

The Day After the Anteroom Battle.

I woke the next morning to Ahiam's amused gaze. The left side of my face felt stiff and puffy, and whatever else had happened last night left me feeling worse than I had after my first real battle.

"I see the hassar explained what he thought of your actions yesterday."

His comment puzzled me before I realized my face must be abraded from its contact with that wall. I groaned and tried to get up. That made the muscles in my back complain, to say nothing of the intense pain from my ribs, and my arms felt like lead weights.

"Go away," I whispered.

My retainer turned my face to the light. "You're developing a beautiful black eye. Sit up so I can wash you off before you dress."

"Dress? I can't move."

"You are general, Dahveed. You have duties to perform."

I winced. Every muscle I had must be tied in knots. What had happened while I was under Yahweh's hand last night, anyway? Somehow I got to my feet and over to the clothes chest, easing into a sitting position beside my harp, holding my left shoulder as still as I could.

Ahiam cleaned off my face, then stood back. "Well, in a couple days, your face will look like the colors on a sar's tunic."

"You're so comforting, Ahiam," I muttered sourly. "Is that wine on the table?"

"Yes, but you might want some water right now."

I didn't want water. I wanted something to dull the pain. "Give me the wine," I ordered.

"Yes, geber." He handed the glazed juglet to me, and I poured some into my mouth.

A searing pain jolted through me, and I yelled, grabbing my face, smashing the juglet into my chin. I threw the juglet down, knocking the harp into the wall, putting a dent on the vertical bar. I collapsed on the clothes chest again, moaning as the wine burned in the cut inside my cheek.

"Would you like some water now, geber?"

I barely nodded, and Ahiam got the waterskin, helping me rinse out my mouth and then drink. By chewing carefully, I ate some leben and bread soaked in goat's milk. I was ravenous, and still thirsty, but I stopped eating when my mouth hurt more than my stomach did.

I walked out later than usual, wondering how long it would be before the pain worked out of my muscles, and wondering if Dara could give me a rub. Of course, he might be tending to the hassar, who was probably as sore as I.

Sahrah Michal saw me and stopped in astonishment. "Dahveed! Are you all right?" she gasped.

I bent my head instead of bowing. "I will be, Sahrah."

"But what happened?"

Her question gave me pause. I didn't know if Jonathan would want anything said about the demon attack on him or not, and until I did, I'd better be noncommittal. "I ran into something unexpected," I mumbled, wincing at the pain in my mouth. "With your leave, Sahrah?"

"Of course." Her eyes wide, she watched me walk to the stairs to the east wall.

I climbed them, going to the chamber for the commander of the guard. The sentry nearly dropped his spear when he saw me, and even Sheva had a difficult time restraining his amazement and curiosity. I took his report and went back down to the courtyard. I stumbled and

caught myself on the wall. My body didn't want to respond to anything I asked of it, and my mid-section felt very odd. Well, I had never been so completely taken by Yahweh before, and I had no idea how long I'd been under His hand. I'd better rest a minute. Stepping into the shadows around a corner, I slumped against the wall.

Michal emerged from the anteroom door, disgusted with the under-scribe who had neglected to adequately check the storage room for days. A container of olives in a dark corner had been left uncovered and had spoiled, stinking up the room and bringing flies and ants, which had invaded a basket of expensive Tekoa figs. Everything had to be thrown out.

"Dahveed!"

The startled exclamation jerked her head around as a man in a kilt and sword, who was talking to the gate guard, charged across the common court, headed for the narrow space between two rooms along the armory wall.

He glanced into the space, then uttered the short, sharp bark of a fox, and dived between the rooms. The door of Dahveed's chamber slammed open, and Ahiam appeared. Michal was already running, but the servant arrived the same time she did.

The first man supported the zammar, who looked nearly dead white, his eyes half closed. "I'll kill whoever beat him like this!" he snarled.

"No, you won't, I will," Michal broke in angrily, feeling Dahveed's clammy skin, and realizing only one person could have given the zammar this punishment. "Get him into his room," she ordered. "I'll send for Dara. Who are you?"

"Shagay, Sahrah."

So, this was the man who visited Dahveed in the night. He looked like he might be able to make good on his threat to her brother, especially if Dara left the hassar on his own, which he probably would once he saw Dahveed.

A shiver ran through the zammar as they moved in a tight group to his room, Achsah running to meet them.

"Send a messenger for Dara," Michal snapped. "Tell him the Dahveed needs him."

With a wild look at Dahveed's face, the serving woman ran for the anteroom.

In Dahveed's room, Ahiam shoved the table aside, and unfolded a bedroll. Shagay eased his burden on it and stripped off the sword and belt knife.

Ahiam's face was tight. "I shouldn't have sent him out today, but he didn't seem this bad," he said.

"What happened?" Shagay asked in a low voice.

"Things didn't go well at Chephirah. The hassar was not pleased, and with reason."

"He's shivering," Michal said. "Get some blankets over him. I'll have Achsah get something hot. Where's Dara?" she fretted. She went outside to find Achsah anxiously waiting.

"Is he all right, Sahrah?"

"I don't know. But he's cold. Built up a fire. I'll get some mint and honey to steep for him."

The water had just begun to boil when the hoof beats of a hard-ridden mule clattered on the road. The animal skidded to a stop at the other side of the courtyard, sides heaving from the steep climb. Dara leaped off, disappearing into the room where he kept his healer's supplies.

He ran across the court, carrying his bag, while one of the off-duty guards tended to the mule. It was Ishvi's, she noted. Dara must have been on the training ground working with

Eleazer, Ishvi's new shield-bearer.

"How bad is it?" he demanded. "The messenger said someone had attacked him and he was near death."

"He's been beaten, not attacked," Michal replied, as she led the way to the room.

Shagay and Ahiam moved back to give the healer room. "Open the shutters," he commanded.

Shagay complied.

Dara quickly assessed the injuries, examining the zammar's face, checking the cut on his neck, running his hands over the rest of his scalp, then over his entire body. While he did, Ahiam told him in terse sentences what he knew.

"He was walking normally when he came back from the anteroom last night?" Dara asked.

"Yes, geber. I knew the hassar would not be pleased with what happened at Chepirah, but they were speaking casually when Dahveed came in, and he didn't seem hurt in any way. It was only when I saw his face this morning that I realized he must have been beaten."

Dara covered Dahveed, who was shivering again. "You said he could hardly move this morning?" he asked thoughtfully

Ahiam nodded.

The healer ran his hand down Dahveed's arms and legs once more. "That cut on his neck looks like something he'd get in a fight, and these muscles feel like he's been through a battle. He had to have been hurting last night." He pressed his hand again over the abraded skin on Dahveed's chest, and the zammar moaned. "That rib has to be cracked at least. You are certain he gave no sign of pain?"

"None."

"What would keep him from feeling pain?" Michal asked.

"His gift," Shagay broke in.

"But the gift took him before noon! He came out of it quickly, I didn't even have to call him. The effect wouldn't last that long," Ahiam protested.

Dara studied the zammar again, his head to one side. "However it happened, he's severely bruised, especially that left side, and if his rib is cracked, he'd better stay in bed for two or three days until we see if he's injured inside anywhere. I'd say a beating on this scale could rouse his gift. Ahiam, how much did Dahveed get to eat and drink yesterday?"

Ahiam closed his eyes. "Next to nothing, geber."

"Considering what I saw the day he sparred with Jonathan and me, I would say we need to get as much food and drink down him as we can, as well as make sure he rests." Dara said. "I can give him a rub down this afternoon."

Michal stood up, casting a quick glance at Dara. She hadn't realized Dahveed had fought them both the day Jonathan had followed Dahveed, curious to see what the zammar did in the early mornings. "I'll see that he eats." She stalked out the door.

Ishvi whirled around as she came out. "Is he all right? What happened? The messenger said he was dying. I didn't want to interrupt Dara if it's bad."

"He won't die," Michal replied. "Achsah saw his face and blew things up from there. It seems Jonathan sent him all over the country, leaving him little time to eat or drink, and when he got back, instead of giving him a chance to have a meal, our brother apparently gave him a severe enough beating to throw him into his gift!"

“Jonathan beat Dahveed?”

“Go look for yourself, and if you can think of anyone else who could do that to him, let me know!”

Ishvi pushed by her into Dahveed’s room. He came back out with his face white with anger. “You’re right. It would seem Jonathan’s temper got the better of him.”

“Something was certainly eating at him yesterday, and he must have taken it all out on Dahveed,” Michal said, pressing her lips together.

“What’s this I hear of the zammar?” Ahinoam asked, walking toward them.

Ishvi told her what little they knew, and Ahinoam stepped over the raised thresh hold into Dahveed’s room, speaking to Dara. She came back out with her lips pressed tightly together, and two white spots on her cheeks. “Michal, go back to your duties. We’ve done all we can here, and I understand there’s a mess in the storeroom that needs to be tended to. Ishvi, go back to the training ground and assure everyone that the Dahveed is not likely to die yet. Since today is preparation day before Shabbat, give everyone the afternoon off. We will all be going to Zelah.”

“What about court?” Ishvi asked in bewilderment.

“Jonathan is going to close it,” Ahinoam said, walking away, already giving orders to the servants regarding their departure.

Michal and Ishvi watched with wide eyes.