

Chapter Eighteen

It was mid-afternoon when the girls awoke. They talked quietly waiting for darkness. Tyrianna related more of her grandmother's wisdom.

"Your grandmother seems very wise," Patricia stated. "Is that true of the rest of your family?"

"Not all," Tyrianna answered, "some are wiser than others. My father is a special counselor, so naturally his opinions are valued."

"I assume it is a blessing having such a father."

"Sometimes it is. He knows a lot about a great many things. However, I do not always agree with him. I suppose that sounds foolish to you."

"I admit I am surprised."

"A few of my friends and I have noted that certain of our elders have rigid ways of viewing matters. They seem incapable of even considering whether a different way might be better. Thus, they refuse to experiment to try to improve."

"Well," Patricia said thoughtfully, "maybe they do not want to make a mistake."

"Perhaps, but that in itself can be a mistake."

"I do not understand."

"Let me give you an example. In a nearby village there is a thinking young man named Nambu, and even though he is several years older than me, we became friends. Now, in my area, when a person gets a wound, the healers make a poultice, that is, a mixture of leaves and stuff, which they put on the wound so it will heal."

"Yes," Patricia agreed, "the healers around my home do the same thing."

"Well, Nambu observed that many times people with smaller wounds do not go to the healers, but the wounds heal up anyway. Has that ever happened to you?"

"Sure, with small cuts."

"That happened with me too. So Nambu figured out that there is something about the body which often heals itself. But when he began to mention this idea, some of the elders became upset with him."

"Hmm."

"Furthermore, some poultices are made with excrement of animals. Nambu saw that flies, which are unclean, are attracted to dung, so he asked if it is a good idea to put this on a wound."

"It must be a good idea if all the healers do it," Patricia answered.

"Nambu began to make poultices without dung, and a strange thing happened."

"What was that?"

"The people he treated healed up faster."

"Then that was a good thing for the village."

"But not for the other healers, because as word traveled around, more and more people with wounds went to Nambu. So these other healers got the elders to make Nambu stop!"

“That is hard to believe!” she exclaimed.

“I saw this happen,” Tyrianna stated, “and it was offensive to see. In my opinion, the elders made a foolish decision, which was an injustice to everyone. I have come to hate that nonsense! Unfortunately, it happens a lot in Nubia.”

“I am sure it happens a lot everywhere!” Patricia proclaimed with conviction.

The two escapees had been walking for a couple of hours.

Suddenly Tyrianna stopped, her senses on full alert. “What is it?” Patricia asked nervously.

Tyrianna sighed. “It sounds like jackals,” she whispered intently. “We need to get to high ground fast!” She cast her eyes around for an elevated rock or even a tree, but saw none. “We will climb that rise over there. Perhaps they will not detect us.”

They made the top of the hill, but soon a pair of glowing eyes appeared. Tyrianna cursed. More eyes joined the first pair. “What are we going to do?” Patricia asked in desperation.

“First, we are going to think.” She considered their choices. “Fortunately, there are only seven of them. I will need to kill one.”

“Can you do that?” Patricia asked incredulously.

“Of course,” came the matter-of-fact reply. “I have a sword.” The jackals began circling in preparation for a probing attack.

She thought again. “Here, take the knife. Hold it with your thumb against the hilt, like so.”

“Then what do I do?”

“Take the remaining half of the rabbit in your left hand. If a jackal approaches, hold it about a cubit away from your body. If the animal goes for it, pull the rabbit toward you and stab the jackal. Aim for its side, but anywhere you connect will disable it.”

“Isn’t the blade too small?”

“It is about a third of a cubit long, and it is razor sharp. It is the perfect size for you.”

“I don’t think I can do this. I have always been afraid of dogs.”

Tyrianna felt her anger rising. She fought to control it. She took a firm hold of Patricia by the shoulders and squeezed. “Do you remember what you did to The Brute? That was far more dangerous.” She now bit off her words in a determined tone. “You can do this and you will! We have no choice!” She spoke with a conviction born of necessity. “Do you understand?”

Patricia could only nod, her eyes wide. “This is life, so ready your mind now!”

The jackals moved closer, studying their prey. Several circled the two girls, while others moved back and forth, looking for any weakness. Tyrianna knew their tactics and she withdrew, faking a limp.

After half an hour, one particularly aggressive jackal darted at her several times. Each time, she staggered back, confirming her disability to the predator. Finally it ran in for a bite.

When it closed, she instantly lunged toward it and swung the sword. The animal sensed the threat and tried to veer off, but it was too late. The sword hit its target, almost severing the jackal’s hind leg. It let out a yowl and hobbled a retreat, yelping as it went. Almost simultaneously, she heard a scream and another yowl.

She ran to Patricia, her sword ready.

“It bit me, but I stabbed it!” Patricia proudly proclaimed. “It went for my arm, not the rabbit, but I jerked it back as I stabbed it!”

“Well done!” Tyrianna congratulated her. “Let me see your wound.”

It was only a nip, but it was bleeding freely. She took the wine skin, poured a little in her hand, and applied it to the wound. Then she took the bloodied knife from Patricia, cleaned it in the sand, and cut off a strip from her garment to wrap the injury. Patricia winced but said nothing.

“This should heal well,” Tyrianna stated. “Will they attack again?”

“No. Basically, jackals are cowards and scavengers. I could have killed my attacker clean, but I wanted it yowling in pain to warn the others. Your stab had the same effect. They will want no more of us tonight!”

“I did not think I could do it,” Patricia said excitedly.

“But I knew you could!” Tyrianna replied with conviction. The rest of the night was mercifully uneventful.