

## Dahveed and Jonathan's Battle in the Anteroom.

When we entered the fortress, Ahiam went straight to our room. I hesitated in the courtyard, wondering if I should change before I reported. Footsteps sounded on the stones.

"Dahveed, I was wondering when you'd . . ." Jonathan's words trailed off as he took in

"I believe I'll take your report in the anteroom now, Dahveed," he said, his voice smooth. The sound of it made me shiver.

He turned and I followed, wondering how to tell him all that had happened, not liking the prickling sensation that came over me as we entered the anteroom. A single lamp burned, and the shadows seemed alive in the far corners.

The bar dropped into place at the door and I turned around. Anger glittered in Jonathan's eyes, and his jaw clenched as he studied the state of my clothes.

I bowed. He was in a very bad mood. "I beg your indulgence, Hassar. Some very unexpected things happened today." Then I told him what had happened. I got as far as standing outside the overseer's gate before he exploded.

"Am I hearing you correctly?" he ground out. "You, representing King Shaul, wearing the girdle of Hassar Israel, *walked* into Chephirah like a common messenger? And after brawling in the market, you wandered the streets in a torn robe and had to stand begging at someone's gate? How dared you be so careless with the king's honor!" he roared.

"I meant no dishonor to the king," I gasped, backing away a couple of steps.

"What else could your action show?" he threw out, moving forward. "This was an official inquiry, Dahveed," he continued, stalking toward me, while I backed away. "How could you possibly consider such behavior appropriate?" he finished savagely.

I blinked. For an instant, something else had stared at me from the hassar's face, and I retreated from it, looking down. It was suddenly hard to breathe, the air pressing against me. The room seemed to shift, making me dizzy, and the air seemed dead, as if we were cut off from everything.

The stark truth of what I had done forced itself into my mind. I realized my actions at Chephirah were just the culmination of decisions I'd been making for months. Yahweh had made me general of the army, and I had turned away from the task, resisting the changes it would bring, making Abner's honor an excuse to back down. And the resultant disarray had torn the army apart, endangering the entire land.

Then, after Yahweh reminded me forcibly of my place when Jonathan, Hassar Israel, bowed to me, after Roeh Shamuël had told me plainly I should expect nothing less, I had the effrontery to shun a lesser task, as if I knew better than the One who anointed me where I should be and what I should do. As the Roeh promised, nothing and no one had stood in the way of either task. I had no excuse.

In the eerie silence surrounding us, Jonathan moved toward me, disparaging contempt blazing out of his eyes, the shadows gathering around him. The hair on my arms rose of its own accord, sending a paralyzing icicle down my spine. Something was terribly wrong. I felt the quickening that came with my gift. I met his eyes again, and saw the same cruel, blank stare I'd seen on the king's face the day he nearly killed Malchi.

He moved so quickly, I didn't have time to dodge, managing to stay away from his grasping hand only because he twisted aside at the last moment and crashed into the scribe's table which he hurled in my direction. Yahweh's gift flooded into me, and I lunged away,

fighting to delay its effects, terrified that if I yielded, I would come out to find myself standing over Jonathan's body.

The hassar checked, staring at me, bewildered. "Dahveed?" he gasped, then cried out in pain, his fists clenching, and the hard look returned to his face as he reached for me. The reality of what had happened slammed into me. I no longer faced the hassar, but a demon!

I grappled with him, but his unpredictable movements caught me off guard, and I smashed face first into the wall, a protruding stone hitting close to my left eye.

"No!" Jonathan cried, and his body twisted away again, giving me time to scramble to my feet. I met his attack a second time, struggling to restrain him, but it was no use. Even with Jonathan resisting as hard as he could, I was flung to the floor, bruising my leg and shoulder. As I crashed into the wall a second time, a shaft of pain cutting into me from my ribs, I saw the terrified desperation in his eyes a brief moment before the hard blank stare returned, and he smiled as I faced him again.

That smile froze my blood.

His dagger swung toward me, and I grabbed his wrist, trying to force the weapon away. He bore down, and the point inched toward my neck, coming steadily nearer despite all I could do.

"You despicable, unworthy, southern fool! Did you really think you were going to take my throne?"

Even though the voice was not Jonathan's, I cringed at the withering scorn, straining with all my might to force the dagger away.

"You, a king?" the strange voice continued. "You can't even keep a lamb safe, let alone the people of Yahweh!"

The sight of the dead lamb in Bethlehem's street rose before me. "I was a boy," I gasped, straining the dagger back a little.

"And you're not any more effective as a man, you cowardly, inept, servant! Your own father didn't want you!" The dagger closed on my neck again as the fear that something was wrong with me poured into me again.

"Yah claimed me!" I gasped, fighting back.

"And you turned your back on Him! Rejected all He tried to do for you! Refused to obey his clear wishes! You are not worthy to have the throne." The dagger inched toward me again.

He was right. Jonathan would make a much better king than I. Especially now that I had deliberately turned away from what I knew Yah required of me.

The dagger nearly scratched my skin, and despair flooded through me. I was nothing but a southern shepherd who'd neglected a small flock of sheep to follow a delusion of greatness.

"He wants the throne!" the demon said, "and bowing to you only made him want it more! But I could not take him until he saw that after he had given *everything* to you, you still did not appreciate what he had done enough to wear the girdle he gave you! It was more than he could bear, and now the desire to rule rages in him, in spite of his childish attempts to deny it! Soon, he will give in and claim what is his, and then I'll kill you, and Israel will be safe in his hands."

There was nothing I could say, but I strained with all my strength against the wrist that held the dagger. It didn't move.

"You can't even do what you know you should, now," the demon went on, amused. "You're too afraid!" That smile was still on his face, and I realized with sickening certainty that he toyed with me, that he could thrust the weapon through my neck any moment he wished, and I

could not stop him.

I must yield to Yahweh's gift or die! But I *was* too afraid. Afraid that Yah would slay me himself for turning from him, and afraid I would slay the man I loved more than any human alive. *"I wanted to disappear into the darkness, and you kept calling me back."* I remembered myself say. I threw every ounce of my strength into the battle. I couldn't betray him! I owed him my life! I should give it for his now, and let him have the throne he craved.

*"Your life is no longer yours to give,"* the roeh's words sounded in my ears. But my life wasn't worth that much. It never had been. Just ask Jesse. Why should I fight to keep it now?

*"Will you grant me your friendship?"* Jonathan pleaded. I could repay him now for all he had done for me. Give him more than he'd ever expected. Give him his dream of a trade empire, with the whole world coming here to his feet.

*"You must never let anything interfere with that loyalty, for you owe honor to Yahweh above all else,"* Shamuel's voice said. I had given honor to Yahweh. I'd killed Goliath and saved Israel. My work was done. The demon forced me to my knees.

*"I need you, zammar,"* Jonathan said. He needed me dead, where I couldn't cause any more divisions and rifts in his family or the army. All I had to do was give in. My strength was almost gone anyway.

The dagger drew blood from my neck, and mockery blazed in those dark eyes locked with mine. "You are nothing, zammar! And no one wants you for anything!"

*"Yahweh has chosen you to be king for Him."* Roeh Shamuel's deep voice rang out.

"Yahweh chose me!" I gasped, barely able to keep myself from collapsing on the floor.

Jonathan's head went back and demonic laughter filled the room. "Why would anyone choose an unclaimed, trouble-making, ungrateful slave like you?"

I couldn't breathe, and I was certain that dagger no longer wavered at my throat, but had been plunged into my heart. The twisted brass earring weighed heavily on my chest, almost as if it was pushing me further down.

*"It will remind you of the honor I give to you, Dahveed, because I decided to,"* the hassar's rich voice filled my mind. *"Put it down to the incomprehensible foibles of the royal family, since it seems you are unable to believe anything else."*

I looked at the cruel, inhuman presence that shown from Jonathan's eyes. "Yahweh chose me because *He decided to*," I answered. Suddenly the room seemed filled with the scent of myrrh, spices and cinnamon. I took a deep breath. I didn't understand why Yah did the things he did, just like I didn't understand why Jonathan treated me as he did. But I did understand that Yahweh had known Jonathan was not a threat to me when he acknowledged me as Mashiah, so He must surely know now my enemy was the demon, not Shaul's son. "Adonai Yahweh, give us hesed!" I cried, throwing myself into the possession of Yahweh's hand.

Jonathan's body stiffened as the shadows coalesced into a dense blackness, howling from the abyss. The lamp light blazed upward into a pillar of flames as the battle joined in the realm of the Elohim. The dagger slowly inched upward as I pushed myself to my feet, Yahweh's strength pouring through me with the light until Jonathan and I strained vainly against each other, stalemated, waiting for something more.

The blinding light took over my mind completely, and I saw Jonathan struggling in torment, wavering between the searing flames and the howling darkness that whipped and blazed around him. The blackness clawed at him. "It is yours," the demon's voice purred. "Think of what you can do for Israel! It can be the greatest nation in the world, an empire like no other, and

only you can make it so! Take it, take what is yours already. That contemptible southerner refused your king, withholding the loyalty he owed. He is not Mashiah. Yahweh would never chose such an unworthy, ignorant fool who is not even of Israel.”

The hassar cried out again in pain, leaning toward the nothingness that gathered around him.

“Take it! Take the throne! It is yours!” the demon urged.

“No!” Jonathan shouted. “*I will not!* Yahweh, slay me!” He threw himself into the swirling vortex of fire.

Time suddenly had meaning to my dazed mind, and the hassar’s despairing cry still echoed in my ears. The dagger clattered to the floor. I pinned Jonathan spread-eagle against the wall of the anteroom as shudder after shudder wracked him. They gradually lessened, and then ceased.

He slowly opened his eyes, staring at the lamp now casting a cheerful glow over the room. “What happened?” he whispered.

“I think the Evil One used you to challenge Yahweh, and Yahweh used me to answer,” I said, letting go.

He shuddered again. “That explains the shadows, then,” he said, rubbing his face. “They gathered around me all afternoon. When you told me about Chephirah, I couldn’t get away from them. That horrible darkness closed out everything!” He shut his eyes, trembling so hard he had to sit down. “I understand now why Abbi cried for the light. What will I do if it comes back?” he whispered, shuddering again in horror.

“It can’t,” I said, easing down to the floor beside him. “You refused it. You dropped the dagger of your own accord.”

The hassar’s hand flew to his girdle, and he looked down. Then he held up both hands, examining the deep red marks on his wrists. “That *was* you hanging onto me. I’ll feel your grip for a long time,” he said, then frowned. “I did attack you then?”

“It wasn’t you!” I said fervently, a shudder going through me this time.

“I remember seeing your eyes turn golden, like a lion’s. And then,” he paused. “And then it wasn’t you,” he finished slowly. He tilted his head back against the wall, his face lined and tired, the lamplight revealing the gray in his hair as we rested.

Much later after I’d finished telling the rest of what happened at Chephirah, Jonathan spoke. “A Philistine?” he asked with distaste.

“Yes, and one who appears to care more about the rights of things than either the overseer or scribe did.”

“Well, I can’t fault your handling of the situation after you found the defaulting scribe. I’ll send a message tomorrow to the elders of Chephirah assuring them that I accept your judgment and punishment of them.”

“They’ll be relieved to hear it. What about me?” I asked.

Jonathan stood. “I think we’ve both had enough for today.”

He held out his hand to help me up, and I gratefully accepted it. My side hurt a little, and my mouth didn’t feel right either. I guessed I was going to be very sore in the morning.