra or Khan. Around her bodice she wore a fisherman's net, with a rainbow of jewels around her neck and shoulders. Below her waist, a linen loincloth flowed to her feet like a silken waterfall exposing her hips and legs. She also had jewelry in concentric circles hanging from her hips.

Tiama approached her. "What do you want, whore?"

"I have come for my husband, Nimrod." She spoke regally and did not flinch.

There was an audible gasp, for everyone knew Nimrod, especially Miriam.

Tiama turned to Miriam. "Go home."

Miriam hesitated. She addressed the strange woman. "Why is it that you are the wife of Nimrod, and yet, he has been living here since he was a child.?"

"My name is Sammur." She paused and raised her eyebrow. She looked bored.

"Nimrod and I were wed when we were small children. Our parents arranged it. I have come to remind him of his commitment, and have a message from his mother, Hathor."

Tiama slapped her daughter Miriam for her disobedience, who abruptly left, running back with tears streaming down her face. This was just one more stab at her heart. She felt so ashamed at loving Nimrod, but she could not help herself. She would always be in love with

Note: According to the historian Eusebius, Semiramis was the wife of Nimrod. In the Sumerian language, her name is "Sammuramat."

him.

There was only one way out. She ran passed her home and the other tents and out into the fields. She would find Nimrod and warn him ... or she would just die trying.

* * *

Nimrod saw a dark lump in the tall dry grass as he and the men approached the city. Getting closer, he saw that the dark mass was blood soaked clothing covering a woman.

"Shem!" He called. "Come see this. I think the lions are here already."

He kneeled down and uncovered the woman's head. Recognition hit him hard like a fist across the face. He fell backward. It felt like pins and needles covering his face, and he stopped breathing.

Shem came close and saw Nimrod on his knees screwing up his face. He saw him bring his fists up to his mouth and squeeze his eyes shut. Nimrod then cried out and hit the ground with both fists. "There is no God!"

Shem looked at the woman. It was Miriam. "Oh God. Be merciful. Carry this thy child to thy bosom and comfort our souls who are left here in the flesh."

Shem put his arm around Nimrod and tried to comfort him. Nimrod shrugged the hand off his shoulder, stood and stepped away. "No. I will not be comforted."

When El-Am came up to find out what the commotion was about, he looked down and saw his daughter. He knelt down and took her in his arms and cried. He picked her up and carried her home.

The men saw other lumps in the field. When they investigated, they saw lions filled with arrows. When they looked up, they saw their servants rising from their hiding places in the grass. Each one of them had bows and arrows.

Del-Tor approached Shem. “Master. We defended Sippar. Very few people died. A child and her mother, and this woman. We were too late to save them.”

Shem put his arm on his servant's shoulder. “Thank you Del-Tor. We also have lost loved ones.” Shem sighed.

The servants gathered up the mother and daughter who had died and took them home.

Nimrod stood alone. In his anguish he ran to one of the killed lions, fell upon it and stabbed it several times. To calm himself, he began skinning it. Then he thought differently and decided to start fresh with a cleaner skin. He walked over to a carcass not so bloody and skinned it. When he finished, he noticed some of the servants staring at him.

“Here.” He lifted up the skin. “Would one of you prepare this for me?”

The men took the skin, a male lion, young, with a long mane. They each bowed to Nimrod and held the skin to the sky, calling him “Lion killer and The Great Hunter.”

Nimrod felt numb. He strode behind the men, letting their chants lead him back to town.

That evening there was much wailing for they had five funerals.

* * *

Sammur made camp near the river and waited patiently for Nimrod. Her servant Toad Tail had gone out and talked to other servants and found out about the lion hunt and the

deaths that resulted. He reported back to Sammur and told her about the noise she was complaining about.

“Did you find Nimrod?” she asked kneeling by the fire.

“Yes, Mistress.” Toad Tail stirred the pot. The spices made both their mouths water. “I talked to him also. He said he would meet you in the early morning.”

She picked up a stick and stuck it in the fire. “The funerals will go on all night. I have a feeling one of the girls here is his lover.”

“I think it is one of those who were killed, Mistress.” He put the wooden spoon to his lips and tasted the pottage.

“Was it that girl who ran away, the one that got slapped this morning?”

“Yes, Mistress, that was her.” He tasted it again. “It's ready to eat.”

* * *

When the townspeople found that Nimrod was going back to Nippur, they threw a banquet and gave him a ceremony. They danced circles around him, chanting his new name of Lion Killer. Then they presented to him his lion skin. The head, skull and teeth, remained, as well as the paws and tail. Nimrod accepted it with gratitude. They put it on his back and he tied the forelegs about his neck. After thanking the town many times, he fitted his bow and arrows about one shoulder, picked up his bag carrying the copy of the Holy Book, threw it over his other shoulder, turned and left.

Nimrod approached the wall and touched the buttress. It was where he and Miriam said their goodbyes. His eyes filled with tears. He wiped them away with the back of his

hand. He refused all comfort except anger. It cuddled him as a mother would her newborn child. He gritted his teeth and passed through the secret door. He didn't notice the man behind a large palm tree, watching him. It was Shem. He also shed tears.

The sun rose from the way of the Tigris. A new day promised a new life. He had spent part of the night's ceremony making new arrows. With no sleep and a sigh, he headed out for Nippur. After a few strides he slapped his forehead. He had forgotten his appointment with the whore. Did he really want to go back with her? Why not? There was nothing else left. As he had told the people on the other side of the wall before, he would go and marry a temple whore. He turned toward the Euphrates.

Approaching the river, he saw that the wall went out into the water several feet. An eddy tore away the ground that held this end. Eventually the wall would weaken and fall. But for now, he would have to swim around to the other side.

Nimrod waded into the river and froze. A river boat made of reeds, supporting a triangular sail, slid around the corner.

A woman's voice called out, "Did you forget, Nimrod?" It was Sammur-amat in full regalia standing next to the mast. "We had an appointment."

The boat turned its bow towards land.

"Down a little way," Nimrod called out, running along the shore. "The eddy is big enough to tear that craft to pieces."

Nimrod motioned with his hand, and Toad Tail jumped into the river carrying lines to haul the boat to shore. Nimrod joined him and took one of the ropes.

The river smelled of dead fish and black rotted marsh mud, but as boat was pulled ashore, all he could smell was myrrh, frankincense, and oranges. It came from Sammu. She looked beautiful, but in another way. There was no joy in her eyes as he had seen in Miriam. This woman radiated pride and the kind of happiness and pleasure that came from barley wine.

“Come aboard,” Sammu invited with a lilting voice.

Nimrod climbed over the thick roll of reeds that made up the rim of the boat. He dropped his gear onto the deck and trembled as the boat rocked, the waves slapping its stern. His hands shot out and caught hold of the bow. He turned around and faced the giggling whore. Her teeth glistened in the rising sun. Her smile was as inviting as the rest of her body. He had always been reticent with Miriam, but with this woman he allowed all his feelings to show. She made him hungry. He wanted to bite her as well as kiss her.

Sammu pointed to several boxes wrapped in oil skin. “Have a seat. You'll be more stable.”

After he sat down, she came and sat beside him. Nimrod turned his head. He couldn't stand so much physical beauty. He saw Toad Tail securing the boat by pounding stakes into the ground and tying lines to them. He returned his attention to her and took deep breaths of her smell. It was intoxicating. She was intoxicating.

Sammu laughed. “You look like a wild man with that lion skin draped around you.”

“The townspeople,” he jerked his head back towards the town, “they gave me a parting ceremony. This,” he said, stroking the coat, “must be a kind of crown.”

“These Shemites haven't treated you well, I hear,” she said, smiling like a snake.

“They gave you a ceremony to cover up their guilt.”

“They have been fair with me.” Nimrod still held onto the rocking boat.

“They have robbed you of your lover, have they not?” Sammu tilted her head and opened the palm of her hand, pointing her long fingernails toward the town.

“She wasn't my lover!” Nimrod said in anger. “She was my friend.”

“And yet, you recoiled when she was married and someone else shared her bed.” She tilted her head the other way. “Is it not true?”

Nimrod's head drooped as he remembered. “Yes. It is true.”

“And now their god has taken her away.”

Sammu scooted closer to him and winding her arms around him placed his head onto her bosom. She caressed his shoulders, back, and head. He let himself drown in her embrace and the scent between her breasts. He breathed deeply, the smell putting him to sleep like a strong drug pulling his mind away. He slept for several hours.

* * *

Nimrod woke suddenly and realized he was in a boat sailing down the river. It was terrifying.

“Let me out!” he cried. He grabbed hold of the rim of the boat and stared with a contorted face at the water.

“Be calm, my love,” wooed Sammu, caressing his hair.

“Toad! Get us to shore. Now!” Nimrod commanded.

Toad Tail held the rudder (actually a long oar) looked at his mistress as to ask what he should do.

“Go ahead, Toad Tail. This man is not seaworthy.” Sammur sighed and frowned. Her husband was a land lover and she, a woman of water.

Toad Tail maneuvered the rudder, and when the boat reached the shore, Nimrod grabbed his lion coat and his gear, jumped out and ran. He not only had to escape the water, he had to get away from Sammur. She was too much woman.

“Toad Tail,” Sammur commanded in a bored voice, “Go after him. Walk with him until he calms down.”

Nimrod turned back. “You go ahead to Nippur. I will walk and meet you there. You do not have to worry about me. I have fought a whole army of lions.”

Sammur left in a huff, saying she could manage the boat herself. Toad Tail walked with Nimrod and would go all the way back to Nippur with him.

The further Nimrod walked, the angrier he felt. Miriam's death was enough, but added to that was the way Shem's family treated him, as though he were a common laborer. Then Sammur shows up and thinks she is a queen, putting him under her thumb to rule as though he had no power to resist. In a fit of anger Nimrod took his bow, strung it, and put an arrow in it. “I will kill God! He has made my life *miserable*. He has taken away the only thing I loved and given me a whore!”

Having said that, Nimrod shot an arrow straight up into the sky before continuing on with Toad Tail following.

There was a loud whisssh! And then thud! Both men looked around.

“Master. Your arrow has returned.”

Nimrod nodded. “Go fetch it Toad. I may need it.”

Nimrod waited for Toad Tail who went behind some scrub trees, scrawny, gnarled cedars, that looked like they were dying of thirst. When he returned, he held up the arrow. It was covered with blood and sand. Nimrod took it and wondered at it. He held it up and yelled, “God is dead! I have killed him!”

What Nimrod did not see was that Toad Tail had picked up a rather large bird near the arrow and put it into his pouch. He had examined it and found an arrow hole through it. It would make for a good dinner later. Of course, he didn't tell Nimrod.

Chapter Five

“Why does she call you Toad?” Nimrod relished the roasted bird leg. He didn't think to ask where it came from. Servants gave you food and that was that.

“My name, Master, is El-Ash-Tod. My mistress thought it sounded like Toad, so I am stuck with it.” Toad Tail smiled as he slipped a bone out of his mouth between his lips, making sure all the meat was stripped off.

The two sat near a small fire that Toad had made to cook the bird. It was the only light and warmth for leagues around, except for the blanket of stars.

Nimrod stared at the belt of the stars running from the southwest to the northeast, filling most of the sky. “Will we walk that path up there to become men of renown? Will we do great deeds and be assigned a place in the heavens like the tales our forefathers handed down?”

“I know not, Master.” Toad was also in a meditative mood as he looked up. “But this I know, if what your grandfather Ham taught is true, each one of those points of light up there are orbs, worlds where we go after we die. And the ones that travel along the sky are close by and may be worlds like the Earth upon which we sit this night. He said that one travels so far out that we can only behold it every sixty-four thousand years.” He pointed to a large star that could be plainly seen. “There it is. It is receding back into the blackness of space.”

“How is my grandfather?” Nimrod licked his fingers as he finished off the last of the white meat. “Is he yet alive?”

“That I couldn't say, Master. He has been gone from us these many years. He took a group of followers and left to settle a new town farther up the Tigris River. They call it Akkad or Acadia.”

“Oh. Then who is king now in Nippur?” Nimrod interlocked his fingers across his knees.

“The priests have taken over ... those who would stay. The high priests went with Ham.”

“Then did Egyptus go with her family?”

“No, Master. She fled to the west and is pursued by Kish. We have not heard from them either in many years.”

“Well, what happened to Khan? Did he go with Ham? They were always together.” Nimrod whittled a sliver of wood into a toothpick and poked at the meat between his teeth.

“Khan's story is a sad tale.” Toad bowed his head and sighed.

“Then tell it indeed.”

“Khan has gone mad. After Egyptus left, he went about the town raping any girl he came across. Night after night he went through the town raping the daughters of men. He was never satisfied. He would drink wine all day and rape at night. Ham and half the town became distraught. That is when Ham and his family, and whoever would follow him, took to the road. They snuck out at night and left. Khan was enraged. He wanted the rest of the town to follow him and force the others back, but they were too afraid. Then he began slapping everyone about, but behold, a champion arose, wandering into town out of nowhere

and saw the injustice. His name was En-Ki-Du, a giant like Khan. I guess he had been living in the wilderness. He came and confronted Khan. The two became enraged and fought for several days, but after defeating Khan, they became fast friends and went off to look for a way to the heavens. Now all is peaceful. It was the priests that sent my mistress to fetch you. They say it is written in the stars that you are to be the next great leader of men.”

“Is my name already written in the stars, Toad? Is that what the priests are saying?”

Nimrod sat by the fire, looking up at the stars, wondering if he was destined for something great.

* * *

Sammur waited in a tent next to the river. The boat was tied up along with the fishermen's boats in an evenly spaced row. Fishermen had helped her land. A cool breeze, filled with fishy river smells, caressed Nimrod and Toad as they approached the tent.

“This is her tent,” Toad said, pointing with an upturned palm. “I will go in and announce your presence.”

Toad went in and Sammur came out wearing a long gown of pleated linen that covered most of her body, leaving her arms bare. She wore no jewelry. She came up to Nimrod and kissed him on the neck.

“Welcome home, stranger.” She stepped back and drew the curtain to let him in.

“Come in and refresh yourself.”

Nimrod followed her in. He sat on floor cushions, and she brought him wine in a tall jug of white pottery decorated with square colored crystals. He took the wine, drank a few

gulps and sighed, wiping the back of his hand across his mouth and new beard.

“All the men will want to wear beards now,” she said, sitting down beside him. She leaned upon his shoulder. “You must be tired. Do you want to make love? It will help you sleep.”

“Yes.” Nimrod took a deep breath. “But you must know I am a virgin.”

Sammur caressed his brow. “I love virgins.”

So, Nimrod found out the secrets of women that day, but he didn't get to sleep until the day had spent itself. They employed most of the day making love, eating royal dishes made by Toad, making love, drinking wine, and making love. Nimrod fell asleep exhausted.

* * *

Nippur had changed since Nimrod was a mere boy. A little fishing village had spread along the river with small round grass huts here and there with men mending their fishing nets. Peddlers of fish, eels, and shell fish cried out in the morning air to sell their catch. Women and their servants came from Nippur to buy the day's meal. There was a well-paved road made of flat stones from there to the city.

Toad hired a four wheeled chariot to take them home. Nimrod felt anxious about his reunion with his mother. Sammur told him that she was yet alive and waiting for him, still the temple matron, though an old woman now. Nimrod didn't care, he still wanted to see her.

* * *

Hathor had anticipated this day for years. She knew that someday Nimrod would grow up and come looking for her. It would be a grand reunion with a full city celebration. He

would be riding in a chariot, wearing garlands of flowers, and all the people cheering. But when she saw a grown man being led up the temple steps by Sammur and Toad, she clasped her hands near her heart and ran forward. It looked like a lion who had swallowed someone. His face was in its mouth, but she knew it was her Nimrod. She forgot about the celebration and parade. All that was in her mind now was that her son had been found and brought home. Nimrod stepped onto the porch, pushing back the lion's head to show himself. There was a moment's hesitation.

“Mother,” Nimrod said, smiling at the old woman, smelling like sandalwood incense. He gazed at her and pitied her. It wasn't the mother he remembered. Her shape had rounded out, her face sagged, and her white hair piled into a jeweled crown. She wore a loose fitting linen gown that flowed to the side in the breeze.

“Nimrod.” Tears ran down her cheeks.

They embraced. He kissed her tears away.

“Have they treated you well?” she asked, holding him close.

“Yes, mother.” He kissed the top of her head.

“But they stole his lover,” mumbled Sammur.

“Come.” Hathor put her arm around him and led him through the multicolored columns holding up the roof over the porch. “There is a room prepared for you and your wife.”

Nimrod wondered at that word “wife.” He would have to get used to that. His anger had buried his past love while Sammur-amat soothed him with a new passionate love.

Chapter Six

Tiama wept silently within her tent. Neither Mia nor El-Am could comfort her. If Miriam had died sick on her bed, Tiama might have understood, but her beautiful child had suffered a violent death, torn by a lion. What was worse was that pride had gotten in the way, and it was her fault that her daughter had run into the fields where she met the terrible and hungry lion. God was punishing her by taking Miriam from her. She had kept herself above other people because of her beauty and white skin. And she would not have her daughter disobey. Now, looking back, she asked herself, how many times had Miriam received a slap from her hand for a small offense? Little things that didn't matter now ... playing with that boy from the South, fooling around and breaking a vase, running outside to see a falling star instead of going to bed, being late for dinner because of playing with friends. A lot of her anger was because of that boy Nimrod. She was so afraid that he would take her back to Nippur and marry her and cut her off from her family. Now Miriam was cut off from her family because of ... Tiama sighed heavily, covered her mouth with a pillow and screamed.

After the tears dried up, Tiama went to Mia's tent. It was night, and the stars lit her way. She stood by the door and called her name. Com, Mia's husband, walked up behind her. He had been out with the sheep, making sure they were secure.

“Good woman ...” Tiama turned to see who it was. Com bowed slightly. “Let me fetch your daughter for you.”

“Mother.” Mia, big with child, opened the folds of the tent. “Come in. I'm glad you

came. It is near the time.”

The inside of the tent glowed with golden light from the hanging lamps, frosting pillows, poles, and wall hangings in pale orange. While Com went into the next room, Tiana sat cross-legged on the floor with Mia at a low table. Mia served her mother a warm fermented goat's milk called yaghort seasoned with mint. Tiana held her copper cup near her lips.

“Thank you, Dear.” She sipped the drink. “I want to apologize. I haven't been the loving mother you deserve.”

Mia bowed her head. This was embarrassing, but she smiled.

Tiana tipped her head to one side. “When Miriam was born I forgot you to tend to her. Then I gave you the care of her. I thought it would give you maturity.” She partook more of the yaghort drink, pressing her lips together, enjoying the flavor. “But I made a mistake in my thinking. I am sure you would have matured in the same way without Miriam to care for. I should have cared for her myself.” Tiana squeezed a tear from her eye and wiped it away with her forefinger.

Mia drank from her cup with both hands and peered at her mother, wondering what was on her mind. “I'm sure you did what was right with Miriam. She turned out to be very happy.”

“She was happy because of Nimrod.” Tiana placed her cup on the table. “I didn't trust him ... I should have. If I had let him marry her, she would still be alive today.”

Mia placed her hand over her mother's. “You can't say that. Everything turns out

according to God's plan. It is said that even that old snake that tempted Eve played right into God's hands.”

Tiama squeezed Mia's hand. “That is true. Maybe we are just pawns to be used in His greater wisdom.” She looked into her daughter's eyes. “I love you Mia. I always have. I want you to know that. Even though you are not of my flesh and blood directly, you are my daughter. I hope the rest of our years will be peaceful and happy. Let us have no enmity between us.”

“I am happy to have you as a mother.” They rose and hugged each other.

* * *

No one noticed El-Am's hurt. When Nimrod had found Miriam in the tall grass, and he heard his name called, chills ran down his back as though he knew what to expect. Then when he looked down upon his bloody daughter he picked her up and cried. That was the only time. After the mass funeral in which there were so many families grieving, his heart had been too heavy for him to cry again. He bore the grief with dignity. He spent the days working with the sheep and the evenings leaning against a palm tree staring at the stars above with no one to comfort him. Tiama had complained that she had no one to comfort her, blaming him. But when he tried, she would not be comforted. He missed the cuddles, the smiles and cheerfulness, and the laughter of his daughter Miriam. He sighed often.

One morning at the reading of the Holy Book, in the writings of Adam, there was a saying that calmed his troubled heart. “For what father having lost a child has not thought upon God's sacrifice of his first born? And what man having lost his brother in battle has not

grieved? But the battle for men's souls is won by infinite pain.” Father Shem had said, “There has been much loss in our war with the lions, but life goes on with us. The sun still shines. Our daily work waits for us and nourishes us. The breeze still cools the hot brow. The river water chills the feet. God still smiles down upon us in every daily blessing. We must remember that those we lose here behold the face of God. Are we so selfish as to wish our loved ones would continue in this veil of tears when they can find rest within the embrace of our Heavenly Father?”

* * *

Mia's pains came faster. It was time to deliver. Com and El-Am waited outside talking while Tiama and several sisters helped with the birthing inside the tent. Uncles gathered outside and passed a bladder of wine around.

“Your first one will be a blessing,” El-Am said, patting Com on the back.

“What will you call him?” Arphaxad asked.

“Mahonri Moriancumer.” Com threw back his head and let the stream of wine drain down his throat.

“When we were hunting the lions up in the mountains,” Com said, as he handed the bladder to Father Shem, “I heard the voice of the Lord coming from the way east and up, so I climbed higher, following the burning in my heart. It was a soft voice, the most beautiful of tone and timbre. He said I should take off my shoes, that I stood on holy ground, and he said that I and my seed had been chosen because of my peace with him. My descendants would inherit a distant land beyond the seas, a land made choice by reason of the flood. There are

many more things he said unto me which I cannot relate.”

Shem stepped forward and put his hand on the lad's shoulder, now understanding the meaning of the name. “Then you have named him well ... *the mountain where you met the Lord.*”

During the talking and drinking, a baby's cry was heard. Everyone began laughing and slapping Com on the back, congratulating him. As Com entered the tent to see Mia and his new son, Tiama pushed him back out.

“Not yet,” she cried. “There is another one.” She went back in, and the men outside could hear her exclaim, “Praise God! He has a little brother.” She stuck her head back out after the second baby began crying. “Daddy. What will we call the second one?”

Com laughed with his whole body. “Name him Jared! For kings will come out of his bowels.”

All the men agreed, for kings would come from each of their sons. Everyone wanted his son to be a king. But that's not what Com meant. He knew in his heart that in that land far away where his sons would be led, Jared's children would indeed be kings.

The celebration lasted all night. Everyone in the town danced and sang. But the next day the only ones that slept were the children. Work had to be done whether one had a headache or not.

End of Book Three

Book Four

Knights and Castles

Chapter One

After several days of tracking them, Kish caught up to Egyptus and her men at night. As he approached her campfire, which he had seen and had been walking towards in the time it took for the moon to rise, he was apprehended by two knights. They grabbed his arms and brought him before Egyptus. He yanked his arms loose.

“Egyptus! What is the meaning of this?”

The fire spread an orange haze upon the faces of the people around it, making their jewels and armor sparkle in its light. Egyptus rose on the other side of the flames to face her brother.

“Kish, my dear brother. Have you come to join us?” she asked in a mocking tone.

“No. I have not.” He placed his hands upon his hips. “I want to persuade you to come back with me to Nippur. What you are doing is treason against our gods and king.”

“Now now, brother. Is our little adventure bothering you?” Egyptus waved her palm towards her surrounding guards and Mitz-Ra. “We have come out here merely to play games, wrestle, explore the area. Is this treason?”

“You have separated yourself from your king and family, and you did it in secret. Is this not treachery?”

Egyptus tilted her head to the side and stared at Kish. “I need some time to think things out. I need some space. Khan was treating me terribly. He wants me to marry him, but he knows not how to be gentle. Maybe if I give him time to think, he will see his mistake.”

Kish dropped his hands and showed his right palm to Egyptus. "I didn't know that. But he wants you to return right away."

"You are right." Egyptus stepped back to the log where she had been sitting. "I will return with you in the morning. Would you like some antelope?" She nodded to one of her knights. "Give him of the meat."

Kish was hungry and ate ravenously. But he stood where they had brought him. He did not trust anyone and didn't want to move.

"We have plenty of wine." Egyptus motioned to another knight who gave Kish a bladder of wine. "And please sit down. We aren't going to harm you."

Kish enjoyed the meat and wine and even reminisced with Egyptus and some of the guards. They told stories of their childhood and of knights of long ago before the flood. Everyone fell asleep around the fire. Kish was the first one because his wine had been doctored.

* * *

Kish woke with a start. He couldn't move his hands or feet. He looked around. He had been left tied up on the ground by the campfire. It was barely burning, and the cold morning air made him shiver. He twisted around but couldn't see any sign of Egyptus and her knights. He grit his teeth in anger and would have bit the ropes apart if he could have reached them. His hands were tied to his feet. He maneuvered closer to the fire. Carefully, he pressed the cords against a burning ember. His flesh was getting very hot, but why yell? There was no one to respond. He weakened the cord enough to break it and loosened his bands enough

to get free.

After unraveling the ropes he stood, took a deep breath of the fresh desert air and assessed his situation. Egyptus was not altogether a demon. She had left him a bladder of wine and a piece of antelope wrapped in leather. He jutted out his jaw and swore he would have his revenge. He would have her flesh bound to his if it was the last thing he did. First, he would go back to Nippur and get chariots. They would have no chance to get away again.

* * *

Khan received Kish with anger.

“You have come back empty handed!” He threw a lion bed at him, but Kish was too quick and dodged it. “Go back! You are an ass. Give me your sister, or I will be after you, and you will not escape.” The beast started throwing everything he could get his hands on, a vase, the table it was sitting on, a chair, and a spear that had been leaning against the wall.

Kish had to jump out of the window because the door was too far away and blocked by the bed. He decided to sever his ties with Khan. He would go after Egyptus because he wanted her for himself.

An armory had been built near the gates of the city, and there were several chariots stored there. They were used for ceremonial purposes, but he would use them again for instruments of war. He chose good soldiers whom he knew personally and young and healthy asses.

Four chariots left Nippur and headed to the river and the wilderness. There they built a sturdy ferry to carry them across. They made ropes from the tall grasses of the fields and tied

the ends to two stakes they drove deeply into the ground. Using a fisherman's boat, they transported the halyards across the choppy waters and attached them to stakes in the same way. They tied together palm tree logs for a raft wide enough to hold a chariot. Loops of rope were tied between the halyards and the raft. By nightfall, they ferried the chariots across one by one, hand over hand, pulling on the halyards and continually slipping the loops attached to them. The resistance of their feet against the raft forced it across the river. Engineers they weren't, but they got the job done.

* * *

Egyptus, with her knights following, trod across the western desert day after day, not realizing that Kish was in pursuit and catching up with them. She was following her dream that showed a land dominated by another river that would bless the lives of her people for millennia. They left Kish tied up. They were sure he would return to Nippur if he wasn't eaten by some wild beast.

“We should have brought camels,” complained Mitz-Ra. He had taken his shirt off and wore it around his head to protect it from the sun. The other knights followed his example. From a distance they looked like old men with long white hair that hung about their shoulders.

“We had no time for camels,” Egyptus retorted. She had made a crown of palm fronds to shade her from the glaring sun. She drained the last bladder of wine.

Mountains like the horns of a giant bull stared at them from the horizon. There would be trees and water, an oasis that promised rest. That's all they thought of as the hot sun god

beat down upon them.

“The giver of life is also the giver of death,” complained Mitz-Ra.

“Remember your training,” Egyptus said calmly. “One foot before the other. Emotions burn up more energy than fighting. We will get there.”

Ham-Robi stopped in his tracks. He looked back. “There is a distant rumble. Listen.”

Everyone stopped and turned their heads. They took the time to pant and refresh the air in their lungs. On the eastern horizon they could see a cloud of dust.

“A dust devil,” said Ben-Pot.

“No,” replied Mitz-Ra. “It's chariots. I rode with Khan to Sippar. That is the dust cloud a chariot makes.”

“Our dear brother,” said Egyptus in an “O, dear!” fashion. “Here he is again.” She looked around the terrain and saw sand dunes to the right and north of them about one league. “Run for the sand. They can't drive chariots in the sand. We will have the advantage.”

Everyone ran toward the dunes with their lungs burning for want of air and the energy to breathe. They had avoided them before, even spending a whole day to go around instead of through. They kept to flat ground whenever possible. Now they had to use the more strenuous path to hide in.

Kish saw the tracks leading to the sand dunes and cried, “Treachery!”

The men left their chariots and asses behind because asses could not tread sand dunes. At least he knew Egyptus and her knights would be slowed down. He had hoped to gain

some advantage, but now was not so sure. You can't run up a sand dune, but you can jump several times on the down side, but so could the knights. After traversing several dunes, Kish stood atop one and gazed into the distance with his hand shading his eyes. All he could see was more sand all the way to the eastern horizon.

Then he saw her. She stood on a distant dune looking back at him. His lust would be satisfied.

“Forward men!” he yelled.

Kish's men struggled up one dune and then another until they reached the one he had seen Egyptus standing on. She appeared to be just as far ahead as before, then she jumped down and disappeared.

“We're not getting anywhere,” a winded Argon called out. “We should go back to the chariots and run a parallel course. Then we will catch them.”

Kish agreed and they marched back. He only wished he had thought of that himself.

Arriving at the edge of the dunes, they stood astonished. There were no chariots, no asses. Kish looked across the red earth plain. There were dust clouds ascending heavenward.

“Treachery again!” Kish yelled, beating the air with his fist. “The gods are on her side. We must do something to placate these gods.”

“We have no cattle to sacrifice, Kish,” E-Do commented, saying the obvious. “And gods don't like asses ... if we had our asses.”

“Come.” Kish began marching east. “There is a mining settlement ahead at the base of those mountains. That's where Egyptus and her knights will find refreshment. They will have

cattle.”

“They may have our asses too,” Ko-Hor said hopefully.

“Alas!” Kish cajoled. “They may have our heads as well.”

Kish and his troop marched on, drinking cactus juice and feeding off little white berries they found on the ground along the way.

* * *

“Hiding in the sand is an old trick,” Mitz-Ra said as he dusted the sand off his shoulders. “Our fathers used to tell of these things in the myths of the before time.”

“Yes,” He-Sef said as he grabbed the reigns of one of the asses. “Now we have their chariots.”

Mitz-Ra and the Knights of the Queen Bee mounted and rode off.

Egyptus waited for them, herself covered in the gritty sand. She hopped onto Mitz-Ra's chariot, laughing. “Wait until Kish goes back for his train. He will think his asses have run away, possessed by evil spirits or returned home.”

Chapter Two

Egyptus wasn't expecting a small village at the foot of the mountains. As the chariots rode in among the dirty little huts, the dirty little people stared at them. All work stopped. The haggling at the marketplace stopped. The carpenter stopped sawing. People came out of the mill in droves. She thought they didn't have the manners to wash their clothes or keep up their shaggy kinky hair. She hadn't seen such poverty or lack of civilization before. The expressions in their dark faces were somber, yet their eyes were as bright little lights. Everything was gray ... the huts, their clothes, and the dirt beneath their feet.

Egyptus called out, "Is there a leader in your midst?" Several people pointed to a man dressed nicer than the others standing near the gate to the mines. He wore jewels on his fingers and in his ears even though his tunic was common. Egyptus drove up to him and addressed him.

"I am Egyptus, queen of the two rivers, daughter of Ham, son of the Savior of Mankind, who was Noah, who rode the waves and saved us all. We are pursued by my brother Kish. We tricked him and took his chariots. We and our asses need rest and refreshment."

The man bowed slightly. "I am Tut-Kan of Amen and am task master here under his master Khan and under liege to your father Ham. We dig the ore from the mountain that was given to us by the gods of the sky, refine it and sell it to the king of the two rivers." He bowed again, saying, "Our stables are at your service, and our marketplace, but our dirt

hovels are not enough to hold the most beautiful of women nor her aids.”

“These are knights of my realm. You will see to their needs. You will build us a shelter quickly, and make it clean ... of clean materials.”

Tut-Kan, clean shaven, short, slightly overweight and bald, bowed, extending his hand. “As you wish, my Lady.” He clapped, and men servants came running. He instructed them and they acted quickly. Some took the halters of the asses and escorted the chariots to the stable where the pack animals were kept. Others escorted the Lady and her knights to the marketplace where they were served wine and cooked delicacies of what was available. There were different kinds of flat breads, barley cakes, cakes of dried fruit, sopped calves and kids and all kinds of sauced beef, lamb, and birds.

After the feast, they were told that sleeping quarters had been built for them. Of course, only half of them went into the huts to lie down on freshly cut straw. The other half stood as sentinels to watch for Kish and his men.

Before they slept, Egyptus told Tut-Kan that he would be amply rewarded if he kept her hidden from the knowledge of her brother.

* * *

Kish and his men, looking like refugees from a war lost to mighty heroes, straggled into the village the day after Egyptus left. He found Tut-Kan and asked, “Chariots ... a woman leading a reckless crew of men ... have you seen them?”

“She headed out around the mountain going north,” Tut-Kan said without too much concern. “She seemed to be in a hurry for they didn't stay to receive our hospitality.”

“Give us food and drink,” Kish demanded, “for I am the son of a king. Refreshments and rest for me and my men.”

The overseer accommodated them as much as he could without giving them the accoutrements he had given to Egyptus and her party. They were out of the finer things. He could see they were not gentlemen and only common soldiers. The others with their chariots acted as royalty and were treated as such. Kish and his men didn't receive the fine house and the sweetmeats, but only pottage and some beef leftovers. They slept on the ground in a hovel like the mine workers. Some preferred to sleep outside under the stars because of the stench inside.

Rested, Kish went to Tut-Kan. “Give us of your cattle so that we might sacrifice to the sky gods. Perhaps they will come and bless my men and me so we can catch that rogue queen and take her back to her father. She has disobeyed him in sneaking away.”

Gray swirls of dust blew past and the people coughed.

Tut-Kan instructed the onlookers to get back to work or they would have the lash on their backs. He then confronted Kish.

“We are a poor community. We have only enough to feed ourselves.” He bowed.

“This people look like they need a ceremony,” Kish said, grabbing the sash about his thin waist.

“Sacrificing and dancing will bring life back into their countenances, I am sure,” Tut-Kan agreed. The prefect understood that Kish was ready to draw his sword.

So a holy day was announced. The miners and their families gathered together and

brought cattle to Kish and his men. Tut-Kan ordered stones to be brought outside the confines of the village on the east where an altar was built. The town's priest began slaughtering the beeves with chanting, wailing, and prayers from the people. As each cow was killed on the altar, it was thrown onto a bonfire. Seven cows, seven sheep, and seven goats were sacrificed and burned. The people danced in circles around the altar and fire pit.

The leaders of the people, including Kish, stood at the four corners of the earth pronouncing the names of the gods.

“I am Anu,” the priest called out, holding a mask of man before his face, “protector of the West.”

“I am Enki,” Tut-Kan called out, holding the mask of an ape, “protector of the East.”

“I am Enlil,” Da-Ku, the mayor, called out, holding the mask of a jackal, “protector of the North.”

“I am Ninurta,” Kish called out, holding the hawk mask, “the protector of the South.”

The leaders were the first to eat and drink the wine, and then it was all passed to the people who ate ravenously as though they had starved for years.

The next day, everyone lay at the foot of the altar in a drunken sleep.

Tut-Kan gave Kish and his men a wagon with asses that was meant for hauling ore. Kish flicked the reins and they sped off, sure they would catch up to Egyptus and force her to be his.

* * *

Kish raced through his memory as the wagon hastened north to circumvent the

mountains. He couldn't remember a time when he wasn't in love with his sister. When they were little, he would seek times to play with her among the cattle, or when she was with Napsut, he would try to get in between them, but they would always run away laughing. When he came into manhood, Kish found every way he could, even hiding himself in the ceiling, to watch her bathe. He would hide under bushes to watch her pass by or look into her windows at night.

One time when she was a young woman he approached her while she was in her bath. The smells of flowers and spices almost made him swoon with delight. He entered just as she climbed the steps out of the pool attached to her bedroom. Her attendant had slipped away on some errand. She had her eyes shut reaching for her towel. He took it and wrapped it around her.

As she dried her hair and wiped her face, she said, "Thank you, Lil-Lil." She wiped her eyes with the towel and opened them.

"You're not Lil-Lil!"

She tried to scream, but Kish covered her mouth with one hand and embraced her with the other. She squirmed.

She tried to say, "What are you doing? Get out of here!"

He tried to rape her, but she inserted her knee into his efforts and ran.

Kish never gave up trying, and when he found her affections were for his brother Mitz-Ra, he sought every opportunity to argue with him and get him into a fight. He had many spars with him, but Mitz-Ra was always the better of the two when it came to

wrestling, fighting with staves, spears or sword fighting. Mitz-Ra bested him in everything. His anger and resentment rose up to a high pitch one day.

Knocked down with a blow across the head from a staff, Kish stood and went for Mitz-Ra's throat, but Mitz-Ra stepped aside and tripped him.

“I'll get Egyptus,” Kish growled. “and ruin her so you will never want her again. You hear! Stay away from her. I can't best you in fighting, but I will take Egyptus some day and lock her in a tower. You will never get your fingers on her again!”

Now it was his only goal in life to take Egyptus away from Mitz-Ra and to make her his pet concubine. He would keep her in a cage.

He managed to keep his feelings for Egyptus from his wife Ok-Hara, but not from Nimrod's mother, the cow. Hathor only laughed when she found out. She hated Egyptus and enjoyed her discomfort, knowing that her mistress had to do everything to avoid being with Kish.

Spotting the wheel tracks of the chariots stolen from him, Kish stopped his reveries. He slapped the asses with the reins and cursed at them, and they raced forward. The men in the back bounced up and down and tried desperately not to fall out of the wagon. The tracks led west to a great sea. He could see it in the distance. As night fell, the sea reflected the myriad stars to form a ribbon of light on the horizon.

Chapter Three

Egyptus and her knights made camp within the mouth of a great red cave that had been carved out by the wind in an ancient time when the winds had swept the earth. Now they had only a calm breeze that made the campfire flicker. The knights sat around eating a deer that had bounced into their path and had been lanced straight on without a thought.

Stopping for the night, they thought they would be safe from Kish and his band, but in the morning they woke to spears pointed at their throats. Kish had kept up his pursuit all night to keep his appointment with Egyptus. But she had not been lying down. She walked out of the shadows of the cave, looking undaunted.

“Now Egyptus,” Kish said in a loud sinister whisper, “you will come back with me to Nippur or I will kill all your knights.”

“Kill them, my brother,” she said nonchalantly. She walked slowly forward, swaying her hips, and sat on a rock. “I will never return alive with you. I will run so far you will never find me.”

“I will always find you, my dear,” Kish sneered. “Your scent is in my nostrils.”

The knights were swift and used their legs to trip the soldiers and their strong arms to grab the spears away from them. Jumping up as though gravity didn't exist, they traded places with the soldiers. The knights thrust each soldier through his throat. Their spears sticking up around the fire appeared as a circular fence.

The rest of the soldiers jumped into the wagon and fled south. Kish was ashen. All he

could do was to shout, "Traitor!" Kish just bared his teeth, growled, and flexed his arms and fists he, was so angry.

"Bind him!" Egyptus commanded. "This time make sure he doesn't escape."

She rose and watched as two of the knights grabbed Kish by his arms and pushed on his shoulders to make him kneel. Then they knocked him over and tied his hands together and feet as though he were a calf ready to be branded. All he could do was to curse under his breath. It only took seconds and they were finished.

Egyptus slowly walked up to him and squatted. "Since you insist on following, we have to give you to the wild dogs. If you survive this time, next time we see you, dear brother, we will kill you." She bent over and kissed his head. "You will never have me."

As she stood up, he didn't beg for mercy, but only growled as the knights broke camp. They continued on their journey north along a sea that looked like blood, reflecting the red rocks that lined it. Egyptus called it The Red Fountain.

* * *

Kish didn't know how many days he lay there. All sharp rocks had been removed, and the fire had been completely drowned, so all his efforts in freeing himself only used up his energy. The only way he could get anywhere was to roll across the sand and rocks. He finally got up into the cave where he could have at least a semblance of shelter. The wind still whipped up into the wide mouth. Kish lost count of the number of sun rises. He became groggy and couldn't think straight, having become dehydrated.

One day he opened his eyes a little to see a blurry light and figures. He assumed

travelers around a campfire. He sighed and tried to call out to them, but all they heard was a groan coming from inside the cave.

He saw someone approach. Surprise covered the man's face. The man returned to his companions, gesticulating back and forth with his arms and hands, pointing to the cave, and spoke very fast in an unknown tongue. Everyone came running and looked upon Kish. When they saw that he was tied up, they carried him to the campfire, untied him and gave him water from a gourd. One of the men took some broth from a kettle above the fire, put it in a little bowl and handed it to Kish.

The broth felt like Heaven. It soothed his whole being. He had been without food for several days and had forgotten his hunger. Now the broth brought it back. He wanted more, but it put him to sleep. When he woke, he was surprised to see the men still there and that they hadn't tied him up. They had made a pallet for him and covered him with a blanket and put a pillow under his head. These are angels, he thought, perhaps the watchers from the sky. But after hearing them argue and yell at each other, he knew they were only merchants traveling to or from somewhere.

As the cool of the morning wore away and the sun took its place in the zenith of the sky, as though sitting upon its throne, the arguing also subsided and one of the merchants spoke to Kish in his own language. Kish sat up and the man knelt upon the ground to be face to face.

“What is your name, Lord, and why are you here by yourself in the wind-swept wilderness?”

“I am Kish, lord of the two rivers. My father is Ham, son of the Savior of Mankind, Father Noah. I have been following my sister, Egyptus, who left her father, trying to persuade her to come back home. She tied me up and left me to die.”

The man stared at Kish for a moment and then went to talk to his comrades. There was more arguing and talking with the hands, but it didn't take long before the man returned. He squatted down again.

“We are traveling to the place of many waters where the land drains into the ocean. It is the route of the gods and Heaven on Earth. We have people settled there to serve the gods. We trade with your people under the mountain who dig for metals. You are welcome to join us for safety. Traveling alone has many dangers. There are many lions and dragons along the way.” He waited for a response from Kish. When Kish didn't respond, he added, “It is safer to come with us than to go back the way you came.” He put his thumbs under his lower lip.

“You are right.” Kish waved his head back and forth. “I will go with you. More men ... more safety.”

The man smiled and related Kish's decision to the others. They all smiled and nodded their heads saying their welcomes in their own tongue.

The next day Kish was given a camel to ride. The previous owner was given the job of herding a group of asses.

Kish smiled at everyone who looked upon him, but what he was thinking was how nice it was to be on the hunt again to find Egyptus. The gods had answered his prayer and accepted his sacrifices.

* * *

Egyptus wished for a camel. She remembered traveling down from Mount Ararat into the southern countries on a camel when she was a little girl. It was a leisurely experience with the camel swaying back and forth. She would look up at the sky and study the constellations and remember the tales of old, how each one was formed by the heroic deeds of men of renown. Then she could sing songs she would make up. Now, she had to rush along, riding inside a chariot, stopping only for short periods to rest their asses.

Chapter Four

After eight years of wandering in the wilderness, living off antelope and deer, Egyptus looked down from a promontory onto the land of her dreams. A small village rose from a marsh, part of a tributary of a mighty river. She looked upon a vast delta that emptied its waters, gathered from the southern mountains, into a vast ocean.

The village was built upon stilts with boats moored alongside each hovel. Racks on which fishing nets were draped and fish and birds hung for drying, dotted the landscape. In the distance she could see men throwing their nets into the air, but they were catching birds not fish. The movement of the hunters caused thousands of water fowl to fill the air, and fill their nets. In other places she saw streams crisscrossed with nets held up by poles. That's where they caught their fish, she guessed.

She turned to Mitz-Ra. "We will have to drain the swamp."

"How's the baby doing?" he asked, placing his hand on her protruding stomach.

"It's doing fine. I am doing fine." She grimaced. "Stop worrying."

"I do worry." He placed his arm around her and brought her close to him. "You already lost a little girl."

Egyptus remembered having to travel with that huge weight pulling her down. She finally had to call to the men to make camp. The contractions were coming too close together, and there was an unexpected pain. She could never get comfortable on the rocky ground despite the tent they had acquired, and there were no midwives. Mitz-Ra stayed close

by, but she had to do this alone. The labor was hard and had lasted all day. It was the hardest thing she had ever done in her life only to have it be for nothing. The baby had come out broken. The cord had been wrapped around its neck. It reminded her of when she was a little girl in a parade. She was riding around with her father Ham in a chariot, and she dropped her clay doll onto the street. It broke apart.

Mitz-Ra had to bury the baby. He had told her it had been a little girl. The death troubled her at first, but she told Mitz-Ra, "I'm glad she died. I want our first born to be a male child and a king. He will be known as Pharaoh."

"It was because of the hard journey." Mitz-Ra gazed out upon the vast landscape.

"Resting and being cautious gave us nothing." Egyptus sighed and looked back towards the chariots and the men waiting for her command. "The men are tired of traveling and raiding caravans."

Mitz-Ra defended their actions. "It was good to keep the men in shape for battle. A knight cannot get soft."

One of the chariots had gone scouting to find a passageway to the village. It returned with good news.

Tit-Tom approached his queen. "Your majesty, I have found a road leading down to the village. We have been traveling parallel to it. It was covered by the brush."

"Good." She raised her voice to all the knights and other men who had joined her through the years. "Mount your chariots and camels. We enter the village."

Tit-Tom asked anxiously, "Do we go in as conquerors?"

“Don't be a fool!” Egyptus replied in anger. “Chariots don't tread water, and I've never seen a camel swim.”

* * *

When the villagers saw a small army approaching, the women and children fled to their straw huts, and the men gathered in boats, pushing off with their poles into deeper water. The chieftain, dressed in his fine feathered headdress, robe, and cape, along with his twenty four priests, presented himself just outside the village where the road came to an abrupt end. The chariots stopped there.

The chieftain bowed. “My most eminent and gracious lady, may we welcome you to our most humble village.”

“Are you the king of this stinky place?” Egyptus asked as her charioteer drove up alongside the welcoming committee.

Kish stepped out from behind. “Welcome sister. I wondered where you had disappeared to.”

Egyptus' face reddened with anger. “You swineherd! How did you ... !” She was without words of exclamation.

“This is Mau-Too, chieftain of this village. I have been living among them for some time now. So be careful how you treat them. They are on my side. I have taught many of them our tongue. They are a great people and know the ways of the ancient gods that used to live in this vicinity. They have a copy of the Holy Book. They say they are the caretakers of this land.”

“Is that your doing?” Egyptus pointed east with the palm of her hand. “There is a large and spacious building being erected in the narrow pass we came through.”

“Yes, my dear sister. That will be my castle. I have promised these people my protection. And ... that is where I plan to hold you captive.”

Egyptus laughed. “That will never be, my dear brother. As you can see, I have my army. Even though it is small, I see nothing here that can withstand it.”

“Ah, my dear. Conquering one's enemy is all in the mind.”

“Enough talk,” Mau-Too interjected. “Step down from your chariots and camels and come to a feast in your honor. We will give unto you beds for your rest.”

Mau-Too and priests led the army across a dock made of small poles laid crosswise on a frame held up above the marshy water. Marsh grass covered most spaces between the buildings. Kish, walking along side Egyptus with Mitz-Ra on her other side, commented, “I see you have a little one coming. Maybe someday he will call me father.”

Mitz-Ra was prevented from hitting Kish with a firm hand from his queen. “Let us be friends for now,” she said with imitation politeness.

The fish was better than Egyptus had expected, and the barley wine had a different flavor. It tasted dark and roasted. It probably was not made from barley at all. Then they brought honey wine, which was completely new to her. She sipped it and had to refuse because of the baby. It was too strong. She knew she would get drunk on it. Not good for the baby at all. But the bread was delicious and so was the water fowl.

After such a feast, everyone became tired and sleepy. Egyptus and the knights were

bedded down in a great hall that looked larger on the inside than what it appeared to be on the outside. The rest of the men were taken in by the peasants.

* * *

Breakfast was a curried rice dish with raisins along with a yaghort drink and cheeses. The bread was so puffy that it had one giant cavity in the center. The natives put in pieces of flesh and cheese. After eating, they rose from their beds which consisted of a cloth covered grass mat. It had less bugs than the feathered mat Egyptus was used to. Or maybe the bugs were just larger, the kind you could see.

The knights gathered around Egyptus, wanting to know when they were going to subjugate the people.

“It has to be a slow process,” Egyptus said as she sat cross-legged in the center of the floor. “First we must ingratiate ourselves to them. Help them out.”

Everyone else sat down in a circle around her.

“In what way?” Ben-Pot asked and scratched his head.

“First, we dig canals and drain the marsh.” Egyptus wrote on the floor mat with her finger. “Here and here. We can use their own men.”

“With what shall we pay them?” He-Sef stretched forth his palm.

Egyptus twisted a little to see him. “These natives don't use gold and silver as money. They barter. What we will give them is design. Their pay will be the end result. They will have land to graze and plant ... more prosperity.”

“We will have to persuade the priesthood,” Mitz-Ra added.

Kish swaggered in. “Yes, persuade the chieftain and his priests.” He put his fists on his hips. “Then we can take over. How quaint.”

The knights rose quickly. Kish put his hands up to show them he did not want trouble. “Careful, gentlemen. Remember that I am well liked by these people, and I mean you no harm. I overheard your plans. I think it a good idea. We should be together in this. I think the chief will listen to me rather than to strangers.”

Egyptus looked up to Mitz-Ra and Ben-Pot. “Help me up.” She stood with their support. “I agree, Kish. You talk to the old man, and we can make this a more civilized place to live in.”

“Oh,” Kish gestured with his hands. “You want to live here, do you?”

“Yes. We intend to make this people our own.” Egyptus sighed. “And knowing you, brother, I believe you would want to join the royal court.”

Kish took her hand and kissed it. “We could reign side by side.”

“You forget Mitz-Ra.” She removed her hand quickly.

Kish turned to look at Mitz-Ra and faced Egyptus again. “I always forget him. Why should he be in your life?”

“He is the father of my child.” Egyptus looked down and held her belly with both hands.

“Mitz-Ra is only a child.” Kish took a step towards Egyptus only to find a restraining hand on his shoulder. He turned his head. It was Mitz-Ra. “Someday dear brother, we shall have a wrestle.”

“And the winner gets the queen?” Kish said menacingly.

“I already have her,” Mitz-Ra countered.

“Boys.” Egyptus said with disgust. “Must I always stand as judge between you two?”

It was agreed that Kish would talk to the leaders of the village and a temporary truce was made between Kish and Mitz-Ra.

Mitz-Ra advised, “Plans can be drawn up by Tot-Ham and myself. We were both taught engineering by Ham. We will include the priesthood of the village.”

Chapter Five

“What do you mean we can't proceed?” Egyptus was wroth. She fumed and paced up and down the Big Hall.

“I spoke to the priests,” Kish explained, turning up the palms of his hands. “They said you can draw up the plans for the excavations, the canals, other things, but they need the workers to complete the road security.”

“You've done this!” She put her face next to his. “You have to build your castle, and you've taken all the workers I need to drain the marsh.”

“They see the castle as a higher priority.” Kish took a step sideways around Egyptus to get out of her face.

“You've persuaded them they need a castle for security.” She stomped her foot and bared her palms. “What do they need protection from? There's nobody out there to harm them ... just a few harmless nomads and merchants.”

“Ah, but merchants coming in caravans,” Kish explained with his cupped hand and forefinger. “They can be taxed.”

“There's your scheme!” Egyptus walked away with a look of disgust then turned back. “You want to rob and plunder. You would starve the village.”

“I would charge only a pittance.” Kish smiled wickedly.

“Merchants may refuse to trade.”

“Then you don't know the ways of the selfish.”

“And you took all the workers!”

Kish stomped *his* foot. “They don't want the marsh drained! The marsh is their livelihood. They refused your offer. I was being polite.”

“But they will give you workers!” Egyptus yelled.

“You talk to the chieftain.” Kish walked out. He had the villagers on his side. He did not need this argument.

* * *

The chieftain responded with every courtesy, even bowing before Egyptus, but his gaze was like steel. “You are asking us to live on arid land, my queen. We cannot do that. You may live above in the arid hills or go further downstream. There is plenty of land for the both of us. But one family cannot survive. You should join us. We will teach you how to fish.”

Egyptus couldn't get him to budge, so she pulled her army out of the village and camped on the hill. There, they drew up plans that would have to wait years for completion.

* * *

Egyptus and Mitz-Ra's attention drew back to the baby in her womb and the labor pains. This time she had all the comfort of bed and pillows and a midwife from the village. Mitz-Ra paced outside the tent. Drinks of spiced wine were passed around, and before they heard the baby cry, they were all drunk and singing songs of glory.

"My dearest, my dearest, my dearest, my darling,*

my darling, my honey of her own mother,

my sappy vine, my honey-sweet,
my honey-mouthed of her mother!

"The gazing of your eyes is pleasant to me;
come my beloved sister.

The speaking of your mouth is pleasant to me,
my honey-mouthed of her mother.

The kissing of your lips is pleasant to me;
come my beloved sister.

"My sister, the beer of your barley is good,
my honey-mouthed of her mother.

The ale of your beer-bread is good;
come my beloved sister.

"My desirable one, my desirable one,
your charms are lovely,
my desirable apple garden,
your charms are lovely.

My fruitful garden of mes trees,
your charms are lovely,

my one who is in himself Dumuzid-abzu,
your charms are lovely.

My holy statuette, my holy statuette,
your charms are lovely.

My alabaster statuette adorned with a lapis-lazuli jewel,
your charms are lovely."

*an actual Sumerian song found at <http://www.humanistictexts.org/sumerlove.htm>

But when they heard the baby crying they awoke and took notice.

“Congratulations, my fair man!” was coming from everyone's mouth as they slapped Mitz-Ra on the back.

Mitz-Ra stumbled into the tent to behold his son. Egyptus lay on her bed nursing the little one. She was smiling contentedly.

Mitz-Ra bent down to take a look at him. He saw a bald baby with an elongated head. The new father jerked back up. “That's not my son.” He swung his arm around pointing with his palm to an imaginary crowd. “You see. He does not look like me at all!” He bent down again.

“Get away,” Egyptus said. “You stink. Go jump in the river.”

“Nope. I do not look like that.” He stood again and walked out.

“Ben-Tot!” She called. “Throw some water on that hulk.”

* * *

With somewhat of a headache, Mitz-Ra held his first born son up to the searing white

disk that traversed the heavens. “Oh Father Ra, we beseech thee this day to accept this child. We give him the name Pharaoh. We ask your blessings upon him that he may have long life, wisdom, and power in the Priesthood of our father Ham. May he be conqueror of all his enemies and flourish upon this land, having many descendants. May kings and queens come from his loins, and all his children prosper in the land ...” The blessing continued for an hour.

All the village participated in the celebration. Dancing and drinking lasted all day and into the night to the sound of many drums, flutes and harps. The girls danced with their arms and hands as they sat on floor mats. Many kinds of bread and cheeses, sprouts, beef, mutton, and all manner of fowl were eaten along with that new dish, rice, which Egyptus said looked like tiny bugs. The rice came in many colors from black and blue to green and red speckled.

After the celebration, Egyptus settled down to nurse her newborn. She paid so much attention to him, not wanting to talk to anyone, not even Mitz-Ra, that he and the knights departed to scout the land. Only two were left to guard Egyptus.

* * *

Five other villages with whom they made friends were discovered throughout the delta and then Mitz-Ra's men raided their cattle. When they found the main river, they were astounded as they floated down the mother of all rivers. (The natives called it the En-Nil, meaning Mother of All.) They came across the remains of an ancient antediluvian civilization in the form of three white, smooth, shiny pyramids topped with wedges of gold.

They had to protect their eyes in order to look at the buildings. Guarding these was a giant lion statue baring its teeth. There was a river landing at the base of its paws. When they returned after a year they had many stories to tell.

Chapter Six

A rabble of men and beasts stirred the dust, and everyone's eyes in the camp turned towards the south to see what was coming. Was it shouts of war? Were they being attacked? People in the camp scurried under rocks or ran to the village to find safety. But as the supposed army reached the camp, only songs of glory were heard. It was Mitz-Ra, the Knights of the Bee, and the cattle they had stolen along the way. Everyone wore the dirt of the trail like crowns.

“Let us sacrifice to the gods!” the men shouted. “For we have come home and none of us are dead.”

As they built altars of stone and killed the bovine, piling them upon the sacrificial fires, people of the village returned, cheering and dancing.

Mitz-Ra, riding a camel, found Egyptus standing with Kish. Pharaoh peeked out from between her knees. She had gone native and wore only a loin cloth like the rest of the villagers. Mitz-Ra stared at Kish and growled. He jumped down, not waiting for the camel to kneel.

“Egyptus! What are you doing with this pig!” Mitz-Ra snarled and grabbed the hilt of his sword.

“Welcome home, brother.” Kish smiled, also slipping his hand on his sword.

The dirty traveler then looked at his little black son, knelt down, and reached out his hand.

Pharaoh stepped to his mother's side and held to her leg with both arms and looked up, seeking her eyes. "Ma-Ma. Ma-Ma." Egyptus tousled his black hair, but she didn't take her gaze off Mitz-Ra. She scooted back as she sensed danger from her two brothers.

"Pharaoh. I'm your da-da." Mitz-Ra saw Egyptus step back. That gave him just enough room to spring towards Kish, drawing his sword, shouting, "I'll quarter you like a pig."

Kish had drawn his sword and stopped Mitz-Ra's advance with a clang of steel on steel as swords collided. They jumped back with both hands on their swords, dancing in a circle. Egyptus stepped between them, leaving little Pharaoh sitting on a rock.

"What are you doing?" She demanded, lifting her hands into the air. "You are brothers! Lay down your weapons. Now!" She stared at one and then the other. "While we live here we need to live in peace."

"What are you doing with him?" Mitz-Ra yelled. "Have you been lying with him while I was away?"

The two brothers let their swords slide to their knees.

"We have become friends. That doesn't mean I have been lying with him." Egyptus kept her hands palm up as she made a circle within a circle, joining their dance. "I've missed you and didn't have anyone to lay with."

"So you did lie with him!" Mitz-Ra tried to parry around Egyptus, but he could not reach Kish.

"I have slept with no one, Mitz-Ra. Put your sword away ... both of you." She turned

to Kish. "Please leave."

As Kish left he muttered under his breath, "The next time we meet, dear brother, it will be I that will tie you up like a pig and quarter you."

Egyptus turned back to Mitz-Ra. "Go wash yourself and then come in unto me."

* * *

Mitz-Ra and Egyptus slept peacefully in a fine house of wood Kish had constructed while the knights were scouting the delta. Kish had promised her a house of stone that would last forever. He would build a temple to her. Egyptus had only laughed. In his resentment, Kish made sure there were secret passages built into the house to have quick access to her bedroom.

A panel slid open near the bed where the two lovers slept. Kish pushed two vials onto the floor. He poured one liquid into another with toxic results and slid the panel closed. He waited until the fumes dispersed. The two would not wake up until the sun reached its zenith.

Slipping into the bedroom, Kish dragged Mitz-Ra into the adjoining secret entrance. He crawled on top of him, slid the panel shut, and dragged Mitz-Ra out of the house. Outside a chariot waited. Kish's charioteer helped lift the drugged man into the chariot. They raced away toward the completed castle. The deed had to be done before sunrise.

The chariot passed by a turn in the road that went down into the marsh silhouetted in the moonlight. He stopped. "Go down there," he told his driver.

In the marsh, Kish found a small road that led along the river. The full moon followed

the chariot as an evil wraith. When he found a wide enough place, he took Mitz-Ra and laid him on the ground. He took out a long handled ax with a wide blade.

“Take his loincloth and throw it into the marsh.”

His driver did so.

Kish took out a knife, bent down and grabbed Mitz-Ra's phallus. He sliced it off and threw it into the water. A fish gobbled it up.

Next, he took the ax and chopped off his enemy's right leg. The thick red blood spattered onto his hands. “One leg, two legs, three legs, four.”

Mitz-Ra groaned, but he couldn't wake up.

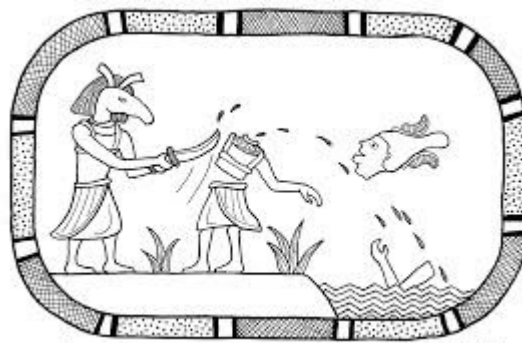
Kish chopped off the left leg. “Two legs, three legs, four.”

Mitz-Ra coughed, trying hard to move his arms. He lifted his head slightly.

Kish chopped the right arm off at the shoulder. “Three legs, four.”

Shock took over Mitz-Ra as his blood poured out upon the ground.

Chopping off the left arm, Kish called out, “One leg, two legs, three legs, four ... are no more.”



Then the head came off. The lungs tried to breathe but failed. Kish lifted Mitz-Ra's

head by the hair and laughed in its face.

Piling all the parts into the chariot, he commanded his driver, "Go!" As they drove down the road, he threw out one part and then another into the marshy waters. He had to stop and cut the torso in half to throw it.

As the sun rose, Kish drank himself into a stupor and lay peacefully in his bed within the tower of his castle. The last thing he said to himself was,

"My desirable one, my desirable one,
your charms are lovely,
my desirable apple garden,
your charms are lovely.

Come up to my tower my lovely and lay next to me, my darling sister."

* * *

Egyptus rose and called for Mitz-Ra. She went about the house, but he was nowhere to be found. She stepped outside. "Men. They always have to be busy."

Inside the house, she refreshed herself by splashing water onto her face and drying it. She picked up Pharaoh. He said, "Da-Da, go," and made an "O" with his mouth, pointing to the wall. Egyptus couldn't help but laugh at the thought of Mitz-Ra disappearing through the wall. Then Pharaoh grabbed her breast and began to nurse.

"Oh, aren't you the hungry one. I'm a little hungry myself. Lil-Lil!"

Abruptly the maid servant ran in, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"I know your name isn't Lil-Lil, but I'm calling you that anyway after a dear friend of

mine. Please fetch me something to eat.”

Egyptus sat down in the doorway to wait for both Mitz-Ra and breakfast. Shortly the girl came with grapes, dates, pomegranate seeds in a bowl and curried rice. As she ate, many of the villagers came up to her bowing and crying, calling out “Mama dearest. Mama dearest.”

“Lil-Lil, come here.” She put down the bowl of pomegranate and asked, “What is this? Is there a holy day celebration?”

Lil-Lil walked out among the people and talked to them. She turned around towards Egyptus, started bowing and crying out with the others, “Mama, Mama ...”

Egyptus put Pharaoh just inside the house on the floor and went out to the crowd. “Lil-Lil! What is this! What do you all mean?”

“Mama,” cried Lil-Lil with tears streaming down her face. “They have something to show you. Please forgive them. Please put no hurt on them. They want to show you.” She kept bowing with the others, reaching up their hands in supplication.

Egyptus stood in the midst of them asking, “What! What is it you want to show me?”

One of the mourners, for that was what they were doing, mourning for someone, brought something up from the ground with both hands to show her. Egyptus didn't understand at first. She couldn't figure out what the thing was. It was spattered with blood. When she finally realized that it was Mitz-Ra's face she was staring at, she screamed, putting her fists to her cheeks. She screamed again, and the man dropped the head, and everyone ran away. She stood there screaming until her throat dried up.

Pharaoh ventured outside. He grabbed hold of his mother's leg and looked at the bloody head, pointing. "Da-Da. Da-Da."

Far away in a castle tower, Kish heard the screams of his sister. He laughed and laughed, laughing so much he rolled onto the floor, holding his sides.

* * *

Egyptus ran through the village to find out who had discovered her brother's head. She grabbed one person after another asking, "Where is the man that found my husband?" When she found him, she made him show her where. After he showed her the spot among the reeds, she asked him to help her find the body. They tromped through the wet marsh, parting the reeds with their hands, not minding what they stepped on until they came upon a foot sticking up out of the water. When she realized what had happened and that Mitz-Ra's body might be strewn along the river, she went back and commanded the whole village to search in the marsh. They were more expert in hunting.

Egyptus gathered another leg, then an arm and shoulder, another arm and shoulder, the parts of his torso, and drove as fast as she could back to her house on the hill. Sobbing, she brought all the parts of Mitz-Ra and placed them on the table. She placed the back of her hand to her mouth, standing there looking at her brother and lover. She called Lil-Lil.

"Bring me needle and thread."

When they were brought, she commenced sewing her brother back together. When she was done, the priesthood stood outside her door knocking with a staff on her door post. She walked to the door slowly, still sobbing. She stared at the bald priests.

“We must hurry,” the one with the staff said. “We don't have much time.”

Egyptus was in shock. All she could do was to watch the priests gather up Mitz-Ra's body and herself and leave in chariots. Pharaoh was left behind crying, “Ma-Ma,” but Lil-Lil scooped him up and cared for him.

* * *

The chariot ride took all day and a night. They came to a small fishing village where they obtained a boat, continuing their journey on the river. By the time they got to the pyramids, Egyptus was herself again. She stood in awe of the giant lion and the three pyramids behind. They shined in the moonlight like ghosts. They seemed to have an aura of power around them which extended to the Lion with its paws stretched out to the landing.

Now the priests were chanting as they carried Mitz-Ra's body and put it on another smaller boat on wheels. It was peaked at both ends with fans pointing fore and aft. This they rolled between the paws and legs of the lion as Egyptus followed with a priest on each side of her. She heard the lion roar, or was it the wind?

Entering the door that had not been there before, they proceeded down a long hallway that slanted downward. Torches the priests carried lit the way. It seemed an hour before they came to another doorway into a large chamber. It was made, like the hallway of huge stone blocks. The ceiling rafters were made of even larger blocks. In the middle was a bath made of stone in the shape of a long box. Egyptus recognized it and started sobbing again, putting the back of her hand to her mouth, but the sobbing would not stop. Tears ran down her cheeks as the priests put the body in the water and circled the box still chanting. She knew

what they were doing. It had been done before in Nippur. They were healing Mitz-Ra.

The chamber resonated with the sound of their chants. Egyptus saw the room light up with a blue prickly aura, especially just above the water. After awhile the priests took the body and put it back into the boat. She held her breath to see if he would rise. Then she noticed another passageway going up. The priests started pushing the boat up the incline. She bit the back of her hand. *Not yet, she thought. Something more is happening.*

Egyptus followed yet another procession that went up and up, turned a corner and continued. The reverberating of the chanting was enough to make her hair stand on end. At one point the boat seemed to float in the air. She understood some of the chanting. It talked about a flying boat that came down from Heaven and went back up again just before the flood.

When they sat the boat down again, they were in another chamber. There was yet another stone box. The priests took Mitz-Ra's wet body and placed it in the empty box. One of them took a vial of oil and poured it out onto different parts of his body. Again they circled the box, chanting. This chamber was larger, and the reverberations were deeper, yet, the chanting buzzed in her ears. And it was hard to breathe. Egyptus became dizzy and had to sit on the floor. The two priests that followed her sat cross-legged on each side of her resting their hands, palms up, in their laps.

Sweat poured profusely over Egyptus' face and body as though she herself were receiving a baptism. She saw spots before her eyes, and became faint. She was told by one of the priests to breathe. She must have been holding her breath.

Chills ran up and down Egyptus' spine and face as she heard within the chanting another voice. She recognized it as Mitz-Ra's. She started sobbing again and couldn't catch her breath. She saw his body rise from the tomb upon waves of blue light. He rose above the priests and came and rested his feet upon the floor in front of her. She bawled. She tried to jump up, but she was held down by the two priests beside her.

Mitz-Ra spoke. "I am Osiris." The sound echoed through the chamber.

Of a sudden, she became very light. She felt very strange as if a new knowledge filled her being. The priests let go as the blue light engulfed her. She drifted up and stood before his majesty, the king, for that was what he had become.

Egyptus spoke. "I am Isis." The thrill of it sent pins and needles all over her body.

The two embraced.

Egyptus couldn't remember much after that except they were on a boat heading down the river. She was in the arms of her brother and lover and felt comforted. She sighed and stared at the stars overhead. Orion was climbing the heavens from the east.

When they arrived back home, it was to the sounds of a hundred drums and a war dance, as the dancers carried shields pointed at both ends and spears. Feather headdress and masks covered each face. The singing of the black men sounded menacing, full of grunts and growls. All the village had come out to welcome them.

Osiris and Isis stood at attention in their chariots as they passed in revue. They were received as king and queen.

Kish stood by the house aghast. He had failed miserably. The gods had failed him

again. He grimaced. But he had friends and followers. He sought out the malcontent, disgruntled and angry, the ones who had complaints against Egyptus' and Mitz-Ra's presence. He promised them power over them when he took over. He left the house and sought out Samesh in the crowd. The man wasn't hard to find. He had shaved his head in protest against the chief and his priests and stood along with friends, who were also bald, aloof from the dancing villagers.

“Come,” Kish commanded. “Let us go to the fort. When others see this shameful display for what it is, they will follow us.” Under his breath he said, “I will have my sister even if she has to be forced.”

Chapter Seven

A division grew between the followers of Mitz-Ra or Osiris and Kish whom they now called Seth, the Well Beloved. They gave him that name because of the many favors he bestowed upon his followers. He gave them gold necklaces, earrings, rings on their fingers, plenty of wine, women, and good meats. With them it was one eternal celebration.

The two groups, the followers of Osiris and the followers of Seth, would often gather in front of the House of Osiris and Isis, beat their drums and display a mock battle, everyone dressed in their masks and feathers, jabbing at each other with spear and shield. When they became tired or were too drunk to stand, the battle would wind down and each go their separate ways. Mitz-Ra and Egyptus would stand on their porch, which they added to their growing sanctuary, thinking they were being honored.

* * *

Kish looked out from the tower he had built for Egyptus. He still longed for her. The women he led to his bed did not satisfy him. They were only a small respite. His heart burned to lay with his sister.

He slammed his fist onto the window sill. "By the gods! I will have her tonight."

Running down the stairs he grabbed a maid by the arm who was coming to see him. "Make the tower room ready. There will be a guest coming to stay with us."

"Yes, Master Seth," she responded, and quickly ran up the stairs while Kish continued down.

Kish entered his laboratory and put two vials in a bag. He left for the stables and had his charioteer ready his chariot. Stepping into his car, the servant slapped the asses and they were off. The guards saluted him as he left the main gate, and he rode down to the royal house singing a merry tune.

“I will have my wish tonight.

My stars, how brightly they shine,

Lighting my path, lighting my path.”

There were no guards protecting the house. They were all asleep in their own quarters. Kish didn't have to sneak behind the bushes, he merely parked his chariot in front and strode gallantly forward behind the house to the hidden door. The structure sat on a brick foundation. One of the bricks was false and easily slid aside. He knelt down and crawled through the tight space and ended up in the bedroom. Mitz-Ra and Egyptus lay sound asleep.

As he had done before when abducting Mitz-Ra, he lay the vials on the floor, poured one into the other and closed the panel. It had a tight seal so as not to let the fumes leak through to him. He waited for the fumes to dissipate and scooted through the hole. Standing, he looked at the two embraced in a love lock. He couldn't wait. He pulled Mitz-Ra off the bed and then crawled in to take his place, wrapping himself around Egyptus. He lay with her for a long while until he thought of the time. It was getting near sunrise. After putting Mitz-Ra back onto the bed, he carried Egyptus down the hole and outside. He didn't even bother to replace the panel inside the bedroom nor the stone on the outside. He was finished with it. He had his prize.

His charioteer helped carry the limp body, putting it onto the chariot. Kish took her to her new home, a captive in a castle tower.

* * *

When Egyptus woke up the sun was high overhead, and Kish was on top of her. She screamed and fought him off. She wasn't worried about herself as much as her other brother.

“What have you done with Mitz-Ra?” She scrambled across the bed, sat on her haunches and held the sheet to cover her body.

“It has been marvelously nice, little sister.” Kish grinned. He just lay there holding his head up against his hand.

“Where is he?” Egyptus slowly looked around at her new surroundings. A round room with four windows, it was furnished with a bed, a dresser, and one chair. Her attention returned to her older brother. “What have you done with him?”

“Nothing has happened to him. He should be waking up just now in his own bed.” He bared his teeth in a wide grin and waved his free hand in the air. “Whereas, you have awoken in *my* bed.”

“How did I get here?” Egyptus pushed her hair back out of her face which was full of contempt.

Kish laughed as he sat up cross-legged at the head of the bed. “Just like I did when I took your beloved the first time.”

Egyptus looked puzzled.

“There is a panel near the left side of your bed. It opens up to a crawl space which

leads outside. I put it in there when I built the house. I merely slipped into your bedroom, pulled you out, and brought you here.”

Egyptus became furious and sought to gouge out her captor's eyes. She sprang at him kicking and scratching. He grabbed her and they both rolled onto the floor where he continued his sexual assault.

Afterward, downstairs, his man servant asked, “What happened to you?” He turned his master's head to look at all the scratches and bites.

Kish licked his bleeding lips. “It was the best time I have ever had with a woman.”

* * *

Mitz-Ra yawned, scratched his head, and looked around. “My honey-mouthed lover? Where have you gone?” He rose on the left side of the bed and noticed the hole in the wall. He scratched his head again. “Egyptus?” He put on his light linen coat and slipped out of the bedroom. “Egyptus? Honey cake?” He looked in all the adjoining rooms, the dining room, the library, the parlor, the grand hall, and then outside, asking every servant he ran into if they had seen his wife. Everyone said, “No, she has not come out,” meaning, out of the bedroom.

Mitz-Ra ran back to the bedroom. He didn't want to believe what he saw. He stared at the hole in the wall for a long time before it dawned on him that she had been stolen. He cried out in anguish, scrapping his face with his fists. He knew in a flash exactly where she had been taken. He seemed to hear a low mocking laugh from a far away.

Without waiting for breakfast, he called out the Knights of the Bee. They had just

finished gnawing the last bits of meat and gristle from the bones of a couple of roasted pigs and jumped at the chance to be busy once again.

Sim-Tak got to Mitz-Ra first. “You want us to kill someone?”

“Yes. My brother,” Mitz-Ra said, girding on his armor and sword. “He has taken your queen.”

“Gladly.” Sim-Tak called out, “Armor and swords, my fellow knights. We are called to defend our queen. It is our oath or our lives.”

As the knights went back to their barracks, Mitz-Ra yelled, “Get your army together. We go to the castle.”

As raiders or soldiers, the men were eager to fight. The knights gathered their own men as well as all the fighting men left in the village who hadn't gone over to Kish's camp. They marched up the road to the castle, Mitz-Ra in the forefront leading them. When they got there, they found the battlements fully occupied. Kish stood behind a row of pickets above the gate ready to receive them.

Kish and Mitz-Ra threw slanderous oaths at each other while Mitz-Ra's men and knights circled the castle fort looking for a way in. The castle, built at the edge of a high plateau, overlooked the delta and butted up against a granite outcropping. No one could ascend the back wall to the tower, and banks of earth were thrown up in front of the castle wall forming a deep ditch. The only way in was by the main gate which had been hoisted up.

As men approached the gate, spears rained down upon them, killing all that were not holding up bronze shields. Hurling spears up at the men occupying the pickets on top of the

wall was useless. A man could reach out, catch the spear and throw it back down.

After an hour without results, Mitz-Ra decided to camp around the castle. They would starve them out. No supplies would be allowed in. By evening, the invaders were famished so Mitz-Ra sent troops back for supplies. The siege would take more than a week. To occupy their time, people played war games, trying to best each other with sword and spear, shouted obscenities at the men manning the walls, played board games such as Oware', played with stones and pits, Hounds and Jackals made of sticks, and gambled with knuckle bones.

After two days the soldiers had had enough and started back to their homes to take care of their families. Mitz-Ra was disheartened. Everyone wanted to fight or leave, so after some arguing he came up with a plan they liked. He told the soldiers to prepare ladders and ropes. They would scale the walls that night. Taking the tall grasses of the wasteland that spread over the plateau, they twisted ropes, and from the few cedar and pine trees that Kish had imported and planted, they cut poles and bound them together to make ladders.

In the security of darkness, Mitz-Ra's army crept over the mounds of earth and down into the ditch. There, they silently hoisted the ladders. As they climbed, they threw ropes around some of the pickets, and letting the ropes drop, soldiers climbed them also. But as they neared the top, they were surprised by sudden flashes of light. Kish's men had been waiting for them with torches. He had ordered them not to light them until they could see the men ascending the walls.

The defenders set fire to the ropes and men screamed as they fell into the ditch. Others were jabbed with spears as they tried to crawl over the top. They pushed the ladders back.

Many men were injured or broke their necks as they plummeted backwards hitting the embankment. Oil poured down upon the wounded soldiers and upon those climbing up. Torches thrown down upon them caused a great bonfire of burning and writhing men.

Mitz-Ra sounded a retreat with a conch shell. He gathered the wounded into tents, and the dead were thrown into the ditch that surrounded the castle.

Mitz-Ra rubbed his gaunt and dirty face as he sat at his table inside his tent. Hesh-Ur-Bala came to him and told him that five of the twelve knights had been killed and most of the villagers.

“I thought they were throwing torches down at us,” Hesh-Ur-Bala said. “But it wasn't. I got a better look when I got to the top of the wall.”

Other knights gathered around Mitz-Ra within his tent.

“Yes,” Ben-Pot said as he sat next to Mitz-Ra. “They have something that throws fire, shooting it all the way over the embankment at our men on the other side of the ditch.”

Mitz-Ra let his hands slide down his face, his mouth open in agony at the loss of his men. “I am Osiris. I know things. I see things in vision. I have memory I have never had before. There are machines under the pyramids.” He stood, staring into empty space.

“He looks like one who is mad,” Tit-Tom said to the others.

Mitz-Ra rose and grabbed Tit-Tom by the neck, pushing him back. “I am not mad. I saw things that no man should see. I have a power at my beckoning. I can do things no man can.” He shoved Tit-Tom against the wall of the tent. “Come, Tit-Tom, you and Hesh-Ur-Bala.” He let Tit-Tom go and went out of the tent. “Get into your chariots and follow me to

the pyramids. Then we will see who is mad.”

Chapter Eight

In the morning, Kish and his soldiers laughed, as they looked out and beheld the field empty of soldiers. The ditch and a little beyond contained the charred remains of half of Mitz-Ra's army. No one could defeat them. The castle proved to be a fortress indeed. Still, spies were sent out to see what had happened to their enemies. They reported back that five of Egyptus' knights had been killed. All the villagers that survived went back to their homes mourning, lamenting, and celebrating funeral rites. People donned black and put ashes on their heads, beat drums and danced. All Mitz-Ra's men were sleeping in their barracks, except for two knights and Mitz-Ra, who fled into the southern deserts.

Kish went up to Egyptus, her pillow wet with tears.

“Stop sobbing,” he implored. “Mitz-Ra is not coming back. Why, he left all his men and went south, probably looking for gold.”

Kish sat on her bed and rubbed her leg which she immediately retracted. “I read in the Holy Book that there is a lot of gold down south in a place called the Abzu. He has probably gone to get gold to buy up an army to rescue you. These villagers are no match for a real army. I have my sources too. I have corresponded with a fellow who thinks he is a king, one called Nimrod, a bastard son of a niece of mine. They call her Hathor.” Kish thought a moment. “That is what you called her isn't it? Hathor. She used to be ...”

“Comrase.” Egyptus wiped her tears away and sat up.

“Oh, yes. Comrase.” Kish scratched his beard with his thumb and forefinger and

stared out the window. "What a little fool." He turned back to Egyptus.

"She was no fool. I guess I was just jealous of her. She knew whose bed to sleep in. I'll give her that."

"I don't know why you want to sleep in a young boy's bed when you can sleep with someone as mature as myself." Kish spied a table with fruit near the bed. He popped a grape into his mouth. "You stay with me and you will be the richest and most powerful woman in the world. I have ways to turn men's hearts to serve me. You can become anyone you want if you stay with me." He smiled. Egyptus turned her head while Kish continued. "I'll make you emperress of the world."

Egyptus sighed. "My Osiris will come for me."

* * *

Mitz-Ra and two knights approached the great lion, securing their boat to the landing.

"Regal, isn't it?" Osiris said, getting out of the boat and tilting his head up to peer into the great stone eyes. "Makes you almost want to bow down to it."

"A place of spirits, I am sure," Tit-Tom said, also looking up. He stretched back and took a deep breath.

Joining them, after securing the boat, Hesh-Ur-Bala said, "This is indeed a place of power."

Walking down the path between the two giant arms, Osiris paused. "I was here. I remember. But I see the whole only in pieces." He stood with his hands on his hips and then walked forward again. He ran his fingertips against the lion's great arm as he walked. When

he reached the breast of the beast, he put out his hand where he thought a door should be. “Somewhere ...” He pressed on a brick and a door cracked open. Pushing on the door, it swung open slightly, enough to let the three men in. There was the long passageway to the underworld.

Tit-Tom and Hesh-Ur-Bala walked behind Osiris in silence. There was no need of a torch. An eerie glow of bluish green light emanated from Osiris, lighting the path.

Osiris stopped from time to time to touch a wall or look for inscriptions. There were none. “I remember attending this place ages ago. It was thousands of years before the flood, a time for the immortals. I had horns then. Everyone wore those horned helmets. It made us look like fierce bulls. When the priests baptized me, a new spirit entered into me, bringing memories as though I had lived in the before-time.”

They came to a juncture. He turned to the right instead of traveling all the way down. The corridor turned off to the left and down again. They came to a large cavern that was filled with house-sized mushrooms covered with dust. The same eerie glow that was about Osiris covered the objects before them as blankets of light.

“I remember being here,” Osiris said as he paused to behold such a sight. “Yet, not me ... another lifetime.”

Hesh-Ur-Bala lifted up his hands and dropped them again. “What are these?”

Tit-Tom stared, turned and stared some more.

Osiris answered, “These are falcons, air ships. They are the one thing that Kish and his castle will not stand against.” He laughed and continued. “All of this,” he said, waving his

hand through the stuffy air, “used to be under my control. I had a wife. Her name was Hat-Hor. That was only her title ... The House of Horus, the place of falcons. Her personal name was Nin-Har-Sag, the nurse that brought forth mankind, she and my brother Enki.” Osiris laughed. “He tried to have a son by her. It never worked for she had a daughter. He tried with her, but she had a daughter also. He tried with his granddaughter. He never could have a son because Nin-Har-Sag was for me ... Enlil, Osiris, Mitz-Ra.” Osiris paused and explained as he waved his right hand slowly. “The natives call me Osiris because that is their language.”

The three walked closer to one of the falcon air ships. “The pyramid is called The House of Horus. It was built by Ra ... Anus ... to hide the falcons here underneath. Nin-Har-Sag was governor in this sacred desert.” Osiris sighed as he reminisced. “It wasn't always desert. That was caused by the wars.” He coughed. “It used to be green. I came to Nin-Har-Sag, and she taught me how to fly the falcons. We had wars and intrigues. We fought valiantly and taught mankind, the antediluvians, to fight each other. We didn't care. They weren't worth much. They were mere mortals. We used them in our wars as soldiers. We used them originally to dig up gold in the Abzu. That was my brother's charge. I lived in the temple in Nippur. Nin-Ur-Ta, my son, hid one of these divine birds there below the temple.”

Osiris walked under the nearest ship. “Look at me now. A mere mortal after all.” He lifted his hand, touched the base of the mushroom and pushed against a panel. A staircase creaked, swinging down to settle on the ground. The interior of the ship lit up. A whirring sound came from within.

“Quickly. We must save Isis.” Osiris ran up the metal stairs followed by Tit-Tom and

Hesh-Ur-Bala.

The two knights, filled with amazement, beheld all the flickering lights and instruments of curious workmanship on the inside along the walls and ceiling and along an oval table attached to the wall. Four chairs, covered with soft leather, sat evenly spaced before the table. The front chair where Osiris sat faced a black window. He flicked control switches, turned knobs, and took hold of two black handles. The black window suddenly held a view of the room filled with all the flying craft, and the metal stairs swung back in place producing a flat seamless section of floor.

“Sit down. We are ascending.”

The craft, pushed up by its stem to the ceiling, reached a hole that opened up to the outside. Sand fell on the craft, covering the window, but was soon swept away by a gust of wind as they sped through the air. Tit-Tom and Hesh-Ur-Bala sat frozen, holding tightly onto the arms of their chairs, eyes wide open and mouths puckered.

* * *

There was much clamor and shouting as the watchmen on the castle walls saw a shining white orb racing towards them. They ran every which way, bumping into each other to get down to safety.

Kish heard the scream of the craft as he raced outside into the courtyard. He saw men running and falling off the battlements. He asked one soldier, “What is it? Why are all the men frightened?”

“It is a star, Master,” the man screamed, covering his eyes with his arm. “It has fallen

from the heavens and is going to hit us!”

Kish looked up shading his eyes. It was like looking into the sun. “It is absurd. Stars don't fall and hit the earth.”

Another soldier yelled, “It is one of the gods who has come to destroy us for holding his daughter.”

He wasn't altogether incorrect.

The flaming star didn't hit the castle. It stopped just before the tower at the southern window. It angled and a stairway swung out connecting it to the window. A man could be heard calling, “Isis. Isis. Crawl up the ladder. It is I, Osiris, who have come to save you.”

When Kish heard this, he raced back into the castle and up the winding stairs to his beloved Egyptus.

Egyptus had seen the shooting star. She crawled under the bed screaming. She had been stolen from her lover, raped, held prisoner in a tower, and now she was going to burn up as a star hit the castle. The gods were against her. But when she heard Mitz-Ra's voice, her jaw dropped. She gulped air, poked her head out from under the bed and screamed again. She saw the ladder stuck in the window, and it was going upward into the star.

“Isis! Isis! Hurry!” Osiris called.

Egyptus scooted out from under the bed when the door opened.

“Oh no you don't!” cried Kish.

Egyptus sprang to her feet and Kish jumped for her. He grabbed her, she fell backward and he on top of her. Her hand went out, found a brass bedpan and hit him with it. Then she

shoved him off. She got up again and ran toward the window. Just as she started climbing, she felt a hand grab her foot. She kicked and knocked Kish down again. Scampering up the stairs, which started closing, she went for the ride of her life. The craft sped off before she climbed to the top. She reached the cabin just before the stairs would have snapped her fingers and toes off. Mitz-Ra grabbed her. He was her lover and her god.

The two embraced in a passionate kiss. The knights clapped their hands and pounded their feet onto the floor.

“There is one more thing I have to do,” Osiris/Mitz-Ra said, holding his lover's beautiful face smeared with tears.

He sat down again and pushed a grip switch on one of the handles. Flames shot out from the air craft and engulfed the castle. It burned, and so did anyone else who did not escape out through the main gate.

The star fled towards the Tigris and Euphrates valley, but on the way, it spied a caravan traveling west. Those in the caravan heard these words coming from the star: “When you get to the mother river, tell the Knights of the Bee to make their way back to Nippur.”

* * *

Nimrod, at the request of Kish, had come to his aid, only to arrive too late. The castle was in flames. Kish was found sitting on a rock watching his world ascend as smoke into the air. He face was contorted with anger.

Nimrod's army filled the lower plateau in front of the burning embers and made camp where a few days before Mitz-Ra's army had been encamped.

Nimrod approached Kish and he greeted him. “And this must be the mighty king to be.”

Kish, sitting on the rock with his chin in his hand looked up. He sprang to his feet with a smile. “Nimrod, my nephew. Or are you my son? Who can tell these days, huh?” They grabbed each other's arms and then gave each other a hug and kiss on the cheeks.

“Yes. This is me. You sent for me and I came. I am sorry I got here too late.” Nimrod turned to look at the ashes of the castle.

“My losses are small. I have a whole new world to conquer.” Kish put his arms around his nephew (or son) and walked away from the castle and his dreams. He had other ideas in mind. “Let's go back to your tent and make plans.”

End of Book Three

Book Five

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Chapter One

Nimrod rose from his bed to catch the morning air. He never slept beyond the time just before sunrise no matter what time he went to bed. He had that habit from living the life of a shepherd most of his growing up years. He strolled out onto the patio of the temple to watch the sunrise. Noticing he was not alone, he looked around for his mother Hathor. She would be among the priests who took this time to worship Nin-Ur-Ta, the sun god. They were assembled below in the town square, kneeling, bowing, and singing towards the step pyramid. Their singing was sonorous, reverberating within Nimrod's bones and all the hollows of his body with a lot of "Ahhhhh's" and "Oooooom's" in one single note coming from their noses.

He felt a soft hand on his shoulder. He placed his hand over hers.

"You thought you'd get rid of me?" she asked.

"I left you asleep," he said without turning, keeping his eye on the sunrise. The sun rose just over the temple atop the pyramid. "Or I thought." He took a deep breath as Sammu embraced him from the back.

Just for a moment, as they watched, a comet appeared attached to the sun.

"It is an omen!" Sammu pointed to the comet which quickly faded into the daylight. She brought her fingers back and bit her nails.

"What do you think it means?" whispered Nimrod.

The priests below were very agitated and made much clamor. Hathor soon joined

Nimrod and his wife. “I will tell you what it means,” she said as she ascended the steps. “If you had seen the previous setting of stars, it would have told you that the gods have crowned you King of the Universe ... my own son. You will conquer all the lands round about and be Emperor.” Hathor embraced Nimrod and kissed him on the cheek. Sammu stood aghast with the back of her hand to her mouth. “The sun is today in Scorpio,” continued Hathor, “which has taken the place of Orion. Nimrod has taken the place of Osiris in dominion. Praise be to my son.” She kissed him again and again on both cheeks. She got down on her knees and grabbed his legs. “My Lord and God. Have mercy upon this people.”

“Who is this Osiris, Mother?” He lifted her up, and she placed her head on his breast.

“It is none other than Mitz-Ra, and he has fled with Egyptus to the West.”

Then Sammu spoke. “Osiris is fled.” She embraced her husband and lover and her mother. “Orion has been conquered by the Scorpion King.” Then she kissed his cheek.

* * *

Drum beats pounded on the ears of everyone in the city and echoed, bouncing about the walls of the houses and temples. The shrill of the trumpets raised chills in their spines. A parade started at the town square and went out to march along the outside walls. People stood upon the walls throwing down flowers and shouted praise to their new king, the Scorpion King, as he rode forth in his own chariot. Emblems of scorpions were emblazoned upon the chariots, shields carried by the soldiers, and the banners that everywhere fluttered in the wind carried on poles by the marching citizens.

“My sting will be sharp,” Nimrod shouted in response, “as it shoots from my bows by

the thousands!”

His captain, Ben-Ho-Twp, who rode with him, called out, “No one can stop the usurper and destroyer of kingdoms.”

“Praise to the Man!” and “He who is mighty to loot!” “Taker of the daughters of women!” and “Taker of the spoils of battle!” were shouted again and again by the soldiers.

After the parade circled the city seven times, the soldiers hefted Nimrod's chariot onto their shoulders and carried it through the gates amid shouts of cheer and pure joy and set it down by the flesh pots full of roasting pork and beef within the town square. Wine was brought and mixed with water. Dancing and singing erupted with glee. Children laughed, ran, and chased each other. The feast was on with meats and breads and merry making. They had a king that would lead them to glory.

During the festivities a throne covered in gold was brought and set upon the steps of the pyramid. Priests chanted and danced in circles with Nimrod in the center. They carried him and sat him on his throne and with prayers and blessings of the gods placed a crown on his head.

“I command you to sing and dance and laugh,” Nimrod called out. “Make merry tonight, for tomorrow we die. Make love to your wives, your sisters and your daughters, for tomorrow we march and may never return. Only babes in their mother's arms will be left to sing our songs of glory and gore. We will make widows of our wives and our children will be left fatherless. So let the smiths blow the coals and hammer the swords, and tomorrow they will sweat with the blood of our enemies. Cut the arrows and string the bows.

Tomorrow it will rain death in the camps of our brothers. So onward through the night. There will be no sleep until our walls expand to the rivers east and west and to the mountains in the north and to the sea in the south.”

All the people shouted, “Nimrod! Nimrod! Nimrod!” and shouted it again.

* * *

In the middle of the night Nimrod and Sammur slipped away and made love in the temple.

“Where will you go first, my husband?” Sammur lay beside Nimrod and combed his hair with her fingers. His hair and beard were growing long and beautiful.

“Where else? Sippar.” He stared into her hypnotic eyes and smiled. “They have walled us out. They didn't ever want to trade. They didn't want to be a part of us. They will not be separated any longer. I will take the city and take the people. They will become our servants and our slaves.”

Chapter Two

Rows upon hundreds of rows of regimented soldiers marched upon an ancient washed out road discovered by Nimrod when he had spied out the land. Each soldier wore armor of leather cloaks sprouting round brass knobs the size of a fist over dresses made of leather strips also decorated, but with smaller knobs. Upon the head of each captain or footman was a brass helmet lined inside with excelsior or grass matting. Each infantryman carried a brass spear, ax, and a wooden shield covered with brass knobs. The archers marched behind the infantry. They carried nothing but the bows across their chests and their quiver of arrows slung across the opposite shoulder. They were to be protected by the infantry. They had to be free to form ranks and shoot, run, form ranks again and shoot upon command.

All these were followed by the four-wheeled chariots. The four wheels made the the chariots cumbersome and slow and easily overturned, but at that time, no other chariots contended with them. The four were the four directions of the globe upon which they intended to conquer. The four wheels were the four destinies, the sun, moon, earth, and stars, and the four asses were the four intents, fire, sword, dearth, and flood. They rode upon the blessings of the gods. It was to conquer or die.

In every chariot rode a spear thrower and the charioteer, and around the inside walls of the chariot were strapped bundles of spears, each one with a sharp bronze spearhead thirsty for the blood of an enemy soldier.

This was an army, the first one that had set its foot upon the land since the flood.

There had been squabbles among villages in which everyone fought, but no one trained as soldiers. This was Khan's legacy. Most of these men now marching upon Sippar had no family, but were born of temple maidens. They grew up training to fight and fighting each other in sports events and trials. Only a hundred or so knew their father and mother and had brothers and sisters. The rest were temple bastards, hardened and tough.

The army had started out clean shaven, both head and chin, with clean clothes and shiny swords. They had marched in parade being garlanded by the women of Nippur. Along the long march the dust clung to their sweat and their mouths and eyes. They breathed it and ate it. Yet they were undaunted and unfeeling. Every night when the moon reached its zenith' they would stop and eat fish and bread, washing it down with barley wine. They slept on the hardened earth and got up before the sun rose.

* * *

A cloud of dust was seen by a guard strolling along the top of the white wall separating Sippar from the rest of the world. He called for Captain Arphaxad who ran up the ramp to the lookout's position.

“What is so urgent, Jameth?” Arphaxad called out before reaching the top.

Jameth, a tall and handsome stripling crowned with curly blonde hair and wearing a leather tunic, pointed to the dust cloud on the southern horizon. Arphaxad stared at the oncoming storm. It didn't look natural.

“Blow your horn, son. That is not a dust storm.”

Jameth put his conch shell to his mouth and blew a long billowy resonant crescendo.

It seemed like the whole town manned the wall. Then they fell to their knees and cried to the Lord their God to fight their battle for them. They were fathers and brothers, shepherds and craftsmen, masters and servants, all to fight side by side to protect their homes, families, and their religion.

“Who would be coming, and why?” Jameth asked his captain.

“There is only one person I know of,” Arphaxad said, “who would be angry enough to come with an army to attack this wall.”

“Who?” Jameth asked.

“Nimrod.”

* * *

Nimrod rode his chariot up to the wall, slapping his asses with a whip. He halted just before a ditch that had been dug in front of the wall. The dirt had been thrown up to form an embankment. He shook his head and looked up. “Bad move Arphaxad. My men can climb this hill and be closer to your men. It will be easy to kill them.”

“We are ready for you, Nimrod, in the strength of the Lord,” Arphaxad shouted back from the top of the white wall.

“Our numbers are stronger than your faith,” Nimrod yelled up to his former friend. “You don't have enough men in the whole city to defend it. It would be better for you to surrender. We need you back in Nippur. We are doing much building. We are expanding our influence over the land, building new cities and temples.”

“We will not give up our city to become your slaves,” Arphaxad retorted.

“As you will.” Nimrod turned his chariot, slapped his asses, and sped back to his army setting up camp.

As night overtook the land, the men of Sippar watched as one campfire after another lit up the landscape. They waited in silence as the army below sang songs of bravery and honor. Arphaxad thought, is it honorable to fight and raid and slaughter? That night the men on the wall slept with sword in hand. Some slept standing up, some not at all. Others slept on piles of stones they had gathered and brought up the ramp to use in their shepherd's slings.

The whole town woke to the pounding of drums and the shrieks of trumpets. Everyone on the wall stood alert, wiping the sleep out of their eyes. Women were sent with water or warm yaghort and mint along with strips of mutton wrapped in bread for the soldiers.

Shem was getting old. He looked up at his family manning the wall, prayed, and worried. He leaned on his staff, breathing heavily. His granddaughter Asamath brought him a chair, and he sat down.

“Father,” whispered Asamath, “will we be safe?”

Shem turned to her. “Daughter, you had better tell the women to gather up the children and flee to the hills and into the mountains. We will not be supported in this battle.”

Asamath, a thin woman with long black hair wound into a double knot that hung across her shoulder, put her hand up to her mouth and trembled. “I don't think they will listen, Father Shem. They will want to fight.”

Chapter Three

The shepherds were sure shots. Their stones found spaces between shields and into the foreheads and throats of the attackers. The stones made a thunk, thunk, thunk sound as they hit the wooden shields, and every now and then a “pink” as they hit a brass knob. For every man that fell from the wall with a spear through his chest, ten men below the wall fell into the ditch. When Nimrod saw that the ditch was being filled with his soldiers, he called in the archers.

“Raise your bows to the sky and let it rain arrows!” he commanded.

The infantry stood in front of their comrades with their shields up. The archers, as they raised their bows began to be mowed down by the stones thrown from the slings of the shepherds. Yet, enough arrows were shot into the air that a dense rain of death came down upon those on the wall. The archers shot again and it rained behind the wall killing most of the survivors. There was no defense unless a man ran into a stone building.

“Bring out the firebrands!” Nimrod commanded.

The archers used a different arrow they dipped into oil and lit them in the fire buckets. When they let go the arrows this time, it rained fire upon the town. They could hear the screams of the women and children and saw the flames licking above the wall.

The next day brought silence, and Nimrod surveyed the damage to his army. He walked along the bank observing the dead. He searched for a way over the ditch. He brought a few soldiers and instructed them to make a bridge across the dead bodies. They placed

shields over the bodies, but walking over them was wobbly. He looked for that secret entrance he knew was there. He found it, but it was walled up. Coming back and getting into his chariot he drove down by the river. He examined the wall and found that it was finally cracking. Parts of it had fallen into the river. He saw a man on the other side who fled.

“Soldier,” he called. “Get a few men, make poles out of these palm trees. Make battering rams. This part of the wall has been weakened by the river. It will come down.”

The ditch near the river was filled in. Trees were cut down and their trunks were used to pound against the wall which cracked and fell in pieces. Enough of the wall was down to let the army cross over five men abreast.

As the army marched into the city they were met by a hundred archers, but they were not trained as soldiers. The infantrymen ran upon them and scattered them. Then the city was empty except for the dead and one man.

Nimrod approached Father Shem who sat before the ashes of what was once a beautifully decorated tent. It had been made of many colors with many designs woven into the material.

Shem tried to rise. “My son, Nimrod.”

“Sit, Father.” Nimrod stood beside the old man looking at the damage the fire had made. “I have not come to harm you. I gave everyone a chance to come out alive, but Arphaxad wanted to fight.”

“He was always bullheaded.”

“Just like the old gods.”

Shem, holding to his staff, looked up at Nimrod. "Someday there will be one god."

* * *

Nimrod went out into the wilderness north of Sippar with a small regiment and gently gathered up the people who had fled the town. He found them hiding in the bushes, in caves, and behind the rocks, saying to them, "I am Nimrod. You know me. I didn't come here to kill or maim, torture or rape or make slaves of you. My cause is just, and I will be merciful to all those who come unto me. I will give you jobs and abodes of comfort and rest and plenty of wine and meat. Come join me, and all your needs will be met. I will protect you. You will have no need of fear."

Of course, when he found men shooting arrows at him or stones, he had them killed. What he wanted were the skilled craftsmen and weavers of cloth. He found most of the women and children and some of the craftsmen. Shepherds he had in abundance, so any who came under his arm he put to work as unskilled laborers. But as promised, he protected them.

He commanded all of his soldiers to never molest the women or children. If any soldiers were caught groaning or complaining, he executed.

The long march brought the citizens of Sippar to Nippur where they were distributed to merchants and tradesmen. Some were sent to other cities, one of which was a winter palace for Sammu-amat in the south along with places of learning called Eridu. There a temple dedicated to Enki was being restored, and the priests needed many workers. It was the southernmost city in the land of Sumer, named for Nimrod's queen.

Chapter Four

A star appeared shooting over the western horizon. It grew brighter as it sped toward the city of Nippur. The people cried out and fell to the earth as the star become a second sun in the noonday sky. It did not frighten the priests at the temple pyramid. They knew what it was as it settled on top of the apex. Ptra-Pah, the old high priest, opened a door underneath the falcon that allowed its ladder to descend into the interior of the temple.

Mitz-Ra led Egyptus down the ladder. Two of her knights followed.

At the bottom of the stairwell, Ptra-Pah bowed. "Welcome back, your majesties. Much has changed since you left, Egyptus. Your star, Sirius, is still the brightest star in the heavens, but I am afraid that the Scorpion King has supplanted Mitz-Ra."

"Thank you, Ptra-Pah." Egyptus touched his outstretched hand letting him rise. "I am glad I still have friends."

"What should we do with the falcon, old man?" Mitz-Ra asked, perturbed. "Who is this Nimrod? Surely he is not of the royal family."

Ptra-Pah bowed his head, "By your leave, Sire, he is of the royal house, the son of Kish."

Mitz-Ra and Egyptus scowled.

Ptra-Pah continued, "And he is supported by a very large army."

"We can deal with him later," Egyptus said demurely. "I am exhausted and need to rest."

“If you will allow an old man,” Ptra-Pah tilted his head and raised the palm of his hand. “I will take the falcon into a room underneath the temple.”

“You may,” Mitz-Ra replied.

Everyone stepped out of the way and allowed the priest to ascend the ladder and into the cockpit of the falcon. What the people saw, those courageous enough to peek, was the sun god, as a blazing disk, rising from the temple and vanishing behind it. This added to their testimony that the sun god, Nin-Ur-Ta, did indeed live within his temple.

Mitz-Ra again met with Ptra-Pah, commanding the old priest, “Send for my uncle Kana'an in Accad. He will be interested in the falcon.”

“You may be interested, your majesty,” Ptra-Pah said with uplifted palms, “that when we first came to Nippur and began rebuilding the temple that another falcon was found underneath. Now we have two.”

Mitz-Ra smiled. “We have many more at our command if we need them.”

“Then,” Ptra-Pah tilted his head back and forth, trying not to be excited. “it is true what I was taught as a youth. You have found the mysterious Great Pyramid.”

“Yes. Now go.”

“Gladly.”

* * *

When Kana'an arrived at the temple annex and first beheld Mitz-Ra, grabbing his wrist in welcome, he stared into his eyes. “You have changed. You are a man now.”

“Yes,” Mitz-Ra smiled. “And more.”

Kana'an could see a aura of godliness about him. "Yes. And more."

They dropped their welcome grip.

"I am to be a father." Mitz-Ra beamed.

"With your sister, Egyptus I assume?" Kana'an asked, raising an eye-brow.

"Yes, but that is not why I invited you. I want to show you something." Mitz-Ra put his arm around his uncle's shoulders and guided him down a corridor that led below the temple.

Kana'an saw two giant mushrooms, and he scratched his head. "What am I looking at?" They were painted with feathers, had tails like a hawk, and beaks like a falcon. Their eyes were black windows revealing darkened interiors.

"They are falcons ... air ships that fight in the sky." Mitz-Ra stood proud with his hands on his hips.

Kana'an grabbed his beard and grinned as he stared at the two falcons. "Son, I am filled with delight and terror at the sight." He turned to Mitz-Ra. "Where did they come from?"

Mitz-Ra only smiled.

"I have only read about such things in the Holy Book." Kana'an stared at Mitz-Ra intensely.

"If you have then read the Holy Book you may have read about the great obelisks in which the sky gods flew out beyond the earth into the heavens."

Kana'an held his chin in his thumb and forefinger. "Hmmm. If I read you right, these

could be very useful. I remember how interested Father and Khan were in finding a way to Heaven.”

“With the knowledge I have brought home, we could make one,” Mitz-Ra as Osiris beamed. “Our domain would be unearthly ... beyond Earth's bounds.”

Mitz-Ra touched a panel on the first falcon. A ladder descended, and the two went up into the belly of the beast.

Kana'an bent over and examined the instruments. He said, “We will need to rebuild the temple at Sippar. Wasn't it the landing platform for the obelisks?” Kana'an placed his hand on a button.

“Yes, and I wouldn't touch that.” Mitz-Ra smiled. “We would be in trouble if you did. We should go there and inspect what is left of it.”

Kana'an stood up and faced his nephew. “How did you learn about these falcons?”

Mitz-Ra told him all about his adventures in the west at the mother of all rivers which the natives called the En-Nil. He told him how Kish had killed him and how the priesthood of the En-Nil had brought him back to life, gave him a new name, and how the Great Pyramid had imparted a new memory to him. Within the context of that new memory he knew how to fly the falcons.

“There must be gods then,” was all Kana'an could say. Trying to digest what he had been told, he said, “And blessed be the gods for your safe return.” Kana'an put his hand on his nephew's shoulder. “Son.” He lowered his voice. “Do you know if you are mortal or immortal?”

“I believe everyone will gain immortality. But no. I do not know yet.”

* * *

The other Knights of the Bee came in from the land of En-Nil at night in the cover of darkness. They carried a special gift for Egyptus in a woven basket covered with white linen. They entered, with whispers, the old house of Ham where she again had taken up residence. Her old servant Lil-Lil brought her down from the bedroom, holding a lamp in her hand. The lamp with its single flame threw contorted shadows of horrible monsters upon the wall. As the two grew closer to the monsters, Egyptus caught the faces of her knights.

“You have arrived,” remarked Egyptus, holding her arms across the robe she had thrown over her shoulders.

The knights knelt before their mistress. She extended her hand and bade them rise.

“Your majesty,” the foremost knight said, “We have a gift for you.” He extended the basket they had carried from the En-Nil.

Her heart raced and tears ran down her face as she took off the white linen. She screamed with delight as she saw her little boy laughing at her. She took him into her arms and danced around the room. Naked Mitz-Ra came down the stairs to see what the noise was about, and Lil-Lil ran about lighting all the lamps. The whole house became joyous at the return of baby Pharaoh, and Mitz-Ra ordered food and drink for the knights. Everyone spent the rest of the night drinking and telling stories of their adventures.

Chapter Five

Nimrod worried about Akkad. He paced the bedroom floor. Sammur lay sound asleep. He walked over to the window to behold the full moon, taking hold of the north pillar holding up the window's arch. How could she sleep in this effulgence?

His grandfather Ham was getting old. He would die soon. His soul would be taken to the heavens to walk the milky path and gain a starry kingdom. But what of his earthly kingdom? Who would take it over? *Would any of Ham's sons or grandsons oppose me?* he thought. He was king now and would be king over the whole of the two rivers. He would have to act quickly to secure that city for himself. His father Kish was building a city between Nippur and Akkad. *He might try taking over Grandfather's throne.*

Then there was Egyptus and Mitz-Ra. They had twelve knights, but soldiers they had none. What they did have was the support of the priesthood. Egyptus had no throne but she had political power. Would she vie for the throne of her father? He must befriend her and get her support. She hated Kish. The two could not live in the same city without fighting, so she naturally would side with him instead of with Kish. If they united, they could have both the city of Kish and Akkad. He had to tread carefully with the royal family.

* * *

Nimrod invited Egyptus and Mitz-Ra to a royal banquet. Kana'an and Put came with their families. There were plenty of jesters, acrobats, and musicians for entertainment along with all the town of Nippur. Everyone had plenty of meat and wine. The banquet would last

until everyone collapsed in complete drunkenness.

Kish was not invited, which caused him to prepare his new castle for war.

“And to what, my fair nephew,” Egyptus asked, holding her wine glass in the air with her elbow on the table for support, “do we owe this pleasure of feasting?”

“Can I have an appetite without sharing it with my family?” Nimrod pointed with his golden goblet full of wine, making a circle with it to all the surrounding citizens eating flesh and bread and dancing in the town square.

The musicians trilled and drummed and plucked the string, presenting a brocade of royal music.

Egyptus addressed Hathor, the cow. “I see you have grown quite plump and gray in my absence. I drink to the fruit of your womb.”

Hathor answered, “And I drink to your worm, my dear. Mine is king.”

Egyptus thoughtfully declined arguing the point and said, “I believe ... all our sons will be kings.”

“Our appetites,” Mitz-Ra responded, “have grown expansive, my dear nephew.” He raised his goblet to the sky before he drank. “It is not our stomachs that are growling or getting big, although our wives may get that way.”

Everyone at the table laughed.

“Our family holds the throne,” Kana'an conceded, “under our father Ham, and he is getting old.”

“See and hear ye old ones,” Put retorted. “It is a rare thing we get together to feast and

enjoy ourselves. Let us not talk about thrones and kingdoms but do what is natural. Our father Ham will appoint his successor. Why should we fret over who that will be?”

Sammur leaned forward and turned toward Put. “But the stars have spoken, my dear uncle. Do they not have more authority? Have they not crowned my husband king over the land?”

Nimrod raised his voice, saying, “Let us be united in this thing, that the right to rule belongs to the family and not to one man.”

“Hear we all and here!” they all said as they slammed their hands on the table and drank.*

Sammur grinned, her face turning red. She reached over and kissed Nimrod's cheek and whispered into his ear. “You hadn't the need to stand up for me or for yourself?”

Nimrod, in trying to repair the damage to Sammur's pride said, “We are all lords and ladies of the same house. Then let us rule together in our separate districts.”

“A compromise?” asked Egyptus reaching for another beef steak.

“We are building cities and temples are being repaired. Each one of us here will command the land of Sumer from his own city,” Nimrod proposed as he leaned forward to look at each face in return. “Are we in agreement?”

“What of Kish?” Egyptus asked with disdain.

“Surely, he has gone after another man's wife,” Mitz-Ra said, blowing from his nostrils like a bull ready to attack.

*the shortened version of “Hear we all that are here.”

“I have meditated upon that problem.” Nimrod took a mouthful of potted pork seasoned with hot peppers and swallowed. Everyone waited for him to speak, acknowledging his superior military authority. “I have given Kish land to live on as long as he does not molest anyone else in the family.”

“Is mercy warranted?” Mitz-Ra asked, making a fist.

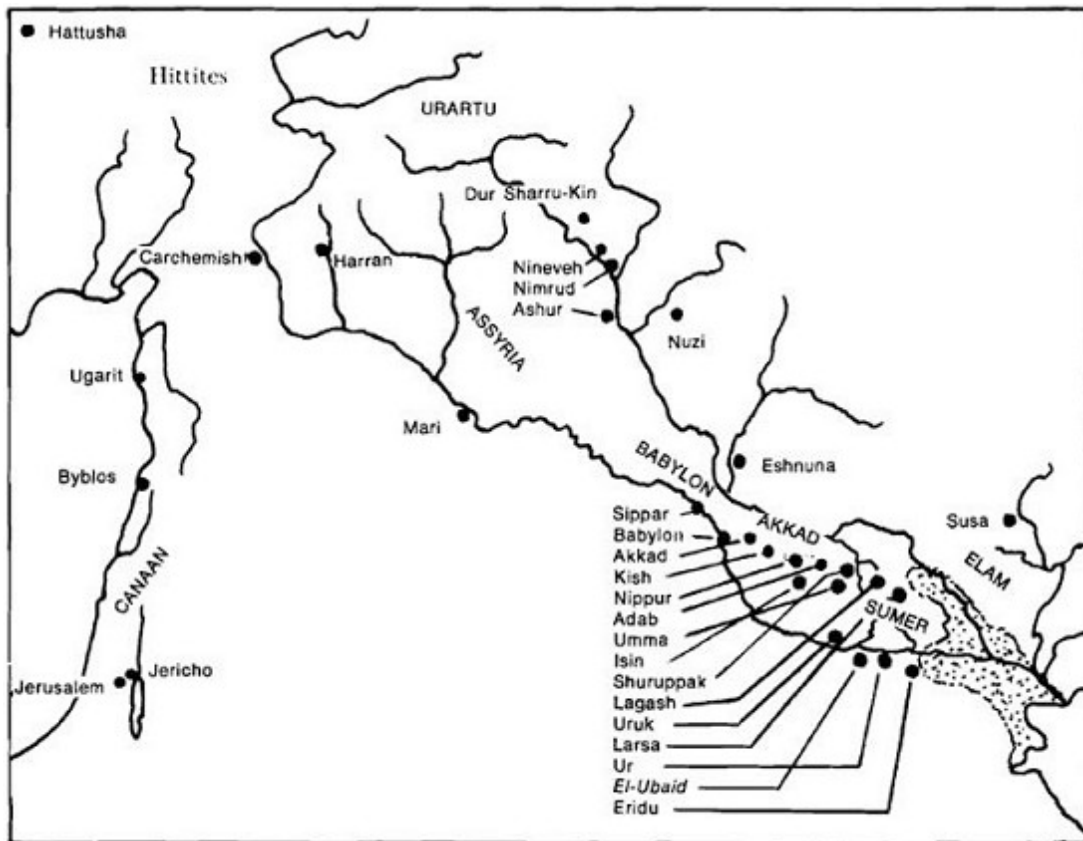
“I will take care of Kish,” Nimrod said politely as he rubbed his mouth on his arm. “He is not to be destroyed. Though I believe he will be persuaded with gold as a ransom for Egyptus and the land he lives on.” He stared at Mitz-Ra. “Is that to your satisfaction?”

“If he accepts the gold and leaves the land,” Mitz-Ra said, bringing the other hand into a fist. “I mean the whole land of Sumer.”

“He can take the land of En-Nil and will be out of our worries,” Egyptus said without a glance.

“If the whole of us agree,” Nimrod said, looking at each face in turn, lifting his goblet.

Everyone of the family of Ham said, “We agree,” and lifting their goblets to the stars of the night sky, drank in unison.



Chapter Six

Jared and his brother walked beside their mother, Mia. She had tied a rope around her waist, around Jared's waist, and around his brother so as not to lose them in the throng. Mia followed her mother, Tiama, and always kept a hand on her shoulder. Sometimes she would doze because of the fatigue, so as she walked, if her hand fell, it would wake her. This way, she was sure they would stay together.

The dust covered everyone's white clothing and stained the slow marching multitude the color of sand, a dark beige. No one could breathe without covering their nose and mouth with their coats or sashes. Some of them loosened their turbans to wrap them around their

faces, letting only their weary eyes show.

The clay of the area had been exposed by the recent floods, and the winds had turned it to dust clouds, which on most days, covered the sun, coloring it red.

Nimrod set aside a time near evening each day to feed his men and give his slaves bread and water. He had hopes that the long march to Nippur would kill only a handful of slaves. He desperately needed their skills to build his new cities. Hastening to get them home, he would let no one rest or sleep too long. After every meal, the march continued until midnight. When that time came, the people of Sippar dropped where they were and slept. They were too tired to create comforts. Some became dizzy and sick to their stomachs and dropped during the day. If they did not respond to the whip, they were left to die. Many of those were trampled by soldiers and chariots.

Along the dusty trail, many women carried their children in their arms. Men carried their daughters on their shoulders. Women with babies tried to nurse them and would lapse behind. If they didn't keep up, a soldier would yank the baby out of her grip and dash it's head against the dry ground. The parched earth greedily sucked up the blood for moisture. If an old or sick person dawdled, they were cut down by an ax to the head. The soldiers yelled at the "two legged cattle" to keep up, to keep going, and not to give up hope. Rest, food and wine and good houses awaited in Nippur.

Most of the people had to squint and keep rubbing the mud from their sore eyes. Whenever they ate, the dust formed clay in their mouths, so they swallowed it along with their bread. The water they were given was brown and salty. But the salt was good, for they

sweat too much.

Only the people in the middle were safe from the yelling and the lashes, but it was crowded. One had to be careful not to step on the neighbor's feet. And how sore were those feet! Many sandals had long worn out unless they were made of wood. But the feet would still blister and bleed. Crying children were punished with the whip. Mothers would pull them into their bosoms and press their faces against their breasts in an attempt to keep them quiet. Many fell asleep in their mother's embrace. Some suffocated. A few women wore blank expressions and stared straight ahead at nothing, carrying a dead child. When someone tried to take the child to lighten their load, their grip would become super human, yet their emotionless faces were unchanged.

* * *

Mia took up one son, carried him, and when he had a good long nap took up the other.

“Mama,” Jared cried, “I am tired. I want to go home.” He raised his hands. “Please carry me, Mama, I want to sleep.”

“It's not your turn, Jared. I am carrying your brother. You can see that, can't you? I can't carry both of you. We are going to a new home. It will be lovely. You wait and see.”

Whenever Mahonri walked behind Mia, he would say nothing nor complain. His expression was not blank or worried, just tired.

She also had to make sure her mother didn't fall or stumble. She felt like she was carrying all three. She wished Com had not been killed. So many arrows had pierced his body! He looked like a quill cushion she used for sewing. He could have carried the other

boy. Surely God had forsaken her. But her mother continued to have a saintly expression on her face as though she saw the angels.

She would ask Tiama, “What is it you see?”

Tiama wouldn't answer directly. She would quote scripture. “My god is my shield and buckler.” or “ He is my brass bowl and my anchor, my golden cord.”

One night Tiama caught Mia giving her bread to Jared. She placed her hand on her daughter's and said, “You must keep up your strength for them.”

“I am not hungry, Mother, and Jared is.”

They sat among a crowd with many ears. Someone growled, “If you don't want your bread give it to me. My son is half-dead.” Mia turned and gave it to a woman she knew from her own washing group. She had seen her day by day at the River and had never spoken to her. Now she wanted her bread. But when she handed her the bread crust, the woman ate it ravenously while her son moaned. Mia turned and cried, holding mostly inside, but tears streamed down her face.

Mahonri gave her a hug. “Don't cry Mama. We will all be happy in the next moon.”

* * *

Shem had refused to ride in Nimrod's chariot, but Nimrod had him forced by two soldiers. He at first sat on the bench stiffly not looking at anyone or anything. He held onto his staff and kept his holy book under his feet. If anyone tried to take it from him, he would instantly be awake and would thump him with his staff.

“You know who that book belongs to, do you not?” Nimrod commented one evening

as they stopped to eat. Shem was reading from the book which he had placed in his lap.

“You stole it from my grandfather.”

“It is the Holy Book.” Shem didn't look at Nimrod. He twisted away from him and continued to read in a low mumble. Then he said, turning his head back in Nimrod's direction, “He has no need of it. He would use it wrongfully, not to seek wisdom, but to use it for selfish purposes.” He turned around again and continued to read.

“You once gave me a copy.” Nimrod chewed the meat and gristle off a bone. “I am grateful. With it, we will be able to build a tower to get to Heaven. We will soar like angels and birds. Above the birds. Beyond man's domain.”

Shem grunted. “You will never get off the earth. You cannot go into the domain of the gods without being prepared. You must seek wisdom first.”

Nimrod threw his bone behind him over the edge of the chariot and reached into his bag to fetch another. “We do seek wisdom. Is there not wisdom in learning how to control the elements for man's benefit?”

Shem turned and sat facing Nimrod. “God's wisdom supersedes all. If you put his kingdom first instead of your own, he will show you the way to Heaven.”

“If you were another man, I would have you thrust through for those words. Is it not treason to talk to a king, asking him to seek some other kingdom than his own?”

Shem did not answer. Instead, he took a piece of bread offered him by the charioteer.

“If a king did not seek his own kingdom,” Nimrod said wryly with a wink of his eye, “he would be a poor king indeed. Why, without judicious attention, his kingdom might

starve or be overthrown, or some such matter.”

Shem read a passage out of the Holy Book. “It says here, 'Gods watch over the earth and appoint kings as its caretakers.' It did not say taskmasters.”

Nimrod nodded. “There you go. As a king, I have a holy right to govern.”

“Another saying,” Shem pointed to another passage, pointing to the figures as he read. “It is good to have kings if you could always have a righteous king, but kings cause trouble in the land and much bloodshed. A wicked king issues wicked decrees and causes the people to sin.”

“Enough of that!” Nimrod stood, looking very proud. “We continue the march.”

Shem looked to the side as the chariot started moving. He spied his sons Arphaxad, El-Am, Ass-Hur, Lud, and A-Ram with their hands bound and chains about their feet, walking with their heads down, their clothes stripped from them, wearing only dirt and sweat. Shem covered his face with his turban and wept.

* * *

Nippur had changed. It had grown. The original wall had turned into the backs of houses and barracks for the soldiers and another wall built around that, leaving space for many shops and marketplaces.

When the remains of Sippar were marched into the city, they were greeted by many hands who guided them into the houses where they were bedded down, given new clothes, their feet washed, and they were given flesh to eat and wine to drink. Those who had been servants were given barley wine which was new to them. Many got drunk.

Tiama, Mia, Jared and his brother were taken by the hand and made comfortable in a small home of a merchant of pieces of cloth which he traded throughout the city. Most of his home was filled with all his collections of different kinds and colors.

They too were given beds and refreshment.

Mahonri, as he sat by his mother on the matted floor, put his head on her shoulder.

“See Mama,” he said, wrapping his skinny arms around her. “We will be happy here.”

Jared sleepily ate from a bone, sipped some wine, lay down by his grandma-ma, and fell asleep.

Mia tried to hug her mother with Jared between them. They rubbed their tear streaked cheeks together and kissed.

The merchant tried to comfort them with words like, “You will have a good home here,” “The sun god Nin-Ur-Ta shines upon you this day,” and “You and your people will always be welcome in my home.”

They slept peacefully all night with the hand of the moon god Nanna placing his hands upon them, bringing them happy dreams.

* * *

Morning brought fear to the people of Sippar when soldiers entered into the hospitable homes, yanked them from their beds and marched them outside, forcing them into the central plaza. There, merchants and builders encircled them and vied for their differing services and skills. It was an auction. Soldiers went among the crowd separating stonemasons from carpenters, engineers from scribes, and weavers of cloth from the dyers. The young girls of

particular beauty were sent to the Temple of Agriculture to be trained by Hathor. Most of the women were sent to weaving cloth. Young men and shepherds were sent to labor for the builders, but by the pleading of the many citizens and priests, the very young stayed with their mothers. That saved Jared and his brother for awhile.

The new laborers were told, "You will be paid for your services whereby you can build homes for your families and buy food and clothing for them. You will be made comfortable and given the opportunity to advance in your trade. If you do so, you will earn more money."

Nimrod, though he had been one, did not like the shepherds. He had them carted off to the south to work on Sammur's palace.

Mia and Tiama were carted off with other women to a large house where they were put to work spinning thread and weaving cloth for the master weaver of Nippur. The merchant they stayed the night with, whose name was Nit-Ni-Pur, called after them, promising, "You come back to me in the evening. Your boys will be safe with me."

* * *

Nit-Ni-Pur was an older man, a widower, whose long face was full of wrinkles. He had a sparse beard and a thin mustache. When he smiled, which he did quite often, his missing teeth reminded one of a game board or the checkered and plaid skirts which were becoming popular with the men. Nit-Ni-Pur wore a simple white tunic with a red sash and red turban. He told others when he did not attire himself in the latest fashions that he did not want to blend in with his merchandise. He had a little laugh that followed nearly everything

he said.

As he took the two boys back to his place, he comforted them by saying, “Come come. Don't whine like babies. Your mother and grandmother will be back tonight. Then we will all eat the lamb I have been saving for such an occasion.” He guided each boy with the ends of his fingers touching their backs as the boys looked back over their shoulders to see their mother. They passed by the many shops where the merchants were setting up their wares. “Your mother and grandmother will be very tired tonight. You must show them what men you are. Men don't cry.” They looked up at Nit-Ni-Pur who nodded his head and greeted by name every merchant he passed.

“Mother told me,” Jared said as he strained to see the tall man's eyes, “I am the man of the family.”

“I am sure you are.” Nit-Ni-Pur smiled, showing his missing teeth. “And you have such a manly brother.”

Mahonri smiled. “My brother is manly too.”

“I am sure you are both manly. So manly, maybe you can help me set up my shop this morning.” They stopped in front of a shop whose window was covered with a wood awning. The door to the right had been left open.

“Oh, yes,” Jared said. “This is where we came from.”

“You are right,” Nit-Ni-Pur said, pushing gently against their backs. “This is where you stayed last night. Come along, and we will get to work.”

* * *

Mia worried about her boys all day. She barely heard the instructions given her by the master weaver, but she picked up what he wanted her to do very quickly. Having learned to weave at the feet of her mother, her hands spun the thread in the morning and set up her warp in the afternoon for weaving. The warp was tied together on a hook in the ceiling, radiating down through the reed and across the heddle and into her lap as she sat on the floor between her mother and her new friend, Net-Net-Le.

During the night the master weaver came and started extinguishing the lamps. Mia stretched her cramped legs and stood, helping her mother. Net-Net-Le took hold of one arm and Mia the other to lift Tiana off the floor. The two hobbled out and downstairs to the street. They were given a lamp to take with them which they promised to return the next day. When they got home, Jared and his brother were fast asleep. Nit-Ni-Pur offered the two women some flesh, herbs, and wine. They ate a little and talked to their host.

“The boys were wonderful. They were men and didn't cry. They helped me set up my wares and kept the shop tidy. I taught them how to retrieve the different cloths out of the back of the house. They were good companions for an old man. They did not fuss and fight.”

* * *

Shem walked the marble floors of the Temple of Agriculture looking for Nimrod. With each step his staff echoed throughout the cold building. Every time someone told him where the king had been seen last, he wound up in an empty room. He found Nimrod out on the porch talking to his wife Sammu and mother Hathor.

“My Lord, my Lord.” Shem bowed every time he said “Lord.”

Nimrod turned. "What is it now, Shem? Have I not given you charge over your own people here in Nippur?"

"I cannot find my sons, my Lord." Shem bowed. "I have been walking the streets of the city and they are nowhere to be found."

Nimrod placed his hand on the old man's shoulder. "They have been sent to the different cities we are building. I have bestowed great honors upon them and given each of them charge over their people in those cities."

With tears dripping off his nose, Shem pleaded, "I am an old man. I cannot go to the different cities to visit my sons. I have no man to write for me if I were to send them letters."

"Don't worry, Shem." Nimrod smiled and slipped his arm around him. "You find my scribe Nat-Itur-Sat and tell him I sent you and that I gave you permission to write letters for you." He took off a ring from his finger. "Here. Take this and give it to him. He will know that it is my ring and will return it to me at the end of the day. He will write for you."

Shem bowed several times, saying, "Thank you my Lord, thank you," and trotted off to the scribe's office.

* * *

Nat-Itur-Sat's office walls were pocketed with pigeon holes stuffed with clay tablets and scrolls of parchment. The room itself was sectioned off with bookshelves also containing clay tablets stacked and categorized. Symbols painted on the shelves beneath each stack told the subject and area of interest like a library, but all the subjects had to do with the realm and reign of Nimrod. Most of the tablets were letters. On one shelf, Shem

noticed there was incoming mail and outgoing mail. A person came in and asked for his mail. The master scribe handed it to him across his desk. When the person left, Shem stepped forward.

“What is it you want?” Nat-Itur-Sat asked, folding his hands. “May I be of assistance?”

“Might I inquire if you will write some letters for me?” Shem produced Nimrod's ring. “I was told that this will be payment enough.”

The master scribe noticed immediately that it was Nimrod's ring and put it in the pocket of his plaid skirt. “I will assist you momentarily.”

“Thank you.”

“Just have a seat next to my desk.”

As Nat-Itur-Sat left the room, he said, under his breath, “These dirty Shemites!” Rumor had spread that they were all shepherds, and if Nimrod didn't like them, then nobody should.

Instead of the master scribe, one of the lower ones sat at the desk. He was bald, bare chested and wore the skirt of leather scraps with no ornaments. He wore the kohl eye cosmetic and was rather stout as though having drunk a lot of barley wine in his short life.

“Hello,” he addressed Shem. “My name is Nit-Ur-Ru, and I will be your scribe today.”

“He said,” Shem turned to look out the door, “that he would be with me directly.”

“Who?”

“The master scribe, I believe.” Shem touched his bottom lip with his forefinger and

wondered if Nat-Itur-Sat had slipped out just to avoid him.

“When the master scribe,” Nit-Ur-Ru smiled, “says that he will be with you momentarily, that means me. I will be with you momentarily to act in his place.”

“Oh. I see.” Shem looked at the door then back to the scribe who was ready with a wet piece of clay and a stylus.

“Ready?”

“Yes.” Shem cleared his throat. “This is to be copied and one sent to each of my sons, Arphaxad, El-Am, Ass-Hur, Lud, and A-Ram. Nimrod knows where they are. He said he sent them to the different cities being built.”

“I understand,” the scribe said. “Mar-Lay, bring me five more fresh tablets.”

A young boy about seven years old brought the tablets on a tray and sat them on the desk.

“Now we will begin,” Nit-Ur-Ru said in earnest, posing his stylus above the clay tablet and tilting his head forward slightly.

As Shem spoke, the young scribe wrote expeditiously.

“To my sons in the Lord of Hosts, the Son of God to come, I write to you in mine own hand according to the language of my fathers. My hope is in God that you are all well and this letter will find you in good spirits. May the Spirit of the Lord always be with you, keep and protect you. My prayer is for you and your families, and I thank my Holy God that you have been spared so that my seed may prosper and become many nations according to the Holy Covenants of the Lord. He surely has visited me in great mercy in saving your lives

and the lives of your loved ones. El-Am, Tiama is here in Nippur, and Mia and her sons are with her. They have suffered much, but they are now comfortable, being taken care of by the merchant Nit-Ni-Pur. He is an old man, but one of great strength and virtue. His mind is keen and is full of wisdom. I have not seen any of the others of our family. I am hoping that they are with you. I am sorry for your loss and sufferings, but the sufferings we can endure if our faith is in the Lord. He has sent us here to be a seed and the salt of the earth, to be a light to the Gentiles. For it is spoken of in the Holy Book that out of our seed shall the Lord choose a holy nation unto himself, and out of that seed should arise a messiah, a savior of the world, that through him our faith might be made whole. It refers to everyone else as gentiles, and we are to be a light to them. So let us live by the word of God while among them and do all manner of good. If they do not good unto you, do good unto them, for this is that charity which will get you into the Kingdom of God. I leave my blessings with you in the name of the Living God and pray that you will write to me soon and tell me of your activities and positions and whether you are well in the Lord. I myself have been given the position of overseer of all those that have come from Sippar. We are doing well here, but we are expected to work for our keep. Most of the women are weaving, some making pottery, some decorating the curtains of the temples. Wish to God he would give us a temple, but He guides and we wait. The men have all been sent to the different cities round about. Please write and tell me of the men in your area and their welfare. I will be able to talk to the king for them. Again, God be with you and keep you. Your loving father, Shem.”

It was amazing that the scribe could get all that on such a little tablet. Shem stared at

the lovely workmanship and wondered at how fast he was.

“I will copy these and get them into the hands of the couriers,” he said. “I hope the rest of your day goes well.”

“Thank you for your service and help. May God go with you.”

As Shem arose to leave, the scribe said, “And may the other gods go with you.”

Chapter Seven

Kish, standing on the battlements, saw the cloud of dust coming up from the south. He had expected Nimrod months before. He had kept his men ready until they complained that the king was never coming. Kish knew he was because he wasn't invited to the celebration Nimrod held for the return of Egyptus and Mitz-Ra. And then he had observed the attack on Sippar. When Nimrod passed up his castle everyone sighed with relief. But Kish knew it was only a matter of time, and he would be here.

“It says in the Holy Book that the king cometh in the night, and that the king cometh when you look for him not.” He gripped his fists as they rested against the palisade. “And here he cometh.” He turned to his men. “Make ready the archers and bring up the firebrands.”

The archers ran up the ladders and took their places along the battlements. There were 300 of them. The soldiers of Kish filled the courtyard and lower battlements. Others were hid in the surrounding wilderness. He had twenty four thousand in all. Nimrod came with his fifty thousand. Kish told his men, “We are in the right. Nimrod himself gave us this land. The gods will support us.”

Nimrod came and camped before Kish on the plains before the castle. Kish noticed the symbol of Egyptus over one of the tents. A brazen bee on a staff. The knights of the Bee had come. Surely, they were here only as observers. She wouldn't want to lose them in a full fledged battle. But Nimrod came for him.

There was no attack the first day. Nimrod always showed the enemy his numbers to let them sweat. The fighting would begin the next morning at sunrise. But there was no movement at the first rays of day. Instead, there was a long, low drone of a conch shell with two little toots at the end. This was repeated several times. It was the sound of truce. When Kish commanded that one of their men return the sound, Nimrod hopped into his chariot and drove to the gate of the castle. Kish greeted him in the battlements above the gate.

“My dear nephew,” Kish addressed Nimrod with a wave of his arm. “What brings you here? Do you have need of my services? Should I gather my men and follow you into some glorious battle against Khan? Or perhaps it is our father Ham you are after.”

“You know, my dear uncle,” Nimrod shouted with his arms outstretched, “that our dear Father Ham is dead. He left a wondrous land for us to live in and to tend. His family are his royal heirs. Yet, the gods have deemed me to rule. It is written in the stars. Surely, you have read them yourself. I have advised the family that we all rule together, each in a province of his own.”

“Or her own,” Kish shouted down to Nimrod. “I know that Egyptus' presence is here. I know she is after my flesh, and surely, she has persuaded the family against me.”

“It was the family that has voted against you and for you. We offer you a way out. I know I gave you this land in friendship. But I have to listen to blood ties.”

“Is it exile then?” Kish bashed his fists against the palisade.

“We give you a whole continent ... the one we named after our mother Afra. Africa.”

“How generous, my king.”

“It is either that or war between us. We know there is plenty of gold in the Abzu. You can have it all for this one little piece of land.”

“I will consult my wife and children and our people.”

Kish turned and disappeared into his castle. Nimrod went back to his tent to await the decision.

* * *

Another day passed. The sun rose upon a somber ceremony. A table was set before the gate of the castle with a hot fire next to it. This was no campfire. It was surrounded with stones built into a little tower with a hole in one side. The fire starter waited along side with a bellows in his hand.

Kish appeared as the castle gate opened, swinging as one giant door. He marched forward with his guards and approached the table. On the other side stood Nimrod with his guards. On the table were several slabs of clay with one stylus for Kish and one for Nimrod. They were for signing only. Nimrod's master scribe Nat-Itur-Sat sat on a stool ready with a stylus in his hand to write the agreement.

Nimrod stood with his hands on his hips, wearing a plaid skirt and cape. His hair was properly braided in tiny braids cut short just above his shoulders with a simple gold crown on his head. “It is agreed to give the whole of Africa to Kish and to his seed.”

Kish stood in his woolen cape and tunic. No crown adorned his head. It would have been an act of aggression if he had worn it. He stood as a conquered man in the dress of a commoner. “I accede the city of Kish and give it to my lady Sammur-amat.”

Nat-Itur-Sat wrote all this down onto the clay tablets, making copies for each party.

“All household goods, cattle, slaves and servants are to remain with Kish. His wives and children will remain with him.” It was a good promise which sounded good in writing, but one thing was not to remain and would be taken as part of the ceremony.

Kish would have to give something in return. “All those soldiers that remain will go with the king and become part of his army.”

Nimrod's eyebrows pressed together. “It is usual to give what part of your army you liege to your king.”

Kish took his sword and laid it on the table. His face was screwed up in anger. “I give you all my kingdom and half my army. My family I keep with me. I also keep enough of my army to protect them in our journey. I give also my sword. It is my hand and my liege to my king. You have it always, heart and soul.”

“I seal this agreement.” Nimrod took a rod and ran it across the bottom of the clay tablet. It left the impression of the king's signature.

“I also seal this agreement.” Kish took his seal and ran it across underneath the king's signature.

Nat-Itur-Sat put his seal on each of the clay tablets and then the two men with their guards marched backwards and bowed. Kish went back to the castle and Nimrod to his tent. Nat-Itur-Sat stood, took the tray that contained the clay tablets and shoved it into the kiln. When the clay tablets had fired, he sent a copy to Kish and then a copy to Nimrod. The others he kept for his library.

As the troop of Kish left with his family, his army and cattle followed. All were bare

breasted wearing skirts and caps. The skirts of the royalty were plaid, and the skirts of the troop were leather.

In a great hoot and holler, the army of Nimrod cut out the cattle from Kish's troop, heading them back into the camp of the king. Nimrod's army yelled their hurrah's, giving glory to the king and started slaughtering them for a great feast. Beef carcasses were piled onto bonfires and barley wine was passed around. Singing and dancing commenced. Peering out from her tent door, Egyptus sighed. "I would have killed the bastard. My sword thirsts for his blood."

"In good time, My Lady, in good time." Mitz-Ra leaned over and kissed her lips.

Chapter Eight

Kana'an yelled at his wife Entela. "Damn Nimrod to the Abzu!" He huffed and raised his fists. "He shall not treat my brother this way."

"What have I done to arouse your anger? Go yell at Nimrod. Not me." She calmly went about embroidering her curtains.

"He's coming for us next. He wants to command Akkad when I have the right to rule after the death of my father Ham." He stomped across the floor to the bare window and peered out across the plain where he could see a cloud of dust approaching.

"You agreed with the rest of your family that Kish should be sent to Africa." Entela looked up at her miserable husband. "What you sow you reap. Isn't that true?"

Kana'an leaned his hands against the window posts. "He can send fifty thousand troops in a moment's notice. He thinks to make himself king over all the land. Everyone bows down to him. Even I, for I fear for my life. I have not the troops to defend this city even though we are sitting on a hill, easily defended. The soldiers have all deserted, pretending they are merchants, builders, and servants. We have to flee." Kana'an continued pacing the floor with his hand against his forehead. He stepped next to his wife. "Where will we go?"

"I hear there is a land beyond the mountains to the west with the longest coastline you ever saw. They say the climate is mild, and the sea breeze calms the most aggravated soul." (She alluded to him.) Entela rose, holding the finished curtain. "Here. Help me hang this across the window. Just slip that pole through here." Kana'an picked up a pole that had been

standing in the corner near the window and slipped it through the loops at the top of the curtain. He took one end and she the other, and they hung the pole with its curtain over the brass hooks above the window. “There, now the room is ready for our royal guest.”

A tall, dark, bushy headed man in a simple white tunic burst through the door, out of breath after running up the stairs of the tower. “Master! Master! The army of Nimrod is at our gate.”

“I know that Na-Hum.” Kana'an put his arm around his old friend. He turned to Entela. “Make ready our departure. Gather up the children, their families and friends. Take a priest with you. Hide on the other side of the city outside the wall. I will meet you there tonight.”

Kana'an walked out the door with his servant. “Let us go down to greet the royal bastard.” Halfway down he asked, “Are the festivities started?”

“Yes, Master Kana'an, they are.”

“That is good. We have to play the sly host this holy evening.”

Na-Hum grinned, showing his white teeth. “It's always holy when a king visits.”

* * *

Kana'an raced down the slope in a single chariot and out to the dusty horde. He had no guards with him, only his servant Na-Hum and his charioteer. He had stationed no army on the battlements and left the gate wide open. He approached the chariot of Nimrod and the whole army stopped its march.

Kana'an lifted up his hands to the sky. “Greetings my King and Lord! This is indeed an

honor!” He smiled as the two grabbed each other's arms. The wind whistled as it blew away the cloud of dust.

“Kana'an, my uncle. It is always a pleasure to see your smiling face.” Nimrod returned Kana'an's smile but gripped his arms tight, then let go.

“Welcome to Akkad, the city of learning. Come into my castle and rest yourself. Bring your knights and your guards. We have made accommodations. The city is yours, a home away from home.”

Both Nimrod's and Kana'an's asses became frightened, jostling the chariots back and forth. The charioteers tried calming them, saying, “Steady now. Steady.”

Nimrod saw smoke coming from the city and smelled the fires with flesh and hair burning. “What is this coming out of your city, Kana'an?”

“I saw you coming and threw a few beasts onto the fires and brought out the barrels of barley wine to celebrate.”

Nimrod had come to conquer a city if need be and found only hospitality. He grabbed Kana'an across the chariots and gave him a hug. “Thank you uncle. You know how to greet a king. I have come seeking to visit each of my cities and see how well the people prosper.”

Kana'an waved a hand towards the city. “We are doing splendid. We have enough and to spare, especially for our king and his guests.”

Nimrod gave the order to make camp, and he and his knights raced toward the city gates.

* * *

Akkad didn't look much different from Nippur, except where a pyramid would be, stood a castle with towers. The castle battlements resembled arms embracing the city. In the town square beeves were roasting in open fire pits surrounded by tables and earthen barrels of barley wine. Houses and temples encircling the square seemed pushed up against the surrounding wall. The temples were different. They didn't look as ostentatious. Ham had not thought adorning buildings a necessity. He liked to see the raw structure he didn't see in other cities, saying that temples were places of learning, not pleasure palaces. The roofs were held up by simple round columns with ringed capitals, and the walls were bare and white-washed.

All the men of high office came into the city to enjoy the meats, the cakes and bread, and drink, while the rest of the army ate their multi-grained bread, pottage, and drank barley wine. They made gruel from the bread and wine because it was too hard to eat otherwise. Everyone had a feast. Those who were too tired to dance brought out their board games and games of chance which they carried with them about their waists, even into battle.

Nimrod was introduced to his quarters in the main tower. "You are quite accommodating, Uncle." Nimrod opened the embroidered curtain. "You have a grand scene from the window. You can see the whole valley from here. The sun lights it clearly as it sets." He turned away from the glare of the sunset and back to Kana'an. "Built on a hill, I can fortify this castle."

"I am sure you can, Nephew." Kana'an waved his arm. "I am pleased that you like your room. I built it as a command center ... for war councils if ever the need arose."

“That is an excellent idea.” Nimrod viewed the large table in the center of the room. The only other furniture besides several chairs was a small comfortable bed for two. “Hmmm.” He fingered his black bearded chin. “Did you provide me with a nightly companion as well? I didn't bring Sammur with me on my travels.”

Kana'an hadn't thought of a prostitute. In his haste to get his family away, he had completely forgotten. “Of course, my Lord.” He bowed and smiled. “I will be back shortly.”

Kana'an thought this would be the right time for him and his family to leave. The soldiers were becoming drunk, and Nimrod was waiting for a bed warmer for the night. He made his way through the castle corridors to a small room situated on the east city wall. Stepping into the room, he turned and bolted the door. He walked over to a panel, lifted it off the wall and exposed a tunnel. Crawling inside, he lit a torch stored there on the wall. He then replaced the panel. Making his way to the end of the tunnel, he threw down the torch, stomping it out. He had to fight his way through bushes that hid the tunnel and greeted the waiting caravan.

Entela rushed to Kana'an and embraced him. “I didn't know when you were coming,” she wept. “I became frightened.”

Kana'an took her by the arms and kissed her lips. “I am here now. We leave immediately.”

They climbed onto their camels as did each of their children and their families. They were followed by braying asses, bleating sheep, and a few prized bulls and cows for breeding that had been spared from the fire pits.

Kana'an hoped the distractions of the feast held in Nimrod's honor would cover the noise of the cattle and camels as they slowly wound their way through the hills. By the time Nimrod suspected that no girl was coming to his bed, Kana'an believed that his nephew would become angry, decide to search for him, discover that the whole royal family had escaped but would then decide to stay and occupy the city, for he could consider it to be a rouse for a counter attack.

* * *

Nimrod paced the floor anxious for Kana'an to return with a girl. Not being naturally suspicious, but because of his experience with people, it dawned on him that the man was not coming back. His first thought was that Kana'an had an army secreted outside the city and would come upon his troops as they lay in a drunken stupor. Alarmed, he ran down the stairs calling for his generals and his knights.

When the general alarm was blown upon the horns, the feasting was over. Nimrod's army crowded into the city, manning all the battlements. Nimrod ran back up to the tower and glanced out each window. The expected attack never came. He sent out his spies to reconnoiter the plains and hills surrounding the city, and commanded his soldiers to search every house and temple. Kana'an and his family were nowhere to be found, yet he waited for an attack. As the spies filtered back in, they told him there was no army.

“Make a count of all able-bodied men and boys who could make such an attack, and search for all weapons of war. Pile them up in the town square.” Nimrod clenched his fists and spat. He had been made a fool of. What better way to defeat an army than to desert into

the wilderness and into the populace?

All the men who didn't have gray hair were brought before Nimrod. He ordered them to tell him where Kana'an had gone. When they couldn't tell him anything except that they might have gone into the wilderness, Nimrod ordered his soldiers to kill all the men, but to save the boys. He could train them for his army.

Then something unexpected happened. All the women, and they were most fair to look upon, pleaded with the king. "We know not where Kana'an and his family have gone, but please save our husbands and brothers. We will all serve our king Nimrod and praise his name forever. Let our men serve you in your army. They are valiant men and strong."

When Nimrod beheld their beauty and their tears, his heart swelled within him. He said, "Let them go. Add them to our army," and turned away. He sighed. *It isn't easy to be a king. I hate my feelings. They make me appear weak.*

* * *

Kana'an's caravan had the cover of darkness. They went as fast as the asses and camels could carry them without losing the cattle and sheep. They completed a two day's march within one night, looking to the stars for guidance. Nimrod and his people never heard more of them. But they prospered in the land they called Kana'an.

Chapter Nine

The city of Khan was north of Sumer on the eastern side of the Tigris and at the junction of a tributary. Its walls were built of huge stones as if placed by giants. There were no wooden buildings or castles. They had one temple in the city built to Inanna the wife of Nanna and daughter of Enki. Nanna was son of Enlil, so in Inanna, one had both brothers, Enki, the father of the underworld, the Abzu, and Enlil, the father of light or day, associated with his son, the sun god Nin-Ur-Ta. So there were four porches around the temple in each of the solar directions, two dedicated to light, Enlil or Nin-Ur-Ta (the two could be confused) and Nanna, the man in the moon, and two to darkness and night, Enki and Inanna, the lady of the moon. But she was also the goddess of love ... thus the association of love and the moon.

There was a procession around the Temple of Inanna when Nimrod arrived. The images of the sun and the two moons* orbited around the temple, carried by the worshipers. The symbol of the Abzu, a snake, moved in and out of the procession, imitating its slithering motion. The women wore thin linen dresses with gold and brass crowns laden with colorful jewels. The men were naked and stood head and shoulders above the women. The glee of the harps, flutes and drums halted when they heard a trumpet sounding at their doors.

Khan stood on the porch of Inanna. He shouted, "To the top of the walls! Man the battlements!"

*Tiahuanaco, Bolivia has a gate showing two moons.

Nimrod's army had forded the Tigris at night and were camped around the city, occupying the harbor and the boats. The ceremony had gone on all night, and now at the dawning of the sun, Nimrod commanded his trumpeters to sound the challenge. The sun would be in Khan's eyes.

As Khan's soldiers took their places along the battlements, Khan's great silent hulk appeared above the city's gate. A rise led to the gate, revealing the foundation of huge stones that supported the wall.

Nimrod shouted, "Khan, I am the King of Sumer and all the lands round about up to Sippar. I greet you. We come in peace. Let us parley and become friends."

Khan replied in his deep bass voice, "I, my brothers, and sons do not need your friendship. We have no need of neighbors. We are strong enough to conquer all the land if we wish. We came here to establish a place for ourselves and to be left alone. Leave or feel our wrath!"

Nimrod heard the entire city laugh at him. Infuriated, he commanded an attack. He brought up his archers who sent clouds of arrows into the city, but the wide circular shields and armor of Khan's army protected them.

"Come now," cried Khan. "Is that all you have?" He turned, calling, "Boys!" and gave a command in a foreign tongue.

Giants, the size of Khan, pushed away the smaller soldiers and stood upon the battlements. They carried large boulders above their heads which they threw down without hesitation upon Nimrod's soldiers. The huge rocks rolled over hundreds of soldiers, crushing

them. Not a single boulder was thrown that did not turn red with blood. Nimrod blew the sound of retreat on his own horn and withdrew twelve leagues from before the wall.

Cramming into the boats of the harbor, Nimrod's army crossed the Tigris and set up camp along the beach.

That night Nimrod took his servant, Ti-Lac, a wiry youth and a rope to the walls of Khan. Traversing the city, they scaled the far eastern wall and let themselves down by means of the rope. Silently sprinting from roof top to roof top, they stopped only when they heard Khan's gruff voice.

“Damn you girl! You are as clumsy as a hare caught in a net.” There was a scream and a thud as though he had thrown her against the wall. “Fetch Le-Ta. She will know how to serve without spilling the wine all over me.” There was a rattling of dishes. “Here. Take these rags that were my clothes and wash them.”

“Great apologies, Master. Great apologies.”

Ti-Lac turned to Nimrod. “This may not be a good time to disturb Khan, Master. He is a terrible beast.”

“I will calm his soul first.” Nimrod said as he spied out the area around the house.

He could see that Khan's bedroom had a open archway that led into a garden surrounded by a wall. The smell of flowers was intoxicating. If Nimrod could get him outside, he would soften the giant's heart. Having brought a special instrument to melt the souls of men, Nimrod dropped down into the garden. Ti-Lac sat haunched on the roof with a reed, armed with a poisoned dart, positioned before his lips.

Nimrod hid in the bushes and played a flute that was designed by the priests of Akkad to lull people to sleep. It was mesmerizing.

Khan heard the soft music and turned toward the garden door. The perfume of the flowers and the magical sounds beckoned to him. He thought a beautiful goddess must be calling to make love to him, but when he walked outside, the moonlight revealed no one. He looked around, and not seeing anyone, sat down upon a stone bench. He felt melancholy, listening to the flute.

Nimrod stepped out of the bushes and approached Khan who looked up, having heard the rustling of the leaves.

“Oh,” mumbled Khan, “it's you, Nimrod.”

Nimrod pointed his hand to another bench next to Khan. “May we talk?”

“Yes. Sit down.” Khan stared at Nimrod dressed in armor and a red cape. Seeing the flute, he asked, “Was that you playing such beautiful music?”

Nimrod sat on the chair and faced Khan. “Yes. That was me.”

“You calm my nerves like no other.” Khan smiled. “I would like you to stay and play for me every day.”

“I will do more for you than that, dear king.” Nimrod turned his eyes towards the night sky and pointed to the myriad stars. “I want to take you into the heavens.”

“Into the heavens?” Khan turned his face toward the stars and then back down to Nimrod. “How is that?”

Nimrod sat forward and rested his chin on his folded hands. “I have heard that you

went on a trek seeking a way into Heaven.”

“Yes.” Khan's eyes widened. “I and my companion, En-Ki-Du, went forth into the mountains far to the north and fought demons and monsters. We found the ben-bens and the platforms, but we knew not how to operate them. Nothing would work for us.”

Nimrod put forth the palms of his hands, withdrawing his right hand as if writing in the air, pulling Khan's attention forward. “That's where I come in, dear friend.” Nimrod smiled. “Mitz-Ra brought back a flying boat from the land of En-Nil. The design will give us the means of building a craft that will take us into the Heavens.”

“Is it not all in the Holy Book, *The Rites of Ascension*? Surely.” Khan rested his elbow on his knee and his head in his hand.

“We cannot understand it. That's why we need you. You are of the ancients who wrote it. You can read what it says. With knowledge from the book and seeing the instruments in the bird of prey, for that is what Mitz-Ra calls it, we can figure this out and understand how to make a ben-ben that can send us into the heavens.”

“We will be as the gods,” Khan said thoughtfully. He looked up at the moon and stars. “You have convinced me. It is what I want, what I have always wanted.”

There was a moment of silence. Nimrod turned his head and wondered what the giant was thinking. Would he go back to Nippur with him?

“I always wanted a foot in both worlds,” Khan continued. “I wanted to be with the gods and be like them, and I wanted to rule in the earth as well. After I killed my brother A-Bel, I became a vagabond. There was no place for me. I was never satisfied. Therefore, I

sought learning, and gaining knowledge, I sought for the gods. I have always sought to return to the Heavens and escape death. But people have not known me. I was God's favorite. He gave me immortality early in my life. People make a mistake. It wasn't immortality I have sought after, but to escape this earth with my immortality intact. The Holy Book tells me how. Yet, it was stolen from me.”

“I have it. I ...”

Khan grabbed Nimrod by the neck so fast he did not have time to react. Khan growled, “You have my book?” Khan swatted at what he thought was an insect that stung his neck.

“I ... I,” Nimrod choked. “I took Sippar ... I got ... the book ... for you.”

Khan let go and fell back into his chair. Nimrod rubbed his throat and tried to catch his breath.

Ti-Lac jumped down from the roof and ran over to his master. “My master and king. Are you alright?” He peered with squinting eyes at Khan. “Is he dead?”

Nimrod coughed. “No. There is not enough poison to kill this man.”

Khan blinked his eyes and looked at Ti-Lac. “Who is this?”

“Khan, this is my servant. He has come to call me back to my men.” Nimrod took hold of Khan's hand. “Will you come back with me? We will build that ben-ben you have always sought for.”

Khan took a deep breath. “Forgive me. I am such a beast. I cannot always control my anger. Yes. I will go back with you. We will build the ben-ben.”

Khan slapped his hands together, and a maiden came running. “Le-Ta, bring wine for our guests. I also am very thirsty.” The girl left as swiftly as her little feet could carry her, and Khan turned to Nimrod and his servant. “You will stay with me for the night. In the morning, we will leave.”

* * *

Nimrod and Ti-Lac lay in their beds overcome with wine. Temple prostitutes crept back to their confines, and Khan rose and stretched. He turned towards his guests and smiled. He stepped very carefully away. He found one of the night servants.

“Nat, go and call my brothers and sons. Tell them to meet me at the temple. We have things to discuss.”

* * *

Khan and his family sat around a table in the middle of the night drinking wine, waited upon by sleepy temple maidens.

Khan's family were all giants with grilled faces and hearts just as hard. Their blonde hair was long and tied up in knots.

“Ar-Nak, Thoth, Tim-Ro, Smartok, Gil-Gath, Gil-Gil, Roth-Mo, Sin-Toth, Ma-Mo, Ham-Tok, Com-Nor, Mom-Tath, and Mim. You are my brothers and sons. The world is before us. As I said before, when you are patient, the world comes to you. We do not need armies that go out and conquer. Nimrod has done that for us. Now he is here and opens the door to the whole land. He asks me to return with him to Nippur. I will be his friend. I will also befriend his wife Sammur-amat.” There was a ruffle of laughter. “At the right time, I

will slowly administer poison until he dies, as if by some sickness. When that happens, I will take Sammur-amat to wife, and the whole land will be ours.”

Khan peered into the eyes of each giant. “Do I have your support?”

Com-Nor, his head oath-shaven, and with wrinkles across his nose as though someone had shoved it into his forehead, said in his foreign tongue, “If anyone here fails to support you, he cannot leave alive.” He turned right and left to see if anyone wanted to leave. No one stood.

“Then,” continued Khan, “Swear to me by the ancient oaths, swearing by Heaven's Throne and footstool, and by your own heads that you will support me in this thing. I claim the right as Master Mahan, your king and lord.”

Each man in turn shook Khan's hand and took the oath of allegiance to him that if any person revealed Khan or their plans he would lose his head.

They retired for the night, secure in the knowledge they would rule the Earth. It was their right, for they were Titans. Khan had been promised hundreds of years before the flood by the gods who came to Earth and found gold here, that all who followed him would be the leaders of mankind. He was told that the man Adam, Khan's own father, was thrust out because he had followed not the god Enki who created him, but the false god Enlil who wanted to keep mankind alive. After the war with Enlil, Enki developed a better and stronger man, the Titans, to be the gods and rulers over man. He had tried to destroy mankind with a flood, but again, Enlil saved them in an ark. And so the fight goes on. Khan was sure to become supreme master of all men.

He did it once before. He would do it again.

End of Book Five

Book Six

The Ascension

Chapter One

Sippar lay in ashes. Yet, a few families filtered back in to inhabit it again. Some were sent by Nimrod to clean up the city. After a section was torn down and the clutter removed, Khan walked with Nimrod over the foundation stones of the ben-ben platform that had been covered by houses. Khan kicked at the massive quartz brickwork laid down anciently over the platform with his sandal.

“Look at it!” Khan complained. “It’s been cracked open.” He kneeled down to peer into the cracks. “It’s deep.” He rose, and with a frown on his face stared at Nimrod. “It will not work.”

“We can repair it.” Nimrod stood with hands on hips returning Khan’s stare. “It may take longer to build, but we can do it.”

“The damage is irreparable.” Khan walked away. He threw the words, “We will find another place to launch the shem and ben-ben. Build another city,” behind his head. “Let’s go.”

Nimrod ran to catch up with the giant. “But this is the place of the launch. It lines up with the other cities to create the launching path. We can’t be out of alignment.”

Khan walked on. “The place is irreparable. It has been cursed by Enlil himself. It cannot be undone.”

* * *

Khan walked beside Nimrod’s camel. An entourage followed, bringing up behind a

little city on wagons ... Khan's family. From a distance it appeared as someone dragging a whole city, buildings and all. Each wagon carried the home of one family. The wheels stood a head taller than Khan himself. Some of the wagons even had gardens. The oxen pulling the wagons were numbered in the hundreds. The smallest wagon was pulled by twenty four, the largest, fifty struggling beasts. The moving city was flanked by Nimrod's chariots and soldiers. The camel came from Khan who said that the king should ride in comfort.

Khan stopped. The entourage came to a cascading halt, each wagon in turn nearly running into the one before it. There was a lot of yelling and braying.

Khan took in the countryside. The Euphrates to the southwest bordered a vast plain. Khan kicked at the soil beneath his feet.

“Bedrock,” he mumbled. “Nimrod. Come down and look at this.”

Nimrod made his camel kneel. He slid off his saddle and stood beside Khan.

Khan waved his hand toward the land. “This is the place we will build our platform. We will build a city here so grand that it will rule the world for a thousand years ... and thousands of years from now when people refer to the world, they will call it the name of this city.”

“It will be my capitol. We will name it Nimrod.” Nimrod filled his lungs with the fresh breeze from the river. “We will get started today.”

Nimrod ordered his general to take some of his men to Nippur and surrounding cities and bring back a workforce with supplies and materials.

Khan turned to Nimrod. “My family will plant themselves right here where they have

landed.” He put his hands to his mouth and yelled out, “Drop the wagons and sacrifice the beasts. This is where we stay!”

There was further yelling and then singing as, one by one, the giants lifted each wagon and stripped its wooden wheels, carefully setting it down on the ground. They took apart the wheels and made a pen for all the cattle and then herded them into it. Each family took an ox, built a fire pit and threw the beast into it. They watched it burn, singing all the while,

“Step by step we grunt with pain
and plant our wagons once again.
Our houses grow, our feet step in,
Our city rises to our chin.

“We herd our cattle to the pen
And pick one out and do him in.
We slice his ribs and then his thigh;
We throw this flesh into a pie and
Dance and sing and drink all night.

“At dawn of day when all is well
We rise from bed and with a yell
Go forth to work until the bell
Rings for tiffin and then we tell

All our ballads, fare thee well,

All our ballads, fare thee well.”

Nimrod watched as the giants worked building a little city. Around their homes they dug a trench with hammers and chisels. With the rock they quarried from the trench they built a wall of sublime beauty. There was not a crack or a seam in it. The wall was divided to make room for a main gate. On top of the walls, they put mud bricks which they made near the river where there was plenty of clay.

Nimrod's men set up a tent city inside the walls which stretched out as two arches that would include the foundation of the platform for the ben-ben which would be the largest pyramid or ziggurat ever made by man.

When Khan set about surveying the land for the platform, he noticed how smooth the stone was underneath his feet. He knelt down, took out a lens from his purse, and peered through it at the stone, studying it carefully. He rubbed his hand across it. *Too smooth*, he thought. *It is man made*. He sent for Nimrod who came running.

“What is it” Nimrod asked between huffs and puffs. “Did you find anything?”

“The pavement has already been prepared.” He pointed to an uncovered square that exposed quartz below the soil. “The gods must have started to build up this area before they decided upon Sippar.” Khan waved his hand in a wide arch. “This whole area is the foundation of an Ascension platform.”

“Then we only have to start building the pyramid.” Nimrod stood with hands on his

hips surveying the land.

Chapter Two

“What do you mean he wants me to move to his camp?” Sammur threw a dress onto the bed, sending daggers from her eyes as she stared at the messenger.

With bowed head, Mentos, a young and lithe blonde man wearing tight braids over his head and a thin linen tunic, apologized. “He said he cannot live without you. He said that he is building a new capitol and that all his family are to join him there.”

Sammur threw more clothes onto the bed. “Tu-Tu!” She called. “Come pack my clothes. Pack everything! We are leaving.” She turned to the lad. “He doesn't need *me* to lie with a woman.”

“You are his queen, my lady.” Mentos bowed slightly. “He said you could go to Eridu, but it is yet unfinished, and his tent has better accommodations than the empty rooms in your summer palace.”

“Ooooh! Tu-Tu!” Sammur stamped out of the room yelling, “Where is that girl?”

Sammur popped her head back into the bedroom. “Don't leave. I am not done with you yet.” She smiled and licked her lips.

* * *

Caravans started arriving at the new city, Nimrod. There was a bleating of camels, beasts of burden, sheep and goats, and the moaning of cows mixed up with the voices of many people who shouted above the din, complaining, asking questions, and bartering, selling their wares, talking so fast that it was hard for anyone to understand them.

Shem arrived on his camel along with his servants in chariots and riding asses. He peered from underneath his hand, trying to block out the bright sunlight. “This city will surely be called Babylon,” he prophesied. “Such a clamor!”

As his camel knelt down, Shem was greeted by a man with hands raised to the sky, crying, “Father. Father. You also have come.”

Shem stepped down from his camel with the help of a servant. Tears streamed down his face as Arphaxad and he embraced. “My son! My son! How are you?” He pushed his son back but held him by the shoulders. “Let me look at you ... You look well. Your labors have not worn you out?”

“I am doing fine, Father.” Arphaxad placed his arm around Shem. “I have come to the market place every day searching for you, for I heard that all of Nimrod's servants were to arrive. Come. We have a camp all to ourselves outside all this mess and commotion. El-Am, Ass-Hur, Lud and A-Ram are all here with me along with their families. We are all here.”

“Surely,” said, ancient Shem, weeping, “this is all a father could wish for. Everyone is well?”

“There have been troubles enough, but we all live, and we are here.”

Arphaxad led Shem arm in arm through the crowd with his servants following until they reached the outskirts of the east side. There, Shem saw a spread of familiar tents, and in front of each, families stood singing and dancing to greet their father and grand sheik. Soon, he was surrounded by family, everyone laughing and speaking all at once. He reached out his hands, laid them upon their heads, giving blessings.

* * *

Sammur's entourage was the richest caravan to arrive. Her camels wore ostrich feathers and leopard skins and were sprayed by the most exotic fragrances. Their bridles and saddles were of gold and silver and studded with precious stones. All her servants wore lavish silk, heavily embroidered, or linen lined with gold borders. Crowns of gold adorned their turbans which were also colored with dyed ostrich feathers. Palm fronds were thrown before her for the camels to walk upon as the crowd opened up a path to her husband's tent.

Nimrod's tent was five times as large as Shem's and surrounded by a garden of the finest fruit bearing trees and flowers which was further surrounded by curtains held up by gold-plated poles. The rectangle made by the curtains and the tent held the same golden ratio. The tent and curtains were embroidered, plus, each pole was topped by a flag.

The caravan stopped at the east entrance, which was the smaller side of the rectangle where curtains were thrown open, forming a gate. Soldiers guarding the tent bowed and swung their arms, pointing towards her husband and king, encouraging Sammur to enter.

As she lighted off her camel, Nimrod came out to greet her. "Welcome, my love. How was your trip?"

They greeted each other with a ceremonial hug and kiss, with horns blasting the air and harps and flutes playing in the background. Girls threw flower petals beneath her feet. Nimrod held her hand and guided her to the tent. As soon as they were alone, they tore each other's clothes off and ravaged each other. Later, they were polite and shared bread and wine along with luscious fruits from the garden. A small orchestra made everything pleasant.

* * *

Nimrod's mother, Hathor, came with Egyptus and Mitz-Ra in their entourage along with the Knights of the Bee. Each knight had his entourage and soldiers, and each servant of the royal family had their servants, and none rode camels, only chariots or walked. They set up camp outside the city proper, and their population proved to be just as great or greater than the population of those who already had arrived. Yet, the population of the city was growing daily as workers came from the different territories, leaving only small crews to finish the cities. Everyone that could be spared had been sent to build the great ziggurat, the launching pad of the ben-ben.

Egyptus addressed Hathor. "How are you holding up, Con-Ass?"

"You are so affectionate, my dear queen." Hathor said, as she fanned her face. "I am doing well enough to lie down for the next three days."

As soldiers took their hands and helped them step down from the chariot, Egyptus remarked, "The tents will soon be erected, but sit down here under this palm tree."

Hathor sat on some of the baggage, and a servant held an umbrella over her head. Egyptus joined her. Another servant brought them wine to drink while Mitz-Ra went off to establish a perimeter and give directions to the servants.

Egyptus sat holding her knees, staring off into space, then she said to Hathor, "You should have a young lad to bed down with you, Con-Ass."

"I wouldn't get very much rest that way." Hathor ignored Egyptus' crude remark by waving the palm of her hand.

“My son Pharaoh is nice. He will do you good. He knows how to make a woman relax. He does the whole body.” Egyptus stared off into space, probably day dreaming of erotic things.

“I bet you have trained him well.” Hathor coughed and took a deep breath.

“Yes, I have.” Egyptus turned her head toward her friend. “It's your indulgences that make you cough. You should try a little self control. Look how old you look.”

“You should talk.”

They both laughed.

Egyptus looked around for Pharaoh. Spotting him, she beckoned. He came running and kneeled down beside her. She wrapped her arms around him, and he rolled into a ball, leaned against her body as she cradled him between her legs. He closed his eyes and sucked his thumb, even though he was nearly fourteen years.

Egyptus started singing softly,

Silent rest, the night comes and kisses my love;

Close your eyes and nest within my embrace.

Rest tonight in my love, my mother's love, and

Let the sun descend into the Abzu and beyond.

Bring the stars down to create your dreams and

In silence rest your weary bones and breathe

Against my bosom and lay your head upon my heart.

Tents went up as the sun settled behind the horizon, turning the cloudy streaks purplish red. People left the crowds and entered their homes or laid upon a pallet under a tree. Mitz-Ra picked up his son and took him away. Egyptus and Hathor followed and then separated, entering their tents. Stars came out one by one until a blanket of diamonds covered the night. A soldier leaned against a tree and started snoring. A camel closed its eyes, turned its head to sniff its young laying next to its side and lay its head down to sleep. A big cat lay atop a nearby hill, yawned and put its head against his mate. The night came and waited. Tomorrow would be a busy day.

Chapter Three

The sun rose upon men sawing, hammering, chiseling, shouting orders, and giants moving huge stones through the air upon their shoulders. Camels and cattle mixed their calls with those men and women selling their wares in the marketplace. The hum of the din made Joseph want to fall asleep again, but he had work to do. There were scarves to pinch and money bags to wisp away, bread to steal, and fruit to sample in the marketplace.

The lean, dark haired youth climbed down from his tree and walked to the well recently uncovered. Splashing water onto his face, he winked at a pretty girl filling her jug.

“Good morning to you, Jen-Ni.”

“Good morning, Joseph.” She smiled. She was covered head to toe in white linen. She was a Shemite. “You are off to work then?”

“Yes. Everyone has to work for a living.” Joseph scooped up some water with his hands and drank. He danced over to her and helped her lift the jug from the well. “You have an excellent day, and tell your mother thanks for the bread, and that I love her.”

“I will do that, Joseph.”

He placed the jug onto her shoulder, put his face close to hers, and with a slight of hand, removed the scarf she had dangling from her girdle. Then he pranced away.

“Oh, Joseph!” she called.

He turned and smiled. “Yes?”

“My scarf?” She held out her hand.

His face turned red as he returned it to her. He turned, laughingly, and ran towards the marketplace.

“Thank you, Joseph,” she called back.

Jen-Ni took the jug off her shoulder and placed it onto her head and returned to her little city of Shemites.

* * *

Joseph had a breakfast of pork rolled in flat-bread, an orange, pomegranate seeds, dates, yaghort drink, and a bump on the head from an irate merchant as he passed through the crowds in the marketplace. Along the way, he acquired plenty of scarves and other pieces of cloth, and several bags of coins.

Becoming lazy at noon day, he climbed a tree to rest and listened in on a conversation.

“Bring your attention to these measurements, Master Architect! With these sound nodes and tunnels, you will wind up with the wrong vibrations.”

“Khan, let your eyes feast upon my calculations.” The architect pointed to the marks he had made in the wet clay. “The vibrations are in harmony with the lords of Heaven and Mother Earth.”

“But these dimensions do not match *my* calculations. You should go over it again.”

Joseph chuckled as he dozed off to sleep.

* * *

Joseph stretched and climbed down from his perch. He headed to the marketplace. He would have a little snack. He went to the fat merchant Ben-Mat who had nice little barley

cakes dipped in honey.

“Feast your eyes on this nice embroidered scarf.” Joseph hung the scarf by its corners before the merchant. “My dear mother spent hours decorating it. Look at the beautiful colors and needle work. It will more than pay for that nice barley cake.”

“You have not a mother to cradle you in her arms, Joseph. But I like the scarf. You may have a barley cake.” Ben-Mat the merchant snatched up the scarf and put it to his nose. Taking a deep breath, he sighed. “It has a wonderful perfume, as well.” He smiled as Joseph scampered off with two barley cakes.

As he passed a little boy whose mother haggled with a merchant for a replacement for her broken pot, Joseph slipped the second barley cake into the boy's hands.

“Thank you Joseph,” he said as he started stuffing his mouth.

Joseph ran into another conversation as he slipped through the legs of a giant whose hips exceeded the height of Joseph's shoulders. He leaned up against a post, holding up a corner of a house going up behind a merchant's table and finished off his barley cake.

The giants wore only leather loincloths which showed their muscular legs, chests and arms. But they wore colorful turbans on their blonde heads.

“Khan says we have to wait for the right time to hit the king. I want to hit him now. Waiting is no fun,” said one giant to another.

Joseph licked the honey off his fingers.

“Yeah, he wants us to move all these heavy stones and make a mountain.”

“He says the king wants us to get to Heaven.”

“We can send the king to Heaven easy. Just hit him. Use a fist and hit him on the head.”

“Make him swallow his own body.”

The giants roared with laughter. They thought no one knew their language, but Joseph picked up languages easily, and he chuckled to himself and grinned.

* * *

The little thief made his way to the rooftops being built all over the city. Tents were replaced with cheap clay brick buildings side by side, so hopping from one house to another was swift. They even replaced the great tabernacle of the king by a palace. While in construction, it was easily accessible, and he could get close enough to watch the queen bathe. Crawling through the trees close to her, he could even eat from her table or snatch a jeweled necklace or bracelet. Today, as he sprawled on a lower branch, he heard this conversation:

“Nimrod is expendable.” Khan drew a jug of wine to his lips and drank. He wiped his lips and beard with the back of his arm.

Sammur stepped out of her perfumed pool as her servant girls covered her body with towels and wiped her dry. “As long as he owns the army, it is impossible to take him out of the picture. Although, his general finds that he needs me more often. He is becoming my slave.”

Khan lay on the ground near the pool at Sammur's feet. He set the jug down and reached for some grapes on the table near his head. They disappeared into the nearby tree

before his hand could touch them. He blinked, looked up at the tray and commanded, “Tu-Tu, get me some more fruit.” He returned his attention to Sammur.

“Perhaps you can ask General Lu-Mu-Mo to bring Nimrod's head on a platter. It was done this way in the before-time.”

“Scoot!” Sammur shooed away her servants as she wrapped herself in her towels and sat on a marble bench near Khan. “I am not done with Nimrod yet. I need him as a well placed pawn against the self proclaimed queen, Egyptus.”

“We will have to get rid of her too.” Khan took some more grapes from the hand of Sammur's servant Tu-Tu.

“You can't get rid of Egyptus, you can only incorporate her. Use her. Maybe she can replace General Lu; combine the armies, keep Egyptus under our thumb. She can take care of Nimrod after he takes care of the general. Once Nimrod sees me with him, he will kill him.”

“Egyptus will be tempted to come this close to the throne, my love,” Khan smiled, showing an inch between his forefinger and thumb.

“My lovely Khan.” Sammur rested her chin in her hand as she leaned towards him. “If we kill Egyptus, Mitz-Ra, in his place, holds power over us with a rod. He can destroy us within minutes.”

“He has yet to realize the power of an immortal.” Khan drank from his jug again, and emptying it, threw it on the ground splintering it into tiny pieces. As one of the maidens bent over to clean it up, Khan swatted her on the bottom. She landed on the ground among the

shards, and Khan and Sammur laughed.

“Very powerful, I am sure.” Sammur laughed again.

Khan lifted himself and sat next to Sammur, letting his feet rest in the pool of perfumed water. “You will see when I make you immortal. We will both sail up into the sky in our ben-ben.”

* * *

Joseph left the tree when he had tired of the two, placing in his belt a few precious items from the table. He ran among the rooftops until he found Nimrod. He jumped down and landed next to his chariot.

“Father,” he exclaimed. “May I ride with you?”

Nimrod touched the shoulder of his charioteer who halted their progression. “And what, my dear child, have you been doing? Yes. Hop in. I want to know what information my little spy has for me today.”

Joseph told of all his adventures and of the conversations he had listened in on. “I think you should stay away from the sons of Enki,” Joseph said nonchalantly as he jumped out of the back of the chariot. “Those giants plan to do you harm.”

Nimrod smiled, self-assured. “Don't worry about me, Joseph. It is my enemies you should worry about.” With a wave of the hand, he sped on to weighty matters.

* * *

Eva-Lin, a woman in her forties, already going gray, kneaded her bread, throwing flour on the flat stone every so often to keep her hands from sticking to the dough. She had

several loaves stuck onto the inside wall of the beehive shaped oven already baking. Joseph was drawn to the heavenly smell like a magnet to iron or like a starving beggar.

As he entered the yard behind her house, she spotted him and grabbed a wet rag she had handy. “Where have you been, little tramp! I needed you yesterday to carry these loaves to the merchant.” She swatted him a few times with the wet rag. He protected himself with his arms and turned his back laughing. “I had to do it all myself. You are no good to me when you stay out all night and come back anytime you please.”

“I was working for Father.”

She went back to her kneading, and he swiped a bite of dough from over her shoulder. She elbowed him and wiped her sweaty brow with her flour encrusted arm.

“You were working for Father, were you?” Eva-Lin took the loaf and slapped it onto the inside of the oven sticking it to the wall. She straightened herself up and said with a frown, “You know how many wives and concubines your father has? Huh? Dozens. And none of them are his wives. He only has one wife, and she is his queen. So how many sons do you think he has? You are one of a hundred. He cares not for the likes of you.”

Peering back into the stove, she reached in and took out the loaves that were done, placing them with others lying on a cloth on the clean table. She tied the corners together to make a bag and wiped her arms with the cool damp rag.

“Here. Put these on the pole and deliver them to the merchant ... and bring me back the money!”

“Mother.” Joseph took a bright broach studded with jewels from under his belt and

handed it to Eva-Lin. “It belonged to the queen herself.”

Eva-Lin snatched it up. “Liar.” She examined it closely and then replaced the bone broach that held her clothes together with it. “I deserve something for all the hard work I do.”

She swatted his behind and said, “Go on. Off with you.”

As Joseph left, she looked up into the blue sky and sighed. “I was young once ... a temple maiden. The king and I ...” She went back to her flour to make another loaf. A tear dripped down her cheek.

Chapter Four

Jared obtained a job driving a juggernaut, one of the giants' wagons. He learned quickly to control sixty oxen. The wide turns of the wagon were controlled using a winch which pulled the reigns of the leading oxen. The winch sat on its side and was located in front of his seat. He turned the handle counterclockwise to make a left turn and clockwise to make a right turn.

The quarry was located in the mountains east of the Tigris River. It was a week's drive between the two locations. At the quarry, a giant would load great blocks of granite onto the wagon, and at the wharf, another giant would unload the wagon and put the stones onto a boat to take across the river. There, a giant unloaded the boat and put the blocks onto another juggernaut.

During the long haul, Jared amused himself by inventing a writing system. He drew pictures of ideas he wanted to portray, using a knife to scrawl onto the blocks of stone. He couldn't read the cuneiform used by scribes and teachers. He hadn't gone to school.

His boyhood had been used up as a slave laborer making bricks for the cities of Nimrod. Now the king was concentrating all the labor on this one tower that was as huge as a mountain. He thought it very lucky to have been hired as a driver. He was making a lot of money.

* * *

The brother of Jared was content to be a shepherd. People needed clothes which the sheep provided from their wool. There was a great market for it. He would occasionally be asked for mutton, but he would not sell the good wool-producing sheep. Only the spotted or the lame or weak would he sell. The only exception was a sacrifice to the gods, then he would give his best as an offering.

The women of the Shemite tents were expert in weaving the wool, and there were men enough in the city for the dying. Everyone kept happy because of the continual work.

The building of the tower brought a good economy. A large superstructure had to be supported. The workers had to be fed, clothed, and housed. Wood, stone, and brick had to be imported. Farms and ranches were started on the outskirts of the growing city. The shepherds found pasture in the hills out beyond the farms. But the brother of Jared cared not for these things. He cared for his sheep and knew each one by name.

The life of a shepherd had its work and labor as he looked after his sheep, but every day there was time to sit and ponder the things of life. Jared had shown his newly invented characters to his brother. He put them to use in writing the things he pondered upon plates of brass or gold. Usually, he was paid in gold which he pounded into plates.

As he watched his sheep on the grassy slopes or as he lay on the ground at night and stared at the stars, the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him and he would sing. These songs he would inscribe on the plates. One scribble was,

“As I behold the handiwork of the Lord,

My heart ponders, and my thoughts wander

among the stars.

I take pleasure in the words of my father,
and delight in the wisdom of his speech
to feed his sheep.

I lead them to green pastures, calling
each one by name, and they follow me,
the healthy and the lame.

My joy is in my life and my love is
in my work. My peace assembles wisdom;
laughter is my gain.”

* * *

“Nimrod,” heralded Shem from his tent to all his assembled family, “has declared a feast. Work on the the tower has been going at a steady pace, and the workers grow tired, yet, the growth of the tower is ahead of schedule, so he wants all his people to celebrate and rejuvenate themselves.” Shem lifted his hands to the heavens. His white hair and beard shined in the morning sun. “We will dance and make merry here, among ourselves, and make a holy sacrifice to our gods. So bring the fatted calf and the lamb without blemish, and we will build an altar to the Giver of All Life.”

Shem's family rushed about making preparations. Arphaxad brought a calf weaned from its mother. The brother of Jared brought a lamb with no blemish and fat. El-Am and Ass-Hur brought fresh wine. The sons of Put were sought and brought to the feast. They

provided the music. The women set themselves to making bread and sweetmeats. The children scurried through the gardens to bring in mint, anise, and sorrel. Lentils were brought from storage and honey from the hives.

Shem sacrificed the calf and the lamb under the noon sun, and his children commenced dancing and singing songs of thanksgiving. The whole afternoon was spent in eating, laughing, and telling stories. A scapegoat was brought from A-Ram's heard to end the festivities. Everyone sent it through a gauntlet, slapping it with palm fronds, driving it out of the camp. Joy filled their hearts as God took away their sins.

* * *

Nimrod was not satisfied. Not all of his servants attended his feast. Shem was absent. When someone did not attend such a feast, he was considered a traitor, a rebel, or a conspirator, so Khan and Sammur whispered into his ear as he sat on his throne at the head of the feast.

“He is plotting something against your highness, surely,” said Sammur, as Nimrod lay his dizzy head against her breast.

“Shem is a good man,” Nimrod defended. “No one of my servants is as honest and upright.”

“The best way to hide a treacherous heart,” Khan commented, who sat on Sammur's right side.

Tu-Tu filled Khan's and Sammur's golden cups with more wine. They poured the wine down each other's throats to quench a thirst that wouldn't go away. They laughed as the wine

spilled down their chins. Some splattered onto Nimrod's head. He paid no notice. Music, dancing, and laughter filled their ears as they conspired against Shem. Khan had told Sammur that Shem would make the best scapegoat after they killed Nimrod.

The king raised his head and commanded the guards to bring Shem that he may kneel before him.

Shem wasn't surprised when the guards came to collect him. His children, though, were aghast. Their rejoicing had been interrupted. They got down on their knees and raised their voices to Heaven on their father's behalf.

Two of the twelve guards grabbed each of Shem's arms and marched him off to the king's festival held at the king's palace which had now been finished. One of the reasons for the festival was to dedicate the palace to the gods. Part of that dedication was for the people, especially the king's servants, to swear obeisance to the king and to his gods. It was assumed that Shem wouldn't do that, so an example could be made of him.

Shem was thrown by the guards at the feet of Nimrod, Sammur, and Khan. He assumed a kneeling posture and bowed his head.

“You may rise, my good servant, Shem,” Nimrod said as he held out his hand.

Shem rose but did not look the king in the eyes.

“Shem,” Nimrod asked, almost slurring because of his inebriation. “Why is it that you did not come to my festival?”

“We are a tribe set apart because of our devotion to God.” Shem glanced at Nimrod, but looked only as high as Nimrod's elaborately decorated necklace covering his shoulders.

“We did celebrate as you asked, and sacrificed to God.”

“I wanted you to sacrifice to *my* gods!” Nimrod yelled.

“We cannot do that, your Majesty.” Shem now raised his eyes to meet his king's. “I am a high priest to a jealous god. He will command his people or he will destroy them when they are fully ripe in iniquity.”

“Are we ripe in iniquity, Shem?” Sammu asked, smiling brightly. “Who is this god of yours that comes to judge us?”

“What do we know of gods, anyway?” Nimrod asked as he waved his hand through the air, almost slapping Sammu in the face. “Shem is a good man.”

“Shem has defied the king!” Sammu cried.

“Yes, he has!” Nimrod bent down to look Shem in the face. “Why have you done this, Shem?”

“Your Magnificence, I will serve you always and do whatever you ask of me if it is in my power to do so, and if it is in the interest of my god.” Shem tilted his head slightly, staring at Nimrod.

“Your god, Shem? What about my gods, the ones who built this great civilization? Is your god against civilization? Your brother Ham said as much.” Nimrod rubbed his chin and left his forefinger there.

Shem showed the palms of his hands, said, “My god and your god is the father of all flesh. He created this world upon which you stand. He creates kings and he takes their lives,” and bowed his head again.

“Are you thinking of killing me, Shem?” Nimrod squinted his eyes.

“My Lord.” Shem looked up at his king again and tilted his head in the other direction.

“My god gives life to every man and brings him home again to his own bosom. He gives us every blessing ... the food we eat and the clothes we wear on our backs ... our homes, and all that we have ... our families ...”

“Enough of this,” Sammur complained. “This is interrupting our festivities. Take this man out and have him flogged.”

“Yes,” Nimrod agreed. “We will deal with this man later.” With the flick of a finger, Nimrod summoned his guards. “Show this man to the crowd.”

The guards grabbed Shem by the arms, lifted him to his feet, and turned him to the revelers. “Behold the man!” Nimrod cried. “He is a traitor, but a good servant. Take him out and give him forty lashes.” The guests clapped or banged on metal pots and bowls and jeered. Then with a wave of his arm, Nimrod commanded, “On with the festivities!”

Shem was taken out and tied to a post. The soldiers tore his clothes to expose his back and whipped him. He cringed with every slap of the whip which tore into his flesh. The sting increased the more he bled. He didn't cry out in pain, but cried out to God. He shed tears for Nimrod. He had been such a promising boy. He prayed for him. Being weak, he fainted, and they left him there to be found by his family. He hung there by his wrists, bleeding until El-Am came, cut him down and carried him away. Shem's son sobbed for the wickedness of Nimrod. He was glad that his daughter Miriam had never married him.

Chapter Five

“An alliance?” asked Egyptus. “I thought family made us allies already.”

Sammur-amat had invited Egyptus to dine with her. The table was a simple affair with different meats such as fish and eel, boar's head, roasted pig, lamb, and beef with a calf boiled in its mother's milk, different types of barley and wheat breads, cheeses and yaghorts. The herbs were either in side dishes or in the meats for flavor.

“Our kingdom is large, my sister.” Sammur took some herbs from a nearby dish, placed them in her meat and sauce and scooped them up with a piece of flat-bread. “We need someone who knows how to command the armies.” She shared it with Egyptus.

“What about Nimrod and your General Lu?” Egyptus took a drink of wine and continued staring at Sammur.

“Nimrod is too obsessed with this tower to get to Heaven. He is becoming fat, and General Lu is mad and wants to build up his own agenda. He would disposed of Nimrod and have me as his consort.” Sammur dipped some celery into a dish of yaghort and delicately bit off the end.

Egyptus smiled. “Rumor has it that you are already his consort.” She took a bite of roast lamb.

“How else to get control of a man?” Sammur returned her smile meanly, like a cat.

“And what do you intend to do with him?” Egyptus sipped more wine.

“Why,” she said, picking up the whole tray of boar's head, “present his head to you on

a platter ... a gold platter.” She passed it to Egyptus who took a knife and cut off a hunk.

“Will you gold-plate his face as well?”

The two laughed. They both knew that Egyptus could capture a man's soul through such a process using gold and chants.

The two women sealed their bond with a kiss.

* * *

Sammur grew up lonely. She had no brothers or sisters. Her mother had died in childbirth. Sammur was married into the royal family, to Nimrod, the son of Hathor, but she couldn't play with him. It was forbidden to play with royalty. This marriage was in payment of back taxes. Her father, Kim-Yap, married again as a financial arrangement to get him out of another debt. Thus, her new mother and daughters treated her like a servant as part of the payment. Sammur would hide from them or disappear into the marsh for days at a time. She slept near the ovens in the back of the house to keep warm. Her father found her one time visiting the witch of the marsh.

“So this is where you've been hiding,” he had said, taking her by the hand to lead her away.

The witch called after him from within the darkness of her woven hut. “She is the virgin mother of the god, Du-Mas.” He turned to stare into the dark hole. She called out again, “She will become the mother of all men, the ruler of all men.”

Her father kept these things to himself, and Sammur was not allowed back into the marsh. The rumor of her being found in the marsh led to one thing and another until she

gained the reputation of being born from the foam of the waves of the sea.

Sammur did not obey her father. She visited the witch from time to time and learned from her a religion that had come from the before-time. As queen, she set up a priesthood with priests and priestesses who promulgated this religion. In part, it was the religion located in Nippur which came from Khan and his followers. It promoted emperor worship, the worship of the constellations of the night sky, and the rightful rule of the dragon god, Enki, Lord of the Abzu. It was this witch that sent Sammu to Nippur to find her husband Nimrod.

A great feast was celebrated at the new year, the beginning of Spring. Then was the lambing season. During this feast, two important things happened. One, Nimrod was declared the god of the world, and everyone was to covenant obedience to him. Secondly, a ram was brought forth and was torn limb from limb while alive. It represented the old year going out. Then a newborn lamb was carried in by a shepherd who had won the lottery, and the priests would place their hands on its head and consecrate it as the new year. It would be raised in a cage and fattened up for the next new year's celebration.

As Sammu grew into an intoxicatingly beautiful woman, she was brought up in the royal court, and after the abduction of her childhood husband, Nimrod, she was trained in the Temple of Agriculture to lie with young men of her own age as a temple maiden. She had enjoyed being a whore and this association with the boys. It kept her from feeling that stone heavy loneliness she experienced as a child. Of course, there were some who pawed her body all over and made her feel dirty, but there were rare times that she actually made love. One of the youth that mauled her every time they were together was Lu-Mu-Mo, now General

Lu. It was he whom she had to seduce so Nimrod would kill him, and she would have her revenge.

Sammur threw many parties, surrounding herself with people who would applaud her every act, laugh at her jokes, and worship her beauty. In the religious celebrations, she was acclaimed a virgin. But at the parties, everyone knew better. That was the way of high society, and she accepted that. She had a lot of friends, even though she knew in the back of her mind, that she would be disdained if they knew she had come from lowly circumstances. If she would be dethroned, she would have no friends. She would do anything to keep her throne. Nimrod was just a stepping stone to make the witch's prophesies come true. He was expendable. At the first new year celebration after his new city had been created, Sammur knew what to do with him. The sacrifice of the ram gave her the inspiration. He would be torn limb from limb, taking the place of the ram. Khan would see to that. He would do anything she asked of him.

* * *

General Lu made a striking figure with his shoulder pad armor and stiff skirts. His black hair was gathered behind his head and tied into several knots. His only whiskers were a thin black mustache that hung down below his mouth. But what he lacked on his chin grew thickly above his eyes.

As he walked in his garden with his young blonde wife, hardly twelve years of age, a courier approached. The tall lank boy winked at the girl who wore only a thin linen garment. He couldn't have been much older than her. She smiled and turned her head shyly as the

young lad bowed his head and handed a scroll to the general. "A message from the queen, Master." He turned to leave, yet his eyes were continually on the girl.

General Lu smiled to himself as he read the invitation. His slanted eyes squinted. "Pu-Lin," he called to his servant, "tell the queen I will accept her offer to share her table." The general twisted his mustache in anticipation.

As the servant left, General Lu called after him. "Make ready my chariot!"

* * *

Sammur always displayed a lavish table with every possible food the marketplace offered.

She met General Lu at the door herself, not leaving the servant to make a mistake and bring dishonor to either of them. She took his hand and led him to the dining room. He licked his lips. She didn't know if that was for her or for the food she was to serve. Her sheer linen dress didn't leave anything to the imagination, even though her hips and shoulders were covered with jeweled necklaces. She smiled at him and accepted polite conversation, even though she knew she would be dessert.

But then, the thought of Nimrod took a load off her chest and lightened her attitude. This night he had promised to come home and be with her.

"You look delightful tonight," the general said as they walked down the entrance corridor, holding her hand near shoulder high, which he kissed often.

"General," she countered, "you outdo yourself. What do you do to keep in shape, seeing you have no battles to engage in?"

“We soldiers keep in shape by training constantly. When we are not training, we fight each other in contests. We have one coming up this week ... in two days.”

As they entered the dining room, she said, “I am sure you win all your engagements.”

“I do.”

The general smiled, kissed her hand a last time as a black servant girl, wearing nothing but a white skirt and jeweled choker, took his hand. She led him around to the back side of the table where a couch awaited him. He lay on the couch against a cylindrical pillow to hold him up while he ate.

Tu-Tu led Sammur by the hand to the center of the table where she sat in a jewel studded chair of gold-plated shittim wood that could have passed for a throne. After sitting, Sammur waved the palms of her hands over the table and said, “May the gods bless this food and drink to bring health, life, and strength.”

General Lu took his golden wine goblet, lifted it to Sammur and said, “May the gods!”

She took her goblet, lifted it towards him and repeated, “May the gods.”

The two enjoyed various meats and breads, fruits and herbs and different wines, one of which was barley wine which she knew was his favorite. After dinner, Sammur had Tu-Tu remove her necklaces, and then she joined him on the couch. He placed his arm around her as she lay beside him, with their arms supporting them on the same pillow. They both chewed mint leaves and winter green before the kissing started.

* * *

Nimrod could think of nothing but making love to Sammur as he drove his chariot

through the gates of the city. His travels led him to every city in the kingdom, performing raids on the cattle and meeting the leaders of each place. Everywhere he went he had to conquer all over again, but only ceremonially, to reestablish his monarchy and gain the loyalty of his subjects. Even though he had concubines in every city, no one could make love like Sammur, and for him, it was true love, someone he could conquer every time they met. It never became old. He never thought of Miriam or her god. Sammur's love had healed him of that hurt forever.

Leaping from his chariot, he imagined how Sammur would meet him, how they would embrace, how she would lead him into the bedroom and lie with him. It would be heavenly. He raced up the marble steps, leaving his guard below to put away the horses, and ran across the porch, through the door into the main room. There was no Sammur to greet him. The room was full of empty couches and tables with fruit and wine waiting for visitors. Where were the servants?

Nimrod found the dining room table filled with all manner of foods for a feast. Still, no Sammur and no servants. He noticed that only two people had been eating. He took an ostrich leg, chewed on it, threw it across the floor, and gulped down some wine from one of the service jugs. He threw it also onto the floor where it crashed and spilled like blood from a wound.

He ran upstairs to the bedrooms, then to Sammur's room.

“Tu-Tu?” Sammur's voice came from the bed. “Is that you? I thought I told you we were not to be disturbed.”

Nimrod leaned into the room, holding onto the door posts. “We?” His face grimaced, and he ran over to the bed, pulling the covers off the two lovers.

Sammur screamed. Nimrod was dressed in his armor and pulled out his sword.

“Lu!” he yelled.

General Lu, naked and in shock, tried to creep across to the other side of the bed.

Nimrod ran around to cut off his retreat, lifting his sword. “You dishonor my bed, Sir.”

“You are never home.” General Lu scooted to the head of the bed and cringed. “Your wife is free to any man. You have no right to her. You never give her any love. I give her my love. She should be my wife.”

“You are nothing but a beast attacking my wife. I will have your head!”

Sammur sat at the head of the bed shaking, trying to cover her body with the bed clothes which she stuffed into her mouth and bit down hard.

She screamed again as Nimrod's sword whooshed down and decapitated his general. His head rolled towards Sammur. It stared up at her with utter surprise. She fainted and fell off the blood spattered bed.

General Lu raised up trying to breath but fell down dead.

Nimrod walked over to Sammur. He bent backwards, laughing and stooped down over her body. He placed his sword against her neck and smeared it with blood. He sighed. His fist hit the floor. She groaned.

Nimrod wiped his sword on the bed covers and replaced it in the scabbard. He picked up his wife and carried her out into his room. She woke up and weeped on his shoulder. He

threw her onto his bed, took off his armor, and lay down beside her.

Sammur turned away from him. “You scared me!” She smiled secretly; he had done the very thing she had wanted him to do. Now she would have Egyptus' services.

“I should leave his body in your room to rot.” He pulled her back around to embrace her. “Make love to me.”

“I'm not your whore,” she said demurely.

They embraced.

“Do you forgive me?” Sammur kissed her king and licked his face.

“No.”

They continued making love.

“Stop!” Sammur pleaded. “You're hurting me.”

“And what have you done to me?”

Sammur sat up and folded her arms around her legs. She looked away from him.

Nimrod got up and walked out. He found himself standing naked at the dinner table. He grabbed a jug of wine and started drinking. After three jugs, he stepped up onto Sammur's chair and then onto the table and pissed on all the food, throwing the last jug onto the table, shattering it to pieces.

Nimrod felt numb and cold. He had tried to love Sammur. He gave her everything she had ever asked for. She was a queen and wanted for nothing. As king, he had responsibilities. His face had to be seen. He had to travel, and he was building the tallest structure and the largest empire ever seen by mankind. All he needed was a bit of love and loyalty. But

treachery was part and parcel of the crown. Everyone was his enemy. Yet, there was this specter that followed him everywhere. He hadn't thought of her in a very long time ... ages. But his heart knew, and it burned like a hot poker. He couldn't shut her out any longer. He raised his hand to his face and wept. He still loved Miriam.

Chapter Six

People were calling it “the tower to get to Heaven.” It wasn't a tower at all. It was more like an elevated platform that was to launch a missile skyward, which was laying on its side near the platform in the form of an obelisk. Of course, some people would call it a pyramid, but it wasn't like the pyramid found by Mitz-Ra and Egyptus along the En-Nil. It had sloping sides like a pyramid, but it was a platform set on top of a platform with another on top of that, up to nine levels, such that a person could walk around each one. On the east side steps rose from the bottom courtyard to the very top. Around the bottom were quartz urns to be laid out around the tower set in the pavement also made of quartz. These would provide the trigger mechanism for the vibrations that would set the missile into motion as soon as they were set in their proper places. Only the main architect knew that if one vessel were out of alignment it could bring disaster. He was the adviser on the project and had warned Nimrod.

The finishing touches were being placed on the tower and around it. White quartz panels had to be secured to the sides and a temple built in front to hold the control console. Antenna would be attached to the roof of the temple to control the vibrations. Gardens then would be placed around both the tower and the temple before the dedication took place. The plants and trees would act as a buffer to protect the people of the city. Sammur and Egyptus would make sure that dedication would be accompanied by the sacrifice of Nimrod.

Of course, Nimrod was not without his spies.

The scaffolding to bring the missile into place on top of the tower was also being built while inscriptions of blessing were inscribed onto the sides of the obelisk. The ben-ben or pyramid-shaped capsule, in which the traveler would sit, was constructed carefully in an adjacent building. Further control panels, a comfortable chair, plus atmosphere producing instruments were placed inside.

* * *

Joseph perched upon the wall of Nimrod's garden and talked with his father.

“They have it in for you, Father.”

Nimrod sipped a drink made from aged lemons as he sat on a marble bench.

“How will my death be, Joseph? Will they run me through or strangle me?”

“They will tear you limb from limb.” Joseph helped himself to a pomegranate from a nearby tree and peeled it with his teeth.

“Who will do such a thing?” Finishing his drink, he placed the newly fashioned glass goblet onto a table to the left of him. He grabbed a couple of dates and bit off the end of one. “I wouldn't wish that on my meanest brother.”

“I am sure they think you are cruel, Sire.”

“They don't know me. A king has to be cruel sometimes. He has hard decisions to make.” Nimrod put the whole date in his mouth and spit out the pit.

Both father and son meditated a moment.

“I ask again.” Nimrod sat up and leaned forward. “Who is going to kill me?”

“It will be the giants. They are the only ones strong enough.”

“But who gives the orders? Is it Khan?”

“No, Sire. It is your wife, Sammu-amat, the queen.” Joseph spoke from between his knees.

Nimrod put his foot onto the bench he was sitting on and rested his chin on his knee.

“I thought as much. She wants the throne all to herself.”

“She wants to see if you will become a constellation in the heavens.”

“I will become a star to be worshiped,” Nimrod said thoughtfully.

Joseph hopped down from the fence and sat next to his father. “Many people worship you now. They make sacrifices in the temple in your name.”

“There are some amongst us that say that is blasphemy. One in particular.” Nimrod put his leg down and embraced his son.

“Is it the man Shem?”

“He and his clan. They worship an unknown God. They don't even know his name.”

“We know who we worship, don't we Father?”

“Yes.” Nimrod's thoughts came back around to Sammu and Khan. He looked his son in the eyes. “They won't get away with it, you know.”

“The Shemites?”

Nimrod looked away, staring into empty space. “No. My dear wife and her lover, Khan.”

“What will you do?”

“They are building a craft to take them into the Heavens. They seek Nibiru, home of

the gods. But when they engage the winds to throw them into the sky, they will receive a surprise.” Nimrod smiled broadly.

“What surprise, Father. What?” Joseph's eyes widened.

“They will never leave the ground. It will not work. I will make sure of that. Their plans will crumble to the Earth.”

* * *

Shem dreamed. He groaned in his sleep and suddenly awoke. Sweat covered his brow. He looked around. There was a single oil lamp hanging from the roof of the tent that showed him where he was. He shook his wife.

“ Aysha'lib. Aysha'lib. Wake up. I have had a dream.”

Shem's wife shook her head and raised herself on one elbow. “What? What is it, my husband?”

“The Lord appeared to me in a dream.” Shem rose up and continued as he dressed. “We are to leave this place. God has forsaken it. Our family is to be scattered to the four winds.”

“What are you talking about? The sun isn't up yet. Our family? What?”

Aysha'lib followed her husband, got dressed and made a little meal for him and gave him wine.

After he ate and drank, he turned to his wife. “We must get ready and leave before the sun rises. I must go tell my sons.”

Aysha'lib was used to getting up before dawn and throwing down the tent, but now

that she was old, she had her servants do that after gathering up all the baggage and personal belongings.

Shem went from tent to tent, waking up his sons and shushing them. They had to get out of town without making any noise.

“Why should we leave?” they would ask.

“There is a great storm coming,” Shem explained. “It will destroy us all. Therefore, the Lord has commanded us to leave. Yet, we should separate. One family will go this way, another that way. Our trails the Lord will confuse so we cannot be followed.”

Tents came down and loaded onto camels who were too sleepy to make any noise. After that they gathered the sheep and goats, the shepherds instructing them to rise quietly.

Two families refused to go. They did not want to leave their lucrative businesses, and they had many friends. These were good and righteous men, but they were bent to the ways of the world. They were none other than Jared and his brother.

Shem nodded his hoary head. “It is well enough. You will be here to record the destruction. God bless you both and your families. I see that he has a place for you ... a goodly place. But beware and follow the voice of the Lord. I will be praying for you always.”

Shem kissed each of his loved ones before he left them in the care of the Lord, clapping his hands upon their heads.

Caravans in the night,

Moonlight shining o'er them,

Ships of the desert swaying;
Caravans in the night,
Slipping out of the way,
Angels watching o'er them;
Caravans in the desert night,
As they flee north and south and east,
Families departing;
Caravans in the night,
Bidding farewell to trouble,
Search the stars for guidance.

And so the family of Shem departed, fleeing the wrath of God to be poured out upon a wicked nation. Jared and his brother looked on as the full moon led their tribe away from them. It would be the last time they would see their patriarch and also their father and his family ... brothers and sisters, mother. They shed tears, but they also needed to hide.

“Come,” said Jared. “My family will go live with our friends in homes of mud. You take your tent,” he told his brother, “and your family and your sheep and depart into the hills as is your custom. You will not be missed, and I will blend in with the populace and will not be found.”

Jared and his brother embraced and kissed.

“I will hear from you from time to time?” asked Jared.

“Yes,” said his brother. “I will come down in the season and we will talk and drink

wine together in the marketplace.”

They embraced once more and departed.

* * *

Egyptus hoisted the symbol of the Bee on top of the tower. She had it plastered or carved on all government buildings and temples. Sammur had given her charge over the armies of the empire with Mitz-Ra at her side. She rode at the head of a parade brandishing her Bee symbol to show all the people who was in charge.

Nimrod remained head of the priesthood. He wore his lion skin in public. The high priests wore jaguar skins because lion skins were in short supply; Nimrod had killed them.

* * *

Nimrod stared out the window at the parade. Toad Tail, Sammur's servant waited on him. Trumpets, drums and shouts of the people below plus the stamping of soldier's feet, and the chinking sound of armor and swords rang in their ears. There was also the screeching sound of chariot wheels that needed to be greased turning round and round.

“When you have two women after your throat,” Nimrod said as he turned his face back into the room, “I think it's about time to run.”

“I could go with you, Master,” Toad Tail said as he folded Nimrod's clothes, placing them into the box set against the wall.

“No, Toad. I wouldn't want to get you in trouble with the mistress.”

“Where will you run to, Master? I will pack your bags with clothes and food and put them in your chariot. I will go and feed your asses and get them ready for your departure.”

Nimrod turned his whole body around and leaned against the window sill with his arms spread supporting his weight. “No, not today, Toad. I am just disgusted at the arrangements made for my life by two conniving females.”

“I will get you some sweet females for you to play with, Master,” volunteered Toad. His mind was simple. He sounded like a fool that didn't quite understand everything that was going on. “They will not think of you as an enemy. They will not try to kill you.”

“That's nice of you, Toad, but I am afraid Sammu has spoiled me. I want no other.”

Only when he was in town, of course, when he was near to his wife. But when he was traveling, he made excuses.

Nimrod sat on the edge of his bed, and Toad Tail brought him a goblet of wine.

“Toad, did I ever tell you why Shem was here, why he brought his whole family and made camp just outside of town, what the real reason was that I had to punish him? I could have put him to death for what he did.” Nimrod placed one foot on the bed and leaned his elbow on his knee and took a sip of the wine.

“No, Master. You never did.” Toad Tail stopped his work to pay attention.

Nimrod explained how Ham had stolen the garment of Adam from his father Noah and how the pattern was given to the high priests which Ham had ordained. “The garment was supposed to be passed down to me, I being the king, when Father Ham died. But Egyptus got to him before I was able to.”

Toad started cleaning the room, dusting and sweeping. “What did she want it for?”

“She gave it to her son Pharaoh in an elaborate ceremony in the Temple of Light in

Nippur. It was his coming of age.” Nimrod grimaced. Then he drank the goblet dry and put his foot down. Leaning forward, he said, “It makes me sick! The boy is feminine. He still nurses. He can't even wield a sword!” He threw the goblet of expensive glass. It shattered against the wall.

Toad Tail giggled. “I will clean it up.” As he cleaned up the mess, he commented, “The boy is not a man. How will he ever be king?”

“Is he too after my throne? By the gods.” Nimrod rose with his fists in the air. “Who is not?”

Toad stood with his weight against his broom. “I am not, Master.”

After a moment, Nimrod sat cross-legged on his bed with his elbows on his knees, held his head in his hands, and said, “Shem was always sneaking around looking for that garment. I caught him several times whispering to the servants. When I approached they would suddenly stop talking or start laughing and joking as if I didn't know what they were up to. He had his whole family scouring the city looking for it.” Nimrod sighed. “I will send the officers out tomorrow and arrest him.”

* * *

Leaving his house at midnight, in disguise, dressed like a servant, Nimrod carried copper nails with him and a hammer. There were not many people that knew his face, but there was no moon out anyway, and the clouds covered the stars. It was black as pitch outside. He felt safe. *I will make sure the frequency output for the launching is terribly wrong.*

He made his way to the pyramid shaped tower. The heavy quartz urns were not yet in place. That was good. He went around the rocket launching platform “tower” finding each inset where the urns were to be placed. In the center of each inset he hammered a copper nail. One would do, but to make it look as if that's what it was supposed to look like, he put one in each inset. As he hammered in each nail, he said, “They think they will take my life without consequences? Any person attempting to go off to Heaven in this missile will die.”

Walking back, having left the extra nails and the hammer at a work table, he ran into Am-Tak, one of the guards of the late General Lu.

“Sire,” he said, saluting with his fist to his heart. “What are you doing out at night? It is dangerous, surely.”

Nimrod put his arm around the soldier. “I have visited the launching pad. You can walk me back to the palace if you think I am unsafe.”

“I will do that.”

As they passed a torch-lit porch, Am-Tak noticed Nimrod's dress. “You wear the clothes of a servant, but I know your face and your voice. It is my lord, is it not?”

“It is Am-Tak, and I know you. I wanted to wear something I could get dirty. You know me, I like to grip my hands onto the work ... see how it feels.”

“I understand.”

After walking two city blocks, they arrived at the palace, whereupon one of the palace guards yelled out, “Who goes there?”

Am-Tak answered, “I am escorting the king home. Take good care of him.”

The palace guard recognized the king in the light of the surrounding torches and saluted him. “My king!” He hit his fist against his heart. Nimrod raised his hand to return the salute and walked up the steps and went to bed.

Sammur awoke. “Is that you, my love?”

“Yes. Had to take a piss.” Nimrod took his clothes off and crawled under the sheet to embrace his wife. He had left his sandals in the hall so as not to wake her, but now that they were both awake, they made love.

* * *

Sammur enjoyed the king whenever she could. He was more gentle now that he knew she would kill him. Khan had convinced her that the king must die. It said so in the holy book. It said that the King of the Universe, and that was the anointing that kings receive, had to die so that all the Earth can live again. Man had become corrupt by the first man created by the gods, and only the king could save them by his death and rise up into the heavens to guide all mankind across the milky way of stars. Only then would they find salvation.

Sammur brought the book to Nimrod who read it himself.

“So this is the reason you want to kill me?” Nimrod looked up from the book.

“I don't want you dead, my dear,” Sammur looked over his shoulder and pointed to the text. “... only fulfilled.” She kissed his neck. “See, it says here that by certain spells you can be reincarnated into my belly. It says that '... a virgin shall conceive and bring forth the first born son ... ' Egyptus assured me she knows the spells. She is a witch supreme.”

Nimrod laughed. “You, a virgin?”

Sammur hit Nimrod's shoulder, bent her head around and looked him in the eyes.

“Don't mock me. It's only a title. No virgin can give birth. Everyone knows that. My title is 'The Virgin Queen.' ”

Nimrod reached up and caressed her neck. “Is Egyptus not after the throne also? Khan and she have been lovers for years before she ever met you.”

“Not so, my love.” Sammur placed her cheek against his. “We all love each other.”

“At what cost?” Nimrod's fingers surrounded her throat.

“We needed a general. Egyptus only serves that function.”

“What about that bee symbol she has placed everywhere? Aren't we to assume that she is in charge, and Khan right behind her?” Nimrod's grip around her neck grew tighter.

Sammur put her hands on his. “Nimrod?”

Nimrod rose from the chair leaving the book opened to the Prophecies of Jar-Om. He lifted Sammur by the throat, placing her face next to his. “You are leaving your flanks open, my honey flower. You are leaving yourself open for the taking. They will lop off your pretty head when I am gone.”

“Nim ... rod,” she choked. Her face turned red.

Sammur fainted. He threw her onto the floor and raped her.

“What love is this,” he exclaimed as he rose, “that requires the blood of a king? Surely, the queen will die also!”

Sammur coughed and also rose. She commenced hitting Nimrod with her fists. He only laughed. “It is death to those who thus strike the king.”

He grabbed her fists and kissed her.

“You love me too much,” Sammu said as she embraced him and returned his kiss passionately. “Oh blessed sacrifice. Your body will cover the sky and rain down blessings on all the people.”

Nimrod rubbed her back. “What I couldn't do in this life, I will do in the next.” He kissed her fleshy lips. “My blood will be avenged. It will bring justice to some and mercy to others.”

As Nimrod carried his wife to the bed, she said, “You will be reborn in my belly. My husband will become my son. Everyone will worship you.”

Chapter Seven

Shem was told in a dream to return to Nimrod's city and the tower. He walked in by night to visit the brother of Jared who ministered to his old grandfather. After eating a long awaited meal of lamb, herbs and bread, he took his staff and his coat of many colors and entered the city.

He walked through the marketplace and waited for the early morning throng of shoppers who came to buy the day's meals. Then he raised his voice.

“Harken and hear, oh ye people! The Lord, he is God. It is he that created the Heaven above and the Earth beneath. He created man from the dust of the Earth and spake unto him from the garden in Eden. He gave man commandments that they should love him, their father, and their neighbor as themselves. But they rebelled and believed not and went their own way. Three hundred years did Noah warn them of the coming calamity. God in his mercy waited until mankind became fully ripe ... and the floods came and wiped away the filth of the Earth, and Noah's family only was saved to inherit the land ...”

Shem walked through the many narrow streets, gathering a following until he came to Nimrod's palace. “This know, ye people. Repent! or the Lord God will scatter you to the four corners of the Earth and none will understand another. He will sweep you away from this place and leave it desolate. Only dragons and scorpions will be its inhabitants. The walls will be thrown down and dust cover the city. Not even the shepherd will lead his sheep to graze here.”

Sammur poked her head out the window. “What manner of mad man are you to spread discontent among my people to bring them to anger and spread contentions? Behold! You say that this city of Nimrod will become deserted and will be brought to dust. But mark you the tower in the middle of the city. We will go to Heaven and bring back the ancient gods who will bring nothing but glory and gold to this land. The noble and great ones will come and cover the earth with blessing. There will be no end to buying and selling. Everyone will become rich and live in the master's house.”

Shem turned his head to the upper window where he spied the queen, Egyptus, and Khan. “I tell you that in the short days ahead the name of this city will become Babylon, the whore of all the earth. Nothing but wickedness and corruption have come from her bowels. Therefore, because of your desires, God will send down corruption and confusion. There will be a great storm arise. The winds that blow from the nostrils of God will blow you across the surface of the earth until all corners thereof will be peopled, and nation will stand against nation, and there will be no union. To those that say a confederacy, I tell you there will be only enmity and arguer. All factions will spit and become nations with wars and rumors of wars throughout the Earth.”

Nimrod was inside laughing at the three sticking their heads out the window. He jumped up from his chair and joined them. He peered out into the crowd. “Why, it's my friend, Shem!” He waved his hand. “Shem!” He cried. “Why do you disturb the populace with such stories? Your god is dead. I killed him with my own arrow. Come up and we will talk of old times and drink and be merry.”

Shem raised his fist. “My son, Nimrod. You left the path of happiness and joined the throng of evil doers and fornicators. God has lifted you up, but he will throw you down to the Abzu to hard labor and agony in the depths with all the lost souls of men!”

Nimrod shook his fist at Shem. “Your god destroyed my only love! I killed him in a fit of anger, and now blood have I spilled over the land. This is the inheritance I received from your god. Now I have other gods and we will see how weak your god is. He will not support your rantings and ravings.” Nimrod leaned over the window sill and commanded. “Guards! Arrest that man! Grab him and bring him to me.”

The palace guards worked their way through the crowd, grabbed Shem by the arms and led him into the palace.

When the guards drug Shem before Nimrod, the king asked, “What is all this commotion, Shem? Why are you disturbing the peace of this people? Why are you disturbing the rejoicing of this people by bringing such a dark and sullen cloud over them?”

Shem stood in chains before his king and said, “God always sends a warning before he destroys a man. He gives the nation a chance to repent, but woe unto him who leads them into sin. A wicked king destroys the nation, and he will be destroyed if he does not repent.”

Nimrod sat on his throne and stretched out the palms of his hands. “Shem. Shem. We have been friends, have we not? But I am a king and a judge. I had you flogged once because of your disobedience. Now, I will have to take your life. It is the law. But I will have to consult the astrologers. You should know. The stars have to be just right for the punishment of such a high person as yourself, a son of Noah.” Nimrod commanded the

guards, "Take him to a holding cell. It will take some thought to make things right."

* * *

Sammur, Egyptus, and Nimrod stood against large open windows that looked out over the city. They could see what was going on below and also watch the work on the tower. As they watched the people of the city, they discussed Shem.

"Nimrod is afraid of the old man," Egyptus said, resting on her elbows, peering out the window.

Sammur chuckled. "I wouldn't hesitate to take his head off."

She turned from the window to wrap her arms seductively around Nimrod who said, "I am surprised at you both. You know the stars are not right for his death. I have consulted the astrologers and it is near the time of the launch at the end of this year when the stars will be aligned."

Sammur put her chin on his shoulder. "You never hesitate to kill other men. Your justice is swift ... usually."

"He was a friend." Nimrod lifted his chin to make the point. "I cannot kill friends without at least mourning first."

"Will you," Egyptus asked, turning her face toward him, "be putting on sack cloth and ashes?"

"The Shemites do that," Sammur said, digging her chin into his flesh.

Nimrod quickly jumped out of her embrace. "Don't do that. It tickles."

Sammur dug her fingers into his ribs. He grabbed her and tickled her ribs and made

her laugh.

“You two,” Egyptus warned. “People shouldn't see the king and queen playing.”

* * *

Shem sat in the darkness. The room stank like an animal cage. He had only a stool to keep him out of the straw on the floor. He stared at a bright beam of light from a small high window pierced the bars in the door. A bright spot shone on the floor beyond. He followed the spot from morning until evening as it started at the bottom of the door and crept along the floor to ascend the wall of the hallway beyond until it disappeared at sunset. For three days he sat meditating. There was nothing else to do. He had no visitors, not even someone to bring him food or water. It was as though he had been forgotten.

He remembered as a child, his father, Noah, took him hunting. It was dark then. The sun had just set. They were making their way along a mountain ledge. Shem slipped and plunged into the blackness. There had been no time to think or to go into shock. Noah had swiftly grabbed his hand and said, “I got you. I won't let go.” He was able to pull him back up to safety and into the arms of his father. Now he felt the hand of God, and it seemed that his Heavenly Father was saying the same thing that his earthly father had said hundreds of years ago. “I got you, and I won't let you go.” He felt comforted.

* * *

The brother of Jared felt a change in the air. He thought about the building of the tower. It meant money in a lot of people's purses. Buying supplies from all corners of the earth had produced a financial boom reaching to far cities in the river valleys. What would

happen after the tower was finished? Would the marketplace remain stable? Or would there be a drop off of business for himself and others? His dreams were of pestilence, drought, and storms from Heaven. That troubled him.

He looked up at the starry sky and wondered how there could ever be such things come to a peaceful and prosperous land. The baa-baa of the sheep lulled him to sleep to behold more troubled dreams.

Jared, on the other hand, felt secure in the marketplace, secure in the embrace of friends and family. No one knew him as a Shemite. He wore the clothes of the rich city man, had shaved his head and beard and fit in with the other merchants. He had made lots of money in shipping and started up his own business. He expanded that as he made his own wagons and sold them. He was becoming known as the best wagon maker in the City of Nimrod.

When Shem preached on the streets and warned the people of dangers to come, Jared and his brother kept hidden. They didn't want to be associated with him or be brought into service to become preachers themselves. They weren't ashamed of their grandfather, they were just cautious, protecting their families. Shemites didn't have a good reputation. They were too different. They all dressed like shepherds, but the brother of Jared was a shepherd, so no one paid attention to him.

When Jared found where his grandfather was being held, he visited him at night. There were no guards on that side of the building because of the wall that surrounded it. Climbing the wall was risky, but once over, they talked together through the little window.

The first night he found that no one had fed his grandfather or given him water since his internment. Jared left and brought him bread with meat and a jug of water.

Shem said, "Bless the Lord, and bless Jared and his family unto salvation."

After only two days, Shem told Jared, "Don't come back. It is too dangerous to come here."

Jared answered, "You are my grandfather. I will not leave you alone. Do you know when they will let you out?"

"They will execute me when the stars are in alignment," came Shem's sonorous voice floating up through the window.

"I will break down this wall and save you." Jared spoke into the hole in the wall that was the window.

"My destiny is with my god. He will free me in the flesh or in the spirit. I care not."

Chapter Eight

The city was in a festive mood. The priests had announced the new year would commence in three days. The marketplace was booming with people haggling over prices with smiles on their faces. Everyone wanted a new dress or tunic and lots of jewelry. Amulets and bracelets depicting the ancient gods or the stars were in demand for good luck. The merchants held up their wares, shouting the best prices in months.

It seemed that everyone had come to buy supplies for the feasts that would last several days. Pigs were in more demand than sheep. Camel milk for yaghort, and then pomegranates, onions, garlic, lettuces, cabbages, cucumbers, turnips, grapes, peas, lentils, carrots, and leeks filled woven grass baskets. For sweets there were dried fruits such as apples, cherries, plums, dates, figs, and pears. There was also corn, yerba-mate, cassava or tapioca, flax seed, tobacco, mandarin oranges, and rice, filling people's stores. Bread was sold in stacks and on sticks. The best selling breads contained fruit, sesame seeds, or cheese.

Ducks, geese and hens waited in cages made of tree branches, making just as much noise as the people. Merchants handed chickens hanging upside down with wings flapping and feathers flying to their customers.

Children chewed on sugarcane, crystallized ginger or differently colored sugar crystals as they ran around laughing and bumping into the adults who jostled each other with merry greetings.

Nimrod's chef, Kim-Kim-Doe, a big lump of lard, was among the most prominent

buyers. He looked over the vegetables and tasted the breads and spreads and potted preserves. He bought jugs of olive oil and palm oil and various fats. He had his underlings bring him pigs, sheep, goats, gazelles and different birds to examine and haggle over. The pits had to be filled with the unspotted and the clean. (Nimrod had learned that from the Shemites.)

Fish were a specialty, and for the pots full of soups. But people had to travel to the river to buy them. Kim-Kim-Do, did not go himself. He sent Sam-Ka who had been a fisherman in his early days. He even looked like a fish, as his mouth stuck out in a continual pucker beyond his fat cheeks.

Nimrod's kitchen was a house separate from the main palace. It smelled of garlic, onions, burnt fat, and woodsmoke. The walls were covered with lecithin and creosote and had to be scraped down every month. On the side of the building, away from the palace, the animals purchased for the festival were sacrificed to the gods. Their carcasses were carried into the cavernous kitchen and placed into pits to be roasted. On another side of the building were bread ovens, which were kept running continually day and night to keep up with the demands of the palace. Dishes of lentils, cucumbers, tomatoes, rice and herbs were prepared along with meat sauces on the far side of the kitchen away from the searing heat of the pits. There, spring water continually flowed down the walls to keep the herbs, yaghort, and small carcasses hung from the ceiling, cool.

Into this environment was brought everything from the market, filling every corner and table. The main concern of the cooks was space to work.

* * *

Nimrod paced up and down in his bedroom. He grit his teeth and yelled. He felt like a caged animal. As he passed by any table or chest, he grabbed a jug, carafe, statuette ... anything he could get his hands on ... and threw it against the wall. His door had been shut and locked. His wife kept him for a sacrifice he wasn't ready for.

“The Holy Book,” he mumbled, “says that the king must die to save his people. But is it me? Why not another king? Who will save me?” He yelled again. He was going mad, pulling his hair. He wouldn't be surprised if he started foaming at the mouth like a rabid dog.

Someone pounded on the door, saying, “Quiet down in there.” There was laughter in the halls.

What would happen to Shem? He had thought of letting Shem go free, but now, he could do nothing. His throne had been stolen from him. He had been grabbed by giants as he sat on his throne and locked in the tower.

He could jump out the window, but there was nothing to catch his fall except the hard pavement stones which surrounded the palace. It was built like a castle, except made of stone. He was in a high tower with no way down. If only he had a rope. He could climb down the outside wall and escape.

What an idea!

Nimrod opened up all the trunks containing his clothes and bed clothes. He ripped up the sheets and blankets, all his tunics and coats and braided the pieces together. He measured the rope he had made by stretching each length across his chest and arms from fist to fist.

Then he peered out the window and guessed the distance, imagining how many times the breadth of his arms covered the length of the outside wall. The rope would stretch a little as he descended. Yes! He would do it.

Nimrod tied one end of the homemade rope to his bed and threw the other end out the window. It almost reached bottom. He would have to jump one story at the bottom. He could make it.

He stared out the window. Damn the moon! It would be full the night of the new year, and that was tomorrow. The moon was bright. Someone was sure to see him. He must make haste. He wondered if he had anyone loyal to himself. It would be nice if he could find someone to hide his escape.

With his hands on the windowsill, he took a deep breath, grabbed hold of the rope, and tugged on it until the bed moved up against the wall below the window. He hopped upon the bed, held the rope and descended backwards out the window. He descended the outside wall, letting himself down hand over hand, holding onto the rope for dear life. When he reached bottom, he ran for the stables.

He ran into a stable boy who called out, "Master. I heard you were held captive."

"Make ready my chariot. I have an important mission to perform before the festival tomorrow. I must go to Sippar."

"Master?" asked the boy. "Take me with you. I will be your charioteer."

"I cannot," Nimrod said, grabbing the boy's arms. "I must go alone."

"Then you had better kill me and take the chariot."

Nimrod let the boy go and raced into the stable, calling out, "I cannot. I did not bring a sword."

"But I must tell the queen." The boy seemed beside himself. He shook and stretched out his arms. "I must betray you, or she will kill me."

"Do what you have to, boy. Come help me with the asses."

Nimrod and the stable boy, Nob-Tim, attached the asses to the chariot. He stepped up into the carriage, took the reins from the boy and headed out of the compound.

* * *

The main hall of the palace was spacious, but the room was cut into six squares by four tall pillars holding up the stone roof. The only light came from four torches placed against the adjacent walls. Without the sunlight coming in from the porch, the hall held a twilight until morning. As the palace guard Am-Tak ran through the hall, passing through the middle of the pillars, the clacking of his shoes upon the marbled floor echoed between the walls. Servants whispered in the alcoves and secret rooms as he entered the bedrooms. Sammur's overseer confronted Am-Tak who struggled to catch his breath.

"Why have you come running into the Queen's chambers?" asked the overseer who was bald, bare chested and wore a skirt of feathers. "She has already gone to bed."

"Wake the queen and tell her," Am-Tak panted, "that King Nimrod has escaped in a chariot on the eve before he was to be sacrificed."

The overseer understood the urgency. He turned and went into the queen's chamber, bowing repeatedly. "My queen, my queen. It is urgent."

Sammur groaned, rubbed her eyes and sat up. “What is it Jan-Din? Why are you making such a noise?”

The overseer's round eyes looked up from his bowed head. “It is the king, Mistress. He has escaped and is running off in a chariot.”

Sammur grabbed the sheet, bit it, and tore it with her teeth. She giggled. “Get my charioteers and four guardsmen. I will give chase to this madman.”

As Jan left her room, she lighted out of bed, stretched and called Hut-Mim, a slim personal maid given as a gift from Egyptus.

Hut-Mim came from an adjoining room, yawning. “Yes, Mistress. What can I get you?”

“My riding clothes. I am going to chase my husband.”

“Behold, Madam,” objected Hut-Mim, pointing to Sammur's stomach. “Your bowels are full of life ... the little one.”

Sammur looked down at her pregnant self and caressed her stomach. It was as large as a melon and felt like a huge one. Then she remembered the urgent message from Jan-Din. “Hurry Hut-Mim. A Chariot ride won't hurt me. It may even bring an earlier delivery. I hope.”

Sammur dressed quickly and waddled out to the waiting chariots, climbed up a step stool into hers, and with a crack of the whip, sped off in pursuit.

* * *

Nimrod raced the wind, whipping the asses ahead of him. They frothed at the mouth.

Sweat poured from their black hides. The chariot shook as it sped over rough ground.

“Hi! Hi!” Nimrod yelled. “Don't be lazy tonight. My life depends on you.”

Far behind came the sound of other chariots. He looked back, and sure enough, in the light of the full moon was a dust cloud between him and the city. Nimrod snapped his whip above his four asses. His chariot bumped over a large rock that sent him a foot's width into the air, but he remained standing.

Far behind Nimrod, Sammu whipped her asses. Her body jolted as the chariot sped over the rough terrain. The wind tore at her face and hair. The four chariots were in a race to see who got to Nimrod first.

The earth shook and thundered as the heels of giants ran past Sammu and her guardsmen. Chills ran up and down her spine. Goose bumps covered her arms and neck. She stared as they ran past her. “By the Gods!” she called out. “If it isn't Khan and his brothers.”

The full moon sitting on a bed of stars stared down at the chase, got up and followed along, pouring moonlight on the whole scene.

Nimrod dared not look back as the ground knocked him up and down. *The terrain is getting rougher*, he thought. “Faster! Faster!” he yelled, but just before the asses gave up and died, giant hands grabbed him and lifted him into the air. The chariot halted and came down with a slam next to the crumpled bodies of the asses.

Nimrod yelled and kicked and wriggled, but he couldn't get out of the hands of the two giants. Each one had one of his arms, dragged him and threw him to the ground in front of Khan. “Going somewhere?” Khan asked, laughing.

“Let me go, Khan,” Nimrod commanded, standing nobly before him, “and I will reward you money, lands and women beyond your ability to hold them.”

“Beyond your ability to give,” Khan laughed, holding his hands on his hips.

At that moment, Sammu arrived. “Hold him!” she commanded with her fist in the air from her chariot. “He will not escape again.”

Khan turned to behold the queen. “Mistress. Glad to see you, but I don't think this little adventure will do a woman good in your condition.”

“Never mind my condition. Tie him up and put him into my chariot.”

Two guardsmen, watching the giants with distrust, took Nimrod, tied his hands and feet and threw him in back of the queen's chariot. They swiftly jumped into their own chariots and stared at their queen, waiting for the command to leave.

“Thank you Khan,” Sammu said, looking behind her as she had her charioteer turned the chariot around. “We will see you back at the palace.”

“Go!” Sammu commanded her charioteer and the guardsmen surrounding her.

“Hello, my love,” Sammu greeted Nimrod. “Having a nice ride in the night air?”

“My Honeycomb,” Nimrod looked up from the floor of the chariot. “I assume you just can't live without me.”

“It would ruin all our plans for your immortality if you escaped.” Sammu kicked him in the side. “Now you wouldn't want that, would you? We have a special ceremony in the morning at the rising of the sun god which will allow you to live forever.”

The wheels of the chariot rumbled as they passed over the land as if they were talking

to the hoofs of the asses clomping in perfect rhythm.

“I, my dear flower, like my life as it is. It is a habit with me.” He smiled up at his queen.

She looked down at him. “But I am sure the change will do us all some good.”

* * *

The four chariots sped away, leaving the three giants in a cloud of dust. They coughed and walked over to the dead asses.

The two turned to Khan and suggested, “Let's eat. We're hungry.”

Khan returned their comment with a grimace. He was too used to the delicacies of palace cuisine. But he denied his brothers nothing. They always served his purposes. “Go ahead.”

They built a fire and roasted the four asses without any preparation of the carcasses except gutting them. They smelled of burnt hair and carrion.

Khan watched the four chariots race back to Nimrod's City. He remembered Shem's words and muttered, “Babylon. That sounds like a good name.”

Nimrod was thrown into the same cell where they kept Shem.

“There,” Sammu said, as the cell door slammed. “You love him, you can bed down with him.”

Shem, sitting on the only stool, stared at Nimrod who stood at the door throwing curses at Sammu. When Nimrod felt someone staring at him as though daggers were hitting his neck, he turned around. “What are you looking at!” Nimrod demanded in anger.

Shem didn't say anything and was completely unruffled, so Nimrod continued as he leaned against the door. “Only a man thrown down from the heights of his glory.” He sighed heavily and sagged to the floor. “I was king over the whole earth. I held life and death for all mankind in my hands.” He held his hand up as though gripping something out of the air. “I established an empire. I was the lion hunter, and then I hunted men. I was kind to all I conquered. I brought a higher quality of living everywhere I marched. I brought civilization to its peak ... Now look at me ... a prisoner in my own prison house.”

“A prisoner of your own desires,” Shem said calmly.

Nimrod scooted away from the door into a corner, clenching his teeth. “You judge me, old man?”

Nimrod held his fist in the air, shaking it at Shem, but the old man never flinched. “I don't judge you, my son.”

Nimrod brought his knees up against his chest, remembering how kind Shem had always been to him. The straw he sat on smelled like bile. He turned his eyes away from Shem. “You are not my father.”

“I could have been ... I loved you.” Shem glanced at Nimrod and then stared straight ahead.

“What for?” Nimrod picked at the straw. “We are both condemned to death ... to be lost among the stars and never rest again.”

“Not so.” Shem tilted his head to the left, gazing at Nimrod as a father gazes at a newborn son. “I have trusted in the Lord my God. It is into his arms I am consigned.”

Nimrod looked into Shem's eyes, testing him. “Sammur said that Egyptus has power in magic spells to make me immortal. I will be reincarnated as Sammur's child. She will be my mother and my wife.”

Shem shook his head. “Don't put your trust in magic. It is only an empty bag of tricks. You will come with me, and we will both come unto the Lord. He will receive us ... me into Paradise, and you into Spirit Prison.”

Nimrod got on his knees before Shem, holding out his hands. “Why can't I go with you into Paradise? I have been a righteous king.”

Shem held out his left hand. “You have been a man of war and blood.”

“Is there no mercy?”

“Do you believe in the Lord God?”

“I believe in you, Shem. You are a righteous man.” Nimrod bowed his head. “Will you pray unto your god for me?”

“You believe enough ... yes. I will pray for you.”

As Shem prayed, there was a bright aura around his head, or was it the light that

poured in from the small window above like a beam from Heaven?

Chapter Nine

Drums beat in the cool crisp morning air to the cadence of drummers' knees, far apart, rising up and down as their feet stomped the earth. Their heads nodded back and forth, slapping their bare backs with hair laced with long dried grass. Flutes sent trills flying like birds to soar above the temple and the obelisk setting on top, pointing skyward. Rattles, sounding like snakes combined, all the sounds and beats into a hypnotizing harmony.

The city and country folk came together to dance in concentric circles around the temple compound. Individuals twirled around in pirouettes, kicking their feet back and forth. Many of them looked like peacocks with their fancy feathers, some wore crazy tin masks, looking like bulls, lions, or rams who moved their faces back and forth, scaring the screaming children who darted in and out of the crowd. The drummers led the dancing citizens out of the city where they paraded and danced around the city walls then back into the city, dancing through the streets to the constant beating of the drums, and winding around back to the temple.

* * *

Sammur and Egyptus led the parade, standing together in a single chariot decorated with flowers of every color. A young naked boy stood with them, waving a fan made of ostrich feathers. Sammur wore a yellow silk gown that flowed in pleats from her breast covered in jeweled necklaces. The wind lifted her dress a little and hid her full belly. Egyptus wore something more revealing. Her gown was also pleated, but white, wrapped

across the shoulders and gathered at the waist with a jeweled belt. While Sammu wore a garland of flowers around her crown of gold, Egyptus wore a taller crown, unadorned, and rising up in the back. It had two wires coming out of the middle that represented the antennae of a bee. Each wire ended in an oval pearl which made the wires nod up and down as the chariot progressed.

“This day will be remembered,” Egyptus said as she pulled back on the reins of her asses. “Are you sure you are going to go through this? Aren't you in pain?”

“Don't worry about me.” Sammu glanced back at Nimrod. “He is the one that will hurt.” She caressed her belly. “I may not have had a baby before, but I will enjoy the result. Are you sure you are a witch and know how to guide Nimrod's soul into my baby?”

“I know what I'm doing, Sam,” Egyptus smiled demurely. “I was taught by Khan. He is the son of Adam, the first man. He knows everything about the powers of Nature and Nature's gods.”

Behind them came Nimrod, fully drugged and smiling. Khan rode with him. They both waved to the people. Everyone cheered. It had been broadcast that his sacrifice would bring greater prosperity to the people. But when they saw the effigy of Shem being dragged behind in chains, they booed and flung vulgar oaths and curses. They called out, “Murderer! Murderer! He who kills Nimrod,” for it was said that he had already killed the king, and everyone believed it.

The giants came next, each wearing a large white sheet over one shoulder with a broad leather belt to hold it in place like a toga. They all smiled to the crowd and waved. They

were revered. People tended to be silent as they passed.

The entourage of courtiers then came. Each one was bedecked with jewels and flowers. Some of them would have been nude, as were their children, if it hadn't been for the decorations.

When the procession halted in front of the divine temple, an old bald priest, bare chested, and wearing a feathered skirt, proclaimed the new year. He then led the people in a chant:

Holy holy gods of Heaven and Earth,

We ask thee this day for a new birth.

Come down and feast with us this day.

Eat of our cattle and bread, we pray.

Drink of our grape or barley wine.

All that is on our table is thine.

Let thy blessings be poured upon our heads;

And our ancestors a long time dead.

Come join the mirth and celebrating.

Fear not our noise and frolicking;

Come down! Come down! Come down

From off your bed of ease;

Come join us! Come join us!

Come feast on the blood of sacrifice.

Drum beats increased the hypnotizing sway of the crowd as the throne of Sammu was brought. She sat at the focal point of the courtyard with its pillars and palm and fruit trees radiating out to encompass the hundreds of dancers. She groaned in labor, spreading her legs apart.

“Bring the sacrifice!” cried the old priest.

Two giants in their white togas brought Nimrod to stand between them. Two other giants came and stood to the right and left.

Egyptus danced around the five of them chanting her spells.

“The rites of night,

The stars give light,

The hoary heads appear;

Gods and men and angels sing

Of deeds done on this watery sphere;

Their blessings give,

Their cursings bane,

To all men give ear!

Nimrod, king of all the land,

Doth give his hand in square,

And swear the oath given of old,

Allegiance to Enki,

Lord of Abzu and Life.”

Egyptus danced around Nimrod, painting him in red on his forehead and chest.

“Life blood be dedicated;

Life blood be given.

Flesh and blood be taken,

The spirit released and directed

Into Sammur's womb;

New life for the husband,

Now a son, now a lover,

Both to be given and

Both to be taken.”

Egyptus made love with Nimrod as the giants on each side of him held his arms and legs. She continued dancing as two giants stretched Nimrod's arms and legs out so that he was suspended in the air. Egyptus painted his arms and legs with a red strip down each extremity. She continued dancing around the five.

“Sacred seed of god and man,

Now we keep inside ourselves,

Gods to make and men to heal,

So kingdoms may rise and fall;”

Sammur screamed in the background, “He's coming! My god and my son!”

Egyptus continued:

“Virgin mother and son to come,

All mankind to bless,
With mercy and grace on one hand
And blood and horror in the other;
She sitteth upon the waters to rule,
With scepter and son in hand,
His death and birth she gives
To man most blessed bliss.”

The watching crowd chanted:

“Flee into her womb,
Flee into her womb,
Flee into her womb, King Nimrod!”

The old priest took the scepter from Sammu, and waving it towards Nimrod,
commanded,

“Give us the holy sacrifice.

End the old year;

End the old kingdom.

Bring in the lamb of God;

Bring in the new year.”

The giants pulled Nimrod's arms and legs until he cried out in pain. The drugs had worn off at that moment when there was a pop, pop, and blood squirted upon Queen Sammu-amat, upon the giants, upon the old priest, the temple steps, the ground, and those

in the crowd close enough to experience the sacrifice.

Nimrod's torso dropped onto the stone pavement in front of his queen as she screamed once more. As Nimrod took his last breath, saying, "Miriam, Miriam," a baby appeared between Sammur's legs. It cried as Egyptus caught it. The crowd roared, blessing the name of the Virgin Mother and her first born son. Egyptus gave the bloody and gray baby to the queen. She wiped his body with a clean cloth and held him up to the crowd. They cried anthems of rejoicing, saying, "Long live the king! Long live King Nimrod!"

Khan picked up Nimrod's torso and let the blood drain into a basin. Then the giants gave Nimrod's body to the priests to prepare it to burn on the pyre. Other priests took the basin and with holy rattles dipped in the blood went about sprinkling the people in the crowd.

* * *

Inside the command center, scientists, technicians, and priests sat at the controls to send the obelisk/shem into the heavens.

Turning dials and watching graphs on monitors, a technician mentioned, "Everyone gets to celebrate but us."

"Tor, I am surprised at you." One of the scientists leaned over the technician's shoulder. "I would think you would find this much more interesting. We get to control the functions of Nature by these little instruments and send the rocket ship up into the solar system. It will meet with a planet which shows up only every sixty-four thousand years."

"Yes, Tor," a priest said. "The great Khan will then invite the gods back to earth."

Hic-Nor, another technician sitting next to Tor asked, “Why did Khan get chosen to go? I would have thought it would be the king.”

“Hmmm,” the scientist intoned. He pointed to a dial. “Shouldn't that be reading a second fraction more?”

“Khan,” said the priest, “is the perfect specimen of man, and is sure to impress the gods by his knowledge and expertise.”

“Look at this frequency.” The scientist pointed to a monitor. “It should match this harmonic over here.”

“I am so sorry, Honorable Mic-Mac,” Tor said. “I will adjust this dial, and now see, it matches.”

“Pay attention to these settings. We cannot have the tiniest mistake. The whole world could blow up.”

Tor winced. “That would not be good.”

“Indeed not,” Mic-Mac said with his hands on his hips.”

* * *

As the people sang songs of joy and rejoicing, the earth opened up before the throne and in the midst of the assemblage. A pile of logs arranged in an alternating, crosswise stack rose up with Nimrod's body wrapped in a bundle on top. It was the funeral pyre. But attached to the side in chains was Shem. He had been stripped of his clothes. His grandsons were not there. He was alone. They had stayed away from the celebration, hiding outside the city.

The pyre sat on a huge stone slab, and all around it was empty space the width of a span, and then a stone wall that went down into the earth. It was like a box coming out of a larger box set in the earth and surrounded by a garden. Four priests came carrying torches. The pyre was aligned so that each side was facing one of the cardinal points of the compass. Each of the priests threw their torch onto one of the sides of the funeral pyre. The wood caught fire in a sudden blaze of red heat. Nimrod's body caught fire, sending a column of smoke up into the morning sky.

Shem's body did not writhe. He did not cry out, but he just silently burned, or that was what it appeared to be. The heat became white hot. The fire became a white light as if the sun had come down and sat in obeisance before the throne of Sammu-amat. The people had to back up in horror. The throne had to be abandoned.

The priests standing nearby, shading their eyes with their arms, cried, "Surely, the stones of the temple will melt!"

"Look," one of them pointed towards Shem. "Are there not two men in the fire? But we only burned one of them. And are they not conversing one with the other?"

"Perhaps it is Nimrod come back to haunt us," said one.

The old priest, whose name was Ptra-Pah, cried out, "Shem! Tell us with whom do you converse?"

"It is the Lord my God," Shem said, as if it were a whisper, but it burned into the hearts of the priests.

"Is it Nimrod then to whom you speak?"

“It is the Almighty whose name is hidden from your untoward lips,” came the whisper. “He has come to destroy this temple and scatter the people.”

* * *

It had been planned that after the burning of Shem that Khan was to ascend up the shem and into the ben-ben. He was waiting up there now in the scaffolding to enter the pyramid-shaped capsule. When he saw the light and felt the white heat, he thought it would be cooler inside, so he entered and sat down in the cockpit seat. A priest closed the door behind him.

The earth shook a little. Khan worried that the shem would fall, so he sent a command through the radio intercom. “Start up the engines now before it is too late. Set up the vibrations. Set the whirlwinds into motion.”

“We are not yet ready,” came back a crackling voice. “There is a minor adjustment to be made.”

“Hurry. I cannot wait.” Khan became anxious as he watched the dials on his panel.

The priests in the command center turned dials and set needles in the clocks, and pushed the buttons that would set the winds around the rocket ship to vortex, lifting it off its launching pad and send it skyward.

There was a scream like a banshee that filled the air. The people who had been celebrating now had to cover their ears, and as the winds came and formed into a tornado above the shem, they had to disperse. Buzzing electricity danced over the pyramid-shaped temple and the obelisk.

Great lightnings bolted out of the clouds as the winds increased, striking various parts of the city. The Earth shook heavily, cracking the temple. The shem fell in a long slow arc, hitting the side of the pyramid-shaped temple. It broke into several pieces, tumbling about in the gardens, crushing trees, bushes and small buildings. The ben-ben hit the command center and crushed it. It was later told that Khan was seen escaping the ben-ben as a giant hairy ape.

Lightning started fires. The great tornado descended upon the city and stayed for several days, screaming at the people and throwing up dust everywhere. People had to flee to their homes in darkness, trying to cover their eyes and nostrils to keep out the dust and sand.

The screaming entered the people's heads. Some even bled through their ears and nose. It caused everyone's heads to hurt so much that it was very hard to even think. All work came to a standstill. Confusion entered everyone's minds. They couldn't communicate.

Some cried, "The gods of Nature are punishing us!"

"We shouldn't have tried to reach the heavens."

"Run for your lives! Let's leave this place."

But as they ran, some were swallowed up by the earth. Some were burned up in the fires. Some were crushed to death as buildings lost their underpins and fell. Some were carried away by the many whirlwinds.

After a day passed, the groaning of the earth ceased, but the winds and sand stayed.

End of Book Six

Book Seven

First Swarm

Chapter One

A lone figure stood near the broken pyramid-shaped temple, standing against the crushing wind, dust, and sand. She held her wrap close to her and gazed out through the gauze that covered her face, neck, and head. It was hard to breathe the dark brown air. The pyramid and pieces of shem strewn across the landscape, the buildings and trees that struggled to stand straight, took on the same dark brown color. She reached out and touched a block of the shem. The power still inside it made her shake. She quickly retracted her hand. She heard shouting as of a voice far away.

“We found it!”

Pushing against the constant whirlwind that covered the temple, she moved toward the voice. A man called again. “Egyptus! Over here.”

She joined Mitz-Ra. “Is he in there?” she shouted.

“The door has been broken off. The ben-ben is empty.”

Even the gauze was failing to keep out the sand, and the two had to cover their faces with their arms.

Egyptus yelled, “Where is he? Where would he go?”

“Let's get back inside. It's useless to search for him until the storm passes.”

Egyptus put her mouth to Mitz-Ra's ear. “You know this storm will not cease until the controls are shut off.”

Mitz-Ra's muffled voice said in her ear, “The engineers are all dead. The ben-ben

crushed them. Only they knew how to shut down the storm. I need to get you back inside the palace to safety.”

The two started back to the palace with their guards, each one holding up the other against the wind.

* * *

Mitz-Ra's face was covered with sweat and dirt, and it glistened. He had been outside again looking for Khan. He sighed and approached Egyptus as she reclined next to her bed. “You bathed,” he said. “You look enticing.”

“What of your search, my love?” She asked. “Have you found Khan?”

After coughing, he answered, “We have spent most of the day looking in every corner of the city. He is not to be found. Yet, some say they saw him during the upheaval. They say they saw a huge hairy beast running away from the conflagration.”

“He probably left. That's what we should do.” Egyptus took up a glass goblet of wine from a small table next to her and sipped. “I know enough of the engine to say that it will not fail for another year or so. We cannot live under these conditions. No one can. And my head hurts tremendously.” She put her hand against her right temple. “The screaming of the engine underneath the temple cannot be tolerated. It will drive us all mad.”

Mitz-Ra stammered. He felt the pain in his head too, but he was a man and pretended it didn't bother him.

“What was it you said?” Egyptus asked, closing her eyes tightly against the pain.

“It's a strange thing.” He put his hand to his head and then his fists on his hips. “I can't

talk to the men. Something is changing them. They are starting to speak gibberish.”

“It's the headaches.” Egyptus sat up and put her feet on the floor. She rubbed her eyes.

“I can't talk to Lil-Lil. She can't seem to understand me.”

Egyptus rose and embraced her husband. “Gather up our forces before we all lose our heads.” She whined like a cat. “I will make our servants pack everything. I will sign to them.”

Lil-Lil brought in the bee's wax Egyptus had asked for and applied it to her ears. She stuffed the wax in Mitz-Ra's ears also, and then stuffed her own.

“That's better,” Egyptus said, sitting upon her bed and clasping her hands. “But you can still hear it. It vibrates throughout the whole body.”

Mitz-Ra headed toward the door. “I will get things started.” He turned toward Egyptus before he left. “Where will we escape to?”

“The En-Nil, of coarse.”

* * *

Camels groaned and cried as people, wrapped up against the wind, loaded them with family possessions and food supplies. Everyone, it seemed, was leaving the City of Nimrod. Some assembled oxen and wagons and loaded all their earthly riches upon them to flee the babel. People split off into groups, who ever they could understand. They went off following all four directions of the compass. They expected to leave the wind and sand and also the screeching that came from the temple. But when they arrived upon the hills and looked back, or the plains or crossed the rivers, the wind remained. All of Nature had been upset by

Nimrod's meddling with the temple engine that was supposed to have launched the shem. The winds blew upon the whole earth.

The giants lifted up the wagons on which their houses, barns, and gardens were built and attached the wheels. They had been used for fences after they had first pulled them off.

As they lifted the wagons the dirt of their yards fell through the cracks, and the wind whipped it into their faces. After gathering the oxen and tethering them to the wagons, the giants hauled their city on wheels, and instead of heading back to their castle on the northeast side of the Tigris River, they headed northwest, following Kana'an to the shores of the great sea.

* * *

Sammur wailed and drank wine from a clay jug as she passed from one room to another, trying to communicate with the servants. She wanted them to pack up her boy Nimrod and all their belongings, but they only acted as though she were drunk and speaking gibberish. She lashed out at them, throwing anything she could pick up until Egyptus arrived on the comic scene.

She ran to Egyptus, embraced her, and cried on her shoulder. "What's wrong? Is everyone drunk? No one understands me! There has been too much celebration."

"Calm yourself, Sam. It is the headaches. People are confused by the strange vibrations coming from the temple."

Egyptus and Lil-Lil took Sammur by the arms and led her to a chair. Lil-Lil kneeled down beside her. "This will help."

Lil-Lil attempted to administer the bee's wax for her ears, but Sammur jerked back.

“It is only bee's wax, my lady,” Lil-Lil said gently.

“It will help the headaches,” Egyptus proffered.

Lil-Lil stuffed the bee's wax into Sammur's ears.

“Isn't that better?” Egyptus asked.

“Yes. But the servants,” Sammur pointed this way and that, “What about them?”

“Lil-Lil will take care of them. She can understand them.”

With Sammur all packed and ready to go, Egyptus hugged and kissed her goodbye.

“Traveling to Eridu is a long journey. Are you sure you are up to it?”

“The tent on top of the camel will protect us from the wind.” Sammur blinked. Her smile was replaced with a blank stare. “We will be all right.”

Egyptus made sure her wrap was tight and the baby was well covered before she released them to the storm outside. The last thing Sammur said before she slipped through the door, was, “Be careful. Kish can be brutal.”

“I will, Sammur,” Egyptus yelled into the wind.

After Jan, the overseer, closed the door, Egyptus screwed up her face and said, “She is such a sow!” Laughing to herself, she commented, “At least I have the army on my side. It is a good time to make a campaign against Kish.”

The hall seemed too quiet as if she were alone and the building was completely empty. She paused a moment and said, “Sammur's kingdom will fail. It will become nothing but a religion, but Egypt will last forever.” Then she blinked and brought her mind back to present

reality.

“Jan,” she said, “make ready to leave. Pack all my belongings, wake up the soldiers, and get our chariots ready.”

“I will, your Highness.” Jan bowed and clapped his hands as he left. Servants ran after him to help.

* * *

An army assembled in the blowing dust and sand. Every soldier complained, cursing under his breath, struggling to breathe through the gauze covering his face. The asses kicked and bucked as their owners attached them to the chariots and had to be lashed into moving. An army of thousands turned the color of sand as they were whipped by the wind-swept dirt and debris. There was one thing that bound them together. It was their loyalty to Egyptus who rode out ahead, standing like a statue in her chariot with the tall and lanky Pharaoh beside her. They called the two Isis and Horus. Egyptus held her cloak tightly against her, but it still flapped in the wind as a terrifying banner. Mitz-Ra rode in his own chariot next to Egyptus, presenting a striking figure in the brown haze. Everyone worshiped him as the immortal god Osiris.

As the soldiers marched, they cried, “In the name of Osiris, Isis and Horus!” repeatedly, with honey dripping from their mouths. They followed the Queen Bee, holding aloft her symbol of Deseret.

The army of chariots and footmen followed their gods out into the desert where the storm was not as harsh. Behind them came wagons, juggernauts, carrying all their

possessions; and like an evil shadow cast by a devil were the pieces of the shem and the ben-ben, each one on its own wagon. As the wind caressed the massive pieces of quartz rich granite and gabbro, sparks flew into the wind, sometimes shocking the drivers.

Chapter Two

Jared and his brother had escaped the heaviest part of the storm. Mahonri's sheep were kept safe in a grotto in a hillside northeast of the city. The women thought for sure their tents would fly away in the wind. Every part of each tent beat against their constraints as if they were alive and trying frantically to escape captivity.

Jared, caked with brown dirt and sand, returned from the city where he had noticed strange things taking place. People were not only losing their senses and fleeing the city, they were also losing their language. He didn't want that for his family, who were also afflicted by the headaches caused by the screaming storm centered around the temple. He rushed into his brother's tent. "Brother. Cry unto the Lord, your god, and plea unto him for us that we not lose our language like unto the people of the city."

Mahonri took Jared by the arm. "What is this you say? What about the language?"

"People are speaking gibberish. I cannot understand them. Surely, the Lord has cursed this place."

Mahonri led his brother to a cushion to sit him down. "Mara, bring this man some wine."

Mara had long black hair, a full face and lips. Her body was slightly heavy covered with a long gown made of wool dyed with many colors and decorated with many embroideries.

He turned back to Jared. "What is it like in the city?"

Jared took a flask of wine from his sister-in-law and drank, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “It is nothing but dust and sand blown around by the whirlwind that surrounds the temple. People are running this way and that trying to get supplies, trying to buy passage out of the city. Some are too afraid to do anything but hide in their little hovels. Camels and asses are running loose, not knowing their masters, running out of the city to save their own lives. I effectively stopped one camel whose master was chasing it. No one can communicate with anyone. Luckily, I was able to talk to some friends. They still hold to our language, but I am afraid they will lose their minds soon, so strong are the headaches, and I will not be able to understand them.”

Mahonri knelt beside Jared. “I knew this was coming. I had a dream of this destruction.”

Jared grabbed his brother's arms. “Go to the Lord. Plead unto him that we not lose our mother tongue.”

“I will, my brother. But let us be faithful to him, and he will bless us.”

“Then go to him.”

“Will you be faithful?” Mahonri asked with upturned palms. He had to ask him because he felt his brother to be too worldly.

“Yes, Brother, I will be faithful.” Jared let go of his brother's arms, rose and extended his hand. “Now go to the Lord and ask.”

Jared's brother left and went to the top of a nearby hill and cried into the wind to his god. When he returned, Jared stood in the doorway of the tent expectantly.

Mahonri came to him and said, "It is done, Brother. We will keep our language."

"Now, Brother," Jared said, grabbing hold of his brother's coat, "go back and plead unto the Lord for our friends, for they are plagued with the headaches and are about to lose their minds."

Mahonri returned to the hill and cried unto the Lord again on behalf of the friends of their families. He heard a whisper of peace within his heart. He again returned to Jared and assured him that he would be able to talk to his friends.

* * *

Jared was so pleased at the response from the Lord that he went back into town to visit his friends. They rejoiced together and made merry with food and wine. They sat around the table laughing, talking, and feasting on flesh, prepared meats, and bread, drinking plenty of wine.

"Everyone is crazy," Job-Hath laughed. "They are running wild in the streets."

"After this storm is over," Dan said, dipping his bread in sauce, "we will gather the leftovers. People are running hither and thither, leaving precious things behind."

"My brother said the storm is to last all year, and this place is to be deserted," Jared informed them, raising the palm of his hand.

"Impossible," said another. "Who is this brother of yours? Can he tell the future?"

Jared smiled. "He is a man of God. Are not your headaches gone, and we all talk the same language? My brother has cried unto the Lord for us all, and here we are making merry. We should give thanks."

“Who can make a sacrifice at a time like this?”

Jared explained. “My brother said that we don't need a sacrifice to give thanks. Just open your mouth and your heart and thank the Lord for your blessings.”

“That is simple enough,” Job-Hath said. “But will the Lord hear us? Did you not have to ask your brother to pray for us?”

“I am an unworthy man,” Jared said, as he took a sip from his cup and dipped his meat in the broth. “I deal in gold and silver, and am a man of the world. My life has been in the noisy marketplace, but my brother has lived a solitary life and has been visited by the Lord in the wilderness, for the Lord does not visit people who are busy.”

“Then,” Com gestured with his hands, holding bread in one and flesh in the other, “had you not go to your brother and ask him to give thanks for us all?”

“I will do that, my friend, but first let us enjoy this gracious meal you have provided.”

After their dinner, and the dishes were put away, everyone sat around the table enjoying figs, grapes, dates, oranges and pomegranates with their wine. The discussion led to “What should we do?”

“Everyone is being blown away by the Lord to distant lands,” Ahah explained with a wide swing of his hands. “Surely, this is a wretched place now. Will the Lord not chase us out of here also with just one huff of his nostrils?”

“He could,” Jared said. “He can do anything according to his will and pleasure.”

“How will we know where to go?” Dan asked.

“I will ask my brother again,” Jared said, popping a grape into his mouth, “to cry unto

the Lord for us.”

“Does he do that often?” Lib asked.

“Quite often,” Jared said. “I will ask it of him tonight when I return to my family.”

“And will the Lord tell us where to go?” Dan asked, chewing a date.

“I am sure of it,” Jared said.

So after spending a merry time with his friends, Jared trekked up the eastern slope to his family's tents. He entered, slightly drunk, into his brother's tent. “My dear brother.”

Mahonri came to him and asked, “Have you had a good time talking with your friends, Jared?”

“Yes, I have,” Jared said, holding onto one of the poles at the door to keep himself standing. “And we have come to a decision. We want to know where the Lord is going to drive us off to. Won't he also with one blast of his nostrils blow us out of this town and into the wilderness? And if he will do this, perhaps he will carry us to a land of promise, a special land that will be an inheritance for our children. And if he do this, let us be faithful unto the Lord.”

Mahonri put his arm around Jared and sat him on a couch where he could sleep.

Jared yawned and asked, “Would you, my brother, cry unto the Lord this night for us, and ask him where he will drive us?”

The brother of Jared placed a blanket upon him. “Yes, Brother, I will go to the Lord this night and ask him.”

* * *

When Jared awoke, he found that he was in his brother's tent. He sat up and rubbed his face. At first he thought the awful headache had come back but remembered he had drunk too much wine the night before. He sighed, yawned and scanned the tent for his brother.

Mahonri entered the tent at that moment and was met by his wife, Mara.

“I have been with the Lord all night,” he told his wife, kissing her lightly, and putting his arm around her. She led him to a couch where she fed him bread and gave him a yaghort drink.

Jared turned to him, still sitting on his couch. “How was it, Brother?”

“The Lord said unto me, 'Go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female, of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy families; and also Jared thy brother and his family; and also thy friends and their families, and the friends of Jared and their families.

And when thou hast done this thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth.

And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth. And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me.' ”

Ether 1:41-43

Chapter Three

The winds never quit. It was upon the back of every soldier, pushing him forward towards the En-Nil, the river that gives life. Everyone ate dust for dinner, for in marching, they only had one meal a day, and rarely did they sleep until they dropped from exhaustion. It was a forced march, but they could only go as fast as the wagons, yet, they were soon to leave the wagons behind and run for two days to escape the constant storm. A rumor ran down the lines that their queen was anxious to get to the river and kill Kish. She wanted to drink his blood.

* * *

Egyptus sulked in her tent, beaten down by the torrential sand and dust. She poured wine down her throat trying to relieve her thirst. “Oh, for a bath,” she moaned.

Mitz-Ra stalked a mouse and stamped it with his foot. “The men will not have the strength for a fight.”

“We will come as friends.” Egyptus licked her lips. “They will give us their hospitality.”

Mitz-Ra turned to look upon his wife and sister. “And then what?” He looked down his nose at her.

“We will slaughter them.” Egyptus wiped her finger on the edge of the wine jug, placed it on her tongue, and licked the last drop of wine left in the camp. “The river will run with their blood.”

“Why are you so blood thirsty all of a sudden?” Mitz-Ra stood with his fists upon his hips and the wind beating against the tent as if it also demanded answers.

Egyptus glanced up at him. “I am thirsty.”

* * *

It was easy for Jared and his train to catch birds. All they had to do was to raise their nets and let the wind blow them in. They would take down the nets, unhook the birds, and place them in cages. The birds were many. There were ducks, geese, white stork, quail, pigeons, doves, wild hens, thrush, black birds, sparrows, larks, partridges, and ibis. The vultures, owls, falcons, and crows were kept separately. They caught fish in a similar way, letting the current sweep them into nets. The members of the train filled large earthen wine jars with water to store the fish for their long journey. Of course, one wagon was loaded with crocks of wine left behind as the people fled.

Beehives had been abandoned by the royal family. These were placed in tiers on wagons and taken with them. But it wasn't enough to have bees; Jared had long ago adopted the insignia of Deseret as he worked to build the tower in the land now designated as Babel. It was the standard that many people carried with them on staves (as long poles tended to be blown down).

Seeds of every kind were brought aboard the wagons in hundred or two hundred pound bags. The Brother of Jared didn't let them bring sprouted barley. Everything had to be dry, and he promised them they would make no barley wine. They were to be a covenant people of the Lord so they would prosper in the land of promise.

The juggernauts, or wagons of the giants, were left scattered about harbors and outside the babel town, abandoned after the tower was built. Not everyone had enough oxen to pull them, but a tall black friend of Jared's called Akish was able to round up the needed cattle. He had been on many raids with the royal family.

Jared's train was over fifty juggernauts. The oxen as well as all the people had to squint in order to see most of the time. There were moments when the dust would clear, but the wind was constant. The storm from the tower followed them along the Tigris River. By the time they reached the Valley of Nimrod, they had left most of the dust and sand behind them, but the wind still blew against their backs.

As the wagons wound down into the valley, they were met by what looked like a white tornado with lightnings and thunder. Everyone cringed. Had they left one bad storm to be emaciated by another? Everyone hid under the wagons or within the houses built on top of the wagons. But the Brother of Jared heard the voice.

“Come unto me and I will direct thy course.”

Jared's people were astonished when his brother strode nonchalantly up to the whirlwind and started talking with it.

When he returned, he said, “The Lord said that he will lead us in the wilderness and take us to a land where no man has before set his foot. He will go before us. We are not to use fire. He will be our light.”

And so Jared, his brother, their families and their friends left the civilized world led by a whirlwind of bright light to a land of promise.

Chapter Four

As the army had passed through a narrow canyon, two tall and slender sentinels appeared suddenly standing atop a hill of slanted strata. They were the color of the dust and sand. Their robes, slung over one shoulder whipping in the wind, showing the nakedness of the other shoulder, were colored with reddish gray dirt. Each one held a thin black metal spear resting on the ground, the point of which reached a span above their heads. Egyptus approached them while the rest of the army waited behind her.

“Ab-Hu, Tal-Mud,” she greeted with an uplifted hand. “What news do you bring?”

Ab-Hu, the one on her left, raised his hand. “I am a soldier in the army of Kish. He has returned and is king over the land of AINU-ORION of the EN-NIL. He has built a temple to worship the old gods and erected a white wall to keep out invaders.”

Tal-Mud then came forward as Ab-Hu stepped back. “I, friend of the high priest HESS-HOP, do worship and ordain in the holy temple. I know that HESS-HOP is loyal to you, my mistress.” He then stepped back to join his twin brother.

Egyptus stared at their eyes for a moment. She had to know if they would flinch. They did not. “Can we expect help from HESS-HOP?”

Tal-Mud bowed his head and said, “Yes, Mistress.”

She tilted her head towards Ab-Hu. “Are there any dissatisfied soldiers who will join us?”

Ab-Hu bowed his head and said, “Yes, Mistress.” Then he held out his hand, rubbing

his thumb with his forefinger.

Egyptus took a gold ring from her finger and handed it to him. He smiled. His big horse teeth lit up his black face.

The two turned and disappeared down the back slope of the hill. Egyptus returned to her chariot.

Mitz-Ra pulled up along side her chariot with a look of concern and curiosity.

“My spies,” she said with a wry smile. “We have a wall to tear down, but we have help from the other side.”

“And Kish?” Mitz-Ra asked as his chariot jerked. “Wao, wao,” he said gently to his lead who snapped at Egyptus' lead.

“He's back,” Egyptus said. Her charioteer had to hold the reins tight to keep the chariot still.

“I thought so,” Mitz-Ra said, spitting sand from his mouth. “He has been expecting us.”

“Yes, but we are ready for him, my love.” She reached over and touched his hand that was resting on the side of his chariot. “We have the power of the shem.”

* * *

The battalion and train of wagons came out of the canyon onto a wide plain. The wind increased. Some of the soldiers wished they had stayed in the canyon, for here upon the plains were evil whirlwinds so huge they would knock a wagon away as if it were a piece of linen. Some of the soldiers believed they were led by the spirit of Sutekh himself who led the

first man Atom into the wilderness.

On they trod with the promise of treasure, honey, and plenty of cattle to take as their own. Caked with dirt and sweat, every part of them itched, but the other promise was that they would bathe in the En-Nil.

It was upon this bedraggled troop that the light shined. It came up out of the horizon and became a second sun. Only Egyptus and Mitz-Ra knew what it was. It was a bird of prey, a craft they could use to destroy Kish and his new kingdom. When it landed in front of Egyptus, the asses bucked and the soldiers cried out and bowed down to it. It was a great god. But the light diminished around the oval craft, and a ladder angled down to rest upon the earth. The high priest Hess-Hop descended.

“Your majesties! Welcome to AINU-ORION.” Hess-Hop spread his arms showing the magnificence of his black and red robe.

Egyptus and Mitz-Ra stepped down from their chariots with wonder filled eyes. Pharaoh also left the chariot and stood behind and above his mother. He was tall, lanky and had a high forehead. He acted enthralled. The expression on his face was pure happiness and joy.

“Mother,” he said, “I was born for this. I, Horus, will fight Seth the accuser and win.”

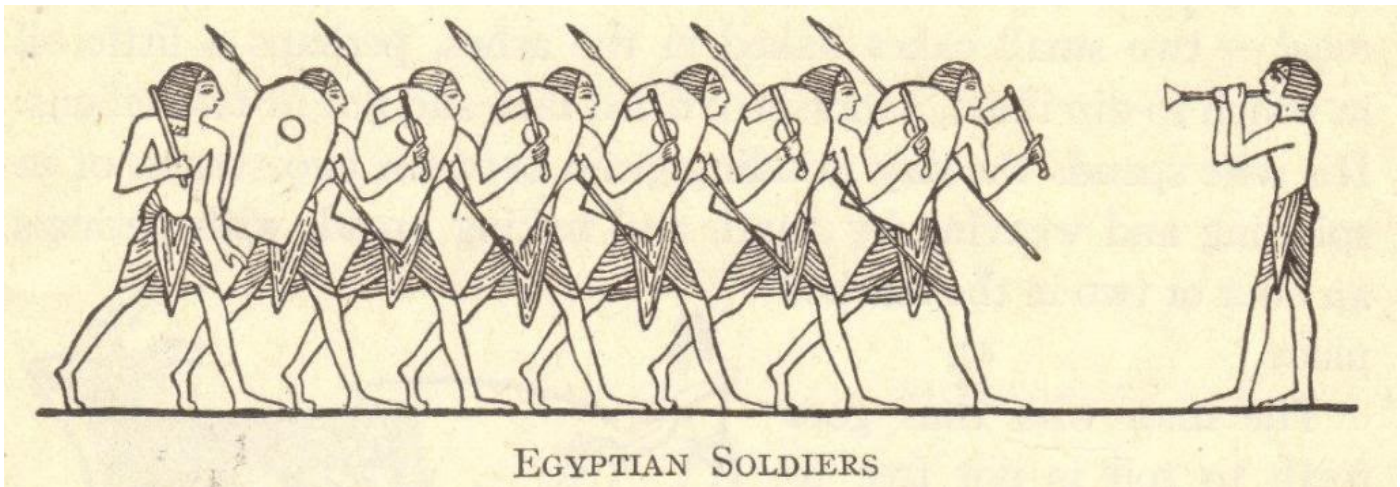
Egyptus turned and looked into his face. She was surprised. Her mouth stood open. She touched his shoulder.

“My son?” She asked. “What has overcome you? Today, you look like a man.”

The priest could see what was going on. The high and holy spirit rested upon the

youth. He bowed and swung his arm towards the ladder and entrance to the falcon. “It is yours to command, Your Majesty.”

Egyptus and Mitz-Ra followed the priest and Pharaoh/Horus into the craft with instructions for the chariots and the army to follow. The whole camp cheered and yelled and clanged their spears against their shields.



The army didn't look so bedraggled as everyone stood straight and proud and followed the falcon aircraft as it hovered above the earth the height of a man. They knew they would follow it into victory.

* * *

The plain before AINU-ORION filled with a cloud of dust and sand. But as the winds blew across the delta of the EN-NIL, the army and camp of Egyptus appeared as though a magic cloak had been lifted. The soldiers on the ramparts of the white wall and the castle beyond were astonished. They began running back and forth and blowing trumpets.

KISH appeared on top of the wall. He waved the banner of hospitality. One of Egyptus' servants standing near her tent waved a like banner in answer. It was an invitation for KISH to come and dine with her and her consort.

A ladder was let down, and Kish and his guards descended.

“That's an odd thing,” remarked Mitz-Ra as he watched the comedy of men descending a ladder. They were expecting Kish to come through a door or come riding around the wall in a chariot. “What would happen if his ladder disappeared?”

Egyptus grabbed his arm, leaned against him and placed her hand on his shoulder so she could whisper, “Down tiger. We want to toy with him first.”

Kish approached the tent and saluted with his hand slashing forward into the air. Then he slammed his fist onto his heart. “Egyptus! Mitz-Ra!” Then he saw a tall lanky figure standing next to Egyptus also wearing the crown of the bee. “And who is this young man?”

Egyptus turned to her son and looked back at Kish. “This is my son Pharaoh. Remember? You tried to kidnap him.”

“Pharaoh!” Kish and Pharaoh grabbed each other's wrists.

“He is,” remarked Mitz-Ra, “king of all the land.”

Kish quickly dropped his hand and stepped in front of Mitz-Ra. “And you are not? Where is Nimrod? Is he faring well?”

“Your spies,” Egyptus said, putting her hand on Kish's shoulder, “have told you, have they not, that his wife Sammu-amat sacrificed him to the gods. He is now residing in her first child, also named Nimrod.”

Kish stepped back so that he could get a better look at the three. “Such news travels fast ... and Khan?”

“We have not heard of him,” Egyptus remarked, tilting her head of thinly braided hair.

“He vanished.”

“And what is this emblem and crown I see? Is it a bee?” Kish mocked.

Mitz-Ra countered with, “The queen bee has a stinger and is surrounded by a numerous host.”

“I see.” Kish clasped his hands and asked, “What does a dirty band dressed in rags have to offer?”

“Come into our tent and we will feast,” Egyptus offered, with a swing of her hand, pointing it toward the table inside.

Jan, the overseer, seated everyone at the table according to rank. The three kings sat at one end, and Kish the other, with guards and other guests between. Antelope of the plains and wild chicken were served along with an ample supply of beef, barley wine and bread. Everything was spiced using the wild plants that grew around them.

“Is this what your army eats, Egyptus?” Kish asked as he gnawed on a beef shank.

“We eat what we have conquered, Kish,” Egyptus said, sipping her wine.

“It tastes like your cattle are tired from pulling your wagons.” Kish grinned.

“They have done their job and are satisfied,” Mitz-Ra remarked. “They deserve a rest, so we have invited the gods to come and consume their flesh.”

“And a proper sacrifice, I am sure.” Kish washed his food down with barley wine and belched. He spied a servant whispering to Pharaoh. “Your son is quiet for a king of all the land.”

Pharaoh whispered to his servant who, interpreting for the king, said, “I see you and

acknowledge.”

Kish did not acknowledge Pharaoh, but spoke to his mother. “I see your son does not know the language, your highness. Perhaps he is lacking in his education.”

“It is his place. Only the royal family speaks to the king, for he is a god to his people,” Egyptus answered.

“Don't be so shy.” Kish spoke with an upturned hand. “We are family, and you are all welcome here. Come over to my castle. We will have a feast in your honor.”

Everyone continued feasting and drinking liberally. By the time the banquet was over, Kish and his soldiers were exhausted. Their heads lay flat on the table, many of them, snoring. The barley wine served to the guests had been prepared in its strength.

Egyptus rose. “Take their bodies out and burn them, except for Kish. Put him in chains and fasten him to the central tent pole.”

“These, Mother,” Pharaoh said, wiping his mouth, “will make an excellent sacrifice to their new gods, Isis, Osiris, and Horus.”

Egyptus smiled as she slipped away with her consort, Mitz-Ra. The guards took the bodies out and burned them in a great bonfire. Jan cleaned the table and gave the bones to the dogs. Kish was chained to the tent pole while sitting on the ground. Night crept over the sky making the fire seem so much brighter.

Chapter Five

Kish woke up with a smarting headache. He could not focus on his blurry surroundings no matter how much he blinked. Heavy chains weighted down his chest and arms, which were tied behind his back. He was sore, having leaned on the pole all night. He growled and struggled against his restraints. He tried to stand, but found his legs and hands tied down with stakes. Then he shouted, “Damn you, Egyptus!”

Egyptus walked in, smiling demurely. “Good morning to you too, Kish. I hope your rest was pleasant.” She circled him, making sure the chains and cords were had not been tampered with.

Kish watched her as she continued around him. “I pray,” he said, “that the great Enki come and drag you down into the Abzu.”

Mitz-Ra entered the tent, hearing the conversation. “And did you find the Abzu, Kish? Isn't that where you were headed the last time we parted?”

“I have found gold beyond your dreams,” Kish said, grinning. A scowl spread over his face. “I have bought the whole delta. All the people are mine. They will revenge me.”

Egyptus continued circling Kish, looking down her nose at him. “You should have stayed down there in the dark lands of my mother Afra.”

“How is our mother these days?” Kish asked.

“She has sought the Abzu, following your trail. Her dark flesh covers the continent,” Egyptus said, speaking of her mother's death.

Mitz-Ra knelt to face the false king, the usurper. “Your people will be conquered.” He tilted his head slightly. “They will be our slaves.”

“You cannot abide people whose skin is lighter than your ebony flesh,” Kish growled. He struggled without effect. “If I were loosed, you would see who would be the slaves. My army is ready for you.”

Pharaoh joined his mother and put his arm around her. She kissed his cheek.

Kish grew even more angry. “I demand as a knight of the royal family a trial by combat.”

Mitz-Ra stood and gazed at Egyptus. He tilted his head toward Kish. “We cannot refuse him and remain honorable.”

Egyptus stepped in front of Mitz-Ra, facing the defeated king. “You may fight any one of us.”

Kish stretched his head to look Egyptus in the eye. “Choose any champion. I will fight him.”

Pharaoh joined his mother and Mitz-Ra. “I am her champion, Shem. I, Horus, the unbeatable, will fight you.”

Kish's raised his brows.

“Are you surprised that I know your secret name? We have our spies.”

“I, Shem, accept the challenge of Horus. Now let me loose.” Kish rattled his chains.

“You may rest there,” Egyptus said, “until we make plans. We want to keep you in our sights until then.”

* * *

Kish sat scanning the tent, trying to think of a way to loose himself. A young woman entered and squatted beside him. She smelled of sandalwood and almond.

“Please, sire, don't make a sound. The priest sent me with this device that produces a magical sound to set you free.”

The young woman pointed a wand at the lock, the wand buzzed, and the lock clicked open. The chains fell to the ground, and she cut the ropes that held his hands and legs to the stakes.

“Quickly. Follow me. We will hide you until night comes.”

Kish rose with her help and followed the girl, sliding underneath the furthest side of the tent. She helped him into a giant earthen vessel that smelled of barley wine and left.

* * *

Outside the tent, Egyptus revealed her dishonorable plan. “We will keep him there until he weakens. Then my son will fight him.”

Pharaoh turned to his mother, placed his hands upon her shoulders, and looking down at her, scanned her eyes. “Mother, do you not think I can fight and win?”

“He is a warrior unequalled. His experience outweighs yours by many years.”

“Mother. You have taught me that strength alone does not win the fight. You will find me wiser than what your heart tells you.”

“You are the fruit of my belly. Do you think I would lose you to an unwise decision?”

“I was bred for this purpose.” His eyes showed impatience. “My name goes before me as a guardian angel. This is my time.”

Egyptus sighed. "You will come back to me?"

"I will return victorious." Pharaoh smiled and kissed his mother. "The sky god Enlil is with me."

Pharaoh stepped toward the tent door then looked back. "I will get a servant to feed him. I do not fight like a coward."

Pharaoh entered the tent and came out quickly. His face was ashen. "He is gone!"

A search of the whole camp revealed nothing.

"It was witchcraft," Egyptus concluded. "Then by witchcraft we will find him."

* * *

Night hides all kinds of mischief, Kish thought as he waited until, at the slightest easing of outside noise, he carefully lifted the lid and rose to poke his head out. Everyone was asleep except one. He could hear a woman chanting. He recognized Egyptus' voice. He laughed within himself. She would never find him, magic or not. He slid out like a snake. Passing between tents and keeping away from campfires, he left under the cover of darkness.

When morning came and the spirits of the night departed, Egyptus knew Kish was not in the camp. Communion with devils left her exhausted. She would not pursue him. She retired to her tent and fell asleep.

Chapter Six

Seeing his mother fast asleep, and Mitz-Ra not around, Pharaoh, as Horus, entered the falcon ship. He took it upon himself to seek out Seth, the Miserable, and kill him.

The falcon rose and moved silently toward the white wall. To the soldiers on the wall, it may have seemed as though the rising sun slithered towards them because the line of sight set the sun just on the top surface of the falcon. It was blinding. The falcon passed over the wall as soldiers screamed and ran.

A new castle built of cedar wood stood in place of the old one at the west end of the plain where the earth sloped down into the valley. To Horus' astonishment, another falcon rose up from behind the castle. On impulse, he slid the craft to the left as the other one shot lightning at him.

Seth's falcon was red with white flames painted over the cockpit. The color of Horus' was dark umber.

Seth chased Horus, firing at him, but Horus circled above and came behind Seth and fired a blast at him. Seth slid from side to side in the air to escape being hit. He turned back toward the castle. Horus chased him. Soldiers on both sides of the wall watched with mouths open in amazement as the gods fought in the sky.

The noise outside woke Egyptus and caused Mitz-Ra to come running from his meeting with the generals. They both thought the war had started without them with men yelling in battle. But everyone was looking up into the sky. It was not hard to see that it must

have been Horus and Seth.

Mitz-Ra caught hold of Egyptus' arm. "Why did you not call me that the battle between those two had started?"

"Let go of your queen!" Egyptus yanked her arm loose. "He started without me. I was sleeping in my tent." She watched the two suns shooting out lightnings at each other while dancing in the sky. "I pray to Enlil, the son, and to Amu, the father of us all, to protect my son!"

Mitz-Ra prayed as he lifted his fists to his mouth, "Let Atom, the first man, give him strength!"

The fight went on all the afternoon over the plain of Ish. Then Egyptus screamed as Horus' falcon received a large blast of lightning from Seth. Horus' falcon plummeted to the ground, leaving a spiral of smoke in the air. Mitz-Ra and Egyptus ran to a chariot and raced to the scene. They saw Horus stagger from the burning craft. Egyptus wanted to rush to her son, but she was held back by Mitz-Ra. She sobbed and beat her fists against his chest, but he wrapped his arms around her tightly.

"Let him be a man!" Mitz-Ra cried.

Seth fired at the downed craft but missed.

Horus shouldered a wand as thick as his arms and fired at Seth's falcon. He hit it. Seth's falcon left a trail of black smoke in the air and hit the ground hard. It shook the earth. The asses tied to the chariot tried to run, but Mitz-Ra held the reigns tight, making them back up a little.

Egyptus filled with pride for her son. She hugged Mitz-Ra as they both watched Seth stumbling out of his craft.

Seth shot a thunder stick at Horus, but Horus somersaulted out of the way. Seth shot again, and again missed as Horus rolled against the earth. Horus also shot at Seth who jumped out of the way.



The two ran toward each other over clumps of the desert grasses and rocks strewn along their path. Each tried to fire at the other, but their wands had run out of charge, so they threw them down and drew their swords.

Pharaoh and Seth

Sword clanged against sword. Seth charged and Horus parried. Then Horus charged. Seth slipped and fell. Horus went in for the kill, but they both heard thunder in the heavens. They looked up to see a flying monster spitting flames in the sky. It rolled its long sinewy body through the air instead of flapping its wings. Covered with scales, its face was framed with horned webs. Both men stood there astonished. Horus took advantage of the situation and jabbed Seth in the side with his sword. Seth fell back as flame shot between them. Seth rose up and ran.

Horus rolled and somersaulted in order to keep from being fried by the flame throwing

monster. It didn't go after Seth, only Horus, so it must have been a gift from the priests and witches of AINU-ORION to protect Seth.

Horus sought out another wand. He ran for the nearest falcon which was Seth's. It lay crumpled and on edge, a black heap. He could not dislodge a wand from the craft, and entering it was not an option. The door was jammed shut and the hole in the cockpit made him a good target if he climbed up to it. There was only one thing to do. Stand bravely against the beast.

He ran out into the open.

“Hail, beast!” he cried.

The sky devil shot more fire at him. He jumped and rolled. He did this several times as the beast furred closer and closer. When it got within range, it reared its head to give one last and huge breath from the Abzu. Horus noticed that its scales were the color of red gold. As it was about to throw the final flame that would turn Horus into a statue of carbon ash, Horus threw his sword. It twirled, making a swishing sound in the air as it approached the dragon. It pierced him through the chest. The monster thudded against the earth. There was no cry from the beast, just a warm exhaust of sulfur. Then it melted into a golden mass upon the earth.

Kish was nowhere to be found.

Pharaoh joined his mother and father. They all three embraced. Egyptus shed tears upon his shoulder. Pharaoh had proved himself to be a man that day.

* * *

Kish, wounded, lay hidden within a cavity in the rocks. He would wait until night ... again, to sneak out and make his way back to the castle. He applied the moist gel from a nearby succulent to the cut in his side and tore the hem of his skirt off, wrapping it about his waist to stop the bleeding. He drank the juice of a cactus to give him nourishment. Then he slept.

Quanabil stooped into the fissure of the rock. "My husband?"

"Quanabil?" Kish asked. "How did you find me?"

"Here is wine and bread. Eat and refresh yourself." She reached her hand in to feel his foot and then gave him the food.

Kish ate the bread and drank from the bladder. When he was feeling well, he crawled out.

"Have you brought a chariot?"

"It is right here. Hurry. The moon rises."

A servant helped Kish into the chariot, and then his wife stepped in. As they rushed north to the end of the wall, Quanabil explained that a spirit had appeared to her and led her to him.

Kish held tightly onto the side of the chariot. "It is not my fate, it seems, that I die yet. Not here."

Over the rough terrain Quanabil held onto Kish's arm. "We must leave this place and go back to Axum and to the Abzu. We will be safe there."

"And leave my kingdom?"

“You have a kingdom ... your family.”

Kish thought about it, pulling his beard. What would be the price of fighting for the delta? What would be left? Egyptus' army was five times the strength of his. There would be a great slaughter. Maybe if he left, she would spare the people. He pulled his beard again. Down in the southern lands, he could start over. He already had a colony down there. No one would know of Axum but he and his family. Not even the priests knew. They only knew he had a gold mine among the mountains. Also, Quanabil assured him that there would be dissenters who would join him in the wilderness.

“I will agree with you if you give me one favor.” Kish looked down his nose at her.

“And what would that be?” She already knew what he wanted. She folded her arms and stared up at him.

“My other wives will accompany us.”

Quanabil's face was ashen. She turned her head and noticed the end of the wall was approaching. It jutted out into deep waters.

“It is either that or we stay here and fight,” Kish cried against the wind in his face.

“Die or conquer!” He smiled.

The chariot stopped. Quanabil stepped down and went around to the side of the chariot to face her husband. “You are a devil!” she huffed. “You may have this favor, but none else, I swear!”

“They will be as your servants. You will be their mistress.”

“The Great God said, 'And concubines you shall have none.'”

Kish leaned over the chariot to put his face close to his wife's. "Which god do you worship? I worship the god of the Abzu, the one who gave us the gold."

Quanabil bowed her head and turned away. "I know. You always have."

The asses were led to the end of the wall where a wide flat boat waited. The asses and chariot were led on after Kish and his wife boarded. The servants used long staves to move the boat around the wall, landing against another shore. The chariot was backed up onto solid ground and then Kish and his queen boarded and headed for his castle.

Chapter Seven

Day broke upon the soldiers of the white wall. The sun in their eyes, they couldn't see the extent of the army approaching, but they had confidence they could defend their citadel. What they saw was juggernauts being pushed by masses of men. On top of the giant wagons were stones ... carved stones with writing on them, lying down, and as long as the wagons that carried them. It made sense that the oxen would be left behind. They would have been filled with arrows. Or maybe the approaching army ate their oxen out of need.

Arrows flew from atop the wall into the air, but they came down upon the shields each soldier carried on his back, taking no effect.

The men lining the walls raced north and south to get away from the coming calamity. They imagined the stones would tear right through the wall. They were surprised when the wagons stopped just before their objective. The men pushing the wagons pulled on dozens of ropes and hauled the massive stones up on end. The wagons tilted, the stones slid off, and the wagons slammed onto the earth, breaking and splintering apart. When the dust settled, there were four granite megaliths in a circle. Workers came and moved the remains of the wagons against the wall. Other stones were set up in the middle of the megaliths, also in circles. They were transparent, made of quartz. Similar stones were set around the outside.

Egyptus rode up on a chariot, and entering the circle, stepped down, carrying an orb. She set it on a central stone pyramid, called a ben-ben, and left.

What happened next amazed the soldiers on both sides of the wall. Lightning from the

heavens lit up the orb. The air in the circle began to sizzle. Electricity arched from the orb to the quartz stanchions where it danced in the air like lightning. Then each of the four megaliths shot out long hairs of static charge. The whole system buzzed and screeched. The soldiers stood shaking in terror.

Egyptus could be heard moaning out a chant along with a hundred drums.

“Light from the Heavens, Darkness from the Earth,

Air and Stone, Fire and Water, Wood and Song

Sung by Spirits coming from above and Spirits from below,

Gold and Ebony, Stones of Light, Stones go bright ...”

The wood against the wall started burning. Flames licked the once white wall, turning it black.

Egyptus danced into a frenzy before her soldiers and then waved a wand towards the wall, shouting, “Power of the stones descend upon the wall!”

The drums stopped and trumpets sounded a shrill scream. The wall burst apart. A hole as wide as the assemblage of soldiers stared back at them like a giant screaming in terror.

Egyptus yelled the command, “Let no man, woman or child survive. Kill them all!”

Mitz-Ra commanded, “Bring up the archers!”



Nimrod's archers shot into the air so that it rained arrows behind the remaining wall. Then soldiers poured around the megaliths and through the wall onto the Plain of Ish and Ainu-Orion. They mowed down any opposition. The soldiers of Kish had been spread into a thin line along the wall, and they had no time to assemble about the hole. Now Egyptus' forces marched against the castle. Flaming arrows only singed the outer wall and the buildings within. It had been prepared by Kish and the priests, as the first castle had burned to the ground. They didn't want to lose this one.

Egyptus spent the rest of the day bringing in the shem which was in four pieces, and the ben-ben to be placed in the center of the circle. Before she assembled the circle as she had previously done, her anxiety and impatience overthrew her reason. She said, "Send me

to the Abzu! Just bash down the gate with one of them.” And so they did. Everyone within the castle was slain. Afterward, Egyptus asked one of the knights in charge, “Where is Kish? I want you to bring me the head of Kish.”

Sim-Tak, out of breath, said, “He is nowhere ... to be found. He must be ... hiding among the marsh people.”

“Did you save any of his captains?”

“You said to kill everyone.”

“Find one of his captains!” Egyptus yelled into his face. “I want Kish!”

Eventually, one of Kish's captains was found. He had not been in the castle, but hiding in the bushes on the plain.

“Where is Kish?” Egyptus asked. She lashed his head with her royal whip, a trounce with twenty four leather straps ending in metal beads and hooks.

The captain covered his head with both hands. “He has fled, my lady. He has left us in your mercy.”

“I am not merciful. If you are telling the truth, then swear an oath of loyalty to me.” She lashed his head again.

“I swear,” he cried. “I swear by the god Isis, the god Osiris, and the god Horus, that I will serve you till I die.” The captain looked up through his fingers, now bleeding as was his head. “I believe he has gone to the Abzu, to his gold mines.”

“Don't you know?” Egyptus whipped him again.

“No, your lady, I only know he goes there often.”

“Then you are no good to me. Off with his head!”

Ti-Lung, the knight that had brought him, took out his sword, and with one swing, sliced through the soldier's neck. His head rolled across the ground. Its eyes stared at the blue sky.

No matter how much she looked, Egyptus could not find Kish. “He wouldn't stay around in a defeated land, would he?” she asked Pharaoh.

“No, Mother. He would not.” He wiped blood off his sword onto his skirt.

“Don't do that,” his mother said, “it is not yet done drinking the blood of this people.”

Egyptus turned her attention to the bundles that were being put into carts. She walked over to them. She took a small knife from her waist and cut through the linen. She took out a bloody hand.

“How many? What is the count?”

The soldiers had gone about cutting the right hand off of each body, binding them up and getting them ready for transport.



“My Lady, there are two thousand, five hundred, forty, and three.”

“That's not near enough to defend this place. There must be more.” Egyptus gazed at

the surroundings, turning her head this way and that. “They must be hiding, but we will find them.”

Chapter Eight

Marsh people scattered when the attack on the castle commenced.

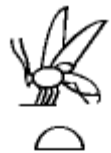
When Egyptus moved her army into AINU-ORION there was not a soul. The village seemed vacated. “Burn the village,” the Queen Bee ordered.

“One of your antenna has broken off,” Mitz-Ra observed, smiling.

“Leave it,” she said cynically. “It is a symbol of my travail over my enemies.”

A search of the village after the burning showed only a few scorched bodies, mostly women and children.

“The people have fled into the marsh, My Lady,” reported Ahem-Cosh, another of the



Knights of the Bee.

Her face screwed up in anger, she barked, “Then find them!” On second thought, she said, “Gather the army. I want to speak to them.”

The army was gathered around a stone pillar that had broken in pieces after having been pulled down. She stood on the highest piece.

“We can play this game also. We will hide among the marsh. We will not move until the marsh men have returned. Then when they are not suspecting us, we will pounce like a leopard and kill them all.”

* * *

Hiding in the marsh was not pleasant. Soldiers lay in the mud that smelled like bile or rotting flesh. The mosquitoes feasted on their exposed skins. The more intelligent covered their arms, legs, and faces with the mud. They dare not catch any fish or bird for fear of making a sound that would alert the marsh men. They planned to win at the foreigner's own game.

After several days the soldiers had eaten all their meat and meal and drank all their water which they had carried on their persons. The waiting became a torment. They could only survive by whispering encouragement to each other. Ten percent of the army became sick with the fever, but they were suffocated or choked to keep the silence.

When the marsh men decided the army had gone, their canoes trickled back in from the different tributaries spidering out from AINU-ORION. Seeing their village burned to the ground, they started rebuilding. Many soldiers held their breath or scooted back a little as

grasses were gathered right next to them for the rebuilding.

The villagers built funeral pyres for their dead and sent them heavenward to join the stars above, then life went on as usual. Men went fishing, women wove cloth and hoed in their gardens, and children played in the streets. In the evening when families were gathered in their huts, the men having returned from their fishing and catching fowl to eat, the jaguar pounced.



Before an army could be assembled, a great machine of swords and spears hacked its way through the village. By morning, the soldiers went through again, looking for stragglers and killing the wounded. The En-Nil was fed by rivulets of blood as it drained off the streets and dripped down from the houses newly built on stilts over the marsh. The land had turned red. Soldiers were covered with blood as their swords drank to the full.

Egyptus was exhausted from the night's work. The rising sun shone on her sheer dress, red and matted with blood. Her arms and legs were drenched in the red stuff, and her face was spattered by it. She turned as she heard the whimpering of a dirty little girl standing in the street. She stared at the girl and then staggered forward, drunk with blood. The girl reminded her of Napsut, her childhood playmate. Could it be, she thought, a ghost from the

past? She caught her breath a moment and looked carefully at the girl. She remembered their reunion when they had hugged and danced and laughed. They played and spent many merry days together until that fateful day they were climbing a rock and Napsut was pulled away from her. She fell to her death. Egyptus tilted her head. A tear ran down her cheek. Then in anger at the thought of having lost her best friend, she cried, “No!” raised her sword, swung it down and beheaded the little girl. Yet, the girl kept on crying.

“Shut up!” she cried, and continued hacking at the girl.

Mitz-Ra grabbed her arms. She turned and dropped her sword. “Tell it to shut up, will you?” She sobbed with her hands in front of her, too filthy to touch anything.

Mitz-Ra shook her. “It is done. They are all dead. Come. We will go wash in the river.”

When they approached the En-Nil, the rising sun exposed its red hue.

“Come,” Mitz-Ra said. “We will go upstream where the water is clean.”

And so they bathed, and the whole army joined them in the river as Egyptus had promised.

The day was spent throwing the dead bodies into the river.

Egyptus had removed to her tent and slept. When she awoke, she ate some lamb and bread and drank some wine. Mitz-Ra sat down beside her and joined in the feast. They had starved for many days, eating only snatches of things like a strip of dried meat or piece of a scallion.

They looked at each other, barely smiling.

“Our swords have drunk to the full,” Mitz-Ra said. “The land has been dyed red.” He stared at her face. It was getting old and wrinkled. She did not show any emotion. She looked like a wild animal feasting on a freshly killed gazelle. “Are you satisfied?”

“We have many other villages to destroy,” she said, stuffing her mouth full of bread and lamb.

“Haven't you had enough blood?” Mitz-Ra ate slowly and took a drink of wine before she answered.

“It is abated for now. Still, we have got to cleanse this land.”

Mitz-Ra rose. “It is red enough.” He looked back at her.

She looked up at him. “It will be called The Red Land ... Kingdom of the Red Land. It will become a sacred land, cleansed by a great sacrifice.”

Mitz-Ra walked toward the tent door.

“Go tell the army,” Egyptus called back, “there must be a great sacrifice to the Sun god before we can call this land our home.”

* * *

And it came to pass that the army of Egyptus marched from village to village across the great delta of the En-Nil. Fires covered the ground where each slaughter took place. The delta ran red with blood. The emblem of Deseret was posted in each place. After Egyptus finished her great sacrifice, she and her army returned to AINU-ORION. She held a parade, reorganized her Knights of the Bee, and presented each one with a Maat feather, representing truth and righteousness, which they wore with honor at the back of their head held there with

a leather crown. The Bee Knight, Ti-Lung, became her engineer and drained the swamps and marshes around her new city of Mitz-Ra, replacing the village of AINU-ORION. She painted her crown red with its one bee antennae coming out from its center. It became the crown of the Red Land and nation of Deseret.

End of Book Seven

Epilog

Mitz-Ra went south to explore the land. He had been to the pyramids, but he had heard of an ancient city southeast of the delta near the mouth of the En-Nil. He was told by Egyptus' spies, Ab-Hu and Tal-Mud, there was a place of pillars or Iu-Nu.

Ab-Hu said with a wide smile, referring to his brother Tal-Mud, "It is On. He does not know how to pronounce it."

As the camel caravan climbed to a sandy hill, Mitz-Ra announced, “On or Iu-Nu, there it is.”



Beyond the dune they could see wooden pillars protruding from the ground. It appeared that several buildings had lost their roofs and walls. Toward the center, a group of pillars browned with age stood out taller than the rest. As they approached, they could see the wood was covered in seams and cracks.

“Caused by the Great Flood, I would guess,” Mitz-Ra said.

“Much older than the flood,” Tal-Mud said as his camel obeyed his master's riding stick. He tapped it on its head and the camel kneeled.

As everyone dismounted, Ab-Hu rubbed one of the columns that was twice as thick as he was. He stared at it. “Very much older.”

Mitz-Ra kicked the dirt. It wasn't very deep. “Let's clear this dirt away.”

One of the servants he had brought with him asked, “Should we not set up tents. Surely, you will want to rest.”

“No. Let's have a look at this building first.”

So they shoveled away the dirt with wooden shovels and swept the floor with palm fronds from the nearby trees, as there was an oasis nearby. “Probably a well for the town is there, covered by the sand,” Mitz-Ra had said.

After the dirt was cleared away, Mitz-Ra examined the floor. It was easy to see that there were places for four other columns or stones, square holes in the floor. Four of them, with the smallest and fifth hole in the center.

Mitz-Ra scratched his head. “Send me to the Abzu! Look at this.”

He called to one of the servants. “Get me a measuring rod.”

Tut-Tit, as tall and skinny as Tal-Mud and Ab-Hu, wearing a thin linen gown, brought the rod. His eyes were round and bulging as if he were always surprised. His wide white smile completed the appearance of a skull.

Mitz-Ra took a piece of chalk from another servant and measured the holes in the floor, marking off on the rod each length. He looked at Tut-Tit. “Does this remind you of anything?”

“Surely it is a master plan. The holes are made for the four pieces of shem we brought with us. And the ben-ben will fit right in the center.”

“Your wits are sharp, Tut-Tit. You have surmised it right. Some priest must have seen us coming in a dream and built these holes and covered them with a temple.”

After uncovering the town's well and sleeping in his tent, Mitz-Ra decided not to do more exploring. He wanted Egyptus to know immediately about this place, especially when

a scan of the sky told him the sun would rise, passing through Orion.

* * *

New juggernauts were built and the stones of the shem were set upon them. Soldiers, turned herdsmen, gathered oxen from all over the delta and brought and attached them to the wagons. It was a long trek down the En-Nil and over to the Iu-Nu.



As the caravan crossed the last rise, Egyptus gazed out over the ancient town. She sat there breathless.

“It's beautiful,” she cried, hailing Mitz-Ra who was in the rear with the wagons.

He came along side her. “It is desert. What do you mean?”

“We could build a temple to the sun,” she exclaimed, pointing to the pillars. “We could plant gardens and extend the oasis.”

“We have no priests. We killed them all.”

The caravan continued into the valley.

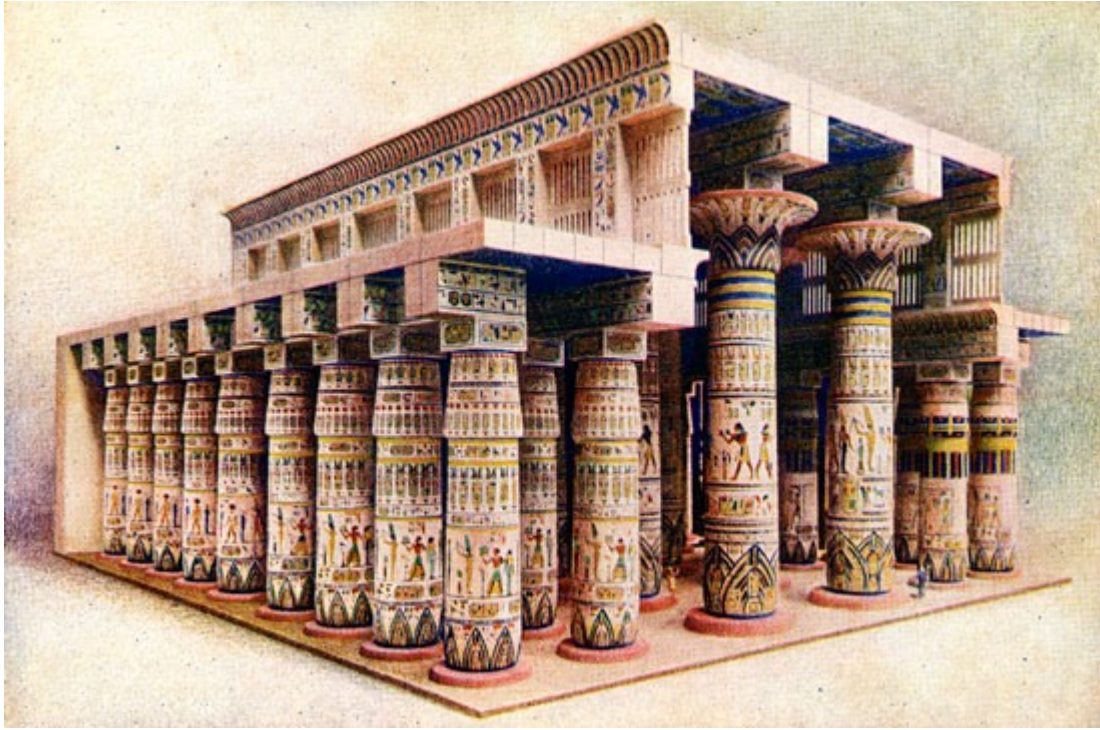
Egyptus smiled. “I have sent for the cow. She will bring priests with her.”

Egyptus was shown the floor of the ancient temple. “You are right. There was prophecy. Someone knew we were coming. The shem will fit perfectly into the holes. Look. Each one is smaller than the next with perfect ratios. It seems that our lives were written by the hands of the gods.” She knelt down to examine the flooring. “Look at these tiles. They have been carefully set within copper. It is electrifying.”

“It might be exciting to you. You are always interested in art.” Mitz-Ra stood with his

fists on his hips, radiating impatience.

Egyptus raised her eyes to catch his. “I really mean electrifying. It controls the vibrations within the shem.” She stood and admired the floor from a greater height. “I like the art also.” There was a depiction of Orion and all the other important constellations producing an inner and an outer circle.



And it came to pass that the shem was set in place within the holes and a temple built around it. This time, the pillars were built of stone. The palaces and temples in the city of Mitz-Ra had been made of granite quarried from the eastern mountains called the land of Sin from the before-time. The Temple of the Sun housing the shem was formed from the same quarry. It's inner columns ran at an angle, connecting it with the three great pyramids and lay in the same holes as had the wooden pillars. All were covered with a flat roof. The outer pillars defined the priest's quarters. The work was done carefully as to not damage the tiled floor. Above the entrance to the temple was written, "Dedicated to the Folly of Man."

Outside the temple near the door a replica of the shem and ben-ben atop it was placed.

* * *

Hat-Hor arrived in time for the feast of the New Year, and true to her nature, she brought a whole troupe of priests. She didn't ride on a camel or within a chariot, but in a

juggernaut, a giant wagon on which a comfortable palace was built complete with gardens containing vineyards and fruit trees. Following her was another juggernaut carrying a temple with her priests, though, the more humble of them preferred to walk. Then came a contingent of chariots and soldiers. What she did was to join the parade that was passing through the city.

Music from harps, flutes, lutes, uods, and drums echoed within blasts of trumpets, conch shells, and rams horns. Naked singers and dancers accompanied the musicians, interlacing themselves among the marching soldiers. The acrobats led the parade, and the royal family, no longer riding in chariots during the procession, watched in comfortable chairs looking out a window next to the street.



A replica of Noah's ark upon a wagon drawn by men played a major in the parade. The burden was put upon men because Egyptus said, "This is to remind us of the mercy of God and of our origins, that we came from a far civilization across the great waters."

Another wagon followed, carrying an obelisk, a replica of the shem and ben-ben. At the beginning of the parade, Egyptus announced, "Let us all remember the great folly of man, that he attempted to get to Heaven in this thing."

Hathor planted her palace in the city square. The temple that followed her was planted next to her. The parade dispersed into chaos circling the strange new buildings. The musicians and acrobats continued to play, and the royal choral continued to sing, but their movements could not be traced in any order.

Steps were let down from Hathor's juggernaut, and she paraded down from her palace with pomp and circumstance. Somehow, her trumpeters joined in harmonically with those of the parade. Egyptus' palace looked out over the square, so she and her entourage met Hathor midway. They greeted each other with ceremonial kisses.

"Hathor," Egyptus greeted in a sing-song manner. "How is your aging progressing?"

"Not much more than yours, my dear," Hathor grinned. "We are getting old, dear lady, but not our enjoyment in our pleasures."



Hathor with horns

“I see you brought your pleasures with you.” Egyptus offered her arm. Hat-Hor took it, and they walked back toward Egyptus' palace.

“I never leave home without taking my house, my boys, and my religion.”



The celebration continued within the palace, spacious porches surrounding the equally spacious throne room. It seemed that the parade proceeded within the building where there were many roasting pits filling the building with aromas that made the mouth water. Wine was drunk liberally, and meats and bread eaten ravenously. There was no limit to the excesses.

* * *

The next morning people found themselves having slept on the floor, on someone else's couch, outside in the bushes, etc. Most of them got up slowly, rubbing their heads, saying, "Ho! What a night!" and trying to find their way back home.

Hathor and Egyptus found themselves wrapped in each other's arms.

"Huh? What is this?" Hathor said groggily.

“Oh, well!” Egyptus exclaimed.

They both laughed which lasted only two seconds when they realized their heads hurt.

“The wine came from the Abzu, I am sure,” Egyptus said, standing as slowly as she could go and keeping her balance. “Come. I have a potion to remedy this situation.”

As Egyptus went to her toilet, where she kept several drugs, she noticed many women she did not recognize. When she went back to Hathor with a small vial, handing it to her, she asked, “Who are all those strange women? Did the priests bring their wives?”

Hathor sat up and drank half the potion. She handed it to Egyptus who said, “No, no. I have had my share. I drank some in the toilet.”

“My dear,” Hathor intoned, “these women are the temple virgins. I could not leave them behind.”

“Here in Mitz-Ra,” Egyptus instructed with her hands on her naked hips, “we do not have temple virgins or any other kind. Everyone gets married, even the priesthood.”

Hathor rose and sat the vial on a small table. She put her arm around Egyptus. “My Lady, how else can we keep our men in line if we do not offer them temple virgins?”

“You will find, my dear, that in this nation, the women own the land, the businesses, and their husbands.”

Hathor smiled and covered her mouth. “That is good, my dear. That is good.”

They both laughed.

On the morrow, Egyptus announced that each priest was to take a temple virgin to wife, and that was that.

* * *

Hathor brought with her a library of learning handed down from Ham and his schools.

When Egyptus saw clay tablets written in cuneiform, she objected.

“I want no script from the old world. We are building a new world here. We have our own language, and I want our own script.”

The bald and shaved priest called Tut-Nor, approached Hathor and Egyptus with a book in his hands while they were holding a hot discussion.

“My ladies, my ladies. Here is perhaps a solution. This script was produced by an intelligent youth who was a mere wagon driver who turned his talents into a thriving business. His name was Jared. Look. He made up these heads from his own imagination.”

The heads he was showing the two old women were the characters made by Jared in keeping his books for his business of wagon building and wheel making.

“They will have to be transformed somehow,”

Egyptus said. “It is easy for even me to read them, and no one has interpreted. See here? It says 'Sold eight wagons to King Nimrod.' ”

Tut-Nor offered. “I believe all they need is to be formalized.”

“Then go and do it,” Egyptus said with a flick of

her fingers. She turned to Hathor. “Let's have something nice to eat. Have two of your boys attend us.”

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	<i>à</i>		<i>h</i>
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	<i>b</i>		<i>t</i>
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The End of Egypt