

Fearful's Journey

Through the Desert

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Dedication:

*I am dedicating this book to my grandpa, Jerry Kinney.
He was my greatest encourager in becoming a writer.
Without his loving pushing, I may not have come this far.*

CHAPTER 1

“Mother! Look! Father...” Fearful began to exclaim. Her father, Anxious, was a logger for Prince Iniquity. This winter was the coldest the capital of the Land of Enslavement had ever seen, and the slaves’ rations of wood were not enough to warm their small shacks. So, when five-year-old Fearful saw her father come home with an extra armload of wood, she started jumping with excitement.

“Fearful!” Anxious reprimanded with a stern but frightened look. Fearful flopped down onto her mat looking dejected. She didn’t understand why her father would yell at her so when she hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Anxious, where did you get that....” Dreaded Horror, Fearful’s mother, started to ask but was interrupted by **BANG!** as the door flew open and let a cold gust of air in.

“Logger, you are under arrest for stealing Prince Iniquity’s wood! For that Prince Iniquity, ruler of the

Land of Enslavement, has ordered your arrest!” a big black guard growled. He grabbed Anxious’s arm, forcing him to drop the wood, and started dragging him out the door. Overseer swooped in then and gathered up all the wood, even taking the family’s normal meager ration of wood. He left with an evil chuckle.

“NO! Please no! Have mercy!” Dreaded Horror sobbed, running out into the snowstorm after the guard, grabbing his arm.

“Mercy! Hah! This lazy wretch doesn’t deserve mercy!” The guard ripped his arm away from Dreaded Horror and stomped off, leaving her sobbing in a drift of snow.

Little, terrified Fearful stood in the doorway staring after the disappearing forms of the guard and her father. From that moment on, terror of everything ruled her life. There was rarely a moment she could remember not being scared of everything she said and did.

“Fearful! Are you okay?” Scaredycat’s voice broke through Fearful’s dreaded memories.

Fearful looked over at her friend as though for the first time. “I can’t get the memory of seeing my father being dragged off that freezing night out of my mind. The next day, it was snowing really hard and still they called all the slaves to the marketplace. When everyone was gathered there, they stripped my father and started beating him unmercifully. Then they sent him away with other criminals to the logging camp, where

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they were to work harder than even the slaves,” Fearful mumbled, trying not to cry.

Scaredycat squeezed Fearful's hand comfortingly as they walked back to the palace gardens. Overseer had blown the horn to call the end of lunch break. So back to the rows of beans Fearful and Scaredycat went for a long afternoon of weeding.

Fearful had only known Scaredycat for a year, but the two had become fast friends within just a few days of meeting. Scaredycat was such an understanding person. She was a tall black girl of very few words, but she was one Fearful could depend on when she needed a comforting hug or just someone to cry with.

The two knelt down and started ruffling through the bean leaves looking for weeds and the little bugs that would destroy the beans. A row behind them Fearful's two other friends worked, jabbering on about nothing in particular. Every once in a while, Scaredycat would make a comment, but Fearful was completely silent, which was unusual.

Once again, Fearful's past flared up in front of her to taunt her. “No! No! Mother!” Fearful screeched as guards pulled her mother away from her. Her hazel eyes bulged out in terror as she ran after the guards trying to grasp her mother's outstretched hand. Her heart was breaking into a million pieces. They couldn't do this to her! They couldn't take away her beloved mother!

“Little Rose! Little Rose!” Fearful's mother cried out,

struggling against the guards. It should have seemed odd to Fearful that her mom was using her father's new name for her, but she was so terrified by the sight of the guards dragging her mother that the name change did not register. Her mother's struggling was in vain.

Fearful finally fell into a heap on the ground, sobbing as she watched the guards carry her mother off to the palace dungeon to await an inevitable execution. She couldn't take it anymore. How could she live when her mother was gone?! Her mother had been the one who had been Fearful's stronghold. Her mother had made things seem somewhat safe. **Noooooooo!!!** her shattered heart cried. ***You can't do this to me!***

King Holy One! How dare You let this evil one do this to me! You aren't loving! If You truly loved my mother... Fearful started ranting in her heart to the king her mother had run away to see. She had gone to find out for herself if He was as wonderful as Fearful's father claimed. Just last summer Fearful's father had run away from the logging camp to King Holy One, ruler of the Land of Promise and had become one of His ambassadors. Since then, he had come back to visit Fearful and her mother a couple of times. Each time he came with stories of this wonderful King Holy One.

How could this king Fearful's father claimed to be so loving and caring now let her mother die like this? It wasn't fair! ***You can't do this to me!*** Fearful's heart cried. She banged her fist into the ground as tears

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slipped down her dusty cheeks and onto the bean leaves. She felt like she had lost everything!

"Fearful, you better get back to work! Overseer's starting to watch you awfully close," Scaredycat whispered into her ear. Fearful shook her head, trying to get rid of those dreadful memories. It had been several months now since Prince Iniquity had tortured her mother to death, and she was still finding herself getting whipped for idling when the memory would overcome her.

Fearful would have been a gorgeous young woman if it wasn't for the apprehension that marred her beauty. Thick, raven black hair hung straight down to the middle of her back. She stood at four feet, ten inches and was extremely petite. Her big, round hazel eyes would have sparkled if not for the terror that clouded them.

Yet, her fear-filled world was soon to be turned upside down:

"Fearful, get over to Prince Iniquity's right away!" came the harsh voice of Overseer from the edge of the gardens.

"Yes Sir," Fearful called, horror in her voice. She ran to the dark, foreboding palace of Prince Iniquity.

She wondered what she had done wrong now. She shook with dread as she ran past the flower gardens that lay between the vegetable gardens and the palace. She stumbled through the servants' door to the

dark and eerie dwelling of her hateful master, who had caused all of her heartache. Her heart hammered away in her chest. She hated being called to the prince with all her might. He was a hard and cruel master, often calling in a dispensable slave for the pleasure of hearing the poor soul wail as he had him or her tortured and then beheaded. There was even rumor that he hung the heads up in his bed chambers as adornment. Others said that those were poor wives' tales to keep children in check, but...Fearful was not so certain.

One of the prince's high officials met her in the hallway that led from the slaves' door to all the different rooms the slaves might need to go to carry out their duties. "Prince Anointed One has come to see you." A worried, grim look replaced the man's usual evil sneer.

"What does He want with me?" Fearful's mouth dropped open in amazement. The official only glared and turned to lead the way. The only Son of King Holy One had come to see her?! Was this bad? The Land of Promise was said to be far away. Why on earth would Prince Anointed One come all that way, through all those dangers, just for her? To get there one had to travel across the Desert of Choice. Almost everyone she knew said it was a treacherous journey filled with bandits, sandstorms, and the chance of dying of thirst.

Also, the very name of these royals brought dread and hatred to Fearful's heart. This was the One who her mother had gone to see, and it was He who had not

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saved her. Had He come to play on her affections only to throw her away like her mother? He hadn't cared about her mother, so why would He want to see her?! Still, she knew she couldn't disobey.

The high official led her through dark hallways and up a frighteningly steep, winding, and dimly lit staircase. Fearful put her hands on either side of the staircase so she wouldn't fall. Her heart started to pound uncontrollably, and her hands trembled.

After what seemed like hours, they came to the top and went down another gloomy hallway which came to double doors. The man opened these to reveal Prince Iniquity sitting on a throne at the other end of an immense room filled with all his courtiers. The man led Fearful up to the throne. She bowed obediently, but as she was doing so, she noticed something strangely familiar out of the corner of her eye. When she looked up to see what it was, her heart jumped for joy, for what she had seen was the edge of the birthmark on her father's hand. He was standing among the courtiers. A man in princely robes stood beside him. *That must be Prince Anointed One*, Fearful thought to herself. Yet, not even the dread of seeing the One who supposedly had come to see her could keep her from rejoicing over her father's presence. She did wonder why her father was with the Prince, though. *It must be because of his new job*, she decided, not giving it much more thought. She was too happy about seeing

him to wonder about that.

Prince Iniquity's voice broke through her joyful thoughts, causing her to cower. "Fearful, this Prince thinks you should have an opportunity to choose between serving in my kingdom or His Father's kingdom. He will take you through the desert, after which you can make your choice." His voice was grating and horrible. Fearful had seen even the strongest and bravest of his warriors go weak in the knees when he got angry with them. She didn't have to look up to know he was glaring at her.

"It's the law of the universe that nobody can be denied this right," Prince Anointed One said, stepping out of the crowd and standing beside Fearful. His voice was so gentle and kind, but also so commanding that it surprised Fearful. This incited curiosity in her as to Who this Prince was, but she didn't dare look up or Prince Iniquity's wrath would fall on her. Even the youngest slaves knew better than to look up at royalty.

How can the One who let my mother be killed sound so kind? Fearful asked herself. She wasn't given time to ponder the question long, though. "Look at me. You have until tomorrow to decide if you want to go with Him and see what is so good about Him. Got that? You must finish today's work, and if you're not packed and gone by sunup, you're in the fields. Now get out of my sight before I change my mind!" Prince Iniquity dismissed her with a threat.

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"Yes, Sir," Fearful said, her voice quivering with terror. She quickly bowed to Prince Iniquity before turning to her father and Prince Anointed One. "Good day, Your Highness. Good day, Father," Fearful murmured with a curtsy. She dared to look up at her father. He gave her a loving smile and nodded. She then turned and ran, for she'd rather weed a thousand rows of beans than be in the presence of Prince Iniquity. He had a mean, hawk-like nose, pale skin, shoulder-length blond hair which made him look like a wild beast, and those cruel, cold blue eyes could almost kill.

She ran down the steps, for her fear of Prince Iniquity was greater than her terror of falling. The sooner she could get as much distance between herself and him as she could, the better. She, for once in her life, actually skipped back to the gardens.

"What did you do?" Prideful asked, looking over her shoulder at Fearful with her haughty green eyes.

"Nothing, Prince Anointed One came to see me." Fearful fell into her place beside Scaredycat.

"Really? Is He as cruel as some say?" asked Scaredycat timidly.

"I don't know...I don't think so," Fearful said after a moment of thinking, but then she caught a glimpse of Overseer out of the corner of her eye. "Overseer is, though. Let's get moving," Fearful exclaimed. Fearful picked up her speed and started picking the weeds with a vengeance, for Overseer had started paying close

attention to her and her friends. He was starting to curl up his whip so it would be ready for use. Other than Prince Iniquity, the most horrible thing was Overseer and his whip.

She'd been the victim of Overseer's wrath and his whip a couple times, and it was like a ghastly nightmare. Overseer's wrath came in second only to Prince Iniquity's, and that was a close second. Overseer's evil green eyes seemed to be able to read one's deepest thoughts, and his dirty, unruly sandy hair, his unshaven face, and his dirty, sloppy clothes gave him the appearance of a wild man. If it was possible, he was uglier than he was scary.

Though Fearful was exhausted, she forced herself to work as hard as she could to finish the last two rows of beans. She hurried herself on by thinking about the nice cool water they would find at their shack and a meal to partially fill her empty stomach.

Finally, Fearful and her three friends, Scaredycat, Prideful, and Boastful were finished and headed for the little hut that was their home. They walked in silence because they were all exhausted. Once they got to the hut they ate their supper and went straight to bed.

The next morning Fearful jumped up off her and Scaredycat's mat after a sleepless night. She rushed through breakfast and packing her few belongings in a skittish eagerness, with only the dim gray light of early dawn to see by. She wanted to get out before the sun

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rose so she wouldn't be stuck here. She hated living in fear all the day through. She knew there had to be something better. Maybe serving in the Land of Promise was that something. Oh, how she hoped that it was.

"How's my Little Rose?" Fearful looked up from the bundle she was packing when she heard her father call her by his nickname for her. She found herself looking into her father's sparkling brown eyes that were illuminated by the lamp he held and almost felt safe.

"Doing okay, I guess."

"Good. Prince Anointed One, I'd like You to meet my daughter, Little Rose, and her friends, Dancer, Servant of Joy, and Mighty Warrior." Fearful's father pointed to Prideful, Boastful, and Scaredycat, calling them by his nicknames for them. "And this is Granny, Dancer's grandma, who's taken care of my daughter for me since my wife died. Girls, Granny, I'd like you to meet His Highness, Prince Anointed One."

During this whole introduction, Fearful looked down at the floor. She shuffled her feet across the dirt floor and tried to keep her hands from shaking, something they did when she was nervous. *Is He glaring at me? Why would He be coming for me? He has such a kind voice, it's almost like it's calling me to trust Him, but could it just be a disguise?* A barrage of questions assailed Fearful.

"Little Rose, look at Me." Fearful timidly looked up at Prince Anointed One to see His strangely kind, gentle

brown eyes. She gasped to see the love that poured out of them. She had only seen that kind of devotion in her grandparents' and her parents' eyes. It wasn't a romantic love, but something much deeper. She couldn't quite put her finger on what it was. The voice possibly could have been disguised, but such a pure, sincere charity flowed from His eyes that surely they couldn't be masked. "Now that wasn't so hard, was it?" The Prince rested a strong hand on her shoulder, a kind smile playing on His lips.

"Your Highness, might I be so bold as to ask a question?" Granny asked shyly.

"Ask Me anything."

"I'm truly happy for Fearful, but why did you choose her over all the other girls in Prince Iniquity's kingdom?"

"My Father gives everyone the choice to come serve Us, but I came for Fearful in answer to her parents' fervent pleading. I will come for the others in due time if I'm wanted," Prince Anointed One said, looking at each of the girls in turn.

What! He said "parents"? Why on earth would Mother be pleading with Prince Anointed One to come to me? Besides, she's dead! Fearful was so confused!

"What makes You any better than Prince Iniquity?!" Prideful scoffed.

"Prideful!!!" Granny and the girls gasped in horror at her disrespect that could get her killed.

"Ah Prideful, must you always make everything

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difficult for yourself?" Prince Anointed One murmured, giving a sad smile. She glared back with a look of defiance. He shook His head mournfully and turned to Fearful. "We need to be heading out."

Fearful slowly nodded her head and looked at her friends, wondering how to say good-bye. She hated to leave them. They were her only friends and had become family to her. She felt a bit guilty for going without them even though she knew they would also get a turn.

She finally hugged each of them in turn and whispered her good-byes. She came to Scaredycat last, having a hard time keeping from crying when she looked into Scaredycat's sad and dejected eyes. "I love you, Scaredycat!" Fearful exclaimed, hugging her longer than she had the other two.

She then said good-bye to Granny, who gave her a kiss on the forehead and wished her well. Once her good-byes were said, she picked up her bundle of belongings and turned to follow her father and the Prince out. Excitement started to well up within her. She was going to a new land where she hoped she would be free from the fear that breathed down her neck every waking moment. *Oh, how slow Prince Anointed One is in getting out of here! Will we be able to get across the border in time?* she worried as she followed Prince Anointed One, who seemed to be letting the donkeys pick their own ambling pace.

She never would have admitted it, but it seemed that she had held her breath the whole day. She was afraid to hope, yet longing that her hope wouldn't be destroyed. She didn't quite understand it but felt it with all her being.

"Sir, may I ask what is to be expected of me?" Fearful asked, trying to keep her mind off what Prince Iniquity would do to her if he decided not to allow her to go. Prince Iniquity was renowned for changing his mind in a split-second.

"During this journey, you will be expected to cook and to run errands I need you to go on. Your most important job, though, is to learn who I am. Does that sound fair to you?" Prince Anointed One looked down at her inquiringly.

Fearful had to fight to keep her jaw from dropping. That was an odd question! Why would a prince ask a slave if they thought something was fair? Since when did royalty care about what a slave thought?

"Sir, that's not my place to say. What You assign me to do I will do!" Fearful exclaimed in astonishment.

For all that holding of breath and apprehension, they got out of the boundaries of the Land of Enslavement way before the sun peeked its head up over the horizon. Still, she was afraid that Prince Iniquity would come after her. She kept looking behind her to see if he was coming.

"Father, I'm overjoyed to have you with, but why are

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you coming along?" Fearful asked. They had stopped for the noon meal, and Prince Anointed One had gone off to wash up, so she took the opportunity to ask the question that had been on her mind.

"I'm actually on the King's business. You and Prince Anointed One are going the same direction, so I'm just traveling with you for a ways. In a couple days, I will be parting with you. There is a small village whose inhabitants have started to waver in their allegiance to the King. I am being sent to encourage them," Ambassador of Trust explained.

"Why did Prince Anointed One say that **both** you and Mother were interceding with Him to come to me?" she asked, for this question had been burning in her heart as well.

"That, my dear, is not for me to answer." Ambassador of Trust nodded toward Prince Anointed One, whose back was turned to them. Fearful blushed. She was scared to ask Him.

CHAPTER 2

Prince Iniquity didn't come. As the sky was being painted with shades of pinks, purples, and golds, they finally came to the desert. Prince Anointed One put a hand on her shoulder, and for the first time in her life, Fearful saw the magnificence of the sunset. It was glorious!

"We'll make camp here," Prince Anointed One said, surveying the endless desert with one sweeping glance. "Will you please get some water?"

Dumbfounded, Fearful took the bucket from Prince Anointed One. Never in her life had she ever heard the word "please" uttered by anyone except her grandparents and parents. Everyone else just ordered her around. What seemed even more astonishing was that it came from someone in an authoritative position. Why would a prince say something like that? She didn't understand.

There was an oasis only about twenty yards away.

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With the rough wooden bucket handle rubbing against her hand, Fearful walked off. On the way there, she was deep in thought. *Could Prince Anointed One be the better choice?* From what she had found out so far, He was polite, even making her feel safe. *All that surely couldn't be fake with that truthful look in His eyes, or could it...?*

Still, the wrath of Prince Iniquity stood before her. If he was in a tolerable mood, he would just throw her in the dungeon with the rats for the rest of her life. He'd have her tortured and then killed in the most agonizing way...hanging on a cross...if he was not in a tolerable mood. Her dread of him made nothing seem safe.

She entered the oasis' shelter by a narrow, beaten-down path. She knelt down at the water's edge. Looking all around her, she was fascinated by the sense of safety in this place. It was like no one had ever been there to mar the beauty. The tall trees grew around the oasis, with bushes and flowers growing in between them and around the water. The only way out was the narrow path by which she had come in. The smell of the flowers filled the air in this sanctuary. It reminded Fearful of something, but she couldn't put her finger on it. The only sound that disturbed the still quiet was the dim sound of her father and Prince Anointed One setting up camp. *If only you could see this place, Mother, it's so quiet and safe. It feels like here...nothing...could...ever...I miss you so...* Fearful looked down into the

water, and tears rolled down her cheeks and fell into the water, blotting out her reflection. The emptiness Fearful felt was unbearable! She missed her mother so much!

Just then something odd happened, for she could hear her friends' voices in her mind. "Fearful, please come back. I need you!" came Scaredycat's pleading whimper.

"Please, Fearful! Don't be stubborn! Prince Iniquity is furious!" Boastful arrogantly taunted her.

Fearful argued out loud with her friends' voices, saying, "I can't come back. Prince Iniquity will kill me like he did my mother! I...I can't come...come back!"

"If you don't come back, he'll be even more furious. He'll find a punishment worse than death!" Prideful mocked.

"I won't come back!" Fearful screamed as she ran out of the trees, scared.

She rushed back to the campsite, hardly caring if the water spilled. She was so frightened. Fearful held her breath when Prince Anointed One's form came in front of her. She braced herself for the scolding or whipping she knew she was in for for being tardy. Instead, she got something totally new to her, and it shocked her. Prince Anointed One knelt so He could look into her lowered eyes. "Thank you, now will you please start supper? You will find all that you need in those." He pointed to a pile of packages wrapped in burlap sacks.

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While Fearful went about cooking the meal, Prince Anointed One wandered off somewhere, and Ambassador of Trust chopped up some logs that had been lying there when the three travelers had come to the spot. "Father, where is Prince Anointed One going?" Fearful's curiosity was aroused at Prince Anointed One going off to the south as though going to meet someone, even though there wasn't a village or anything for miles.

"To talk to His father; there is a small cave cut into those mountains where Prince Anointed One likes to go to meet with the King when He's gone from the castle." Ambassador of Trust wiped the sweat off his brow with his sleeve and then pointed to a group of mountains dwarfed by distance.

"It would take days to get there," Fearful exclaimed in shock.

"To the King and Prince, distance is nothing." Ambassador of Trust piled the wood he had chopped up by the fire ring. Fearful's brows knit together as she fell into deep thought. She didn't understand these royals.

Prince Anointed One came back as Fearful was taking the lamb off the spit that her father had set up over the fire. "That smells delicious!" He remarked, taking the heavy platter from her just before she was about to drop it and setting it on a big boulder that she had been using as a table to set the food on.

She stared up at Him in amazement. Would His kindness never cease?! He grinned at her amazement. She then realized what she was doing and quickly lowered her eyes, quaking with shame and fear. She jumped when what she'd expected to be a hand going to box her ears was a hand that caressingly cupped her face and gently forced it up so she was looking at Him. In His eyes was that deep love that had astounded her that morning. "My Father has given you such pretty hazelnut eyes. Will you please give Me the honor of looking into them from now on?"

"What...whatever...plea...pleas...pleases You, Sir," Fearful stammered.

"Good, now come sit with us and dine."

Fearful gasped to hear such an invitation. A slave eat with a prince?! She gave Prince Anointed One a confused look, unsure if she had heard Him right. He just smiled and patted the log beside Him.

They both looked over to where Ambassador of Trust was struggling with one of the donkeys that had one of the food packages in its mouth. Ambassador of Trust was pulling for all he was worth, but the donkey wouldn't give it up. He was grunting and growling and making quite a comical sight. Prince Anointed One shook His head, chuckling. He said something Fearful didn't understand, and the donkey let go of the package right away. Ambassador of Trust went sprawling on the ground.

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"Thanks, Your Highness," Ambassador of Trust said, laughing at himself as he picked himself up and dusted off his tunic and trousers. "I'm not real hungry, so I think I'll go for a walk."

Prince Anointed One just nodded. He bowed His head as Ambassador of Trust walked off. "Salutations, Father, I ask that You bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies. We thank You that this journey is going to end in success. Amen."

Fearful just stared at Him as He talked to a father who wasn't even in sight. She looked, but even her father had disappeared into the fading light. The only other living beings around were the donkeys who were eating the hay in front of them.

"Do you find it odd that I should thank My Father for the food He gives us?" Prince Anointed One gave a questioning look. Fearful shook her head, feeling awkward. She got up and served up the food and then sat down beside Prince Anointed One.

As hungry as Fearful was, she just picked at her food. The question of Prince Iniquity coming after her was nagging her more than ever. She kept looking over at Prince Anointed One, wishing she could ask but afraid that He would become angry at her.

"You have questions in your eyes," Prince Anointed One stated, looking her straight in the eye.

Taking a little courage in Prince Anointed One addressing her, she asked the question: "When I'm here

in the desert with You, but I'm out getting water or something, could Prince Iniquity steal me back?"

"According to the laws My Father set, you are to be serving My Father. Yet, He gives you free will to disobey. Now, since you were a child and had no choice but to go where your parents went, you were a slave of Prince Iniquity. However, now you have a choice. Until you make the choice to serve My Father, though, you are still under the power of Prince Iniquity. I can make you one promise, however. I will never be so far away that you can't call for help, wherever you are."

This promise made Fearful feel somewhat better and gave her the courage to ask her next question: "This morning You said that **both** my parents were requesting that You come for me, but my mother is dead." Because You let her be murdered was on the tip of her tongue, but she bit her tongue to keep that phrase back.

Prince Anointed One looked at her with a gentle smile. "That, My child, I cannot answer."

"WHO CAN THEN?!" she shouted in reckless frustration. Instantly she regretted those words. Her eyes got big with terror, and she cowered, awaiting her punishment. Instead she felt a tender arm wrap around her shoulders.

"In time, Daughter, in time, I can." She buried her face in His arm and wept. She was desperately lonely, missing her mother with her entire being. He let her be. When she moved to wipe her tears away, He let her

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go. She awkwardly looked down at her food, uncertain whether she should thank Him or say nothing. He gently nudged her. She looked up to see a gentle grin sparkling in His brown eyes. He knew she was grateful. That was enough for now. She smiled in return and turned hungrily to her plate. They had walked a long way today, and she had worked up an appetite.

"You like lamb?"

Forgetting herself, Fearful looked up to find that Prince Anointed One was staring at her. This made her feel self-conscious. "I've only had scraps before, but yes I do, Sir."

"You did an excellent job at cooking it. Has anyone taught you how?"

"My mother used to be the cook for Prince Iniquity, and when I was younger, I helped her. She made lamb a lot."

At the mention of her mother, the sight of her mother being dragged off by guards popped back into her mind. Tears quickly welled up in her eyes as she tried to block the image but couldn't, her mother's hand reaching out for her own. The sight tore Fearful's heart out.

"Why weren't you there? You could have stopped him! You could have saved Mother!" Fearful screamed at her father, who had just come back.

"I'm sorry, Little Rose, but your mother died a..." Her father put a comforting arm around her. She shoved him away, putting her hands to her ears. She didn't

want to be comforted.

After a few uncomfortable seconds, Prince Anointed One laid a gentle hand on Fearful's shoulder and whispered, "We should retire. We have a busy day ahead of us."

Fearful started gathering the dishes together, and Ambassador of Trust headed to bed the donkeys down. "Here, let Me help you," Prince Anointed One started to help gather the dishes.

Fearful looked at Prince Anointed One with shock in her eyes. First, He said "please," and now He was offering to lower Himself to do a slave's job! What kind of prince was He? Fearful could hardly believe what she was hearing and seeing. This was all starting to feel like a dream.

"I came **to** serve, **not to be** served. Does that surprise you?" Fearful looked down at the ground, feeling awkward at being questioned like that and feeling ashamed for looking up at Him without being told. Even though He had told her that He wanted her to look up from now on, she still felt the shame. She had been taught it was despicable to dishonor royalty by looking at them. That was ground into her so well that it would take time to get used to the idea that a prince would think it an honor to be looked up at by a slave.

It took only a minute to clean up everything. Then Fearful and Prince Anointed One headed toward the tents while Ambassador of Trust kept watch by the fire.

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Fearful lay down in the tent she and her father were to share. Yet, she couldn't get to sleep. Her mind kept racing about. Why was Prince Anointed One so nice to her? She was just a slave! Why would He serve when there were slaves to do that? Who would He serve over here? He certainly wouldn't serve Prince Iniquity, His worst enemy! Prince Iniquity's officials were served hand and foot. So, who? Fearful had questions flying around in her head. She couldn't make heads or tails of any of them. She was especially confused about a vague feeling of hope and something else rising up within her. It was something so desperate that it wouldn't settle down until it was given satisfaction. It was something so strange she couldn't describe it. Yet it seemed oddly familiar, as though she had seen the feeling displayed in someone else. The word to describe it seemed to be at the tip of her tongue, yet she couldn't think of it.

Finally out of frustration, she got up and went to the fire to sit by her father. He looked at her as she sat down but didn't say anything for a while. They sat there staring at the fire as it crackled and popped, just enjoying each other's presence. Even though she was upset that her father had not been there to protect her mother, Fearful couldn't be angry at him for long.

"What is that?" Fearful looked at her father to see he was pointing at her worn rag doll that she always slept with. She knew she was way too old for dolls, but as weird as it might seem that rag doll gave her a feeling

of security and safety.

“The rag doll Mother made for me when I was little. I used to slip away for hours and play with her. It was during those times that I almost forgot I was a slave. I felt like nothing bad could ever happen.” Quickly Fearful wiped at the tears that had started to slip down her tan cheeks. Silence fell over her and her father. She looked around the camp in the light of the fire. There were the two tents on either side of the fire ring and the donkeys sleeping just inside the circle of flickering light. An elf owl called out in the dark, sounding like some strange high-pitched giggle. His mate responded only a short distance away. As she sat there, Fearful started to feel that feeling again. Only this time it seemed a little more intense. It was as if something inside her soul wished to respond to the elf owls as if they were speaking to her.

However, the long hard day’s walk was finally catching up with her. Though frustrated at her inability to respond to the owls and the cry in her soul, all of a sudden, she was exhausted. She could hardly get herself to the tent. Her legs felt like logs. Even though the ground was lumpy underneath her and the questions were still racing around in her head, Fearful fell asleep as soon as she lay down.

The next morning, Fearful woke to the gray light of dawn coming in through the open tent flap. She got up and stretched her aching limbs as she slipped out of the tent. She felt more refreshed and ready for the day

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than she'd ever been.

"Good morning. Are you feeling rested?" Prince Anointed One questioned her, lacing up His sandals.

"Yes, thank you." Fearful was continually being surprised by Prince Anointed One's kindness.

"Good. One of the donkeys slipped off last night. I'm going to go looking for it."

Fearful watched Prince Anointed One head out toward the east. She longed to run after Him and ask all her questions. Fearing His kindness would run out, she bit her lip to restrain herself. So instead of running after Him, she turned to making breakfast. She let out a heavy sigh. Her questions would have to wait until who knew when.

If only her friends were here now, they would be able to help her take her mind off her questions. She was starting to miss them a lot. She needed someone her age to talk to. Everything seemed strangely quiet without Prideful and Boastful's loud talk and empty without Scaredycat's quiet presence. She had never known how much her life revolved around them.

She sighed and gathered the oatmeal and pot to start breakfast. As she stoked up the fire, she sang an old song her grandmother had taught her. It was about being set free from bondage. As she sang, the song started to come to life for Fearful. The heavy burden of fear that always weighed down on her shoulders seemed to lift a little bit.

As she continued to sing, she felt a small drop of joy come into her heart. She could tell Prince Anointed One and her father were starting to rub off on her. Their unlimited joy had been spilling out since yesterday morning, and now Fearful felt a small bit of that in herself.

The oatmeal was done and still her father slept and Prince Anointed One didn't come back. Fearful wondered what to do. At the age of six, Fearful had learned the hard way that to eat before royalty was a horrible crime. She had been whipped until she could hardly move and then wasn't given her food rations for two whole days. Her stomach was starting to growl as loud as a famished lion. After a few minutes of waiting and trying not to listen to her stomach, she finally gave in to the growling protests and wolfed down a bowl of oatmeal. She hoped Prince Anointed One wouldn't find out. Once she had eaten, she grabbed an empty pail and set out for the oasis. Again, she was caught by the sense of safety.

"Ah, there you are. I was wondering what happened to you." Fearful looked up to see Ambassador of Trust coming towards her.

"I'm sorry. I came to get water and was overwhelmed by the sense of safety in this place." Fearful looked around the oasis.

"Yes, I know what you mean," Ambassador of Trust whispered, sitting down beside her.

"Why is Prince Anointed One so kind? Why does He

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act like a servant when He's a prince? Why is...He...like He is?"

"Why don't you ask Him?" Ambassador of Trust pointed with his chin toward the path. There stood Prince Anointed One.

Fearful made a conscious effort to look up as she scrambled to her feet. Every slave stood with respect in front of royalty. Even if you were old or crippled, you were expected to be somehow standing when royalty was in sight. "Come. I want to show you something," Prince Anointed One said, holding His hand out.

CHAPTER 3

Prince Anointed One took her by the hand and led her out from the oasis' protection. Out of the ring of trees stood a beautiful chestnut horse with a black mane and tail; the mare shook her head, whinnying. Fearful resisted the leading of Prince Anointed One toward the horse. Last time she was on a horse she was thrown off. She had never trusted horses since then.

"Come on. Chestnut is as gentle as a dove."

Fearful hesitantly let herself be lifted up onto the horse. She hung onto the saddle's horn so tightly that her knuckles started turning white, and they screamed to be allowed to let go. Her terror would not permit it. She held her breath, fighting the oncoming panic. She had imagined she had seen an evil glint in the horse's eye, and her mind went through all the things a horse could do to a person.

"Relax. I won't let you fall," came a whisper into her ear as a strong arm slipped around her middle.

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The strength that radiated from Prince Anointed One's whole body was overwhelming. He could have squeezed her like a cobra if He had wanted to, and yet love seemed to be blended with His strength.

"Now, I believe you wanted to ask Me some questions." Fearful felt awkward at being put on the spot and bit her lip, not knowing what to say.

"Uhhh...Uhhh..." Fearful was feeling more and more awkward and embarrassed.

"Why are you like this...kind, loving...and everything else to me? I'm just a slave."

"Close your eyes and put your arms out like you're a bird," Prince Anointed One whispered. Fearful turned around to look at Him as though He was mad. Her hazel eyes getting bigger than they naturally were. "Trust Me. I won't let you go." His eyes told Fearful that that was a promise He would keep.

So, scared as she was, she let go of the saddle horn and slowly raised her arms. Then taking a deep breath and holding it, she closed her eyes. Once her eyes were closed, all her fears blew away with the wind. It felt like she was flying! The urgent feeling that had started to rise within her last night seemed to be somewhat appeased with that ride, and yet it also was like it was becoming more desperate—a compelling longing—to be totally satisfied.

"Little Rose, I want to be able to give you this feeling for every day of your life. I want you to be free! I want

you to be free from all your fears and worries,” Prince Anointed One whispered into Fearful’s ear and then let her just revel in the moment.

After they had been riding that way for several minutes, Prince Anointed One’s gentle voice broke through her rapture. “Okay, now open your eyes. We’re at the place I wanted to show you. See that shepherd? What do you suppose his feelings are for his sheep?” Fearful found that they were no longer in the desert but in a luscious meadow with green grass and a laughing brook flowing through it. By the brook stood an old, knobby tree and under it sat a shepherd playing a harp. His flock was spread out in front of him.

Fearful finally answered with a smile, “He loves his sheep dearly and would protect them with his life.”

“Excellent observation,” Prince Anointed One said as He turned the horse around. “That is how I feel about you, Little Rose. That is why I’m kind and became a servant. I love you!”

Fearful’s heart was pounding at these words. She, Fearful, being loved in such a way, was that even possible? She could hardly believe what she was hearing! How could this be? How could a prince love her, a servant without a drop of royal blood?

They now were going slower, and Fearful looked around. They were going through a canyon with mountains rising sharply on both sides of them. When they came out on the other side, the desert spread out

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before them, flat and practically featureless. Here and there was an occasional cactus or a rock with a lizard sunbathing. The sky was the only thing with vibrant color. It was so blue and beautiful.

Everything was so safe-feeling that Fearful began to doze. As she entered the dream world she saw Prideful, Boastful, and Scaredycat. She called to them saying, "I've so much to tell you about Prince Anointed One... what is your problem?" Fearful realized her friends were ignoring her. They didn't even look up from their weeding. Why? They had always listened. They had always lent a friendly ear. Fearful was confused and hurt by the cold silence.

"Traitor, how dare you leave the master who clothed and fed you! You ingrate!" Fearful looked at Prideful in total confusion.

"Prideful, you know as well as anyone else that Prince Iniquity is a hateful, cruel tyrant!"

All of a sudden her friends, Granny, and all the slaves in Prince Iniquity's garden started surrounding her and shouting, "Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!!!" A sharp pain of hurt and loneliness struck her square in the chest. Fearful looked down, tears welling up in her eyes. Why were all her friends going against her? It was like they thought she was the hateful, cruel person.

A groan from the depths of her being left her lips for she was totally crushed! Her own friends, whom she loved, had turned against her. "No!" she wailed as her

heart shattered. She wanted that overwhelming sense of everything being all right and of being loved, but she also wanted the feeling of belonging with friends. Tears ran down her tanned cheeks as she looked around at the angry crowd, searching for just one friendly face.

Fearful found Scaredycat standing quietly off to the side looking on sadly. Fearful reached out her hand pleadingly, but Scaredycat just turned away and went back to work. This act was even worse than the angry chanting. She covered her tear-streaked face with her hands. It was too much!

“Little Rose, Little Rose, wake up!” Prince Anointed One’s voice broke into her dream.

Fearful woke up sobbing. “Oh, is that really how my friends will react toward me if I decide to make You my master?”

Prince Anointed One looked down at her sadly. “I’m afraid so.”

“Even those closest to me?”

“Yes, they will treat you horribly.” Prince Anointed One seemed to know what she had been dreaming. He placed a comforting hand on her shoulder.

“Can’t any of them see how terrible Prince Iniquity is?”

“Some of them can, but are too scared to see that there’s a way out. Others are just so blind that they wouldn’t know what wickedness was if it were to box them in the ears.”

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Prince Anointed One set Fearful down on her own two feet. They were back at camp, and it was way past dark. As Fearful stood there, she noticed a delicious smell hanging in the air and the crackling of the fire.

"Good. You're back in time for the evening meal," Ambassador of Trust said, stirring whatever was in the pot.

At the mention of food, Fearful for the first time since breakfast noticed that her stomach was grumbling loudly. She hadn't eaten since then. Even though she was famished, she couldn't enjoy the food. She was wrapped deeply in thought about her dream. Those angry faces of Prideful and Boastful, that sad and hurt face of Scaredycat's, were seared into her mind. She couldn't block out the sound of their voices... Did she really want to risk that?

Later that night when her father was keeping watch, Fearful went out to sit with him. She had tossed and turned but was unable to stop thinking about her nightmare. She needed his comforting presence.

"Do you know how much you remind me of your mother? Your mother used to always get that faraway look when she didn't want to think about something, but it wouldn't leave her in peace. What's on your mind?" Ambassador of Trust whispered, starting to rub Fearful's back.

"What's 'peace'?"

"It is the feeling that everything will be all right even

though it doesn't look that way."

Fearful looked up at the pitch-black sky for a moment, wondering how to tell her thoughts. "I had a dream while riding back here. I was back in Prince Iniquity's garden telling the girls how wonderful Prince Anointed One was when all of a sudden, they all started yelling 'traitor' at me. Scaredycat wasn't yelling. She simply gave me a cold shoulder, which was even worse. I don't want to lose my friends. They were the only ones who loved and understood me other than Grandpa, Grandma, and Mother, but they're dead now. Yet, I can't express the love I feel flowing from Prince Anointed One. Is that real or are my emotions tricking me into feeling something that's not there?"

Fearful looked over at her father, longing for an answer. She wanted something that would put her heart to ease. Did she want to risk losing her friendships for one she wasn't sure was real? Was He lying to her? Deep down inside she hoped not. Yet, she was scared to find out. What if deep down lurked someone worse than Prince Iniquity? Was that even possible? If it was, Fearful didn't want to be the one to find out.

"Little Rose, I could tell you all I know, and the sinful nature in you would keep making excuses. You're going to have to see this one through by yourself, but I'll be there by your side."

Fearful arose and went to bed, disappointed. How was she supposed to find the answers she wanted on

her own? That seemed to be impossible! She fell asleep quickly but was haunted with evil nightmares.

Fearful woke up screaming, drenched in a cold sweat. It was so dark she couldn't see her hand in front of her face, but she could feel herself quaking. A tangible sense of evil filled the tent. It was almost like she could feel Prince Iniquity breathing down her back. Yet, she could hear her father snoring peacefully beside her.

"Little Rose, come out here," Prince Anointed One called quietly from the fire ring.

Fearful got up, slowly slipping on her sandals. She pushed the flap away and walked out into the flickering light of the fire. "Yes, Sir?" Fearful asked, standing across the fire from Him.

"Come, sit by My side," Prince Anointed One motioned.

Fearful sat down on the edge of the log, somewhat scared of what He wanted.

"Now what was that scream of terror in the dark?"

Frightened of telling the truth, she answered with a different question. "What happens after death?"

"It depends on who your master is. If you belong to King Holy One, you go into Our palace and all discomforts disappear, and you no longer have worldly worries. Your trouble will be worse than you have ever imagined or experienced if Prince Iniquity is your master. Now, what was your dream?" Fearful looked into Prince Anointed One's brown eyes, surprised.

“Uhhh...” Fearful hesitated. She decided to try to trust Him in this. So, she began to tell the whole horrid dream. She felt better after telling the nightmare and then felt an assuring hand on her shoulder.

Fearful looked up, and to her surprise the sun was starting to peek its head out from the edge of the world, giving some of its brilliant light. It was the most beautiful sunrise Fearful had ever seen, with vivid purples, golds, and blues. It took her breath away.

“Come on. I bet you can’t catch me!” With that Prince Anointed One gently pushed her off the log and started running. Fearful, who was shocked, stood dumbfounded, but then she started after Him with a smile.

Prince Anointed One and Fearful raced around after each other laughing for a long time. After about half an hour, they tumbled to the ground beside each other. They were laughing so hard they could hardly breathe. Once He got His breath, Prince Anointed One said they probably should get to work. They both went their separate ways: Fearful to start breakfast and Prince Anointed One to chop more wood. Fearful went about mixing the porridge with a song in her heart, a smile on her face, and a lilt in her step.

“What are you doing, Father?” Fearful asked, looking down at the pieces of paper with the strange black marks that people called writing. Ambassador of Trust had skipped breakfast and lunch to pore over these

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papers. It was now the middle of the afternoon and still he had not moved from the log he sat on.

"When King Holy One sent me on this mission, He gave me these papers. Supposedly there is a sorcerer in the village that King Holy One is sending me to. This sorcerer is the cause of the village's problems. King Holy One told me it is imperative that I get to know this man's strengths and weakness."

Fearful nodded. "This village is between Land of Promise and Land of Enslavement, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is right."

"Then why did you come with Prince Anointed One to come get me? Wouldn't you have passed right by it on the way to the Land of Enslavement?"

Ambassador of Trust bit his lip thoughtfully for a few seconds as he looked up at Fearful, apparently slightly ashamed of himself. "To explain that, we have to look back into history. You know that in the beginning of time all humans were under King Holy One's reign. Then the first man and woman sold themselves and all their children to Prince Iniquity and that caused a fraction between us and King Holy One. So now whenever someone wants to go back over to King Holy One, the cost that has to be paid is the shedding of blood. Each year each of King Holy One's servants has to give Him their sacrifices. After that is done, they have to go with one of King Holy One's representatives to announce to Prince Iniquity that they are at peace with King Holy

One for another year. That way he cannot try to steal them back. Last week I presented my sacrifices to King Holy One, but I couldn't find a representative to go with me to Prince Iniquity. They were all busy with King Holy One's other servants. Prince Anointed One said He would represent me since He was coming to get you anyway." Fearful nodded her head again, accepting the answer he gave.

"Little Rose, I need you to start filling those flasks with water for our journey," Prince Anointed One said, coming up to where Fearful was talking with her father. He pointed to a bundle of flasks lying beside the other supplies.

"Yes, Sir." Fearful then picked up as many empty flasks as she could carry and jogged off towards the oasis. As she neared the oasis, she couldn't help but think of going for a dip in the refreshing cool water. It was unusually hot even for the desert. Sweat was slowly dripping down her face and body, soaking her dress.

The quiet bubbling of the water and the sight of green everywhere met Fearful as she entered the oasis. The high-noon heat didn't seem to have any effect on this place. There was a gentle, fresh breeze playing in the trees but that didn't seem to leave the oasis. Fearful took a deep breath, enjoying the pungent smell of the oasis flowers that filled her nose.

She knelt down and looked into the crystal pool. It was so clear and deep. As she filled the flasks with

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water, she wondered how such a deep and cool pool had started in such a hot place or how such a fresh, crisp breeze could exist in this oasis but nowhere else. Fearful thought to herself, *Could it be the power of the King?*

The breeze helped a lot to cool her off...but still oh how she wished she could step into the pool if only for a second. It looked so inviting. Still, she had work to do, and she didn't want to make Prince Anointed One upset. So, she resisted the strong urge to jump in and instead turned her mind back to her work.

After hiding the filled flasks under the bushes to keep them cool, Fearful went back to camp for more flasks. They were going to need lots of flasks of water, for their journey would be long and the oases they came upon would be few and far apart. Little did Fearful know as she walked back toward the camp the danger she would soon meet.

CHAPTER 4

“**F**earful, what are you doing out here?” Fearful’s stomach went into a thousand knots for there was no voice quite like this one. She could have recognized it anywhere. It was so awful that it was a voice that would be seared in one’s memory forever after hearing it just once.

“Yes, Sir.” Fearful looked up at Prince Iniquity with fear in her eyes.

“I didn’t tell you to look at me!”

Fearful dropped her head and stepped back. A vain attempt to miss the blow she knew was coming. It didn’t help any. He got her good and hard on the ear. She bit her lip to keep from crying. Both ears were ringing from the blow.

“I asked you a question. Now answer me!!”

“I came out here to see if I wanted to serve the Prince and His Father, King Holy One,” Fearful murmured.

“You stupid girl, come back with me. If you don’t,

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you shall be flogged until you don't even remember those names! Maybe that's a good idea anyway." Prince Iniquity grabbed for Fearful, but she jumped out of the way.

"Don't touch me or I'll scream, and Prince Anointed One will hear!" Fearful was really scared now, but she couldn't let this evil being know that she was scared.

"Oh, you poor deluded girl, He doesn't care for you. Come back with me for I have always taken care of you." Prince Iniquity's words came out like honey, sounding quite different from the last thing he had said. "Come back, and I will feed and clothe you better than He ever would. He doesn't care. Why do you think He sent your mother back to me? Because He didn't care about her. I'm sorry for the way..."

"No! Don't you speak another word to me! You don't care! If you did, you wouldn't have killed my mother! You're not sorry for anything you do! The only thing you care about is control and your own well-being!" Fearful exclaimed, a new courage rising within her; otherwise she would never have even dared utter those words.

"Oh, you poor girl, that is not true. Your mother got what she deserved for running away. She was a confused woman. Please don't blame me for something I had no choice but to do." Prince Iniquity reached out a hand as if to caress Fearful's cheek.

"Don't you dare touch me. I know what you're trying to do. You want to put me under a spell like you've

done to dozens of others who have tried to escape.”

With that, Fearful dodged around him and ran for the camp. She didn’t dare look back to see if that monster was following her. She just kept running.

Once back in the camp, she felt safe enough to look behind her. Thankfully the only thing she saw was the open desert and the oasis. That evil one had left, but she was sure it wouldn’t be for long.

She sat down on the log by the fire pit and covered her face. She stayed there for several minutes catching her breath. Finally, she calmed down some and picked up a couple flasks that needed mending.

There was something she didn’t understand. She had felt somewhat scared while standing in front of Prince Iniquity, and yet she had felt a boldness she had never experienced before. The hope she had started to feel that first night on her journey had risen up within her. It had been as if Prince Anointed One were right behind her giving her the strength to say those words and then run away. She would never have run away otherwise. She would have been too scared to run away. No slave ran from Prince Iniquity without being dismissed unless they wanted to be the victim of his horrible torture.

What she had said, though, had also made her think. Prince Iniquity didn’t care. He was just a hateful, cruel master. Something she guessed she had always known, and yet would never have thought about unless she

had said that.

After she had calmed down completely, she grabbed two pails and hurried off to get water for the evening meal. She didn't want to have to be accountable to two hungry stomachs. It only took her a minute to get the water. As she was heading back she saw someone running towards her. As he got closer, she saw that it was Tempting, the gatekeeper boy. She had met him as a little girl, when she used to go to the market with her mother. Her heart jumped for joy for he was a great friend. It was good to see his face again.

"What's up, and what are you doing here?"

"Greetings, Fearful, there's a beautiful spot just a mile from here to the east that I want to show you."

"That's back in the Land of Enslavement. What if Prince Iniquity catches us?"

"That evil one will never catch us. Come on. You have to see it when the sun is almost setting or you don't get the full impact of the place. Come, please see it. It's really special, and you're the only one I want to show it to." He took her hand in both of his own, filling her with a sweet desire.

Fearful couldn't say no when Tempting asked her to do something. He had a way of sweet-talking girls. She and the other girls had started calling him Honey-tongue because he made everything sound so tempting and intriguing. "Come on. We will be back in plenty of time for you to prepare the evening meal." So Fearful

dropped all reason and decided to go with him.

Fearful set the buckets of water in the shade of the bushes and ran off with Tempting. As they ran, Fearful began to share her experiences in the desert with him. Fearful was so caught up in her story that she didn't realize until later that their direction wasn't quite right. If they were supposed to be going east, shouldn't they be heading more to the left?

After only a few minutes of pondering this, Fearful's eyes were opened to what was going on. Only this time it was way too late! "Well, Fearful, let's see you scream for help now," Prince Iniquity sneered.

Prince Iniquity with his guards was coming towards her, claws curled and ready for the strike. Fearful looked to Tempting for help, still not fully realizing that she had been betrayed. The look of wild terror on her face was mirrored in his blank eyes.

"Come on, Tempting. Let's go!"

"Why? This is the place I wanted to show you."

The full realization finally dawned on Fearful, and she felt like giving Tempting a bloody nose! There was no time for that, though. She had to get away fast! She whirled around like a rabbit finding its enemy in front of it. She hadn't even gotten all the way around when the guards' hands of steel clasped her bare arms.

"You can't say I didn't warn you," Prince Iniquity said as he stroked her cheek.

Her whole body shook as a cold shiver went down

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her spine at his touch. She struggled to get free, but the guard's strength was far superior to her young girl's frame.

"Tie her up good. For in just those few days, that One has made her forget her place." The two men started dragging her off.

"LET ME GO!" Fearful kept struggling. Her heart started racing, and she began to gasp for breath panicking. She then remembered: "I will never be too far away that you can't call for help, wherever you are."

"Prince Anointed One, help me!"

"Trust Me," came Prince Anointed One's whispering voice on the wind.

Fearful was so scared, and having lost the courage from earlier, she was having trouble obeying the whisper. Her stomach felt like it was one big knot being pulled from a thousand different directions. How could she trust Prince Anointed One when she was ready to faint, and He wasn't even there?!

The two men tied her wrists in front of her so tightly tears welled up in her eyes. They set her on a horse in front of one of the men before starting out at a fast gallop. Oh, how different this ride was from the one she took yesterday. The strong, loving back was replaced by a cold, grim back that gave no comfort whatsoever.

The hours dragged by with nothing but desert around them. Then they finally came to gardens with slaves working as hard as they could, only getting up as

Prince Iniquity passed by. Every time they passed a garden, Fearful wished the ground would swallow her up. Those long stares and whispers were like a thousand arrows being shot in her direction.

They finally came to the capital city, and people started gathering around them. "Sound the horn for the gardeners to come into the city. I want them all to see what happens to traitors!" Prince Iniquity shouted, jumping off his horse. The herald took his place beside the watch keeper in the tower, lifting the horn to his lips. A low, long blast went out through the fields calling all slaves to come in.

It only took a few minutes for the gardeners to come in. Fearful was roughly pushed up onto a platform that had a cross set up on it and stood there for all mocking eyes to see. Tears trickled down Fearful's tanned cheeks and fell onto her dusty feet.

"Did I not make myself clear last time that I will not tolerate betrayal! I must not have, because this stupid girl did just that! Mark my word. I warned, and I pleaded with her like a compassionate master, but what thanks did I get? A slap in the face! I tell you for her disrespect she shall be rightfully punished! The correct punishment is DEATH!"

With that, someone behind her started whipping her. "Stop!" Someone yelled from the crowd. Fearful looked up, and her face lit up with a smile. He had come! He was actually here! He looked like a gardener.

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He had chopped off His shoulder-length brown curls. He wore the rough potato-sack pants and an extremely realistic mask. His bare chest was streaked with mud. He looked as though He had been whipped. In fact, if it hadn't been for the love in His eyes, she would not have recognized Him, but there was no way to disguise that love.

He started to peel off the mask as He made His way through the crowd. Once His face was unveiled, a hum of murmuring voices arose from the crowd, and Fearful heard the guards by her side start to clear their throats uncomfortably. What surprised her most was that out of the corner of her eye she saw Prince Iniquity trembling.

"Prince Anointed One, You of all people should know that a slave who runs away is worthy of death!"

Fearful looked up out of the corner of her eye to see Prince Iniquity had fear in his eyes. This was something she had never seen before.

"True, but I also know that if someone is willing to take their place, they are vindicated." Prince Anointed One made His way up to the platform.

"You want to give **Your life** for this runaway wretch?" Prince Iniquity scoffed.

"You know what I see when I look at her?" Prince Anointed One was now on the platform and had both hands on Fearful's shoulders. Her tense shoulders relaxed, and the fear that she had felt all afternoon

melted away.

"I see a gorgeous princess who is lost and can't find her way home to Me. So, with that, I can truthfully say I'll take her place and anyone else who asks Me to."

An evil grin came onto Prince Iniquity's face. Fearful knew that could not mean anything good. "Free the girl if His Highness wants to give His life for her!"

Fearful tensed again at the evil look he gave her, which said, "You're mine now!"

She looked up into Prince Anointed One's eyes with a question in hers. He took her face in His hands and smiled. "Trust Me."

She bit her lip uncertainly. How could she be free from Prince Iniquity if Prince Anointed One was dead? She would be watched even closer than before. Yet, Prince Anointed One had come after her, asking her to trust Him. She hesitantly nodded her head.

Fearful ran down the steps of the platform to her father, who must have come with Prince Anointed One. He too was disguised as a gardener, but she recognized him by the birthmark on his right hand. She put her arms around his waist. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders. She looked up to see Prince Anointed One kneeling up on the platform. The men were whipping Him as hard as they could.

After what seemed like hours but was probably no more than a few minutes, Prince Iniquity held up his hand, signaling the guards to stop. "I think this man

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ought to have a proper thank-you for saving one of my best gardeners.” With that they pulled a robe over Prince Anointed One’s head, they jammed a crown of thorns on His head and placed a scepter in His hand. Once they had Him in kingly apparel, they started to mock Him. Well-aimed, spoiled vegetables, punches, and kicks started flying at Him.

A cry escaped Fearful’s lips as tears ran down her cheeks. How could they be so cruel? What had He done to them?! Ambassador of Trust tightened his grasp around her, and when she looked up, quiet tears were rolling down his cheeks too.

“Now nail Him to the cross!”

“NO!!!!” Fearful sobbed. A sharp pain squeezed her heart as though a noose was being tightened around it. She buried her face in her father’s arm.

Something impelled her to look up. The face she looked into was streaked with blood from the thorns and tears of pain. Yet, that sparkle of love in His eyes that she had learned to depend on was sparkling brighter than ever. “I love you,” He mouthed as Prince Iniquity’s men roughly nailed Him to the cross.

She couldn’t watch any more. She had to leave! She ripped herself away from Ambassador of Trust and pushed her way through the crowd. How could there be a love so strong that it would die for another? She didn’t understand!

CHAPTER 5

Fearful woke up to someone shaking her. She was cold and stiff from sleeping on the cave floor. She had gone to the cave that was just beyond the gardens and had cried herself to sleep there. “Prince Anointed One!”

“Shush, child. He’s dead, and you won’t do yourself any good by alerting the guards,” Granny whispered in a husky voice.

“I must see Him!” Fearful said, scrambling to her feet. Granny looked reluctant but finally signaled for Fearful to follow her.

At the back of the cave there were two outlets; the left one had a creek running through it. The right one had a big stone rolled in front of the low opening, but Fearful and Granny managed to roll it away. They hadn’t walked far when Granny’s lamp shone on pockets in the walls. Fearful’s stomach turned at the sight of dead bodies of all sizes. They came upon one that was

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wrapped in a tattered but clean cloth, unlike the others, with only His face showing. A sob escaped Fearful's mouth as she knelt beside the ripped-up corpse of Prince Anointed One.

"We need to be going now, Fearful!" Granny's voice squeaked with worry a couple of seconds later as she pulled Fearful back to her feet. Fearful dragged herself after Granny, tears staining her face. She had never felt so alone!

They hurried out of the tunnel and out of the cave. They squinted as they came out of the cave, almost blinded by the bright morning sun. They shielded their eyes, but it didn't do much good as the sun was determined to show off all its glory and didn't want anyone missing it.

It didn't take them long to go down the hill to the garden. Once there, Granny shoved a piece of dry old bread in Fearful's hand. "Take this and get to work weeding. Don't you dare give any indication of leaving. I'd like to keep you alive at least until your next birthday," Granny whispered dryly and then hurried off. (She was actually really fit for someone who was ninety-eight.)

"Oh Fearful, I was so worried about you last night. Where did you go?" Scaredycat murmured, wrapping Fearful in a quick hug as she took her place beside Scaredycat.

"I'm fine," Fearful mumbled. The picture of the

dead Prince Anointed One still haunted her.

“What was it like being in the service of Prince Anointed One?”

Fearful looked over at Scaredycat’s shy but curious face and smiled for the first time since yesterday morning. “Simply put, amazing!” With that, Fearful told Scaredycat all about it, not leaving a detail out.

On the day she had started her journey with Prince Anointed One, she had begun to feel hopeful. Now as she talked with Scaredycat, that overwhelming sense of hope came back stronger than ever. She didn’t understand it because she was still a slave of Prince Iniquity. Yet, she felt hopeful. What did it mean? Prince Anointed One was dead. She had seen Him with her own eyes. Sure, He had been hard to recognize, but she had known it was Him. Still, the hope tenaciously lived on! The feeling was as real as the summer heat that hung in the air.

Both Prideful and Boastful scoffed at Fearful once she was done. Neither one of them sounded like they really believed a word she had just said. They both thought they were too good to need to be saved, but Scaredycat listened intently, taking in every word Fearful said.

“Are you going to finish that bread?” Scaredycat asked shyly once Fearful was done telling her story.

“No, have it.” Fearful watched with curiosity as the last half of her bread disappeared in the blink of an eye. She had also noticed as she had been sharing her story

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that Scaredycat had been sneakily popping a bean or two in her mouth when no one was looking. That was really strange! Scaredycat usually had a small appetite and was fine with their poor rations. Yet, here she was acting like a starved dog.

"I struck the Overseer. As punishment, they stopped giving me my rations," Scaredycat explained.

"You struck the Overseer?!" Fearful looked at her tall black friend unbelievably. Yes, her friend was probably strong enough to do that, but Scaredycat wasn't given that name because it was pretty!

"Yeah, the idiot! She can't see a good thing that sits right in front of her nose. If it were me..." Prideful went on a tirade, but the others simply ignored her.

"Yeah, I don't know what got into me. All of a sudden, this anger at his lack of mercy welled up within me, and I decked him." Fearful was shocked to see a sheepish grin plastered on Scaredycat's face.

Fearful made sure the others weren't looking and then gave Scaredycat two thumbs up. After that, they both fell silent, and their hands started flying even faster over the beans. They worked side by side in silence, both thinking about Fearful's adventures and the lesson each one taught. Fearful was weighing the cost carefully. She noticed that Scaredycat's eyes had taken on that far-off, glazed look they always got when she was deep in thought.

At lunchtime, as Fearful and Scaredycat sat close

together eating Fearful's piece of stale bread and old vegetables, a guard came to the gardens with a chained, bare-chested slave. "Work him hard! He is to have no rations for three days." The guard threw the man at Overseer's feet. Taking a close look at the slave, Fearful realized with shock that it was Prince Iniquity's top official. She gasped to see him being roughly pushed toward the garden.

"Come on. We should get back to work." Fearful swallowed her last bite and turned around to her row of beans.

Scaredycat whispered so only Fearful could hear, "Thanks for the food, Fearful."

The high official was assigned to the row ahead of them. Noticing that his back was covered with blood, she cringed at the sight of it, trying not to look again. Yet, her heart went out to this man, whose name was Noble Conceited, who for some odd reason was lowered to a place of dishonor.

Now the sun was starting its trip down to the west and was beating down on the slaves' bent backs. Fearful wiped the sweat from her forehead and took the dipper of cool water from the young water girl gratefully. It was so cool and refreshing that she wished she could splash some on her face. Instead, nodding her thanks, she went back to work, for she knew she would get both herself and the girl in trouble.

"Girl! Don't give him any water! He's being punished."

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Fearful looked up to see that Overseer was talking about Noble Conceited. What were they trying to do, make him so weak that he would die? Surely, whatever he had done wasn't worth all this pain and disgrace.

At this, the picture of her and Prince Anointed One watching the shepherd came to her mind, and how He had told her how much He loved her. Surely He wouldn't have been so harsh on anybody, no matter what they did. Sure, He was just and would give punishment if there wasn't repentance. However, mercy would be given to those who asked for forgiveness. She had always known Prince Iniquity was cruel, but after knowing Prince Anointed One, she saw Prince Iniquity's cruelty in a new light.

Well, she couldn't let this man die of thirst, no matter how cruel he had been before. It just wasn't right! If she ever wanted to become a servant for King Holy One, she'd better start acting like it. With that conclusion, Fearful picked up a bucket and started out for the creek which was just a short way off.

"Where do you think you're going?" Overseer blocked her way.

"Some of the beans are too small to pick. The plants are parched. The beans won't grow if they don't have water."

"Fine, but hurry up about it." Overseer pushed her with his big, dirty hands toward the creek.

Fearful ran to the creek to fill her bucket. While it

was filling, she stuck her hand into a hole in the side of the creek bank that had been hollowed out by the water. In there, she found the clay cup she was looking for. She had made it and three like it to play with when she was younger, but now it was the perfect thing to secretly give Noble Conceited water in. She gently set it in the bottom of the bucket of water, hurrying back to the gardens.

Back at the gardens, she brought the clay cup up brimming with the cool spring water and slid it between the plants so it was right beside Noble Conceited. “Psst.” He looked at her, and she nodded to the cup. He looked to make sure Overseer wasn’t looking and then gulped the water down. Head hung as though embarrassed, he slid the cup back. Fearful could see he was thankful.

The rest of the day passed—long and uneventful—and at the end of the day all the slaves headed home, where their rations waited for them. All of them were tired and ready to be home. It had been a long day that had been hotter than usual.

All four girls were tired and so after eating went straight to bed. All except Fearful fell asleep right away. She couldn’t go to sleep for she had a plan and couldn’t trust herself to even close her eyes until it was done. Knowing that infection would set in to Noble Conceited’s wounds if they were not attended, Fearful had determined that she wanted to help him. Her heart had been moved for compassion for the first time. Her

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grandmother had died six years ago, and yet, she could hear the dear woman's gravelly voice still, "Little Rose, there is a king who hates to see people suffering. He hurts to see the slaves being whipped. He has placed a small portion of that pain in my heart as well." She felt her grandmother's maimed hand on her shoulder still. "Why would you want someone else's pain, Nanna? You have enough of your own!" Her grandmother's sad smile confessed that this was true. "That, my child, I cannot explain. The best I can do is to pray that someday you will understand."

Now, remembering the whole thing, Fearful took a deep, long breath. She was going to overcome her fear and help a man who was being punished! For, now, she understood.

She waited until she was certain everyone was asleep and then very quietly whispered to Scaredycat to wake up.

"What's going on?"

"Shush! Hurry! Put on your sandals." Fearful had already started to wind the leather laces of one sandal around her ankle. "I need your help with something, so be quick."

Once they were done getting sandals on, Fearful got two of their soup bowls and a pail and handed them to Scaredycat. Now ready, the two quietly sneaked out the door and headed away from the gardens, the slave huts, and the city. The moon shone and illuminated the

whole land, making it easy to see but also making them easy targets.

At every rustling leaf, every distant hyena call, Fearful froze, holding her breath to listen better. There were times she was sure she heard someone calling after them, but every time it was just her imagination. By the time they got to the cave, her hands were trembling, and her nerves were so taut she didn't know how much longer she could take this.

"King Holy One, I need Your help," Fearful murmured. She wasn't sure if what Prince Anointed One had said to her applied also to the King, but it was worth a try. Once those words left her mouth, she felt a small drop of courage in the pit of her stomach. She was still somewhat scared. However, the strong urge to run back to the shack and stay out of harm's way had left.

Fearful led the way through to the back, following the sound of the creek slowly making its way through the cave. Once there, she felt along the left entrance wall for the lamp that she knew always hung on a peg. She lit it with one of the matches she had brought along. Then the two started down through the tunnel, while Fearful looked for something on the wall.

The dim light threw long, eerie shadows on the walls as the flame played inside the soot-smudged globe of the lamp. The creek whispered as it ambled along. Fearful tried not to think of the one dead body

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that lay on the other side of the right wall. She didn't do a very good job of pushing the thought of the corpse out of her mind, and she began to wonder if she ever would get out of Prince Iniquity's grasp.

"What time do you think it is?" Fearful looked over her shoulder at Scaredycat, who had sweat pouring down her face even though it wasn't that hot in the cave.

"Somewhere around eight," Scaredycat whispered.

"Good. Don't worry, we're almost there."

"What are we doing?"

"My grandparents used to make a medicine that they would put on whipped slaves' backs to stop infection. There's a spot in the wall that's full of the minerals that make the medicine strong. My grandparents were servants of King Holy One, and He sent them to the Land of Enslavement to minister to the people here and try to lead them to Him. I am going to make the medicine for Noble Conceited."

"Fearful, do you know what will happen if we're caught....?!" Fearful slapped a hand over Scaredycat's mouth because she had started screaming. Fearful put a finger to her own mouth before releasing Scaredycat's mouth.

"Yes, I do, but if we don't we're worse than even Prince Iniquity. I'm nervous too. There's one thing I know for sure, though, if I ever want to be free of that evil one someday, I have to stop letting him control me with fear."

“Why aren’t you scared stiff?”

“Because I know that I have King Holy One to protect me.”

Scaredycat looked thoughtful at this statement.

“Now pick as many of those big green berries as you can find. We’ll feed them to Noble Conceited. He’s probably starving.” Fearful pointed to a bush that was profuse with the green berries that were indigenous only to the caves in Land of Enslavement.

Fearful had found the big black X on the wall that she’d been looking for. While Scaredycat picked berries from the big bush that grew from a crack in the rock floor, Fearful stepped up into the foot hole that was there. She scooped her bowl in the big crack in the ceiling where she knew there was a pool of a dustlike substance. After this, she got her hand wet and let it drip into the bowl; she did this several times, stirring it as the water dripped in.

By the time Scaredycat had a bowlful of berries, Fearful had the medicine at just the right texture. They filled the pail with the crystal-clear water and then hurried back through the tunnel. Once back at the entrance, they blew out the lantern and put it back on its peg. They then hastened as fast as they could with the bucket of water, bowl of medicine, and bowl of berries out of the cave. They hoped with all their beings that it wasn’t ten yet because that was when a guard checked the huts.

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They hurried across the moonlit field that separated the cave from the gardens and the slave shacks, trying to stay in what shadows they could. The summer's heat still clung in the air. Fearful wiped the sweat from her forehead, not sure if it was the stuffy climate or her nervousness.

Every muscle inside her was as taut as a bow string as she crouched behind their last hiding place. After that, there was ten yards of clear space until they came to the shacks. She couldn't wait until this whole ordeal was done. Never in her life had she felt so tense.

"Come on. Let's go. The coast is clear."

"I thought I saw something move," Fearful whispered. She knew it was better to be cautious than a brave fool and go out without making sure the coast was truly clear. Some clouds were covering the moon. The castle and shacks were just dark squares. Fearful waited a long time and then decided it was safe.

She darted across the space between the hiding place and the nearest shack and then crept along the shacks until she came to the one closest to the castle. Fearful gently knocked on the door, hoping no one but Noble Conceited would wake up. The door was opened right away and a tall dark form filled the doorway. "We came to help you. Can we come in?" The form hung his head in disgrace and started to shut the door. "No, wait, please. Don't let pride get in the way. I have some medicine to put on your back to stop the pain and

infection.” Fearful grabbed the door to stop him from closing it.

Noble Conceited paused a second before opening the door wider to let them in. It was pitch-black inside the shack with the door closed. “Great, how am I supposed to work in this?” Fearful murmured. She had just finished saying this when she heard ***scratch, hissss*** and then there was a spark of light. Scaredycat was lighting a candle. Fearful gave her friend a thumbs-up and got right to work on Noble Conceited’s back. He didn’t say a thing the whole time. Fearful wondered if he still was being prideful or was just too embarrassed to speak.

An anger rose up within her as she looked at his back in the flickering light. It was all torn up. There wasn’t a spot of his back that wasn’t caked in blood. Prince Anointed One would never have done something so cruel, no matter what! Why was she staying in the Land of Enslavement with such a cruel master?

Noble Conceited cringed. Fearful looked down to see what she’d done. She discovered she was rubbing too hard, causing him pain. With this, she realized why she stayed. She was scared of being caught again and having a back like his. For if she was caught once again going against Prince Iniquity’s will, she surely would be whipped, if not worse. Was it really better being a slave and not risking getting hurt, or risking it and having the chance of being free?

There was a fierce war going on inside Fearful’s

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heart! At the moment, it seemed the side to stay was winning. Oh! She was torn in two wretched parts! One part yearned to be free and have that love Prince Anointed One had given her. This part was desperately clawing for ground. The other was terrified of the of risk getting hurt. This part kept pushing the longing for freedom down.

Fearful quickly finished putting on the medicine and then wiped her slippery hands on her rough potato-sack dress. She addressed him, "Here are some berries and water for you, Sir. They'll give you back your strength. Is there anything else we can do for you?"

Noble Conceited looked at her with eyes filled with shame and uncertainty but after a second slowly nodded his head. He tore a piece of old cloth from the mattress and grabbed a piece of coal from the coal box and proceeded to write on it. He handed her the piece of old cloth with writing on it, but Fearful couldn't read and so had no idea what it said. A look of tender love crossed his face as he handed it to her. At the sight of this look, Fearful guessed its meaning. "I will make sure it gets to your wife."

With that, Scaredycat blew out the candle, and the two girls left his shack. The moon was still behind the clouds, so they didn't worry so much about being caught. It only took a second to get back to their shack, and once inside the two fell into their cot without taking their sandals off. "How on earth do you plan on

getting close to the noble lady?" Scaredycat asked in an incredulous whisper.

"I don't know, but we'll think of something," Fearful whispered back with an exhausted sigh. She had got up around five and it probably was ten by now. Even though she was so tired and every muscle hurt, she didn't fall asleep until an hour later.

When she did fall asleep, her dream world was haunted with nightmares. The war that had started inside her followed her into her dreams. In her dreams, she was running through the desert, trying to find Prince Anointed One. Then Prince Iniquity's guards caught her. She was whipped to an inch of her life. Next, she was thrown into a dark, slimy dungeon. Rats and snakes were crawling all over her and biting her. Ghostly ghosts cackled at her, *"Why would Prince Anointed One want you? You are dirty! You are broken! You are just a worthless slave!"* **Yet**, even in her nightmares, Prince Anointed One's voice always seemed to come dancing into her dreams as on the wind, calling her to come to Him.

"Oh no, don't look now, but our nightmare is coming," Scaredycat whispered the next morning. Fearful lifted her head ever so slightly, and sure enough there came the prince, but what she noticed first was the very pregnant young lady at his side. Fearful's eyes got big with excitement as she recognized Lady Uncertainty, Noble Conceited's wife. She had spent the entire

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morning of weeding beans trying to think of a plan to get close to Lady Uncertainty. The girl couldn't have been more than two years older than Fearful, but being better fed looked older.

"I'm going to give the message to the Lady. Give me those two empty buckets."

"Are you crazy?! Are you trying to get killed?!"

"This is more than likely the only chance I'll get. Now give them to me."

Fearful tried not to look at Scaredycat's terrified brown eyes as she took the buckets from her. Fearful was anxious enough as it was. She didn't need someone else being scared. She had made a promise. So lifting her head high with determination, she marched off to get some water. She tried to ignore the big knot that had lodged itself in her throat and her heart that was hammering in her chest. It was one thing to look determined and a different thing entirely to feel determined. Her knuckles were going white from her tight grasp on the rough wooden handles. Still, she desperately tried to cling to the courage she felt that King Holy One had given her the night before.

When Fearful came back from the creek with buckets brimming with water, Lady Uncertainty was off her horse and was standing at the edge of the garden. It was just as Fearful had hoped. She sighed with relief that her plan was starting out well. Taking a deep breath, she headed right towards Lady Uncertainty. /

hope all this is worth it! Once she was a foot away, she made herself stumble and fling her buckets of water. Just as she had anticipated, the water went all over the Lady's exquisitely embroidered gown.

"You clumsy, stupid fool! You just wasted water and made the Lady all wet!" Overseer yelled, coming at Fearful with his whip.

"Don't you lay even one strike of that whip on her! It was an accident, and I was fool enough to get off of my horse," Lady Uncertainty's high, shrill voice pleaded.

"Milady, I'm so very sorry! Here, let me wipe you off." With that, Fearful took the letter from her pocket and started wiping the water off a bit.

"Thank you, I..." Fearful quickly slipped the cloth letter into Lady Uncertainty's hand.

"Umm, oh yes, I should go get changed. Please, Your Highness, don't let this man whip the poor girl. It was just an accident." Lady Uncertainty put an imploring, pale white hand on Prince Iniquity's arm.

Fearful quickly ran to the creek to get some more water. She was quaking all over. As the buckets filled, she took several deep breaths, trying to calm herself down. She went back to the garden head down, so she wouldn't have to see the angry faces of Overseer and Prince Iniquity.

"I'll teach you a lesson not to be such a clumsy, lazy fool! You'll do five extra rows once everyone else is done." Prince Iniquity grabbed her arm tightly and

hissed.

Who is he calling lazy? I work ten times harder than he ever has! The thought popped into Fearful's head, but she quickly pushed it away, afraid to even think it. Still, it started her really thinking: Prince Anointed One had expected her to work, but He had always given a helping hand. Prince Iniquity always overworked his slaves and didn't even think of helping. He was the lazy one, so why he was angry at her was beyond Fearful's imagination.

The clouds that had started gathering last night now covered the sky as far as Fearful could see in every direction. As Fearful got back to work, the sky started to rumble, like a storm was about to start any second. The daylight was really gray like late dusk and a light breeze had picked up, signaling the cool rainy season. Closing her eyes, Fearful smiled with pleasure as the cool wind danced around her hot, worn-out body. A murmur of rejoicing sounded through the huge garden. This meant that they were almost done with garden duty and would soon start inside duties. It would also be a lot cooler.

CHAPTER 6

Fearful looked up, startled to find Lady Uncertainty by her side dressed as a slave. “Milady...” It had been several hours since Fearful had spilled water on her. Fearful had not been expecting to see her again.

“Shush. If you two want to escape, meet me at the cave at dusk,” Lady Uncertainty whispered. Fearful looked over her shoulder at Scaredycat. Her eyebrows were raised high in shock as well. Lady Uncertainty looked around her like a skittish little mouse.

“I can’t. I’m supposed to do five extra rows after everyone else is done.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll make sure you’re free to go. Until then don’t utter a word about it.” Lady Uncertainty’s green, berry-like eyes took on a serious, threatening look. She was known for being tenderhearted, but she didn’t look very tenderhearted now with the choppy haircut and dirty slave look. Still, Fearful knew she couldn’t hurt a fly much less a girl.

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The rest of the day Fearful was buried in thought about her choice. She was seriously beginning to think on the cost of the two choices. Was it better to not risk the chance of death and be chained to this horrible place the rest of her life? Or was it better to try escaping and have a chance at freedom? If she chose to go to King Holy One, she was risking her life, losing all her friends, and missing Prince Anointed One's love. Yet, if she did go, there was a loving Master Who would protect her. She wouldn't have to be afraid anymore. The war inside her was fiercer than before! The side for going was ever so slowly getting the upper hand. The feeling of a desperate need for something to be satisfied was now championing it on.

That night after everyone other than Overseer, Fearful, and Noble Conceited had gone home, Fearful heard an odd sound rising from the city. It wasn't long until the sound was ear-piercing. There were shouts of anger and pain. It all was tremendously overwhelming! It was all Fearful could do to keep from running away from the sound!

After a few minutes of this had passed, Fearful looked up to see people running out of the city coming toward the slave shacks. In their hands, they held pitchforks, staffs, anything that could work as weapons. They rushed into the shacks and came out with the slaves running after them with makeshift weapons in their hands. Everyone was shouting. It all was

total confusion! Next came the guards rushing out of the city fully armed for battle. The slaves and people who had come out of the city rushed at the guards with their odd weapons. They were a mass of metal, wood, and bodies. It was hard to determine one from the other.

Overseer was caught up into the chaos, and Fearful saw her opportunity to run. She started to run, but then she saw Noble Conceited's stooped-over black back. He was attempting to smash the chains from his ankles with the ax Overseer had dropped. She couldn't just leave him. She grabbed the ax from him and smashed the chains for him. "Come on, let's get out of here!" She shouted grabbing his arm and running. He followed her as well as he could with the manacles around his wrists throwing off his balance.

There were times Fearful froze thinking she heard someone running after them. Every time it was just her hammering heart. It seemed like an eternity before they got to the cave. In reality, it took only five minutes. They finally got to the cave with no mishaps and no one following them.

Scaredycat, Lady Uncertainty, and her servant girl were already there waiting for them. When Lady Uncertainty saw her husband, she ran to him. He put his chained hands up and over her head. "Oh, Conceited, it was so awful!" Lady Uncertainty sobbed on her husband's chest.

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"You did wonderful!"

"You mean she started that rebellion?" Fearful whispered to Scaredycat. Scaredycat just raised an eyebrow mischievously, her eyes brimming with an overwhelming joy. "Wait a minute...what are you doing here?" Fearful asked, looking at her friend in astonishment.

"Lady Uncertainty found me as I was getting water and asked me to help her. I can't explain how, but in that moment something broke, and I felt as courageous as a lion." Speechless, Fearful put an arm around her friend, grateful to have Scaredycat with her.

Even though content with the thought of her friend coming with her, she was distracted by the spectacle of the nobleman and his wife. Fearful looked at the two, mesmerized by them. She didn't mean to stare, but she couldn't help it. They made an odd sight. She pale in all her finery and her sloppily cut blond hair, and he black as night, bare-chested, and in chains. Fearful had only seen this depth of love between her grandparents. Then again in Prince Anointed One's eyes. Only it had been even stronger and slightly different in His eyes. Every time she saw it she wished, she wished, ohhh, what was it she wished?

"What are you wishing for?" That voice could only belong to One! Fearful whirled around excitedly.

"Prince Anointed One!" Fearful threw herself into His arms.

"But..." Fearful was confused for she had seen

Prince Anointed One dead.

“Death can’t hold Me down. Now, what are you wishing for?” He knew what it was even more than she did. She could sense it.

She thought for a minute but couldn’t find words for it. The longing was there, yet she couldn’t express it. No matter how she tried she just couldn’t do it.

She looked up into His eyes, silently pleading with Him to understand the message. The message in her eyes spoke volumes. It revealed more than words ever could. Prince Anointed One smiled down at her. He was satisfied with the silent answer.

“Then, you have a decision to make. All of you do. Will you throw all you know away and follow Me?” He scanned the faces looking for their answers.

“We’ll follow You to the end,” came a chorus of voices.

“What did I tell you, Joy?”

“I never doubted You a second, Sir,” the lady’s servant girl said with a wide grin.

“Okay, there’s no time to lose. I’m taking you to Prince Iniquity. Be quick and put these on. Trust Me,” Prince Anointed One said in response to the doubtful looks as He gave each one a suit of armor. Prince Anointed One took Noble Conceited’s wrists in His own hands and said a phrase none of them understood. The manacles and the metal bands around his ankles fell to the stone floor with a loud **CLANK!** There was no time

to marvel or ponder over this.

Fearful knew by now that Prince Anointed One didn't use those words lightly. What He really meant by them was, "Lay your life in My hands and see that I'll NEVER leave you, nor forsake you." By now she could, with full assurance, lay her life in His hands and let go. She knew with all her being that this was the safest place.

They all put the armor on and went out of the cave. Outside they found horses for all but one of them. "Little Rose," Prince Anointed One said, holding out His hand to pull her up onto His horse with Him.

The sky was dark with clouds. There was no way the moon could shine through. There was a gigantic streak of lightning and a horrific thunderclap. **BOOM!** Fearful turned in the saddle and buried her face in Prince Anointed One's arm. "Don't fear. The storm won't hurt you. Besides, My Father and I created it to be a magnificent event. Look up. You're missing the best part."

Slowly, Fearful looked up. She saw something she had never noticed before, a thunderstorm in all its glory. The lightning zigzagged across the sky and the thunder shook the earth. Sitting in front of Prince Anointed One, it no longer seemed like a terrifying event but a wonderful occurrence that proclaimed King Holy One's power and majesty.

Before Fearful knew it, they were in the town square. Prince Iniquity must have called everyone together to

reproach those who had taken part in the rebellion. Lamps dotted the square, giving an eerie light.

A murmur arose in the crowd as Prince Anointed One's procession passed through. Fearful noticed several of the guards shifting their weight nervously. When they got to the platform, Prince Anointed One dismounted and started up the steps to the stage where Prince Iniquity's throne was. Fearful felt like He meant for her and the others to follow. She carefully slipped off the horse and followed Him. Walking in the unaccustomed armor, she found, was awkward and difficult.

"You..." Prince Iniquity uncharacteristically squealed in a terrified pitch. His eyes bulged out of their sockets. He gripped the arms of the throne so tightly that his already pale fingers went as white as snow.

"You thought the other day announced My defeat. It actually was the opposite. I tell you the truth that it actually proclaimed the destruction of your reign!" Prince Anointed One's words were firm and triumphant. At that an ear-piercing thunderclap rolled across the sky as if to emphasize His words. **BOOM!**

Fearful felt impelled to look up even though she was in Prince Iniquity's presence. She raised her eyebrows in pure astonishment—Prince Iniquity was quivering! It wasn't very noticeable, but still Fearful caught it.

"As required, the blood price has been paid. Everyone who chooses to can follow Me." The thing He

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said next was loud and stern. "If anyone is deceived into believing that they don't have the right to follow Me because of you, I will bring My vengeance upon you!"

Fearful looked up at Prince Anointed One and was startled by the look in His eyes. She had never seen such a fierce anger radiating from them. Someone would have to be a fool to even try to defy those eyes. The gentle, loving shepherd had disappeared and an angry, fierce warrior stood in His place.

*Boom, boom...**BANG!*** The last thunderclap was louder than all the others before it and much closer. It resonated across the sky, calling all to attention. It signaled that Prince Anointed One was coming to the climax of His message. He turned to the crowd and shouted, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. My blood was poured out for all sins." Fearful jumped as His words came out like a lion's roar.

With that, the heavens opened their gates, and the waters poured down. The lightning and thunder came faster than ever. The storm was announcing the good news for all who cared to hear. The King's plan had been fulfilled! No longer did people have to be under Prince Iniquity's control. No longer did people have to try to get right with King Holy One by making sacrifices. Prince Anointed One had made the ultimate sacrifice, and now all people had to do was accept His gift of salvation and live for Him. The world had come to a major

turning point.

“Come, it’s time for us to go,” Prince Anointed One stated as He mounted His horse and then pulled Fearful up to sit in front of Him. “We have a long journey ahead of us.”

As they galloped off for the desert, Fearful couldn’t get her mind off the sight of Prince Anointed One’s ferocious eyes. What had happened there? Why had He turned into a...?

Slowly it dawned on her, a warrior was a shepherd protecting His sheep. Prince Anointed One was still the gentle, loving shepherd, yet, also a fearsome warrior, who would protect His own when they were being threatened. As Fearful processed all this, Prince Anointed One gave her a gentle squeeze as if to say, “That’s right. You got it.”

After an hour of galloping, they stopped for the night in front of a huge camp. There had to be at least twenty campfires spread out before them, each with four or five men huddled around them.

The call that Prince Anointed One had arrived passed quickly through the camp. Like one gigantic wave they all stood to attention. Out of their midst came a man who was at least six feet tall. He was dressed like a high-ranking officer.

“I trust Your trip went well, Your Highness?”

“Very well, but there’s no time to waste. I need some of your men to set up a tent a safe distance from

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camp. Joy, you are to take your mistress there and attend to her. Commander, I need fifteen of your finest men to guard that tent when Prince Iniquity comes to attack. He will be coming with his best warriors, so we need to be ready.”

Fearful watched as Joy led Lady Uncertainty's horse over to where the tent was going to be. She bit her lip with concern in her eyes. Lady Uncertainty seemed to be in more pain than was usual for being in labor.

“Little Rose, get some hot water from one of the men and take it to Joy. After that, the second-in-command will tell you what to do.” Prince Anointed One lowered her to the ground.

After one final look up at Him, she ran off as well as she could in the armor. It didn't take her long to find warm water. All the men had been in the middle of making a late evening meal. Once she had the water she hurried off to where the tent was being set up.

By the time she got there, the tent was set up and screams of extreme pain were coming from inside it. Fearful cringed at the sound of it. “Here, Joy.” Fearful handed her the water.

“You must be the Ambassador of Trust's daughter. I'm Colonel Victory.” A man with a comical-looking face saluted her and said, “You have been assigned to my command for tonight.” He handed her a sword and shield.

“But Sir, I don't know how to fight!” Fearful shrieked,

anxiety filling every fiber of her being, causing every muscle in her body to tense up.

“Sure you do. King Holy One equips each one of us for the mission in front of us. Now come, I’ll introduce you to your fellow soldiers.” Colonel Victory took her by the shoulders and turned her around. “Men, this is Little Rose, Ambassador of Trust’s daughter. She will be fighting alongside us tonight.” The Colonel went on to introduce her to the men, “This is Trustworthy, Victorious...” The Colonel kept listing them off as he pointed to them, but being anxious about this assignment Fearful was unable to register them.

“One last thing you’ll need your steed.”

Fearful took a step back, looking with horror in her eyes at the stallion whose reins the Colonel handed her. This was no gentle Chestnut. This was a beast of war. How could she be expected to ride that thing?

“This child is very important to the kingdom. So remember one thing: King Holy One enables you for the assignments He has called you on.” With that, Colonel Victory mounted his own steed and gave the soldiers the same encouragement.

I need help, Fearful silently cried. It was then that the courage she had gotten in the desert came back to her stronger than before and the realization of what courage truly is. Courage is strength from King Holy One to stand up against evil and doing what one knows is right even when one is facing fear. With that, Fearful

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put her right foot into the stirrup and swung the other leg over.

"All right, soldiers, now I want you stationed around the tent two feet apart from each other. The young life about to be born in there depends on our accuracy to detail, our courage, and speed. The enemy is very well trained, and so our reliance on the Chief Commander must be strong," Colonel Victory ordered, pacing back and forth before them.

Just then a war cry arose from the camp. Fearful looked back to find the enemy swarming in. Colonel ordered, "To your stations quick!"

It wasn't long before twenty men came charging at them. "Swords drawn. Do not leave your stations. Let them come to you!" Colonel Victory commanded.

Fearful could feel the tension rise. It felt thick enough to cut with a sword. Yet, for some odd reason, her own stomach wasn't going into knots. She raised her sword, clasp on to what Colonel Victory had said about King Holy One enabling her.

In a blink of an eye, Fearful and her fellow soldiers were surrounded by the enemy. Even still, she kept calm. She didn't understand it, but she didn't have time to mull over it. "I have given you My peace," came that whisper on the wind, as though to answer her unasked question.

"Thank You so very much, King Holy One!" her heart exclaimed.

“Remember, King Holy One is on our side!” Colonel Victory yelled to encourage the warriors.

They had been fighting a long time when Prince Iniquity came charging at Fearful. For some unknown reason, her stallion reared, catching her off guard, and she went head over heels backwards. She landed on her back. The wind knocked out of her for a second.

Prince Iniquity came galloping towards her. Still gasping for breath, Fearful scrambled to her feet. “King Holy One,” she gasped as she reached for her sword that had fallen from her grasp, and with what little strength she had, she swung it at Prince Iniquity’s horse. It reared, whinnying. The prince, though trying to hang on, was shaken off, but somehow, he landed on his feet.

Finally, Fearful’s breath came back to her. She took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the dry desert air. That felt much better.

“You wicked, disobedient girl. This is all your fault!” Prince Iniquity yelled, charging at Fearful, sword drawn. “Now an unneeded war was started.”

“This was not started on my account! You’re just angry because you know you have no chance of winning against Prince Anointed One,” Fearful yelled over the shouting and cries of war.

“YOU HAVE CAUSED ME ENOUGH TROUBLE! I should have done this when I first had the opportunity!” Prince Iniquity swung his sword at her neck. Quick as a flash Fearful lifted up her shield, at the same time

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meeting his attack like a warrior who'd seen many wars.

Fearful was surprised at how well she fought. She had never been trained. As surprised as she was, she wasn't half as shocked as Prince Iniquity was.

She spotted her chance in his astonishment and went right for his fighting arm. She got his arm but then her sword slipped, and she also got him in the side. A horrific scream came from him. It made Fearful's blood curdle. The whole fight seemed to pause for a second. Then a trumpet for retreat was blown. The whole enemy army ran off as though they had just been waiting for that blast of the trumpet. A triumphant cry arose from Prince Anointed One's army as they ran after the enemy for a while.

Prince Anointed One, who had joined Fearful at the top of the hill on which Lady Uncertainty's tent had been set up, stayed behind and just watched. Suddenly, a baby's cry came from the tent. "It's a boy!" Joy came out of the tent holding a whimpering bundle. Prince Anointed One and Fearful turned around. He took the bundle in His arms, saying, "A strong boy who shall change the world with his faith."

"How will that be, Sir?" Fearful asked, her curiosity roused by the look in Prince Anointed One's eyes.

"I see a young man leaving Lady Uncertainty's side and going out into the darkness to be a brilliant light. He will be girded up with his mother's stories of My forgiveness and mercy and with his passion to bring others

into the kingdom. He will do great damage to the forces of darkness. It will never recover from his attacks.”

The next morning the camp was buzzing like a hive filled with bees. Last night Prince Anointed One had given the order to get ready to pull out first thing in the morning. Tents were collapsing and being folded up, the air was filled with the sound and smell of the morning meal being cooked, and the mules were being packed.

“May I sit with you two?” Joy asked, standing in front of the log Fearful and Scaredycat were sitting on. She had a bowl of oatmeal in one hand and a glass of milk in the other.

“Sure,” Fearful and Scaredycat said together, scooting over to make room for her. “So where are you from?” Fearful asked, guessing Joy was a servant of King Holy One who had been sent to minister to the people of Land of Enslavement. Still, Fearful was curious to learn more about her.

“City of Promise, my father is over all the armies and my mother was head archer until she was killed last summer,” Joy explained, tears welling up in her eyes at the mention of her mother.

“My mother died a couple months ago too,” Fearful said, putting an understanding arm around Joy’s shoulders.

“When you girls are done, put these on.” Prince Anointed One came over to where Fearful and

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Scaredycat sat eating their meal and handed each of them a bundle.

"Sir, these are head ar...cher clothes." Scaredycat unfolded her bundle and stared at the clothes and bow and arrow in amazement and a little bit of guilt.

"You have shown wisdom and experience beyond your years that should be put to proper use," Prince Anointed One explained to Scaredycat, putting a supporting hand on Joy's shoulder. Joy had lowered her head and looked ready to cry.

She swallowed a couple of times and with eyes sparkling with tears looked up at Scaredycat. "Congratulations...My mom was a very good archer, and she left very big shoes...However, I'm sure you will be able to fill them well...in time," Joy said with difficulty.

"Little Rose, you've got the talents of an ambassador," Prince Anointed One went on with assignments.

"I can't speak in front of crowds. I faint. Besides, how am I to convince thousands of strangers when my own friends won't believe me?"

"Just practice with small crowds and ask My Father for boldness. For the convincing part, just speak what's on your heart. Also, believe with all your being in what you're talking about. You'll be surprised at the outcome."

Once they, Joy, Noble Conceited, and Lady Uncertainty were dressed in their appropriate garb,

they all headed out. The air of excitement was heightened as they all mounted their horses. They couldn't wait to get back to the Land of Promise. Even Lady Uncertainty, who had regained her strength, now sat erect on her own horse. She had the baby strapped to her back and was ready to set out.

After traveling for several hours, they came to the valley where Prince Anointed One had taken Fearful several days ago. There at the old, gnarled tree was the same shepherd, and alongside him stood a young man about Fearful's age. He was holding a horse by its bridle. When he saw them, he jumped onto his horse and rode to Prince Anointed One, who led the procession.

"Good day, Miladies." Startled, Fearful gave a little jump in her saddle at the low bass voice. She hadn't noticed the young man had finished speaking with Prince Anointed One and had ridden up beside her. "Sorry, Milady, I didn't intend to startle you." The young man was quite handsome with hair the color of gold, a care-free smile, and eyes so blue and so compassionate that they made one stare in awe.

Fearful found out the young man was Ambassador of Salvation and a lot of fun. He had been an ambassador only a few weeks but had had a big impact in several lives. He was hoping to find a partner to share the load with him. So far, however, there were very few qualified for the job.

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By nightfall, they had entered the City of Life, and the contrast between it and the City of Death shocked Fearful! The whole atmosphere was so different! There was no comparing it. She had never seen so many happy faces.

As the heralds gave a loud trumpet blast, Prince Anointed One stood in the city square. All faces eagerly turned towards Him. "I'm proud to present to you Fearful, now Ambassador of Grace, Scaredycat, now Warrior of Light, Uncertainty, now Servant of Trust, and Conceited, Now Humility." Fearful looked up uncertainly at Ambassador of Salvation. Was she the Fearful the Prince was talking about?

"Go on up. That's you, Ambassador of Grace," Ambassador of Salvation said, nodding his head at Fearful. Fearful, now Ambassador of Grace, looked uncertainly from Ambassador of Salvation to the stage and back again.

"Come on." With that, Ambassador of Salvation reached over and wrapped his arm around her middle and hoisted her up onto his horse with him as though she was a rag doll. He clucked to the horse, and they made their way to the stage. "Your Highness, may I present Ambassador of Grace."

"Ambassador of Grace," Prince Anointed One took her hand to steady her as she dismounted from the horse to the stage steps, "I'm glad to announce that you are no longer a slave of Prince Iniquity but will be serving

under My Father from now on. Congratulations!” Prince Anointed One declared, smiling as He handed her a scroll. A loud cheer rose from the crowd. He did the same with the others. Ambassador of Grace unrolled her scroll and gasped to see its message.

*This certifies that Fearful, now
Ambassador of Grace, is now rightfully
a citizen of Land of Promise. She
has King Holy One’s protection
for wherever He might send her.*

“Come on, let’s go celebrate.” Ambassador of Salvation took her by the hand to steady her as she jumped from the stage and started running. She still was trying to grasp the full meaning of the proclamation. Yet, as she ran behind Ambassador of Salvation, it settled in and she finally got the feeling of belonging. With this came an overwhelming sense of joy and she had to smile. She was FREE! She felt contentment settle over her. She realized that what she had been longing for had been granted to her the moment Prince Anointed One had handed her the scroll. She had been granted the peace she had sensed in the oasis, the hope and freedom she had anticipated that first night lying restlessly in the tent. She now had found rest in her King. It had been freedom that she hadn’t been able to put a word to. She stopped short. Jerking her hand

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from Ambassador of Salvation, spinning around several times, and throwing her head back, she sang King Holy One's praise for the joy that was overflowing her heart. The stars that had arrived to stand witness to this great occasion sang back to her. The joy she had tasted while she sang and cooked breakfast in the desert was now hers forever!

"Where are we going?" she finally asked, slowing down to a standing position.

"To play some games with the others," Ambassador of Salvation responded, gesturing to a group of young adults their age.

The two of them played games that Ambassador of Grace had never heard of. She had a lot of fun! For the second time in her life, she laughed. She laughed so hard that she couldn't catch her breath. At last, she had found the something that was better than enslavement. It was freedom. Something she had never fully understood until now. She had finally learned how to live a life that wasn't controlled by anxiety. Now she knew what that desperate feeling had been. It had been the need for freedom. When King Holy One created the world, He had intended for humans to be free. However, when one has lived in slavery all one's life, the need is buried under all the fear, hurt, and anger that is raised when one has been in captivity. Then when one finally comes into the presence of King Holy One and Prince Anointed One, one's spirit rises in desperation to

be freed, because it senses the joy and freedom it can have when in peace with the King.

“It sure does a father’s heart good to hear his daughter laugh,” Ambassador of Grace heard her father’s warm, gentle voice.

“Father!” Ambassador of Grace whirled around and threw her arms around his neck.

“Now that’s what I call a hug. It’s so good to see you smile.”

Ambassador of Grace looked into her father’s brown eyes and knew it was all worth it. The cost for all of this was really insignificant for all the joy and freedom she had received. Nothing could ever equal this feeling!



The next day Prince Anointed One and Ambassador of Salvation came over to the inn where Ambassador of Grace was staying. They took her to the Land of Promise’s gardens, where people were harvesting. Never had Ambassador of Grace seen people, besides her grandparents, who were glad to work in gardens. They all worked with a swing in their step. She looked around, surprised and confused that there seemed to be no overseer.

Why would King Holy One leave His slaves without an overseer? That just didn’t make any sense. Ambassador

of Grace looked to Prince Anointed One for an answer. He pointed over to one end of the garden, where a man was talking with a boy who was about ten. The man had a firm but gentle look on his face.

"The Overseer's job is to talk to wanderers. He tries to help them through their problems using wisdom and mercy. Yet, in the end he can't force them to stay. My Father wants an intimate relationship with His people. He can't get that by being a tyrant, can He?"

"No, I guess not. Is everyone always so happy?" Ambassador of Grace still had some of the mentality of a slave of Prince Iniquity.

"I won't try to tell you it's all sunshine and clear skies here. Everyone here has their rough times too. Prince Iniquity has some effect everywhere except for in My Father's house. There will be times when nothing seems to go right."

As He was speaking, the garden faded from view, and they were in a weaver's house. The weaver looked really frustrated with his loom, which looked like it had a ratted piece of cloth on it. "Still, count it all joy," Prince Anointed One declared.

Then in the blink of an eye, they were on a steep, rocky mountain. The sun had gone behind the clouds, and a damp wind had picked up. Beside them a man was struggling to climb the mountain. He looked exhausted and ready to give up.

"Even when you feel alone and it seems like you

won't be able to hold on much longer, I am right there beside you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

Once again, the scene changed, and Ambassador of Grace shrieked as the old fear flooded back. She was back in the Land of Enslavement! She felt Prince Anointed One's comforting hand on her shoulder, and then saw in front of her, her mother struggling against the guards. This time, though, Ambassador of Grace saw something in her mother's eyes she hadn't seen the day of this horrid occurrence—**PEACE!** "Little Rose! Little Rose!" Her mother was trying to reach toward her, but the guards were yanking her away. Ambassador of Grace watched as her old self crumpled to the ground. Then she saw her mother mouth something she hadn't seen on that day, "King Holy One!" Next, she heard her mother shout something she hadn't heard in that horrific moment, "It's true! Believe, Precious! He's the One!" At this the guard started to gag her mouth. "BELIEVE!"

Ambassador of Grace covered her face as the vision faded away and wept. No longer did she weep out of despair...but from loneliness. Prince Anointed One put His arm around her shoulders. That is the way they stayed for quite a while. "My daughter, look," Prince Anointed One's voice was just above a whisper. When she lifted her face from her hands, she saw a throne room. This time she could not see clearly. It was as if she were looking through sandblasted glass. She

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saw her mother dancing before Someone sitting on a throne. She could see that her mother was overjoyed to be doing the thing she loved most for the Person she obviously loved the most!

"Mama!" It was a lonely whisper, but the painful edge had left the cry.

"Your mother loved you, Little Rose! She did what she did for you. Honor that memory. I'm never too far away that I can't be called upon when needed." With a gentle squeeze of her shoulders, He disappeared. "I am with you always," the whisper came dancing on the wind.

Ambassador of Salvation had been standing at a respectful distance, but now he came up to her. He silently sat down next to her. Staring out over the creek and meadow, he kept her company. Gently, the words of a lullaby came sailing upon the wind. A small smile creased Ambassador of Grace's lips as she recognized her mother's song. So clear were the words that she could almost hear her grandmother's voice. Slowly joining in with the song, she wiped her tears away. "Shepherd, with your gentle staff, mercifully lead my lamb on home." Ambassador of Salvation joined in. "Shepherd, with your gentle staff, mercifully lead my lamb on home." His clear baritone rang true. The bleeding hearts and bluebells nodded their delicate heads in agreement.

"My grandmother used to sing that song to me

every night. One night after she finished and had headed into the front room, I heard my mom reprimand her, 'Mother, you must stop filling her head with fairy tales and nonsense! It is only going to make things harder for her when reality comes her way!'

My grandmother responded, 'Darling, they aren't fairy tales. They are truth! You used to believe in King Holy One's goodness too. That is why you wrote that song when you were a child. Where did I go wrong that I can tell Prince Iniquity's slaves about the King's faithfulness and they leave here running in anticipation, but my own daughter doesn't accept it?'

Now..." Ambassador of Grace's voice trailed off as she closed her eyes, holding on to the vision Prince Anointed One had shown her. A smile came to her face as she imagined her grandparents meeting her mother in the brightly lit marble halls of King Holy One's palace. She shook her head as new tears welled up, threatening to choke her.

Ambassador of Salvation stood up and offered her a hand to help her up. "What are your favorite memories of them?" The two started walking as Ambassador of Grace rambled on about her grandparents and mother. As she remembered all the good things, the loneliness lifted. Slowly, excitement filled her as she thought of what was ahead of her. Finally, she didn't need to be afraid. She had been anxious of what had happened to her grandparents and mother when they had died and

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what would happen to her as a slave of Prince Iniquity. She had caught a glimpse of where they were now, and it looked beautiful! Then there was the scroll thumping about in the satchel at her side to remind her that she was no longer Prince Iniquity's subject. All of this brought a great amount of relief. It felt like a huge burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She was finally free!