

DAUGHTERS *of the* PROMISED LAND • 1

The
CRIMSON
CORD

RAHAB'S STORY

JILL EILEEN SMITH


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To M'shiach Adonai, the Lord's Anointed One, Messiah—
my Rock, my Strength, my Redeemer—who redeemed
Rahab so we could see a picture of mercy and of grace.
Thank you.



PART 1

And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there . . .

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land . . . Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and . . . that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”

Joshua 2:1, 8–9, 12–13 ESV



JERICHO, 1406 BC

Rahab draped the pale blue scarf over her head and shivered in the predawn chill. Her two sisters, Cala and Adara, took some convincing, but in the end, they had followed her on the short walk to the city's public gardens in search of the dead carcasses of the female *coccus ilicis*, the crimson worms prized for their deep scarlet dyes.

“You know the king's servants have probably already stripped the trees bare,” Cala said, resting a protective hand over the growing babe within her. “And Tzadok was not too happy to have me leave him with just a blanket for warmth when I left our bed.”

Gamal never noticed whether Rahab shared their bed anymore. How quickly his ardor had cooled after the war that left him both injured and a national hero for saving the prince's life. Yet how could a single battle cause so much change?

Shame heated her face, and she quickly ducked her head

lest Cala notice. Surely she had done something to displease him. Surely her childlessness had forced him to seek lovers in the streets and drink in the taverns at night.

Your daughter is very beautiful, my lord. The memory of Gamal's words that day during her fifteenth summer invaded her thoughts. He had accompanied his father to her father's home to seek her hand in marriage. How tall and proud Gamal had looked, standing like the soldier he was with one hand behind his back, the other resting on his close-cropped dark beard. Dark hair peeked beneath a leather helmet, and a slight smile tipped the corners of a strong, round jaw.

Her heart had beat faster at the sound of his deep yet gentle voice, and though she hid in the shadows in the connecting room, she heard every word of the exchange, the bartering. Gamal's father had the prescribed bride-price, and Gamal, a soldier in the king's guard, earned a good living. Rahab would be well cared for in her new home.

How short-lived that promise.

The familiar twinge of envy filled her in one glance at Cala's protruding middle. In five years of marriage she had not produced a son for Gamal, or even a daughter, though a daughter would not have pleased him. Perhaps she should be searching for mandrakes or performing fertility rites at the temple to procure a child instead of searching for worms that might bring her profit to feed her husband's gaming habit. A child would remove the sting of her shame and give her someone to love. A child might cause Gamal to look on her with favor again.

"Your thoughts are very far away, my sister," Cala said, drawing up beside her as they walked along the mud-brick streets now where palm trees lined the boulevard. "I know

that look.” Her voice dropped to a whisper, and they both glanced Adara’s way.

Rahab shook her head. “It is nothing.” Though in truth it was everything. She could not create a child any more than she could find the elusive mandrakes. And she was not about to offer sacrifices or prostitute herself to the temple on the whims of false hope.

“Has Gamal hurt you again?” Cala rested a hand on her arm, forcing Rahab to stop and meet her gaze. Cala knew the truth of his hidden abuse, something Rahab could not tell her mother or father or brothers.

Rahab looked beyond her sister, feeling the sudden touch of the morning breeze like a forgiving kiss. She drew in a slow breath, strangely strengthened. She glanced once more at Adara, then leaned close to Cala. “He is always angry,” she said quickly. “The prince’s edict arrived yesterday afternoon. They want an accounting by week’s end and Gamal is not ready.” She walked on, remembering the panic in his eyes. “Scarlet linens bring a high price in the markets.” She *had* to find a way to repay Gamal’s debt, to earn his respect. She glanced at Cala. “I have to try.”

Rahab looked at Adara, whose young eyes were wide with curiosity. “Have to try what?” Adara asked.

“I have to try to find these worms so I can create scarlet threads and sell them to feed my family.” She smiled at Adara, on the cusp of womanhood, still innocent and carefree and irresponsible. Something Rahab had not felt since the day Gamal returned from war, three years before, but wanted desperately to preserve in her baby sister for as long as she could.

“That’s not all that you told Cala. What does the prince

want with Gamal?” Adara’s thin brows narrowed, and her lip jutted in her typical pout. “I’m not naive, you know.”

You are far more naive than you realize, dear sister. “I know you aren’t, my sweet, but I don’t have time to explain it all right now. Please. I need your help to find these worms. Their carcasses will be white and we will have to scrape them off the trees.”

Adara’s shoulders drooped, but she turned her attention to the nearest tree, her whole energy caught up in the hunt as though they were searching for buried treasure.

Which they were. Rahab moved deeper into the grove and slowly scanned the trunk of an oak tree. If only there were a god of worms, she would pray to him or her and offer a sacrifice of the few hoarded pieces of bronze and silver she kept hidden in a jar in their bedchamber. Precious metals she had earned from her weaving but that would not even come close to paying off Gamal’s debt.

She had to find enough worms to make the prized red dye and make it in abundance.

She could not even consider another option.



Rahab shuddered, feeling the weight of Gamal’s cursing the following evening. “What good are you to me if you cannot produce even the smallest lump of silver?” He tossed both hands above his head in a frustrated gesture. “A wife that cannot produce heirs could at least find some way to increase her husband’s fortunes. You are a worthless whore!”

She ducked her head, waiting for the blow that did not come, yet his words did not miss their mark. How swift his

barbs—sharp daggers to her soul. She heard his pacing limp thump against the woven mats she had lovingly made to keep the floor packed and smooth. They had once lived in a house in the wealthier section of town, with a large private courtyard in a home of stone floors and many rooms. One they shared with his family.

But the king had greatly rewarded Gamal for his action in battle, for the day he had thrown himself in front of the prince and taken the arrow that should have ended the prince's life. Gamal had used some of that reward to rent a house closer to the main thoroughfare. A smaller dwelling, but one Rahab had taken great joy in making their own. One free of his mother's nagging tongue.

"My luck is changing tonight, Rahab. I'm *this* close to winning"—he pinched his fingers together to emphasize his point—"but I need silver to put in the pot." His voice had softened as if he had suddenly forgotten his tirade. Did he think she could so easily sweep aside his accusing words to give him what he wanted?

She straightened, drawing on courage she thought she had lost. "The games are slanted against you, Gamal. Wouldn't it be better to wait just awhile? Give me time. I can give you more if you can just be patient."

The blow came too fast for her to duck this time. Tears stung her eyes, matching the sharp sting against her cheek.

"Don't tell me to be patient. I have given you years!" She knew in an instant they were no longer talking about silver but sons. Did he not consider the fact that if he spent more time with her instead of the foreign women he had come to favor, she might at last produce a child? But of course, the fault was hers alone. Always hers.

She flinched as his hand drew close again, and he fingered a lock of her hair as if turning a new thought over in his mind. “There is a way you could repay me.” He let the comment hang in the air between them until she slowly, fearfully met his level gaze.

She swallowed, recognizing the scheming gleam in his eyes. There was always some new plan, some way he devised for her to please him, though none ever did. Did he want her to visit the temples as she had considered the previous morning?

Horror filled her, and she wanted to pull away from him, to curl into a corner and hide like a young girl again in her father’s house. Shaking overtook her, and she clasped her hands to her arms, trying to still the sudden cold.

“I’ve had men ask after you,” he said after too many breaths. His dark eyes searched hers.

She stared at him wide-eyed but could not find her voice.

He shook his head and gave a brittle laugh. “Of course, I tell them where they can take their suggestions.” He lifted her chin with two fingers, possessive. “I need you to be quicker with the cloth, or find some other way to get me gold.”

So now it was gold he wanted? *I am doing all that I can.* “Yes, my lord.”

“It’s the only way we can get out from under our debt,” he said as though trying to convince her.

Your debt. How he loved to include her in his foolish choices. And yet . . . if she had been all she should have been as wife to him, would he have needed to pursue women or drink or games to find relief from the pain she caused? The question haunted her, as it did every time he left the house at night, leaving her alone. Every time she crawled into their

bed without his company. Every time he looked at her with disdain.

She blinked, hating the tears that threatened. One moment she wanted to fall at his feet and weep, begging him to forgive her. But sometimes in the next breath, sudden violent emotions would overtake her. If she had dared, she would flail her arms against his proud chest and scream in his face.

Why can't you return to work as a guard? Why can't you be kind like my father and brothers, like normal men? The words barely held on the tip of her tongue, but to say them would incur an even fiercer wrath. Surely his former commander, Dabir, now the king's advisor, would allow him to work in one of the positions that required less marching. He could guard the king's prisoners or sit at the gate, inspecting the merchants as they entered.

But Gamal had allowed the king's praise and his forthcoming gift to make him lazy, and he had wasted all he had been given until he was the one indebted to the king rather than the king indebted to him.

She jumped at the jarring sound of the door slamming, caught off guard that Gamal would leave without another word to her. She shook herself from her conflicted thoughts. How she hated that man! And yet how much she longed to please him.

She touched her cheek, briefly wondering if it had started to purple. Her brothers would kill him if they knew what he did to her.

But she could not allow his blood on their hands, despite what he was. He was still her husband.

A sigh escaped as she walked to the door to secure the latch.



Rahab stared into the flickering lamp some time later, too weary to rise. She had been up well before dawn and had worked at combing the flax to prepare for dyeing ever since Gamal had left, and now wanted nothing more than to fall into bed and succumb to blessed sleep. Her paltry efforts would not bring silver to Gamal's pockets any sooner for her late hours, but somehow keeping her hands busy helped stop her mind from racing through all manner of future fears.

She startled at a light rap at the outer door. Surely her nerves were overly heightened. She stilled, listening. Probably a wandering drunk tapping on the posts of her gate as he passed.

The knock came again, louder, incessant, and Rahab felt a sense of dread. Dare she answer with Gamal still out? What if it was someone from the gaming house come to tell her that Gamal had been hurt in a fight, or worse . . .

She would not let her thoughts trail there.

But the knock continued, refusing to be ignored. She rose slowly and crept to the inner door, peering into the gathering dusk. Moonlight streamed into her courtyard, illuminating two men. On closer inspection, she noted the king's insignia on the guard's helmet and breastplate. She hesitated, trying to make out the face of the other man, when he raised a fist to knock once more.

Dabir? Gamal's former commander still held sway over the troops, but he had risen in power to advise both Prince Nahid and the king. What was he doing at her door in the dark of night?

She hesitated again. Dare she answer? Gamal was not here to defend her.

She nearly scoffed at that last thought. Gamal had not defended her honor in years.

Indecision warred in her exhausted mind. Her lighted lamps gave her presence away, and to refuse to answer an emissary of the king . . . She stood a moment more until at last, hands trembling, she lifted the latch.

“My lord.” She bowed. “What can I do for you?”

“Rahab?” Dabir bent low, took her hand, and lifted her to her feet. The look in his dark, narrow eyes and the touch of his strong yet gentle fingers fairly scorched her. He led her into the room and closed the door, leaving the guard at the gate. His lazy smile made her blood pump hard.

What was he doing here? She pulled her hand free of his and took a step back. “Has something happened to my husband, to Gamal?”

He stared down at her, his eyes roaming, his look possessive, causing her skin to tingle as though he still held her hand. Silence filled the space between them, and she searched her mind for something to say, something to make him go.

“Your husband is fine. The last time I saw him, he was carousing and eyeing a prostitute before he passed out on the floor. The owner of the gaming house thought to throw him into the street, but I convinced the man to let Gamal stay and sleep it off.”

Rahab closed her eyes, blinking back tears of rage . . . and defeat. Gamal probably lost another bet and then drank himself into unconsciousness—again. He deserved to be thrown into the street.

“Why then have you come?” If he knew Gamal’s whereabouts, then his only reason for coming here was . . . She met his gaze, caught the edge in his smile.

“Gamal owes the crown a lot of gold, Rahab. If he is tossed into the gutter and dies, he is of no use to us.”

“Of course not.” *That doesn’t explain why you are here.*

“Is that a bruise on your cheek?” Dabir’s question startled her. He moved slowly closer and gently touched the spot Gamal had slapped. She gasped. “Did he hurt you?” He drew back, his dark brows drawn low. “If he laid a hand on you . . .”

She shook her head and looked away. “I fell. That is all. I’m fine.” She found his concern strangely disconcerting.

He stood without moving, and she sensed him assessing her. At last he stepped closer, placed two fingers beneath her chin, and gently drew her gaze to his. “I would never hurt you, Rahab.” His look held such kindness, such desire, she struggled to pull in a breath.

“I’m fine,” she said again. Her breath hitched as his finger traced a line along her jaw. “Gamal does not hurt me.” But she could not meet his gaze.

He stepped closer still and cupped her injured cheek. “We both know that’s not true, Rahab. I have heard him go so far as to offer you to the highest bidder, just to stay in the game.”

Another gasp escaped. No words would come. She stared at him.

“I would not let him go through with such a thing,” he said, his voice warm, his words honey. “You are fortunate that I frequent the gaming houses. Another time I might not be there to stop such a thing.” His finger trailed the path from her ear to her throat.

He tugged her nearer, his lips soft, gentle, molding her to him. “I can give you so much more than Gamal ever could, Rahab.” His breath grew hot against her cheek. “He would never have to know.”

Rahab's lips tingled with another lingering kiss, and she could not stop the desire, the deep longing for more. To be loved and cherished, as Gamal once cared for her. She closed her eyes against the memory and allowed his kiss to deepen. "He cannot know," she whispered between breaths. "Unless . . ." Horror struck her with such force she drew back, breaking his hold, trembling. "Did Gamal sell me to you for a night?" Of course he had. Why else would a man of Dabir's standing want her?

Her stomach twisted at the memory of Gamal's threat a few hours earlier. *I've had men ask after you.* She crossed her arms, shielding her heart and her body from his words.

Dabir cocked his head, studying her, his gaze understanding, his smile congenial. "Dear, sweet Rahab. I am not a man who pays a drunkard for time with his wife." He lifted a hand toward her, but she took a step backward. He lowered his arm, accepting. "But you . . . you, my dear, are a treasure Gamal should not own, a woman of passion and beauty. The mere thought of you has often robbed me of sleep and invaded my dreams."

"Men visit the harlots at the temples to appease their dreams, or go to the gaming houses for the women of the night, but that doesn't mean I want to be one of them." Her shaking grew.

His soft chuckle incensed her. "My darling Rahab, you are much too beautiful to be a common harlot."

She looked away, all comments frozen within her. *Your daughter is very beautiful, my lord.* Gamal did not say those things now. His lack of desire for her had caused her to fear she had lost her beauty due to her barrenness, that she now appeared gaunt, like the ones at the edge of Sheol.

“If you have not paid my husband for a night with me, why are you here?”

“I think you know the answer to that question, Rahab.” And she did know, but she did not want to face it.

“Am I to become mistress to the king’s advisor to repay my husband’s debt?” She was alone with him, unprotected. How could she stop him from doing as he pleased?

“Not if you do not want to.” He lowered his dark head, his shoulders drooping ever so slightly in a gesture of defeat.

She watched him, pulled in a long breath, and slowly released it. She swallowed, summoning courage. “You would leave if I asked it of you?”

He lifted his gaze again, and she sensed his power . . . and his vulnerability. “I would not force you.”

So he did not purchase her, and he was not forcing Gamal’s debt on her.

Dabir’s rich robes swished as he took two steps closer to her. He stopped, stretched one ringed hand toward her. “I would give you myself, Rahab. I would show you all the pleasures Gamal has forgotten.”

She looked from his outstretched hand to his aristocratic face. The lines along his brow showed concern, his strong jaw determination.

“I will not allow Gamal to hurt you ever again.” His promise held a tiny thread of hope, and yet what could he do but cause ill to her husband?

“I would not have you harm him.” She searched Dabir’s face and did not pull away as his fingers slowly encased hers.

“I will not harm him.” He tugged her closer. Exhaustion filled her, and she did not have the strength to resist. His arms came around her, and his kiss barely skimmed her lips.

Gentle fingers rubbed circles at her back, and his kiss slowly, tenderly deepened. “Come with me, Rahab.” His feet moved in the rhythm of a dance to the door of her chambers. With the ease of a warrior, he lifted her into his arms.

Common sense whispered warnings. *Fight back. Flee.* But he had captured her with kindness, leaving all courage behind her.



Dabir stood over her some time later, tying the belt of his robe. She lounged among the bed pillows, feeling warm, accepted. She folded her hands beneath her chin, a smile ghosting her lips. Longing rose to ask him to stay, to come again. But one glance at the moon’s bright glow through her window told her Gamal would soon return, fall into bed with her, and assume she slept.

She clutched the sheets to her and sat up. “Please, my lord, would you hand me my robe?” He had tossed it onto a nearby chair.

He looked at her and chuckled. “You weren’t so shy an hour ago, my love.” He cupped her cheek and bent to kiss her. “Get it yourself.”

She balked at his tone, uncertain. But she did as he said, dressing quickly.

She walked with him to the door. When would she see him again? But she could not ask it. Dare not think it. He had come, and she had given him what he wanted. That was the extent of it.

He pulled a small packet from the pocket of his robe and handed it to her. “For you. Don’t show Gamal.”

She took it but did not undo the strings to the wrapping. “Open it.”

She searched his face, saw him smile again in that gentle, coaxing way.

She fumbled with the strings until his hands came beneath hers to steady them. At last she pulled free the finest length of scarlet fabric she had ever seen. Never in her lifetime could she duplicate such richness.

“I cannot accept this,” she said without thinking.

His frown made her stomach flutter. “Of course you can. It is a gift.”

“But I did nothing to earn it.”

“Precisely why it is a gift, my dear.” He tipped her chin. “But you did earn it.” He smiled down at her with the gaze of one who has known more than he should. “Keep it.”

His parting kiss left her shaken.