

***Dalil, Chapter 1***  
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**Another Journey Begins**

"You and yours are welcome here in all times, good and bad." Bakiri gives his hand to Petros as they clasp each other warmly. These two wise leaders of their peoples recognized that they have the same problems to solve for those under their protection. They forged a bond that will persist despite the passage of time and the great distances that may prevent them ever meeting again. "We will keep Alimah safe while she learns the arts of dance and music that are new to her."

Alimah and Kaliq say their farewells from which Petros the Wise and Bakiri avert their eyes but none the less are aware of. Alimah, the singer of songs, stays behind to learn, she says, new ways of dancing and singing that that she cannot learn at her home. Kaliq bends towards her, his yearning clear to all who watch. Then, aware of onlookers, he stands straight and brings her slender fingers to his lips. That caress marks his farewell. If Alimah is disturbed at Kaliq's leaving she conceals it perfectly. Petros the Wise hopes that Kaliq's heart is not set on her, for he sees that she says good-by to him with great tranquility. He remembers how his gifted sister Sardow and Lukenow, from the land of the bull dancers, set their hearts on each other when they were much younger than Alimah. Bakiri, wise in the way of the young, says quietly to Petros the Wise, "I do not think that they are meant to be mated." Petros nods his agreement and says, "Kaliq has much to keep him busy as he learns more of the arts of leadership." The two good men clasp hands one more time as they say their farewells.

Dalil's face shows nothing of what he may be thinking or feeling. He looks across to his comrade kinsman, Kaliq, wondering how he can leave the land of the one river so easily, leave Alimah unprotected, leave her where her heart may lead her to another. If she were his, he could not leave her so. But, she is not his. He regrets that but he knows that Alimah and he are not fated to be mated. It is clear to him now, but her beauty still moves him and her memory will be forever in his heart. There will be a woman for him. Somewhere she exists: One who fears his inner storms not, but welcomes his size, welcomes him. He wonders where he will ever find that someone, or even if she exists outside of his yearning dreams.

The golden orb rises in a clear sky, ushering in another day. Birds twitter in the trees intent on their early morning tasks that speak of renewal and loveliness. Goats call to each other, cattle and oxen rumble their way to the life giving river. Behind fences the war mares thrive, some taking a dust bath on their backs with their slim legs waving in the air, others nurse their young, others gambol about as their kind are wont to do.

Cooking smells mingle with the fragrant early air. Amid the chatter of the women at their morning rituals, the sounds of the children playing remind the travelers of what they wish to return to. All is well. Order has been restored, if only for a time, for the forces that bring disorder are as strong as ever.

Bathed in the fresh morning air that heralds another day, the diminished band prepares to leave the land of the one river and their newly known and cherished kin. Serena and Lukenow have already departed, sailing in his tidy craft to leave the river and sail again on the great green sea, where he is so at home.

The Bedouin drops back to talk with Kaliq as Dalil takes his place alongside Petros. Dalil, the son whom Petros has never understood. The son who has not found his place amongst the kin. Serena says that he has a gift for making stories, that when Dalil has a certain look, as if he is not quite with them, when he has a far-a-way look, that he is making stories in his head. She is usually right, but what can they do with such a talent? What will Dalil do with such a talent? Dalil, oh Dalil, from the beginning Petros has been puzzled by him. And worried for him, for he cannot advise him as he can the other youngsters among them, who are more like himself.

"My son, have you found on this journey what you sought?"

"Maybe." Dalil thinks of Alimah whom he lost to his kinsman Kaliq. No, he did not lose her to Kaliq, he never had her. She never saw into his heart, and he never saw into hers. It is fitting that she will one day mate with Kaliq, or his thoughts stirring, with some one other than either of them. Something about the farewell between Kaliq and Alimah caused that thought to drift across his mind. Suddenly he knows that Alimah will never leave the land of the one river, that they have seen the last of her. A chill comes over him, a sadness at the beauty they will never see again. Does he have the far-seeing eye? He shakes off that thought and thinks only of the what time will bring to him. He knows not what he seeks but know only that he has yet to find it, and that he must keep searching.

Petros finds it hard to talk with this son who is so unlike him. "Maybe? or maybe not?"

Dalil looks at his father and smiles at him, to lessen his concern. He almost reaches out and pats his arm to comfort him but restrains himself. It is not their way. "I will find what I need one way or the other. I haven't yet, but it disturbs me not." In some wonder, Dalil realizes that he has spoken truly: That he will keep searching until he finds his way.

At the look on Dalil's face, Petros's own face relaxes.

It is as his wise sister, Serena, told him. Dalil, his odd son, is the hardest to see into. Where will his talent for seeming like someone he is not lead him? He can change his way of speaking and his way of being to seem like someone else, change even his plumage so he does not look like a strong and handsome young warrior, but like anyone he wishes to look like. What crooked road will his talent lead him along? Serena thinks that his gift of story telling is the silver thread that leads him onward. Petros listens to her, as all men of sense do.

Perhaps Dalil is a maker of stories. A new thought for Petros, a new thought which comforts him. The gifted ones have never yet included one who tells stories. Maybe this will be another version of the great gifts that their people have protected

Dalil tells himself a story, trying first one way of telling it than another, as he makes note of how his companions talk and bow and laugh during their farewell. They prepare to leave this fragrant land to travel through many lands back to where they are making their, for the present, home. Until one of their gifted ones insists that they move out of the path of a coming destruction.

They will make their way across harsh deserts to reach the great green sea. Along the way Dalil has learned from his father, Petros the Wise, that they will spend a short time in the small village where Hasna lived with her new kin and where her remains, as well as Thutmose's lie in the ground on a hillside. Dalil had said to his father:

"I need to see where your father Hoval was born and grew into his gift. I need to see where Thutmose and Hasna ended their lives."

Petros, after a look at his mysterious son, quickly said: "Of course, it will not delay to our homecoming to stop to see where our ancestors lived." Petros had a far-away look on his face at what was an unusual request.

Petros says softly, almost to himself, "Sardow made such requests, too. She said she needed to harvest images for her work." A spasm flitted over his face. If Dalil had not been watching his father closely he would have missed it.

Dalil thinks to himself, *I need the images for my stories*. He still is quiet about his story telling, but knows that he, at last, is on the right path. He finds himself shaping stories as they ride along. Stories unbidden come to him in the night with the vividness of broad daylight. Stories flood his mind during the day when he is free to let his mind wander. Always he looks at what happens around him and thinks how he can translate the events into stories.

Dalil reminds himself that Hasna was driven out of this land of the one river and from her true mate, Thutmose, by the upheavals of those who thought only of power and the riches that came from that power. Dalil questions himself. *Is it any different now?* In sorrow, he answers himself. *It is not*. He weaves that thought into his emerging story, the sadness drifts away as the story emerges ready to tell to his enthralled kinfolk.

As they make their way to the small village which served as a refuge for many years, Dalil muses on the journey ahead of them. They will follow the great green sea to the remains of Ugarit. Then they will follow the ancient trade route to where their people await them. They leave behind kinfolk who have become familiar to them, but still they have to leave to return to their loved ones, their little ones, and for the lucky ones, their mates.

Kaliq shows nothing on his face as he travels away from his heart's delight. Leaving Alimah, leaving her to learn new songs and dances, leaving her unprotected in the land of the one river: he is certain it is wise to do so, to wait for her to come to him with a contented heart. Still it troubles him. His body is ready for her, his whole being is ready for her, but it is too soon, for she is not ready for him. Will she ever be ready for him? The question squats unwelcome at the bottom of his mind. He quickly pushes that thought away. Their kinsman will protect her body. But who will keep her for him? Is she meant to be with him?

Kaliq sees the road he must travel to be a leader of his people. He will learn from Petros the Wise the ways of leading, of fighting, of strategy. If he does not have the respect of the warriors and traders among them he cannot win the trust of the makers of beauty. He has to learn to lead the men and then later all of his people. He needs the trust of all to lead as Petros the Wise leads. When Alimah returns to him he will have much to offer her in addition to his protection and loyalty. If Alimah returns.

The Bedouin astride his war mare, his sun darkened face immobile, glances towards the river: The river that carried Serena and her chosen mate, Lukenow, away from him: The sea calls Lukenow, just as the desert calls him. Perhaps, when he is back with his own people in the desert he will forget Serena and his desire for her. The journey back makes him impatient for he will not have Serena to talk to, to learn from, and most of all to admire. He will be relieved when his desire for her fades. He will be sad when it fades and when the memory of her fades. He will welcome adventures on their way home. When next he sees Serena, which should be in Ugarit, she will, no doubt, be carrying yet another child with Lukenow. The child that, if all goes well, will lighten her grief at the child who came too soon and resides under a small mound of earth. The child that will never be his, for Serena will never be his. In the hours of their captivity he came to know how much he desired her. If they had been in captivity for weeks, for months, would she have come to him in the way of a woman to a man? She would have, he is certain. After they were freed, she told him so as they dangled their feet in a clear pool of water. But it was not to be. They were rescued before that came to pass. Serena rescued them, he must not forget that. That rescue only increased his desire for her. Maybe he should have made sure that they remained in captivity until she was his. He smiles, for he could never do that. It would not be honorable.

How his heart yearns for her. He wonders if he yearns for her because he cannot have her. He never suspected that a mere woman could become so important to him. It makes him uneasy. Women should not be that important. A fine war mare, yes, but women are replaceable; they are needed for comfort and most of all for sons, fine sons to carry on his name and blood. He tries to tell himself that Serena attracted him only because she had proved herself as the mother of many fine sons: Just as he would value a war mare because she had bred true. He knows he lies to himself, for even if she were beyond the time of breeding, he would still desire her. Her courage, her honor, and her body would still arouse him. The errant curl that falls over her noble brow, her brown eyes that look at the world clearly, the smile that hides itself as the sun hides itself behind clouds and then breaks out in luminous glory - all these he cherishes.

Petros the Wise sees all. He has been on many journeys and has found many adventures. He has never yet grown weary of them, even now when he is no longer called Petros the Protector, but Petros the Wise. He wonders if this is the last adventure that he will be part of. He wonders if Kaliq, so obviously the next leader, will supplant him so that he will no longer be of use to the kin. He stops that treacherous thought. His clever ways that were evident from his beginning will always be of use to the kin. His memories, for he is now the only one who remembers the living Thutmose and Hasna, are precious. He must pass down these memories to the young who are under his protection. Most of all he must pass them down to Dalil, who will preserve them. The weary thought that nothing has changed saddens him. That he is still wanted and needed in the kin's perpetual task of surviving in tumultuous times stiffens his resolve to be of use. All times are tumultuous, he thinks to himself, as they set off to journey home: Home to his lady mate and his other little ones: Home to welcoming arms that warm his very being.

The young with them look forward to more adventures. Their taste for excitement has been whetted by skirmishes on the way to the land of the one river, and further whetted by the war they fought here, to clean out the viper's nest that had brought trouble to them far away in their new home. They have learned much from Haidar, their kinsman who is gifted in war and stealth, and they have turned themselves into a fighting force under the direction of Petros the Wise and of Kaliq. Kaliq was once their leader in their childhood games and is now their leader in the more serious matters of actual warfare. They have all learned much.

Petros sees their eager young faces and his own face softens. He thought himself almost beyond the time of adventures, but found that was not so. Yet, he finds himself unexpectedly weary after many months away. Always, he knows he must keep those under his protection safe. While he keeps them safe he must also teach them the ways that allow the kin to thrive no matter that they live in a small trading town, or in the great city of Ugarit, or again in a small town along the trading route near the great desert and its peoples.

The Bedouin and Petros lead them away from the compound of Bakiri, out of the land of the one river towards the harsh desert they must cross to reach the shores of the great green sea. Haidar and his son ride behind the others, guarding those who are between Petros and The Bedouin and themselves.

"We have done well, my brother." Petros remarks.

"Yes we have." The Bedouin's sun darkened face creases in what might be a smile. "The war mares are safe and well cared for so we can keep sending them here. The dangerous person who was the source of much evil is dead, so you may rest easy. The young have learned more of the arts of war. They have also learned that misdeeds echo down the generations, so it is wise to always act with honor. It is vital that they learn that, and now they have seen how old hatreds destroy. They will not forget. Perhaps Dalil will weave that into his stories."

"Perhaps he will. But there will be other dangers, as you very well know, my friend." Petros smiles slightly.

"Yes, there will be, there always will be for that is the nature of the world." The Bedouin does not look unhappy at the thought. "There will be other fights, other skirmishes, other adventures." His face lightens at the thought.

Petros glances at him, for he is intent on pointing The Bedouin toward his peoples traditional enjoyments and away from Serena, who disturbed him greatly. He has succeeded, for The Bedouin is clearly thinking about and relishing raids to be made, horses to race, camels to race and all the delights of his nomadic life. It is best that he not brood on Serena who came into his life and awakened desires that he knew not he had. But will The Bedouin be content with his old life, now that he has learned new ways? Petros has no answer to his own question. The answer will become obvious with time, he thinks. As so much does.

On they travel, coming to the desert that reminds The Bedouin of his home. They cross it without troubles. They are not disturbed by storms. They are not attacked by bandits. For once, they just have to make their way across with the sand flaying their skin, and the heat baking them, measuring out water so they do not run short. But nothing else disturbs the monotony of their passage. The young are disappointed at having no enemies to vanquish. The older among them know that enemies will show up, and may at any moment. The young are set to guard and sent out to roam about to find such enemies before they make themselves known.

They trod along the ancient route that leads out of the desert and reach the village where their kin lived and worked for many seasons. The dusty houses lie somnolent under the bright sky. Goats wander in the hills. Nothing remains of where Hoval once made his famous jewelry for those who reigned. They pause on the hillside. Nothing marks where Thutmose and Hasna were put in the ground after their final journey. All are quiet. Petros the Wise tells of their final days, and tells that the kin waited patiently for them to make their final journey from which none return. The kin had been leaving for many seasons to live and work in Ugarit, which then was safer because it further away from those who hated Thutmose and hated his new family. Thutmose and Hasna, together at last, made their final journey in each others arms. The kin guarded their final hours so that no enemies could disturb them.

Dalil, quiet, absorbed all. Petros, seeing his son's profound quiet, realized anew the resemblance to the gifted Sardow. *I hope he doesn't also have her far-seeing sight that was such a burden to her*, he thinks.

Leaving the quiet hillside that holds such memories, they approach the great green sea. A storm comes up out of nowhere. Grey clouds race across the darkening sky, the life giving sun vanishes behind the storm. Out in the open with no place to shelter, rain courses down their faces, clothes cling wetly. The winds tear at them, battering them.

They cannot hear each other above the din of the storm. Even the war mares have trouble staying upright.

Petros, undaunted by the storm and familiar with this terrain, leads them along a seemingly treacherous path to a valley that has sheltering hills. The riders all dismount and lead their unhappy steeds through the gusts of wind and the torn branches of trees that strike their unprepared selves. They hold onto the tails of the war mares in front of them so that none are lost or injured and left behind. The war mares are soaked and unhappy for they do not like the slippery mud underfoot. Some war mares and their riders are damaged by limbs torn off of trees that are used by the storm as weapons to beat them. All flinch against the pain and bruises, but keep on as they must during storms, searching for a sheltered place to wait out the tumult. Reaching the deep valley, they hear the winds in the tall trees, and see them sway, see them sway with the wild winds. Deep in the valley below it is not so wild, although the rain still beats down on them, and the winds slash at them.

Dalil spares a thought for Serena and Lukenow who are out on the great green sea. Lukenow is skilled in the handling of boats, but still, even the best of seamen can come to grief in winds such as these. The Bedouin, unused to winds that bring water, but used to desert storms, also spares a thought for Serena and Lukenow. Magnificent Serena, never to be his own. She, he tells himself for comfort, being one of those who mates only once and forever, is mated to Lukenow.

Petros looks at his companions, valiant men all. He sees into their hearts. Petros the Wise looks at The Bedouin who makes no complaint about the water falling from the sky onto him. Something he is not accustomed to, but he complains not. Petros is glad in his heart that he is making his way back to his lady mate, and his little ones that he has been so long parted from. He is impatient to be with them, but knows that impatience can breed a carelessness that can prove fatal. He lets go of his impatience, refuses to give it entrance into his thoughts. He must, to protect those who are under his care.

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