

Chapter 11

When I saw Marcus again, he was pacing around the courtyard, as if impatient for something to happen. When he saw Lydia and me, he abruptly went to his seat, and pulled out a scroll from a pouch leaning against it. He gestured impatiently for me to come stand before him. As he looked at me, for just the barest instant, I saw a look of something more than professional interest in his eyes, but it was gone almost at once. He opened the scroll, tapped at, then pointed to me.

He handed me the open scroll, and I looked down to see what it might be about. It was astounding; though written in Tirzan, it concerned the land of my birth, Berith. There was no way for me to convey to him what it said. When I looked up, he was gazing at me intently.

When he spoke, he said something that included the word “read,” so I understood he was asking if I could read the scroll. I nodded, but said, “No speak.”

After his answering nod, he turned, and waved to Lydia. When she came to stand beside me, he spoke rapidly to her, with frequent gestures toward me. She nodded several times. I caught enough to know he was telling her to teach me the common tongue, which I later discovered was Greek. He turned back to me, and reached for the scroll. When I gave it back, he dismissed both of us with a wave toward the inside of the house.

In the coming weeks, I was with Lydia as she did her household tasks, and as she tended Marcus. He was gone for much of the time, so we had hours alone, except for the cook, the only other slave besides us. Lydia talked to me constantly, and patiently taught me the new language. I always had an ear for sounds, and picked up the pronunciation of words rapidly. Vocabulary and grammar were a bit more of a problem, but I still learned at what I thought was a remarkable pace. It took me a couple of years to become at all comfortable speaking Korei; I was speaking in Greek, at least passably, in a few months. I had not doubt that God’s hand was in it.

As I learned to talk, I also learned more about Lydia. She was born in Kirjath, the child of slaves. She became pregnant by a former master, and the child’s name was Lysia, as I already knew. The child died of a fever when she was only five. Lydia had mourned for her for many months until one day another slave introduced her to Christ. Since then, the joy had returned to her life. Marcus had purchased her from her former master five years earlier, and her life had never been happier. He allowed her to meet regularly with other Christian slaves in the city, though he resisted all of her efforts to tell him about Jesus.

Marcus had few visitors, but one of them came frequently. He was huge man, as big as some of the bears I had seen paraded in Tirzah. His name was Brutellas, and he obviously worshipped the very ground under Marcus’s feet. As I learned to understand Greek, I found out from Lydia that he and Marcus had been friends since childhood, growing up together in the streets of Kirjath. His father was a blacksmith, and he plied that trade himself. Every free moment, though, he spent either at Marcus’s shop, or at his house. Like Marcus, he had no brothers or sisters, and his parents were dead. The two of them were very much like brothers.

At first, Brutellas ignored me as not being worthy of his notice, but he gradually warmed. Despite his gruff and blustery manner, he was basically a gentle man, with a quirky sense of humor. Once he discovered he could tease me without offending me – or Marcus – he did so relentlessly. I looked forward to his being around, not only because of the attention, but because he alone seemed to have the capacity to make Marcus laugh.

The cook, Marcina, was a dour woman, not given to conversation. She was friendly enough, in her way, but not someone to feel close to. Years before, she had been taken in by Marcus's mother, after her own parents were killed. Attached to the household by choice rather than by chains, she was free to come and go as she chose, but had no intent of leaving. Not a Christian herself, she nonetheless listened patiently when Lydia, or I, talked about Jesus. Lydia believed, as I did, that she would eventually turn her life over to Christ.

I rarely went out into the streets of Kirjath, and then only with Lydia. She and I went to the market together, though the cook did most of the food shopping. Mostly we went to meet with other Christians, in the home of a noble lady, Karis, who served the Lord. The slaves met in the servants' quarters, while she and her friends met in the main house. I didn't think that kind of distinction was worthy of Christ, but it was not up to me to try to change things. At least we had a place to meet, out from under the eyes of the not-too-friendly authorities.

The day came finally when Marcus felt I had learned enough Greek to translate the scroll for him. Neither Lydia nor I could write in Greek, and he didn't want anyone else involved, so he would be writing the Greek version himself. One thing puzzled me.

"Please, Master, don't think me ungrateful, but I was wondering – would you be offended if I asked you one question."

He smiled briefly. "I may not choose to answer it, but you may ask."

"If you know someone who can translate Tirzan, as you must, why not ask them to translate this scroll?"

He smiled again, a little wider this time. "Because, dear Lysia, I do not trust that person with any information of value. He was recommended by Crispan, which is enough reason not to trust him."

I nodded and smiled back at him, even though his casual "dear Lysia" had set my heart racing. Perhaps before too long he would really mean that.

"Bring a seat, and let's begin," he said then, rather brusquely. Being allowed to sit in his presence was a kind gesture in itself. Once I was seated, he handed me the scroll, and spread out a blank one on the writing table he had set up in front of him.

It took several weeks of painstaking work, two or three hours a day, before the job was finished. Many times I had to ask him the Greek meaning of words, which were often not in everyday use. Some explanations I had to make were quite lengthy, and they themselves challenged my still limited vocabulary. Marcus was as patient as Lydia had been, and I learned almost as much from him as I had from her.

The work itself was hard, but I treasured every minute of it, because it was time with Marcus. Some where along the way, I realized I was falling in love, not just with the idea

of a future husband, but with the man himself. I began saying and doing silly things just to get his attention, or to make him smile. At first he didn't respond in more than a polite way, but gradually he warmed to me, as Brutellas had but in a different way.

Thoughts of him came to my mind in my every waking moment, and at night I had dreams about him. Some of them were embarrassing to recall. Lydia didn't seem to mind that his name was constantly on my lips, and the sparkle in her eyes told me she knew very well what was going on, and approved.

The translation drew near the end all too soon, some six weeks after it began. As darkness fell, we were still working by lamplight. My eyes were fixed on Marcus as he wrote the last few words I had translated. When he looked up at me for the next phrase, our eyes met in a way they never had before. He was looking at me with such an expression of tenderness and love that my heart bounded, then melted. Tears came to my eyes, and I smiled at him in the way a woman smiles at the one she loves.

He put down his quill, pushed back his chair, and came around the desk to where I sat. Taking my hand in his, he lifted me to my feet, then took my face in both of his hands, and kissed me. Warmth flooded over my whole body, and I closed my eyes in the kind of ecstasy I had only dreamed was possible. With his mouth still seeking mine in warm passion, he drew me into his arms, and mine went around him.

When his mouth left my lips, it felt as if the world had ended, but he kissed me all over my face, and on the top of my head. He kept whispering my name over and over, and each repetition was a melody.

He released me, but let me get no further away than the length of his arms. "I love you, Lysia. I've loved you since I first saw you. I don't want you for my slave any more; would you be my wife?"

I could hardly see his dear face through my tears, but I heard the voice of love without any problem. I said, "Yes," kissed him, then repeated these two actions over and over until he finally laughed and said, "I think you said 'Yes', dear one."

Finishing the translation the next day was almost an afterthought. That's what I thought, anyway, until I read out the last few sentences to my husband-to-be. When he heard the words, it was as if a fire was suddenly kindled in his eyes. He looked at me without seeing me, his face suddenly transformed into something I hardly recognized. Now I know what had troubled me when I first saw him; Marcus was consumed by greed. Despite the wealth he already had, more than most men would ever see in the course of a lifetime, he wanted more.

"A treasure like none other," he said in a dreamy voice, repeating the words I had just read to him. He was looking straight at me, without seeing me. "The light of the winter solstice..."

His eyes cleared for a moment, and focused on me. "How far are we removed from the winter solstice? Four months? And how long would it take to reach Berith?"

"But, please, my love," I said, an almost desperate note of pleading in my voice. "What need do you have of such a treasure? You already have wealth, and you have me as well. Is that not enough?"

The ugly mask of greed came over his face once more. “No, it’s not enough. It’s never enough. All of my life, I’ve wanted to find my own riches, not just live on money given to me by my parents. This is everything I’ve ever hoped for, and I won’t be denied it. Now – how long?”

“But – I don’t know, I haven’t been there since – “

“Since when? I didn’t know you had ever been there! I thought you were from Tirzah!”

“I never had to chance – I was born there, but I was taken away when I was a small child. Just the journey to Tirzah would take about six weeks, if we made it at all. It’s a very dangerous journey.”

He paused a moment, an almost frantic air of speculation coming over his face. His words, when they came, weren’t even directed at me. He was thinking aloud. “Six weeks, and that’s after I make arrangements for the journey. At the most, I would have two months to get from Tirzah to Berith, and find the temple...”

His words trailed off, and for long minutes he said nothing. I could feel my new world of joy and happiness crumbling around me. Just an hour before, I was making plans for my wedding in my mind, as I opened the scroll for what I thought would be the last time. Now it looked as if I might never see my bridal bed.

I was forgotten. Marcus rose from his chair, and turned to walk away. As he entered the main part of the house, I called after him. “Marcus! Please talk to me! What about our lives together? Our wedding?”

There was no answer. Lydia came out at that moment, and I ran to her open arms. All I could do was weep. God had forgotten his promise.