

### *Note to Reader*

All that we know from Scripture about David's life before he became king has always been interesting to me, but I've never before realized (or researched) the women who tagged along for the journey.

If you haven't read Parts 1 & 2 of the story about his wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, the Truth of Scripture in 1 Samuel 25:41 through 1 Samuel 29 will help familiarize you with the context of the story to come. I pray that somewhere in the hopes, fears, and prayers of Ahinoam, Abigail, and Maakah, you'll hear the gentle whisper of Yahweh's Spirit speaking to your heart.

Know this for certain, dear one, the God of David ben Jesse still speaks to men and women who chase after His heart.

## ***Chapter One***

*“Now David and his men went up and raided  
the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites.*

*(From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) Whenever*

*David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive,  
but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes.*

*Then he returned to Achish.”*

### **1 Samuel 27:8-9**

#### **Maakah**

Lying on my back, I relaxed into a carpet of green grass and looked into a sky as dark blue as lapis lazuli. Gray clouds floated past, driven by a rising wind. A sudden trumpet blast chilled my blood and sent me screaming into a field of red flowers. As I ran through them, the strange flowers tangled around my ankles and stained my white robe. Their stems grew longer and wrapped my legs until I tripped and fell headlong into the staining flowers. The blood-red flowers—were bleeding. Now, my robe dripped with it. My face, hands, and arms were bathed in it.

Skittering to my feet, I swiped at my face but only managed to smear it. The sound of many screams turned me around, and I saw people running toward me. Wounded. Bleeding. “Help us!” I tried to run, but now people were running toward me from every direction. “Help us, Maakah!”

I couldn’t move. My feet were buried. I was sinking. “I’m coming!” I shrieked. “Wait for me! I’m coming!”

The earth began shaking. “Mistress!” I was shaking. “Mistress, wake up.”

I bolted upright on my feather-stuffed mattress.

My maid pulled me into her arms. “Shhh, love. It’s just a dream.”

“No, Zulat, it was the *same* dream.” I burst into tears, my words garbled by sobs. “This time there were more people. More injured. More of them calling me for help. What does it mean? What are the gods trying to tell me?”

“Nothing. Nothing.” She was rocking me, as she’d done since I was a small child.

“Sometimes our fear of a dream can make it recur.”

“But the priestess said repetition means—”

“Your abu has banished that priestess.” She nudged me away, glaring at me. “The king said you must ignore them.”

I started to speak, but no words came. She’d never spoken so harshly—even when I deserved it. Shrugging off her hands, I scooted away. “What are you not telling me?”

Zulat appeared wounded and then slid off my mattress, prostrating herself. “Forgive me, Mistress. I know only what the king tells me.”

“That’s not an answer, Zulat.” She’d taught me the art of manipulation since I could speak. I reached for her arm, insisting my gray-haired maid rise. “You’ll never get off the floor without my help, and you won’t claim your aching knees as an excuse to avoid this discussion.”

Every part of her made a noise while she struggled to stand. My long, black curls got in the way—as usual—but we finally repositioned her old bones safely on my mattress again. I reached for her hand and waited until her eyes met mine. “I won’t ask you to break an oath to my abu.”

“Please, my treasure. Let this go.” Tears spilled onto her cheeks. “Ignore the dream as your abu asks.”

I lifted her soft, wrinkled hands to my lips and kissed them. “You know I can’t.”

Her little snort held both love and censure. “You’re as stubborn as your ammatu was.”

“That’s the best compliment I’ll receive all day.” I grinned, but her continued tears proved the dream needed probing—but not with Zulat. “Prepare me for an audience with Abu.”

She closed her eyes, pressing a new flood of tears down her wrinkled cheeks, but she obeyed. Gathering my cosmetics, she chose my favorite purple robe, while I began the arduous task of unbraiding my thick, black curls. Each night Zulat braided my knee-length curls into a rope as big around as a small tree trunk. Ammatu had the same luxurious curls. Hers had grown so quickly that Zulat cut it each year, using the trimmings to stuff pillows. I started at the bottom of my braid and worked up to unfurl it, lost in memories.

“Come, little one.” Zulat pulled me off my mattress. “Your purple gown always brightens your mood.” She knew me better than I knew myself. She’d been the breath in my lungs after Ammatu died. The only daughter of Geshur’s king and queen, I’d lived a charmed life until then. Though I knew someday I’d be called to a marriage that secured wealth or political advantage for Geshur, my childhood had been idyllic. And while Ammatu and Zulat prepared me for the duties of a treaty bride, Abu prepared my little brother for the tasks of becoming Geshur’s next king.

“What do you think happened to her?” I asked as Zulat pulled my long mane out of the robe and finished the unbraiding. She knew I meant Ammatu. One morning, Abu woke beside her empty shell.

“The priests said she crossed peacefully over the River of Souls.”

“But we didn’t get to say goodbye.”

Zulat tugged gently on my curls, as if they were bit and bridle, and led me to the couch for my cosmetics. “But we still talk with her through the priests and our offerings.”

It wasn't the same. "I miss her laughter." It sounded like a morning lark, and she hummed all day long. Zulat and I teased her ruthlessly. "Sometimes I ache for her, Zulat."

"I know," she whispered, "but she'd be so proud of the woman you've become in two short years." She leaned down and kissed my forehead. "Now close your eyes so I can apply your kohl."

I obeyed, wondering again how I could convince Abu to confide whatever secrets he was keeping from me. He and my brother missed Ammatu too, but had turned to me to fill her shadow. I'd become Abu's gaming partner for Hounds and Jackals and my little brother's tutor for sums and writing.

"Tell me what's spinning in your head." I heard the tinkling of wooden sticks against small ceramic pots as Zulat mixed the colored powders with water for my cosmetics.

Should I tell her what I feared most about the dream? "Why has Abu not spoken of a betrothal for me?"

"He's still grieving, Love."

A vague answer to my vague inquiry. "Only a little color on my cheeks today, Zulat. I don't wish to draw attention."

"Mm-hmm." She began the line of kohl at the base of my top lashes, her breath warm against my cheek.

"I've been prepared to be a treaty bride since I knew what a treaty meant," I said, trying hard not to move. "Doesn't he understand that the best way to honor Ammatu's legacy is to strengthen Geshur's alliances?"

Zulat said nothing. Instead, I felt the prickly sensation of a frayed stick delivering red ochre to my lips. The conversation was over, so I opened my eyes and found my maid wiping tears.

She turned away quickly, setting aside her beauty tools and drying her cheeks. “Forgive me, Mistress. I have no right—”

“No right to care for me?” I asked, sitting up and pulling her into my arms. “You’re the only safety I’ve known, Zulat. I barely remember the southern Geshurite palace or our lives before Abu escaped the unrest there. I only remember the peace Ammatu and I felt when Bijan became Abu’s personal protector. You and your husband have been my family’s shield.”

She pulled away and pierced me with a ferocious glare. “Then forget your dreams, and stay in Geshur, Maakah. No more talk of a treaty marriage. You must ignore the gods and their prodding.” Her breath caught.

*Their prodding.* She’d affirmed my suspicions. “The dream *is* from the gods.” She looked away, but her silence was my answer. “Tell me, Zulat, is there a political match with which I could help preserve Geshur’s independence?”

“What does an old woman know of such things?” she whispered, returning her focus to me. “I know only that my heart would break—as would your abu’s—if you left Geshur.”

A knot formed in my stomach. What if the people in my dream could be saved by a treaty marriage, but Abu had placed his own desires above our kingdom’s welfare?

I pushed my unruly black curls behind my shoulders and turned from the woman who loved me as her own. “Plait my hair in a simple braid. No gemstones today. I must see Abu—now.”