

Chapter One: Gold of the North by Joan H. Parks

Alimah Is Alone

I know not when or if I shall ever see them again. I could run after them, crying “Wait, wait! I will go with you!” It is not too late. But I do nothing. I can do nothing.

Kaliq does not look back as he rides away from me. He and Petros the Wise and the Bedouin and Dalil become smaller and smaller until they vanish in the distance. Dust stirred up from their departure settles into its usual pattern. All is quiet under the implacable sun. I am left with my kin who are new to me.

I seek out the war mare whom I have ridden from the time we left the kin on the ancient trade route. I rode her on the long trails that lead to the Great Green Sea. I rode her as bandits attacked us. I rode her along that sea until we reached our destination: The Land of the One River and our blood relatives whom Bakiri leads. I rode her that day when the Evil One's men tried to capture me. She fought as I fought that day, with wild resolve.

The mare nuzzles my hair, blowing her warm breath on me. I wrap my arms around her supple neck, press my face against her warm body and let my tears flow. She patiently awaits my revival.

I ride in the hot wind—the hot wind that dries my tears. Alone with the one live being from my home and my long journey, my heart quiets.

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