

# ALMA

OTHER BOOKS AND AUDIO BOOKS  
BY H.B. MOORE:

*Out of Jerusalem: Of Goodly Parents*

*Out of Jerusalem: A Light in the Wilderness*

*Out of Jerusalem: Towards the Promised Land*

*Out of Jerusalem: Land of Inheritance*

*Abinadi*

# ALMA

*a novel*

H.B. MOORE

Covenant Communications, Inc.



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This is a work of historical fiction. Many of the characters, names, incidents, places, and dialogue are products of the author's imagination, and are not to be construed as real.

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## Praise for H.B. Moore's Books

“H.B. Moore takes the reader on an incredible journey of a man who makes the ultimate sacrifice. *Abinadi* is a historically rich, well researched, poignant account of one of the most influential prophets in the Book of Mormon. Moore's creativity, mixed with the heart of Mesoamerican culture, brings new insights to the influence that the prophet Abinadi had on generations to come.”

—Dian Thomas

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

“Heather Moore once again establishes herself as the best Book of Mormon fiction writer in the business. She has created a flesh-and-blood Abinadi that will forever change my perception of this remarkable man, his influence on Alma, and the importance of his mission in Book of Mormon history.”

—Charlene Hirschi

*The Herald Journal*

“Scripture invites fresh thinking, and H.B. Moore has done just that. Her story of Abinadi, the first martyr, captures a world of human relationships set against the inner struggles of individuals to come to grips with what matters most in their lives. In a word, her story is real, breathing life into the daily routines of people who lived thousands of years ago and highlighting the dramatic moments that must have occurred in the lives of a few—Abinadi, his family, the king and

his priests, and the man Alma. Moore's deft and lively style makes this book a delectable, and informative, reading feast."

—S. Kent Brown  
*Director of the Laura F. Willes Center for  
Book of Mormon Studies, BYU*

"This book is a delightful combination of careful research and getting inside an inspiring character. Although H.B. Moore disclaims being a scholar, her Abinadi not only lives and breathes but is authentic to the time and place in which he lived. While she paints a fuller picture of a fascinating Book of Mormon character, she stays close to the facts, as presented in that book."

—Ann Madsen  
*Ancient Scripture Department, BYU*

"[*Abinadi*] holds drama and excitement, reveals serious research, an understanding of a mature commitment to God, and the ability to speak directly of the sins and excesses of King Noah's court."

—Jennie Hansen  
*Meridian Magazine*

"Moore takes an imaginative approach to the lives of three scriptural men: Abinadi, King Noah, and especially the life of Alma. Who were these men, really? What were their thoughts, their desires, their goals in life? H.B. Moore explores these thoughts and fills in the relatively unknown inner-linings of these individuals."

—C.S. Bezas  
*BellaOnline*

"In *Land of Inheritance* . . . Moore persuasively renders as must-read historical fiction the rich (and growing) body of scholarship about ancient life in Mesoamerica. I highly recommend this exciting, well-written, faith-centered and faith-enhancing novel."

—Richard H. Cracroft  
*BYU Magazine*

“In the first three volumes of her Book of Mormon historical fiction series [*Out of Jerusalem*], H.B. Moore showed that she could create a view of an ancient world that combines the best scholarship with a lively imagination. She does a fine job of walking the tricky line of faithfulness to the scripture and creative storytelling. She opened up the hearts of her characters in ways both remarkably touching and authentic. In this fourth and final volume she does all of that, as well as writing one of the most exciting adventure tales that I have read in a while.”

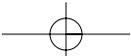
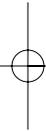
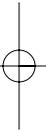
—Andrew Hall  
*Association of Mormon Letters*

“H.B. Moore may be the most exciting new writer in the LDS genre. In *Out of Jerusalem*, Moore takes characters from thousands of years ago and breathes life into them. I look forward to reading more from Moore.”

—Richard Paul Evans  
#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author

“Moore takes us into the thrilling world of Lehi and Nephi and brings the women onto center stage with remarkable effect.”

—Peter Johnson  
*Motion Picture Producer & Director*

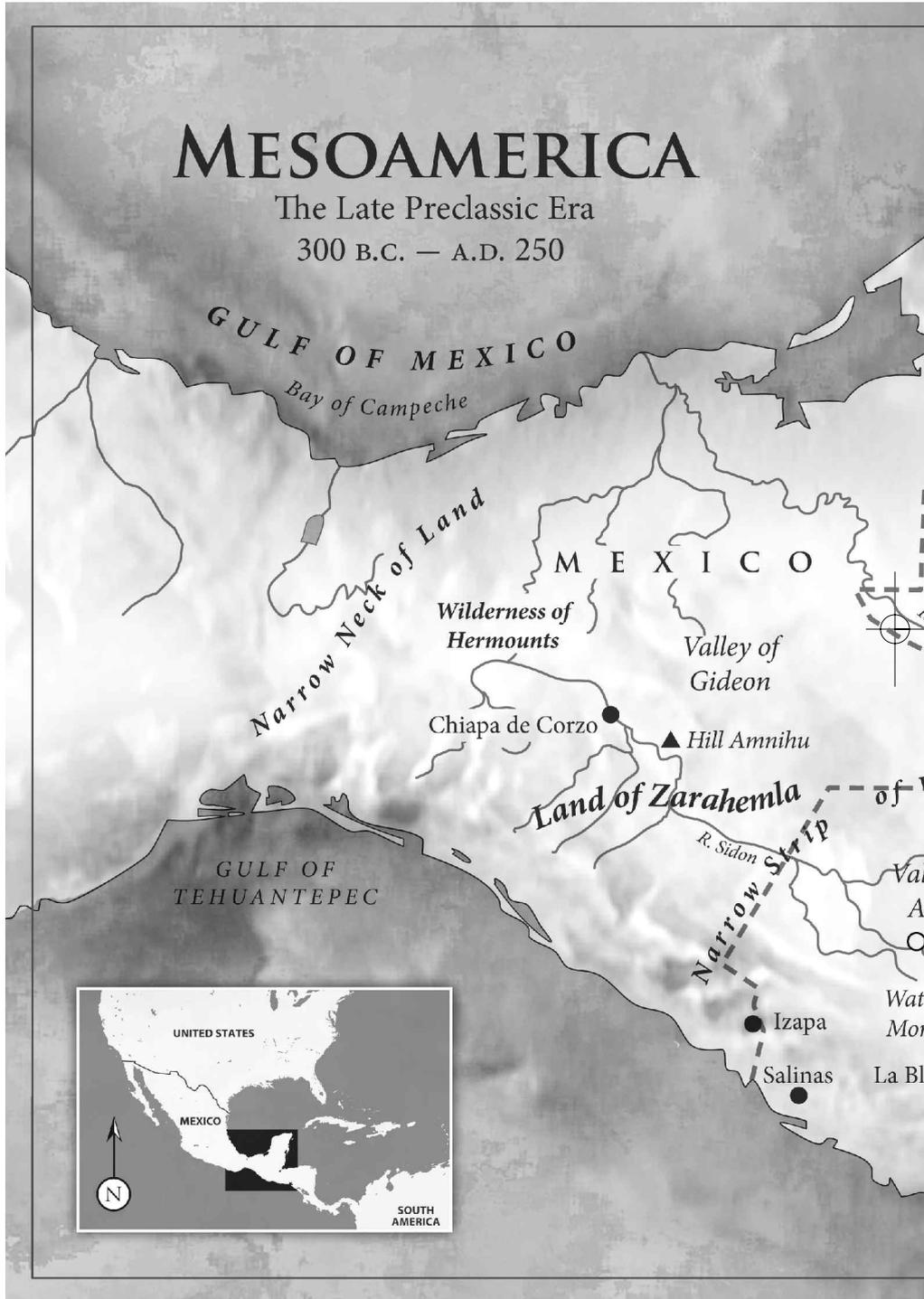


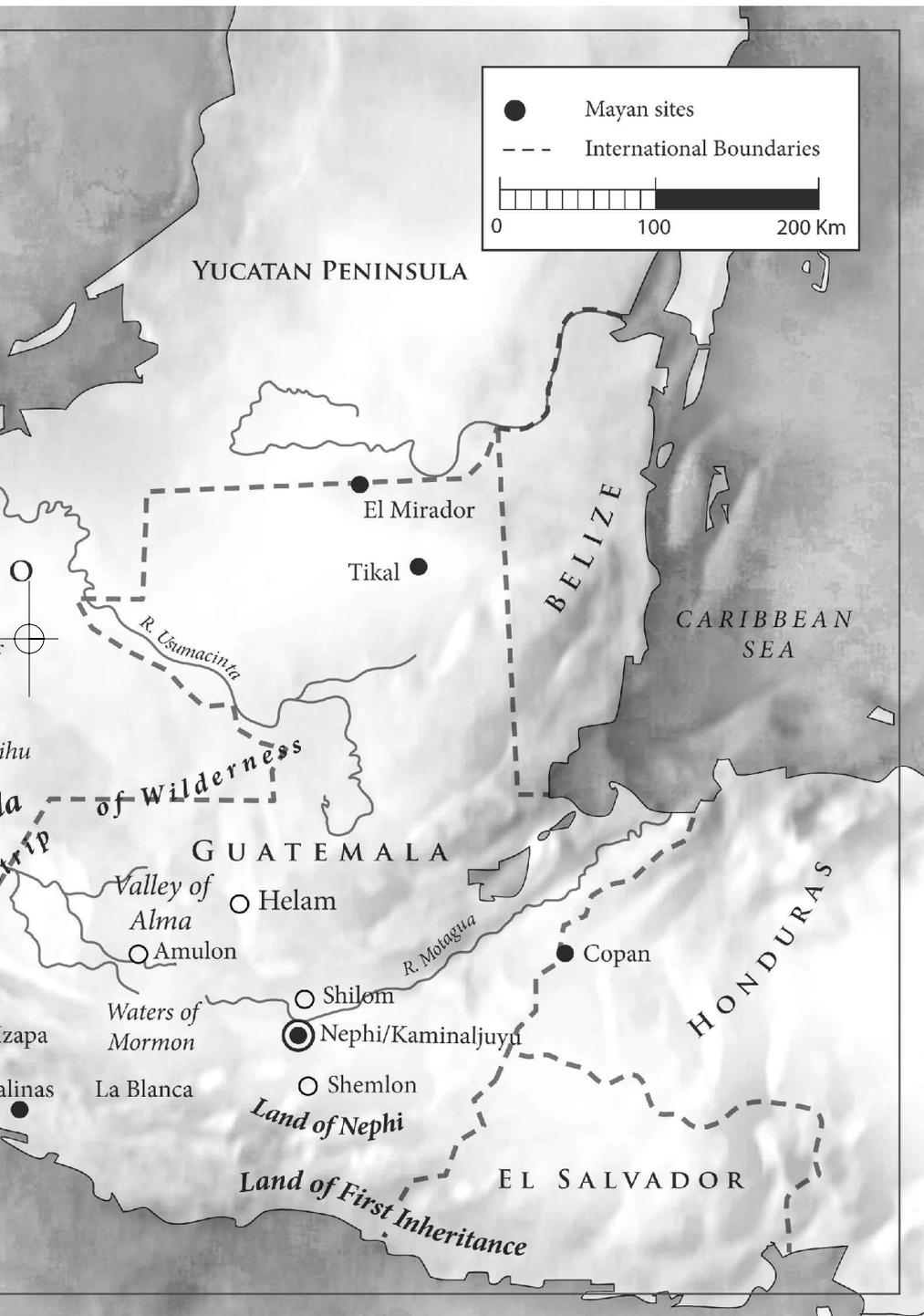
To the honorable men of my family—  
my brother, Scott, and my brothers-in-law:  
the Moore Boys—Corey, Jason, Jeff, and Derris—  
Russell Pearson, Jason Clegg, and Joel Jacquart

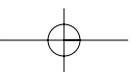
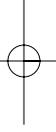
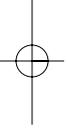
# MESOAMERICA

The Late Preclassic Era

300 B.C. — A.D. 250







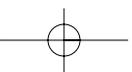
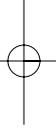
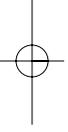
## Acknowledgments

Every writer has an extensive support system in order to stay motivated since writing is often a solitary task and frequently mind-numbing. This year has marked a slight change in my audience as my two older children read my books—and actually liked them. Perhaps they now understand more that Mom isn't just “playing on the computer.” Special thanks to my children for being the rock that holds me steady, and to my husband, Chris, who has been supportive from day one.

Next, eternal gratitude goes to my parents, Kent and Gayle Brown, who are always the guinea readers. They have to wade through the very beginnings of a plot and sketches of the characters. After the first draft is completed and revised, I hand the book off to several beta readers—not to be confused with beta fish—although sometimes I do feel like they are circling my manuscript, nipping at every sentence. Lu Ann Staheli, Annette Lyon, and Michele Paige Holmes—thanks for your invaluable help. And to J. Scott Savage and Robison Wells—the action scenes would be lost without your input.

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## Preface

Following the death of Abinadi, a priest named Alma went into hiding and recorded the teachings of the deceased prophet. These teachings proved to be a catalyst, prompting Alma to return to the city of Nephi under the cloak of darkness to deliver the Lord's message to friends in secret. Within the chapters of Mosiah 18 through 24, an incredible physical and spiritual journey unfolds, centering around Alma and those who choose to follow him—a journey fraught with fear, death, and ultimately survival.

Book of Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley characterizes Alma as being a direct descendent of Nephi. Alma was a man born with the right to hold the priesthood (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon—Part Two*, 77). Even though Alma served as a priest in King Noah's court, he may not have carried out the priesthood functions as they were intended in the local temple. Once free of King Noah, Alma was able to perform the ordinances that were necessary to establish a church and baptize the believers.

Interestingly enough, Nibley points out that Alma was not baptizing the people for the remission of sins. For in this pre-Christ era, the sacred duty of following the law of Moses was still required. Instead, Alma baptized the people as a “witness,” allowing them to enter into “a covenant with [the Lord]” and to have “his Spirit more abundantly upon” them. (See Mosiah 18:10, 13; and *Teachings*, 88–89.)

Alma established a colony at a place called the Waters of Mormon. The majority of scholars have joined in the opinion that Lake Atitlan is the most likely location. Joseph Allen informs us that the lake is located ninety miles west of Guatemala City (where the

city of Nephi is believed to have been generally located). Pottery and other archeological finds in this region have been dated to the middle and late pre-classical periods (*Sacred Sites*, 34).

As we learn from the Book of Mormon, when the Lamanites invaded the city of Nephi after Alma had gone, King Noah took his priests and some of his men and fled, leaving behind the women and children. The Nephite men began to regret their action and ended up turning on King Noah, killing him. The priests fled again, led by Amulon, who functioned essentially as a chief priest among them. Incredibly enough, years later, he and his men abducted twenty-four daughters of the Lamanites and married them. When the Lamanites discovered their colony (the land of Amulon), they showed compassion on these renegade Nephites. Amulon rose to power and was appointed king over the land of Helam—ruling over Alma and his people.

Nibley reminds us that Amulon was one of the most dangerous men in the Book of Mormon, and he should not be taken lightly. Throughout history it was common for a king to appoint leaders, or lesser kings, over communities. When Amulon was appointed king of the land of Helam, he took it to the extreme—following in the footsteps of his predecessor, King Noah (*Teachings*, 125). We learn in Doctrine and Covenants 121:39, that “it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority . . . they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.”

Through researching the Mesoamerican culture, I’ve come across many similarities in what we know about the Nephites and Lamanites versus the histories of the Maya people during the late pre-classical era (300 BC—AD 250). I’ve documented some of these details in chapter notes at the end of this book.

Various scholars hold differing opinions about the chronology of the Book of Mormon. In the appendix of *Voices from the Dust*, S. Kent Brown suggests that Abinadi’s martyrdom takes place around 128 BC. Thus, this story begins shortly after the prophet’s death.

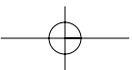
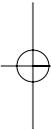
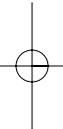
It is a daunting task to write a story about or fictionalize part of Alma’s life in any way. He has certainly been one of the most influential prophets in my life—his teachings have impacted me as few others have. As I studied the chapters on Alma within the Book of

*Alma*

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Mosiah, time and time again I was struck by parallels to our modern-day challenges. Alma was the only priest who was willing to stand up to King Noah. And only when his life was put in danger did he flee. His reliance on the Lord was complete and utter as he was forced to escape Noah's army a second time. Years later, when he was required to live under Amulon's tyrannical rule, Alma must have wondered if he'd ever be free. Yet inside his soul he was truly free. He was true to his convictions, his faith, his Lord. His increasing burdens were made light, and deliverance finally came.

In reading Alma's story, I was reminded of the burdens that each of us carries throughout our lives—some are but short trials, while others may be lifelong hardships. The Lord did not take away the burdens placed upon Alma's back, but through prayer and righteous living, the burdens were made light. And in spite of all the difficulties along the way, Alma was able to continue the work of Abinadi and bring countless people unto Christ.



## Character Chart

Alma—Former high priest of King Noah’s court

Helam—Brother of Abinadi

Amulon—High priest in King Noah’s court

Married to Itzel

Daughter: Raquel

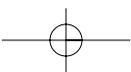
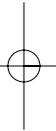
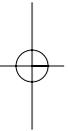
Maia—Married to King Noah

Daughter of Jachin and Lael

Raquel—Widow of Abinadi

Son: Abe

Gideon—Former high priest of King Zeniff’s court



# CHAPTER 1

*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.*  
(Isaiah 66:13)

128 BC

Amulon stared at the king's red face, wondering if he'd ever hated a man more.

"What do you mean you can't find him?" King Noah yelled. He gripped his elaborate bird headdress and yanked it off, throwing it at Amulon.

Ducking the sailing headdress wasn't hard, but it was humiliating. The entire court had stopped to watch Amulon deliver the bad news—the same news—week after week. The former high priest Alma had disappeared, and more people left the city each night. Guards had been stationed at every possible road, but somehow the "believers" managed to escape. Women, children, men. *Humiliating.*

Amulon straightened to his full height. Even though he wasn't the king, he still commanded fear and respect. To be berated in front of the court would earn him ridicule. He could already see it in the other priests' eyes. For a strange moment, he wished his old friend Alma were here to give him advice. But that was impossible now. Alma was a traitor.

Amulon looked at the ground, hoping the king would mistake his bowed head for a gesture of subservience. "I pledge not to rest until Alma and his followers are found."

The king was on his feet now, his beady eyes fiery. "The court has heard your promise, and now they will hear mine. If you do not deliver Alma into my hands by the next moon, you'll suffer punishment that will have you begging for death." He tightened his pudgy, jeweled hands into fists.

Amulon raised his gaze and nodded at Noah's fury. "Yes, O King." The two men locked eyes for a moment—two men who had shared every luxury, every conquest, every victory, even a few women. Two men who lived for power at all costs. Amulon stared into the king's eyes and saw his future—a future that didn't include this preposterous king.

A future where *he* was in power.

He kept his smile to himself as he turned and strode toward the back of the court room. A young boy passed him, eyes wild with fear.

Amulon paused and watched the child bow before the king and request permission to speak.

"O King, another family has abandoned their home," the boy said in a trembling voice. "Jachin and Lael of the lower district. All animals and goods were left behind."

Amulon left the scene, not interested in hearing the sure explosion from the king. He walked out of the court and toward the front entrance of the palace, having nowhere else to go, at least not in the palace. The harlots had all but sequestered themselves in their rooms. Not much time for making merry or celebrating when the king was in a rage day and night. So Amulon left the palace and headed for home. At least there he would find some quiet—if only because his house was empty.

It didn't take him long to walk the dark, silent streets. They were deserted because of the new curfews. When he reached his home, he walked through the courtyard and entered the gathering room where one of the servants had left an oil lamp burning. He sank onto the cushions piled along the wall and looked around the room. Rugs, vases, and carved idols decorated it. Had it really been so long ago that his wife and daughter had lived with him under the same roof? He hadn't seen his daughter, Raquel, since that day in the plaza when her husband, the traitor Abinadi, was put to death.

He tried to push thoughts of his disowned daughter from his

mind, but the questions crept back. *Where did I go wrong?* Amulon thought. *How did my daughter go from a young, beautiful child to a defiant woman running from marriage to a king? And what possessed her to marry a poor farmer who called himself a prophet?*

It had torn at his heart to see her at the plaza during Abinadi's final moments. But her pleas for her fanatical husband had closed the door on his sympathy once and for all. His wife, Itzel, had apparently empathized with their daughter—and had disappeared that same day. Rumors circulated that she'd followed Raquel back to the hidden community of the elders.

If the other rumors were also true, and Itzel had left with Alma's believers, then she was as good as dead to him.

*Dead!*

After struggling to his feet, Amulon went into the cooking room. He spotted a jug of wine and took a long drink. To think of his wife disobeying him—by following the man who'd betrayed him so deeply—infuriated him in the worst way.

*Alma. It seems I found a man I hate worse than the king.*

Amulon took another drink, trying to determine how he could avenge himself of the wrongs that had been committed against him. It had all started with that preacher—Abinadi. But since he was dead, Amulon had to find another to bring to trial. The next logical person was Alma—the ever-evasive high priest. Amulon thought hard. There had to be a way to discover Alma's whereabouts—the believers that still remained in the city *had* to know his whereabouts. Finding out who the believers were was nearly impossible, but there must be a way.

Something tickled at the back of his mind. What had the boy said earlier? The most recent deserters—Jachin and Lael. They were familiar to him . . . they were the parents of Maia, the king's own wife. And Maia was the one whom Alma had risked his own life to defend.

Amulon took another long drink, this one in celebration. If Maia's parents were believers, then it wasn't unreasonable to assume that she was, too. He knew she had returned to her parents' home for a short time after the death of her son but had since been granted a private residence, though he couldn't recall where. Nothing a little research couldn't take care of.

He wiped the excess wine from his lips and grinned. He'd just found a way to redeem himself in the eyes of the king—and perhaps exact some revenge of his own.

\* \* \*

It had been a good day—a hard day. Alma's back and shoulders ached from constructing shelters for the two dozen families now living in the wild country of the Waters of Mormon. More Nephites arrived daily—travel-weary, but joyous to reunite with their fellow believers. And Alma welcomed them all.

The sun dipped toward the horizon, splashing its rays across the lake. Alma paused to watch the final light illuminating the rippling water for a few more moments—blue, green, orange, and violet. The ibis and jabirus birds had long since retreated but would be back in full force to welcome the morning.

Footsteps approached behind him, and Alma turned.

The face was hard to distinguish in the fading light, but the hooded form was familiar. "Hello, Helam."

The man nodded once. "We have a new family."

Alma smiled. "Take me to them." He cast a glance at the lake again; the sun had disappeared, leaving the water a deep violet. Then he followed Helam silently, walking along the shoreline and turning toward the spring. There beyond the thickets sat rudimentary structures housing the families. Children gathered in groups playing with a rubber ball, using only their elbows and hips, while mothers and fathers watched, enjoyment replacing the exhaustion of hard labor on their faces.

Alma greeted those they passed by name. He knew each person, each child. A young boy ran up and tugged on his arm. "Will you play ball with us?"

He patted the boy's head. "Another time. Tonight I have to welcome some new arrivals."

Disappointment shadowed the boy's face, but it was gone the instant he set off toward his friends.

Helam laughed. "You're everyone's favorite uncle."

He smiled at Helam's laughter, grateful that the quiet man had warmed up to him. Helam was Abinadi's brother.

*And I was a part of the court that condemned Abinadi.*

Although Alma was an outcast when the judgment was passed down, he had served many years as a part of Noah's corrupt court. The thought still made him shudder.

If Helam noticed Alma's sudden change of mood, he didn't say anything. As the two continued around the makeshift shelters, Alma thought about all Helam must have endured—not only as a youth when he was badly burned in a crop fire, but as a scarred citizen of the city of Nephi. When it came to appearances, King Noah was a perfectionist. His palace, his food, his women, and especially his city were without blemish—on the surface. The crippled or the scarred were simply driven out, and Helam had spent most of his years living in exile with a colony of elders who accepted him—elders such as Gideon, a former priest from King Zeniff's time, when the land had been ruled by a righteous king and the law of Moses was revered.

No longer. The creeping decay of the original temple had been replaced by newer, higher, and more elaborate temples. Carved idols guarded the doors, and altars were used for illegitimate sacrifices of all manner of beasts—even humans.

Tears pricked Alma's eyes, and he shook the gloomy thoughts away. That life was behind him now, yet he couldn't forget. Although he was twenty-three years of age, it still took some doing to accept his leadership position among the believers. He spent every moment trying to make up for his previous wrongs. Trying to undo everything he'd done. Trying to do as much good as he'd done harm, hoping to surpass it one day.

They rounded the final hut, and Helam stopped, letting Alma pass by. There were only two people sitting on top of their bundles, food and drink in hand. Alma felt his breath catch as the man and woman raised their gazes. Jachin and Lael—Maia's parents—had arrived.

The man stood on shaky legs and grinned. "We came to join the Lord's fold."

The lump in Alma's throat tightened as he walked toward the couple and pulled the man into an embrace.

"Welcome, Jachin." He turned to the woman, who rose, and embraced her too. "Welcome, Lael."

She pulled back, wiping joyful tears from her face. “We were afraid we wouldn’t make it before nightfall.”

Jachin put his arm around his wife’s shoulders. “Every night the sounds of the wild beasts seemed closer.”

Alma let out a sigh of relief. It had been over a month since he’d last stood in their humble home, sharing the teachings of the Lord. “We’ve been praying for you. Each day when you didn’t come . . .” He couldn’t help but look past them, searching.

“It’s just the two of us,” Jachin said, a knowing look in his eyes.

Alma snapped his focus back to the couple, questions burning on his tongue. But now wasn’t the time to ask them, not when they needed food and rest.

Lael touched his arm. “She is well.”

Alma nodded, a measure of relief trickling through him. Perhaps Maia had been able to find some semblance of peace as one of King Noah’s wives, even after all that had happened. If that was so, then he could sleep with one less burden. “Very good. You can report the latest news to the colony in the morning. I know they’ll all be eager to hear what you have to say. You may sleep in my hut until we can build you a shelter.”

“We don’t want to intrude,” Jachin began.

“No intrusion.” Alma smiled. “I have a favorite sleeping spot near the lake.” He motioned toward Helam, who stood a few paces away. “This is Abinadi’s brother. He’ll take you to my hut.”

At the mention of the prophet’s name, Lael and Jachin stared at Helam for a moment before gathering their bundles. He bowed slightly. “Welcome to Mormon.” He reached for Lael’s bundle and led them toward the huts.

Alma watched them leave, his heart filled with a mixture of relief and heaviness. Maia’s parents had arrived safely and she was well. But she was still in the city—still at the mercy of a wicked king. Alma knew firsthand the torture of hiding a converted heart. He feared for her life if her conversion were discovered. The king hadn’t hesitated in bringing her to trial for the death of their infant son—a child who had been born too early to survive. The king’s abuses of his wife had almost certainly been the cause of the premature birth. What if Maia incurred the king’s wrath again?

Like a whisper, her words came to his mind: *I could no longer live with the king when I love another man.* He shook his head at the tangible memory. She'd wanted to request a divorce from the king, but Alma knew it would be a death sentence. He'd pleaded with her, and finally she had agreed not to seek such action.

*I'm not asking you to love me,* she had said. At the time he'd known it was too late for that. But he had changed. He had overcome his unrighteous feelings toward a married woman. He had repented and been forgiven by the Lord.

Yet still he worried about her. The last words she had spoken to him were, *Somehow, I'm going to make it to Mormon.*

His prayers over the last weeks had been for the safety of all those who desired to join the believers. Including Maia. But if the cost were too great, he could only pray that her life would be spared.

Alma walked around the spring and arrived at the lake once again. The water was almost black now, peaceful, quiet. The three mountains surrounding the lake had blended into the sky, yet he could feel their protective force even without seeing them. He moved to a small grove and unrolled the rug he kept there for such occasions. It was still early for sleep, but he sat on it, resting his weary body. He clasped his hands together—the new calluses a sign of hard labor—and thought about the chores that would have to be done the next day: start on Jachin's small home, finish cultivating the modest fields, and prepare for the Sabbath eve.

His message tomorrow night would be one of redemption and repentance. Most of the new believers struggled with leaving their old lives behind and truly accepting that the Lord had forgiven them. Alma understood perfectly. He'd had the same struggle.

*But I know better now,* he thought. *The Lord has forgiven me. The Lord has taught me a new way—through Abinadi. And I will spend my life teaching others what I know in my heart to be true. But how can I help the believers understand the true scope of the Lord's forgiveness and the meaning of redemption?*

Alma moved to his knees and bowed his head. He had so much to pray for, so much to ask the Lord for. But first, he must thank Him for the safe arrival of Maia's parents.

As he prayed, a familiar warmth spread through him, seeming to

expand his chest. Clenching his hands together, his whispered prayer fell quiet as he listened. Then, as gentle as a lamb, yet stronger than a lion, the Lord's voice came.

*Organize my Church and invite my people into my fold. If they are willing to bear one another's burdens and mourn with those that mourn, they may be redeemed. If they are willing to comfort those that stand in need and stand as my witnesses, they shall be baptized, that they be numbered with those of the first resurrection and have eternal life.*

The words flowed through Alma as the Lord continued to instruct him in the way to baptize the people into the Church of God. Alma's heart soared. The believers would have their own church—one organized by the Lord Himself. This was the key to their redemption and would start them on the path to eternal life.

Tears spilled onto Alma's face as gratitude blossomed in his heart. Through him, through the Lord, the believers would be counted among the fold of God. They would become as one—united in heart and purpose—as witnesses of the Lord at all times and in all things. As the Lord's voice went silent, Alma found that he was trembling. Humility and joy blended together until he didn't know if he'd be able to catch his breath.

After several moments, his breathing returned to normal, and he lay down on his bedroll, exhausted and exhilarated. He closed his eyes against the quiet night, knowing that his journey as an instrument in the Lord's hand was only beginning.

## CHAPTER 2

*For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black . . .*  
(Jeremiah 4:28)

An insect buzzed close to Raquel's ear, waking her. After swatting at the obnoxious offender, she reluctantly opened her eyes. Morning seemed to come too early now. It was easy for her to sleep well past dawn and even the morning meal—if little Abe let her. But not today. She glanced over at the child sleeping next to her mat. Each of them seemed to derive comfort from the other—comfort that came in the smallest of measures.

On the other side of a room, behind a curtain, slept Raquel's mother. Bringing her this far had been difficult since she wasn't used to such heavy work, but she stayed determined. And now, Raquel had never seen her more at peace. The other women had been patient in teaching her the skills she lacked.

Raquel stood and moved away from Abe. The longer the one-year-old slept, the happier he would be. It seemed that with his father gone—and now his favorite uncle—he'd developed an ornery nature. *When are you coming back, Helam?* she wondered. After her husband's death, Helam had been the steady hand in her life. But he'd traveled to Mormon to help build a colony for the believers. He promised to return to the elders' community for her and Abe, along with his mother, Esther, and hopefully Raquel's mother, too.

Raquel crossed to the small window at the back of the hut. It looked over a stretch of carefully tended fields. She had grown to love this narrow valley, which the elders had established when they were

banished from the city of Nephi. But since her husband's death, it hadn't felt the same. Everything reminded her of Abinadi. The grove where they had their wedding, the secluded forest where they camped the first nights of their marriage, and of course this hut. She looked around at the rudimentary room. Abinadi had built it with his own hands, all the while making plans to build a bigger one for their growing family.

But with him gone, there was no need for a larger hut.

Inevitable tears pushed their way to the surface as her chin trembled. Although she was only twenty, she wondered if she'd spend the rest of her life feeling this much pain. Mornings were the most difficult, when she woke and remembered all over again in the second or two that it took to move from sleep to awareness—and the ache always twisted her heart. It would take her an entire day of hard work to feel better. By nightfall, she would reconcile herself again, exhausted with work, so that as soon as she curled up next to her son, she'd fall asleep.

Raquel wrapped her arms around her body and sank to the floor. Her chest heaved as she silently cried. It was for this reason she hated waking before the settlement had come to life. The quiet was disconcerting, and the loneliness amplified itself into every crevice of her home. She was almost tempted to wake Abe or her mother, but instead she allowed herself to feel the sorrow, alone.

She squeezed her eyes shut and prayed for Helam to return soon. If only for her son, if only to leave this settlement, if only to start anew.

"Mama?"

Raquel raised her head. Two brown eyes blinked at her. Abe bounded to his feet and toddled over to her, his arms outstretched. She pulled him into a fierce embrace, hoping that the hut was still too dim for her son to see her tears. He was too young to articulate his observations, but she knew he *felt* when she was sad. After all, they'd both suffered the same loss, though in time it would fade for her son. He was already starting to forget. He asked for "Papa" less and less.

Noises came from outside. Raquel stood, Abe still in her arms, and stepped out of the hut. Esther crouched near the cooking fire, stoking the embers from the night before.

Raquel watched her mother-in-law for a moment. Here was another person who had suffered. First with the abandonment of her husband so long ago and now with the death of her son.

“Mama,” Abe said, stretching his hands toward his grandmother. His vocabulary didn’t differentiate between the two women yet.

Esther turned, shielding her eyes from the rising sun, and grinned. “Good morning, sweetheart, come see your grandmother.”

Raquel smiled and set Abe on the ground. He swayed a bit, gaining his balance, then walked over to her. Raquel followed him closely, ready to catch him if he stumbled on a rock.

“Mama,” he called again.

Esther scooped him up in her arms and planted a hearty kiss on his cheek. Looking over Abe’s head, she met Raquel’s gaze.

She hoped that all traces of her tears were gone. Her mother-in-law didn’t say anything, just bounced Abe for a few minutes, getting him to laugh.

Raquel crossed to the stone and started to grind kernels into flour for the cakes. Soon Esther was at her side, taking up her own stone and making the work go twice as fast. Raquel kept an eye trained on Abe as he picked up a rock and brought it to his mouth.

“No, Abe,” she said. He looked directly at her and popped it in. “No, no.” She straightened and grabbed her son, then fished the rock out of his mouth. “You could choke.”

His lips puckered, and he started to cry.

She sighed and shook her head. “He’s getting ready for another ornery day.”

A knowing smile on her face, Esther straightened. “Here, let me take him for a little walk, and you can finish with the maize.”

Raquel handed her son over to Esther then bent over the grinding stone again. She didn’t know what she’d do without her mother-in-law. Just simple things like taking Abe for a few minutes meant so much. A short time later, Raquel had created enough flour to start the first two cakes. She mixed the flour and some water in a bowl and formed a sticky ball. She relaxed with the mundane task.

Suddenly she had the distinct feeling she was being watched. She looked up just as a hooded figure stepped into the circle.

“Helam!” she cried and leapt to her feet. Rushing to him, she

threw her arms around his neck. He laughed and returned her embrace, then pulled away. Sticky dough covered his shoulders, but Helam didn't seem to notice.

"You're finally back," Raquel said, feeling a little awkward at the display of affection. He *was* her brother-in-law, but still.

He peered at her through his hood, his smile shaded. "It took longer than expected. New families arrive each day, and the work is never-ending."

She nodded. "Once you take us there, I can help."

"There's still uncertainty, Raquel." He hesitated. "The soldiers haven't given up the search, and the king is coming down hard on his commanders."

Squaring her shoulders, she tried to push back her fears. "We *have* to go to Mormon. I don't know if I can bear living here any longer." She glanced around at the group of huts. She'd loved living here with Abinadi, but now the memories were too painful. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "It's difficult . . . I see Abinadi everywhere. Each morning I wake up in our home, and it's like I can't breathe." Immediately, she was chagrined. She hadn't been this forthright with anyone in the settlement. She dropped her head, knowing that she was selfish in her grief. Everyone had loved Abinadi, and everyone mourned him.

"I know," Helam said, touching her arm. "I miss him too." He looked away for a moment, then said, "You should see how fast the community of Mormon is growing. It is invigorating working with Alma. Teaching people that have so many questions. Building a community of people who want to be righteous and seeing their numbers and faith growing each day."

Raquel looked up again. "That's what I need. A different place. Hard work. A new life."

Just then, Esther called out, "Helam?" She and Abe came into view, back from their walk.

Helam crossed to his mother and embraced her. Then he grabbed Abe and swung him around. Screeching with delight, the child laughed.

Raquel waited, smiling at the two. They'd developed a strong bond on the journey from the city after Abinadi's death. Abe tugged

at his uncle's hood, and Raquel said, "How many people are in Mormon, and how long is the journey?"

Helam turned, a smile on his shadowed face. "So many questions."

Raquel put her hands on her hips.

He laughed. "Fifty or so believers and five days' travel."

Just then, several people exited their huts and joined them at the cooking fire. Raquel's mother, Itzel; Gideon and his wife, Tia; and another elder, Ezra. Ben, a boy of eleven, also ran out of his hut. He'd mourned Abinadi fiercely and stayed close to Raquel for weeks. Recently, he'd spent most of his time making swords. It seemed his grief had been replaced with the obsession to make the perfect sword—the perfect sword to defend those he loved against any future threats.

Helam was soon surrounded by all the greetings and questions from the others. Raquel didn't have a chance to ask more questions.

The day passed agonizingly slow as Raquel waited for a chance to speak with Helam alone. She'd brought up the topic of traveling to Mormon once with her mother, but her mother had seemed reluctant to make a decision. *Then I will have to make it for us*, Raquel thought. It didn't help much that Ben continued to ask *her* questions. If it were possible, he was more eager to travel to Mormon than she was.

"I need to try out my swords," Ben told her that afternoon. He carried two swords, each carved with angled designs that looked like mountain ridges.

Raquel had to restrain Abe from reaching out and grabbing the sharp obsidian. "Maybe one of the men can practice with you."

Ben scrunched up his nose. "They're always too busy."

"All right," Raquel said, setting Abe down and handing him a strand of bird feathers to occupy him.

She took one of Ben's swords and held it straight out.

"No," Ben said. "Like this." He brought his sword in front of his face and narrowed his gaze. "It's all in the eyes."

Raquel tried to hide her smile. "Like this?" She angled the sword close to her body, then squinted back. Soon they were hopping around, tapping swords.

"Do you think Abinadi would have liked my designs?"

She halted and turned her sword over. "I'm sure he would have loved them. What are they?"

Ben stopped too and pointed to the horizon. "I outlined the landscape. See?"

She did and was impressed. "We'll always be able to remember this place."

"Yes, and if we ever need to come back, we'll have a map to show us the lay of the land," Ben said, looking at her. "When are we going to leave for Mormon?"

"I have the same question," she said. "Maybe tonight I can speak with Helam about it."

When Abe was down for the night and her mother inside the hut, Raquel sought out Helam. She found him huddled with the elders near the fire. More waiting. Since the other elders didn't seem eager to leave this place, Helam was probably her one chance. He'd been to Mormon, and he'd enjoyed the work there. Only when the moon sat high in the sky did the council break. Raquel waited for the other men to leave, grateful that Helam stayed behind, then she crossed to him.

He turned from the fire. "What are you doing out this late?"

She hid her annoyance. He used to shadow her when Abinadi spent time in the city preaching. It seemed his old protectiveness had returned.

She neared the fire, feeling the heat of the dying blaze on her legs. "I want to go back with you."

Helam shook his head. "The country is untamed, with wild beasts at every border. Even fifty people aren't enough to keep the colony secure. Mothers have to keep their children close by at all times."

She was prepared for the argument. "This valley was untamed when the elders first came. I didn't shy away from the hard work then, and I won't now. I know there are risks." She stared into the moving flames. "I think it will be good for all of us—your mother and my mother."

He fell silent for a moment, and Raquel hoped that she'd finally broken through to him. "We discussed it tonight in the elders' council. A couple of men expressed interest, but Gideon pointed out something that quieted anyone's desire to leave."

Raquel looked at Helam, curious. Gideon was one of the bravest men she knew—he wouldn't be concerned about a wild territory.

"Noah's soldiers are still scouring the countryside. Rumors say they've started to break into homes unannounced, trying to find evidence of any of the citizens planning a departure. Then those citizens are brought to trial."

She lifted a shoulder. "I'd expect no less of the king, but we'll stay clear of the city when we travel."

"Don't you see, Raquel?" Helam said, keeping his voice low. "On the right, we have King Noah's soldiers; on the left, we have the Lamanites. Before us, the unknown. But if we stay here, we'll be safe." His gaze bore into hers. "And that's all I care about—that you and Abe are safe."

"But Helam, surely—"

"You are the most stubborn woman I know," he interrupted. "I wouldn't be surprised if I discovered you packing a bundle before dawn."

Raquel shrugged, an apologetic expression on her face. When she'd tried to sneak out of the village and go after Abinadi, Helam had caught her, then accompanied her—his stubbornness matched hers. But the wild country of Mormon? Even that was a journey she didn't dare make on her own.

"What if we just went? Then if, after some time, it proved to be too difficult, we could return here?" Raquel said.

"Just you, Abe, and me?" he asked.

"No, I'm sure Esther and my mother—" she started.

"So I'm to escort and somehow protect three women and a baby, lead you through dangerous, warlike territory, watch you labor in a temporary settlement, then help you flee anytime the king's soldiers come near."

Raquel stared at him for several seconds. "Exactly."

\* \* \*

The morning dawned in a haze, at least in Amulon's mind. He groaned as he sat up, blinking at his surroundings. He'd fallen asleep on the cushions in the gathering room, an empty wine jug nearby. Then he remembered—he'd been celebrating.

A smile crept to his lips as he reminded himself of his plan. Find Maia. Force her to admit that she was a believer. Bring her to trial. The king would make an example of her to the people and reward him later. It would be *almost* like bringing in Alma. Almost.

Amulon pulled on one of his best feathered capes and ate a meal of maize cakes and pitted cherries prepared by his servant. By mid-morning he set out for the lower quarter. Even though Maia's parents had received a generous bride price from the king, he heard that they hadn't upgraded their residence. Perhaps neighbors could direct him to Maia. As Amulon passed through the streets, most of the people bowed their heads when they saw him. A couple even ran up and handed him a painted ceramic vessel. He smiled generously and moved on his way. He loved being revered. The road narrowed until it became a series of paths, leading in several directions. He stopped when he came to a cluster of three huts—all of them simple, only two or three rooms each, but the courtyards were well tended.

Amulon hesitated, wondering which one belonged to Maia's parents. He heard someone singing. He walked to the edge of the courtyard of the middle hut, realizing with surprise that the voice belonged to Maia. He'd heard her sing many times at court, and her voice was unmistakable. She must have returned here after it became known that her parents had fled. He smiled gleefully. This was going to be even easier than he had thought. He listened to the words of her song carefully. It was a traditional tune he'd heard before, nothing to do with a new belief.

He scanned the two surrounding huts. He'd need a reason to bring her to trial—so he'd have to find something that she was guilty of.

A plan formulating in his mind, he left Maia's home. He hurried through the streets, barely acknowledging those who paid homage to him. Reaching his estate, he gathered supplies—food, wine, and servants' clothing. He'd learned one thing from his daughter—how to wear a disguise.

Before he put his plans into action, he spent part of the day strategizing with the captain of the border guards. All manpower was to be doubled, and nighttime patrols would be increased.

When the sun crossed the sky and began its descent, Amulon headed for home. Once there, he put on the servant's robe and

wrapped his feathered cape in a bundle of clothing. As twilight began to fall, he strapped a parcel of food and wine, including a pouch of silver onties, to his back. Then he set off.

It was only a short time until curfew, so if he hurried, he wouldn't be stopped or questioned. Not that he couldn't reveal his identity and continue on his errand, but he didn't want to raise any interest.

In a short time, he arrived at the collection of three huts. The glow of oil lamps came from all three, and now it was just a matter of guessing which hut on either side of Maia's to approach. He went to the left and peered in the window. A woman and baby sat inside, with a young boy playing on the floor. Amulon crept away, skirting Maia's hut, and peered into the window of the hut on the right. A man and woman sat inside, eating supper. No children in sight.

Amulon smiled and rounded the hut. He pulled the feathered cape out of his bundle, swept it around his shoulders, and knocked on the door.

When the man opened it, Amulon held out the pouch of silver. "On authority of His Highness, King Noah, you must vacate this home immediately."

The man's eyes widened, and he looked from Amulon to the pouch.

Amulon thrust it toward him. "Count it, if you must." He waved his hand. "It will more than pay for this place."

The woman moved to her husband's side, bowing her head.

"Any one else live here?" Amulon asked.

Both the husband and wife shook their heads.

"Very well," Amulon said, "I'll wait outside until you have gathered what you can carry." He looked at them pointedly. "Tell no one about these orders."

The woman clutched her husband's arm, fear in her eyes. But they turned away silently and started to gather their things.

Satisfied, Amulon moved out of the doorway. He scanned the other two huts. There didn't seem to be any sign of outside activity. Sooner than he expected, the couple emerged, and Amulon handed them the bag of silver.

They hurried off into the darkness. Amulon watched them disappear then entered the hut and shut the door with satisfaction. The first part of his plan had gone perfectly. He took off his cape and

wrapped it into a bundle. He would save it again for the right time. Next, he blew out the oil lamp and left the hut. He climbed over the low wall that separated his new hut from Maia's, then picked one of the trees where he'd have a good angle and pulled himself up on the first branch. From his position, he could see directly through her window.

He settled back, enjoying the night air and the vision before him. He'd forgotten how beautiful she was. Her dark hair shone in the lamplight. Her features were still flawless, even though she was no longer a young bride of sixteen. How exquisite. If it were possible for a woman to become more beautiful as she aged, Maia was the example at the age of nineteen.

She sat near the flickering oil lamp, bent over some handiwork. Her dark copper hair had come loose from its plaits, and every so often, she brushed it back from her face. Then she started singing softly. Amulon found himself leaning forward, trying to hear each melodic phrase. How the king had allowed this wife to live apart from him he couldn't understand. He could well understand Alma's interest in her—even though she was forbidden as a king's wife.

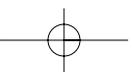
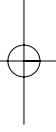
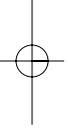
A smile touched Amulon's lips. Perhaps being forbidden made her all the more enticing. Their twenty-five-year age difference didn't hurt either. He continued to watch her for several minutes before reminding himself that he should be looking for any incriminating items in her home. From his angle, he could see most of the gathering room, except for a couple of corners. He looked for any idols that might prove she still worshipped the sun god or the moon goddess. He couldn't see any. That might be proof alone.

Then suddenly Maia stood, yawning. Amulon gripped the branch below him, ready to run for cover. But she didn't come near the window—she turned and moved into the next room. Amulon slipped from his perch and walked along the side of the hut, keeping to the edge of the trees, following the glow.

She was in her bedchamber. Amulon climbed the next tree and balanced a little more precariously than before. Maia yawned again, then unbound her hair. Maybe he would catch her praying. His heart started to hammer. She pulled the robe from her shoulders, and Amulon held his breath. Before removing anything else, she blew out the oil lamp.

Amulon let out his breath, blinking in the sudden darkness. When his eyes adjusted to the new dark, he silently climbed down from his perch and crept toward the window. He peered inside, trying to make out her form, huddled beneath a cover on the bed. She was quiet. No words, no praying, no singing. He watched for several moments, disappointment throbbing in his chest, before he finally pulled back.

Tomorrow would be another day. Another chance.



## CHAPTER 3

*For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven . . .*  
(Malachi 4:1)

About a week after Helam's return, Raquel knew she had to approach him again. The more time that passed, the harder it would be to convince him to take her to Mormon. Everyone had settled into a comfortable routine, as if Helam had never been absent, as if Abinadi . . .

Raquel met Helam's gaze across the evening fire, but he quickly looked away. Gideon, the head elder—the Teacher—continued to expound on the teachings of the Lord and His Ten Commandments, something Raquel was quite familiar with now. She remembered when she'd asked Abinadi several questions about the laws of God—especially the ones King Noah had chosen to ignore.

Raquel folded her arms, feeling sleepy as Gideon's soft voice rose and fell in the night. Her son was already asleep in the hut, her mother with him—likely asleep as well. Raquel stifled a yawn, then noticed Helam looking at her again. Maybe he'd changed his mind. She pulled her worn mantle tighter about her shoulders, looking around the darkened settlement—the huts neatly lined up, the fields beyond. There was nothing here she would take except the memories.

Gideon finished, then offered a prayer. The meeting had ended. Next to her, Esther stood and stretched. "Good night."

Raquel watched her mother-in-law bid good-night to several others then walk to her hut. By the time Raquel rose to her feet, almost everyone had left. Helam, Gideon, and Ezra remained. She walked up to the three men and folded her arms.

Gideon arched a brow, his expression turning serious before she could speak. "I'm sorry Raquel, but our decision remains the same."

Next to him, Ezra nodded, but Raquel turned her gaze on Helam. "All right," she said. "You have your way . . . for now."

He nodded, his face hidden in the shadow of his hood. Sometimes Raquel wished she could just pull the hood off. What was he hiding from? Who was he protecting? Everyone knew him and knew of his childhood burns. No one here would shrink away or treat him differently.

"For now," she repeated, then looked at Gideon and Ezra.

Gideon put a hand on her shoulder, his face full of fatherly concern. "We know it's been difficult for you to stay in this place with all of Abinadi's memories. And if we had another option, one of us would take you to Mormon."

Raquel's eyes stung. *Not now*. She had warded off her emotions all day. It was easier to feel angry at the elders than to think about *why* she was in this situation of being dependent on other men for her well-being instead of on a husband.

She took a step back, and Gideon's hand fell away. She didn't want anyone's pity; she just didn't want to live here anymore. Turning before tears could appear, she called good-night over her shoulder, then walked toward her hut. She didn't know if the men discussed her after she left, but suddenly she felt ashamed. She'd been ungrateful and selfish. Hot tears burned against her eyelids. She had her own mother to think about, plus her mother-in-law, and her son. How could she even consider putting any one of them in danger, just because she missed her husband with every breath?

She would always miss him—some days more intensely than others—but his presence would always be in her heart. Then she stopped cold, a shiver of realization trailing down her body. She wasn't the only husbandless woman here. Esther had been abandoned by her husband years ago, and her own mother had left her husband and home. She was not the only one in this situation. A half-sob rose in her throat. With one more backward glance at the faltering fire, she escaped into her hut.

Once inside, Raquel pressed the backs of her hands against her eyes, taking several deep breaths, trying to calm herself against a

deluge of grief. "Not tonight," she whispered as she felt her way through the dark until she reached Abe. Lying next to him, she wriggled close, smelling the slight dampness of his neck. His breathing was steady, quiet. She kissed his hair, then closed her eyes against the moonlight mixed with the glow of the fire coming through the lone window.

She must have fallen asleep, because the next thing she knew, the room had brightened. Something was wrong. She opened her eyes, tasting something acrid in her mouth. The taste traveled to her throat, making her feel like gagging. Smoke. The hairs on her neck bristled as she sat up.

The door of her hut burst open, and smoke billowed in. Helam ran in to the room, shouting, "We have to leave, now!"

Raquel scrambled to her feet, fear piercing her heart. "What is it?"

"The Lamanites," he hissed. "Gideon's hut is already burning."

"Oh, no!" Raquel's mother cried out from the corner. She started grabbing things to pack.

"There's no time," Helam said.

Panic welled inside Raquel as she scooped up her son. "Where's your mother and Ben?" she asked Helam.

"Here!" Ben spoke from the doorway, smoke coming in behind him. Esther and Ben stood together, looking frighteningly small and vulnerable. Esther put a hand to her mouth and coughed violently.

"Let's go!" Helam said, leading the small group out of the hut.

The women filed out after him, staying huddled together.

Raquel looked around at the burning village in horror. Several huts had caught fire. She gasped when Lamanites rushed into a hut just three away, and screams erupted from inside. Flashes of Abinadi being beaten with burning sticks leapt to her mind, and she froze, gripped with fear. But someone pulled her arm, and she numbly followed.

"Run! Run! Don't stop no matter what you hear or see." It must have been Helam, because in the next instant he took Abe from her and grabbed her hand.

Raquel stumbled alongside him, her eyes stinging with smoke. The cries from within the village became her own, and soon she couldn't tell the difference between them.

Her legs ached as she plunged into the nearest field, gripping Helam's hand, following the others. Behind her a man shouted, but she didn't understand what he said. Then he shouted again, a terrible piercing sound. A war cry. Dread pulsed through her.

In front of her Ben stumbled. She nearly tripped over him, but Helam caught her just in time. He helped Ben to his feet. "Go! Go! They're coming after us."

One look behind sent a shock of terror through Raquel. At least half a dozen Lamanite warriors were leaping over the waist-high maize, whooping and hollering as they drew closer.

"Drop to the ground!" Helam whispered in a fierce voice. "Turn to the left and crawl as fast as you can."

Abe whimpered in Helam's arms, and Raquel longed to comfort her child. In front of her, Esther, Itzel, and Ben dropped to all fours and started to scurry away.

Raquel threw a fearful look at Helam.

"If they get too close," he said, "take Abe and run as fast as you can. I'll only be able to hold them off for so long."

She nodded, trying to hold back the tears. She started crawling, ignoring the sharp jabs of the small rocks beneath her hands and knees. Half the time she held her breath, listening as the war cries drew closer. Then suddenly, they curbed. When they seemed to move farther away she turned to look at Helam behind her. "Have we lost them?"

"I hope so. We'll keep going until we reach the other side of the field."

They still crawled, but a little slower, as if they didn't dare disturb the stalks they moved between.

Finally they reached the far side of the field and moved to a group of trees at the base of a hill. Raquel stood and helped Itzel and Esther to their feet. Both women stood unsteadily, panting. Raquel's entire body trembled. She looked over at Helam, who was still holding her son. Abe's eyes were wide open—staring at the blazing settlement.

She took her son in her arms, cradling him against her. *Thank heaven we are all safe.* She turned to see at least half of the huts burning and the dark shadows of Lamanites moving against the orange backdrop.

“Look over there,” Ben whispered.

On the adjacent side of the field, a group of people emerged and seemed to melt into the trees.

“Must be Gideon’s group, heading for the city,” Esther said.

“Where’s everyone else?” Ben asked, sounding frightened.

“Some escaped before we did,” Helam said. “They’re probably well on their way.” He looked over at Raquel. “Do you still want to go to Mormon?”

She stared at him.

“It looks like you finally get what you wanted.”

She shook her head, feeling a tear slip down her cheek. “This is not what I wanted.”

“I know.” Helam moved closer to her and put a hand on her shoulder. “I think it will be a better choice than the city. Even with Gideon and the others going, there will be no guarantee of safety.” He hesitated. “Especially yours. If I thought that we could find refuge in your father’s home or elsewhere . . . but I’m afraid it would be too tempting for some citizens to turn you in.”

She nodded. The city wasn’t exactly friendly to her—not only had King Noah threatened to put her to death, but her father would follow the king’s orders, no matter what.

Helam faced her as he spoke to the small huddled group. “Our best option is going to Mormon.”

Raquel let out a breath and tightened her hold on her son, knowing she had everything she wanted in her arms. Her mother was with her, and if Ben, Esther, and Helam were safe, what more could she ask for? She shivered. She had wanted to leave the settlement and start a new life, but not like this. Not in this horrible way.

“Look. They’re burning another one!” Ben whispered loudly.

Raquel and Helam simultaneously hushed him, but their eyes were drawn to the village. Orange flames rose in the sky.

“They’re going into your hut!” Ben said.

Raquel couldn’t speak, clearly seeing the light from the torches spill out of the window and doorway. Her stomach felt sick as she thought about her enemies going through her belongings. Then the Lamanites left her hut. Raquel held her breath.

“It’s on fire,” she whispered in the deathly silence.

No one spoke as they watched flames reach out the window and doorway, slowly consuming the home.

Raquel stroked Abe's hair as he buried his head against her chest. Somewhere in the back of her mind she realized that Helam had put an arm around her shoulders. Then she felt tears streaming down her cheeks.

As if he could hear her agony, Helam answered, "They don't want to give us a reason to come back." His grip tightened around her shoulders.

Raquel stared at the rising flames, and even though they were far away, it was as if she could feel the heat singeing her face. Soon the rest of the huts went up in flames. She didn't know how much time passed as she stood there, watching. It was sickening and mesmerizing. Fire had taken almost everything she had.

Helam's soft voice finally broke through. "Let's go." He reached for Abe and took him from her.

Raquel followed the others numbly, looking back time and again. Ben sidled up next to her and took her hand, and she held on tight.

"I brought my swords," he whispered.

She nodded, knowing exactly what he meant. At least they had one part of the valley the Lamanites couldn't burn.

\* \* \*

Amulon watched Maia day and night, growing more impatient each day. She seemed to be a model citizen. She'd even come over to check on her neighbors and knocked on the door. Fortunately, she didn't try to enter.

He had her day memorized—rise, then fix an early breakfast. Feed the turkeys, fetch the water, weed the garden, travel to the market and barter with some of her embroidered wraps, then return home again in the evening. Sit by the oil lamp and embroider.

It wasn't a schedule that befit the wife of a king, but it was unvarying. Predictable.

He was wasting his time. He'd send a soldier to watch the house instead. Tonight would be his last night.

The light glowed from her home as Amulon watched. He could see her bent over her embroidery. He was half-asleep when she raised her head, her expression startled.

Amulon straightened, listening. What had she heard? Then he heard it too—a soft knock on her door.

Maia rose and walked slowly to the door, and Amulon had to move to get a view of the visitor.

In the doorway stood a man Amulon thought he'd never see again.

*Gideon.* The man who'd been banished from the city years ago—the man who was responsible for the strength of the elders—the man who must have sent Abinadi to the city to preach.

Amulon strained to hear the conversation. It seemed Maia didn't know him, that Gideon was introducing himself.

*Why is he here?* Amulon wanted to know. His chest burned as all the possibilities spun in his mind. Regardless of the reason, Maia's associating with this man was against the law. Now she could be tried for treason against her own husband.

He held his breath as Gideon spoke to Maia in quiet tones. She seemed to agree with whatever he said, as she kept nodding. Then Gideon moved out of the doorway. Half a dozen people entered the hut.

Amulon stared. They were dressed like . . . believers. They wore simple tunics made of linen, with little adornment. Their capes were of woven material, not a feather in sight.

*Maia's home is full of believers!* Amulon almost shouted with triumph. He needed more men. Gideon would put up a fight.

Without wasting any more time, Amulon grabbed his cape and fled the area, keeping to the side streets and out of sight of any curfew-breakers. As he reached the central marketplace, he donned his feathered cape. Now no one would mistake his identity. Two soldiers lazed near a corner. When they saw him approach, they straightened to attention.

Amulon spoke only two words. "Follow me."

He traveled the city until he had gathered a dozen more men, all of them curious but obedient. No one asked questions.

When they finally reached the road to Maia's hut, Amulon stopped and pointed. "Inside is a host of traitors to the king. Some might be hostile, so we must be prepared to use our weapons. One of the traitors is the king's own wife. Make sure she is not harmed; she must be brought before the king."

The soldiers nodded their understanding, their eyes wide.

“Move,” Amulon said. He led them to the front door, then directed one of the soldiers to kick it open.

The soldiers rushed inside, shouting. Then they stopped and quieted.

Amulon entered the hut. It was empty.